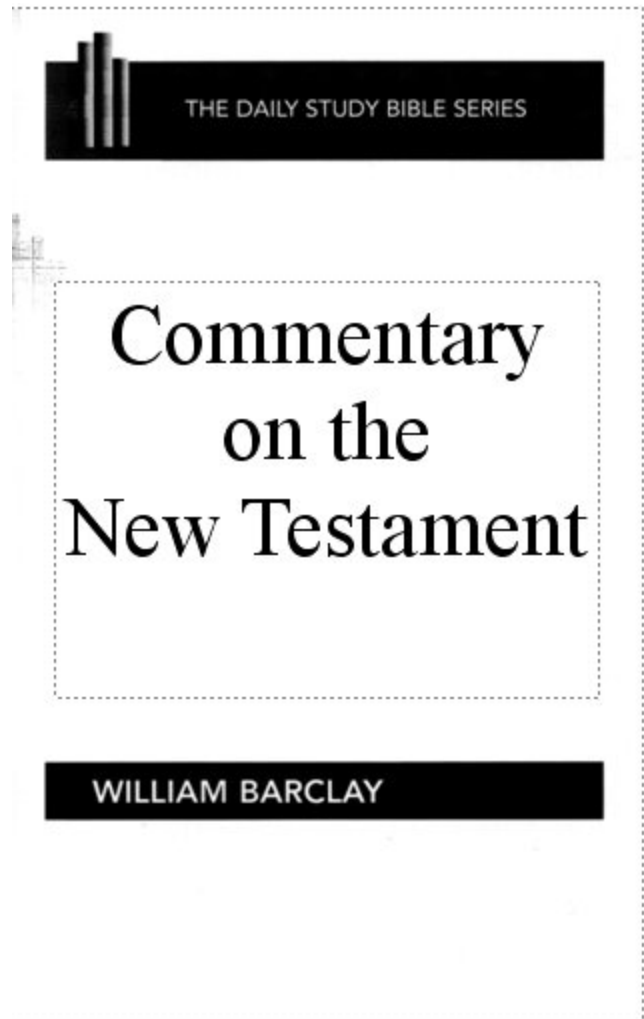


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Synoptic Gospels

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Matthew, Mark and Luke are usually known as the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic comes from two Greek words which mean to see together and literally means able to be seen together. The reason for that name is this. These three gospels each give an account of the same events in Jesus' life. There are in each of them additions and omissions; but broadly speaking their material is the same and their arrangement is the same. It is therefore possible to set them down in parallel columns, and so to compare the one with the other.

When that is done, it is quite clear that there is the closest possible relationship between them. If we, for instance, compare the story of the feeding of the five thousand (Matt.14:12-21; Mk.6:30-44; Lk.9:10-17) we find exactly the same story told in almost exactly the same words.

Another instance is the story of the healing of the man who was sick with the palsy (Matt.9:1-8; Mk.2:1-12; Lk.5:17-26). These three accounts are so similar that even a little parenthesis--"he then said to the paralytic"--occurs in all three as a parenthesis in exactly the same place. The correspondence between the three gospels is so close that we are bound to come to the conclusion either that all three are drawing their material from a common source, or that two of them must be based on the third.

THE EARLIEST GOSPEL

When we examine the matter more closely we see that there is every reason for believing that Mark must have been the first of the gospels to be written, and that the other two, Matthew and Luke, are using Mark as a basis.

Mark can be divided into 105 sections. Of these sections 93 occur in Matthew and 81 in Luke. Of Mark's 105 sections there are only 4 which do not occur either in Matthew or in Luke.

Mark has 661 verses: Matthew has 1,068 verses: Luke has 1,149 verses. Matthew reproduces no fewer than 606 of Mark's verses; and Luke reproduces 320. Of the 55 verses of Mark which Matthew does not reproduce Luke reproduces 31; so there are only 24 verses in the whole of Mark which are not reproduced somewhere in Matthew or Luke.

It is not only the substance of the verses which is reproduced; the very words are reproduced. Matthew uses 51 per cent of Mark's words; and Luke uses 53 per cent.

Both Matthew and Luke as a general rule follow Mark's order of events. Occasionally either Matthew or Luke differs from Mark; but they never both differ against him; always at least one of them follows Mark's order.

IMPROVEMENTS ON MARK

Since Matthew and Luke are both much longer than Mark, it might just possibly be suggested that Mark is a summary of Matthew and Luke; but there is one other set of facts which show that Mark

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is earlier. It is the custom of Matthew and Luke to improve and to polish Mark, if we may put it so. Let us take some instances.

Sometimes Mark seems to limit the power of Jesus; at least an ill-disposed critic might try to prove that he was doing so. Here are three accounts of the same incident:

Mk.1:34: And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons;

Matt.8:16: And he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick;

Lk.4:40: And he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.

Let us take other three similar examples:

Mk.3:10: For he had healed many;

Matt.12:15: And he healed them all;

Lk.6:19: and healed them all.

Matthew and Luke both change Mark's many into all so that there may be no suggestion of any limitation of the power of Jesus Christ.

There is a very similar change in the account of the events of Jesus' visit to Nazareth. Let us compare the account of Mark and of Matthew.

Mk.6:5-6: And he could do no mighty work there... and he marvelled because of their unbelief;

Matt.13:58: And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

Matthew shrinks from saying that Jesus could not do any mighty works; and changes the form of the expression accordingly.

Sometimes Matthew and Luke leave out little touches in Mark in case they could be taken to belittle Jesus. Matthew and Luke omit three statements in Mark.

Mk.3:5: "He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart."

Mk.3:21: And when his friends heard it, they went out to seize him: for they said, He is beside himself;

Mk.10:14: He was indignant

Matthew and Luke hesitate to attribute human emotions of anger and grief to Jesus, and shudder to think that anyone should even have suggested that Jesus was mad.

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Sometimes Matthew and Luke slightly alter things in Mark to get rid of statements which might seem to show the apostles in a bad light. We take but one instance, from the occasion on which James and John sought to ensure themselves of the highest places in the coming Kingdom. Let us compare the introduction to that story in Mark and in Matthew.

Mk.10:35: James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him...

Matt.20:20: Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked him for something.

Matthew hesitates to ascribe motives of ambition directly to the two apostles, and so he ascribes them to their mother.

All this makes it clear that Mark is the earliest of the gospels. Mark gives a simple, vivid, direct narrative; but Matthew and Luke have already begun to be affected by doctrinal and theological considerations which make them much more careful of what they say.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS

We have seen that Matthew has 1,068 verses; and that Luke has 1,149 verses; and that between them they reproduce 582 of Mark's verses. That means that in Matthew and Luke there is much more material than Mark supplies. When we examine that material we find that more than 200 verses of it are almost identical. For instance such passages as Lk.6:41-42 and Matt.7:1,5; Lk.10:21-22 and Matt.11:25-27; Lk.3:7-9 and Matt.3:7-10 are almost exactly the same.

But here we notice a difference. The material which Matthew and Luke drew from Mark was almost entirely material dealing with the events of Jesus' life; but these 200 additional verses common to Matthew and Luke tell us, not what Jesus did, but what Jesus said. Clearly in these verses Matthew and Luke are drawing from a common source-book of the sayings of Jesus.

That book does not now exist; but to it scholars have given the letter Q which stands for Quelle, which is the German word for "source." In its day it must have been an extraordinarily important book, for it was the first handbook of the teaching of Jesus.

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Letters of Paul

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS OF PAUL

THE LETTERS OF PAUL

There is no more interesting body of documents in the New Testament than the letters of Paul. That is because of all forms of literature a letter is most personal. Demetrius, one of the old Greek literary critics, once wrote, "Every one reveals his own soul in his letters. In every other form of composition it is possible to discern the writer's character, but in none so clearly as the epistolary." (Demetrius, *On Style*, 227.) It is just because he left us so many letters that we feel we know Paul so well. In them he opened his mind and heart to the folk he loved so much; and, in them, to this day, we can see that great mind grappling with the problems of the early church and feel that great heart throbbing with love for men, even when they were misguided and mistaken.

THE DIFFICULTY OF LETTERS

At the same time there is often nothing so difficult to understand as a letter. Demetrius (*On Style*, 223) quotes a saying of Artemon, who edited the letters of Aristotle. Artemon said that a letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue, because it was one of the two sides of a dialogue. In other words, to read a letter is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation. So when we read the letters of Paul we are often in a difficulty. We do not possess the letter which he was answering; we do not fully know the circumstances with which he was dealing; it is only from the letter itself that we can deduce the situation which prompted it. Before we can hope to understand fully any letter Paul wrote, we must try to reconstruct the situation which produced it.

THE ANCIENT LETTERS

It is a great pity that Paul's letters were ever called epistles. They are in the most literal sense letters. One of the great lights shed on the interpretation of the New Testament has been the discovery and the publication of the papyri. In the ancient world, papyrus was the substance on which most documents were written. It was composed of strips of the pith of a certain bulrush that grew on the banks of the Nile. These strips were laid one on top of the other to form a substance very like brown paper. The sands of the Egyptian desert were ideal for preservation, for papyrus, although very brittle, will last forever so long as moisture does not get at it. As a result, from the Egyptian rubbish heaps, archaeologists have rescued hundreds of documents, marriage contracts, legal agreements, government forms, and, most interesting of all, private letters.

When we read these private letters we find that there was a pattern to which nearly all conformed; and we find that Paul's letters reproduce exactly that pattern. Here is one of these ancient letters. It is from a soldier, called Apion, to his father Epimachus. He is writing from Misenum to tell his father that he has arrived safely after a stormy passage.

"Apion sends heartiest greetings to his father and lord Epimachus.
I pray above all that you are well and fit; and that things are
going well with you and my sister and her daughter and my

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brother. I thank my Lord Serapis [his god] that he kept me safe when I was in peril on the sea. As soon as I got to Misenum I got my journey money from Caesar--three gold pieces. And things are going fine with me. So I beg you, my dear father, send me a line, first to let me know how you are, and then about my brothers, and thirdly, that I may kiss your hand, because you brought me up well, and because of that I hope, God willing, soon to be promoted. Give Capito my heartiest greetings, and my brothers and Serenilla and my friends. I sent you a little picture of myself painted by Euctemon. My military name is Antonius Maximus. I pray for your good health. Serenus sends good wishes, Agathos Daimon's boy, and Turbo, Gallonius' son." (G. Milligan, Selections from the Greek Papyri, 36.)

Little did Apion think that we would be reading his letter to his father 1800 years after he had written it. It shows how little human nature changes. The lad is hoping for promotion quickly. Who will Serenilla be but the girl he left behind him? He sends the ancient equivalent of a photograph to the folk at home. Now that letter falls into certain sections. (i) There is a greeting. (ii) There is a prayer for the health of the recipients. (iii) There is a thanksgiving to the gods. (iv) There are the special contents. (v) Finally, there are the special salutations and the personal greetings. Practically every one of Paul's letters shows exactly the same sections, as we now demonstrate.

(i) The Greeting: Rom.1:1; 1Cor.1:1; 2Cor.1:1; Gal.1:1; Eph.1:1; Php.1:1; Col.1:1-2; 1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:1.

(ii) The Prayer: in every case Paul prays for the grace of God on the people to whom he writes: Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:3; 2Cor.1:2; Gal.1:3; Eph.1:2; Php.1:3; Col.1:2; 1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:2.

(iii) The Thanksgiving: Rom.1:8; 1Cor.1:4; 2Cor.1:3; Eph.1:3; Php.1:3; 1Th.1:3; 2Th.1:3.

(iv) The Special Contents: the main body of the letters.

(v) Special Salutations and Personal Greetings: Rom.16; 1Cor.16:19; 2Cor.13:13; Php.4:21-22; Col.4:12-15; 1Th.5:26.

When Paul wrote letters, he wrote them on the pattern which everyone used. Deissmann says of them, "They differ from the messages of the homely papyrus leaves of Egypt, not as letters but only as the letters of Paul." When we read Paul's letters we are not reading things which were meant to be academic exercises and theological treatises, but human documents written by a friend to his friends.

THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION

With a very few exceptions, all Paul's letters were written to meet an immediate situation and not treatises which he sat down to write in the peace and silence of his study. There was some

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Letters of Paul

threatening situation in Corinth, or Galatia, or Philippi, or Thessalonica, and he wrote a letter to meet it. He was not in the least thinking of us when he wrote, but solely of the people to whom he was writing. Deissmann writes, "Paul had no thought of adding a few fresh compositions to the already extant Jewish epistles; still less of enriching the sacred literature of his nation. He had no presentiment of the place his words would occupy in universal history; not so much that they would be in existence in the next generation, far less that one day people would look at them as Holy Scripture." We must always remember that a thing need not be transient because it was written to meet an immediate situation. All the great love songs of the world were written for one person, but they live on for the whole of mankind.

It is just because Paul's letters were written to meet a threatening danger or a clamant need that they still throb with life. And it is because human need and the human situation do not change that God speaks to us through them today.

THE SPOKEN WORD

One other thing we must note about these letters. Paul did what most people did in his day. He did not normally pen his own letters but dictated them to a secretary, and then added his own authenticating signature. (We actually know the name of one of the people who did the writing for him. In Rom.16:22 Tertius, the secretary, slips in his own greeting before the letter draws to an end.) In 1Cor.16:21 Paul says, "This is my own signature, my autograph, so that you can be sure this letter comes from me" (compare Col.4:18; 2Th.3:17).

This explains a great deal. Sometimes Paul is hard to understand, because his sentences begin and never finish; his grammar breaks down and the construction becomes involved. We must not think of him sitting quietly at a desk, carefully polishing each sentence as he writes. We must think of him striding up and down some little room, pouring out a torrent of words, while his secretary races to get them down. When Paul composed his letters, he had in his mind's eye a vision of the folk to whom he was writing, and he was pouring out his heart to them in words that fell over each other in his eagerness to help.

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Introduction to Matthew

MATTHEW'S PLACE IN THE GOSPEL TRADITION

It is here that we come to Matthew the apostle. Scholars are agreed that the first gospel as it stands does not come directly from the hand of Matthew. One who had himself been an eye-witness of the life of Christ would not have needed to use Mark as a source-book for the life of Jesus in the way Matthew does. But one of the earliest Church historians, a man called Papias, gives us this intensely important piece of information:

"Matthew collected the sayings of Jesus in the Hebrew tongue."

So, then, we can believe that it was none other than Matthew who wrote that book which was the source from which all men must draw, if they wished to know what Jesus taught. And it was because so much of that source-book is incorporated in the first gospel that Matthew's name was attached to it. We must be for ever grateful to Matthew, when we remember that it is to him that we owe the Sermon on the Mount and nearly all we know about the teaching of Jesus. Broadly speaking, to Mark we owe our knowledge of the events of Jesus' life; to Matthew we owe our knowledge of the substance of Jesus' teaching.

MATTHEW THE TAXGATHERER

About Matthew himself we know very little. We read of his call in Matt.9:9. We know that he was a taxgatherer and that he must therefore have been a bitterly hated man, for the Jews hated the members of their own race who had entered the civil service of their conquerors. Matthew would be regarded as nothing better than a quisling.

But there was one gift which Matthew would possess. Most of the disciples were fishermen. They would have little skill and little practice in putting words together on paper; but Matthew would be an expert in that. When Jesus called Matthew, as he sat at the receipt of custom, Matthew rose up and followed him and left everything behind him except one thing--his pen. And Matthew nobly used his literary skill to become the first man ever to compile an account of the teaching of Jesus.

THE GOSPEL OF THE JEWS

Let us now look at the chief characteristics of Matthew's gospel so that we may watch for them as we read it.

First and foremost, Matthew is the gospel which was written for the Jews. It was written by a Jew in order to convince Jews.

One of the great objects of Matthew is to demonstrate that all the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in Jesus, and that, therefore, he must be the Messiah. It has one phrase which runs through it like an ever-recurring theme--"This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet." That phrase occurs in the gospel as often as 16 times. Jesus' birth and Jesus' name are the fulfillment of prophecy (Matt.1:21-23); so are the flight to Egypt (Matt.2:14-15); the slaughter of the children (Matt.2:16-18); Joseph's settlement in Nazareth and Jesus' upbringing there

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(Matt.2:23); Jesus' use of parables (Matt.13:34-35); the triumphal entry (Matt.21:3-5); the betrayal for thirty pieces of silver (Matt.27:9); the casting of lots for Jesus' garments as he hung on the Cross (Matt.27:35).

It is Matthew's primary and deliberate purpose to show how the Old Testament prophecies received their fulfillment in Jesus; how every detail of Jesus' life was foreshadowed in the prophets; and thus to compel the Jews to admit that Jesus was the Messiah.

The main interest of Matthew is in the Jews. Their conversion is especially near and dear to the heart of its writer. When the Syro-Phoenician woman seeks his help, Jesus' first answer is: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt.15:24). When Jesus sends out the Twelve on the task of evangelization, his instruction is: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt.10:5-6). Yet it is not to be thought that this gospel by any means excludes the Gentiles. Many are to come from the east and the west to sit down in the kingdom of God (Matt.8:11). The gospel is to be preached to the whole world (Matt.24:14). And it is Matthew which gives us the marching orders of the Church: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt.28:19). It is clear that Matthew's first interest is in the Jews, but that it foresees the day when an nations will be gathered in.

The Jewishness of Matthew is also seen in its attitude to the Law. Jesus did not come to destroy, but to fulfil the Law. The least part of the Law will not pass away. Men must not be taught to break the Law. The righteousness of the Christian must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt.5:17-20). Matthew was written by one who knew and loved the Law, and who saw that even the Law has its place in the Christian economy.

Once again there is an apparent paradox in the attitude of Matthew to the Scribes and Pharisees. They are given a very special authority: "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you" (Matt.23:2). But at the same time there is no gospel which so sternly and consistently condemns them.

Right at the beginning there is John the Baptist's savage denunciation of them as a brood of vipers (Matt.3:7-12). They complain that Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners (Matt.9:11). They ascribe the power of Jesus, not to God, but to the prince of devils (Matt.12:24). They plot to destroy him (Matt.12:14). The disciples are warned against the leaven, the evil teaching, of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt.16:12). They are like evil plants doomed to be rooted up (Matt.15:13). They are quite unable to read the signs of the times (Matt.16:3). They are the murderers of the prophets (Matt.21:41). There is no chapter of condemnation in the whole New Testament like Matt.23, which is condemnation not of what the Scribes and the Pharisees teach, but of what they are. He condemns them for falling so far short of their own teaching, and far below the ideal of what they ought to be.

There are certain other special interests in Matthew. Matthew is especially interested in the Church. It is in fact the only one of the Synoptic Gospels which uses the word Church at all. Only Matthew introduces the passage about the Church after Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt.16:13-23; compare Mk.8:27-33; Lk.9:18-22). Only Matthew says that disputes are to be settled by the Church (Matt.18:17). By the time Matthew came to be written the Church had

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become a great organization and institution; and indeed the dominant factor in the life of the Christian.

Matthew has a specially strong apocalyptic interest. That is to say, Matthew has a specially strong interest in all that Jesus said about his own Second Coming, about the end of the world, and about the judgment. Matt.24 gives us a fuller account of Jesus' apocalyptic discourse than any of the other gospels. Matthew alone has the parables of the talents (Matt.25:14-30); the wise and the foolish virgins (Matt.25:1-13); and the sheep and the goats (Matt.25:31-46). Matthew has a special interest in the last things and in judgment.

But we have not yet come to the greatest of all the characteristics of Matthew. It is supremely the teaching gospel.

We have already seen that the apostle Matthew was responsible for the first collection and the first handbook of the teaching of Jesus. Matthew was the great systematizer. It was his habit to gather together in one place all that he knew about the teaching of Jesus on any given subject. The result is that in Matthew we find five great blocks in which the teaching of Jesus is collected and systematized. All these sections have to do with the Kingdom of God. They are as follows:

- (a) The Sermon on the Mount, or The Law of the Kingdom (Matt.5-7).
- (b) The Duties of the Leaders of the Kingdom (Matt.10)
- (c) The Parables of the Kingdom (Matt.13).
- (a) Greatness and Forgiveness in the Kingdom (Matt.18).
- (e) The Coming of the King (Matt.24-25).

Matthew does more than collect and systematize. It must be remembered that Matthew was writing in an age when printing had not been invented, when books were few and far between because they had to be hand-written. In an age like that, comparatively few people could possess a book; and, therefore, if they wished to know and to use the teaching and the story of Jesus, they had to carry them in their memories.

Matthew therefore always arranges things in a way that is easy for the reader to memorize. He arranges things in threes and sevens. There are three messages to Joseph; three denials of Peter; three questions of Pilate; seven parables of the Kingdom in Matt.13; seven woes to the Scribes and Pharisees in Matt.23.

The genealogy of Jesus with which the gospel begins is a good example of this. The genealogy is to prove that Jesus is the Son of David. In Hebrew there are no figures; when figures are necessary the letters of the alphabet stand for the figures. In Hebrew there are no written vowels. The Hebrew letters for David are D-W-D; if these letters be taken as figures and not as letters, they add up to 14; and the genealogy consists of three groups of names, and in each group there are 14 names. Matthew does everything possible to arrange the teaching of Jesus in such a way that people will be able to assimilate and to remember it.

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Introduction to Matthew

Every teacher owes a debt of gratitude to Matthew, for Matthew wrote what is above all the teacher's gospel.

Matthew has one final characteristic. Matthew's dominating idea is that of Jesus as King. He writes to demonstrate the royalty of Jesus.

Right at the beginning the genealogy is to prove that Jesus is the Son of David (Matt.1:1-17). The title, Son of David, is used oftener in Matthew than in any other gospel (Matt.15:22; Matt.21:9; Matt.21:15). The wise men come looking for him who is King of the Jews (Matt.2:2). The triumphal entry is a deliberately dramatized claim to be King (Matt.21:1-11). Before Pilate, Jesus deliberately accepts the name of King (Matt.27:11). Even on the Cross the title of King is affixed, even if it be in mockery, over his head (Matt.27:37). In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew shows us Jesus quoting the Law and five times abrogating it with a regal: "But I say to you..." (Matt.5:21,27,34,38,43). The final claim of Jesus is: "All authority has been given to me" (Matt.28:18).

Matthew's picture of Jesus is of the man born to be King. Jesus walks through his pages as if in the purple and gold of royalty.

THE SIX ACCENTS IN THE VOICE OF JESUS

Matt.11 is a chapter in which Jesus is speaking all the time; and, as he speaks to different people and about different things, we hear the accent of his voice vary and change. It will be of the greatest interest to look one by one at the six accents in the voice of Jesus.

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Matthew 1:1-17

THE LINEAGE OF THE KING

Matthew 1:1-17 (Part 1)

This is the record of the lineage of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob. Jacob begat Judah and his brothers. Judah begat Phares and Zara, whose mother was Tamar. Phares begat Esrom. Esrom begat Aram. Aram begat Aminadab. Aminadab begat Naasson. Naasson begat Salmon. Salmon begat Booz, whose mother was Rachab. Booz begat Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed begat Jesse. Jesse begat David, the king.

David begat Solomon, whose mother was Uriah's wife. Solomon begat Roboam. Roboam begat Abia. Abia begat Asaph. Asaph begat Josaphat. Josaphat begat Joram. Joram begat Ozias. Ozias begat Joatham. Joatham begat Achaz. Achaz begat Ezekias. Ezekias begat Manasses. Manasses begat Amos. Amos begat Josias. Josias begat Jechonias, and his brothers, in the days when the exile to Babylon took place.

After the exile to Babylon Jechonias begat Salathiel. Salathiel begat Zorobabel. Zorobabel begat Abioud. Abioud begat Eliakim. Eliakim begat Azor. Azor begat Zadok. Zadok begat Acheim. Acheim begat Elioud. Elioud begat Eleazar. Eleazar begat Matthan. Matthan begat Jacob. Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, who was the mother of Jesus, who is called Christ.

From Abraham to David there were in all fourteen generations. From David to the exile to Babylon there were also fourteen generations. From the exile to Babylon to the coming of Christ there were also fourteen generations.

It might seem to a modern reader that Matthew chose an extraordinary way in which to begin his gospel; and it might seem daunting to present right at the beginning a long list of names to wade through. But to a Jew this was the most natural, and the most interesting, and indeed the most essential way to begin the story of any man's life.

The Jews were exceedingly interested in genealogies. Matthew calls this the book of the generation (GSN0976 - biblos; GSN1078 - geneseos) of Jesus Christ. That to the Jews was a common phrase; and it means the record of a man's lineage, with a few explanatory sentences, where such comment was necessary. In the Old Testament we frequently find lists of the generations of famous men (Gen.5:1; Gen.10:1; Gen.11:10; Gen.11:27). When Josephus, the great Jewish historian, wrote his own autobiography, he began it with his own pedigree, which, he tells us, he found in the public records.

The reason for this interest in pedigrees was that the Jews set the greatest possible store on purity of lineage. If in any man there was the slightest admixture of foreign blood, he lost his right to be called a Jew, and a member of the people of God. A priest, for instance, was bound to produce an unbroken record of his pedigree stretching back to Aaron; and, if he married, the woman he married must produce her pedigree for at least five generations back. When Ezra was reorganizing the

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Matthew 1:1-17

worship of God, after the people returned from exile, and was setting the priesthood to function again, the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, and the children of Barzillai were debarred from office, and were labelled as polluted because "These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there" (Ezr.2:62).

These genealogical records were actually kept by the Sanhedrin. Herod the Great was always despised by the pure-blooded Jews because he was half an Edomite; and we can see the importance that even Herod attached to these genealogies from the fact that he had the official registers destroyed, so that no one could prove a purer pedigree than his own. This may seem to us an uninteresting passage, but to the Jew it would be a most impressive matter that the pedigree of Jesus could be traced back to Abraham.

It is further to be noted that this pedigree is most carefully arranged. It is arranged in three groups of fourteen people each. It is in fact what is technically known as a mnemonic, that is to say a thing so arranged that it is easy to memorize. It is always to be remembered that the gospels were written hundreds of years before there was any such thing as a printed book. Very few people would be able to own actual copies of them; and so, if they wished to possess them, they would be compelled to memorize them. This pedigree, therefore, is arranged in such a way that it is easy to memorize. It is meant to prove that Jesus was the son of David, and is so arranged as to make it easy for people to carry it in their memories.

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Matthew 1:1-17

THE THREE STAGES

Matthew 1:1-17 (Part 2)

There is something symbolic of the whole of human life in the way in which this pedigree is arranged. It is arranged in three sections, and the three sections are based on three great stages in Jewish history.

The first section takes the history down to David. David was the man who welded Israel into a nation, and made the Jews a power in the world. The first section takes the story down to the rise of Israel's greatest king.

The second section takes the story down to the exile to Babylon. It is the section which tells of the nation's shame, and tragedy, and disaster.

The third section takes the story down to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the person who liberated men from their slavery, who rescued them from their disaster, and in whom the tragedy was turned into triumph.

These three sections stand for three stages in the spiritual history of mankind.

(i) Man was born for greatness. "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him" (Gen.1:27). God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen.1:26). Man was created in the image of God. God's dream for man was a dream of greatness. Man was designed for fellowship with God. He was created that he might be nothing less than kin to God. As Cicero, the Roman thinker, saw it, "The only difference between man and God is in point of time." Man was essentially man born to be king.

(ii) Man lost his greatness. Instead of being the servant of God, man became the slave of sin. As G. K. Chesterton said, "whatever else is true of man, man is not what he was meant to be." He used his free-will to defy and to disobey God, rather than to enter into friendship and fellowship with him. Left to himself man had frustrated the design and plan of God in His creation.

(iii) Man can regain his greatness. Even then God did not abandon man to himself and to his own devices. God did not allow man to be destroyed by his own folly. The end of the story was not left to be tragedy. Into this world God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, that he might rescue man from the morass of sin in which he had lost himself, and liberate him from the chains of sin with which he had bound himself so that through him man might regain the fellowship with God which he had lost.

In his genealogy Matthew shows us the royalty of kingship gained; the tragedy of freedom lost; the glory of liberty restored. And that, in the mercy of God, is the story of mankind, and of each individual man.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 1:1-17

THE REALIZATION OF MEN'S DREAMS

Matthew 1:1-17 (Part 3)

This passage stresses two special things about Jesus.

(i) It stresses the fact that he was the son of David. It was, indeed, mainly to prove this that the genealogy was composed. The New Testament stresses this again and again.

Peter states it in the first recorded sermon of the Christian Church (Ac.2:29-36). Paul speaks of Jesus Christ descended from David according to the flesh (Rom.1:3). The writer of the Pastoral Epistles urges men to remember that Jesus Christ, descended from David, was raised from the dead (2Tim.2:8). The writer of the Revelation hears the Risen Christ say: "I am the root and the offspring of David" (Rev.22:16).

Repeatedly Jesus is so addressed in the gospel story. After the healing of the blind and dumb man, the people exclaim, "Can this be the son of David?" (Matt.12:23). The woman of Tyre and Sidon, who wished for Jesus' help for her daughter, calls him: "Son of David" (Matt.15:22). The blind men cry out to Jesus as son of David (Matt.20:30-31). It is as son of David that the crowds greet Jesus when he enters Jerusalem for the last time (Matt.21:9,15).

There is something of great significance here. It is clear that it was the crowd, the common people, the ordinary folk, who addressed Jesus as son of David. The Jews were a waiting people. They never forgot, and never could forget, that they were the chosen people of God. Although their history was one long series of disasters, although at this very time they were a subject people, they never forgot their destiny. And it was the dream of the common people that into this world would come a descendant of David who would lead them to the glory which they believed to be theirs by right.

That is to say, Jesus is the answer to the dreams of men. It is true that so often men do not see it so. They see the answer to their dreams in power, in wealth, in material plenty, and in the realization of the ambitions which they cherish. But if ever men's dreams of peace and loveliness, and greatness and satisfaction, are to be realized, they can find their realization only in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ and the life he offers is the answer to the dreams of men. In the old Joseph story there is a text which goes far beyond the story itself. When Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker were prisoners along with him. They had their dreams, and their dreams troubled them, and their bewildered cry is, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them" (Gen.40:8). Because man is man, because he is a child of eternity, man is always haunted by his dream; and the only way to the realization of it lies in Jesus Christ.

(ii) This passage also stresses that Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy. In him the message of the prophets came true. We tend nowadays to make very little of prophecy. We are not really interested, for the most part, in searching for sayings in the Old Testament which are fulfilled in the

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Matthew 1:1-17

New Testament. But prophecy does contain this great and eternal truth, that in this universe there is purpose and design and that God is meaning and willing certain things to happen.

J. H. Withers quotes a saying from Gerald Healy's play, *The Black Stranger*. The scene is in Ireland, in the terrible days of famine in the mid-nineteenth century. For want of something better to do, and for lack of some other solution, the government had set men to digging roads to no purpose and to no destination. Michael finds out about this and comes home one day, and says in poignant wonder to his father, "They're makin' roads that lead to nowhere."

If we believe in prophecy that is what we can never say. History can never be a road that leads to nowhere. We may not use prophecy in the same way as our fathers did, but at the back of the fact of prophecy lies the eternal fact that life and the world are not on the way to nowhere, but on the way to the goal of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 1:1-17

NOT THE RIGHTEOUS, BUT SINNERS

Matthew 1:1-17 (Part 4)

By far the most amazing thing about this pedigree is the names of the women who appear in it.

It is not normal to find the names of women in Jewish pedigrees at all. The woman had no legal rights; she was regarded, not as a person, but as a thing. She was merely the possession of her father or of her husband, and in his disposal to do with as he liked. In the regular form of morning prayer the Jew thanked God that he had not made him a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. The very existence of these names in any pedigree at all is a most surprising and extraordinary phenomenon.

But when we look at who these women were, and at what they did, the matter becomes even more amazing. Rachab, or as the Old Testament calls her, Rahab, was a harlot of Jericho (Josh.2:1-7). Ruth was not even a Jewess; she was a Moabitess (Ru.1:4), and does not the law itself lay it down, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none belonging to them shall enter the assembly of the Lord for ever"(Deut.23:3)? Ruth belonged to an alien and a hated people. Tamar was a deliberate seducer and an adulteress (Gen.38). Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, was the woman whom David seduced from Uriah, her husband, with an unforgivable cruelty (2Sam.11-12). If Matthew had ransacked the pages of the Old Testament for improbable candidates he could not have discovered four more incredible ancestors for Jesus Christ. But, surely, there is something very lovely in this. Here, at the very beginning, Matthew shows us in symbol the essence of the gospel of God in Jesus Christ, for here he shows us the barriers going down.

(i) The barrier between Jew and Gentile is down. Rahab, the woman of Jericho, and Ruth, the woman of Moab, find their place within the pedigree of Jesus Christ. Already the great truth is there that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek. Here, at the very beginning, there is the universalism of the gospel and of the love of God.

(ii) The barriers between male and female are down. In no ordinary pedigree would the name of any woman be found; but such names are found in Jesus' pedigree. The old contempt is gone; and men and women stand equally dear to God, and equally important to his purposes.

(iii) The barrier between saint and sinner is down. Somehow God can use for his purposes, and fit into his scheme of things, those who have sinned greatly. "I came" said Jesus, "not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt.9:13).

Here at the very beginning of the gospel we are given a hint of the all-embracing width of the love of God. God can find his servants amongst those from whom the respectable orthodox would shudder away in horror.

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Matthew 1:18-25

THE SAVIOUR'S ENTRY INTO THE WORLD

Matthew 1:18-25 (Part 1)

The birth of Jesus Christ happened in this way. Mary, His mother, was betrothed to Joseph, and, before they became man and wife, it was discovered that she was carrying a child in her womb through the action of the Holy Spirit. Although Joseph, her husband, was a man who kept the law, he did not wish publicly to humiliate her, so he wished to divorce her secretly. When he was planning this, behold, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David" said the angel, "do not hesitate to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been begotten within her has come from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you must call his name Jesus, for it is he who will save his people from their sins.

All this has happened that there might be fulfilled that which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Behold, the maiden will conceive and bear a son, and you must call his name Emmanuel, which is translated: God with us'." So Joseph woke from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him; and he accepted his wife: and he did not know her until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

To our western ways of thinking the relationships in this passage are very bewildering. First, Joseph is said to be betrothed to Mary; then he is said to be planning quietly to divorce her; and then she is called his wife. But the relationships represent normal Jewish marriage procedure, in which there were three steps.

(i) There was the engagement. The engagement was often made when the couple were only children. It was usually made through the parents, or through a professional match-maker. And it was often made without the couple involved ever having seen each other. Marriage was held to be far too serious a step to be left to the dictates of the human heart.

(ii) There was the betrothal. The betrothal was what we might call the ratification of the engagement into which the couple had previously entered. At this point the engagement, entered into by the parents or the match-maker, could be broken if the girl was unwilling to go on with it. But once the betrothal was entered into, it was absolutely binding. It lasted for one year. During that year the couple were known as man and wife, although they had not the rights of man and wife. It could not be terminated in any other way than by divorce. In the Jewish law we frequently find what is to us a curious phrase. A girl whose fiance had died during the year of betrothal is called "a virgin who is a widow". It was at this stage that Joseph and Mary were. They were betrothed, and if Joseph wished to end the betrothal, he could do so in no other way than by divorce; and in that year of betrothal Mary was legally known as his wife.

(iii) The third stage was the marriage proper, which took place at the end of the year of betrothal.

If we remember the normal Jewish wedding customs, then the relationships in this passage are perfectly usual and perfectly clear.

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Matthew 1:18-25

So at this stage it was told to Joseph that Mary was to bear a child, that that child had been begotten by the Holy Spirit, and that he must call the child by the name Jesus. Jesus is the Greek form of the Jewish name Joshua, and Joshua means Jehovah is salvation. Long ago the Psalmist had heard God say, "He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (Ps.130:8). And Joseph was told that the child to be born would grow into the Saviour who would save God's people from their sins. Jesus was not so much The Man born to be King as The Man born to be Saviour. He came to this world, not for his own sake, but for men and for our salvation.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 1:18-25

BORN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Matthew 1:18-25 (Part 2)

This passage tells us how Jesus was born by the action of the Holy Spirit. It tells us of what we call the Virgin Birth. This is a doctrine which presents us with many difficulties; and our Church does not compel us to accept it in the literal and the physical sense. This is one of the doctrines on which the Church says that we have full liberty to come to our own conclusion. At the moment we are concerned only to find out what this means for us.

If we come to this passage with fresh eyes, and read it as if we were reading it for the first time, we will find that what it stresses is not so much that Jesus was born of a woman who was a virgin, as that the birth of Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit. "Mary was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit." "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." It is as if these sentences were underlined, and printed large. That is what Matthew wishes to say to us in this passage. What then does it mean to say that in the birth of Jesus the Holy Spirit of God was specially operative? Let us leave aside all the doubtful and debatable things, and concentrate on that great truth, as Matthew would wish us to do.

In Jewish thought the Holy Spirit had certain very definite functions. We cannot bring to this passage the Christian idea of the Holy Spirit in all its fullness, because Joseph would know nothing about that. We must interpret it in the light of the Jewish idea of the Holy Spirit, for it is that idea that Joseph would inevitably bring to this message, for that was all he knew.

(i) According to the Jewish idea, the Holy Spirit was the person who brought God's truth to men. It was the Holy Spirit who taught the prophets what to say; it was the Holy Spirit who taught men of God what to do; it was the Holy Spirit who, throughout the ages and the generations, brought God's truth to men. So then, Jesus is the one person who brings God's truth to men.

Let us put it in another way. Jesus is the one person who can tell us what God is like, add what God means us to be. In him alone we see what God is and what man ought to be. Before Jesus came men had only vague and shadowy, and often quite wrong, ideas about God; they could only at best guess and grope; but Jesus could say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn.14:9). In Jesus we see the love, the compassion, the mercy, the seeking heart, the purity of God as nowhere else in all this world. With the coming of Jesus the time of guessing is gone, and the time of certainty is come. Before Jesus came men did not really know what goodness was. In Jesus alone we see true manhood, true goodness, true obedience to the will of God. Jesus came to tell us the truth about God and the truth about ourselves.

(ii) The Jews believed that the Holy Spirit not only brought God's truth to men, but also enabled men to recognize that truth when they saw it. So then Jesus opens men's eyes to the truth. Men are blinded by their own ignorance; they are led astray by their own prejudices; their minds and eyes are darkened by their own sins and their own passions. Jesus can open our eyes until we are able to see the truth.

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Matthew 1:18-25

In one of William J. Locke's novels there is a picture of a woman who has any amount of money, and who has spent half a lifetime on a tour of the sights and picture galleries of the world. She is weary and bored. Then she meets a Frenchman who has little of this world's goods, but who has a wide knowledge and a great love of beauty. He comes with her, and in his company things are completely different. "I never knew what things were like," she said to him, "until you taught me how to look at them."

Life is quite different when Jesus teaches us how to look at things. When Jesus comes into our hearts, he opens our eyes to see things truly.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 1:18-25

CREATION AND RE-CREATION

Matthew 1:18-25 (Part 3)

(iii) The Jews specially connected the Spirit of God with the work of creation. It was through his Spirit that God performed his creating work. In the beginning the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters and chaos became a world (Gen.1:2). "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made," said the Psalmist, "and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps.33:6). (Both in Hebrew: HSN7307 - ruwach, and in Greek: GSN4151 - pneuma, the word for breath and spirit is the same word.) "When thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created" (Ps.104:30). "The Spirit of God has made me," said Job, "and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Jb.33:4).

The Spirit is the Creator of the World and the Giver of Life. So, then, in Jesus there came into the world God's life-giving and creating power. That power, which reduced the primal chaos to order, is come to bring order to our disordered life. That power, which breathed life into that in which there was no life, is come to breathe life into our weaknesses and frustrations. We could put it this way--we are not really alive until Jesus enters into our lives.

(iv) The Jews specially connected the Spirit, not only with the work of creation, but with the work of re-creation. Ezekiel draws his grim picture of the valley of dry bones. He goes on to tell how the dry bones came alive; and then he hears God say, "I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live" (Eze.37:1-14). The Rabbis had a saying, "God said to Israel: 'In this world my Spirit has put wisdom in you, but in the future my Spirit will make you to live again'." When men are dead in sin and in lethargy, it is the Spirit of God which can waken them to life anew.

So then, in Jesus there came to this world the power which can re-create life. He can bring to life again the soul which is dead in sin; he can revive again the ideals which have died; he can make strong again the will to goodness which has perished. He can renew life, when men have lost all that life means.

There is much more in this chapter than the crude fact that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin mother. The essence of Matthew's story is that in the birth of Jesus the Spirit of God was operative as never before in this world. It is the Spirit who brings God's truth to men; it is the Spirit who enables men to recognize that truth when they see it; it is the Spirit who was God's agent in the creation of the world; it is the Spirit who alone can re-create the human soul when it has lost the life it ought to have.

Jesus enables us to see what God is and what man ought to be; Jesus opens the eyes of our minds so that we can see the truth of God for us; Jesus is the creating power come amongst men; Jesus is the re-creating power which can release the souls of men from the death of sin.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 2:1-2

THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE KING

Matthew 2:1-2 (Part 1)

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judaea, in the days of Herod the King, behold there came to Jerusalem wise men from the East. "Where," they said, "is the newly born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in its rising and we have come to worship him."

It was in Bethlehem that Jesus was born. Bethlehem was quite a little town six miles to the south of Jerusalem. In the olden days it had been called Ephrath or Ephratah. The name Bethlehem means The House of Bread, and Bethlehem stood in a fertile countryside, which made its name a fitting name. It stood high up on a grey limestone ridge more than two thousand five hundred feet in height. The ridge had a summit at each end, and a hollow like a saddle between them. So, from its position, Bethlehem looked like a town set in an amphitheatre of hills.

Bethlehem had a long history. It was there that Jacob had buried Rachel, and had set up a pillar of memory beside her grave (Gen.48:7; Gen.35:20). It was there that Ruth had lived when she married Boaz (Ru.1:22), and from Bethlehem Ruth could see the land of Moab, her native land, across the Jordan valley. But above all Bethlehem was the home and the city of David (1Sam.16:1; 1Sam.17:12; 1Sam.20:6); and it was for the water of the well of Bethlehem that David longed when he was a hunted fugitive upon the hills (2Sam.23:14-15).

In later days we read that Rehoboam fortified the town of Bethlehem (2Chr.11:6). But in the history of Israel, and to the minds of the people, Bethlehem was uniquely the city of David. It was from the line of David that God was to send the great deliverer of his people. As the prophet Micah had it: "O Bethlehem Ephratah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days" (Mic.5:2).

It was in Bethlehem, David's city, that the Jews expected great David's greater Son to be born; it was there that they expected God's Anointed One to come into the world. And it was so.

The picture of the stable and the manger as the birthplace of Jesus is a picture indelibly etched in our minds; but it may well be that that picture is not altogether correct. Justin Martyr, one of the greatest of the early fathers, who lived about A.D. 150, and who came from the district near Bethlehem, tells us that Jesus was born in a cave near the village of Bethlehem (Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho, 78, 304); and it may well be that Justin's information is correct. The houses in Bethlehem are built on the slope of the limestone ridge; and it is very common for them to have a cave-like stable hollowed out in the limestone rock below the house itself, and very likely it was in such a cave-stable that Jesus was born.

To this day such a cave is shown in Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus and above it the Church of the Nativity has been built. For very long that cave has been shown as the birthplace of Jesus. It was so in the days of the Roman Emperor, Hadrian, for Hadrian, in a deliberate attempt to desecrate the place, erected a shrine to the heathen god Adonis above it. When the Roman Empire became

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Matthew 2:1-2

Christian, early in the fourth century, the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, built a great church there, and that church, much altered and often restored, still stands.

H. V. Morton tells how he visited the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. He came to a great wall, and in the wall there was a door so low that he had to stoop to enter it; and through the door, and on the other side of the wall, there was the church. Beneath the high altar of the church is the eave, and when the pilgrim descends into it he finds a little cavern about fourteen yards long and four yards wide, lit by silver lamps. In the floor there is a star, and round it a Latin inscription: "Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary."

When the Lord of Glory came to this earth, he was born in a cave where men sheltered the beasts. The cave in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem may be that same cave, or it may not be. That we will never know for certain. But there is something beautiful in the symbolism that the church where the cave is has a door so low that all must stoop to enter. It is supremely fitting that every man should approach the infant Jesus upon his knees.

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Matthew 2:1-2

THE HOMAGE OF THE EAST

Matthew 2:1-2 (Part 2)

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem there came to do him homage wise men from the East. The name given to these men is Magi, and that is a word which is difficult to translate. Herodotus (1: 101,132) has certain information about the Magi. He says that they were originally a Median tribe. The Medes were part of the Empire of the Persians. They tried to overthrow the Persians and substitute the power of the Medes. The attempt failed. From that time the Magi ceased to have any ambitions for power or prestige, and became a tribe of priests. They became in Persia almost exactly what the Levites were in Israel. They became the teachers and instructors of the Persian kings. In Persia no sacrifice could be offered unless one of the Magi was present. They became men of holiness and wisdom.

These Magi were men who were skilled in philosophy, medicine and natural science. They were soothsayers and interpreters of dreams. In later times the word Magus developed a much lower meaning, and came to mean little more than a fortune-teller, a sorcerer, a magician, and a charlatan. Such was Elymas, the sorcerer (Ac.13:6,8), and Simon who is commonly called Simon Magus (Ac.8:9,11). But at their best the Magi were good and holy men, who sought for truth.

In those ancient days all men believed in astrology. They believed that they could foretell the future from the stars, and they believed that a man's destiny was settled by the star under which he was born. It is not difficult to see how that belief arose. The stars pursue their unvarying courses; they represent the order of the universe. If then there suddenly appeared some brilliant star, if the unvarying order of the heavens was broken by some special phenomenon, it did look as if God was breaking into his own order, and announcing some special thing.

We do not know what brilliant star those ancient Magi saw. Many suggestions have been made. About 11 B.C. Halley's comet was visible shooting brilliantly across the skies. About 7 B.C. there was a brilliant conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. In the years 5 to 2 B.C. there was an unusual astronomical phenomenon. In those years, on the first day of the Egyptian month, Messori, Sirius, the dog star, rose heliacally, that is at sunrise, and shone with extraordinary brilliance. Now the name Messori means the birth of a prince, and to those ancient astrologers such a star would undoubtedly mean the birth of some great king. We cannot tell what star the Magi saw; but it was their profession to watch the heavens, and some heavenly brilliance spoke to them of the entry of a king into the world.

It may seem to us extraordinary that those men should set out from the East to find a king, but the strange thing is that, just about the time Jesus was born, there was in the world a strange feeling of expectation of the coming of a king. Even the Roman historians knew about this. Not so very much later than this Suetonius could write, "There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world" (Suetonius: Life of Vespasian, 4: 5). Tacitus tells of the same belief that "there was a firm persuasion ... that at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers coming from Judaea were to acquire universal

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Matthew 2:1-2

empire" (Tacitus: Histories, 5: 13). The Jews had the belief that "about that time one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth" (Josephus: Wars of the Jews, 6: 5, 4). At a slightly later time we find Tiridates, King of Armenia, visiting Nero at Rome with his Magi along with him (Suetonius: Life of Nero, 13: 1). We find the Magi in Athens sacrificing to the memory of Plato (Seneca: Epistles, 58: 3 1). Almost at the same time as Jesus was born we find Augustus, the Roman Emperor, being hailed as the Saviour of the World, and Virgil, the Roman poet, writing his Fourth Eclogue, which is known as the Messianic Eclogue, about the golden days to come.

There is not the slightest need to think that the story of the coming of the Magi to the cradle of Christ is only a lovely legend. It is exactly the kind of thing that could easily have happened in that ancient world. When Jesus Christ came the world was in an eagerness of expectation. Men were waiting for God and the desire for God was in their hearts. They had discovered that they could not build the golden age without God. It was to a waiting world that Jesus came; and, when he came, the ends of the earth were gathered at his cradle. It was the first sign and symbol of the world conquest of Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 2:3-9a

THE CRAFTY KING

Matthew 2:3-9a

When Herod the king heard of this he was disturbed, and so was all Jerusalem with him. So he collected all the chief priests and scribes of the people, and asked them where the Anointed One of God was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem in Judaea. For so it stands written through the prophets, 'And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means the least among the leaders of Judah. For there shall come forth from you the leader, who will be a shepherd to my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men, and carefully questioned them about the time when the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem. "Go," he said, "and make every effort to find out about the little child. And, when you have found him, send news to me, that I, too, may come and worship him." When they had listened to the king they went on their way.

It came to the ears of Herod that the wise men had come from the East, and that they were searching for the little child who had been born to be King of the Jews. Any king would have been worried at the report that a child had been born who was to occupy his throne. But Herod was doubly disturbed.

Herod was half Jew and half Idumean. There was Edomite blood in his veins. He had made himself useful to the Romans in the wars and civil wars of Palestine, and they trusted him. He had been appointed governor in 47 B.C.; in 40 B.C. he had received the title of king; and he was to reign until 4 B.C. He had wielded power for long. He was called Herod the Great, and in many ways he deserved the title. He was the only ruler of Palestine who ever succeeded in keeping the peace and in bringing order into disorder. He was a great builder; he was indeed the builder of the Temple in Jerusalem. He could be generous. In times of difficulty he remitted the taxes to make things easier for the people; and in the famine of 25 B.C. he had actually melted down his own gold plate to buy corn for the starving people.

But Herod had one terrible flaw in his character. He was almost insanely suspicious. He had always been suspicious, and the older he became the more suspicious he grew, until, in his old age, he was, as someone said, "a murderous old man." If he suspected anyone as a rival to his power, that person was promptly eliminated. He murdered his wife Mariamne and her mother Alexandra. His eldest son, Antipater, and two other sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, were all assassinated by him. Augustus, the Roman Emperor, had said, bitterly, that it was safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son. (The saying is even more epigrammatic in Greek, for in Greek *huos* (GSN5300) is the word for a pig, and *huios* is the word for a son).

Something of Herod's savage, bitter, warped nature can be seen from the provisions he made when death came near. When he was seventy he knew that he must die. He retired to Jericho, the loveliest of all his cities. He gave orders that a collection of the most distinguished citizens of Jerusalem should be arrested on trumped-up charges and imprisoned. And he ordered that the moment he died, they should all be killed. He said grimly that he was well aware that no one would mourn for his death, and that he was determined that some tears should be shed when he died.

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Matthew 2:3-9a

It is clear how such a man would feel when news reached him that a child was born who was destined to be king. Herod was troubled, and Jerusalem was troubled, too, for Jerusalem well knew the steps that Herod would take to pin down this story and to eliminate this child. Jerusalem knew Herod, and Jerusalem shivered as it waited for his inevitable reaction.

Herod summoned the chief priests and the scribes. The scribes were the experts in scripture and in the law. The chief priests consisted of two kinds of people. They consisted of ex-high priests. The high priesthood was confined to a very few families. They were the priestly aristocracy, and the members of these select families were called the chief priests. So Herod summoned the religious aristocracy and the theological scholars of his day, and asked them where, according to the scriptures, the Anointed One of God should be born. They quoted the text in Mic.5:2 to him. Herod sent for the wise men, and despatched them to make diligent search for the little child who had been born. He said that he, too, wished to come and worship the child; but his one desire was to murder the child born to be king.

No sooner was Jesus born than we see men grouping themselves into the three groups in which men are always to be found in regard to Jesus Christ. Let us look at the three reactions.

(i) There was the reaction of Herod, the reaction of hatred and hostility. Herod was afraid that this little child was going to interfere with his life, his place, his power, his influence, and therefore his first instinct was to destroy him.

There are still those who would gladly destroy Jesus Christ, because they see in him the one who interferes with their lives. They wish to do what they like, and Christ will not let them do what they like; and so they would kill him. The man whose one desire is to do what he likes has never any use for Jesus Christ. The Christian is the man who has ceased to do what he likes, and has dedicated his life to do as Christ likes.

(ii) There was the reaction of the chief priests and scribes, the reaction of complete indifference. It did not make the slightest difference to them. They were so engrossed in their Temple ritual and their legal discussions that they completely disregarded Jesus. He meant nothing to them.

There are still those who are so interested in their own affairs that Jesus Christ means nothing to them. The prophet's poignant question can still be asked: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" (Lam.1:12).

(iii) There was the reaction of the wise men, the reaction of adoring worship, the desire to lay at the feet of Jesus Christ the noblest gifts which they could bring.

Surely, when any man realizes the love of God in Jesus Christ, he, too, should be lost in wonder, love and praise.

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Matthew 2:9b-12

GIFTS FOR CHRIST

Matthew 2:9b-12

And, behold, the star, which they had seen in its rising, led them on until it came and stood over the place where the little child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. When they came into the house, they saw the little child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him; and they opened their treasures, and offered to him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. And because a message from God came to them in a dream, telling them not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another way.

So the wise men found their way to Bethlehem. We need not think that the star literally moved like a guide across the sky. There is poetry here, and we must not turn lovely poetry into crude and lifeless prose. But over Bethlehem the star was shining. There is a lovely legend which tells how the star, its work of guidance completed, fell into the well at Bethlehem, and that it is still there and can still be seen sometimes by those whose hearts are pure.

Later legends have been busy with the wise men. In the early days eastern tradition said that there were twelve of them. But now the tradition that there were three is almost universal. The New Testament does not say that there were three, but the idea that there were three no doubt arose from the threefold gift which they brought.

Later legend made them kings. And still later legend gave them names, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. Still later legend assigned to each a personal description, and distinguished the gift which each of them gave to Jesus. Melchior was an old man, grey haired, and with a long beard, and it was he who brought the gift of gold. Caspar was young and beardless, and ruddy in countenance, and it was he who brought the gift of frankincense. Balthasar was swarthy, with the beard newly grown upon him, and it was he who brought the gift of myrrh.

From very early times men have seen a peculiar fitness in the gifts the wise men brought. They have seen in each gift something which specially matched some characteristic of Jesus and his work.

(i) Gold is the gift for a king. Seneca tells us that in Parthia it was the custom that no one could ever approach the king without a gift. And gold, the king of metals, is the fit gift for a king of men.

So then Jesus was "the Man born to be King." But he was to reign, not by force, but by love; and he was to rule over men's hearts, not from a throne, but from a Cross.

We do well to remember that Jesus Christ is King. We can never meet Jesus on an equality. We must always meet him on terms of complete submission. Nelson, the great admiral, always treated his vanquished opponent?, with the greatest kindness and courtesy. After one of his naval victories, the defeated admiral was brought aboard Nelson's flagship and on to Nelson's quarter-deck. Knowing Nelson's reputation for courtesy, and thinking to trade upon it, he advanced across the quarter-deck with hand outstretched as if he was advancing to shake hands with an equal. Nelson's

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Matthew 2:9b-12

hand remained by his side. "Your sword first," he said, "and then your hand." Before we must be friends with Christ, we must submit to Christ.

(ii) Frankincense is the gift for a priest. It was in the Temple worship and at the Temple sacrifices that the sweet perfume of frankincense was used. The function of a priest is to open the way to God for men. The Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means a bridge-builder. The priest is the man who builds a bridge between men and God.

That is what Jesus did. He opened the way to God; he made it possible for men to enter into the very presence of God.

(iii) Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die. Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead.

Jesus came into the world to die. Holman Hunt has a famous picture of Jesus. It shows Jesus at the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. He is still only a boy and has come to the door to stretch his limbs which had grown cramped over the bench. He stands there in the doorway with arms outstretched, and behind him, on the wall, the setting sun throws his shadow, and it is the shadow of a cross. In the background there stands Mary, and as she sees that shadow there is the fear of coming tragedy in her eyes.

Jesus came into the world to live for men, and, in the end, to die for men. He came to give for men his life and his death.

Gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for one who was to die--these were the gifts of the wise men, and, even at the cradle of Christ, they foretold that he was to be the true King, the perfect High Priest, and in the end the supreme Saviour of men.

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Matthew 2:13-15

ESCAPE TO EGYPT

Matthew 2:13-15

When they had gone away, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph. "Rise," he said, "and take the little child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the little child, in order to kill him." So he arose and took the little child and his mother by night and went away into Egypt, and he remained there until the death of Herod. This happened that the word spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

The ancient world had no doubt that God sent his messages to men in dreams. So Joseph was warned in a dream to flee into Egypt to escape Herod's murderous intentions. The flight into Egypt was entirely natural. Often, throughout the troubled centuries before Jesus came, when some peril and some tyranny and some persecution made life intolerable for the Jews, they sought refuge in Egypt. The result was that every city in Egypt had its colony of Jews; and in the city of Alexandria there were actually more than a million Jews, and certain districts of the city were entirely handed over to them. Joseph in his hour of peril was doing what many a Jew had done before; and when Joseph and Mary reached Egypt they would not find themselves altogether amidst strangers, for in every town and city they would find Jews who had sought refuge there.

It is an interesting fact that in after days the foes of Christianity and the enemies of Jesus used the stay in Egypt as a peg to attach their slanders to him. Egypt was proverbially the land of sorcery, of witchcraft and of magic. The Talmud says, "Ten measures of sorcery descended into the world; Egypt received nine, the rest of the world one". So the enemies of Jesus declared that it was in Egypt that Jesus had learned a magic and a sorcery which made him able to work miracles., and to deceive men.

When the pagan philosopher, Celsus, directed his attack against Christianity in the third century, that attack which Origen met and defeated, he said that Jesus was brought up as an illegitimate child, that he served for hire in Egypt, that he came to the knowledge of certain miraculous powers, and returned to his own country and used these powers to proclaim himself God (Origen: Contra Celsum 1: 38). A certain Rabbi, Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, said that Jesus had the necessary magical formulae tattooed upon his body so that he would not forget them. Such were the slanders that twisted minds connected with the flight to Egypt; but they are obviously false, for it was as a little baby that Jesus was taken to Egypt, and it was as a little child that he was brought back.

Two of the loveliest New Testament legends are connected with the flight into Egypt. The first is about the penitent thief. Legend calls the penitent thief Dismas, and tells that he did not meet Jesus for the first time when they both hung on their crosses on Calvary. The story runs like this. When Joseph and Mary were on their way to Egypt, they were waylaid by robbers. One of the robber chiefs wished to murder them at once and to steal their little store of goods. But something about the baby Jesus went straight to Dismas' heart, for Dismas was one of these robbers. He refused to allow any harm to come to Jesus or his parents. He looked at Jesus and said, "O most blessed of children, if ever there come a time for having mercy on me, then remember me, and forget not this

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Matthew 2:13-15

hour". So, the legend says, Jesus and Dismas met again at Calvary, and Dismas on the cross found forgiveness and mercy for his soul.

The other legend is a child's story, but it is very lovely. When Joseph and Mary and Jesus were on their way to Egypt, the story runs, as the evening came they were weary, and they sought refuge in a cave. It was very cold, so cold that the ground was white with hoar frost. A little spider saw the little baby Jesus, and he wished so much that he could do something to keep him warm in the cold night. He decided to do the only thing he could and spin his web across the entrance of the cave, to make, as it were, a curtain there.

Along the path came a detachment of Herod's soldiers, seeking for children to kill to carry out Herod's bloodthirsty order. When they came to the cave they were about to burst in to search it, but their captain noticed the spider's web, covered with the white hoar frost and stretched right across the entrance to the cave. "Look," he said, "at the spider's web there. It is quite unbroken and there cannot possibly be anyone in the cave, for anyone entering would certainly have torn the web."

So the soldiers passed on, and left the holy family in peace, because a little spider had spun his web across the entrance to the cave. And that, so they say, is why to this day we put tinsel on our Christmas trees, for the glittering tinsel streamers stand for the spider's web, white with the hoar frost, stretched across the entrance of the cave on the way to Egypt. It is a lovely story, and this much, at least, is true, that no gift which Jesus receives is ever forgotten.

The last words of this passage introduce us to a custom which is characteristic of Matthew. He sees in the flight to Egypt a fulfilment of the word spoken by Hosea. He quotes it in the form: Out of Egypt have I called my son. That is a quotation from Hos.11:1, which reads: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son".

It can be seen at once that in its original form this saying of Hosea had nothing to do with Jesus, and nothing to do with the flight to Egypt. It was nothing more than a simple statement of how God had delivered the nation of Israel from slavery and from bondage in the land of Egypt.

We shall see, again and again, that this is typical of Matthew's use of the Old Testament. He is prepared to use as a prophecy about Jesus any text at all which can be made verbally to fit, even although originally it had nothing to do with the question in hand, and was never meant to have anything to do with it. Matthew knew that almost the only way to convince the Jews that Jesus was the promised Anointed One of God was to prove that he was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. And in his eagerness to do that he finds prophecies in the Old Testament where no prophecies were ever meant. When we read a passage like this we must remember that, though it seems strange and unconvincing to us, it would appeal to those Jews for whom Matthew was writing.

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Matthew 2:16-18

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE CHILDREN

Matthew 2:16-18

The Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, and he sent and slew all the children in Bethlehem, and in all the districts near by. He slew every child of two years and under, reckoning from the time when he had made his inquiries from the wise men. Then the word which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "A voice was heard in Rama, weeping and much lamenting, Rachel weeping for her children, and she refused to be comforted, for they were no more."

We have already seen that Herod was a past master in the art of assassination. He had no sooner come to the throne than he began by annihilating the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews. Later he slaughtered three hundred court officers out of hand. Later he murdered his wife Mariamne, and her mother Alexandra, his eldest son Antipater, and two other sons, Alexander and Aristobulus. And in the hour of his death he arranged for the slaughter of the notable men of Jerusalem.

It was not to be expected that Herod would calmly accept the news that a child had been born who was going to be king. We have read how he had carefully enquired of the wise men when they had seen the star. Even then he was craftily working out the age of the child so that he might take steps towards murder, and now he put his plans into swift and savage action. He gave orders that every child under two years of age in Bethlehem and the surrounding district should be slaughtered.

There are two things which we must note. Bethlehem was not a large town, and the number of the children would not exceed from twenty to thirty babies. We must not think in terms of hundreds. It is true that this does not make Herod's crime any the less terrible, but we must get the picture right.

Secondly, there are certain critics who hold that this slaughter cannot have taken place because there is no mention of it in any writer outside this one passage of the New Testament. The Jewish historian Josephus, for instance, does not mention it. There are two things to be said. First, as we have just seen, Bethlehem was a comparatively small place, and in a land where murder was so widespread the slaughter of twenty or thirty babies would cause little stir, and would mean very little except to the broken-hearted mothers of Bethlehem. Second, Carr notes that Macaulay, in his history, points out that Evelyn, the famous diarist, who was a most assiduous and voluminous recorder of contemporary events, never mentions the massacre of Glencoe. The fact that a thing is not mentioned, even in the places where one might expect it to be mentioned, is no proof at all that it did not happen. The whole incident is so typical of Herod that we need not doubt that Matthew is passing the truth down to us.

Here is a terrible illustration of what men will do to get rid of Jesus Christ. If a man is set on his own way, if he sees in Christ someone who is liable to interfere with his ambitions and rebuke his ways, his one desire is to eliminate Christ; and then he is driven to the most terrible things, for if he does not break men's bodies, he will break their hearts.

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Matthew 2:16-18

Again, at the end of this passage, we see Matthew's characteristic way of using the Old Testament. He quotes Jer.31:15, "Thus says the Lord: a voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not."

The verse in Jeremiah has no connection with Herod's slaughter of the children: the picture in Jeremiah was this. Jeremiah was picturing the people of Jerusalem being led away in exile. In their sad way to an alien land they pass Ramah, and Ramah was the place where Rachel lay buried (1Sam.10:2); and Jeremiah pictures Rachel weeping, even in the tomb, for the fate that had befallen the people.

Matthew is doing what he so often did. In his eagerness he is finding a prophecy where no prophecy is. But, again, we must remind ourselves that what seems strange to us seemed in no way strange to those for whom Matthew was writing in his day.

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Matthew 2:19-23

RETURN TO NAZARETH

Matthew 2:19-23

When Herod died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. "Rise," he said, "and take the little child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel. For those who seek the little child's life are dead." So he rose and took the little child and his mother, and went into the land of Israel. When he heard that Archelaus was king in Judaea instead of Herod, his father, he was afraid to go there. So, when, he had received a message from God in a dream, he withdrew to the districts of Galilee, and he came and settled in a town called Nazareth. This happened so that the word spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled-- "He shall be called a Nazarene."

In due time Herod died, and when Herod died the whole kingdom over which he had ruled was split up. The Romans had trusted Herod, and they had allowed him to reign over a very considerable territory, but Herod well knew that none of his sons would be allowed a like power. So he had divided his kingdom into three, and in his will he had left a part to each of three of his sons. He had left Judaea to Archelaus; Galilee to Herod Antipas; and the region away to the northeast and beyond Jordan to Philip.

But the death of Herod did not solve the problem. Archelaus was a bad king, and he was not to last long upon the throne. In fact he had begun his reign with an attempt to out-Herod Herod, for he had opened his rule with the deliberate slaughter of three thousand of the most influential people in the country. Clearly, even now that Herod was dead, it was still unsafe to return to Judaea with the savage and reckless Archelaus on the throne. So Joseph was guided to go to Galilee where Herod Antipas, a much better king, reigned.

It was in Nazareth that Joseph settled, and it was in Nazareth that Jesus was brought up. It must not be thought that Nazareth was a little quiet backwater, quite out of touch with life and with events.

Nazareth lay in a hollow in the hills in the south of Galilee. But a lad had only to climb the hills for half the world to be at his door. He could look west and the waters of the Mediterranean, blue in the distance, would meet his eyes; and he would see the ships going out to the ends of the earth. He had only to look at the plain which skirted the coast, and he would see, slipping round the foot of the very hill on which he stood, the road from Damascus to Egypt, the land bridge to Africa. It was one of the greatest caravan routes in the world.

It was the road by which centuries before Joseph had been sold down into Egypt as a slave. It was the road that, three hundred years before, Alexander the Great and his legions had followed. It was the road by which centuries later Napoleon was to march. It was the road which in the twentieth century Allenby was to take. Sometimes it was called The Way of the South, and sometimes the Road of the Sea. On it Jesus would see all kinds of travellers from all kinds, of nations on all kinds of errands, coming, and going from the ends of the earth.

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Matthew 2:19-23

But there was another road. There was the road which left the sea coast at Acre or Ptolemais and went out to the East. It was the Road of the East. It went out to the eastern bounds and frontiers of the Roman Empire. Once again the cavalcade of the caravans and their silks and spices would be continually on it, and on it also the Roman legions clanked out to the frontiers.

Nazareth indeed was no backwater. Jesus was brought up in a town where the ends of the earth passed the foot of the hilltop. From his boyhood days he was confronted with scenes which must have spoken to him of a world for God.

We have seen how Matthew clinches each event in the early life of Jesus with a passage from the Old Testament which he regards as a prophecy. Here Matthew cites a prophecy: "He shall be called a Nazarene"; and here Matthew has set us an insoluble problem, for there is no such text in the Old Testament. In fact Nazareth is never mentioned in the Old Testament. No one has ever satisfactorily solved the problem of what part of the Old Testament Matthew has in mind.

The ancient writers liked puns and plays on words. It has been suggested that Matthew is playing on the words of Isaiah in Isa. 11:1: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." The word for branch is HSN5342 - netser; and it is just possible that Matthew is playing on the word Nazarene and the word Netser (HSN5342); and that he is saying at one and the same time that Jesus was from Nazareth and that Jesus was the Netser (HSN5342), the promised Branch from the stock of Jesse, the descendant of David, the promised Anointed King of God. No one can tell. What prophecy Matthew had in mind must remain a mystery.

So now the stage is set; Matthew has brought Jesus to Nazareth and in a very real sense Nazareth was the gateway to the world.

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Matthew 3

THE YEARS BETWEEN

Before we move on to the third chapter of Matthew's gospel there is something at which we would do well to look. The second chapter of the gospel closes with Jesus as a little child; the third chapter of the gospel opens with Jesus as a man of thirty (compare Lk.3:23). That is to say, between the two chapters there are thirty silent years. Why should it have been so? What was happening in those silent years? Jesus came into the world to be the Saviour of the world, and for thirty years he never moved beyond the bounds of Palestine, except to the Passover at Jerusalem. He died when he was thirty-three, and of these thirty-three years thirty were spent without record in Nazareth. To put it in another way, ten-elevenths of Jesus' life were spent in Nazareth. What was happening then?

(i) Jesus was growing up to boyhood, and then to manhood, in a good home; and there can be no greater start to life than that. J. S. Blackie, the famous Edinburgh professor, once said in public, "I desire to thank God for the good stock-in-trade, so to speak, which I inherited from my parents for the business of life." George Herbert once said, "A good mother is worth a hundred schoolmasters." So for Jesus the years passed, silently but mouldingly, in the circle of a good home.

(ii) Jesus was fulfilling the duties of an eldest son. It seems most likely that Joseph died before the family had grown up. Maybe he was already much older than Mary when they married. In the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana of Galilee there is no mention of Joseph, although Mary is there, and it is natural to suppose that Joseph had died.

So Jesus became the village craftsman of Nazareth to support his mother and his younger brothers and sisters. A world was calling him, and yet he first fulfilled his duty to his mother and to his own folks and to his own home. When his mother died, Sir James Barrie could write, "I can look back, and I cannot see the smallest thing undone." There lies happiness. It is on those who faithfully and ungrudgingly accept the simple duties that the world is built.

One of the great examples of that is the great doctor, Sir James Y. Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform. He came from a poor home. One day his mother took him on her knee and began to darn his stockings. When she had finished, she looked at her neat handiwork. "My, Jamie," she said. "mind when your mither's away that she was a grand darning." Jamie was the "wise wean, the little box of brains," and his family knew it. They had their dreams for him. His brother Sandy said, "I aye felt he would be great some day." And so, without jealousy and willingly, his brothers worked in the bakeshop and at their jobs that the lad might have his college education and his chance. There would have been no Sir James Simpson had there not been simple folk willing to do simple things and to deny themselves so that the brilliant lad might have his chance.

Jesus is the great example of one who accepted the simple duties of the home.

(iii) Jesus was learning what it was like to be a working man. He was learning what it was like to have to earn a living, to save to buy food and clothes, and maybe sometimes a little pleasure; to meet the dissatisfied and the critical customer, and the customer who would not pay his debts. If Jesus was to help men, he must first know what men's lives were like. He did not come into a

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Matthew 3

protected cushioned life; he came into the life that any man must live. He had to do that, if he was ever to understand the life of ordinary people.

There is a famous story of Marie Antoinette, the Queen of France, in the days when the storm of the French Revolution was brooding over the country before it broke. Men were starving; the mob was rioting. The Queen asked what all the uproar was about. She was told: "They have no bread." "If they have no bread," she said, "let them eat cake." The idea of a life without plenty was an idea which did not come within her horizon. She did not understand.

Jesus worked in Nazareth for all the silent years in order that he might know what our life was like, and that, understanding, he might be able to help.

(iv) Jesus was faithfully performing the lesser task before the greater task was given to him to do. The great fact is that, if Jesus had failed in the smaller duties, the mighty task of being the Saviour of the world could never have been given to him to do. He was faithful in little that he might become master of much. It is a thing never to be forgotten that in the everyday duties of life we make or mar a destiny, and we win or lose a crown.

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Matthew 3:1-6

THE EMERGENCE OF JOHN THE BAPTIZER

Matthew 3:1-6

In those days John the Baptizer arrived on the scene, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea. "Repent," he said, "for the Kingdom of the Heavens has come near." It was this man who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make ready the road by which the Lord is coming, and make straight the paths which he must travel!'" John himself wore a garment made from camel's hair, and he had a leathern belt round his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan, went out to him. They were baptized in the river Jordan, and, as they were baptized, they confessed their sins.

The emergence of John was like the sudden sounding of the voice of God. At this time the Jews were sadly conscious that the voice of the prophets spoke no more. They said that for four hundred years there had been no prophet. Throughout long centuries the voice of prophecy had been silent. As they put it themselves, "There was no voice, nor any that answered." But in John the prophetic voice spoke again. What then were the characteristics of John and his message?

(i) He fearlessly denounced evil wherever he might find it. If Herod the king sinned by contracting an evil and unlawful marriage, John rebuked him. If the Sadducees and Pharisees, the leaders of orthodox religion, the churchmen of their day, were sunk in ritualistic formalism, John never hesitated to say so. If the ordinary people were living lives which were unaware of God, John would tell them so.

Wherever John saw evil--in the state, in the Church, in the crowd--he fearlessly rebuked it. He was like a light which lit up the dark places; he was like wind which swept from God throughout the country. It was said of a famous journalist who was great, but who never quite fulfilled the work he might have done, "He was perhaps not easily enough disturbed." There is still a place in the Christian message for warning and denunciation. "The truth," said Diogenes, "is like the light to sore eyes." "He who never offended anyone," he said, "never did anyone any good."

It may be that there have been times when the Church was too careful not to offend. There come occasions when the time for smooth politeness has gone, and the time for blunt rebuke has come.

(ii) He urgently summoned men to righteousness. John's message was not a mere negative denunciation; it was a positive erecting of the moral standards of God. He not only denounced men for what they had done; he summoned them to what they ought to do. He not only condemned men for what they were; he challenged them to be what they could be. He was like a voice calling men to higher things. He not only rebuked evil, he also set before men the good.

It may well be that there have been times when the Church was too occupied in telling men what not to do; and too little occupied in setting before them the height of the Christian ideal.

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Matthew 3:1-6

(iii) John came from God. He came out of the desert. He came to men only after he had undergone years of lonely preparation by God. As Alexander Maclaren said, "John leapt, as it were, into the arena full-grown and full-armed." He came, not with some opinion of his own, but with a message from God. Before he spoke to men, he had companied long with God.

The preacher, the teacher with the prophetic voice, must always come into the presence of men out of the presence of God.

(iv) John pointed beyond himself. The man was not only a light to illumine evil, a voice to rebuke sin, he was also a signpost to God. It was not himself he wished men to see; he wished to prepare them for the one who was to come.

It was the Jewish belief that Elijah would return before the Messiah came, and that he would be the herald of the coming King. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Mal.4:5). John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leathern belt around his waist. That is the very description of the raiment which Elijah had worn (2Kgs.1:8).

Matthew connects him with a prophecy from Isaiah (Isa.40:3). In ancient times in the East the roads were bad. There was an eastern proverb which said, "There are three states of misery-- sickness, fasting and travel." Before a traveller set out upon a journey he was advised "to pay all debts, provide for dependents, give parting gifts, return all articles under trust, take money and good-temper for the journey; then bid farewell to all." The ordinary roads were no better than tracks. They were not surfaced at all because the soil of Palestine is hard and will bear the traffic of mules and asses and oxen and carts. A journey along such a road was an adventure, and indeed an undertaking to be avoided.

There were some few surfaced and artificially made roads. Josephus, for instance, tells us that Solomon laid a causeway of black basalt stone along the roads that lead to Jerusalem to make them easier for the pilgrims, and "to manifest the grandeur of his riches and government." All such surfaced and artificially-made roads were originally built by the king and for the use of the king. They were called "the king's highway." They were kept in repair only as the king needed them for any journey that he might make. Before the king was due to arrive in any area, a message was sent out to the people to get the king's roads in order for the king's journey.

John was preparing the way for the king. The preacher, the teacher with the prophetic voice, points not at himself, but at God. His aim is not to focus men's eyes on his own cleverness, but on the majesty of God. The true preacher is obliterated in his message.

Men recognized John as a prophet, even after years when no prophetic voice had spoken, because he was a light to light up evil things, a voice to summon men to righteousness, a signpost to point men to God, and because he had in him that unanswerable authority which clings to the man who comes into the presence of men out of the presence of God.

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Matthew 3:7-12

THE MESSAGE OF JOHN--THE THREAT

Matthew 3:7-12 (Part 1)

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who put it into your minds to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit to fit repentance. Do not think that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as a father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. The axe is already applied to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not produce good fruit is on the point of being cut down, and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water that you may repent. He who is coming after me is stronger than I. I am not fit to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather the corn into his storehouse, but he will burn the chaff with a fire that no man can quench."

In John's message there is both a threat and a promise. This whole passage is full of vivid pictures.

John calls the Pharisees and the Sadducees a brood of vipers, and asks them who has suggested to them to flee from the coming wrath. There may be one of two pictures there.

John knew the desert. The desert had in places thin, short, dried-up grass, and stunted thorn bushes, brittle for want of moisture. Sometimes a desert fire would break out. When that happened the fire swept like a river of flame across the grass and the bushes, for they were as dry as tinder. And in front of the fire there would come scurrying and hurrying the snakes and the scorpions, and the living creatures who found their shelter in the grass and in the bushes. They were driven from their lairs by this river of flame, and they ran for their lives before it.

But it may be that there is another picture here. There are many little creatures in a standing field of corn--the field mice, the rats, the rabbits, the birds. But when the reaper comes they are driven from their nests and their shelters, and as the field is laid bare they have to flee for their lives.

It is in terms of these pictures that John is thinking. If the Pharisees and Sadducees are really coming for baptism, they are like the animals scurrying for life before a desert fire or in front of the sickle of the harvester.

He warns them that it will avail them nothing to plead that Abraham is their father. To the orthodox Jew that was an incredible statement. To the Jew Abraham was unique. So unique was he in his goodness and in his favour with God, that his merits sufficed not only for himself but for all his descendants also. He had built up a treasury of merit which not all the claims and needs of his descendants could exhaust. So the Jews believed that a Jew simply because he was a Jew, and not for any merits of his own, was safe in the life to come. They said, "All Israelites have a portion in the world to come." They talked about "the delivering merits of the fathers." They said that Abraham sat at the gates of Gehenna to turn back any Israelite who might by chance have been consigned to its terrors.

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They said that it was the merits of Abraham which enabled the ships to sail safely on the seas; that it was because of the merits of Abraham that the rain descended on the earth; that it was the merits of Abraham which enabled Moses to enter into heaven and to receive the Law; that it was because of the merits of Abraham that David was heard. Even for the wicked these merits sufficed." If thy children," they said of Abraham, "were mere dead bodies, without blood vessels or bones, thy merits would avail for them!"

It is that spirit which John is rebuking. Maybe the Jews carried it to an unparalleled distance, but there is always need of a warning that we cannot live on the spiritual capital of the past. A degenerate age cannot hope to claim salvation for the sake of an heroic past; and an evil son cannot hope to plead the merits of a saintly father.

Then, once again, John returns to his harvest picture. At the end of the season the keeper of the vineyards and the fig trees would look at his vines and his trees; and those which were fruitless and useless would be rooted out. They only cumbered the ground. Uselessness always invites disaster. The man who is useless to God and to his fellow-men is in grave peril, and is under condemnation.

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Matthew 3:7-12

THE MESSAGE OF JOHN--THE PROMISE

Matthew 3:7-12 (Part 2)

But after John's threat there came the promise--which had also a threat within it. As we have said, John pointed beyond himself to the one who was to come. At the moment he was enjoying a vast reputation, and he was wielding a most powerful influence. Yet he said that he was not fit to carry the sandals of the one who was to come--and to carry sandals was the duty of a slave. John's whole attitude was self-obliteration, not self-importance. His only importance was, as he saw it, as a signpost pointing to the one who was to come.

He said that the one who was to come would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

All through their history the Jews had looked for the time when the Spirit would come. Ezekiel heard God say, "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.... And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to observe my ordinances" (Eze.36:26-27). "And I will put my Spirit within you and you shall live" (Eze.37:14). "And I will not hide my face any more from them; when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God" (Eze.39:29). "For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring" (Isa.44:3). "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" (Jl.2:28).

What then is the gift and work of this Spirit of God? When we try to answer that question, we must remember to answer it in Hebrew terms. John was a Jew, and it was to Jews that he was speaking. He is thinking and speaking, not in terms of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but in terms of the Jewish doctrine of the Spirit.

(i) The word for spirit is HSN7307 - ruwach, and ruwach, like GSN4151 -pneuma in Greek, means not only spirit; it also means breath. Breath is life; and therefore the promise of the Spirit is the promise of life. The Spirit of God breathes God's life into a man. When the Spirit of God enters us, the tired, lack-lustre, weary defeatedness of life is gone, and a surge of new life enters us.

(ii) This word HSN7307 - ruwach not only means breath; it also means wind. It is the word for the storm wind, the mighty rushing wind that once Elijah heard. Wind means power. The gale of wind sweeps the ship before it and uproots the tree. The wind has an irresistible power. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of power. When the Spirit of God enters into a man, his weakness is clad with the power of God. He is enabled to do the undoable, and to face the unfaceable, and to bear the unbearable. Frustration is banished; victory arrives.

(iii) The Spirit of God is connected with the work of creation. It was the Spirit of God who moved upon the face of the waters and made the chaos into a cosmos, turned disorder into order, and made a world out of the uncreated mists. The Spirit of God can re-create us. When the Spirit of God enters into a man the disorder of human nature becomes the order of God; our dishevelled, disorderly, uncontrolled lives are moulded by the Spirit into the harmony of God.

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(iv) To the Spirit the Jews assigned special functions. The Spirit brought God's truth to men. Every new discovery in every realm of thought is the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit enters into a man's mind and turns his human guesses into divine certainty, and changes his human ignorance into divine knowledge.

(v) The Spirit enables men to recognize God's truth when they see It. When the Spirit enters our hearts, our eyes are opened. The prejudices which blinded us are taken away. The self-will which darkened us is removed. The spirit enables a man to see.

Such are the gifts of the Spirit, and, as John saw it, such were the gifts the one who was to come would bring.

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Matthew 3:7-12

THE MESSAGE OF JOHN--THE PROMISE AND THE THREAT

Matthew 3:7-12 (Part 3)

There is a word and a picture in John's message which combine both promise and threat.

John says that the baptism of the one who is to come will be with fire. In the thought of a baptism with fire there are three ideas.

(i) There is the idea of illumination. The blaze of a flame sends a light through the night and illuminates the darkest corners. The flame of the beacon guides the sailor to the harbour and the traveller to his goal. In fire there is light and guidance. Jesus is the beacon light to lead men into truth and to guide them home to God.

(ii) There is the idea of warmth. A great and a kindly man was described as one who lit fires in cold rooms. When Jesus comes into a man's life, he kindles his heart with the warmth of love towards God and towards his fellow men. Christianity is always the religion of the kindled heart.

(iii) There is the idea of purification. In this sense purification involves destruction; for the purifying flame burns away the false and leaves the true. The flame tempers and strengthens and purifies the metal. When Christ comes into a man's heart, the evil dross is purged away. Sometimes that has to happen through painful experiences, but, if a man throughout all the experiences of life believes that God is working together all things for good, he will emerge from them with a character which is cleansed and purified, until, being pure in heart, he can see God.

So, then, the word fire has in it the illumination, the warmth and the purification of the entry of Jesus Christ into the heart of a man.

But there is also a picture which has in it a promise and a threat--the picture of the threshing floor. The fan was the great wooden winnowing shovel. With it the grain was lifted from the threshing floor and tossed into the air. When that was done the heavy grain fell to the ground, but the light chaff was blown away by the wind. The grain was then collected and stored in the barns, while any chaff which remained was used as fuel for the fire.

The coming of Christ necessarily involves a separation. Men either accept him or reject him. When they are confronted with him, they are confronted with a choice which cannot be avoided. They are either for or against. And it is precisely that choice which settles destiny. Men are separated by their reaction to Jesus Christ.

In Christianity there is no escape from the eternal choice. On the village green in Bedford, John Bunyan heard the voice which drew him up all of a sudden and left him looking at eternity: "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or wilt thou have thy sins and go to hell?" In the last analysis that is the choice which no man can evade.

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THE MESSAGE OF JOHN--THE DEMAND

Matthew 3:7-12 (Part 4)

In all John's preaching there was one basic demand--and that basic demand was: "Repent!" (Matt.3:2). That was also the basic demand of Jesus himself, for Jesus came saying, "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk.1:15). We will do well to seek to understand what this repentance is, and what this basic demand of the King and his herald means.

It is to be noted that both Jesus and John use the word repent without any explanation of its meaning. They use it as a word which they were sure their hearers would know and understand.

Let us then look at the Jewish teaching about repentance.

To the Jew repentance was central to all religious faith and to all relationship with God. G. F. Moore writes, "Repentance is the sole, but inexorable, condition of God's forgiveness and the restoration of his favour, and the divine forgiveness and favour are never refused to genuine repentance." He writes, "That God fully and freely remits the sins of the penitent is a cardinal doctrine of Judaism." The Rabbis said, "Great is repentance for it brings healing upon the world. Great is repentance for it reaches to the throne of glory." C. G. Montefiore wrote, "Repentance is the great mediatorial bond between God and man."

The Law was created two thousand years before creation, but, the Rabbis taught, repentance was one of the things created even before the Law; the six things are repentance, paradise, hell, the glorious throne of God, the celestial temple, and the name of the Messiah. "A man" they said, "can shoot an arrow for a few furlongs, but repentance reaches even to the throne of God."

There is a famous rabbinic passage which sets repentance in the first of all places: "Who is like God a teacher of sinners that they may repent?" They asked Wisdom, "What shall be the punishment of the sinner?" Wisdom answered: "Misfortune pursues sinners" (Prov.13:21). They asked Prophecy. It replied: "The soul that sins shall die" (Eze.18:4). They asked the Law. It replied: "Let him bring a sacrifice" (Lev.1:4), they asked God, and he replied: "Let him repent and obtain his atonement. My children, what do I ask of you? Seek me and live." So, then, to the Jew the one gateway back to God is the gateway of repentance.

The Jewish word commonly used for repentance is itself interesting. It is the word teshubah (HSN8666) which is the noun for the verb shuwb (HSN7725) which means to turn. Repentance is a turning away from evil and a turning towards God. G. F. Moore writes, "The transparent primary meaning of repentance in Judaism is always a change in man's attitude towards God, and in the conduct of life, a religious and moral reformation of the people or the individual." C. G. Montefiore writes, "To the Rabbis the essence of repentance lay in such a thorough change of mind that it issues in a change of life and a change of conduct." Maimonides, the great medieval Jewish scholar, defines repentance thus: "What is repentance? Repentance is that the sinner forsakes his sin and puts it away out of his thoughts and fully resolves in his mind that he will not do it again; as it is written, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the bad man his plans.'"

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G. F. Moore very interestingly and very truly points out that, with the single exception of the two words in brackets, the Westminster Confession definition of repentance would be entirely acceptable to a Jew: "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God (in Christ), doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavour after, new obedience." Again and again the Bible speaks of this turning away from sin, and this turning towards God. Ezekiel had it: "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel" (Eze.33:11). Jeremiah had it: "Bring me back that I may be restored, for thou art the Lord my God" (Jer.31:18). Hosea had it: "Return, O Israel, to the Lord thy God.... Take with you words and return to the Lord" (Hos.14:1-2).

From all this it is quite clear that in Judaism repentance has in it an ethical demand. It is a turn from evil to God, with a corresponding change in action. John was fully within the tradition of his people when he demanded that his hearers should bring forth fruit meet for repentance. There is a beautiful synagogue prayer which runs, "Cause us to return, O Father, unto thy law; draw us near, O King, unto thy service; bring us back in perfect repentance unto thy presence. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who delightest in repentance." But that repentance had to be shown in a real change of life.

A Rabbi, commenting on Jnh.3:10, wrote, "My brethren, it is not said of the Ninevites that God saw their sackcloth and their fasting, but that God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way." The Rabbis said, "Be not like fools, who, when they sin, bring a sacrifice but do not repent. If a man says, 'I will sin and repent, I will sin and repent,' he is not allowed to repent." Five unforgivable sinners are listed, and the list includes "Those who sin in order to repent, and those who repent much and always sin afresh." They said: "If a man has an unclean thing in his hands, he may wash them in all the seas of the world, and he will never be clean; but if he throws the unclean thing away, a little water will suffice." The Jewish teachers spoke of what they called "the nine norms of repentance," the nine necessities of real repentance.

They found them in the series of commandments in Isa.1:16: "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." The son of Sirach writes in Ecclesiasticus: "Say not, I sinned, and what happened to me? For the Lord is long-suffering. Do not become rashly confident about expiation, and go on adding sin to sins; and do not say, his compassion is great, he will forgive the multitude of my sins; for mercy and wrath are with him, and upon sinners his anger will rest. Delay not to turn to the Lord, and do not put it off from day to day" (Sir.5:4-7). He writes again, "A man who bathes to purify himself from contact with a dead body and touches it again, what profit was there in his bath? So a man who fasts for his sins and goes again and does the same things--who will listen to his prayer, and what profit was there in his afflicting himself." (Sir.34:25-26).

The Jew held that true repentance issues, not merely in a sentimental sorrow, but in a real change in life--and so does the Christian. The Jew had a holy horror of seeking to trade on the mercy of God--and so has the Christian. The Jew held that true repentance brings forth fruits which demonstrate the reality of the repentance--and so does the Christian.

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But the Jews had still more things to say about repentance and we must go on to look at them.

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THE MESSAGE OF JOHN--THE DEMAND

Matthew 3:7-12 (Part 5)

There is an almost terrifying note in the ethical demand of the Jewish idea of repentance, but there are other comforting things.

Repentance is always available. "Repentance," they said, "is like the sea--a man can bathe in it at any hour." There may be times when even the gates of prayer are shut; but the gates of repentance are never closed.

Repentance is completely essential. There is a story of a kind of argument that Abraham had with God. Abraham said to God, "Thou canst not lay hold of the cord at both ends at once. If Thou desirest strict justice the world cannot endure. If Thou desirest the preservation of the world, strict justice cannot endure." The world cannot continue to exist without the mercy of God, and the gateway of repentance. If there was nothing but the justice of God, it would be the end of all men and of all things. So essential is repentance that in order to make it possible God cancels his own demands: "Beloved is repentance before God, for he cancels his own words for its sake." The threat of the destruction of the sinner is cancelled by the acceptance of repentance for the sinner's sins.

Repentance lasts as long as life. So long as life remains, there remains the possibility of repentance. "God's hand is stretched out under the wings of the heavenly chariot to snatch the penitent from the grasp of justice." Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai said, "If a man has been completely righteous all his days, and rebels at the end, he destroys it all, for it is said, 'The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses' (Eze.33:12); if a man has been completely wicked all his days, and repents at the end, God receives him, for it is said, 'And as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall by it when he turns from his wickedness'" (Eze.33:12). "Many," they said, "can go into the world to come only after years and years; while another gains it in an hour." As the poet said of the man who gained the mercy of God in the instant of death:

Between the saddle and the ground,
I mercy sought, and mercy found."

Such is the mercy of God that he will receive even secret repentance. Rabbi Eleazar said, "It is the way of the world, when a man has insulted his fellow in public, and after a time seeks to be reconciled to him, that the other says, 'You insult me publicly, and now you would be reconciled to me between us two alone! Go bring the men in whose presence you insulted me, and I will be reconciled to you.' But God is not so. A man may stand and rail and blaspheme in the market place, and the Holy One says, 'Repent between us two alone, and I will receive you.'" God's mercy is open to the man who is so ashamed that he can tell his shame to no one except God.

There is no forgetfulness in God, because he is God, but such is the mercy of God that he not only forgives, but, incredible as it may sound, he even forgets the sin of the penitent: "Who is a God like thee pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his

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inheritance?"" (Mic.7:18). "Thou didst forgive the iniquity of thy people; thou didst pardon all their sin" (Ps.85:2).

Loveliest of all, God comes halfway and more to meet the penitent: "Return so far as you can, and I will come to you the rest of the way." The Rabbis at their highest had a glimpse of the Father who in his love ran to meet the prodigal son.

Yet, even remembering all this mercy, it remains the case that in true repentance reparation is necessary in so far as it can be made. The Rabbis said, "Injury must be repaired, and pardon sought and forgiven. The true penitent is he who has the opportunity to do the same sin again, in the same circumstances, and who does not do it." The Rabbis stressed again and again the importance of human relationships, and of setting them right.

There is one curious rabbinic passage. A tsaddiyq (HSN6662) is a righteous man.) "He who is good towards heaven and towards his fellow men is a good tsaddiyq. He who is good towards heaven and not towards his fellow men, is a bad tsaddiyq (HSN6662). He who is wicked against heaven and wicked against his fellow men, is a bad sinner. He who is wicked against heaven, but not wicked against his fellow men is not a bad sinner."

It is because reparation is so necessary that he who teaches others to sin is the worst of sinners; for he cannot make reparation because he can never tell how far his sin has gone out and how many it has gone on to influence.

Not only is reparation necessary for true repentance; confession is equally necessary. Again and again we find that demand within the Bible itself." When a man or woman commits any of the sins that men commit ... he shall confess his sin which he has committed" (Num.5:6-7). "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Prov.28:13). "I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin" (Ps.32:5). It is the man who says that he is innocent and who refuses to admit that he has sinned who is condemned (Jer.2:35). Maimonides gives the formula which a man may use to confess his sin: "O God, I have sinned, I have done iniquity, I have transgressed before thee, and have done thus and so. I am sorry and ashamed for my deed, and I will never do it again." True repentance necessitates the humility to admit and to confess our sin.

No case is hopeless for repentance, and no man is beyond repentance. The Rabbis said, "Let not a man say, 'Because I have sinned, no repair is possible for me,' but let him trust in God and repent, and God will receive him." The classical example of a seemingly impossible reformation was the case of Manasseh. He worshipped the Baals, he brought strange gods into Jerusalem; he even sacrificed children to Moloch in the valley of Hinnom. Then he was taken away captive to Assyria, and there in fetters he lay upon the thorns. Then he prayed to God in his distress, and God heard his supplication and brought him again to Jerusalem. "Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God" (2Chr.33:13). Sometimes it takes God's threat and God's discipline to do it, but none is beyond the power of God to bring him home.

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Matthew 3:7-12

There is one last Jewish belief about repentance, and it is a belief which must have been in John's mind. Certain, at least, of the Jewish teachers taught that if Israel could repent perfectly for even one day the Messiah would come. It was only the hardness of the hearts of men which delayed the sending of God's Redeemer into the world.

Repentance was the very centre of the Jewish faith as it is the very centre of the Christian faith, for repentance is the turning away from sin and the turning towards God, and towards the life that God means us to live.

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Matthew 3:13-17

JESUS AND HIS BAPTISM

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent him. "It is I," he said, "who need to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?" Jesus answered him, "Let it be just now, for so it befits us to fulfil all righteousness." Then he allowed Jesus to be baptized. After Jesus had been baptized he came up immediately from the water and, lo, the heavens were opened for John, and he saw the Spirit of God descending, like a dove, and coming upon him. And, lo, there came a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved One, in whom I am well pleased."

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John was startled and unwilling to baptize him. It was John's conviction that it was he who needed what Jesus could give, not Jesus who needed what he could give.

Ever since men began to think about the gospel story at all, they have found the baptism of Jesus difficult to understand. In John's baptism there was a summons to repentance, and the offer of a way to the forgiveness of sins. But, if Jesus is who we believe him to be, he did not stand in need of repentance, and did not need forgiveness from God. John's baptism was for sinners conscious of their sin, and therefore it does not seem applicable to Jesus at all.

A very early writer suggested that Jesus came to be baptized only to please his mother and his brothers, and that it was in answer to their entreaties that he was almost compelled to let this thing be done. The Gospel according to the Hebrews, which is one of the gospels which failed to be included in the New Testament, has a passage like this: "Behold the mother of the Lord and his brethren said to him, 'John the Baptist baptizeth for the remission of sins; let us go and be baptized by him.' But he said to them, 'What sin have I committed, that I should go and be baptized by him? Except perchance this very thing that I have said is ignorance.'"

From the earliest times thinkers were puzzled by the fact that Jesus submitted to be baptized. But there were reasons, and good reasons, why he did.

(i) For thirty years Jesus had waited in Nazareth, faithfully performing the simple duties of the home and of the carpenter's shop. All the time he knew that a world was waiting for him. All the time he grew increasingly conscious of his waiting task. The success of any undertaking is determined by the wisdom with which the moment to embark upon it is chosen. Jesus must have waited for the hour to strike, for the moment to come, for the summons to sound. And when John emerged Jesus knew that the time had arrived.

(ii) Why should that be so? There was one very simple and very vital reason. It is the fact that never in all history before this had any Jew submitted to being baptized. The Jews knew and used baptism, but only for proselytes who came into Judaism from some other faith. It was natural that the sin-stained, polluted proselyte should be baptized, but no Jew had ever conceived that he, a member of the chosen people, a son of Abraham, assured of God's salvation, could ever need

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Matthew 3:13-17

baptism. Baptism was for sinners, and no Jew ever conceived of himself as a sinner shut out from God. Now for the first time in their national history the Jews realized their own sin and their own clamant need of God. Never before had there been such a unique national movement of penitence and of search for God.

This was the very moment for which Jesus had been waiting. Men were conscious of their sin and conscious of their need of God as never before. This was his opportunity, and in his baptism he identified himself with the men he came to save, in the hour of their new consciousness of their sin, and of their search for God.

The voice which Jesus heard at the baptism is of supreme importance. "This is my beloved Son," it said, "with whom I am well pleased." That sentence is composed of two quotations. "This is my beloved Son," is a quotation from Ps.2:7. Every Jew accepted that Psalm as a description of the Messiah, the mighty King of God who was to come. "With whom I am well pleased" is a quotation from Isa.42:1, which is a description of the Suffering Servant, a description which culminates in Isa.53.

So in the baptism there came to Jesus two certainties--the certainty that he was indeed the chosen One of God, and the certainty that the way in front of him was the way of the Cross. In that moment he knew that he was chosen to be King, but he also knew that his throne must be a Cross. In that moment he knew that he was destined to be a conqueror, but that his conquest must have as its only weapon the power of suffering love. In that moment there was set before Jesus both his task and the only way to the fulfilling of it.

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Matthew 4

THE TESTING TIME

Step by step Matthew unfolds the story of Jesus. He begins by showing us how Jesus was born into this world. He goes on to show us, at least by implication, that Jesus had to perform faithfully his duties to his home before he began on his duty to the world, that he had to show himself faithful in the smaller tasks before God gave to him the greatest task in all the world.

He goes on to show us how, with the emergence of John the Baptist, Jesus knew that the hour had struck. and that the time had come to enter upon his work. He shows us Jesus identifying himself with a people's unprecedented search for God. In that moment he shows us Jesus' realization that he was indeed the chosen one of God, but that his way to victory lay through the Cross.

If any man has a vision, his immediate problem is how to turn that vision into fact; he has to find some way to turn the dream into reality. That is precisely the problem which faced Jesus. He had come to lead men home to God. How was he to do it? What method was he to adopt? Was he to adopt the method of a mighty conqueror, or was he to adopt the method of patient, sacrificial love? That was the problem which faced Jesus in his temptations. The task had been committed into his hands. What method was he to choose to work out the task which God had given him to do?

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Matthew 4:1-11

THE TEMPTATIONS OF CHRIST

Matthew 4:1-11 (Part 1)

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After he had deliberately gone without food for forty days and forty nights he was hungry. So the tempter came and said to him, "If you really are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread." He answered: "It stands written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds through the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the Temple.

"If you really are the son of God," he said to him, "fling yourself down, for it stands written, He will give his angels orders to care for you, and they will lift you upon their hands, lest at any time you should strike your foot against a stone." Jesus said to him, "Again it stands written, 'You must not try to put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again the devil took him to a very lofty mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory, and said to him, "I will give you all these things, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it stands written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him alone you will serve.'" Then the devil left him alone, and behold, angels came and gave him their service.

There is one thing which we must carefully note right at the beginning of our study of the temptations of Jesus, and that is the meaning of the word to tempt. The Greek word is *peirazein* (GSN3985). In English the word "tempt" has a uniformly and consistently bad meaning. It always means to entice a man to do wrong, to seek to seduce him into sin, to try to persuade him to take the wrong way. But *peirazein* (GSN3985) has a quite different element in its meaning. It means to test far more than it means to tempt in our sense of the word.

One of the great Old Testament stories is the story of how narrowly Abraham escaped sacrificing his only son Isaac. Now that story begins like this in the King James Version "And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham" (Gen.22:1). Quite clearly the word to tempt cannot there mean to seek to seduce into evil. It is unthinkable that God should try to make any man a wrong-doer. But the thing is quite clear when we understand that it means: "After these things God tested Abraham." The time had come for a supreme test of the loyalty of Abraham. Just as metal has to be tested far beyond any stress and strain that it will ever be called upon to bear, before it can be put to any useful purpose, so a man has to be tested before God can use him for his purposes. The Jews had a saying, "The Holy One, blessed be his name, does not elevate a man to dignity till he has first tried and searched him; and if he stands in temptation, then he raises him to dignity."

Now here is a great and uplifting truth. What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad, it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger and finer and purer from the ordeal. Temptation is not the penalty of being a man, temptation is the glory of being a man. It is the test which comes to a man whom God wishes to use. So, then, we must think of this whole incident, not so much the tempting, as the testing of Jesus.

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We have to note further where this test took place. It took place in the wilderness. Between Jerusalem, on the central plateau which is the backbone of Palestine, and the Dead Sea there stretches the wilderness. The Old Testament calls it Jeshimon, which means The Devastation, and it is a fitting name. It stretches over an area of thirty-five by fifteen miles.

Sir George Adam Smith, who travelled over it, describes it. It is an area of yellow sand, of crumbling limestone, and of scattered shingle. It is an area of contorted strata, where the ridges run in all directions as if they were warped and twisted. The hills are like dust heaps; the limestone is blistered and peeling; rocks are bare and jagged; often the very ground sounds hollow when a foot or a horse's hoof falls upon it. It glows and shimmers with heat like some vast furnace. It runs right out to the Dead Sea, and then there comes a drop of twelve hundred feet, a drop of limestone, flint, and marl, through crags and corries and precipices down to the Dead Sea.

In that wilderness Jesus could be more alone than anywhere else in Palestine. Jesus went into the wilderness to be alone. His task had come to him; God had spoken to him; he must think how he was to attempt the task which God had given him to do; he had to get things straightened out before he started; and he had to be alone.

It may well be that we often go wrong simply because we never try to be alone. There are certain things which a man has to work out alone. There are times when no one else's advice is any good to him. There are times when a man has to stop acting and start thinking. It may be that we make many a mistake because we do not give ourselves a chance to be alone with God.

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THE SACRED STORY

Matthew 4:1-11 (Part 2)

There are certain further things we must note before we proceed to detailed study of the story of the temptations.

(i) All three gospel writers seem to stress the immediacy with which the temptations followed the baptism of Jesus. As Mark has it: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (Mk.1:12).

It is one of the truths of life that after every great moment there comes a moment of reaction--and again and again it is in the reaction that the danger lies. That is what happened to Elijah. With magnificent courage Elijah in all his loneliness faced and defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1Kgs.18:17-40). That was Elijah's greatest moment of courage and of witness. But the slaughter of the prophets of Baal provoked the wicked Jezebel to wrath, and she threatened Elijah's life. "Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life and came to Beer-sheba" (1Kgs.19:3). The man who had stood fearlessly against all comers is now fleeing for his life with terror at his heels. The moment of reaction had come.

It seems to be the law of life that just after our resistance power has been highest it nose-dives until it is at its lowest. The tempter carefully, subtly, and skilfully chose his time to attack Jesus--but Jesus conquered him. We will do well to be specially on our guard after every time life has brought us to the heights, for it is just then that we are in gravest danger of the depths.

(ii) We must not regard this experience of Jesus as an outward experience. It was a struggle that went on in his own heart and mind and soul. The proof is that there is no possible mountain from which all the kingdoms of the earth could be seen. This is an inner struggle.

It is through our inmost thoughts and desires that the tempter comes to us. His attack is launched in our own minds. It is true that that attack can be so real that we almost see the devil. To this day you can see the ink-stain on the wall of Luther's room in the Castle of the Wartburg in Germany, Luther caused that ink-stain by throwing his ink-pot at the devil as he tempted him. But the very power of the devil lies in the fact that he breaches our defences and attacks us from within. He finds his allies and his weapons in our own inmost thoughts and desires.

(iii) We must not think that in one campaign Jesus conquered the tempter for ever and that the tempter never came to him again. The tempter spoke again to Jesus at Caesarea Philippi when Peter tried to dissuade him from taking the way to the Cross, and when he had to say to Peter the very same words he had said to the tempter in the wilderness, "Begone Satan" (Matt.16:23). At the end of the day Jesus could say to his disciples, "You are those who have continued with me in my trials" (Lk.22:28). And never in all history was there such a fight with temptation as Jesus waged in Gethsemane when the tempter sought to deflect him from the Cross (Lk.22:42-44).

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"Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom." In the Christian warfare there is no release. Sometimes people grow worried because they think that they should reach a stage when they are beyond temptation, a stage at which the power of the tempter is forever broken. Jesus never reached that stage. From the beginning to the end of the day he had to fight his battle; that is why he can help us to fight ours.

(iv) One thing stands out about this story--the temptations are such as could only come to a person who had very special powers and who knew that he had them. Sanday described the temptations as "the problem of what to do with supernatural powers." The temptations which came to Jesus could only have come to one who knew that there were amazing things which he could do.

We must always remember that again and again we are tempted through our gifts. The person who is gifted with charm will be tempted to use that charm "to get away with anything." The person who is gifted with the power of words will be tempted to use his command of words to produce glib excuses to justify his own conduct. The person with a vivid and sensitive imagination will undergo agonies of temptation that a more stolid person will never experience. The person with great gifts of mind will be tempted to use these gifts for himself and not for others, to become the master and not the servant of men. It is the grim fact of temptation that it is just where we are strongest that we must be forever on the watch.

(v) No one can ever read this story without remembering that its source must have been Jesus himself. In the wilderness he was alone. No one was with him when this struggle was being fought out. And we know about it only because Jesus himself must have told his men about it. It is Jesus telling us his own spiritual autobiography.

We must always approach this story with a unique and special reverence, for in it Jesus is laying bare his inmost heart and soul. He is telling men what he went through. It is the most sacred of all stories, for in it Jesus is saying to us that he can help others who are tempted because he himself was tempted. He draws the veil from his own struggles to help us in our struggle.

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Matthew 4:1-11

THE ATTACK OF THE TEMPTER

Matthew 4:1-11 (Part 3)

The tempter launched his attack against Jesus along three lines, and in every one of them there was a certain inevitability.

(i) There was the temptation to turn the stones into bread. The desert was littered with little round pieces of limestone rock which were exactly like little loaves; even they would suggest this temptation to Jesus.

This was a double temptation. It was a temptation to Jesus to use his powers selfishly and for his own use, and that is precisely what Jesus always refused to do. There is always the temptation to use selfishly whatever powers God has given to us.

God has given every man a gift, and every man can ask one of two questions. He can ask, "What can I make for myself out of this gift?" or, "What can I do for others with this gift?" This kind of temptation can come out in the simplest thing. A person may possess, for instance, a voice which is good to hear; he may thereupon "cash in on it", and refuse to use it unless he is paid. There is no reason why he should not use it for pay, but there is every reason why he should not use it only for pay. There is no man who will not be tempted to use selfishly the gift which God has given to him.

But there was another side to this temptation. Jesus was God's Messiah, and he knew it. In the wilderness he was facing the choice of a method whereby he could win men to God. What method was he to use for the task which God had given him to do? How was he to turn the vision into actuality, and the dream into fact?

One sure way to persuade men to follow him was to give them bread, to give them material things. Did not history justify that? Had not God given his people manna in the wilderness? Had God not said, "I will rain bread from heaven for you"? Did not the visions of the future golden age include that very dream? Had not Isaiah said, "They shall not hunger or thirst"? (Isa.49:10). Was the Messianic Banquet not a settled feature in the dreams of the kingdom between the Testaments? If Jesus had wished to give men bread, he could have produced justification enough for it.

But to give men bread would have been a double mistake. First, it would have been to bribe men to follow him. It would have been to persuade men to follow him for the sake of what they could get out of it, whereas the reward Jesus had to offer was a Cross. He called men to a life of giving, not of getting. To bribe men with material things would have been the denial of all he came to say and would have been ultimately to defeat his own ends.

Second, it would have been to remove the symptoms without dealing with the disease. Men are hungry. But the question is, why are they hungry? Is it because of their own foolishness, and their own shiftlessness, and their own carelessness? Is it because there are some who selfishly possess too much while others possess too little? The real way to cure hunger is to remove the causes--and

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these causes are in men's souls. And above all there is a hunger of the heart which it is not in material things to satisfy.

So Jesus answered the tempter in the very words which express the lesson which God had sought to teach his people in the wilderness: "Man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (Deut.8:3). The only way to true satisfaction is the way which has learned complete dependence on God.

(ii) So the tempter renewed his attack from another angle. In a vision he took Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple. That may mean one of two things.

The Temple was built on the top of Mount Sion. The top of the mountain was levelled out into a plateau, and on that plateau the whole area of the Temple buildings stood. There was one corner at which Solomon's porch and the Royal porch met, and at that corner there was a sheer drop of four hundred and fifty feet into the valley of the Kedron below. Why should not Jesus stand on that pinnacle, and leap down, and land unharmed in the valley beneath? Men would be startled into following a man who could do a thing like that.

On the top of the roof of the Temple itself there was a stance where every morning a priest stood with a trumpet in his hands, waiting for the first flush of the dawn across the hills of Hebron. At the first dawn light he sounded the trumpet to tell men that the hour of morning sacrifice had come. Why should not Jesus stand there, and leap down right into the Temple court, and amaze men into following him? Had not Malachi said, "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his Temple"? (Mal.3:1). Was there not a promise that the angels would bear God's man upon their hands lest any harm should come to him? (Ps.91:11-12).

This was the very method that the false Messiahs who were continually arising promised. Theudas had led the people out, and had promised with a word to split the waters of Jordan in two. The famous Egyptian pretender (Ac.21:38) had promised that with a word he would lay flat the walls of Jerusalem. Simon Magus, so it is said, had promised to fly through the air, and had perished in the attempt. These pretenders had offered sensations which they could not perform. Jesus could perform anything he promised. Why should he not do it?

There were two good reasons why Jesus should not adopt that course of action. First, he who seeks to attract men to him by providing them with sensations has adopted a way in which there is literally no future. The reason is simple. To retain his power he must produce ever greater and greater sensations. Wonders are apt to be nine day wonders. This year's sensation is next year's commonplace. A gospel founded on sensation-mongering is foredoomed to failure. Second, that is not the way to use the power of God. "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test," said Jesus (Deut.6:16). He meant this; there is no good seeing how far you can go with God; there is no good in putting yourself deliberately into a threatening situation, and doing it quite recklessly and needlessly, and then expecting God to rescue you from it.

God expects a man to take risks in order to be true to him, but he does not expect him to take risks to enhance his own prestige. The very faith which is dependent on signs and wonder is not

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faith. If faith cannot believe without sensations it is not really faith, it is doubt looking for proof and looking in the wrong place. God's rescuing power is not something to be played and experimented with, it is something to be quietly trusted in the life of every day.

Jesus refused the way of sensations because he knew that it was the way to failure--it still is--and because to long for sensations is not to trust, but to distrust, God.

(iii) So the tempter tried his third avenue of attack. It was the world that Jesus came to save, and into his mind there came a picture of the world. The tempting voice said: "Fall down and worship me, and I will give you all the kingdoms of this world." Had not God himself said to his chosen one, "Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession"? (Ps.2:8).

What the tempter was saying was, "Compromise! Come to terms with me! Don't pitch your demands quite so high! Wink just a little at evil and questionable things--and then people will follow you in their hordes." This was the temptation to come to terms with the world, instead of uncompromisingly presenting God's demands to it. It was the temptation to try to advance by retreating, to try to change the world by becoming like the world.

Back came Jesus' answer: "You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and swear by his name" (Deut.6:13). Jesus was quite certain that we can never defeat evil by compromising with evil. He laid down the uncompromisingness of the Christian faith. Christianity cannot stoop to the level of the world; it must lift the world to its own level. Nothing less will do.

So Jesus made his decision. He decided that he must never bribe men into following him; he decided that the way of sensations was not for him; he decided that there could be no compromise in the message he preached and in the faith he demanded. That choice inevitably meant the Cross--but the Cross just as inevitably meant the final victory.

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Matthew 4:12-17

THE SON OF GOD GOES FORTH

Matthew 4:12-17 (Part 1)

When Jesus heard that John had been delivered into the hands of the authorities, he withdrew into Galilee. He left Galilee and came and made his home in Capernaum, which is on the lake-side, in the districts of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was done that there might be fulfilled that which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, when he said, "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and a light has risen for those who sat in the land and in the shadow of death." From that time Jesus began to proclaim his message and to say, "Repent, for the Kingdom of the Heavens has come near!"

Before very long disaster came to John. He was arrested and imprisoned in the dungeons of the Castle of Machaerus by Herod the king. His crime was that he had publicly denounced Herod for seducing his brother's wife, and making her his own wife, after he had put away the wife he had. It is never safe to rebuke an eastern despot, and John's courage brought him first imprisonment and then death. We shall come later to the details of that story which Matthew does not tell until Matt. 14:3-12.

For Jesus the time had come when he must go forth to his task.

Let us note what he did first of all. He left Nazareth and he took up residence in the town of Capernaum. There was a kind of symbolic finality in that move. In that moment Jesus left his home never again to return to live in it. It is as if he shut the door that lay behind him before he opened the door that stood in front of him. It was the clean cut between the old and the new. One chapter was ended and another had begun. Into life there come these moments of decision. It is always better to meet them with an even surgical cut than to vacillate undecided between two courses of action.

Let us note where Jesus went. He went into Galilee. When Jesus went into Galilee to begin his mission and his ministry, he knew what he was doing. Galilee was the most northerly district of Palestine. It stretched from the Litany River in the north to the Plain of Esdraelon in the south. On the west it did not reach the sea coast of the Mediterranean, because the coastal strip was in the possession of the Phoenicians. On the north-east it was bounded by Syria, and its eastern limit was the waters of the Sea of Galilee. Galilee was not large; it was only fifty miles from north to south, and twenty-five miles from east to west.

But, small as it was, Galilee was densely populated. It was by far the most fertile region of Palestine; its fertility was indeed phenomenal and proverbial. There was a saying that it was easier to raise a legion of olives in Galilee than it was to bring up one child in Judaea. Josephus, who was at one time governor of the province, says, "It is throughout rich in soil and pasturage, producing every variety of tree, and inviting by its productiveness even those who have the least inclination for agriculture; it is everywhere tilled; no part is allowed to lie idle, and everywhere it is productive." The result of this was that for its size Galilee had an enormous population. Josephus

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tells us that in it there were two hundred and four villages, none with a population of fewer than fifteen thousand people. So, then, Jesus began his mission in that part of Palestine where there were most people to hear him; he began his work in an area teeming with men to whom the gospel proclamation might be made.

But not only was Galilee a populous district; its people were people of a certain kind. Of all parts of Palestine Galilee was most open to new ideas. Josephus says of the Galileans, "They were ever fond of innovations, and by nature disposed to changes, and delighted in seditions." They were ever ready to follow a leader and to begin an insurrection. They were notoriously quick in temper and given to quarrelling. Yet withal they were the most chivalrous of men. "The Galileans," said Josephus, "have never been destitute of courage." "Cowardice was never a characteristic of the Galileans." "They were ever more anxious for honour than for gain." The inborn characteristics of the Galileans were such as to make them most fertile ground for a new gospel to be preached to them.

This openness to new ideas was due to certain facts.

(i) The name Galilee comes from the Hebrew word galiyl (HSN1550; compare HSN1551 and HSN1556) which means a circle. The full name of the area was Galilee of the Gentiles. Plummer wishes to take that to mean "heathenish Galilee." But the phrase came from the fact that Galilee was literally surrounded by Gentiles. On the west, the Phoenicians were its neighbours. To the north and the east, there were the Syrians. And even to the south, there lay the territory of the Samaritans. Galilee was in fact the one part of Palestine that was inevitably in touch with non-Jewish influences and ideas. Galilee was bound to be open to new ideas in a way that no other part of Palestine was.

(ii) The great roads of the world passed through Galilee, as we saw when we were thinking of the town of Nazareth. The Way of the Sea led from Damascus through Galilee right down to Egypt and to Africa. The Road to the East led through Galilee away out to the frontiers. The traffic of the world passed through Galilee. Away in the south Judaea is tucked into a corner, isolated and secluded. As it has been well said, "Judaea is on the way to nowhere: Galilee is on the way to everywhere." Judaea could erect a fence and keep all foreign influence and all new ideas out; Galilee could never do that. Into Galilee the new ideas were bound to come.

(iii) Galilee's geographical position had affected its history. Again and again it had been invaded and conquered, and the tides of the foreigners had often flowed over it and had sometimes engulfed it.

Originally it had been assigned to the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Zebulun when the Israelites first came into the land (Josh.9) but these tribes had never been completely successful in expelling the native Canaanite inhabitants, and from the beginning the population of Galilee was mixed. More than once foreign invasions from the north and east had swept down on it from Syria, and in the eighth century B.C. the Assyrians had engulfed it completely, the greater part of its population had been taken away into exile, and strangers had been settled in the land. Inevitably this brought a very large injection of foreign blood into Galilee.

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From the eighth until the second century B.C. it had been largely in Gentile hands. When the Jews returned from exile under Nehemiah and Ezra, many of the Galileans came south to live in Jerusalem. In 164 B.C. Simon Maccabaeus chased the Syrians north from Galilee back to their own territory; and on his way back he took with him to Jerusalem the remnants of the Galileans who were left.

The most amazing thing of all is that in 104 B.C. Aristobulus reconquered Galilee for the Jewish nation, and proceeded forcibly to circumcise the inhabitants of Galilee, and thus to make them Jews whether they liked it or not. History had compelled Galilee to open its doors to new strains of blood and to new ideas and to new influences.

The natural characteristics of the Galileans, and the preparation of history had made Galilee the one place in all Palestine where a new teacher with a new message had any real chance of being heard, and it was there that Jesus began his mission and first announced his message.

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Matthew 4:12-17

THE HERALD OF GOD

Matthew 4:12-17 (Part 2)

Before we leave this passage there are certain other things which we must note.

It was to the town of Capernaum that Jesus went. The correct form of the name is Capharnaum. The form Capernaum does not occur at all until the fifth century A.D., but it is so fixed in our minds and memories that it would not be wise to try to change it.

There has been much argument about the site of Capernaum. Two places have been suggested. The commonest, and the likeliest, identification is that Capernaum is Tell Hum, which is on the west side of the extreme north of the Sea of Galilee; the alternative, and the less likely, identification is that Capernaum is Khan Minyeh, which is about two and a half miles to the south-west of Tell Hum. In any event, there is now nothing but ruins left to show where Capernaum once stood.

It was Matthew's habit to find in the Old Testament something which he could use as a prophecy about every event in Jesus' life. He finds such a prophecy in Isa.9:1-2. In fact that is another of the prophecies which Matthew tears violently from its context and uses in his own extraordinary way. It is a prophecy which dates back to the reign of Pekah. In those days the northern parts of Palestine, including Galilee, had been despoiled by the invading armies of the Assyrians; and this was originally a prophecy of the deliverance which would some day come to these conquered territories. Matthew finds in it a prophecy which foretold of the light that Jesus was to bring.

Finally, Matthew gives us a brief one-sentence summary of the message which Jesus brought. The King James Version and Revised Standard Version both say that Jesus began to preach. The word preach has come down in the world; it is all too unfortunately connected in the minds of many people with boredom. The word in Greek is *kerussein* (GSN2784), which is the word for a herald's proclamation from a king. *Kerux* (GSN2783) is the Greek word for herald, and the herald was the man who brought a message direct from the king.

This word tells us of certain characteristics of the preaching of Jesus and these are characteristics which should be in all preaching.

(i) The herald had in his voice a note of certainty. There was no doubt about his message; he did not come with perhapses and maybes and probablys; he came with a definite message. Goethe had it: "Tell me of your certainties: I have doubts enough of my own." Preaching is the proclamation of certainties, and a man cannot make others sure of that about which he himself is in doubt.

(ii) The herald had in his voice the note of authority. He was speaking for the king; he was laying down and announcing the king's law, the king's command, and the king's decision. As was said of a great preacher, "He did not cloudily guess; he knew." Preaching, as it has been put, is the application of prophetic authority to the present situation.

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(iii) The herald's message came from a source beyond himself; it came from the king. Preaching speaks from a source beyond the preacher. It is not the expression of one man's personal opinions; it is the voice of God transmitted through one man to the people. It was with the voice of God that Jesus spoke to men.

The message of Jesus consisted of a command which was the consequence of a new situation. "Repent!" he said. "Turn from your own ways, and turn to God. Lift your eyes from earth and look to heaven. Reverse your direction, and stop walking away from God and begin walking towards God." That command had become urgently necessary because the reign of God was about to begin. Eternity had invaded time; God had invaded earth in Jesus Christ, and therefore it was of paramount importance that a man should choose the right side and the right direction.

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Matthew 4:18-22

CHRIST CALLS THE FISHERMEN

Matthew 4:18-22

While he was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew. his brother, casting their net into the sea, for they were fishermen. He said to them 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' They immediately left their nets and followed him. He went on from there and saw other two brothers, James, Zebedee's son, and John, his brother. They were in the boat with Zebedee their father getting ready their nets for use. So he called them. They immediately left their boat and their father, and followed him.

All Galilee centered round the Sea of Galilee. It is thirteen miles long from north to south, and eight miles across from east to west. The Sea of Galilee is therefore small, and it is interesting to note that Luke, the Gentile, who had seen so much more of the world, never calls it the sea (GSN2281 - thalassa), but always the lake (GSN3041 - limne). It is the shape of an oval, wider at the top than at the bottom. It lies in that great rift in the earth's surface in which the Jordan valley runs, and the surface of the Sea of Galilee is six hundred and eighty feet below sea level. The fact that it lies in this dip in the earth's surface gives it a very warm climate, and makes the surrounding countryside phenomenally fertile. It is one of the loveliest lakes in the world. W. M.

Thomson describes it: "Seen from any point of the surrounding heights it is a fine sheet of water--a burnished mirror set in a framework of rounded hills and rugged mountains, which rise and roll backward and upward to where Hermon hangs the picture against the blue vault of heaven."

In the days of Josephus there were no fewer than nine populous cities on its shore. In the 1930's, when H. V. Morton saw it, only Tiberias was left and it was little more than a village. Today it is the largest town in Galilee and steadily growing.

In the time of Jesus the Sea of Galilee was thick with fishing boats. Josephus on a certain expedition had no difficulty in assembling two hundred and forty fishing boats to set out from Tarichaea; but nowadays the fishermen are few and far between.

There were three methods of fishing. There was fishing by line.

There was fishing with the casting net. The casting net was circular, and might be as much as nine feet across. It was skilfully cast into the water from the land, or from the shallow water at the edge of the lake. It was weighted with pellets of lead round the circumference. It sank into the sea and surrounded the fish; it was then drawn through the water as if the top of a bell tent were being drawn to land, and in it the fish were caught. That was the kind of net that Peter and Andrew, and James and John, were handling when Jesus saw them. Its name was the amphiblestron (GSN0293).

The drag net was used from a boat, or better from two boats. It was cast into the water with ropes at each of the four corners. It was weighted at the foot so that, as it were, it stood upright in the water. When the boats were rowed along with the net behind them, the effect was that the net became a great cone, and in the cone the fishes were caught and brought into the boat. This kind of net is the net in the parable of the dragnet; and is called the sagene (GSN4522).

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So Jesus was walking by the lakeside; and as he walked he called Peter and Andrew, James and John. It is not to be thought that this was the first time that he had seen them, or they him. As John tells the story, at least some of them were already disciples of John the Baptist (Jn.1:35). No doubt they had already talked with Jesus and had already listened to him, but in this moment there came to them the challenge once and for all to throw in their lot with him.

The Greeks used to tell how Xenophon first met Socrates. Socrates met him in a narrow lane and barred his path with his stick. First of all Socrates asked him if he knew where he could buy this and that, and if he knew where this and that were made. Xenophon gave the required information. Then Socrates asked him, "Do you know where men are made good and virtuous?" "No," said the young Xenophon. "Then," said Socrates, follow me and learn!"

Jesus, too, called on these fishermen to follow him. It is interesting to note what kind of men they were. They were not men of great scholarship, or influence, or wealth, or social background. They were not poor, they were simple working people with no great background, and certainly, anyone would have said, with no great future.

It was these ordinary men whom Jesus chose. Once there came to Socrates a very ordinary man called Aeschines. "I am a poor man," said Aeschines. "I have nothing else, but I give you myself." "Do you not see," said Socrates, "that you are giving me the most precious thing of all?" What Jesus needs is ordinary folk who will give him themselves. He can do anything with people like that.

Further these men were fishermen. It has been pointed out by many scholars that the good fisherman must possess these very qualities which will turn him into the good fishers of men.

(i) He must have patience. He must learn to wait patiently until the fish will take the bait. If he is restless and quick to move he will never make a fisherman. The good fisher of men will have need of patience. It is but rarely in preaching or in teaching that we will see quick results. We must learn to wait.

(ii) He must have perseverance. He must learn never to be discouraged, but always to try again. The good preacher and teacher must not be discouraged when nothing seems to happen. He must always be ready to try again.

(iii) He must have courage. As the old Greek said when he prayed for the protection of the gods: "My boat is so small and the sea is so large." He must be ready to risk and to face the fury of the sea and of the gale. The good preacher and teacher must be well aware that there is always a danger in telling men the truth. The man who tells the truth, more often than not takes his reputation and his life in his hands.

(iv) He must have an eye for the right moment. The wise fisherman knows well that there are times when it is hopeless to fish. He knows when to cast and when not to cast. The good preacher and teacher chooses his moment. There are times when men will welcome the truth, and times

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Matthew 4:18-22

when they will resent the truth. There are times when the truth will move them, and times when the truth will harden them in their opposition to the truth. The wise preacher and teacher knows that there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

(v) He must fit the bait to the fish. One fish will rise to one bait and another to another. Paul said that he became all things to all men if by any chance he might win some. The wise preacher and teacher knows that the same approach will not win all men. He may even have to know and recognize his own limitations. He may have to discover that there are certain spheres in which he himself can work. and others in which he cannot.

(v) The wise fisherman must keep himself out of sight. If he obtrudes his own presence, even his own shadow, the fish will certainly not bite. The wise preacher and teacher will always seek to present men, not with himself, but with Jesus Christ. His aim is to fix men's eyes. not on himself, but on that figure beyond.

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Matthew 4:23-25

THE METHODS OF THE MASTER

Matthew 4:23-25 (Part 1)

Jesus made a circular tour of Galilee, teaching in the Synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and healing all kinds of diseases and ailments among the people: and the report of his activities went out all over Syria. So they brought to him an those who were ill, those who were in the grip of the most varied diseases and pains, those who were possessed by demons, those who were epileptics, and those who were paralysed; and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, and from the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

Jesus had chosen to begin his mission in Galilee, and we have seen how well-prepared Galilee was to receive the seed. Within Galilee Jesus chose to launch his campaign in the synagogues.

The synagogue was the most important institution in the life of any Jew. There was a difference between the synagogues and the Temple. There was only one Temple, the Temple in Jerusalem, but wherever there was the smallest colony of Jews there was a synagogue. The Temple existed solely for the offering of sacrifice; in it there was no preaching or teaching. The synagogue was essentially a teaching institution. The synagogues have been defined as "the popular religious universities of their day." If a man had any religious teaching or religious ideas to disseminate, the synagogue was unquestionably the place to start.

Further, the synagogue service was such that it gave the new teacher his chance. In the synagogue service there were three parts. The first part consisted of prayers. The second part consisted of readings from the Law and from the Prophets, readings in which members of the congregation took part. The third part was the address. The important fact is that there was no one person to give the address. There was no such thing as a professional ministry. The president of the synagogue presided over the arrangements for the service. Any distinguished stranger could be asked to give the address, and anyone with a message to give might volunteer to give it; and, if the ruler or president of the synagogue judged him to be a fit person to speak, he was allowed to speak. Thus, at the beginning, the door of the synagogue and the pulpit of the synagogue were open to Jesus. He began in the synagogue because it was there he would find the most sincerely religious people of his day, and the way to speak to them was open to him. After the address there came a time for talk, and questions, and discussion. The synagogue was the ideal place in which to get a new teaching across to the people.

But not only did Jesus preach; he also healed the sick. It was little wonder that reports of what he was doing went out and people came crowding to hear him, and to see him, and to benefit from his pity.

They came from Syria. Syria was the great province of which Palestine was only a part. It stretched away to the north and the north-east with the great city of Damascus as its center. It so happens that one of the loveliest legends passed down to us by Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History 1: 13) goes back to this time. The story goes that there was a king called Abgar, in Edessa, and he was

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ill. So, it is said, he wrote to Jesus: "Abgar, ruler of Edessa, to Jesus, the most excellent Saviour, who has appeared in the country of Jerusalem--greeting. I have heard of you and of your cures, performed without medicine and without herb; for, it is said, you make the blind to see and the lame to walk, you cleanse the lepers, you cast out evil spirits and demons, you heal those afflicted with lingering diseases, and you raise the dead.

Now, as I have heard all this about you, I have concluded that one of two things must be true; either, you are God, and having descended from heaven, you do these things, or else, you are a son of God by what you do. I write to you, therefore, to ask you to come and cure the disease from which I am suffering. For I have heard that the Jews murmur against you, and devise evil things against you. Now, I have a very small but an excellent city which is large enough for both of us."

Jesus was said to have written back: "Blessed are you for having believed in me without seeing me. For it is written concerning me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, while they who have not seen me will believe and be saved. But, as to your request that I should come to you, I must fulfil all things here for which I have been sent, and, after fulfilling them, be taken up again to him who sent me.

Yet, after I am taken up, I will send you one of my disciples to cure your disease, and to give life to you and to yours." So, the legend goes on, Thaddeus went to Edessa and cured Abgar. It is only a legend, but it does show how men believed that even in distant Syria men had heard of Jesus and longed with all their hearts for the help and the healing which he alone could give.

Very naturally they came from Galilee, and the word about Jesus had spread south to Jerusalem and Judaea also, and they came from there. They came from the land across the Jordan, which was known as Peraea, and which stretched from Pella in the north to Arabia Petra in the south. They came from the Decapolis. The Decapolis was a federation of ten independent Greek cities, all of which, except Scythopolis, were on the far side of the Jordan.

This list is symbolic, for in it we see not only the Jews but the Gentiles also coming to Jesus Christ for what he alone could give them. Already the ends of the earth are gathering to him.

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Matthew 4:23-25

THE ACTIVITIES OF JESUS

Matthew 4:23-25 (Part 2)

This passage is of great importance because it gives us in brief summary the three great activities of Jesus' life.

(i) He came proclaiming the gospel, or, as the King James and Revised Standard Version have it, he came preaching. Now, as we have already seen, preaching is the proclamation of certainties. Therefore, Jesus came to defeat men's ignorance. He came to tell them the truth about God, to tell them that which by themselves they could never have found out. He came to put an end to guessing and to groping, and to show men what God is like.

(ii) He came teaching in the synagogues. What is the difference between teaching and preaching? Preaching is the uncompromising proclamation of certainties; teaching is the explanation of the meaning and the significance of them. Therefore, Jesus came to defeat men's misunderstandings. There are times when men know the truth and misinterpret it. They know the truth and draw the wrong conclusions from it. Jesus came to tell men the meaning of true religion.

(iii) He came healing all those who had need of healing. That is to say, Jesus came to defeat men's pain. The important thing about Jesus is that he was not satisfied with simply telling men the truth in words; he came to turn that truth into deeds. Florence Allshorn, the great missionary teacher, said, "An ideal is never yours until it comes out of your finger tips." The ideal is not yours until it is realized in action. Jesus realized his own teaching in deeds of help and healing.

Jesus came preaching that he might defeat all ignorance. he came teaching that he might defeat all misunderstandings. He came healing that he might defeat all pain. We, too, must proclaim our certainties; we, too, must be ready to explain our faith; we, too, must turn the ideal into action and into deeds.

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Matthew 5

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

As we have already seen, Matthew has a careful pattern in his gospel.

In his story of the baptism of Jesus he shows us Jesus realizing that the hour has struck, that the call to action has come, and that Jesus must go forth on his crusade. In his story of the Temptations he shows us Jesus deliberately choosing the method he will use to carry out his task, and deliberately rejecting methods which he knew to be against the will of God. If a man sets his hand to a great task, he needs his helpers, his assistants, his staff. So Matthew goes on to show us Jesus selecting the men who will be his fellow-workers.

But if helpers and assistants are to do their work intelligently and effectively, they must first have instruction. And now, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew shows us Jesus instructing his disciples in the message which was his and which they were to take to men. In Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount this becomes even clearer. In Luke the Sermon on the Mount follows immediately after what we might call the official choosing of the Twelve (Lk.6:13 ff).

For that reason one great scholar called the Sermon on the Mount "The Ordination Address to the Twelve." Just as a young minister has his task set out before him, when he is called to his first charge, so the Twelve received from Jesus their ordination address before they went out to their task. It is for that reason that other scholars have given other titles to the Sermon on the Mount. It has been called "The Compendium of Christ's Doctrine," "The Magna Charta of the Kingdom," "The Manifesto of the King." All are agreed that in the Sermon on the Mount we have the essence of the teaching of Jesus to the inner circle of his chosen men.

THE SUMMARY OF THE FAITH

In actual fact this is even truer than at first sight appears. We speak of the Sermon on the Mount as if it was one single sermon preached on one single occasion. But it is far more than that. There are good and compelling reasons for thinking that the Sermon on the Mount is far more than one sermon, that it is, in fact, a kind of epitome of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached.

(i) Anyone who heard it in its present form would be exhausted long before the end. There is far too much in it for one hearing. It is one thing to sit and read it, and to pause and linger as we read; it would be entirely another thing to listen to it for the first time in spoken words. We can read at our own pace and with a certain familiarity with the words; but to hear it in its present form for the first time would be to be dazzled with excess of light long before it was finished.

(ii) There are certain sections of the Sermon on the Mount which emerge, as it were, without warning; they have no connection with what goes before and no connection with what comes after. For instance, Matt.5:31-32 and Matt.7:7-11 are quite detached from their context. There is a certain disconnection in the Sermon on the Mount.

(iii) The most important point is this. Both Matthew and Luke give us a version of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew's version there are 107 verses. Of these 107 verses 29 are found all together

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in Lk.6:20-49; 47 have no parallel in Luke's version; and 34 are found scattered all over Luke's gospel in different contexts.

For instance, the simile of the salt is in Matt.5:13 and in Lk.14:34-35; the simile of the lamp is in Matt.5:15 and in Lk.8:16; the saying that not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass away is in Matt.5:18 and in Lk.16:17. That is to say, passages which are consecutive in Matthew's gospel appear in widely separated chapters in Luke's gospel.

To take another example, the saying about the mote in our brother's eye and the beam in our own is in Matt.7:1-5 and in Lk.6:37-42; the passage in which Jesus bids men to ask and seek and find is in Matt.7:7-12 and in Lk.11:9-13.

If we tabulate these things, the matter will become clear:

Matt.5:13	= Lk.14:34-35
Matt.5:15	= Lk.8:16
Matt.5:18	= Lk.16:17
Matt.7:1-5	= Lk.6:37-42
Matt.7:7-12	= Lk.11:9-13

Now, as we have seen, Matthew is essentially the teaching gospel; it is Matthew's characteristic that he collects the teaching of Jesus under certain great headings; and it is surely far more likely that Matthew collected Jesus' teaching into one whole pattern, than that Luke took the pattern and broke it up and scattered the pieces all over his gospel. The Sermon on the Mount is not one single sermon which Jesus preached on one definite situation; it is the summary of his consistent teaching to his disciples. It has been suggested that, after Jesus definitely chose the Twelve, he may have taken them away into a quiet place for a week or even a longer period of time, and that, during that space, he taught them all the time, and the Sermon on the Mount is the distillation of that teaching.

In point of fact Matthew's introductory sentence goes a long way to make that clear.

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Matthew 5:1-2

MATTHEW'S INTRODUCTION

Matthew 5:1-2

"Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them."

In that brief verse there are three clues to the real significance of the Sermon on the Mount.

(i) Jesus began to teach when he had sat down. When a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially he sat to teach. We still speak of a professor's chair; the Pope still speaks *ex cathedra*, from his seat. Often a Rabbi gave instruction when he was standing or strolling about; that his really official teaching was done when he had taken his seat. So, then, the very intimation that Jesus sat down to teach his disciples is the indication that this teaching is central and official.

(ii) Matthew goes on to say that when he had opened his mouth, he taught them. This phrase he opened his mouth is not simply a decoratively roundabout way of saying he said. In Greek the phrase has a double significance. (a) In Greek it is used of a solemn, grave and dignified utterance. It is used, for instance, of the saying of an oracle. It is the natural preface for a most weighty saying. (b) It is used of a person's utterance when he is really opening his heart and fully pouring out his mind. It is used of intimate teaching with no barriers between. Again the very use of this phrase indicates that the material in the Sermon on the Mount is no chance piece of teaching. It is the grave and solemn utterance of the central things; it is the opening of Jesus' heart and mind to the men who were to be his right-hand men in his task.

(iii) The King James Version has it that when Jesus had sat down, he opened his mouth and taught them saying. In Greek there are two past tenses of the verb. There is the aorist tense, and the aorist tense expresses one particular action, done and completed in past time. In the sentence, "He shut the gate," shut would be an aorist in Greek because it describes one completed action in past time. There is the imperfect tense, and the imperfect tense describes repeated, continuous, or habitual action in past time. In the sentence, "It was his custom to go to Church every Sunday," in Greek it was his custom to go would be expressed by a single verb in the imperfect tense, because it describes continuous and often-repeated action in the past.

Now the point is that in the Greek of this sentence, which we are studying, the verb taught is not an aorist, but an imperfect and therefore it describes repeated and habitual action, and the translation should be: "This is what he used to teach them." Matthew has said as plainly as Greek will say it that the Sermon on the Mount is not one sermon of Jesus, given at one particular time and on one particular occasion; it is the essence of all that Jesus continuously and habitually taught his disciples.

The Sermon on the Mount is greater even than we think. Matthew in his introduction wishes us to see that it is the official teaching of Jesus; that it is the opening of Jesus' whole mind to his disciples; that it is the summary of the teaching which Jesus habitually gave to his inner circle. The

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Sermon on the Mount is nothing less than the concentrated memory of many hours of heart to heart communion between the disciples and their Master.

As we study the Sermon on the Mount, we are going to set at the head of each of the beatitudes the translation of the Revised Standard Version; and then at the end of our study of each beatitude we shall see what the words mean in modern English.

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Matthew 5:3

THE SUPREME BLESSEDNESS

Matthew 5:3 (Part 1)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Before we study each of the beatitudes in detail there are two general facts which we must note.

(i) It can be seen that every one of the beatitudes has precisely the same form. As they are commonly printed in our Bibles, each one of them in the King James Version has the word *are* printed in italic, or sloping, type. When a word appears in italics in the King James Version it means that in the Greek, or in the Hebrew, there is no equivalent word, and that that word has had to be added to bring out the meaning of the sentence.

This is to say that in the beatitudes there is no verb, there is no *are*. Why should that be? Jesus did not speak the beatitudes in Greek; he spoke them in Aramaic, which was the kind of Hebrew people spoke in his day. Aramaic and Hebrew have a very common kind of expression, which is in fact an exclamation and which means, "O the blessedness of . . ." That expression ('*ashere* (HSN0835) in the Hebrew) is very common in the Old Testament. For instance, the first Psalm begins in the Hebrew: "O the blessedness of the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Ps.1:1), that is the form in which Jesus first spoke the beatitudes. The beatitudes are not simple statements; they are exclamations: "O the blessedness of the poor in spirit!"

That is most important, for it means that the beatitudes are not pious hopes of what shall be; they are not glowing, but nebulous prophecies of some future bliss; they are congratulations on what is. The blessedness which belongs to the Christian is not a blessedness which is postponed to some future world of glory; it is a blessedness which exists here and now. It is not something into which the Christian will enter; it is something into which he has entered.

True, it will find its fulness and its consummation in the presence of God; but for all that it is a present reality to be enjoyed here and now. The beatitudes in effect say, "O the bliss of being a Christian! O the joy of following Christ! O the sheer happiness of knowing Jesus Christ as Master, Saviour and Lord!" The very form of the beatitudes is the statement of the joyous thrill and the radiant gladness of the Christian life. In face of the beatitudes a gloom-encompassed Christianity is unthinkable.

(ii) The word *blessed* which is used in each of the beatitudes is a very special word. It is the Greek word *makarios* (GSN3107). *Makarios* is the word which specially describes the gods. In Christianity there is a godlike joy.

The meaning of *makarios* (GSN3107) can best be seen from one particular usage of it. The Greeks always called Cyprus *he makaria* (GSN3588) (the feminine form of the adjective), which means The Happy Isle, and they did so because they believed that Cyprus was so lovely, so rich, and so fertile an island that a man would never need to go beyond its coastline to

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find the perfectly happy life. It had such a climate, such flowers and fruits and trees, such minerals, such natural resources that it contained within itself all the materials for perfect happiness.

Makarios (GSN3107) then describes that joy which has its secret within itself, that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, that joy which is completely independent of all the chances and the changes of life. The English word happiness gives its own case away. It contains the root hap which means chance. Human happiness is something which is dependent on the chances and the changes of life, something which life may give and which life may also destroy. The Christian blessedness is completely untouchable and unassailable. "No one," said Jesus, "will take your joy from you" (Jn. 16:22). The beatitudes speak of that joy which seeks us through our pain, that joy which sorrow and loss, and pain and grief, are powerless to touch, that joy which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away.

The world can win its joys, and the world can equally well lose its joys. A change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition, even a change in the weather, can take away the fickle joy the world can give. But the Christian has the serene and untouchable joy which comes from walking for ever in the company and in the presence of Jesus Christ.

The greatness of the beatitudes is that they are not wistful glimpses of some future beauty; they are not even golden promises of some distant glory; they are triumphant shouts of bliss for a permanent joy that nothing in the world can ever take away.

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Matthew 5:3

THE BLISS OF THE DESTITUTE

Matthew 5:3 (Part 2)

It seems a surprising way to begin talking about happiness by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." There are two ways in which we can come at the meaning of this word poor.

As we have them the beatitudes are in Greek, and the word that is used for poor is the word ptochos (GSN4434). In Greek there are two words for poor. There is the word penes (GSN3993). Penes describes a man who has to work for his living; it is defined by the Greeks as describing the man who is autodiakonos, that is, the man who serves his own needs with his own hands. Penes (GSN3993) describes the working man, the man who has nothing superfluous, the man who is not rich, but who is not destitute either. But, as we have seen, it is not penes (GSN3993) that is used in this beatitude, it is ptochos (GSN4434), which describes absolute and abject poverty. It is connected with the root ptossein (GSN4434), which means to crouch or to cower; and it describes the poverty which is beaten to its knees. As it has been said, penes (GSN3993) describes the man who has nothing superfluous; ptochos (GSN4434) describes the man who has nothing at all. So this beatitude becomes even more surprising.

Blessed is the man who is abjectly and completely poverty-stricken. Blessed is the man who is absolutely destitute.

As we have also seen the beatitudes were not originally spoken in Greek, but in Aramaic. Now the Jews had a special way of using the word Poor. In Hebrew the word is `aniy (HSN6041) or 'ebyown (HSN0034). These words in Hebrew underwent a four-stage development of meaning. (i) They began by meaning simply poor. (ii) They went on to mean, because poor, therefore having no influence or power, or help, or prestige. (iii) They went on to mean, because having no influence, therefore down-trodden and oppressed by men. (iv) Finally, they came to describe the man who, because he has no earthly resources whatever, puts his whole trust in God.

So in Hebrew the word poor was used to describe the humble and the helpless man who put his whole trust in God. It is thus that the Psalmist uses the word, when he writes, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps.34:6). It is in fact true that in the Psalms the poor man, in this sense of the term, is the good man who is dear to God. "The hope of the poor shall not perish for ever" (Ps.9:18). God delivers the poor (Ps.35:10). "In thy goodness, O God, thou didst provide for the needy" (Ps.68:10). "He shall defend the cause of the poor of the people" (Ps.72:4). "He raises up the needy out of affliction, and makes their families like flocks" (Ps.107:41). "I will satisfy her poor with bread" (Ps.132:15). In all these cases the poor man is the humble, helpless man who has put his trust in God.

Let us now take the two sides, the Greek and the Aramaic, and put them together. Ptochos (GSN4434) describes the man who is absolutely destitute, the man who has nothing at all; `aniy (HSN6041) and 'ebyown (HSN0034) describe the poor, and humble, and helpless man who has put his whole trust in God. Therefore, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" means:

Blessed is the man who has realised his own utter helplessness,

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Matthew 5:3

and who has put his whole trust in God.

If a man has realized his own utter helplessness, and has put his whole trust in God, there will enter into his life two things which are opposite sides of the same thing. He will become completely detached from things, for he will know that things have not got it in them to bring happiness or security; and he will become completely attached to God, for he will know that God alone can bring him help, and hope, and strength. The man who is poor in spirit is the man who has realized that things mean nothing, and that God means everything.

We must be careful not to think that this beatitude calls actual material poverty a good thing. Poverty is not a good thing. Jesus would never have called blessed a state where people live in slums and have not enough to eat, and where health rots because conditions are all against it. That kind of poverty it is the aim of the Christian gospel to remove. The poverty which is blessed is the poverty of spirit, when a man realises his own utter lack of resources to meet life, and finds his help and strength in God.

Jesus says that to such a poverty belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. Why should that be so? If we take the two petitions of the Lord's Prayer and set them together:

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,

we get the definition: the Kingdom of God is a society where God's will is as perfectly done in earth as it is in heaven. That means that only he who does God's will is a citizen of the Kingdom; and we can only do God's will when we realize our own utter helplessness, our own utter ignorance, our own utter inability to cope with life, and when we put our whole trust in God. Obedience is always founded on trust. The Kingdom of God is the possession of the poor in spirit, because the poor in spirit have realized their own utter helplessness without God, and have learned to trust and obey.

So then, the first beatitude means:

O the bliss of the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God, for thus alone he can render to God that perfect obedience which will make him a citizen of the kingdom of heaven!

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Matthew 5:4

THE BLISS OF THE BROKEN HEART

Matthew 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

It is first of all to be noted about this beatitude that the Greek word for to mourn, used here, is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for the passionate lament for one who was loved. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, it is the word which is used of Jacob's grief when he believed that Joseph, his son, was dead (Gen.37:34). It is defined as the kind of grief which takes such a hold on a man that it cannot be hid. It is not only the sorrow which brings an ache to the heart; it is the sorrow which brings the unrestrainable tears to the eyes. Here then indeed is an amazing kind of bliss:

Blessed is the man who mourns like one mourning for the dead.

There are three ways in which this beatitude can be taken.

(i) It can be taken quite literally: Blessed is the man who has endured the bitterest sorrow that life can bring. The Arabs have a proverb: "All sunshine makes a desert." The land on which the sun always shines will soon become an arid place in which no fruit will grow. There are certain things which only the rains will produce; and certain experiences which only sorrow can beget.

Sorrow can do two things for us. It can show us, as nothing else can, the essential kindness of our fellow-men; and it can show us as nothing else can the comfort and the compassion of God. Many and many a man in the hour of his sorrow has discovered his fellow-men and his God as he never did before. When things go well it is possible to live for years on the surface of things; but when sorrow comes a man is driven to the deep things of life, and, if he accepts it aright, a new strength and beauty enter into his soul.

"I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she,
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!"

(ii) Some people have taken this beatitude to mean:

Blessed are those who are desperately sorry for the sorrow and the suffering of this world.

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When we were thinking of the first beatitude we saw that it is always right to be detached from things, but it is never right to be detached from people. This world would have been a very much poorer place, if there had not been those who cared intensely about the sorrows and the sufferings of others.

Lord Shaftesbury probably did more for ordinary working men and women and for little children than any social reformer ever did. It all began very simply. When he was a boy at Harrow, he was going along the street one day, and he met a pauper's funeral. The coffin was a shoddy, ill-made box. It was on a hand-barrow. The barrow was being pushed by a quartette of men who were drunk; and as they pushed the barrow along, they were singing ribald songs, and joking and jesting among themselves. As they pushed the barrow up the hill the box, which was the coffin, fell off the barrow and burst open. Some people would have thought the whole business a good joke; some would have turned away in fastidious disgust; some would have shrugged their shoulders and would have felt that it had nothing to do with them, although it might be a pity that such things should happen. The young Shaftesbury saw it and said to himself "When I grow up, I'm going to give my life to see that things like that don't happen." So he dedicated his life to caring for others.

Christianity is caring. This beatitude does mean: Blessed is the man who cares intensely for the sufferings. and for the sorrows, and for the needs of others.

(iii) No doubt both these thoughts are in this beatitude, but its main thought undoubtedly is: Blessed is the man who is desperately sorry for his own sin and his own unworthiness.

As we have seen, the very first word of the message of Jesus was, "Repent!" No man can repent unless he is sorry for his sins. The thing which really changes men is when they suddenly come up against something which opens their eyes to what sin is and to what sin does. A boy or a girl may go his or her own way, and may never think of effects and consequences; and then some day something happens and that boy or girl sees the stricken look in a father's or a mother's eyes; and suddenly sin is seen for what it is.

That is what the Cross does for us. As we look at the Cross, we are bound to say, "That is what sin can do. Sin can take the loveliest life in all the world and smash it on a Cross." One of the great functions of the Cross is to open the eyes of men and women to the horror of sin. And when a man sees sin in all its horror he cannot do anything else but experience intense sorrow for his sin.

Christianity begins with a sense of sin. Blessed is the man who is intensely sorry for his sin, the man who is heart-broken for what his sin has done to God and to Jesus Christ, the man who sees the Cross and who is appalled by the havoc wrought by sin.

It is the man who has that experience who will indeed be comforted; for that experience is what we call penitence, and the broken and the contrite heart God will never despise (Ps.51:17). The way to the joy of forgiveness is through the desperate sorrow of the broken heart.

The real meaning of the second beatitude is:

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Matthew 5:4

O the bliss of the man whose heart is broken for the world's suffering and for his own sin, for out of his sorrow he will find the joy of God!

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Matthew 5:5

THE BLISS OF THE GOD-CONTROLLED LIFE

Matthew 5:5

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

In our modern English idiom the word meek is hardly one of the honourable words of life. Nowadays it carries with it an idea of spinelessness, and subservience, and mean-spiritedness. It paints the picture of a submissive and ineffective creature. But it so happens that the word meek--in Greek *praus* (GSN4239)--was one of the great Greek ethical words.

Aristotle has a great deal to say about the quality of meekness (*praotis* = GSN4236). It was Aristotle's fixed method to define every virtue as the mean between two extremes. On the one hand there was the extreme of excess; on the other hand there was the extreme of defect; and in between there was the virtue itself, the happy medium. To take an example, on the one extreme there is the spendthrift; on the other extreme there is the miser; and in between there is the generous man.

Aristotle defines meekness, *praotes* (GSN4236), as the mean between *orgilotes* (see *orge*, GSN3709), which means excessive anger, and *aorgesia*, which means excessive angerlessness. *Praotes* (GSN4236), meekness, as Aristotle saw it, is the happy medium between too much and too little anger. And so the first possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who is always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time.

If we ask what the right time and the wrong time are, we may say as a general rule for life that it is never right to be angry for any insult or injury done to ourselves; that is something that no Christian must ever resent; but that it is often right to be angry at injuries done to other people. Selfish anger is always a sin; selfless anger can be one of the great moral dynamics of the world.

But the word *praus* (GSN4239) has a second standard Greek usage. It is the regular word for an animal which has been domesticated, which has been trained to obey the word of command, which has learned to answer to the reins. It is the word for an animal which has learned to accept control. So the second possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who has every instinct, every impulse, every passion under control. Blessed is the man who is entirely' self-controlled.

The moment we have stated that, we see that it needs a change. It is not so much the blessing of the man who is self-controlled, for such complete self-control is beyond human capacity; rather, it is the blessing of the man who is completely God-controlled. for only in his service do we find our perfect freedom, and in doing his will our peace.

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But there is still a third possible side from which we may approach this beatitude. The Greeks always contrasted the quality which they called *praotes* (GSN4236), and which the King James Version translates meekness, with the quality which they called *hupselokardia*, which means lofty-heartedness. In *praotes* (GSN4236) there is the true humility which banishes all pride.

Without humility a man cannot learn, for the first step to learning is the realization of our own ignorance. Quintilian, the great Roman teacher of oratory, said of certain of his scholars, "They would no doubt be excellent students, if they were not already convinced of their own knowledge." No one can teach the man who knows it all already. Without humility there can be no such thing as love, for the very beginning of love is a sense of unworthiness. Without humility there can be no true religion. For all true religion begins with a realization of our own weakness and of our need for God. Man reaches only true manhood when he is always conscious that he is the creature and that God is the Creator, and that without God he can do nothing.

Praotes (GSN4236) describes humility, the acceptance of the necessity to learn and of the necessity to be forgiven. It describes man's only proper attitude to God. So then, the third possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who has the humility to know his own ignorance, his own weakness, and his own need.

It is this meekness, Jesus says, which will inherit the earth. It is the fact of history that it has always been the men with this gift of self-control, the men with their passions, and instincts, and impulses under discipline, who have been great. Numbers says of Moses, the greatest leader and the greatest law-giver the world has ever seen: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Num.12:3). Moses was no milk and water character; he was no spineless creature; he could be blazingly angry; but he was a man whose anger was on the leash, only to be released when the time was right. The writer of Proverbs has it: "He that rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city" (Prov.16:32).

It was the lack of that very quality which ruined Alexander the Great, who, in a fit of uncontrolled temper in the middle of a drunken debauch, hurled a spear at his best friend and killed him. No man can lead others until he has mastered himself; no man can serve others until he has subjected himself; no man can be in control of others until he has learned to control himself. But the man who gives himself into the complete control of God will gain this meekness which will indeed enable him to inherit the earth.

It is clear that this word *praus* (GSN4239) means far more than the English word meek now means; it is, in fact, clear that there is no one English word which will translate it, although perhaps the word gentle comes nearest to it. The full translation of this third beatitude must read:

O the bliss of the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, who has every instinct, and impulse, and passion under control because he himself is God-controlled, who has the humility to

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realise his own ignorance and his own weakness, for
such a man is a king among men!

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Matthew 5:6

THE BLISS OF THE STARVING SPIRIT

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Words do not exist in isolation; they exist against a background of experience and of thought; and the meaning of any word is conditioned by the background of the person who speaks it. That is particularly true of this beatitude. It would convey to those who heard it for the first time an impression quite different from the impression which it conveys to us.

The fact is that very few of us in modern conditions of life know what it is to be really hungry or really thirsty. In the ancient world it was very different. A working man's wage was the equivalent of three pence a day, and, even making every allowance for the difference in the purchasing power of money, no man ever got fat on that wage. A working man in Palestine ate meat only once a week, and in Palestine the working man and the day labourer were never far from the border-line of real hunger and actual starvation.

It was still more so in the case of thirst. It was not possible for the vast majority of people to turn a tap and find the clear, cold water pouring into their house. A man might be on a journey, and in the midst of it the hot wind which brought the sand-storm might begin to blow. There was nothing for him to do but to wrap his head in his burnous and turn his back to the wind, and wait, while the swirling sand filled his nostrils and his throat until he was likely to suffocate, and until he was parched with an imperious thirst. In the conditions of modern western life there is no parallel at all to that.

So, then, the hunger which this beatitude describes is no genteel hunger which could be satisfied with a mid-morning snack; the thirst of which it speaks is no thirst which could be slaked with a cup of coffee or an iced drink. It is the hunger of the man who is starving for food, and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks.

Since that is so this beatitude is in reality a question and a challenge. In effect it demands. "How much do you want goodness? Do you want it as much as a starving man wants food, and as much as a man dying of thirst wants water?" How intense is our desire for goodness?

Most people have an instinctive desire for goodness, but that desire is wistful and nebulous rather than sharp and intense; and when the moment of decision comes they are not prepared to make the effort and the sacrifice which real goodness demands. Most people suffer from what Robert Louis Stevenson called "the malady of not wanting." It would obviously make the biggest difference in the world if we desired goodness more than anything else.

When we approach this beatitude from that side it is the most demanding, and indeed the most frightening, of them all. But not only is it the most demanding beatitude; in its own way it is also the most comforting. At the back of it there is the meaning that the man who is blessed is not necessarily the man who achieves this goodness, but the man who longs for it with his whole heart.

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If blessedness came only to him who achieved, then none would be blessed. But blessedness comes to the man who, in spite of failures and failings, still clutches to him the passionate love of the highest.

H. G. Wells somewhere said, "A man may be a bad musician and yet be passionately in love with music." Robert Louis Stevenson spoke of even those who have sunk to the lowest depths "clutching the remnants of virtue to them in the brothel and on the scaffold." Sir Norman Birkett, the famous lawyer and judge, once, speaking of the criminals with whom he had come in contact in his work, spoke of the inextinguishable something in every man. Goodness, "the implacable hunter," is always at their heels. The worst of men is "condemned to some kind of nobility."

The true wonder of man is not that he is a sinner, but that even in his sin he is haunted by goodness, that even in the mud he can never wholly forget the stars. David had always wished to build the Temple of God; he never achieved that ambition; it was denied and forbidden him; but God said to him, "You did well that it was in your heart" (1Kgs.8:18). In his mercy God judges us, not only by our achievements, but also by our dreams. Even if a man never attains goodness, if to the end of the day he is still hungering and thirsting for it, he is not shut out from blessedness.

There is one further point in this beatitude, a point which only emerges in the Greek. It is a rule of Greek grammar that verbs of hungering and thirsting are followed by the genitive case. The genitive case is the case which, in English, is expressed by the word of, of the man is the genitive case. The genitive which follows verbs of hungering and thirsting in Greek is called the partitive genitive, that is the genitive of the part. The idea is this. The Greek said, "I hunger for of bread." It was some bread he desired, a part of the bread, not the whole loaf. The Greek said, "I thirst for of water." It was some water he desired. a drink of water, not all the water in the tank.

But in this beatitude, most unusually, righteousness is in the direct accusative, and not in the normal genitive. Now, when verbs of hungering and thirsting in Greek take the accusative instead of the genitive, the meaning is that the hunger and the thirst is for the whole thing. To say I hunger for bread in the accusative means, I want the whole loaf. To say I thirst for water in the accusative means, I want the whole pitcher. There the correct translation is:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the whole of righteousness, for complete righteousness.

That is in fact what people seldom do. They are content with a part of righteousness. A man, for instance, may be a good man in the sense that, however hard one tried, one could not pin a moral fault on to him. His honesty, his morality, his respectability are beyond question; but it may be that no one could go to that man and weep out a sorry story on his breast; he would freeze, if one tried to do so. There can be a goodness which is accompanied with a hardness, a censoriousness, a lack of sympathy. Such a goodness is a partial goodness.

On the other hand a man may have all kinds of faults; he may drink, and swear, and gamble, and lose his temper; and yet, if any one is in trouble, he would give him the last penny out of his pocket and the very coat off his back. Again that is a partial goodness.

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This beatitude says, it is not enough to be satisfied with a partial goodness. Blessed is the man who hungers and thirsts for the goodness which is total. Neither an icy faultlessness nor a faulty warm-heartedness is enough.

So, then, the translation of the fourth beatitude could run:

O the bliss of the man who longs for total righteousness
as a starving man longs for food, and a man perishing of
thirst longs for water, for that man will be truly
satisfied!

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 5:7

THE BLISS OF PERFECT SYMPATHY

Matthew 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Even as it stands this is surely a great saying; and it is the statement of a principle which runs all through the New Testament. The New Testament is insistent that to be forgiven we must be forgiving. As James had it: "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy" (Jas.2:13). Jesus finishes the story of the unforgiving debtor with the warning: "So also my heavenly Father will do to everyone of you; if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt.18:35). The Lord's Prayer is followed by the two verses which explain and underline the petition, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors". "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt.6:12,14,15). It is the consistent teaching of the New Testament that indeed only the merciful shall receive mercy.

But there is even more to this beatitude than that. The Greek word for merciful is *eleemon* (GSN1655). But, as we have repeatedly seen, the Greek of the New Testament as we possess it goes back to an original Hebrew and Aramaic. The Hebrew word for mercy is *cheched* (HSN2617); and it is an untranslatable word. It does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the popular sense of the term; it does not mean simply to feel sorry for someone in trouble. *Cheched* (HSN2617), mercy, means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings.

Clearly this is much more than an emotional wave of pity; clearly this demands a quite deliberate effort of the mind and of the will. It denotes a sympathy which is not given, as it were, from outside, but which comes from a deliberate identification with the other person, until we see things as he sees them, and feel things as he feels them. This is sympathy in the literal sense of the word. Sympathy is derived from two Greek words, *sun* (GSN4862) which means together with, and *paschein* (GSN3958) which means to experience or to suffer. Sympathy means experiencing things together with the other person, literally going through what he is going through.

This is precisely what many people do not even try to do. Most people are so concerned with their own feelings that they are not much concerned with the feelings of anyone else. When they are sorry for someone, it is, as it were, from the outside; they do not make the deliberate effort to get inside the other person's mind and heart, until they see and feel things as he sees and feels them.

If we did make this deliberate attempt, and if we did achieve this identification with the other person, it would obviously make a very great difference.

(i) It would save us from being kind in the wrong way. There is one outstanding example of insensitive and mistaken kindness in the New Testament. It is in the story of Jesus' visit to the house of Martha and Mary at Bethany (Lk.10:38-42). When Jesus paid that visit, the Cross was

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only a few days ahead. All that he wanted was an opportunity for so short a time to rest and to relax, and to lay down the terrible tension of living.

Martha loved Jesus; he was her most honoured guest; and because she loved him she would provide the best meal the house could supply. She bustled and scurried here and there with the clatter of dishes and the clash of pans; and every moment was torture to the tense nerves of Jesus. All he wanted was quiet.

Martha meant to be kind, but she could hardly have been more cruel. But Mary understood that Jesus wished only for peace. So often when we wish to be kind the kindness has to be given in our way, and the other person has to put up with it whether he likes it or not. Our kindness would be doubly kind, and would be saved from much quite unintentional unkindness, if we would only make the effort to get inside the other person.

(ii) It would make forgiveness, and it would make tolerance ever so much easier. There is one principle in life which we often forget--there is always a reason why a person thinks and acts as he does, and if we knew that reason, it would be so much easier to understand and to sympathize and to forgive. If a person thinks, as we see it, mistakenly, he may have come through experiences, he may have a heritage which has made him think as he does. If a person is irritable and discourteous, he may be worried or he may be in pain. If a person treats us badly, it may be because there is some idea in his mind which is quite mistaken.

Truly, as the French proverb has it, "To know all is to forgive all," but we will never know all until we make the deliberate attempt to get inside the other person's mind and heart.

(iii) In the last analysis, is not that what God did in Jesus Christ? In Jesus Christ, in the most literal sense, God got inside the skin of men. He came as a man; he came seeing things with men's eyes, feeling things with men's feelings, thinking things with men's minds. God knows what life is like, because God came right inside life.

Queen Victoria was a close friend of Principal and Mrs. Tulloch of St. Andrews. Prince Albert died and Victoria was left alone. Just at the same time Principal Tulloch died and Mrs. Tulloch was left alone. All unannounced Queen Victoria came to call on Mrs. Tulloch when she was resting on a couch in her room. When the Queen was announced Mrs. Tulloch struggled to rise quickly from the couch and to curtsy. The Queen, stepped forward: "My dear," she said, "don't rise. I am not coming to you today as the queen to a subject, but as one woman who has lost her husband to another."

That is just what God did; he came to men, not as the remote, detached, isolated, majestic God; but as a man. The supreme instance of mercy, checked (HSN1617), is the coming of God in Jesus Christ.

It is only those who show this mercy who will receive it. This is true on the human side, for it is the great truth of life that in other people we see the reflection of ourselves. If we are detached and disinterested in them, they will be detached and disinterested in us. If they see that we care, their

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hearts will respond in caring. It is supremely true on the divine side, for he who shows this mercy has become nothing less than like God.

So the translation of the fifth beatitude might read:

O the bliss of the man who gets right inside other people,
until he can see with their eyes, think with their
thoughts, feel with their feelings, for he who does that
will find others do the same for him, and will know that
that is what God in Jesus Christ has done!

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THE BLISS OF THE CLEAN HEART

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Here is the beatitude which demands that every man who reads it should stop, and think, and examine himself.

The Greek word for pure is *katharos* (GSN2513), and it has a variety of usages, all of which have something to add to the meaning of this beatitude for the Christian life.

(i) Originally it simply meant clean, and could, for instance, be used of soiled clothes which have been washed clean.

(ii) It is regularly used for corn which has been winnowed or sifted and cleansed of all chaff. In the same way it is used of an army which has been purged of all discontented, cowardly, unwilling and inefficient soldiers, and which is a force composed solely of first-class fighting men.

(iii) It very commonly appears in company with another Greek adjective--*akiratos*. *Akiratos* can be used of milk or wine which is unadulterated with water, or of metal which has in it no tinge of alloy.

So, then, the basic meaning of *katharos* (GSN2513) is unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed. That is why this beatitude is so demanding a beatitude. It could be translated:

Blessed is the man whose motives are always entirely unmixed,
for that man shall see God.

It is very seldom indeed that we do even our finest actions from absolutely unmixed motives. If we give generously and liberally to some good cause, it may well be that there lingers in the depths of our hearts some contentment in basking in the sunshine of our own self-approval, some pleasure in the praise and thanks and credit which we will receive. If we do some fine thing, which demands some sacrifice from us, it may well be that we are not altogether free from the feeling that men will see something heroic in us and that we may regard ourselves as martyrs. Even a preacher at his most sincere is not altogether free from the danger of self-satisfaction in having preached a good sermon. Was it not John Bunyan who was once told by someone that he had preached well that day, and who answered sadly, "The devil already told me that as I was coming down the pulpit steps"?

This beatitude demands from us the most exacting self-examination. Is our work done from motives of service or from motives of pay? Is our service given from selfless motives or from motives of self-display? Is the work we do in Church done for Christ or for our own prestige! Is our church-going an attempt to meet God or a fulfilling of an habitual and conventional respectability? Are even our prayer and our Bible reading engaged upon with the sincere desire to company with God or because it gives us a pleasant feeling of superiority to do these things? Is our religion a

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thing in which we are conscious of nothing so much as the need of God within our hearts, or a thing in which we have comfortable thoughts of our own piety? To examine one's own motives is a daunting and a shaming thing, for there are few things in this world that even the best of us do with completely unmixed motives.

Jesus went on to say that only the pure in heart will see God. It is one of the simple facts of life that we see only what we are able to see; and that is true not only in the physical sense, it is also true in every other possible sense.

If the ordinary person goes out on a night of stars, he sees only a host of pinpoints of light in the sky; he sees what he is fit to see. But in that same sky the astronomer will call the stars and the planets by their names, and will move amongst them as his friends; and from that same sky the navigator could find the means to bring his ship across the trackless seas to the desired haven.

The ordinary person can walk along a country road, and see by the hedgerows nothing but a tangle of weeds and wild flowers and grasses. The trained botanist would see this and that, and call it by name and know its use; and he might even see something of infinite value and rarity because he had eyes to see.

Put two men into a room filled with ancient pictures. A man with no knowledge and no skill could not tell an old master from a worthless daub, whereas a trained art critic might well discern a picture worth thousands of pounds in a collection which someone else might dismiss as junk.

There are people with filthy minds who can see in any situation material for a prurient snigger and a soiled jest. In every sphere of life we see what we are able to see.

So, says Jesus, it is only the pure in heart who shall see God. It is a warning thing to remember that, as by God's grace we keep our hearts clean, or as by human lust we soil them, we are either fitting or unfitting ourselves some day to see God.

So, then, this sixth beatitude might read:

O the bliss of the man whose motives are absolutely
pure, for that man will some day be able to see
God!

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Matthew 5:9

THE BLISS OF BRINGING MEN TOGETHER

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God.

We must begin our study of this beatitude by investigating certain matters of meaning in it.

(i) First, there is the word peace. In Greek, the word is eirene (GSN1515), and in Hebrew it is shalom (HSN7965). In Hebrew peace is never only a negative state; it never means only the absence of trouble; in Hebrew peace always means everything which makes for a man's highest good. In the east when one man says to another, Salaam--which is the same word--he does not mean that he wishes for the other man only the absence of evil things; he wishes for him the presence of all good things. In the Bible peace means not only freedom from all trouble; it means enjoyment of all good.

(ii) Second, it must carefully be noted what the beatitude is saying. The blessing is on the peace-makers, not necessarily on the peace-lovers. It very often happens that if a man loves peace in the wrong way, he succeeds in making trouble and not peace. We may, for instance, allow a threatening and dangerous situation to develop, and our defence is that for peace's sake we do not want to take any action. There is many a person who thinks that he is loving peace, when in fact he is piling up trouble for the future, because he refuses to face the situation and to take the action which the situation demands. The peace which the Bible calls blessed does not come from the evasion of issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them, and conquering them. What this beatitude demands is not the passive acceptance of things because we are afraid of the trouble of doing anything about them, but the active facing of things, and the making of peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle.

(iii) The King James Version says that the peace-makers shall be called the children of God; the Greek more literally is that the peace-makers will be called the sons (huiioi, GSN5207) of God. This is a typical Hebrew way of expression. Hebrew is not rich in adjectives, and often when Hebrew wishes to describe something, it uses, not an adjective, but the phrase son of... plus an abstract noun. Hence a man may be called a son of peace instead of a peaceful man. Barnabas is called a son of consolation instead of a consoling and comforting man. This beatitude says: Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God; what it means is: Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be doing a God-like work. The man who makes peace is engaged on the very work which the God of peace is doing (Rom.15:33; 2Cor.13:11; 1Th.5:23; Heb.13:20).

The meaning of this beatitude has been sought along three main lines.

(i) It has been suggested that, since shalom (HSN7965) means everything which makes for a man's highest good, this beatitude means: Blessed are those who make this world a better place for all men to live in. Abraham Lincoln once said: "Die when I may, I would like it to be said of me, that I always pulled up a weed and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow." This then would be the beatitude of those who have lifted the world a little further on.

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(ii) Most of the early scholars of the Church took this beatitude in a purely spiritual sense, and held that it meant: Blessed is the man who makes peace in his own heart and in his own soul. In every one of us there is an inner conflict between good and evil; we are always tugged in two directions at once; every man is at least to some extent a walking civil war. Happy indeed is the man who has won through to inner peace, in which the inner warfare is over, and his whole heart is given to God.

(iii) But there is another meaning for this word peace. It is a meaning on which the Jewish Rabbis loved to dwell, and it is almost certainly the meaning which Jesus had in his mind. The Jewish Rabbis held that the highest task which a man can perform is to establish right relationships between man and man. That is what Jesus means.

There are people who are always storm-centers of trouble and bitterness and strife. Wherever they are they are either involved in quarrels themselves or the cause of quarrels between others. They are trouble-makers. There are people like that in almost every society and every Church, and such people are doing the devil's own work. On the other hand--thank God--there are people in whose presence bitterness cannot live, people who bridge the gulfs, and heal the breaches, and sweeten the bitternesses. Such people are doing a godlike work, for it is the great purpose of God to bring peace between men and himself, and between man and man. The man who divides men is doing the devil's work; the man who unites men is doing God's work.

So, then, this beatitude might read:

O the bliss of those who produce right relationships
between man and man, for they are doing a godlike
work!

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Matthew 5:10-12

THE BLISS OF THE SUFFERER FOR CHRIST

Matthew 5:10-12 (Part 1)

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."

One of the outstanding qualities of Jesus was his sheer honesty. He never left men in any doubt what would happen to them if they chose to follow him. He was clear that he had come "not to make life easy, but to make men great."

It is hard for us to realise what the first Christians had to suffer. Every department of their life was disrupted.

(i) Their Christianity might well disrupt their work. Suppose a man was a stone-mason. That seems a harmless enough occupation. But suppose his firm received a contract to build a temple to one of the heathen gods, what was that man to do? Suppose a man was a tailor, and suppose his firm was asked to produce robes for the heathen priests, what was that man to do? In a situation such as that in which the early Christians found themselves there was hardly any job in which a man might not find a conflict between his business interests and his loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The Church was in no doubt where a man's duty lay. More than a hundred years after this a man came to Tertullian with this very problem. He told of his business difficulties. He ended by saying, "What can I do? I must live!" "Must you?" said Tertullian. If it came to a choice between a loyalty and a living, the real Christian never hesitated to choose loyalty.

(ii) Their Christianity would certainly disrupt their social life. In the ancient world most feasts were held in the temple of some god. In very few sacrifices was the whole animal burned upon the altar. It might be that only a few hairs from the forehead of the beast were burned as a symbolic sacrifice. Part of the meat went to the priests as their perquisite; and part of the meat was returned to the worshipper. With his share he made a feast for his friends and his relations. One of the gods most commonly worshipped was Serapis. And when the invitations to the feast went out, they would read:

"I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Serapis."

Could a Christian share in a feast held in the temple of a heathen god? Even an ordinary meal in an ordinary house began with a libation, a cup of wine, poured out in honour of the gods. It was like grace before meat. Could a Christian become a sharer in a heathen act of worship like that? Again the Christian answer was clear. The Christian must cut himself off from his fellows rather than by his presence give approval to such a thing. A man had to be prepared to be lonely in order to be a Christian.

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(iii) Worst of all, their Christianity was liable to disrupt their home life. It happened again and again that one member of a family became a Christian while the others did not. A wife might become a Christian while her husband did not. A son or a daughter might become a Christian while the rest of the family did not. Immediately there was a split in the family. Often the door was shut for ever in the face of the one who had accepted Christ.

Christianity often came to send, not peace, but a sword which divided families in two. It was literally true that a man might have to love Christ more than he loved father or mother, wife, or brother or sister. Christianity often involved in those days a choice between a man's nearest and dearest and Jesus Christ.

Still further, the penalties which a Christian had to suffer were terrible beyond description. All the world knows of the Christians who were flung to the lions or burned at the stake; but these were kindly deaths. Nero wrapped the Christians in pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack; they were scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them; red hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies; eyes were tom out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. These things are not pleasant to think about, but these are the things a man had to be prepared for, if he took his stand with Christ.

We may well ask why the Romans persecuted the Christians. It seems an extraordinary thing that anyone living a Christian life should seem a fit victim for persecution and death. There were two reasons.

(i) There were certain slanders which were spread abroad about the Christians, slanders for which the Jews were in no small measure responsible. (a) The Christians were accused of cannibalism. The words of the Last Supper--"This is my body." "This cup is the New Testament in my blood"--were taken and twisted into a story that the Christians sacrificed a child and ate the flesh. (b) The Christians were accused of immoral practices, and their meetings were said to be orgies of lust. The Christian weekly meeting was called the Agape (GSN0026), the Love Feast; and the name was grossly misinterpreted. Christians greeted each other with the kiss of peace; and the kiss of peace became a ground on which to build the slanderous accusations. (c) The Christians were accused of being incendiaries. It is true that they spoke of the coming end of the world, and they clothed their message in the apocalyptic pictures of the end of the world in flames. Their slanderers took these words and twisted them into threats of political and revolutionary incendiarism. (d) The Christians were accused of tampering with family relationships. Christianity did in fact split families as we have seen; and so Christianity was represented as something which divided man and wife, and disrupted the home. There were slanders enough waiting to be invented by malicious-minded men.

(ii) But the great ground of persecution was in fact political. Let us think of the situation. The Roman Empire included almost the whole known world, from Britain to the Euphrates, and from Germany to North Africa. How could that vast amalgam of peoples be somehow welded into one?

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Where could a unifying principle be found? At first it was found in the worship of the goddess Roma, the spirit of Rome. This was a worship which the provincial peoples were happy to give, for Rome had brought them peace and good government, and civil order and justice. The roads were cleared of brigands and the seas of pirates; the despots and tyrants had been banished by impartial Roman justice. The provincial was very willing to sacrifice to the spirit of the Empire which had done so much for him.

But this worship of Roma took a further step. There was one man who personified the Empire, one man in whom Roma might be felt to be incarnated, and that was the Emperor; and so the Emperor came to be regarded as a god, and divine honours came to be paid to him, and temples were raised to his divinity. The Roman government did not begin this worship; at first, in fact, it did all it could to discourage it. Claudius, the Emperor, said that he deprecated divine honours being paid to any human being. But as the years went on the Roman government saw in this Emperor-worship the one thing which could unify the vast Empire of Rome; here was the one centre on which they all could come together. So, in the end, the worship of the Emperor became, not voluntary, but compulsory. Once a year a man had to go and burn a pinch of incense to the godhead of Caesar and say, "Caesar is Lord." And that is precisely what the Christians refused to do.

For them Jesus Christ was the Lord, and to no man would they give that title which belonged to Christ.

It can be seen at once that Caesar-worship was far more a test of political loyalty than anything else. In actual fact when a man had burned his pinch of incense he received a certificate, a libellus, to say that he had done so, and then he could go and worship any god he liked, so long as his worship did not interfere with public order and decency. The Christians refused to conform. Confronted with the choice, "Caesar or Christ?" they uncompromisingly chose Christ. They utterly refused to compromise. The result was that, however good a man, however fine a citizen a Christian was, he was automatically an outlaw. In the vast Empire Rome could not afford pockets of disloyalty, and that is exactly what every Christian congregation appeared to the Roman authorities to be. A poet has spoken of

"The panting, huddled flock whose crime was Christ."

The only crime of the Christian was that he set Christ above Caesar; and for that supreme loyalty the Christians died in their thousands, and faced torture for the sake of the lonely supremacy of Jesus Christ.

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Matthew 5:10-12

THE BLISS OF THE BLOOD-STAINED WAY

Matthew 5:10-12 (Part 2)

When we see how persecution arose, we are in a position to see the real glory of the martyr's way. It may seem an extraordinary thing to talk about the bliss of the persecuted; but for him who had eyes to see beyond the immediate present, and a mind to understand the greatness of the issues involved, there must have been a glory in that blood-stained way.

(i) To have to suffer persecution was an opportunity to show one's loyalty to Jesus Christ. One of the most famous of all the martyrs was Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna. The mob dragged him to the tribunal of the Roman magistrate. He was given the inevitable choice--sacrifice to the godhead of Caesar or die. "Eighty and six years," came the immortal reply, "have I served Christ. and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" So they brought him to the stake, and he prayed his last prayer: "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy well-beloved and ever-blessed son, by whom we have received the knowledge of thee ... I thank thee that thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour." Here was the supreme opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to Jesus Christ.

In the First World War Rupert Brooke, the poet, was one of those who died too young. Before he went out to the battle he wrote:

"Now God be thanked who has matched us with his hour."

There are so many of us who have never in our lives made anything like a real sacrifice for Jesus Christ. The moment when Christianity seems likely to cost us something is the moment when it is open to us to demonstrate our loyalty to Jesus Christ in a way that all the world can see.

(ii) To have to suffer persecution is, as Jesus himself said, the way to walk the same road as the prophets, and the saints, and the martyrs have walked. To suffer for the right is to gain a share in a great succession. The man who has to suffer something for his faith can throw back his head and say,

"Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod."

(iii) To have to suffer persecution is to share in the great occasion. There is always something thrilling in even being present on the great occasion, in being there when something memorable and crucial is happening. There is an even greater thrill in having a share, however small, in the actual action. That is the feeling about which Shakespeare wrote so unforgettably in Henry the Fifth in the words he put into Henry's mouth before the battle of Agincourt:

"He that shall live this day and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his friends,
And say, 'Tomorrow is Saint Crispian':
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,

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And say, 'These wounds I had on Crispin's day.'

.....

And gentlemen in England now abed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap while any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day."

When a man is called on to suffer something for his Christianity that is always a crucial moment; it is the great occasion; it is the clash between the world and Christ; it is a moment in the drama of eternity. To have a share in such a moment is not a penalty but a glory. "Rejoice at such a moment," says Jesus, "and be glad." The word for be glad is from the verb *agalliaisthai* (GSN0021) which has been derived from two Greek words which mean to leap exceedingly. It is the joy which leaps for joy. As it has been put, it is the joy of the climber who has reached the summit, and who leaps for joy that the mountain path is conquered.

(iv) To suffer persecution is to make things easier for those who are to follow. Today we enjoy the blessing of liberty because men in the past were willing to buy it for us at the cost of blood, and sweat, and tears. They made it easier for us, and by a steadfast and immovable witness for Christ we may make it easier for others who are still to come.

In the great Boulder Dam scheme in America men lost their lives in that project which was to turn a dust-bowl into fertile land. When the scheme was completed, the names of those who had died were put on a tablet and the tablet was put into the great wall of the dam, and on it there was the inscription. "These died that the desert might rejoice and blossom as the rose."

The man who fights his battle for Christ will always make things easier for those who follow after. For them there will be one less struggle to be encountered on the way.

(v) Still further, no man ever suffers persecution alone; if a man is called upon to bear material loss, the failure of friends, slander, loneliness, even the death of love, for his principles, he will not be left alone. Christ will be nearer to him than at any other time.

The old story in Daniel tells how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the furnace heated seven times hot because of their refusal to move from their loyalty to God. The courtiers watched. "Did we not cast three men, bound, into the fire?" they asked. The reply was that it was indeed so. Then came the astonished answer, "But I see four men, loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods" (Dn.3:19-25).

As Browning had it in Christmas Eve and Easter Day:

"I was born sickly, poor and mean,
A slave; no misery could screen
The holders of the pearl of price
From Caesar's envy; therefore twice
I fought with beasts, and three times saw

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My children suffer by his law;
At last my own release was earned;
I was some time in being burned,
But at the close a Hand came through
The fire above my head, and drew
My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
Sergius, a brother, writes for me
This testimony on the wall--
For me, I have forgot it all."

When a man has to suffer something for his faith, that is the way to the closest possible companionship with Christ.

There remains only one question to ask--why is this persecution so inevitable? It is inevitable because the Church, when it really is the Church, is bound to be the conscience of the nation and the conscience of society. Where there is good the Church must praise; where there is evil, the Church must condemn--and inevitably men will try to silence the troublesome voice of conscience. It is not the duty of the individual Christian habitually to find fault, to criticise, to condemn, but it may well be that his every action is a silent condemnation of the unchristian lives of others, and he will not escape their hatred.

It is not likely that death awaits us because of our loyalty--to the Christian faith. But insult awaits the man who insists on Christian honour. Mockery awaits the man who practises Christian love and Christian forgiveness. Actual persecution may well await the Christian in industry who insists on doing an honest day's work. Christ still needs his witnesses; he needs those who are prepared, not so much to die for him, as to live for him. The Christian struggle and the Christian glory still exist.

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Matthew 5:13

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

Matthew 5:13

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men."

When Jesus said this, he provided men with an expression which has become the greatest compliment that can be paid to any man. When we wish to stress someone's solid worth and usefulness, we say of him, "People like that are the salt of the earth."

In the ancient world salt was highly valued. The Greeks called salt divine (theion, GSN2303). In a phrase, which in Latin is a kind of jingle, the Romans said, "There is nothing more useful than sun and salt." (Nil utilius sole et sale.) In the time of Jesus salt was connected in people's minds with three special qualities.

(i) Salt was connected with purity. No doubt its glistening whiteness made the connection easy. The Romans said that salt was the purest of all things, because it came from the purest of all things, the sun and the sea. Salt was indeed the most primitive of all offerings to the gods, and to the end of the day the Jewish sacrifices were offered with salt. So then, if the Christian is to be the salt of the earth he must be an example of purity.

One of the characteristics of the world in which we live is the lowering of standards. Standards of honesty, standards of diligence in work, standards of conscientiousness, moral standards, all tend to be lowered. The Christian must be the person who holds aloft the standard of absolute purity in speech, in conduct, and even in thought. A certain writer dedicated a book to J. Y. Simpson "who makes the best seem easily credible." No Christian can depart from the standards of strict honesty. No Christian can think lightly of the lowering of moral standards in a world where the streets of every great city provide their deliberate enticements to sin. No Christian can allow himself the tarnished and suggestive jests which are so often part of social conversation. The Christian cannot withdraw from the world, but he must, as James said, keep himself "unstained from the world" (Jas.1:27).

(ii) In the ancient world salt was the commonest of all preservatives. It was used to keep things from going bad, and to hold putrefaction at bay. Plutarch has a strange way of putting that. He says that meat is a dead body and part of a dead body, and will, if left to itself, go bad; but salt preserves it and keeps it fresh, and is therefore like a new soul inserted into a dead body.

So then salt preserves from corruption. If the Christian is to be the salt of the earth, he must have a certain antiseptic influence on life.

We all know that there are certain people in whose company it is easy to be good; and that also there are certain people in whose company it is easy for standards to be relaxed. There are certain people in whose presence a soiled story would be readily told, and there are other people to whom no one would dream of telling such a tale. The Christian must be the cleansing antiseptic in any

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society in which he happens to be; he must be the person who by his presence defeats corruption and makes it easier for others to be good.

(iii) But the greatest and the most obvious quality of salt is that salt lends flavour to things. Food without salt is a sadly insipid and even a sickening thing. Christianity is to life what salt is to food. Christianity lends flavour to life.

The tragedy is that so often people have connected Christianity with precisely the opposite. They have connected Christianity with that which takes the flavour out of life. Swinburne had it:

"Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilaean; the world has grown gray from Thy breath."

Even after Constantine had made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, there came to the throne another Emperor called Julian, who wished to put the clock back and to bring back the old gods. His complaint, as Ibsen puts it, was:

"Have you looked at these Christians closely? Hollow-eyed, pale-cheeked, flat-breasted all; they brood their lives away, unspurred by ambition: the sun shines for them, but they do not see it: the earth offers them its fulness, but they desire it not; all their desire is to renounce and to suffer that they may come to die."

As Julian saw it, Christianity took the vividness out of life.

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers." Robert Louis Stevenson once entered in his diary, as if he was recording an extraordinary phenomenon, "I have been to Church to-day, and am not depressed."

Men need to discover the lost radiance of the Christian faith. In a worried world, the Christian should be the only man who remains serene. In a depressed world, the Christian should be the only man who remains full of the joy of life. There should be a sheer sparkle about the Christian but too often he dresses like a mourner at a funeral, and talks like a specter at a feast. Wherever he is, if he is to be the salt of the earth, the Christian must be the diffuser of joy.

Jesus went on to say that, if the salt had become insipid, it was fit only to be thrown out and trodden on by men. This is difficult, because salt does not lose its flavour and its saltiness. E. F. F. Bishop in his book *Jesus of Palestine* cites a very likely explanation given by Miss F. E. Newton. In Palestine the ordinary oven is out of doors and is built of stone on a base of tiles. In such ovens "in order to retain the heat a thick bed of salt is laid under the tiled floor. After a certain length of time the salt perishes. The tiles are taken up, the salt removed and thrown on the road outside the door of the oven ... It has lost its power to heat the tiles and it is thrown out." That may well be the picture here.

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Matthew 5:13

But the essential point remains whatever the picture, and it is a point which the New Testament makes and remakes again and again--uselessness invites disaster. If a Christian is not fulfilling his purpose as a Christian, then he is on the way to disaster. We are meant to be the salt of the earth, and if we do not bring to life the purity, the antiseptic power, the radiance that we ought, then we invite disaster.

It remains to be noted that sometimes the early Church made a very strange use of this text. In the synagogue, among the Jews, there was a custom that, if a Jew became an apostate and then returned to the faith, before he was received back into the synagogue, he must in penitence lie across the door of the synagogue and invite people to trample upon him as they entered. In certain places the Christian Church took over that custom, and a Christian who had been ejected by discipline from the Church, was compelled, before he was received back, to lie at the door of the Church and to invite people as they entered, "Trample upon me who am the salt which has lost its savour."

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Matthew 5:14-15

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 5:14-15

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

It may well be said that this is the greatest compliment that was ever paid to the individual Christian, for in it Jesus commands the Christian to be what he himself claimed to be. Jesus, said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn.9:5). When Jesus commanded his followers to be the lights of the world, he demanded nothing less than that they should be like himself.

When Jesus spoke these words, he was using an expression which was quite familiar to the Jews who heard it for the first time. They themselves spoke of Jerusalem as "a light to the Gentiles," and a famous Rabbi was often called "a lamp of Israel." But the way in which the Jews used this expression will give us a key to the way in which Jesus also used it.

Of one thing the Jews were very sure--no man kindled his own light. Jerusalem was indeed a light to the Gentiles, but "God lit Israel's lamp." The light with which the nation or the man of God shone was a borrowed light. It must be so with the Christian. It is not the demand of Jesus that we should, as it were, produce our own light. We must shine with the reflection of his light. The radiance which shines from the Christian comes from the presence of Christ within the Christian's heart. We often speak about a radiant bride, but the radiance which shines from her comes from the love which has been born within her heart.

When Jesus said that the Christian must be the light of the world, what did he mean?

(i) A light is first and foremost something which is meant to be seen. The houses in Palestine were very dark with only one little circular window perhaps not more than eighteen inches across. The lamp was like a sauce-boat tiled with oil with the wick floating in it. It was not so easy to rekindle a lamp in the days before matches existed. Normally the lamp stood on the lampstand which would be no more than a roughly shaped branch of wood; but when people went out, for safety's sake, they took the lamp from its stand, and put it under an earthen bushel measure, so that it might burn without risk until they came back. The primary duty of the light of the lamp was to be seen.

So, then, Christianity is something which is meant to be seen. As someone has well said, "There can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy." A man's Christianity should be perfectly visible to all men.

Further, this Christianity should not be visible only within the Church. A Christianity whose effects stop at the church door is not much use to anyone. It should be even more visible in the ordinary activities of the world. Our Christianity should be visible in the way we treat a shop assistant across the counter, in the way we order a meal in a restaurant, in the way we treat our

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Matthew 5:14-15

employees or serve our employer, in the way we play a game or drive or park a motor car, in the daily language we use, in the daily literature we read. A Christian should be just as much a Christian in the factory, the workshop, the shipyard, the mine, the schoolroom, the surgery, the kitchen, the golf course, the playing field as he is in church. Jesus did not say, "You are the light of the Church"; he said, "You are the light of the world," and in a man's life in the world his Christianity should be evident to all.

(ii) A light is a guide. On the estuary of any river we may see the line of lights which marks the channel for the ships to sail in safety. We know how difficult even the city streets were when there were no lights. A light is something to make clear the way.

So then a Christian must make the way clear to others. That is to say, a Christian must of necessity be an example. One of the things which this world needs more than anything else is people who are prepared to be foci of goodness. Suppose there is a group of people, and suppose it is suggested that some questionable thing should be done. Unless someone makes his protest the thing will be done. But if someone rises and says, "I will not be a party to that," another and another and another will rise to say, "Neither will I." But, had they not been given the lead, they would have remained silent.

There are many people in this world who have not the moral strength and courage to take a stand by themselves, but if someone gives them a lead, they will follow; if they have someone strong enough to lean on, they will do the right thing. It is the Christian's duty to take the stand which the weaker brother will support, to give the lead which those with less courage will follow. The world needs its guiding lights; there are people waiting and longing for a lead to take the stand and to do the thing which they do not dare by themselves.

(iii) A light can often be a warning light. A light is often the warning which tells us to halt when there is danger ahead.

It is sometimes the Christian's duty to bring to his fellowmen the necessary warning. That is often difficult, and it is often hard to do it in a way which will not do more harm than good; but one of the most poignant tragedies in life is for someone, especially a young person, to come and say to us, "I would never have been in the situation in which I now find myself, if you had only spoken in time."

It was said of Florence Alishorn, the famous teacher and principal, that if she ever had occasion to rebuke her students, she did it "with her arm round about them." If our warnings are, given, not in anger, not in irritation, not in criticism, not in condemnation, not in the desire to hurt, but in love, they will be effective.

The light which can be seen, the light which warns, the light which guides, these are the lights which the Christian must be.

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Matthew 5:16

SHINING FOR GOD

Matthew 5:16

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

There are two most important things here.

(i) Men are to see our good deeds. In Greek there are two words for good. There is the word *agathos* (GSN0018) which simply defines a thing as good in quality; there is *kalos* (GSN2570) which means that a thing is not only good, but that it is also winsome and beautiful and attractive. The word which is used here is *kalos* (GSN2570).

The good deeds of the Christian must be not only good; they must be also attractive. There must be a certain winsomeness in Christian goodness. The tragedy of so much so-called goodness is that in it there is an element of hardness and coldness and austerity. There is a goodness which attracts and a goodness which repels. There is a charm in true Christian goodness which makes it a lovely thing.

(ii) It is further to be noted that our good deeds ought to draw attention, not to ourselves, but to God. This saying of Jesus is a total prohibition of what someone has called "theatrical goodness."

At a conference at which D. L. Moody was present there were also present some young people who took their Christian faith very seriously. One night they held an all night prayer meeting. As they were leaving it in the morning they met Moody, and he asked them what they had been doing. They told him; and then they went on: "Mr. Moody, see how our faces shine." Moody answered very gently: "Moses wist not that his face shone." That goodness which is conscious, which draws attention to itself, is not the Christian goodness.

One of the old historians wrote of Henry the Fifth after the Battle of Agincourt: "Neither would he suffer any ditties to be made and sung by the minstrels of his glorious victory, for that he would wholly have the praise and thanks altogether given to God." The Christian never thinks of what he has done, but of what God has enabled him to do. He never seeks to draw the eyes of men to himself, but always to direct them to God. So long as men are thinking of the praise, the thanks, the prestige which they will get for what they have done, they have not really even begun on the Christian way.

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Matthew 5:17-20

THE ETERNAL LAW

Matthew 5:17-20 (Part 1)

Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy them but to fulfil them. This is the truth I tell you--until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, the smallest letter or the smallest part of any letter shall not pass away from the Law, until all things in it shall be performed. So then, whoever will break one of the least of these commandments, and will teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of the Heavens; but whoever will do them and will teach others to do them, he will be called great in the Kingdom of the Heavens. For I tell you, that you will certainly not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, unless your righteousness goes beyond that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

At a first reading it might well be held that this is the most astonishing statement that Jesus made in the whole Sermon on the Mount. In this statement Jesus lays down the eternal character of the Law; and yet Paul can say, "Christ is the end of the Law" (Rom.10:4).

Again and again Jesus broke what the Jews called the Law. He did not observe the handwashings that the Law laid down; he healed sick people on the Sabbath, although the Law forbade such healings; he was in fact condemned and crucified as a law-breaker; and yet here he seems to speak of the Law with a veneration and a reverence that no Rabbi or Pharisee could exceed. The smallest letter--the letter which the King James Version calls the jot--was the Hebrew letter yod. In form, it was like an apostrophe--'--; not even a letter not much bigger than a dot was to pass away. The smallest part of the letter--what the King James Version calls the tittle--is what we call the serif, the little projecting part at the foot of a letter, the little line at each side of the foot of, for example, the letter "I". Jesus seems to lay it down that the law is so sacred that not the smallest detail of it will ever pass away.

Some people have been so puzzled by this saying that they have come to the conclusion that Jesus could not have said it. They have suggested that, since Matthew is the most Jewish of the gospels, and since Matthew wrote it specially to convince Jews, this is a saying which Matthew put into Jesus' mouth, and that this is not a saying of Jesus at all. But that is a weak argument, for this is a saying which is indeed so unlikely that no one would have invented it; it is so unlikely a saying that Jesus must have said it; and when we come to see what it really means, we will see that it is inevitable that Jesus should have said it.

The Jews used the expression The Law in four different ways. (i) They used it to mean the Ten Commandments. (ii) They used it to mean the first five books of the Bible. That part of the Bible which is known as the Pentateuch--which literally means The Five Rolls--was to the Jew The Law par excellence and was to them by far the most important part of the Bible. (iii) They used the phrase The Law and the prophets to mean the whole of Scripture; they used it as a comprehensive description of what we would call the whole Old Testament. (iv) They used it to mean the Oral or the Scribal Law.

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Matthew 5:17-20

In the time of Jesus it was the last meaning which was commonest; and it was in fact this Scribal Law which both Jesus and Paul so utterly condemned. What, then, was this Scribal Law?

In the Old Testament itself we find very few rules and regulations; what we do find are great, broad principles which a man must himself take and interpret under God's guidance, and apply to the individual situations in life. In the Ten Commandments we find no rules and regulations at all; they are each one of them great principles out of which a man must find his own rules for life. To the later Jews these great principles did not seem enough. They held that the Law was divine, and that in it God had said his last word, and that therefore everything must be in it. If a thing was not in the Law explicitly it must be there implicitly. They therefore argued that out of the Law it must be possible to deduce a rule and a regulation for every possible situation in life. So there arose a race of men called the Scribes who made it the business of their lives to reduce the great principles of the Law to literally thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations.

We may best see this in action. The Law lays it down that the Sabbath Day is to be kept holy, and that on it no work is to be done. That is a great principle. But the Jewish legalists had a passion for definition. So they asked: What is work?

All kinds of things were classified as work. For instance, to carry a burden on the Sabbath Day is to work. But next a burden has to be defined. So the Scribal Law lays it down that a burden is "food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye-salve, paper enough to write a customs house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make a pen"--and so on endlessly. So they spent endless hours arguing whether a man could or could not lift a lamp from one place to another on the Sabbath, whether a tailor committed a sin if he went out with a needle in his robe, whether a woman might wear a brooch or false hair, even if a man might go out on the Sabbath with artificial teeth or an artificial limb, if a man might lift his child on the Sabbath Day. These things to them were the essence of religion.

Their religion was a legalism of petty rules and regulations.

To write was to work on the Sabbath. But writing has to be defined. So the definition runs: "He who writes two letters of the alphabet with his right or with his left hand, whether of one kind or of two kinds, if they are written with different inks or in different languages, is guilty. Even if he should write two letters from forgetfulness, he is guilty, whether he has written them with ink or with paint, red chalk, vitriol, or anything which makes a permanent mark. Also he that writes on two walls that form an angle, or on two tablets of his account book so that they can be read together is guilty ... But, if anyone writes with dark fluid, with fruit juice, or in the dust of the road, or in sand, or in anything which does not make a permanent mark, he is not guilty....

If he writes one letter on the ground, and one on the wall of the house, or on two pages of a book, so that they cannot be read together, he is not guilty." That is a typical passage from the Scribal Law; and that is what the orthodox Jew regarded as true religion and the true service of God.

To heal was to work on the Sabbath. Obviously this has to be defined. Healing was allowed when there was danger to life, and especially in troubles of the ear, nose and throat; but even then, steps

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could be taken only to keep the patient from becoming worse; no steps might be taken to make him get any better. So a plain bandage might be put on a wound, but no ointment; plain wadding might be put into a sore ear, but not medicated wadding.

The Scribes were the men who worked out these rules and regulations. The Pharisees, whose name means The Separated Ones, were the men who had separated themselves from all the ordinary activities of life to keep all these rules and regulations.

We can see the length to which this went from the following facts. For many generations this Scribal Law was never written down; it was the oral law, and it was handed down in the memory of generations of Scribes. In the middle of the third century A.D. a summary of it was made and codified. That summary is known as the Mishnah; it contains sixty-three tractates on various subjects of the Law, and in English makes a book of almost eight hundred pages. Later Jewish scholarship busied itself with making commentaries to explain the Mishnah. These commentaries are known as the Talmuds. Of the Jerusalem Talmud there are twelve printed volumes; and of the Babylonian Talmud there are sixty printed volumes.

To the strict orthodox Jew, in the time of Jesus, religion, serving God, was a matter of keeping thousands of legalistic rules and regulations; they regarded these petty rules and regulations as literally matters of life and death and eternal destiny. Clearly Jesus did not mean that not one of these rules and regulations was to pass away; repeatedly he broke them himself; and repeatedly he condemned them; that is certainly not what Jesus meant by the Law, for that is the kind of law that both Jesus and Paul condemned.

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THE ESSENCE OF THE LAW

Matthew 5:17-20 (Part 2)

What then did Jesus mean by the Law? He said that he had not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil the Law. That is to say, he came really to bring out the real meaning of the Law. What was the real meaning of the Law? Even behind the Scribal and Oral Law there was one great principle which the scribes and the Pharisees had imperfectly grasped. The one great principle was that in all things a man must seek God's will, and that, when he knows it, he must dedicate his whole life to the obeying of it. The Scribes and Pharisees were right in seeking God's will, and profoundly right in dedicating their lives to obeying it; they were wrong in finding that will in their man-made hordes of rules and regulations.

What then is the real principle behind the whole Law, that principle which Jesus came to fulfil, the true meaning of which he came to show?"

When we look at the Ten Commandments, which are the essence and the foundation of all law, we can see that their whole meaning can be summed up in one word--respect, or even better, reverence. Reverence for God and for the name of God, reverence for God's day, respect for parents, respect for life, respect for property, respect for personality, respect for the truth and for another person's good name, respect for oneself so that wrong desires may never master us--these are the fundamental principles behind the Ten Commandments, principles of reverence for God, and respect for our fellow men and for ourselves. Without them there can be no such thing as law. On them all law is based.

That reverence and that respect Jesus came to fulfil. He came to show men in actual life what reverence for God and respect for men are like. Justice, said the Greeks, consists in giving to God and to men that which is their due. Jesus came to show men in actual life what it means to give to God the reverence and to men the respect which are their due.

That reverence and that respect did not consist in obeying a multitude of petty rules and regulations. They consisted not in sacrifice, but in mercy; not in legalism but in love; not in prohibitions which demanded that men should not do things, but in the instruction to mould their lives on the positive commandment to love.

The reverence and the respect which are the basis of the Ten Commandments can never pass away; they are the permanent stuff of man's relationship to God and to his fellow-men.

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Matthew 5:17-20

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

Matthew 5:17-20 (Part 3)

When Jesus spoke as he did about the Law and the Gospel, he was implicitly laying down certain broad principles.

(i) He was saying that there is a definite continuation between the past and the present. We must never look on life as a kind of battle between the past and the present. The present grows out of the past.

After Dunkirk, in the Second World War, there was a tendency on all hands to look for someone to blame for the disaster which had befallen the British forces, and there were many who wished to enter into bitter recriminations with those who had guided things in the past. At that time Mr. Winston Churchill, as he then was, said a very wise thing: "If we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future."

There had to be the Law before the Gospel could come. Men had to learn the difference between right and wrong; men had to learn their own human inability to cope with the demands of the law, and to respond to the commands of God; men had to learn a sense of sin and unworthiness and inadequacy. Men blame the past for many things--and often rightly--but it is equally, and even more, necessary to acknowledge our debt to the past. As Jesus saw it, it is man's duty neither to forget nor to attempt to destroy the past, but to build upon the foundation of the past. We have entered into other men's labours, and we must so labour that other men will enter into ours.

(ii) In this passage Jesus definitely warns men not to think that Christianity is easy. Men might say, "Christ is the end of the law; now I can do what I like." Men might think that all the duties, all the responsibilities, all the demands are gone. But it is Jesus' warning that the righteousness of the Christian must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. What did he mean by that?

The motive under which the Scribes and Pharisees lived was the motive of law; their one aim and desire was to satisfy the demands of the Law. Now, at least theoretically, it is perfectly possible to satisfy the demands of the law; in one sense there can come a time when a man can say, "I have done all that the law demands; my duty is discharged; the law has no more claim on me." But the motive under which the Christian lives is the motive of love; the Christian's one desire is to show his wondering gratitude for the love wherewith God had loved him in Jesus Christ. Now, it is not even theoretically possible to satisfy the claims of love. If we love someone with all our hearts, we are bound to feel that if we gave them a lifetime's service and adoration, if we offered them the sun and the moon and the stars, we would still not have offered enough. For love the whole realm of nature is an offering far too small.

The Jew aimed to satisfy the law of God; and to the demands of law there is always a limit. The Christian aims to show his gratitude for the love of God; and to the claims of love there is no limit in time or in eternity. Jesus set before men, not the law of God, but the love of God. Long ago Augustine said that the Christian life could be summed up in the one phrase: "Love God, and do

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what you like." But when we realize how God has loved us, the one desire of life is to answer to that love, and that is the greatest task in all the world, for it presents a man with a task the like of which the man who thinks in terms of law never dreams of, and with an obligation more binding than the obligation to any law.

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Matthew 5:21-48

THE NEW AUTHORITY

Matthew 5:21-48 (Part 1)

This Section of the teaching of Jesus is one of the most important in the whole New Testament. Before we deal with it in detail, there are certain general things about it which we must note.

In it Jesus speaks with an authority which no other man had ever dreamed of assuming: the authority which Jesus assumed always amazed those who came into contact with him. Right at the beginning of his ministry, after he had been teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, it is said of his hearers: "They were astonished at his teaching; for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the Scribes" (Mk.1:22). Matthew concludes his account of the Sermon on the Mount with the words: "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one who had authority and not as their Scribes" (Matt.7:28-29).

It is difficult for us to realize just how shocking a thing this authority of Jesus must have seemed to the Jews who listened to him. To the Jew the Law was absolutely holy and absolutely divine; it is impossible to exaggerate the place that the Law had in their reverence. "The Law," said Aristeas, "is holy and has been given by God." "Only Moses' decrees," said Philo, "are everlasting, unchangeable and unshakable, as signed by nature herself with her seal." The Rabbis said, "Those who deny that the Law is from heaven have no part in the world to come." They said, "Even if one says that the Law is from God with the exception of this or that verse, which Moses, not God, spoke from his own mouth, then there applies to him the judgment. He has despised the word of the Lord: he has shown the irreverence which merits the destruction of the soul." The first act of every synagogue service was the taking of the rolls of the Law from the ark in which they were stored, and the carrying of them round the congregation, that the congregation might show their reverence for them.

That is what the Jews thought of the Law; and now no fewer than five times (Matt.5:21,27,; Matt.5:33,38,43) Jesus quotes the Law, only to contradict it, and to substitute a teaching of his own. He claimed the right to point out the inadequacies of the most sacred writings in the world, and to correct them out of his own wisdom. The Greeks defined *exousia* (GSN1849), authority, as "the power to add and the power to take away at will." Jesus claimed that power even with regard to that which the Jews believed to be the unchanging and unchangeable word of God. Nor did Jesus argue about this, or seek in any way to justify himself for so doing, or seek to prove his right to do so. He calmly and without question assumed that right.

No one had ever heard anything like this before. The great Jewish teachers had always had characteristic phrases in their teaching. The characteristic phrase of the prophet was: "Thus saith the Lord." He claimed no personal authority at all; his only claim was that what he spoke God had told him. The characteristic phrase of the Scribe and the Rabbi was: "There is a teaching that" The Scribe or the Rabbi never dared to express even an opinion of his own unless he could buttress it with supporting quotations from the great teachers of the past. Independence was the last quality that he would claim. But to Jesus a statement required no authority other than the fact that he made it. He was his own authority.

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Matthew 5:21-48

Clearly one of two things must be true--either Jesus was mad, or he was unique; either he was a megalomaniac or else he was the son of God. No ordinary person would dare claim to take and overturn that which up to his coming had been regarded as the eternal word of God.

The amazing thing about authority is that it is self-evidencing. No sooner does a man begin to teach than we know at once whether or not he has the right to teach. Authority is like an atmosphere about a man. He does not need to claim it; he either has it, or he has not.

Orchestras which played under Toscanini, the master conductor, said that as soon as he mounted the rostrum they could feel a wave of authority flowing from him. Julian Duguid tells how he once crossed the Atlantic in the same ship as Sir Wilfred Grenfell; and he says that when Grenfell came into one of the ship's public rooms, he could tell (without even looking round) that he had entered the room, for a wave of authority went out from the man. It was supremely so with Jesus.

Jesus took the highest wisdom of men and corrected it, because he was who he was. He did not need to argue; it was sufficient for him to speak. No one can honestly face Jesus and honestly listen to him without feeling that this is God's last word beside which all other words are inadequate, and all other wisdom out of date.

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Matthew 5:21-48

THE NEW STANDARD

Matthew 5:21-48 (Part 2)

But startling as was Jesus' accent of authority, the standard which he put before men was more startling yet. Jesus said that in God's sight it was not only the man who committed murder who was guilty, the man who was angry with his brother was also guilty and liable to judgment. It was not only the man who committed adultery who was guilty; the man who allowed the unclean desire to settle in his heart was also guilty.

Here was something which was entirely new, something which men have not yet fully grasped. It was Jesus' teaching that it was not enough not to commit murder; the only thing sufficient was never even to wish to commit murder. It was Jesus' teaching that it was not enough not to commit adultery; the only thing sufficient was never even to wish to commit adultery.

It may be that we have never struck a man; but who can say that he never wished to strike a man? It may be that we have never committed adultery; but who can say that he has never experienced the desire for the forbidden thing? It was Jesus' teaching that thoughts are just as important as deeds, and that it is not enough not to commit a sin; the only thing that is enough is not to wish to commit it. It was Jesus' teaching that a man is not judged only by his deeds, but is judged even more by the desires which never emerged in deeds. By the world's standards a man is a good man, if he never does a forbidden thing. The world is not concerned to judge his thoughts. By Jesus' standards, a man is not a good man until he never even desires to do a forbidden thing. Jesus is intensely concerned with a man's thoughts. Three things emerge from this.

(i) Jesus was, profoundly right, for Jesus' way is the only way to safety and to security. To some extent every man is a split personality. There is part of him which is attracted to good, and part of him which is attracted to evil. So long as a man is like that, an inner battle is going on inside him. One voice is inciting him to take the forbidden thing; the other voice is forbidding him to take it.

Plato likened the soul to a charioteer whose task it was to drive two horses. The one horse was gentle and biddable and obedient to the reins and to the word of command; the other horse was wild and untamed and rebellious. The name of the one horse was reason; the name of the other was passion. Life is always a conflict between the demands of the passions and the control of the reason. The reason is the leash which keeps the passions in check. But, a leash may snap at any time. Self-control may be for a moment off its guard--and then what may happen? So long as there is this inner tension, this inner conflict, life must be insecure. In such circumstances there can be no such thing as safety. The only way to safety, Jesus said, is to eradicate the desire for the forbidden thing for ever. Then and then alone life is safe.

(ii) If that be so, then God alone can judge men. We see only a man's outward actions; God alone sees the secret of his heart. And there will be many a man, whose outward actions are a model of rectitude, whose inward thoughts stand condemned before God. There is many a man who can stand the judgment of men, which is bound to be a judgment of externals, but whose goodness collapses before the all-seeing eye of God.

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(iii) And if that be so, it means that every one of us is in default; for there is none who can stand this judgment of God. Even if we have lived a life of outward moral perfection, there is none who can say that he never experienced the forbidden desire for the wrong things. For the inner perfection the only thing that is enough for a man to say is that he himself is dead and Christ lives in him. "I have been crucified with Christ," said Paul. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal.2:19-20).

The new standard kills all pride, and forces us to Jesus Christ who alone can enable us to rise to that standard which he himself has set before us.

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Matthew 5:21-22

THE FORBIDDEN ANGER

Matthew 5:21-22 (Part 1)

You have heard that it was said by the people of the old days: You shall not kill; and whoever kills is liable to the judgment court. But I say unto you that everyone who is angry with his brother is liable to the judgment court; and he who says to his brother, "You brainless one!" is liable to judgment in the supreme court; and he who says to his brother, "You fool!" is liable to be cast into the Gehenna of fire.

Here is the first example of the new standard which Jesus takes. The ancient law had laid it down: "You shall not kill" (Exo.20:13); but Jesus lays it down that even anger against a brother is forbidden. In the King James Version the man who is condemned is the man who is angry with his brother without a cause. But the words without a cause are not found in any of the great manuscripts, and this is nothing less than a total prohibition of anger. It is not enough not to strike a man; the only thing that is enough is not even to wish to strike him; not even to have a hard feeling against him within the heart.

In this passage Jesus is arguing as a Rabbi might argue. He is showing that he was skilful in using the debating methods which the wise men of his time were in the habit of using. There is in this passage a neat gradation of anger, and an answering neat gradation of punishment.

(i) There is first the man who is angry with his brother. The verb here used is *orgizesthai* (GSN3710). In Greek there are two words for anger. There is *thumos* (GSN2372), which was described as being like the flame which comes from dried straw. It is the anger which quickly blazes up and which just as quickly dies down. It is an anger which rises speedily and which just as speedily passes. There is *orge* (GSN3709), which was described as anger become inveterate. It is the long-lived anger; it is the anger of the man who nurses his wrath to keep it warm; it is the anger over which a person broods, and which he will not allow to die.

That anger is liable to the judgment court. The judgment court is the local village council which dispensed justice. That court was composed of the local village elders, and varied in number from three in villages of fewer than one hundred and fifty inhabitants, to seven in larger towns and twenty-three in still bigger cities.

So, then, Jesus condemns all selfish anger. The Bible is clear that anger is forbidden. "The anger of man," said James, "does not work the righteousness of God" (Jas.1:20). Paul orders his people to put off all "anger, wrath, malice, slander" (Col.3:8). Even the highest pagan thought saw the folly of anger. Cicero said that when anger entered into the scene "nothing could be done rightly and nothing sensibly." In a vivid phrase Seneca called anger "a brief insanity."

So Jesus forbids for ever the anger which broods, the anger which will not forget, the anger which refuses to be pacified, the anger which seeks revenge. If we are to obey Jesus, all anger must be banished from life, and especially that anger which lingers too long. It is a warning thing to

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Matthew 5:21-22

remember that no man can call himself a Christian and lose his temper because of any personal wrong which he has suffered.

(ii) Then Jesus goes on to speak of two cases where anger turns into insulting words. The Jewish teachers forbade such anger and such words. They spoke of "oppression in words," and of "the sin of insult." They had a saying, "Three classes go down to Gehenna (GSN1067) and return not--the adulterer, he who puts his neighbour openly to shame, and he who gives his neighbour an insulting name." Anger in a man's heart, and anger in a man's speech are equally forbidden.

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Matthew 5:21-22

WORDS OF INSULT

Matthew 5:21-22 (Part 2)

First of all, the man who calls his brother Raca is condemned. Raca (see rhaka, GSN4469 and compare HSN7386) is an almost untranslatable word, because it describes a tone of voice more than anything else. Its whole accent is the accent of contempt. To call a man Raca (see rhaka, GSN4469; HSN7386) was to call him a brainless idiot, a silly fool, an empty-headed blunderer. It is the word of one who despises another with an arrogant contempt.

There is a Rabbinic tale of a certain Rabbi, Simon ben Eleazar. He was coming from his teacher's house, and he was feeling uplifted at the thought of his own scholarship and erudition and goodness. A very ill-favoured passer-by gave him a greeting. The Rabbi did not return the greeting, but said, "You Raca! How ugly you are! Are all the men of your town as ugly as you?" "That," said the passer-by, "I do not know. Go and tell the Maker who created me how ugly is the creature he has made." So there the sin of contempt was rebuked.

The sin of contempt is liable to an even severer judgment. It is liable to the judgment of the Sanhedrin (sunedrion, GSN4892), the supreme court of the Jews. This of course is not to be taken literally. It is as if Jesus said: "The sin of inveterate anger is bad; the sin of contempt is worse."

There is no sin quite so unchristian as the sin of contempt. There is a contempt which comes from pride of birth, and snobbery is in truth an ugly thing. There is a contempt which comes from position and from money, and pride in material things is also an ugly thing. There is a contempt which comes from knowledge, and of all snobberies intellectual snobbery is the hardest to understand, for no wise man was ever impressed with anything else than his own ignorance. We should never look with contempt on any man for whom Christ died.

(iii) Then Jesus goes on to speak of the man who calls his brother moros (GSN3474). Moros also means fool, but the man who is moros (GSN3474) is the man who is a moral fool. He is the man who is playing the fool. The Psalmist spoke of the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God (Ps.14:1). Such a man was a moral fool, a man who lived an immoral life, and who in wishful thinking said that there was no God. To call a man moros (GSN3474) was not to criticise his mental ability; it was to cast aspersions on his moral character; it was to take his name and reputation from him, and to brand him as a loose-living and immoral person.

So Jesus says that he who destroys his brother's name and reputation is liable to the severest judgment of all, the judgment of the fire of Gehenna (GSN1067).

Gehenna (GSN1067) is a word with a history; often the Revised Standard Version translates it "hell." The word was very commonly used by the Jews (Matt.5:22,29,30; Matt.10:28; Matt.18:9; Matt.23:15; Matt.23:33; Mk.9:43,45,47; Lk.12:5; Jas.3:6). It really means the Valley of Hinnom. The Valley of Hinnom is a valley to the south-west of Jerusalem. It was notorious as the place where Ahaz had introduced into Israel the fire worship of the heathen God Molech, to whom little children were burned in the fire. "He burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned

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his sons as an offering" (2Chr.28:3). Josiah, the reforming king, had stamped out that worship, and had ordered that the valley should be for ever after an accursed place. "He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the sons of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech" (2Kgs.23:10). In consequence of this the Valley of Hinnom became the place where the refuse of Jerusalem was cast out and destroyed.

It was a kind of public incinerator. Always the fire smouldered in it, and a pall of thick smoke lay over it, and it bred a loathsome kind of worm which was hard to kill (Mk.9:44-48). So Gehenna, the Valley of Hinnom, became identified in people's minds with all that was accursed and filthy, the place where useless and evil things were destroyed. That is why it became a synonym for the place of God's destroying power, for hell.

So, then, Jesus insists that the gravest thing of all is to destroy a man's reputation and to take his good name away. No punishment is too severe for the malicious tale-bearer, or the gossip over the teacups which murders people's reputations. Such conduct, in the most literal sense, is a hell-deserving sin.

As we have said, all these gradations of punishment are not to be taken literally. What Jesus is saying here is this: "In the old days men condemned murder; and truly murder is for ever wrong. But I tell you that not only are a man's outward actions under judgment; his inmost thoughts are also under the scrutiny and the judgment of God. Long-lasting anger is bad; contemptuous speaking is worse, and the careless or the malicious talk which destroys a man's good name is worst of all." The man who is the slave of anger, the man who speaks in the accent of contempt, the man who destroys another's good name, may never have committed a murder in action, but he is a murderer at heart.

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Matthew 5:23-24

THE INSURMOUNTABLE BARRIER

Matthew 5:23-24

So, then, if you bring your gift to the altar, and if you there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go, and first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

When Jesus said this, he was doing no more than recall the Jews to a principle which they well knew and ought never to have forgotten. The idea behind sacrifice was quite simple. If a man did a wrong thing, that action disturbed the relationship between him and God, and the sacrifice was meant to be the cure which restored that relationship.

But two most important things have to be noted. First, it was never held that sacrifice could atone for deliberate sin, for what the Jews called "the sin of a high hand." If a man committed a sin unawares, if he was swept into sin in a moment of passion when self-control broke, then sacrifice was effective; but if a man deliberately, defiantly, callously and open-eyed committed sin, then sacrifice was powerless to atone.

Second, to be effective, sacrifice had to include confession of sin and true penitence; and true penitence involved the attempt to rectify any consequences sin might have had. The great Day of Atonement was held to make atonement for the sins of the whole nation, but the Jews were quite clear that not even the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement could avail for a man unless he was first reconciled to his neighbour. The breach between man and God could not be healed until the breach between man and man was healed. If a man was making a sin-offering, for instance, to atone for a theft, the offering was held to be completely unavailing until the thing stolen had been restored; and, if it was discovered that the thing had not been restored, then the sacrifice had to be destroyed as unclean and burned outside the Temple. The Jews were quite clear that a man had to do his utmost to put things right himself before he could be right with God.

In some sense sacrifice was substitutionary. The symbol of this was that, as the victim was about to be sacrificed, the worshipper placed his hands upon the beast's head, and pressed them down upon it, as if to transfer his own guilt to it. As he did so he said, "I entreat, O Lord; I have sinned, I have done perversely, I have rebelled; I have committed ... (here the sacrificer specified his sins); but I return in penitence, and let this be for my covering."

If any sacrifice was to be valid, confession and restoration were involved. The picture which Jesus is painting is very vivid. The worshipper, of course, did not make his own sacrifice; he brought it to the priest who offered it on his behalf. The worshipper has entered the Temple; he has passed through its series of courts, the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of the Men. Beyond that there lay the Court of the Priests into which the layman could not go. The worshipper is standing at the rail, ready to hand over his victim to the priest; his hands are on it to confess; and then he remembers his breach with his brother, the wrong done to his brother; if his sacrifice is to avail, he must go back and mend that breach and undo that wrong, or nothing can happen.

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Matthew 5:23-24

Jesus is quite clear about this basic fact--we cannot be right with God until we are right with men; we cannot hope for forgiveness until we have confessed our sin, not only to God, but also to men, and until we have done our best to remove the practical consequences of it. We sometimes wonder why there is a barrier between us and God; we sometimes wonder why our prayers seem unavailing. The reason may well be that we ourselves have erected that barrier, through being at variance with our fellow-men, or because we have wronged someone and have done nothing to put things right.

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Matthew 5:25-26

MAKE PEACE IN TIME

Matthew 5:25-26

Get on to good terms again with your opponent, while you are still on the road with him, in case your opponent hands you over to the judge, and the judge hands you over to the court officer, and you be cast into prison. This is the truth I tell you--if that happens, you certainly will not come out until you have paid the last farthing.

Here Jesus is giving the most practical advice; he is telling men to get trouble sorted out in time, before it piles up still worse trouble for the future.

Jesus draws a picture of two opponents on their way together to the law courts; and he tells them to get things settled and straightened out before they reach the court, for, if they do not, and the law takes its course, there will be still worse trouble for one of them at least in the days to come.

The picture of two opponents on the way to court together seems to us very strange, and indeed rather improbable. But in the ancient world it often happened.

Under Greek law there was a process of arrest called apagoge (GSN0520), which means summary arrest. In it the plaintiff himself arrested the defendant. He caught him by his robe at the throat, and held the robe in such a way that, if the man struggled, he would strangle himself. Obviously the causes for which such an arrest was legal were very few and the male-factor had to be caught redhanded.

The crimes for which a man might be summarily arrested by anyone in this way were thieving, clothes-stealing (clothes-stealers were the curse of the public baths in ancient Greece), picking pockets, house-breaking and kidnapping (the kidnapping of specially gifted and accomplished slaves was very common). Further, a man might be summarily arrested if he was discovered to be exercising the rights of a citizen when he had been disfranchised, or if he returned to his state or city after being exiled. In view of this custom it was by no means uncommon to see a plaintiff and a defendant on their way to court together in a Greek city.

Clearly it is much more likely that Jesus would be thinking in terms of Jewish law; and this situation was by no means impossible under Jewish law. This is obviously a case of debt, for, if peace is not made, the last farthing will have to be paid. Such cases were settled by the local council of elders. A time was appointed when plaintiff and defendant had to appear together; in any small town or village there was every likelihood of them finding themselves on the way to the court together. When a man was adjudged guilty, he was handed over to the court officer. Matthew calls the officer the *huperetes* (GSN5257); Luke calls him, in his version of the saying, by the more common term, *praktor* (GSN4233) (Lk. 12:58-59). It was the duty of the court officer to see that the penalty was duly paid, and, if it was not paid, he had the power to imprison the defaulter, until it was paid. It is no doubt of that situation that Jesus was thinking. Jesus' advice may mean one of two things.

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Matthew 5:25-26

(i) It may be a piece of most practical advice. Again and again it is the experience of life that, if a quarrel, or a difference, or a dispute is not healed immediately, it can go on breeding worse and worse trouble as time goes on. Bitterness breeds bitterness. It has often happened that a quarrel between two people has descended to their families, and has been inherited by future generations, and has in the end succeeded in splitting a church or a society in two.

If at the very beginning one of the parties had had the grace to apologize or to admit fault, a grievous situation need never have arisen. If ever we are at variance with someone else, we must get the situation put right straight away. It may mean that we must be humble enough to confess that we were wrong and to make apology; it may mean that, even if we were in the right, we have to take the first step towards healing the breach. When personal relations go wrong, in nine cases out of ten immediate action will mend them; but if that immediate action is not taken, they will continue to deteriorate, and the bitterness will spread in an ever-widening circle.

(ii) It may be that in Jesus' mind there was something more ultimate than this. It may be that he is saying, "Put things right with your fellow-men, while life lasts, for some day--you know not when--life will finish, and you will go to stand before God, the final Judge of all." The greatest of all Jewish days was the Day of Atonement. Its sacrifices were held to atone for sin known and unknown; but even this day had its limitations. The Talmud clearly lays it down: "The Day of Atonement does atone for the offences between man and God. The Day of Atonement does not atone for the offences between a man and his neighbour, unless the man has first put things right with his neighbour." Here again we have the basic fact--a man cannot be right with God unless he is right with his fellow-men. A man must so live that the end will find him at peace with all men.

It may well be that we do not need to choose between these two interpretations of this saying of Jesus. It may well be that both were in his mind, and that what Jesus is saying is: "If you want happiness in time, and happiness in eternity, never leave an unreconciled quarrel or an unhealed breach between yourself and your brother man. Act immediately to remove the barriers which anger has raised."

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 5:27-28

THE FORBIDDEN DESIRE

Matthew 5:27-28

You have heard that it has been said: You must not commit adultery. But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman in such a way as to waken within himself forbidden desires for her has already committed adultery with her within his heart.

Here is Jesus' second example of the new standard. The Law laid it down: You shall not commit adultery (Exo.20:14). So serious a view did the Jewish teachers take of adultery that the guilty parties could be punished by nothing less than death (Lev.20:10); but once again Jesus lays it down that not only the forbidden action, but also the forbidden thought is guilty in the sight of God.

It is necessary that we should understand what Jesus is saying here. He is not speaking of the natural, normal desire, which is part of human instinct and human nature. According to the literal meaning of the Greek the man who is condemned is the man who looks at a woman with the deliberate intention of lusting after her. The man who is condemned is the man who deliberately uses his eyes to awaken his lust, the man who looks in such a way that passion is awakened and desire deliberately stimulated.

The Jewish Rabbis well knew the way in which the eyes can be used to stimulate the wrong desire. They had their sayings. "The eyes and the hand are the two brokers of sin." "Eye and heart are the two handmaids of sin." "Passions lodge only in him who sees." Woe to him who goes after his %yes for they are adulterous! As someone has said, "There is an internal desire of which adultery is only the fruit."

In a tempting world there are many things which are deliberately designed to excite desire, books, pictures, plays, even advertisements. The man whom Jesus here condemns is the man who deliberately uses his eyes to stimulate his desires; the man who finds a strange delight in things which waken the desire for the forbidden thing. To the pure all things are pure. But the man whose heart is defiled can look at any scene and find something in it to titillate and excite the wrong desire.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 5:29-30

THE SURGICAL CURE

Matthew 5:29-30

If your right eye proves a stumbling-block to you, tear it out and throw it away from you; for it is better that one part of your body should be destroyed, than that your whole body should go away to Gehenna. If your right hand proves a stumbling-block to you, cut it off and throw it away from you; for it is better for you that one part of your body should be destroyed than that your whole body should go away to Gehenna.

Here Jesus makes a great and a surgical demand: he insists that anything which is a cause of, or a seduction to, sin should be completely cut out of life.

The word he uses for a stumbling-block is interesting. It is the word skandalon (GSN4625). Skandalon is a form of the word skandalithron, which means the bait-stick in a trap. It was the stick or arm on which the bait was fixed and which operated the trap to catch the animal lured to its own destruction. So the word came to mean anything which causes a man's destruction.

Behind it there are two pictures. First, there is the picture of a hidden stone in a path against which a man may stumble, or of a cord stretched across a path, deliberately put there to make a man trip. Second, there is the picture of a pit dug in the ground and deceptively covered over with a thin layer of branches or of turf, and so arranged that, when the unwary traveller sets his foot on it, he is immediately thrown into the pit. The skandalon (GSN4625), the stumbling-block is something which trips a man up, something which sends him crashing to destruction, something which lures him to his own ruin.

Of course, the words of Jesus are not to be taken with a crude literalism. What they mean is that anything which helps to seduce us to sin is to be ruthlessly rooted out of life. If there is a habit which can be seduction to evil, if there is an association which can be the cause of wrongdoing, if there is a pleasure which could turn out to be our ruin, then that thing must be surgically excised from our life.

Coming as it does immediately after the passage which deals with forbidden thoughts and desires, this passage compels us to ask: How shall we free ourselves from these unclean desires and defiling thoughts? It is the fact of experience that thoughts and pictures come unbidden into our minds, and it is the hardest thing on earth to shut the door to them.

There is one way in which these forbidden thoughts and desires cannot be dealt with--and that is to sit down and to say, I will not think of these things. The more we say, I will not think of such and such a thing, the more our thoughts are in fact concentrated on it.

The outstanding example in history of the wrong way to deal with such thoughts and desires was the hermits and the monks in the desert in the time of the early Church. They were men who wished to free themselves from all earthly things, and especially of the desires of the body. To do so they went away into the Egyptian desert with the idea of living alone and thinking of nothing but God.

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Matthew 5:29-30

The most famous of them all was Saint Anthony. He lived the hermit's life; he fasted; he did without sleep; he tortured his body. For thirty-five years he lived in the desert, and these thirty-five years were a non-stop battle, without respite, with his temptations. The story is told in his biography. "First of all the devil tried to lead him away from discipline, whispering to him the remembrance of his wealth, cares for his sister, claims of kindred, love of money, love of glory, the various pleasures of the table, and the other relaxations of life, and, at last, the difficulty of virtue and the labour of it ... The one would suggest foul thoughts, and the other counter them with prayers; the one fire him with lust, the other, as one who seemed to blush, fortify his body with prayers, faith and fasting. The devil one night even took, upon him the shape of a woman, and imitated all her acts simply to beguile Anthony." So for thirty-five years the struggle went on.

The plain fact is that, if ever anyone was asking for trouble, Anthony and his friends were. It is the inevitable law of human nature that the more a man says he will not think of something, the more that something will present itself to his thoughts. There are only two ways to defeat the forbidden thoughts.

The first way is by Christian action. The best way to defeat such thoughts is to do something, to fill life so full with Christian labour and Christian service that there is no time for these thoughts to enter in; to think so much of others that in the end we entirely forget ourselves; to rid ourselves of a diseased and morbid introspection by concentrating not on ourselves but on other people. The real cure for evil thoughts is good action.

The second way is to fill the mind with good thoughts. There is a famous scene in Barrie's Peter Pan. Peter is in the children's bedroom; they have seen him fly; and they wish to fly too. They have tried it from the floor and they have tried it from the beds and the result is failure. "How do you do it?" John asked. And Peter answered: "You just think lovely, wonderful thoughts and they lift you up in the air." The only way to defeat evil thoughts is to begin to think of something else.

If any man is harassed by thoughts of the forbidden and unclean things, he will certainly never defeat the evil things by withdrawing from life and saying, I will not think of these things. He can do so only by plunging into Christian action and Christian thought. He will never do it by trying to save his own life; he can do it only by flinging his life away for others.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 5:31-32

THE BOND WHICH MUST NOT BE BROKEN

1. Marriage amongst the Jews

Matthew 5:31-32 (Part 1)

It has been said: Let every man who divorces his wife give her a bill of divorcement. But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife for any other cause than fornication causes her to commit adultery; and anyone who marries a woman who has been so divorced himself commits adultery.

When Jesus laid down this law for marriage he laid it down against a very definite situation. There is no time in history when the marriage bond stood in greater peril of destruction than in the days when Christianity first came into this world. At that time the world was in danger of witnessing the almost total break-up of marriage and the collapse of the home.

Christianity had a double background. It had the background of the Jewish world, and of the world of the Romans and the Greeks. Let us look at Jesus' teaching against these two backgrounds.

Theoretically no nation ever had a higher ideal of marriage than the Jew had. Marriage was a sacred duty which a man was bound to undertake. He might delay or abstain from marriage for only one reason--to devote his whole time to the study of the Law. If a man refused to marry and to beget children he was said to have broken the positive commandment which bade men to be fruitful and to multiply, and he was said to have "lessened the image of God in the world," and "to have slain his posterity."

Ideally the Jew abhorred divorce. The voice of God had said, "I hate divorce" (Mal.2:16). The Rabbis had the loveliest sayings. "We find that God is long-suffering to every sin except the sin of unchastity." "Unchastity causes the glory of God to depart." "Every Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder or adultery." "The very altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth."

The tragedy was that practice fell so far short of the ideal. One thing vitiated the whole marriage relationship. The woman in the eyes of the law was a thing. She was at the absolute disposal of her father or of her husband. She had virtually no legal rights at all. To all intents and purposes a woman could not divorce her husband for any reason, and a man could divorce his wife for any cause at all. "A woman," said the Rabbinic law, "may be divorced with or without her will; but a man only with his will."

The matter was complicated by the fact that the Jewish law of divorce was very simple in its expression and very debatable in its meaning. It is stated in Deut.24:1: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house." The process of divorce was extremely simple. The bill of divorcement simply ran:

"Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and

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Matthew 5:31-32

deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt."

All that had to be done was to hand that document to the woman in the presence of two witnesses and she stood divorced.

Clearly the crux of this matter lies in the interpretation of the phrase some indecency. In all matters of Jewish law there were two schools. There was the school of Shammai, which was the strict, severe, austere school, and there was the school of Hillel which was the liberal, broad-minded, generous school. Shammai and his school defined some indecency as meaning unchastity and nothing but unchastity. "Let a wife be as mischievous as the wife of Ahab," they said, "she cannot be divorced except for adultery." To the school of Shammai there was no possible ground of divorce except only adultery and unchastity. On the other hand the school of Hillel defined some indecency, in the widest possible way.

They said that it meant that a man could divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner by putting too much salt in his food, if she went in public with her head uncovered, if she talked with men in the streets, if she was a brawling woman, if she spoke disrespectfully of her husband's parents in his presence, if she was troublesome or quarrelsome. A certain Rabbi Akiba said that the phrase, if she find no favour in his sight, meant that a man might divorce his wife if he found a woman whom he considered to be more attractive than she.

Human nature being such as it is, it is easy to see which school would have the greater influence. In the time of Jesus divorce had grown easier and easier, so that a situation had arisen in which girls were actually unwilling to marry, because marriage was so insecure.

When Jesus said this, he was not speaking as some theoretical idealist; he was speaking as a practical reformer. He was seeking to deal with a situation in which the structure of family life was collapsing, and in which national morals were becoming ever more lax.

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THE BOND THAT CANNOT BE BROKEN

2. Marriage amongst the Greeks

Matthew 5:31-32 (Part 2)

We have seen the state of marriage in Palestine in the time of Jesus, but the day was soon to come when Christianity would go out far beyond Palestine, and it is necessary that we should look at the state of marriage in that wider world into which the teachings of Christianity were to go.

First then, let us look at marriage amongst the Greeks. Two things vitiated the marriage situation in the Greek world.

A. W. Verrall, the great classical scholar, said that one of the chief diseases from which ancient civilization died was a low view of woman. The first thing which wrecked the marriage situation among the Greeks was the fact that relationships outside marriage carried no stigma whatsoever, and were in fact the accepted and the expected thing. Such relationships brought not the slightest discredit; they were part of the ordinary routine of life. Demosthenes laid it down as the accepted practice of life: "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs." In later days, when Greek ideas had penetrated into, and had ruined Roman morality, Cicero in his speech, In defence of Caelius says, "If there is anyone who thinks that young men should be absolutely forbidden the love of courtesans he is indeed extremely severe.

I am not able to deny the principle that he states. But he is at variance, not only with the licence of his own age, but also from the customs and concessions of our ancestors. When indeed was this not done? When did anyone ever find fault with it? When was permission denied? When was it that that which is now lawful was not lawful?" It is Cicero's plea, as it was the statement of Demosthenes, that relationships outside marriage were the ordinary and the conventional thing.

The Greek view of marriage was an extraordinary paradox. The Greek demanded that the respectable woman should live such a life of seclusion that she could never even appear on the street alone, and that she did not even have her meals in the apartments of the men. She had no part even in social life. From his wife the Greek demanded the most complete moral purity; for himself he demanded the utmost immoral licence. To put it bluntly, the Greeks married a wife for domestic security, but found their pleasure elsewhere. Even Socrates said, "Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife, and is there anyone to whom you talk less?" Verus, the colleague of Marcus Aurelius in the imperial power, was blamed by his wife for associating with other women. His answer was that she must remember that the name of wife was a title of dignity, not of pleasure.

So, then, in Greece an extraordinary situation arose. The Temple of Aphrodite at Corinth had a thousand priestesses, who were sacred courtesans; they came down to the streets of Corinth at evening time so that it became a proverb: "Not every man can afford a journey to Corinth." This amazing alliance of religion with prostitution can be seen in an almost incredible way in the fact

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that Solon was the first to allow the introduction of prostitutes into Athens and the building of brothels, and with the profits of the brothels a new temple was built to Aphrodite the goddess of love. The Greeks saw nothing wrong in the building of a temple with the proceeds of prostitution.

But apart altogether from the practice of common prostitution there arose in Greece an amazing class of women called the hetairai (compare hetairos, GSN2083). They were the mistresses of famous men; they were easily the most cultured and socially accomplished women of their day; their homes were nothing less than salons; and many of their names go down in history with as much fame as the great men with whom they associated. This was the hetaira (compare, GSN2083) of Alexander the Great. On Alexander's death she married Ptolemy, and became the mother of the Egyptian royal family. Aspasia was the hetaira (compare, GSN2083) of Pericles, perhaps the greatest ruler and orator Athens ever had; and it is said that she taught Pericles his oratory and wrote his speeches for him. Epicurus, the famous philosopher, had his equally famous Leontium. Socrates had his Diotima. The way in which these women were regarded can be seen from the visit that Socrates paid to Theodota, as Xenophon tells of it. He went to see if she was as beautiful as she was said to be. He talked kindly to her; he told her that she must shut the door against the insolent; that she must care for her lovers in their sicknesses, and rejoice with them when honour came to them, and that she must tenderly love those who gave their love to her.

Here, then, in Greece we see a whole social system based on relationships outside marriage; we see that these relationships were accepted as natural and normal, and not in the least blameworthy; we see that these relationships could, in fact, become the dominant thing in a man's life. We see an amazing situation in which Greek men kept their wives absolutely secluded in a compulsory purity, while they themselves found their real pleasure and their real life in relationships outside marriage.

The second thing which vitiated the situation in Greece was that divorce required no legal process whatsoever. All that a man had to do was to dismiss his wife in the presence of two witnesses. The one saving clause was that he must return her dowry intact.

It is easy to see what an incredible novelty the Christian teaching regarding chastity and fidelity in marriage was in a civilization like that.

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Matthew 5:31-32

THE BOND THAT CANNOT BE BROKEN

3. Marriage amongst the Romans

Matt 5:31-32 (Part 3)

The history of the development of the marriage situation amongst the Romans is the history of tragedy. The whole of Roman religion and society was originally founded on the home. The basis of the Roman commonwealth was the patria potestas, the father's power; the father had literally the power of life and death over his family. A Roman son never came of age so long as his father was alive. He might be a consul; he might have reached the highest honour and office the state could offer but so long as his father was alive he was still within his father's power.

To the Roman the home was everything. The Roman matron was not secluded like her Greek counterpart. She took her full part in life. "Marriage," said Modestinus, the Latin jurist, "is a life-long fellowship of all divine and human rights." Prostitutes, of course, there were, but they were held in contempt and to associate with them was dishonourable. There was, for instance, a Roman magistrate who was assaulted in a house of ill-fame, and who refused to prosecute or go to law about the case, because to do so would have been to admit that he had been in such a place. So high was the standard of Roman morality that for the first five hundred years of the Roman commonwealth there was not one single recorded case of divorce. The first man to divorce his wife was Spurius Carvilius Ruga in the year 234 B.C., and he did so because she was childless and he desired a child.

Then there came the Greeks. In the military and the imperial sense Rome conquered Greece; but in the moral and the social sense Greece conquered Rome. By the second century B.C. Greek morals had begun to infiltrate into Rome, and the descent was catastrophic. Divorce became as common as marriage. Seneca speaks of women who were married to be divorced and who were divorced to be married. He tells of women who identified the years, not by the names of the consuls, but by the names of their husbands. Juvenal writes: "Is one husband enough for Iberina? Sooner will you prevail upon her to be content with one eye." He cites the case of a woman who had eight husbands in five years. Martial cites the case of a woman who had ten husbands. A Roman orator, Metellus Numidicus, made an extraordinary speech: "If, Romans, it were possible to love without wives, we would be free from trouble; but since it is the law of nature that we can neither live pleasantly with them, nor at all without them, we must take thought for the continuance of the race rather than for our own brief pleasure." Marriage had become nothing more than an unfortunate necessity. There was a cynical Roman jest: "Marriage brings only two happy days--the day when the husband first clasps his wife to his breast, and the day when he lays her in the tomb."

To such a pass did things come that special taxes were levied on the unmarried, and the unmarried were prohibited from entering into inheritances. Special privileges were given to those who had children, for children were regarded as a disaster. The very law was manipulated in an attempt to rescue the necessary institution of marriage.

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Matthew 5:31-32

There lay the Roman tragedy, what Lecky called "that outburst of ungovernable and almost frantic depravity which followed upon the contact with Greece." Again it is easy to see with what a shock the ancient world must have heard the demands of Christian chastity.

We shall leave the discussion of the ideal of Christian marriage until we come to Matt.19:3-9. At the present we must simply note that with Christianity there had come into the world an ideal of chastity of which men did not dream.

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Matthew 5:33-37

A WORD IS A PLEDGE

Matthew 5:33-37 (Part 1)

You have heard that it was said by the people of the old days: You shall not take an oath falsely, but you shall pay your oath in full to the Lord. But I say to you: Do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God, nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King, nor by your head, for you cannot make one hair black or white. When you say, Yes, let it be yes; and when you say, No, let it be no. Anything which goes beyond that has its source in evil.

One of the strange things about the Sermon on the Mount is the number of occasions when Jesus was recalling to the Jews that which they already knew. The Jewish teachers had always insisted on the paramount obligation of telling the truth. "The world stands fast on three things, on justice, on truth, and on peace." "Four persons are shut out from the presence of God--the scoffer, the hypocrite, the liar, and the retailer of slander." "One who has given his word and who changes it is as bad as an idolater." The school of Shammai was so wedded to the truth that they forbade the ordinary courteous politenesses of society, as, for instance, when a bride was complimented for her charming appearance when in fact she was plain.

Still more did the Jewish teachers insist on the truth, if the truth had been guaranteed by an oath. Repeatedly that principle is laid down in the New Testament. The commandment has it: "You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Exo.20:7). That commandment has nothing to do with swearing in the sense of using bad language; it condemns the man who swears that something is true, or who makes some promise, in the name of God, and who has taken the oath falsely. "When a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word" (Num.30:2). "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not be slack to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you" (Deut.23:21-22).

But in the time of Jesus there were two unsatisfactory things about taking oaths.

The first was what might be called frivolous swearing, taking an oath where no oath was necessary or proper. It had become far too common a custom to introduce a statement by saying, "By thy life," or, "By my head," or, "May I never see the comfort of Israel if. . ." The Rabbis laid it down that to use any form of oath in a simple statement like: "That is an olive tree," was sinful and wrong. "The yes of the righteous is yes," they said, "and their no is no."

There is still need of warning here. Far too often people use the most sacred language in the most meaningless way. They take the sacred names upon their lips in the most thoughtless and irreverent way. The sacred names should be kept for sacred things.

The second Jewish custom was in some ways even worse than that; it might be called evasive swearing. The Jews divided oaths into two classes, those which were absolutely binding and those which were not. Any oath which contained the name of God was absolutely binding; any oath

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Matthew 5:33-37

which succeeded in evading the name of God was held not to be binding. The result was that if a man swore by the name of God in any form, he would rigidly keep that oath; but if he swore by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by his head, he felt quite free to break that oath. The result was that evasion had been brought to a fine art.

The idea behind this was that, if God's name was used, God became a partner in the transaction; whereas if God's name was not used, God had nothing to do with the transaction. The principle which Jesus lays down is quite clear. In effect Jesus is saying that, so far from having to make God a partner in any transaction, no man can keep God out of any transaction. God is already there. The heaven is the throne of God; the earth is the footstool of God; Jerusalem is the city of God; a man's head does not belong to him; he cannot even make a hair white or black; his life is God's; there is nothing in the world which does not belong to God; and, therefore, whether God is actually named in so many words or not, does not matter. God is there already.

Here is a great eternal truth. Life cannot be divided into compartments in some of which God is involved and in others of which he is not involved; there cannot be one kind of language in the Church and another kind of language in the shipyard or the factory or the office; there cannot be one kind of standard of conduct in the Church and another kind of standard in the business world. The fact is that God does not need to be invited into certain departments of life, and kept out of others. He is everywhere, all through life and every activity of life. He hears not only the words which are spoken in his name; he hears all words; and there cannot be any such thing as a form of words which evades bringing God into a transaction. We will regard all promises as sacred, if we remember that all promises are made in the presence of God.

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Matthew 5:33-37

THE END OF OATHS

Matthew 5:33-37 (Part 2)

This passage concludes with the commandment that when a man has to say yes, he should say yes, and nothing more; and when he has to say no, he should say no, and nothing more.

The ideal is that a man should never need an oath to buttress or guarantee the truth of anything he may say. The man's character should make an oath completely unnecessary. His guarantee and his witness should lie in what he is himself. Isocrates, the great Greek teacher and orator, said, "A man must lead a life which will gain more confidence in him than ever an oath can do." Clement of Alexandria insisted that Christians must lead such a life and demonstrate such a character that no one will ever dream of asking an oath from them. The ideal society is one in which no man's word will ever need an oath to guarantee its truth, and no man's promise ever need an oath to guarantee its fulfilling.

Does this saying of Jesus then forbid a man to take an oath anywhere--for instance, in the witness box? There have been two sets of people who completely refused all oaths. There were the Essenes, an ancient sect of the Jews. Josephus writes of them: "They are eminent for fidelity and are ministers of peace. Whatsoever they say also is firmer than an oath. Swearing is avoided by them and they esteem it worse than perjury. For they say that he who cannot be believed without swearing is already condemned."

There were, and still are, the Quakers. The Quakers will not in any situation submit to taking an oath. The utmost length to which George Fox would go was to use the word Verily. He writes: "I never wronged man or woman in all that time [the time that he worked in business]. While I was in that service, I used in my dealings the word Verily, and it was a common saying, 'If George Fox says Verily, there is no altering him.'"

In the ancient days the Essenes would not in any circumstances take an oath, and to this day the Quakers are the same.

Are they correct in taking this line in this matter? There were occasions when Paul as it were, put himself upon oath. "I call God to witness against me," he writes to the Corinthians, "It was to spare you that I refrained from coming to Corinth" (2Cor.1:23). "Now the things that I write unto you," he writes to the Galatians, "In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!" (Gal.1:20). On these occasions Paul is putting himself on oath. Jesus himself did not protest at being put on oath. At his trial before the High Priest, the High Priest said to him: "I adjure you by the living God--I put you on oath by God himself--tell us if you are the Christ, the son of God" (Matt.26:63). What then is the situation?

Let us look at the last part of this verse. The Revised Standard Version has it that a man must answer simply yes or no, "anything more than this comes from evil." What does that mean? It can mean one of two things.

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Matthew 5:33-37

(a) If it is necessary to take an oath from a man, that necessity arises from the evil that is in man. If there was no evil in man, no oath would be necessary. That is to say, the fact that it is sometimes necessary to make a man take an oath is a demonstration of the evil in Christless human nature.

(b) The fact that it is necessary to put men on oath on certain occasions arises from the fact that this is an evil world. In a perfect world, in a world which was the Kingdom of God, no taking of oaths would ever be necessary. It is necessary only because of the evil of the world.

What Jesus is saying is this--the truly good man will never need to take an oath; the truth of his sayings and the reality of his promises need no such guarantee. But the fact that oaths are still sometimes necessary is the proof that men are not good men and that this is not a good world.

So, then, this saying of Jesus leaves two obligations upon us. It leaves upon us the obligation to make ourselves such that men will so see our transparent goodness that they will never ask an oath from us; and it leaves upon us the obligation to seek to make this world such a world that falsehood and infidelity will be so eliminated from it that the necessity for oaths will be abolished.

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Matthew 5:38-42

THE ANCIENT LAW

Matthew 5:38-42 (Part 1)

You have heard that it has been said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist evil; but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also; and if anyone wishes to obtain judgement against you for your tunic, give him your cloak also; and if anyone impresses you into the public service to go a mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who asks you, and do not turn away from him who wishes to borrow from you.

Few passages of the New Testament have more of the essence of the Christian ethic in them than this one. Here is the characteristic ethic of the Christian life, and the conduct which should distinguish the Christian from other men.

Jesus begins by citing the oldest law in the world--an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. That law is known as the Lex Talionis, and it may be described as the law of tit for tat. It appears in the earliest known code of laws, the Code of Hammurabi, who reigned in Babylon from 2285 to 2242 B.C. The Code of Hammurabi makes a curious distinction between the gentleman and the workman. "If a man has caused the loss of a gentleman's eye, his eye one shall cause to be lost. If he has shattered a gentleman's limb, one shall shatter his limb. If he has caused a poor man to lose his eye, or shattered a poor man's limb, he shall pay one mina of silver ... If he has made the tooth of a man who is his equal fall out, one shall make his tooth fall out. If he has made the tooth of a poor man fall out, he shall pay one third of a mina of silver." The principle is clear and apparently simple--if a man has inflicted an injury on any person, an equivalent injury shall be inflicted upon him.

That law became part and parcel of the ethic of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament we find it laid down no fewer than three times. "If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exo.21:23-25). "When a man causes a disfigurement in his neighbour, as he has done it shall be done to him, fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has disfigured a man, he shall be disfigured" (Lev.24:19-20). "Your eye shall not pity; it shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut.19:21). These laws are often quoted as amongst the blood thirsty, savage and merciless laws of the Old Testament; but before we begin to criticise certain things must be noted.

(i) The Lex Talionis, the law of tit for tat, so far from being a savage and bloodthirsty law, is in fact the beginning of mercy. Its original aim was definitely the limitation of vengeance. In the very earliest days the vendetta and the blood feud were characteristic of tribal society. If a man of one tribe injured a man of another tribe, then at once all the members of the tribe of the injured man were out to take vengeance on all the members of the tribe of the man who committed the injury; and the vengeance desired was nothing less than death. This law deliberately limits vengeance. It lays it down that only the man who committed the injury must be punished, and his punishment must be no more than the equivalent of the injury he has inflicted and the damage he has done. Seen against its historical setting this is not a savage law, but a law of mercy.

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(ii) Further, this was never a law which gave a private individual the right to extract vengeance; it was always a law which laid down how a judge in the law court must assess punishment and penalty (compare Deut.19:18). This law was never intended to give the individual person the right to indulge even in the vengeance of tit for tat. It was always intended as a guide for a judge in the assessment of the penalty which any violent or unjust deed must receive.

(iii) Still further, this law was never, at least in any even semi-civilized society, carried out literally. The Jewish jurists argued rightly that to carry it out literally might in fact be the reverse of justice, because it obviously might involve the displacement of a good eye or a good tooth for a bad eye or a bad tooth. And very soon the injury done was assessed at a money value; and the Jewish law in the tractate Baba Kamma carefully lays down how the damage is to be assessed. If a man has injured another, he is liable on five counts--for injury, for pain, for healing, for loss of time, for indignity suffered. In regard to injury, the injured man is looked on as a slave to be sold in the market place. His value before and after the injury was assessed, and the man responsible for the injury had to pay the difference. He was responsible for the loss in value of the man injured. In regard to pain, it was estimated how much money a man would accept to be willing to undergo the pain of the injury inflicted, and the man responsible for the injury had to pay that sum. In regard to healing, the injurer had to pay all the expenses of the necessary medical attention, until a complete cure had been effected. In regard to loss of time, the injurer had to pay compensation for the wages lost while the injured man was unable to work, and he had also to pay compensation if the injured man had held a well paid position, and was now, in consequence of the injury, fit for less well rewarded work. In regard to indignity, the injurer had to pay damages for the humiliation and indignity which the injury had inflicted. In actual practice the type of compensation which the Lex Talionis laid down is strangely modern.

(iv) And most important of all, it must be remembered that the Lex Talionis is by no means the whole of Old Testament ethics. There are glimpses and even splendours of mercy in the Old Testament. "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people" (Lev.19:18). "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (Prov.25:21). "Do not say, I will do to him as he has done to me" (Prov.24:29). "Let him give his cheek to the smiter; he be filled with insults" (Lam.3:30). There is abundant mercy in the Old Testament too.

So, then, ancient ethics were based on the law of tit for tat. It is true that that law was a law of mercy; it is true that it was a law for a judge and not for a private individual; it is true that it was never literally carried out; it is true that there were accents of mercy speaking at the same time. But Jesus obliterated the very principle of that law, because retaliation, however controlled and restricted, has no place in the Christian life.

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Matthew 5:38-42

THE END OF RESENTMENT AND OF RETALIATION

Matthew 5:38-42 (Part 2)

So, then, for the Christian Jesus abolishes the old law of limited vengeance and introduces the new spirit of non-resentment and of non-retaliation. He goes on to take three examples of the Christian spirit in operation. To take these examples with a crude and ununderstanding literalism is completely to miss their point. It is therefore very necessary to understand what Jesus is saying.

(i) He says that if anyone smites us on the right cheek we must turn to him the other cheek also. There is far more here than meets the eye, far more than a mere matter of blows on the face.

Suppose a right-handed man is standing in front of another man, and suppose he wants to slap the other man on the right cheek, how must he do it? Unless he goes through the most complicated contortions, and unless he empties the blow of all force, he can hit the other man's cheek only in one way--with the back of his hand. Now according to Jewish Rabbinic law to hit a man with the back of the hand was twice as insulting as to hit him with the back of the hand. So, then, what Jesus is saying is this: "Even if a man should direct at you the most deadly and calculated insult, you must on no account retaliate, and you must on no account resent it."

It will not happen very often, if at all, that anyone will slap us on the face, but time and time again life brings to us insults either great or small; and Jesus is here saying that the true Christian has learned to resent no insult and to seek retaliation for no slight. Jesus himself was called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. He was called the friend of taxgatherers and harlots, with the implication that he was like the company he kept. The early Christians were called cannibals and incendiaries, and were accused of immorality, gross and shameless, because their service included the Love Feast.

When Shaftesbury undertook the cause of the poor and the oppressed he was warned that it would mean that "he would become unpopular with his friends and people of his own class," and that "he would have to give up all hope of ever being a cabinet minister." When Wilberforce began on his crusade to free the slaves slanderous rumours that he was a cruel husband, a wife-beater, that he was married to a negress were deliberately spread abroad.

Time and time again in a church someone is "insulted" because he is not invited to a platform party, because he is omitted from a vote of thanks, because in some way he does not get the place due to him. The true Christian has forgotten what it is to be insulted; he has learned from his Master to accept any insult and never to resent it, and never to seek to retaliate:

(ii) Jesus goes on to say that if anyone tries to take away our tunic in a law suit, we must not only let him have that, but must offer him our cloak also. Again there is much more than meets the eye.

The tunic, chiton (GSN5509), was the long, sack-line inner garment made of cotton or of linen. The poorest man would have a change of tunics. The cloak was the great, blanket-like outer garment which a man wore as a robe by day, and used as a blanket at night. Of such garments the Jew would have only one. Now it was actually the Jewish law that a man's tunic might be taken as a

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pledge, but not his cloak. "If ever you take your neighbour's garment in pledge (his cloak), you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep?" (Exo.22:26-27). The point is that by right a man's cloak could not be taken permanently from him.

So, then, what Jesus is saying is this: "The Christian never stands upon his rights; he never disputes about his legal rights; he does not consider himself to have any legal rights at all." There are people who are for ever standing on their rights, who clutch their privileges to them and who will not be pried loose from them, who will militantly go to law rather than suffer what they regard as the slightest infringement of them. Churches are tragically full of people like that, officials whose territory has been invaded, office-bearers who have not been accorded their proper place, courts which do business with a manual of practice and procedure on the table all the time, lest anyone's rights should be invaded. People like that have not even begun to see what Christianity is. The Christian thinks not of his rights, but of his duties; not of his privileges, but of his responsibilities.

The Christian is a man who has forgotten that he has any rights at all; and the man who will fight to the legal death for his rights, inside or outside the Church, is far from the Christian way.

(iii) Jesus then goes on to speak of being compelled to go one mile; and says that in such a case the Christian must willingly go two miles.

There is here a picture of which we know little, for it is a picture from an occupied country. The word used for to compel is the verb *aggareuein* (GSN0029), and *aggareuein* is a word with a history. It comes from the noun *aggareus*, which is a Persian word meaning a courier. The Persians had an amazing postal system. Each road was divided into stages lasting one day. At each stage there was food for the courier and water and fodder for the horses, and fresh horses for the road. But, if by any chance there was anything lacking, any private person could be impressed, compelled into giving food, lodging, horses, assistance, and even into carrying the message himself for a stage. The word for such compulsion was *aggareuein* (GSN0029).

In the end the word came to signify any kind of forced impressment into the service of the occupying power. In an occupied country citizens could be compelled to supply food, to provide billets, to carry baggage. Sometimes the occupying power exercised this right of compulsion in the most tyrannical and unsympathetic way. Always this threat of compulsion hung over the citizens. Palestine was an occupied country. At any moment a Jew might feel the touch of the flat of a Roman spear on his shoulder, and know that he was compelled to serve the Romans, it might be in the most menial way. That, in fact, is what happened to Simon of Cyrene, when he was compelled (*aggareuein*, GSN0029) to bear the Cross of Jesus.

So, then, what Jesus is saying is: "Suppose your masters come to you and compel you to be a guide or a porter for a mile. don't do a mile with bitter and obvious resentment; go two miles with cheerfulness and with a good grace." What Jesus is saying is: "Don't be always thinking of your liberty to do as you like, be always thinking of your duty and your privilege to be of service to others. When a task is laid on you, even if the task is unreasonable and hateful, don't do it as a grim duty to be resented; do it as a service to be gladly rendered."

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There are always two ways of doing things. A man can do the irreducible minimum and not a stroke more; he can do it in such a way as to make it clear that he hates the whole thing; he can do it with the barest minimum of efficiency and no more; or he can do it with a smile, with a gracious courtesy, with a determination, not only to do this thing, but to do it well and graciously. He can do it, not simply as well as he has to, but far better than anyone has any right to expect him to. The inefficient workman, the resentful servant, the ungracious helper have not even begun to have the right idea of the Christian life. The Christian is not concerned to do as he likes; he is concerned only to help, even when the demand for help is discourteous, unreasonable and tyrannical.

So, then, in this passage, under the guise of vivid eastern pictures Jesus is laying down three great rules--the Christian will never resent or seek retaliation for any insult, however calculated and however deadly; the Christian will never stand upon his legal rights or on any other rights he may believe himself to possess; the Christian will never think of his right to do as he likes, but always of his duty to be of help. The question is: How do we measure up to that?

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GRACIOUS GIVING

Matthew 5:38-42 (Part 3)

Finally, it is Jesus' demand that we should give to all who ask and never turn away from him who wishes to borrow. At its highest the Jewish law of giving was a lovely thing. It was based on Deut.15:7-11:

"If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin in you. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you. You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land."

The point about the seventh year is that in every seventh year there was a cancellation of debts; and the grudging and the calculating man might refuse to lend anything when the seventh year was near, lest the debt be cancelled and he lose what he had given.

It was on that passage that the Jewish law of giving was founded. The Rabbis laid down five principles which ought to govern giving.

(i) Giving must not be refused. "Be careful not to refuse charity, for everyone who refuses charity is put in the same category with idolators." If a man refuses to give, the day may well come when he has to beg--perhaps from the very people to whom he refused to give.

(ii) Giving must befit the man to whom the gift is given. The law of Deuteronomy had said that a man must be given whatever he lacks. That is to say, a man must not be given that bare sufficiency which will keep body and soul together; he must be given enough to enable him to retain at least something of the standard and the comfort which once he knew. So, it is said, Hillel arranged that the poverty-stricken son of a noble family should be given, not simply enough to keep him from starvation, but a horse to ride and a slave to run before him; and once, when no slave was available, Hillel himself acted as his slave and ran before him. There is something gracious and lovely in the idea that giving must not only remove actual poverty; it must do something also to remove the humiliation which poverty brings.

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(iii) Giving must be carried out privately and secretly. There must be no one else there. In fact, the Rabbis went the length of saying that in the highest kind of giving, the giver must not know to whom he was giving, and the receiver must not know from whom he was receiving. There was a certain place in the Temple to which people secretly came and gave their gifts; and these secret gifts were used in secrecy to help the impoverished members of once noble families, and to give the daughters of such impoverished ones the dowries without which they could not be married. The Jew would have regarded with abhorrence the gift which was given for the sake of prestige, publicity, or self-glorification.

(iv) The manner of giving must befit the character and the temperament of the recipient. The rule was that if a man had means, but was too miserly to use them, a gift must be given as a gift, but afterwards reclaimed from his estate as a loan. But if a man was too proud to ask for help, Rabbi Ishmael suggested that the giver should go to him and say, "My son, perhaps you need a loan." His self-respect was thus saved, but the loan was never to be asked back, and it was in fact, not a loan, but a gift. It was even laid down that if a man was unable to respond to an appeal for help, his very refusal must be such as to show that, if he could give nothing else, he at least gave sympathy. Even a refusal was to be such that it helped and did not hurt. Giving was to be carried out in such a way that the manner of the giving was to help as much as the gift.

(v) Giving was at once a privilege and an obligation for in reality all giving is nothing less than giving to God. To give to some needy person was not something which a man might choose to do; it was something he must do; for, if he refused, the refusal was to God. "He who befriends the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his good deed." "To every one who shows mercy to other men, mercy is shown from heaven; but to him who shows no mercy to other men, no mercy is shown from heaven." The Rabbis loved to point out that loving-kindness was one of the very few things to which the Law appointed no limit at all.

Are we then to say that Jesus urged upon men what can only be called indiscriminate giving? The answer cannot be given without qualification. It is clear that the effect of the giving on the receiver must be taken into account. Giving must never be such as to encourage him in laziness and in shiftlessness, for such giving can only hurt. But at the same time it must be remembered that many people who say that they will give only through official channels, and who refuse to help personal cases, are frequently merely producing an excuse for not giving at all, and are removing the personal element from giving altogether. And it must also be remembered that it is better to help a score of fraudulent beggars than to risk turning away the one man in real need.

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Matthew 5:43-48

CHRISTIAN LOVE

1. The Meaning of it

Matthew 5:43-48 (Part 1)

You have heard that it has been said: You shall love your neighbour, and you shall hate your enemy; but I say to you: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become the sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward can you expect? Do not even the tax-gatherers do that? If you greet only your brothers, where is there anything extra about that? Do not even the Gentiles do that? So, then, you must be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect.

C. G. Montefiore, the Jewish scholar, calls this "the central and most famous section" of the Sermon on the Mount. It is certainly true that there is no other passage of the New Testament which contains such a concentrated expression of the Christian ethic of personal relations. To the ordinary person this passage describes essential Christianity in action, and even the person who never darkens the door of the church knows that Jesus said this, and very often condemns the professing Christian for falling so far short of its demands.

When we study this passage we must first try to find out what Jesus was really saying, and what he was demanding of his followers. If we are to try to live this out, we must obviously first of all be quite clear as to what it is asking. What does Jesus mean by loving our enemies?

Greek is a language which is rich in synonyms; its words often have shades of meaning which English does not possess. In Greek there are four different words for love.

(i) There is the noun *storgi* with its accompanying verb *stergein*. These words are the characteristic words of family love. They are the words which describe the love of a parent for a child and a child for a parent. "A child," said Plato "loves (*stergein*) and is loved by those who brought him into the world." "Sweet is a father to his children," said Philemon, "if he has love (*storge*)." These words describe family affection.

(ii) There is the noun *eros* and the accompanying verb *eran* (compare GSN2037). These words describe the love of a man for a maid; there is always passion in them; and there is always sexual love. Sophocles described *eros* as "the terrible longing." In these words there is nothing essentially bad; they simply describe the passion of human love; but as time went on they began to be tinged with the idea of lust rather than love, and they never occur in the New Testament at all.

(iii) There is *philia* (GSN5373) with its accompanying verb *philein* (GSN5368). These are the warmest and the best Greek words for love. They describe real love, real affection. *Hot philountes* (GSN5368), the present participle, is the word which describes a man's closest and nearest and truest friends. It is the word which is used in the famous saying of Meander: "Whom the gods love,

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dies young." Philein (GSN5368) can mean to fondle or to kiss. It is the word of warm, tender affection, the highest kind of love.

(iv) There is agape (GSN0026) with its accompanying verb agapan (GSN0025). These words indicate unconquerable benevolence, invincible goodwill. (Agape (GSN0026) is the word which is used here.) If we regard a person with agape (GSN0026), it means that no matter what that person does to us, no matter how he treats us, no matter if he insults us or injures us or grieves us, we will never allow any bitterness against him to invade our hearts, but will regard him with that unconquerable benevolence and goodwill which will seek nothing but his highest good. From this certain things emerge.

(i) Jesus never asked us to love our enemies in the same way as we love our nearest and our dearest. The very word is different; to love our enemies in the same way as we love our nearest and our dearest would neither be possible nor right. This is a different kind of love.

(ii) Wherein does the main difference lie? In the case of our nearest and our dearest we cannot help loving them; we speak of falling in love; it is something which comes to us quite unsought; it is something which is born of the emotions of the heart. But in the case of our enemies, love is not only something of the heart, it is also something of the will. It is not something which we cannot help; it is something which we have to will ourselves into doing. It is in fact a victory over that which comes instinctively to the natural man.

Agape (GSN0026) does not mean a feeling of the heart, which we cannot help, and which comes unbidden and unsought; it means a determination of the mind, whereby we achieve this unconquerable goodwill even to those who hurt and injure us. Agape (GSN0026), someone has said, is the power to love those whom we do not like and who may not like us. In point of fact we can only have agape (GSN0026) when Jesus Christ enables us to conquer our natural tendency to anger and to bitterness, and to achieve this invincible goodwill to all men.

(iii) It is then quite obvious that the last thing agape (GSN0026), Christian love, means is that we allow people to do absolutely as they like, and that we leave them quite unchecked. No one would say that a parent really loves his child if he lets the child do as he likes. If we regard a person with invincible goodwill, it will often mean that we must punish him, that we must restrain him, that we must discipline him, that we must protect him against himself. But it will also mean that we do not punish him to satisfy our desire for revenge, but in order to make him a better man. It will always mean that all Christian discipline and all Christian punishment must be aimed, not at vengeance, but at cure. Punishment will never be merely retributive; it will always be remedial.

(iv) It must be noted that Jesus laid this love down as a basis for personal relationships. People use this passage as a basis for pacifism and as a text on which to speak about international relationships. Of course, it includes that, but first and foremost it deals with our personal relationships with our family and our neighbours and the people we meet with every day in life. It is very much easier to go about declaring that there should be no such thing as war between nation and nation, than to live a life in which we personally never allow any such thing as bitterness to invade our relationships with those we meet with every day. First and foremost, this commandment

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of Jesus deals with personal relationship. It is a commandment of which we should say first and foremost: "This means me."

(v) We must note that this commandment is possible only for a Christian. Only the grace of Jesus Christ can enable a man to have this unconquerable benevolence and this invincible goodwill in his personal relationships with other people. It is only when Christ lives in our hearts that bitterness will die and this love spring to life. It is often said that this world would be perfect if only people would live according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount; but the plain fact is that no one can even begin to live according to these principles without the help of Jesus Christ. We need Christ to enable us to obey Christ's command.

(vi) Lastly--and it may be most important of all--we must note that this commandment does not only involve allowing people to do as they like to us; it also involves that we should do something for them. We are bidden to pray for them. No man can pray for another man and still hate him. When he takes himself and the man whom he is tempted to hate to God, something happens. We cannot go on hating another man in the presence of God. The surest way of killing bitterness is to pray

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Matthew 5:43-48

CHRISTIAN LOVE

2. The Reason for it

Matthew 5:43-48 (Part 2)

We have seen what Jesus meant when he commanded us to have this Christian love; and now we must go on to see why he demanded that we should have it. Why, then, does Jesus demand that a man should have this love, this unconquerable benevolence, this invincible goodwill? The reason is very simple and tremendous--it is that such a love makes a man like God.

Jesus pointed to the action of God in the world, and that is the action of unconquerable benevolence. God makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil; he sends his rain on the just and the unjust. Rabbi Joshua ben Nehemiah used to say, "Have you ever noticed that the rain fell on the field of A, who was righteous, and not on the field of B, who was wicked? Or that the sun rose and shone on Israel, who was righteous, and not upon the Gentiles, who were wicked? God causes the sun to shine both on Israel and on the nations, for the Lord is good to all." Even the Jewish Rabbi was moved and impressed with the sheer benevolence of God to saint and sinner alike.

There is a rabbinic tale which tells of the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. When the Egyptians were drowned, so the tale runs, the angels began a paean of praise, but God said sorrowfully: "The work of my hands are sunk in the sea, and you would sing before me!" The love of God is such that he can never take pleasure in the destruction of any of the creatures whom his hands have made. The Psalmist had it: "The eyes of all look to thee; and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps.145:15). In God there is this universal benevolence even towards men who have broken his law and broken his heart.

Jesus says that we must have this love that we may become "the sons of our Father who is in heaven." Hebrew is not rich in adjectives; and for that reason Hebrew often uses son of... with an abstract noun, where we would use an adjective. For instance a son of peace is a peaceful man; a son of consolation is a consoling man. So, then, a son of God is a godlike man. The reason why we must have this unconquerable benevolence and goodwill is that God has it; and, if we have it, we become nothing less than sons of God, godlike men.

Here we have the key to one of the most difficult sentences in the New Testament, the sentence with which this passage finishes. Jesus said: "You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." On the face of it that sounds like a commandment which cannot possibly have anything to do with us. There is none of us who would even faintly connect ourselves with perfection.

The Greek word for perfect is *teleios* (GSN5046). This word is often used in Greek in a very special way. It has nothing to do with what we might call abstract, philosophical, metaphysical perfection. A victim which is fit for a sacrifice to God, that is a victim which is without blemish, is *teleios* (GSN5046). A man who has reached his full-grown stature is *teleios* (GSN5046) in

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Matthew 5:43-48

contradistinction to a half-grown lad. A student who has reached a mature knowledge of his subject is teleios (GSN5046) as opposed to a learner who is just beginning, and who as yet has no grasp of things.

To put it in another way, the Greek idea of perfection is functional. A thing is perfect if it fully realizes the purpose for which it was planned, and designed, and made. In point of fact, that meaning is involved in the derivation of the word. Teleios (GSN5046) is the adjective formed from the noun telos (GSN5056). Telos (GSN5056) means an end, a purpose, an aim, a goal. A thing is teleios (GSN5046), if it realizes the purpose for which it was planned; a man is perfect if he realizes the purpose for which he was created and sent into the world.

Let us take a very simple analogy. Suppose in my house there is a screw loose, and I want to tighten and adjust this screw. I go out to the ironmonger and I buy a screw-driver. I find that the screw-driver exactly fits the grip of my hand; it is neither too large nor too small, too rough nor too smooth. I lay the screw-driver on the slot of the screw, and I find that it exactly fits. I then turn the screw and the screw is fixed. In the Greek sense, and especially in the New Testament sense, that screw-driver is teleios (GSN5046), because it exactly fulfilled the purpose for which I desired and bought it.

So, then, a man will be teleios (GSN5046) if he fulfils the purpose for which he was created. For what purpose was man created? The Bible leaves us in no doubt as to that. In the old creation story we find God saying, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness" (Gen.1:26). Man was created to be like God. The characteristic of God is this universal benevolence, this unconquerable goodwill, this constant seeking of the highest good of every man. The great characteristic of God is love to saint and to sinner alike. No matter what men do to him, God seeks nothing but their highest good.

The hymn has it of Jesus:

"Thy foes might hate, despise, revile,
Thy friends unfaithful prove;
Unwearied in forgiveness still,
Thy heart could only love."

It is when man reproduces in his life the unwearied, forgiving, sacrificial benevolence of God that he becomes like God, and is therefore perfect in the New Testament sense of the word. To put it at its simplest, the man who cares most for men is the most perfect man.

It is the whole teaching of the Bible that we realise our manhood only by becoming godlike. The one thing which makes us like God is the love which never ceases to care for men, no matter what men do to it. We realize our manhood, we enter upon Christian perfection, when we learn to forgive as God forgives, and to love as God loves.

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Matthew 6:1-18

THE REWARD MOTIVE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Matthew 6:1-18

When we study the opening verses of Matt.6, we are immediately confronted with one most important question-- What is the place of the reward motive in the Christian life? Three times in this section Jesus speaks of God rewarding those who have given to him the kind of service which he desires (Matt.6:4,6; Matt.6:18). This question is so important that we will do well to pause to examine it before we go on to study the chapter in detail.

It is very often stated that the reward motive has no place whatsoever in the Christian life. It is held that we must be good for the sake of being good, that virtue is its own reward, and that the whole conception of reward must be banished from the Christian life. There was an old saint who used to say that he would wish to quench all the fires of hell with water, and to bum up all the joys of heaven with fire, in order that men seek for goodness nor nothing but goodness' sake, and in order that the idea of reward and punishment might be totally eliminated from life.

On the face of it that point of view is very fine and noble; but it is not the point of view which Jesus held. We have already seen that three times in this passage Jesus speaks about reward. The right kind of almsgiving, the right kind of prayer, and the right kind of fasting will all have their reward.

Nor is this an isolated instance of the idea of reward in the teaching of Jesus. He says of those who loyally bear persecution, who suffer insult without bitterness, that their reward will be great in heaven (Matt.5:12). He says that whoever gives to one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple will not lose his reward (Matt.10:42). At least part of the teaching of the parable of the talents is that faithful service will receive its reward (Matt.25:14-30). In the parable of the last judgment the plain teaching is that there is reward and punishment in accordance with our reaction to the needs of our fellow-men (Matt.25:31-46). It is abundantly clear that Jesus did not hesitate to speak in terms of rewards and punishments. And it may well be that we ought to be careful that we do not try to be more spiritual than Jesus was in our thinking about this matter of reward. There are certain obvious facts which we must note.

(i) It is an obvious rule of life that any action which achieves nothing is futile and meaningless. A goodness which achieves no end would be a meaningless goodness. As has been very truly said: "Unless a thing is good for something, it is good for nothing." Unless the Christian life has an aim and a goal which it is a joy to obtain, it becomes largely without meaning. He who believes in the Christian way and the Christian promise cannot believe that goodness can have no result beyond itself

(ii) To banish all rewards and punishments from the idea of religion is in effect to say that injustice has the last word. It cannot reasonably be held that the end of the good man and the end of the bad man are one and the same. That would simply mean that God does not care whether men are good or not. It would mean, to put it crudely and bluntly, that there is no point in being good,

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Matthew 6:1-18

and no special reason why a man should live one kind of life instead of another. To eliminate all rewards and punishments is really to say that in God there is neither justice nor love.

Rewards and punishments are necessary in order to make sense of life. A. E. Housman wrote:

Yonder, on the morning blink, The sun is up, and so must I, To wash and dress and eat and drink
And look at things and talk and think And work, and God knows why. And often have I washed
and dressed, And what's to show for all my pain? Let me lie abed and rest; Ten thousand times I've
done my best, And all's to do again."

If there are no rewards and no punishments, then that poem's view of life is true. Action is meaningless and all effort goes unavailingly whistling down the wind.

(i) The Christian Idea of Reward

But having gone this length with the idea of reward in the Christian life, there are certain things about which we must be clear.

(i) When Jesus spoke of reward, he was very definitely not thinking in terms of material reward. It is quite true that in the Old Testament the idea of goodness and prosperity are closely connected. If a man prospered, if his fields were fertile and his harvest great, if his children were many and his fortune large, it was taken as a proof that he was a good man.

That is precisely the problem at the back of the Book of Job. Job is in misfortune; his friends come to him to argue that that misfortune must be the result of his own sin; and Job most vehemently denies that charge. "Think now," said Eliphaz, "who that was innocent ever perished?" (Jb.4:7) "If you are pure and upright," said Bildad, "surely then he would rouse himself for you and reward you with a rightful habitation" (Jb.8:6). "For you say, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in God's eyes," said Zophar, "but oh that God would speak and open his lips to you" (Jb.11:4). The very idea that the Book of Job was written to contradict is that goodness and material prosperity go hand in hand.

"I have been young, and now am old," said the Psalmist, "yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, or his children begging bread" (Ps.37:25). "A thousand may fall at your side," said the Psalmist, "and ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent" (Ps.91:7-10). These are things that Jesus could never have said. It was certainly not material prosperity which Jesus promised his disciples. He in fact promised them trial and tribulation, suffering, persecution and death. Quite certainly Jesus did not think in terms of material rewards.

(ii) The second thing which it is necessary to remember is that the highest reward never comes to him who is seeking it. If a man is always seeking reward, always reckoning up that which he believes himself to be earning, then he will in fact miss the reward for which he is seeking. And he will miss it because he is looking at God and looking at life in the wrong way. A man who is

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Matthew 6:1-18

always calculating his reward is thinking of God in terms of a judge or an accountant, and above all he is thinking of life in terms of law. He is thinking of doing so much and earning so much. He is thinking of life in terms of a credit and debit balance sheet. He is thinking of presenting an account to God and of saying, "I have done so much. Now I claim my reward."

The basic mistake of this point of view is that it thinks of life in terms of law, instead of love. If we love a person deeply and passionately, humbly and selflessly, we will be quite sure that if we give that person all we have to give, we will still be in default, that if we give that person the sun, the moon and the stars, we will still be in debt. He who is in love is always in debt; the last thing that enters his mind is that he has earned a reward. If a man has a legal view of life, he may think constantly in terms of reward that he has won; if a man has a loving view of life, the idea of reward will never enter his mind.

The great paradox of Christian reward is this--the person who looks for reward, and who calculates that it is due to him, does not receive it; the person whose only motive is love, and who never thinks that he has deserved any reward, does, in fact, receive it. The strange fact is that reward is at one and the same time the by-product and the ultimate end of the Christian life.

(ii) The Christian Reward

We must now go on to ask: What are the rewards of the Christian life?

(i) We begin by noting one basic and general truth. We have already seen that Jesus Christ does not think in terms of material reward at all. The rewards of the Christian life are rewards only to a spiritually minded person. To the materially minded person they would not be rewards at all. The Christian rewards are rewards only to a Christian.

(ii) The first of the Christian rewards is satisfaction. The doing of the right thing, obedience to Jesus Christ, the taking of his way, whatever else it may or may not bring, always brings satisfaction. It may well be that, if a man does the right thing, and obeys Jesus Christ, he may lose his fortune and his position, he may end in gaol or on the scaffold, he may finish up in unpopularity, loneliness and disrepute, but he will still possess that inner satisfaction, which is greater than all the rest put together. No price-ticket can be put upon this; this is not to be evaluated in terms of earthly currency, but there is nothing like it in all the world. It brings that contentment which is the crown of life.

The poet George Herbert was a member of a little group of friends who used to meet to play their musical instruments together like a little orchestra. Once he was on his way to a meeting of this group, when he passed a carter whose cart was stuck in the mud of the ditch. George Herbert laid aside his instrument and went to the help of the man. It was a long job to get the cart out, and he finished covered with mud. When he arrived at the house of his friends, it was too late for music. He told them what had detained him on the way. One said: "You have missed all the music." George Herbert smiled. "Yes," he said. "but I will have songs at midnight." He had the satisfaction of having done the Christlike thing.

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Matthew 6:1-18

Godfrey Winn tells of a man who was the greatest plastic surgeon in Britain. During the war, he gave up a private practice, which brought him in 10,000 British pounds per year, to devote all his time to remoulding the faces and the bodies of airmen who had been burned and mutilated in battle. Godfrey Winn said to him, "What's your ambition, Mac?" Back came the answer, "I want to be a good craftsman." The 10,000 British pounds per year was nothing compared with the satisfaction of a selfless job well done.

Once a woman stopped Dale of Birmingham on the street. "God bless you, Dr. Dale," she said. She absolutely refused to give her name. She only thanked him and blessed him and passed on. Dale at the moment had been much depressed. "But," he said, "the mist broke, the sunlight came; I breathed the free air of the mountains of God." In material things he was not one penny the richer, but in the deep satisfaction, which comes to the preacher who discovers he has helped someone, he had gained wealth untold.

The first Christian reward is the satisfaction which no money on earth can buy.

(iii) The second reward of the Christian life is still more work to do. It is the paradox of the Christian idea of reward that a task well done does not bring rest and comfort and ease; it brings still greater demands and still more strenuous endeavours. In the parable of the talents the reward of the faithful servants was still greater responsibility (Matt.25:14-30). When a teacher gets a really brilliant and able scholar, he does not exempt him from work; he gives him harder work than is given to anyone else. The brilliant young musician is given, not easier, but harder music to master. The lad who has played well in the second eleven is not put into the third eleven, where he could walk through the game without breaking sweat; he is put into the first eleven where he has to play his heart out. The Jews had a curious saying. They said that a wise teacher will treat the pupil "like a young heifer whose burden is increased daily." The Christian reward is the reverse of the world's reward.

The world's reward would be an easier time; the reward of the Christian is that God lays still more and more upon a man to do for him and for his fellow-men. The harder the work we are given to do, the greater the reward.

(iv) The third, and the final, Christian reward is what men all through the ages have called the vision of God. For the worldly man, who has never given a thought to God, to be confronted with God will be a terror and not a joy. If a man takes his own way, he drifts farther and farther from God; the gulf between him and God becomes ever wider, until in the end God becomes a grim stranger, whom he only wishes to avoid. But, if a man all his life has sought to walk with God, if he has sought to obey his Lord, if goodness has been his quest through all his days, then all his life he has been growing closer and closer to God, until in the end he passes into God's nearer presence, without fear and with radiant joy--and that is the greatest reward of all.

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Matthew 6:1

RIGHT THINGS FROM THE WRONG MOTIVE

Matthew 6:1

Take care not to try to demonstrate how good you are in the presence of men, in order to be seen by them. If you do, you have no reward with your Father in heaven.

To the Jew there were three great cardinal works of the religious life, three great pillars on which the good life was based--almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Jesus would not for a moment have disputed that; what troubled him was that so often in human life the finest things were done from the wrong motives.

It is the strange fact that these three great cardinal good works readily lend themselves to wrong motives. It was Jesus' warning that, when these things were done with the sole intention of bringing glory to the doer, they lost by far the most important part of their value. A man may give alms, not really to help the person to whom he gives, but simply to demonstrate his own generosity, and to bask in the warmth of some one's gratitude and all men's praise. A man may pray in such a way that his prayer is not really addressed to God, but to his fellow-men. His praying may simply be an attempt to demonstrate his exceptional piety in such a way that no one can fail to see it. A man may fast, not really for the good of his own soul, not really to humble himself in the sight of God, but simply to show the world what a splendidly self-disciplined character he is. A man may practise good works simply to win praise from men, to increase his own prestige, and to show the world how good he is.

As Jesus saw it, there is no doubt at all that that kind of thing does receive a certain kind of reward. Three times Jesus uses the phrase, as the Revised Standard Version has it: "Truly I say to you, they have their reward" (Matt.6:2,5; Matt.6:16). It would be better to translate it: "They have received payment in full." The word that is used in the Greek is the verb *apechein* (GSN0568), which was the technical business and commercial word for receiving payment in full. It was the word which was used on receipted accounts. For instance, one man signs a receipt given to another man: "I have received (*apecho*, GSN0568) from you the rent of the olive press which you have on hire." A tax collector gives a receipt, saying, "I have received (*apecho*, GSN0568) from you the tax which is due." A man sells a slave and gives a receipt, saying, "I have received (*apecho*, GSN0568) the whole price due to me."

What Jesus is saying is this: "If you give alms to demonstrate your own generosity, you will get the admiration of men--but that is all you will ever get. That is your payment in full. If you pray in such a way as to flaunt your piety in the face of men, you will gain the reputation of being an extremely devout man--but that is all you will ever get. That is your payment in full. If you fast in such a way that all men know that you are fasting, you will become known as an extremely abstemious and ascetic man--but that is all you will ever get. That is your payment in full." Jesus is saying, "If your one aim is to get yourself the world's rewards, no doubt you will get them--but you must not look for the rewards which God alone can give." And he would be a sadly short-sighted creature who grasped the rewards of time, and let the rewards of eternity go.

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Matthew 6:2-4

HOW NOT TO GIVE

Matthew 6:2-4 (Part 1)

So, when you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. This is the truth I tell you--they are paid in full. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms-giving may be in secret, and your Father who sees what happens in secret will give you your reward in full.

To the Jew almsgiving was the most sacred of all religious duties. How sacred it was may be seen from the fact that the Jews used the same word--tsedaqah (HSN6666)--both for righteousness and almsgiving. To give alms and to be righteous were one and the same thing. To give alms was to gain merit in the sight of God, and was even to win atonement and forgiveness for past sins. "It is better to give alms than to lay up gold; almsgiving doth deliver from death, and it purges away all sin" (Tob.12:8).

"Almsgiving to a father shall not be blotted out,
And as a substitute for sins it shall stand firmly planted.
In the day of affliction it shall be remembered to thy credit.
It shall obliterate thine iniquities as the heat, the hoar-frost."
(Ecc.3:14-15).

There was a rabbinic saying: "Greater is he who gives alms than he who offers all sacrifices." Almsgiving stood first in the catalogue of good works.

It was then natural and inevitable that the man who desired to be good should concentrate on almsgiving. The highest teaching of the Rabbis was exactly the same as the teaching of Jesus. They too forbade ostentatious almsgiving. "He who gives alms in secret," they said, "is greater than Moses." The almsgiving which saves from death is that "when the recipient does not know from whom he gets it, and when the giver does not know to whom he gives it." There was a Rabbi who, when he wished to give alms, dropped money behind him, so that he would not see who picked it up. "It were better" they said, "to give a man nothing, than to give him something, and to put him to shame." There was one particularly lovely custom connected with the Temple. In the Temple there was a room called The Chamber of the Silent. People who wished to make atonement for some sin placed money there; and poor people from good families who had come down in the world were secretly helped by these contributions.

But as in so many other things practice fell far short of precept. Too often the giver gave in such a way that all men might see the gift, and gave far more to bring glory to himself than to bring help to someone else. During the synagogue services, offerings were taken for the poor, and there were those who took good care that others should see how much they gave. J. J. Wetstein quotes an eastern custom from the ancient days: "In the east water is so scarce that sometimes it had to be bought. When a man wanted to do a good act, and to bring blessing on his family, he went to a water-carrier with a good voice, and instructed him: 'Give the thirsty a drink.' The water-carrier

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Matthew 6:2-4

filled his skin and went to the market-place. 'O thirsty ones,' he cried, 'come to drink the offering.' And the giver stood by him and said, 'Bless me, who gave you this drink.'" That is precisely the kind of thing that Jesus condemns. He talks about the hypocrites who do things like that. The word hupokrites (GSN5273) is the Greek word for an actor. People like that put on an act of giving which is designed only to glorify themselves.

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Matthew 6:2-4

THE MOTIVES OF GIVING

Matthew 6:2-4 (Part 2)

Let us now look at some of the motives which lie behind the act of giving.

(i) A man may give from a sense of duty. He may give not because he wishes to give, but because he feels that giving is a duty which he cannot well escape. It may even be that a man can come--perhaps unconsciously--to regard the poor as being in the world to allow him to carry out this duty, and thus to acquire merit in the sight of God.

Catherine Carswell in her autobiography, *Lying Awake*, tells of her early days in Glasgow: "The poor, one might say, were our pets. Decidedly they were always with us. In our particular ark we were taught to love, honour and entertain the poor." The key-note, as she looked back upon it, was superiority and condescension. Giving was regarded as a duty, but often with the giving there was a moral lecture which provided a smug pleasure for the man who gave it. In those days Glasgow was a drunken city on a Saturday night. She writes: "Every Sunday afternoon, for some years, my father went a round of the cells of the police station, bailing out the week-end drunks with half-crowns, so that they might not lose their jobs on Monday morning. He asked each one to sign the pledge, and to return his half-crown out of the next week's wages." No doubt he was perfectly right, but he gave from a smug eminence of respectability, and included a moral lecture in the giving.

He clearly felt himself to be in a quite different moral category from those to whom he gave. It was said of a great, but superior man: "With all his giving he never gives himself" When a man gives, as it were, from a pedestal, when he gives always with a certain calculation, when he gives from a sense of duty, even a sense of Christian duty, he may give generously of things, but the one thing he never gives is himself, and therefore the giving is incomplete.

(ii) A man may give from motives of prestige. He may give to get to himself the glory of giving. The chances are that, if no one is to know about it, or, if there is no publicity attached to it, he would not give at all. Unless he is duly thanked and praised and honoured, he is sadly disgruntled and discontented. He gives, not to the glory of God, but to the glory of himself. He gives, not primarily to help the poor person, but to gratify his own vanity and his own sense of power.

(iii) A man may give simply because he has to. He may give simply because the overflowing love and kindness in his heart will allow him to do no other. He may give because, try as he may, he cannot rid himself of a sense of responsibility for the man in need.

There was a kind of vast kindness about Dr. Johnson. There was a poverty-stricken creature called Robert Levett. Levett in his day had been a waiter in Paris and a doctor in the poorer parts of London. He had an appearance and manners, as Johnson said himself, such as to disgust the rich and to terrify the poor. Somehow or other he became a member of Johnson's household. Boswell was amazed at the whole business, but Goldsmith knew Johnson better. He said of Levett: "He is poor and honest which is recommendation enough for Johnson. He is now become miserable, and that insures the protection of Johnson." Misfortune was a passport to Johnson's heart.

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Matthew 6:2-4

Boswell tells this story of Johnson. "Coming home late one night he found a poor woman lying on the street, so much exhausted that she could not walk: he took her upon his back and carried her to his house, where he discovered that she was one of these wretched females, who had fallen into the lowest state of vice, poverty and disease. Instead of harshly upbraiding her, he had her taken care of with all tenderness for a long time, at considerable expense, till she was restored to health, and endeavoured to put her in a virtuous way of living." All that Johnson got out of that was unworthy suspicions about his own character, but the heart of the man demanded that he should give.

Surely one of the loveliest pictures in literary history is the picture of Johnson, in his own days of poverty, coming home in the small hours of the morning, and, as he walked along the Strand, slipping pennies into the hands of the waifs and strays who were sleeping in the doorways because they had nowhere else to go. Hawkins tells that one asked him how he could bear to have his house filled with "necessitous and undeserving people." Johnson answered: "If I did not assist them no one else would, and they must not be lost for want." There you have real giving, the giving which is the upsurge of love in the heart of a man, the giving which is a kind of overflow of the love of God.

We have the pattern of this perfect giving in Jesus Christ himself. Paul wrote to his friends at Corinth: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2Cor.8:9). Our giving must never be the grim and self-righteous outcome of a sense of duty, still less must it be done to enhance our own glory and prestige among men; it must be the instinctive outflow of the loving heart; we must give to others as Jesus Christ gave himself to us.

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Matthew 6:5-8

HOW NOT TO PRAY

Matthew 6:5-8 (Part 1)

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they are fond of praying standing in the synagogues and at the corners of the streets, so that they may be seen by people. This is the truth I tell you--they are paid in full. But when you pray, go into your private room, and shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what happens in secret will give you your reward in full. When you pray, do not pile up meaningless phrases, as the Gentiles do, for their idea is that they will be heard because of the length of their words. So, then, do not be like them, for your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.

No nation ever had a higher ideal of prayer than the Jews had; and no religion ever ranked prayer higher in the scale of priorities than the Jews did. "Great is prayer," said the Rabbis, "greater than all good works." One of the loveliest things that was ever said about family worship is the Rabbinic saying, "He who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall that is stronger than iron." The only regret of the Rabbis was that it was not possible to pray all the day long.

But certain faults had crept into the Jewish habits of prayer. It is to be noted that these faults are by no means peculiar to Jewish ideas of prayer; they can and do occur anywhere. And it is to be noted that they could only occur in a community where prayer was taken with the greatest seriousness. They are not the faults of neglect; they are the faults of misguided devotion.

(i) Prayer tended to become formalized. There were two things the daily use of which was prescribed for every Jew.

The first was the Shema (compare HSN8088), which consists of three short passages of scripture--Deut.6:4-9; Deut.11:13-21; Num.15:37-41. Shema is the imperative of the Hebrew word to hear (HSN8085), and the Shema takes its name from the verse which was the essence and center of the whole matter: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord."

The full Shema had to be recited by every Jew every morning and every evening. It had to be said as early as possible. It had to be said as soon as the light was strong enough to enable a man to distinguish between blue and white, or, as Rabbi Eliezer said, between blue and green. In any event it had to be said before the third hour, that is, 9 a.m.; and in the evening it had to be said before 9 p.m. If the last possible moment for the saying of the Shema had come, no matter where a man found himself, at home, in the street, at work, in the synagogue, he must stop and say it.

There were many who loved the Shema and who repeated it with reverence and adoration and love; but inevitably there were still more who gabbled their way through it, and went their way. The Shema had every chance of becoming a vain repetition, which men mumbled through like some spell or incantation. We Christians are but ill-qualified to criticise, for everything that has been said about formally gabbling through the Shema can be said about grace before meat in many a family.

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Matthew 6:5-8

The second thing which every Jew must daily repeat was called the Shemoneh 'Esreh which means The Eighteen. It consisted of eighteen prayers, and was, and still is, an essential part of the synagogue service. In time the prayers became nineteen, but the old name remains. Most of these prayers are quite short, and nearly all of them are very lovely.

The twelfth runs:

"Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be showed upon the upright, the humble, the elders of thy people Israel, and the rest of its teachers; be favourable to the pious strangers amongst us, and to us all. Give thou a good reward to those who sincerely trust in thy name, that our lot may be cast among them in the world to come, that our hope be not deceived. Praised be thou, O Lord, who art the hope and confidence of the faithful."

The fifth runs:

Bring us back to thy law, O our Father; bring us back, O King, to thy service; bring us back to thee by true repentance. Praised be thou, O Lord who dost accept our repentance,

No Church possesses a more beautiful liturgy than the Shemoneh 'Esreh The law was that the Jew must recite it three times a day, once in the morning, once in the afternoon, and once in the evening. The same thing happened again. The devout Jew prayed it with loving devotion; but there were many to whom this series of lovely prayers became a gabbled formula. There was even a summary supplied which a man might pray, if he had not the time or the memory to repeat the whole eighteen. The repetition of the Shemoneh 'Esreh became nothing more than the superstitious incantation of a spell. Again, we Christians are ill-qualified to criticise, for there are many occasions when we do precisely the same with the prayer which taught us to pray.

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Matthew 6:5-8

HOW NOT TO PRAY

Matthew 6:5-8 (Part 2)

(ii) Further, the Jewish liturgy supplied stated prayers for all occasions. There was hardly an event or a sight in life which had not its stated formula of prayer. There was prayer before and after each meal; there were prayers in connection with the light, the fire, the lightning, on seeing the new moon, comets, rain, tempest, at the sight of the sea, lakes, rivers, on receiving good news, on using new furniture, on entering or leaving a city. Everything had its prayer. Clearly there is something infinitely lovely here. It was the intention that every happening in life should be brought into the presence of God.

But just because the prayers were so meticulously prescribed and stated, the whole system lent itself to formalism, and the danger was for the prayers to slip off the tongue with very little meaning. The tendency was glibly to repeat the right prayer at the right time. The great Rabbis knew that and tried to guard against it. "If a man," they said, "says his prayers, as if to get through a set task, that is no prayer." "Do not look on prayer as a formal duty, but as an act of humility by which to obtain the mercy of God." Rabbi Eliezer was so impressed with the danger of formalism that it was his custom to compose one new prayer every day, that his prayer might be always fresh. It is quite clear that this kind of danger is not confined to Jewish religion. Even quiet times which began in devotion can end in the formalism of a rigid and ritualistic timetable.

(iii) Still further, the devout Jew had set times for prayer. The hours were the third, the sixth and the ninth hours, that is, 9 a.m., 12 midday and 3 p.m. In whatever place a man found himself he was bound to pray. Clearly he might be genuinely remembering God, or he might be carrying out an habitual formality. The Mohammedans have the same custom. There is a story of a Mohammedan who was pursuing an enemy with drawn knife to kill him. The muezzin rang out; he stopped, unrolled his prayer mat, knelt and raced through his prayer; and then rose to continue his murderous pursuit. It is a lovely thing that three times a day a man should remember God; but there is very real danger that it may come to no more than this that three times a day a man gabbles his prayers without a thought of God.

(iv) There was a tendency to connect prayer with certain places, and especially with the synagogue. It is undeniably true that there are certain places where God seems very near, but there were certain Rabbis who went the length of saying that prayer was efficacious only if it was offered in the Temple or in the synagogue. So there grew up the custom of going to the Temple at the hours of prayer. In the first days of the Christian Church, even the disciples of Jesus thought in terms like these, for we read of Peter and John going up to the Temple at the hour of prayer (Ac.3:1).

There was a danger here, the danger that a man might come to think of God as being confined to certain holy places and that he might forget that the whole earth is the temple of God. The wisest of the Rabbis saw this danger. They said, "God says to Israel, pray in the synagogue of your city; if you cannot, pray in the field; if you cannot, pray in your house; if you cannot, pray on your bed; if you cannot, commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still."

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The trouble about any system lies, not in the system, but in the men who use it. A man may make any system of prayer an instrument of devotion or a formality, glibly and unthinkingly to be gone through.

(v) There was amongst the Jews an undoubted tendency towards long prayers. That was a tendency by no means confined to the Jews. In 18th century worship in Scotland length meant devotion. In such a Scottish service there was a verse by verse lecture on scripture which lasted for an hour, and a sermon which lasted for another hour. Prayers were lengthy and extempore. Dr. W. D. Maxwell writes, "The efficacy of prayer was measured by its ardour and its fluency, and not least by its fervid lengthiness." Rabbi Levi said, "Whoever is long in prayer is heard." Another saying has it: "Whenever the righteous make their prayer long, their prayer is heard."

There was--and still is--a kind of subconscious idea that if men batter long enough at God's door, he will answer; that God can be talked, and even pestered, into condescension. The wisest Rabbis were well aware of this danger. One of them said, "It is forbidden to lengthen out the praise of the Holy One. It says in the Psalms: 'Who can utter the mighty doings of the Lord, or show forth all his praise?' (Ps.106:2). There only he who can may lengthen out and tell his praise--but no one can." "Let a man's words before God always be few, as it is said, 'Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter a word before God; for God is in heaven, and you upon earth, therefore let your words be few'" (Ecc.5:2). "The best adoration consists in keeping silence." It is easy to confound verbosity with piety, and fluency with devotion, and into that mistake many of the Jews fell.

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Matthew 6:5-8 (Part 3)

(vi) There were certain other forms of repetition, which the Jews, like all eastern peoples, were apt to use and to overuse. The eastern peoples had a habit of hypnotising themselves by the endless repetition of one phrase or even of one word. In 1 Kgs. 18:26 we read how the prophets of Baal cried out, "O Baal answer us," for the space of half a day. In Ac. 19:34 we read how the Ephesian mob, for two hours, kept shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." The Mohammedans will go on repeating the sacred syllable HE for hours on end, running round in circles, until they drive themselves to ecstasy, and finally fall down unconscious in total exhaustion. The Jews did that with the Shema. It is a kind of substitution of self-hypnotism for prayer.

There was another way in which Jewish prayer used repetition. There was an attempt to pile up every possible title and adjective in the address of the prayer to God. One famous prayer begins:

"Blessed, praised, and glorified, exalted, extolled and honoured, magnified and lauded be the name of the Holy One."

There is one Jewish prayer which actually begins with sixteen different adjectives attached to the name of God. There was a kind of intoxication with words. When a man begins to think more of how he is praying than of what he is praying, his prayer dies upon his lips.

(vii) The final fault which Jesus found with certain of the Jews was that they prayed to be seen of men. The Jewish system of prayer made ostentation very easy. The Jew prayed standing, with hands stretched out, palms upwards, and with head bowed. Prayer had to be said at 9 a.m., 12 midday, and 3 p.m. It had to be said wherever a man might be, and it was easy for a man to make sure that at these hours he was at a busy street corner, or in a crowded city square, so that all the world might see with what devotion he prayed. It was easy for a man to halt on the top step of the entrance to the synagogue, and there pray lengthily and demonstratively, so that all men might admire his exceptional piety. It was easy to put on an act of prayer which all the world might see.

The wisest of the Jewish Rabbis fully understood and unsparingly condemned this attitude. "A man in whom is hypocrisy brings wrath upon the world, and his prayer is not heard." "Four classes of men do not receive the face of the glory of God--the mockers, the hypocrites, the liars, and the slanderers." The Rabbis said that no man could pray at all, unless his heart was attuned to pray. They laid it down that for perfect prayer there were necessary an hour of private preparation beforehand, and an hour of meditation afterwards. But the Jewish system of prayer did lend itself to ostentation, if in a man's heart there was pride.

In effect, Jesus lays down two great rules for prayer.

(i) He insists that all true prayer must be offered to God. The real fault of the people whom Jesus was criticising was that they were praying to men and not to God. A certain great preacher once described an ornate and elaborate prayer offered in a Boston Church as "the most eloquent prayer

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ever offered to a Boston audience." The preacher was much more concerned with impressing the congregation than with making contact with God. Whether in public or in private prayer, a man should have no thought in his mind and no desire in his heart but God.

(ii) He insists that we must always remember that the God to whom we pray is a God of love who is more ready to answer than we are to pray. His gifts and his grace have not to be unwillingly extracted from him. We do not come to a God who has to be coaxed, or pestered, or battered into answering our prayers. We come to one whose one wish is to give. When we remember that, it is surely sufficient to go to God with the sigh of desire in our hearts, and on our lips the words, "Thy will be done."

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Matthew 6:9-15

THE DISCIPLE'S PRAYER

Matthew 6:9-15

So, then, pray in this way: Our Father in heaven, let your name be held holy: Let your Kingdom come: Let your will be done, as in heaven, so upon earth: Give us to-day bread for the coming day: Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One. For, if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you too; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Before we begin to think about the Lord's Prayer in detail there are certain general facts which we will do well to remember about it.

We must note, first of all, that this is a prayer which taught his disciples to pray. Both Matthew and Luke are clear about that. Matthew sets the whole Sermon on the Mount in the context of the disciples (Matt.5:1); and Luke tells us that Jesus taught this prayer in response to the request of one of his disciples (Lk.11:1). The Lord's Prayer is a prayer which only a disciple can pray; it is a prayer which only one who is committed to Jesus Christ can take upon his lips with any meaning.

The Lord's Prayer is not a child's prayer, as it is so often regarded; it is, in fact, not meaningful for a child. The Lord's Prayer is not the Family Prayer as it is sometimes called, unless by the word family we mean the family of the Church. The Lord's Prayer is specifically and definitely stated to be the disciple's prayer; and only on the lips of a disciple has the prayer its full meaning. To put it in another way, the Lord's Prayer can only really be prayed when the man who prays it knows what he is saying, and he cannot know that until he has entered into discipleship.

We must note the order of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer. The first three petitions have to do with God and with the glory of God; the second three petitions have to do with our needs and our necessities. That is to say, God is first given his supreme place, and then, and only then, we turn to ourselves and our needs and desires. It is only when God is given his proper place that all other things fall into their proper places. Prayer must never be an attempt to bend the will of God to our desires; prayer ought always to be an attempt to submit our wills to the will of God.

The second part of the prayer, the part which deals with our needs and our necessities, is a marvellously wrought unity. It deals with the three essential needs of man, and the three spheres of time within which man moves. First, it asks for bread, for that which is necessary for the maintenance of life, and thereby brings the needs of the present to the throne of God. Second, it asks for forgiveness and thereby brings the past into the presence of God. Third, it asks for help in temptation and thereby commits all the future into the hands of God. In these three brief petitions, we are taught to lay the present, the past, and the future before the footstool of the grace of God.

But not only is this a prayer which brings the whole of life to the presence of God; it is also a prayer which brings the whole of God to our lives. When we ask for bread to sustain our earthly lives, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the Father, the Creator and the Sustainer of all life. When we ask for forgiveness, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the

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Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Redeemer. When we ask for help for future temptation, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Strengthener, the Illuminator, the Guide and the Guardian of our way.

In the most amazing way this brief second part of the Lord's Prayer takes the present, the past, and the future, the whole of man's life, and presents them to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, to God in all his fulness. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us to bring the whole of life to the whole of God, and to bring the whole of God to the whole of life.

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Matthew 6:9

THE FATHER IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:9 (Part 1)

Our Father in Heaven.

It might well be said that the word Father used of God is a compact summary of the Christian faith. The great value of this word Father is that it settles all the relationships of this life.

(i) It settles our relationship to the unseen world. Missionaries tell us that one of the greatest reliefs which Christianity brings to the heathen mind and heart is the certainty that there is only one God. It is the heathen belief that there are hordes of gods, that every stream and river, and tree and valley, and hill and wood, and every natural force has its own god. The heathen lives in a world crowded with gods. Still further, all these gods are jealous, and grudging, and hostile. They must all be placated, and a man can never be sure that he has not omitted the honour due to some of these gods. The consequence is that the heathen lives in terror of the gods; he is "haunted and not helped by his religion."

The most significant Greek legend of the gods is the legend of Prometheus. Prometheus was a god. It was in the days before men possessed fire; and life without fire was a cheerless and a comfortless thing. In pity Prometheus took fire from heaven and gave it as a gift to men. Zeus, the king of the gods, was mightily angry that men should receive this gift. So he took Prometheus and he chained him to a rock in the middle of the Adriatic Sea, where he was tortured with the heat and the thirst of the day, and the cold of the night. Even more, Zeus prepared a vulture to tear out Prometheus' liver, which always grew again, only to be torn out again.

That is what happened to the god who tried to help men. The whole conception is that the gods are jealous, and vengeful, and grudging; and the last thing the gods wish to do is to help men. That is the heathen idea of the attitude of the unseen world to men. The heathen is haunted by the fear of a horde of jealous and grudging gods. So, then, when we discover that the God to whom we pray has the name and the heart of a father it makes literally all the difference in the world. We need no longer shiver before a horde of jealous gods; we can rest in a father's love.

(ii) It settles our relationship to the seen world, to this world of space and time in which we live. It is easy to think of this world as a hostile world. There are the chances and the changes of life; there are the iron laws of the universe which we break at our peril; there is suffering and death; but if we can be sure that behind this world there is, not a capricious, jealous, mocking god, but a God whose name is Father, then although much may still remain dark, all is now bearable because behind all is love. It will always help us if we regard this world as organized not for our comfort but for our training.

Take, for instance, pain. Pain might seem a bad thing, but pain has its place in the order of God. It sometimes happens that a person is so abnormally constituted that he is incapable of feeling pain. Such a person is a danger to himself and a problem to everyone else. If there were no such thing as

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pain, we would never know that we were ill, and often we would die before steps could be taken to deal with any disease or illness. That is not to say that pain cannot become a bad thing, but it is to say that times without number pain is God's red light to tell us that there is danger ahead.

Lessing used to say that if he had one question to ask the Sphinx, it would be: "Is this a friendly universe?" If we can be certain that the name of the God who created this world is Father, then we can also be certain that fundamentally this is a friendly universe. To call God Father is to settle our relationship to the world in which we live.

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Matthew 6:9

THE FATHER IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:9 (Part 2)

(iii) If we believe that God is Father, it settles our relationship to our fellow-men. If God is Father, he is Father of all men. The Lord's Prayer does not teach us to pray My Father; it teaches us to pray Our Father. It is very significant that in the Lord's Prayer the words I, me, and mine never occur; it is true to say that Jesus came to take these words out of life and to put in their place we, us, and ours. God is not any man's exclusive possession. The very phrase Our Father involves the elimination of self. The fatherhood of God is the only possible basis of the brotherhood of man.

(iv) If we believe that God is Father, it settles our relationship to ourselves. There are times when every man despises and hates himself. He knows himself to be lower than the lowest thing that crawls upon the earth. The heart knows its own bitterness, and no one knows a man's unworthiness better than that man himself.

Mark Rutherford wished to add a new beatitude: "Blessed are those who heal us of our self-despisings." Blessed are those who give us back our self-respect. That is precisely what God does. In these grim, bleak, terrible moments we can still remind ourselves that, even if we matter to no one else, we matter to God; that in the infinite mercy of God we are of royal lineage, children of the King of kings.

(v) If we believe that God is Father, it settles our relationship to God. It is not that it removes the might, majesty and power of God. It is not that it makes God any the less God; but it makes that might, and majesty, and power, approachable for us.

There is an old Roman story which tells how a Roman Emperor was enjoying a triumph. He had the privilege, which Rome gave to her great victors, of marching his troops through the streets of Rome, with all his captured trophies and his prisoners in his train. So the Emperor was on the march with his troops. The streets were lined with cheering people. The tall legionaries lined the streets' edges to keep the people in their places. At one point on the triumphal route there was a little platform where the Empress and her family were sitting to watch the Emperor go by in all the pride of his triumph. On the platform with his mother there was the Emperor's youngest son, a little boy. As the Emperor came near the little boy jumped off the platform, burrowed through the crowd, tried to dodge between the legs of a legionary, and to run out on to the road to meet his father's chariot. The legionary stooped down and stopped him. He swung him up in his arms: "You can't do that, boy," he said.

"Don't you know who that is in the chariot? That's the Emperor. You can't run out to his chariot." And the little lad laughed down. "He may be your Emperor," he said, "but he's my father." That is exactly the way the Christian feels towards God. The might, and the majesty, and the power are the might, and the majesty, and the power of one whom Jesus taught us to call Our Father.

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THE FATHER IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:9 (Part 3)

So far we have been thinking of the first two words of this address to God--Our Father, but God is not only Our Father, He is Our Father who is in heaven. The last words are of primary importance. They conserve two great truths.

(i) They remind us of the holiness of God. It is very easy to cheapen and to sentimentalize the whole idea of the fatherhood of God, and to make it an excuse for an easy-going, comfortable religion. "He's a good fellow and all will be well." As Heine said of God: "God will forgive. It is his trade." If we were to say Our Father, and stop there, there might be some excuse for that; but it is Our Father in heaven to whom we pray. The love is there, but the holiness is there, too.

It is extraordinary how seldom Jesus used the word Father in regard to God. Mark's gospel is the earliest gospel, and is therefore the nearest thing we will ever have to an actual report of all that Jesus said and did; and in Mark's gospel Jesus calls God Father only six times, and never outside the circle of the disciples. To Jesus the word Father was so sacred that he could hardly bear to use it; and he could never use it except amongst those who had grasped something of what it meant.

We must never use the word Father in regard to God cheaply, easily, and sentimentally. God is not an easy-going parent who tolerantly shuts his eyes to all sins and faults and mistakes. This God, whom we can call Father, is the God whom we must still approach with reverence and adoration, and awe and wonder. God is our Father in heaven, and in God there is love and holiness combined.

(ii) They remind us of the power of God. In human love there is so often the tragedy of frustration. We may love a person and yet be unable to help him achieve something, or to stop him doing something. Human love can be intense--and quite helpless. Any parent with an erring child, or any lover with a wandering loved one knows that. But when we say, 'Our Father in heaven,' we place two things side by side. We place side by side the love of God and the power of God. We tell ourselves that the power of God is always motivated by the love of God, and can never be exercised for anything but our good; we tell ourselves that the love of God is backed by the power of God, and that therefore its purposes can never be ultimately frustrated or defeated. It is love of which we think, but it is the love of God. When we pray Our Father in heaven we must ever remember the holiness of God, and we must ever remember the power which moves in love, and the love which has behind it the undefeatable power of God.

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Matthew 6:9

THE HALLOWING OF THE NAME

Matthew 6:9 (Part 4)

Let your name be held holy.

"Hallowed be Thy name"--it is probably true that of all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer this is the one whose meaning we would find it most difficult to express. First, then, let us concentrate on the actual meaning of the words.

The word which is translated hallowed is a part of the Greek verb *hagiazesthai* (GSN0037). The Greek verb *hagiazesthai* is connected with the adjective *hagios* (GSN0040), and means to treat a person or a thing as *hagios*. *Hagios* is the word which is usually translated holy; but the basic meaning of *hagios* is different or separate. A thing which is *hagios* (GSN0040) is different from other things. A person who is *hagios* is separate from other people. So a temple is *hagion* (GSN0039) because it is different from other buildings. An altar is *hagios* (GSN0040) because it exists for a purpose different from the purpose of ordinary things. God's day is *hagios* (GSN0040) because it is different from other days. A priest is *hagios* (GSN0040) because he is separate from other men. So, then, this petition means, "Let God's name be treated differently from all other names; let God's name be given a position which is absolutely unique."

But there is something to add to this. In Hebrew the name does not mean simply the name by which a person is called-- John or James, or whatever the name may be. In Hebrew the name means the nature, the character, the personality of the person in so far as it is known or revealed to us. That becomes clear when we see how the Bible writers use the expression.

The Psalmist says, "Those who know thy name put their trust in thee" (Ps.9:10). Quite clearly that does not mean that those who know that God is called Jehovah will trust in him. It means that those who know what God is like, those who know the nature and the character of God will put their trust in him. The Psalmist says, "Some boast of chariots and some of horses, but we boast of the name of the Lord our God" (Ps.20:7). Quite clearly that does not mean that in a time of difficulty the Psalmist will remember that God is called Jehovah. It means that at such a time some will put their trust in human and material aids and defences, but the Psalmist will remember the nature and the character of God; he will remember what God is like, and that memory will give him confidence.

So, then, let us take these two things and put them together. *Hagiazesthai* (GSN0037), which is translated to hallow, means to regard as different, to give a unique and special place to. The name is the nature, the character, the personality of the person in so far as it is known and revealed to us. Therefore, when we pray "Hallowed be Thy name," it means, "Enable us to give to thee the unique place which thy nature and character deserve and demand."

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Matthew 6:9

THE PRAYER FOR REVERENCE

Matthew 6:9 (Part 5)

Is there, then, one word in English for giving to God the unique place which his nature and character demand? There is such a word, and the word is reverence. This petition is a prayer that we should be enabled to reverence God as God deserves to be revered. In all true reverence of God there are four essentials.

(i) In order to reverence God we must believe that God exists. We cannot reverence someone who does not exist; we must begin by being sure of the existence of God.

To the modern mind it is strange that the Bible nowhere attempts to prove the existence of God. For the Bible God is an axiom. An axiom is a self-evident fact which is not itself proved, but which is the basis of all other proofs. For instance, 'A straight line is the shortest distance between two points,' and, 'Parallel lines, however far produced, will never meet,' are axioms.

The Bible writers would have said that it was superfluous to prove the existence of God, because they experienced the presence of God every moment of their lives. They would have said that a man no more needed to prove that God exists than he needs to prove that his wife exists. He meets his wife every day, and he meets God every day.

But suppose we did need to try to prove that God exists, using our own minds to do so, how would we begin? We might begin from the world in which we live. Paley's old argument is not yet completely outdated. Suppose there is a man walking along the road. He strikes his foot against a watch lying in the dust. He has never in his life seen a watch before; he does not know what it is. He picks it up; he sees that it consists of a metal case, and inside the case a complicated arrangement of wheels, levers, springs and jewels. He sees that the whole thing is moving and working in the most orderly way. He sees further that the hands are moving round the dial in an obviously predetermined routine.

What then does he say? Does he say: "All these metals and jewels came together from the ends of the earth by chance, by chance made themselves into wheels and levers and springs, by chance assembled themselves into this mechanism, by chance wound themselves up and set themselves going, by chance acquired their obvious orderly working"? No. He says, "I have found a watch; somewhere there must be a watch-maker."

Order presupposes mind. We look at the world; we see a vast machine which is working in order. Suns rise and set in an unvarying succession. Tides ebb and flow to a timetable. Seasons follow each other in an order. We look at the world, and we are bound to say, "Somewhere there must be a world-maker." The fact of the world drives us to God. As Sir James Jeans has said, "No astronomer can be an atheist." The order of the world demands the mind of God behind it.

We might begin from ourselves. The one thing man has never created is life. Man can alter and rearrange and change things, but he cannot create a living thing. Where then did we get our life?

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From our parents. Yes, but where did they get theirs? From their parents. But where did all this begin? At some time life must have come into the world; and it must have come from outside the world for man cannot create life; and once again we are driven back to God.

When we look in upon ourselves and out upon the world we are driven to God. As Kant said long ago, "the moral law within us, and the starry heavens above us," drive us to God.

(ii) Before we can reverence God, we must not only believe that God is, we must also know the kind of God he is. No one could reverence the Greek gods with their loves and wars, their hates and their adulteries, their trickeries and their knaveries. No one can reverence capricious, immoral, impure gods. But in God as we know him there are three great qualities. There is holiness; there is justice; and there is love. We must reverence God, not only because he exists, but because he is the God whom we know him to be.

(iii) But a man might believe that God is; he might be intellectually convinced that God is holy, just and loving; and still he might not have reverence. For reverence there is necessary a constant awareness of God. To reverence God means to live in a God-filled world, to live a life in which we never forget God. This awareness is not confined to the Church or to so-called holy places; it must be an awareness which exists everywhere and at all times.

Wordsworth spoke of it in Lines composed near Tintern Abbey:

"And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

One of the finest of modern devotional poets is Henry Ernest Hardy who wrote under the name of Father Andrew. In *The Mystic Beauty* he writes:

"O London town has many moods,
And mingled 'mongst its many broods
A leavening of saints,

And ever up and down its streets,
If one has eyes to see one meets
Stuff that an artist paints.

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I've seen a back street bathed in blue,
Such as the soul of Whistler knew:
A smudge of amber light,

Where some fried fish-shop plied its trade,
A perfect note of colour made--
Oh, it was exquisite!

I once came through St. James' Park
Betwixt the sunset and the dark,
And oh the mystery

Of grey and green and violet!
I would I never might forget
That evening harmony.

I hold it true that God is there
If beauty breaks through anywhere;
And his most blessed feet,

Who once life's roughest roadway trod.,
Who came as man to show us God,
Still pass along the street."

God in the back street, God in St. James' Park, God in the fried fish-shop--that is reverence. The trouble with most people is that their awareness of God is spasmodic, acute at certain times and places, totally absent at others. Reverence means the constant awareness of God.

(iv) There remains one further ingredient in reverence. We must believe that God exists; we must know what kind of a God he is; we must be constantly aware of God. But a man might have all these things and still not have reverence. To all these things must be added obedience and submission to God. Reverence is knowledge plus submission. In his catechism Luther asks, "How is God's name hallowed amongst us?" and his answer is, "When both our life and doctrine are truly Christian," that is to say, when our intellectual convictions, and our practical actions, are in full submission to the will of God.

To know that God is, to know what kind of a God he is, to be constantly aware of God, and to be constantly obedient to him--that is reverence and that is what we pray for when we pray: "Hallowed be thy name." Let God be given the reverence which his nature and character deserve.

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Matthew 6:10

GOD'S KINGDOM AND GOD'S WILL

Matthew 6:10 (Part 1)

Let your Kingdom come: Let your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.

The phrase The Kingdom of God is characteristic of the whole New Testament. No phrase is used oftener in prayer and in preaching and in Christian literature. It is, therefore, of primary importance that we should be clear as to what it means.

It is evident that the Kingdom of God was central to the message of Jesus. The first emergence of Jesus on the scene of history was when he came into Galilee preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God (Mk.1:14). Jesus himself described the preaching of the kingdom as an obligation laid upon him: "I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose" (Lk.4:43; Mk.1:38). Luke's description of Jesus' activity is that he went through every city and village preaching and showing the good news of the Kingdom of God (Lk.8:1). Clearly the meaning of the Kingdom of God is something which we are bound to try to understand.

When we do try to understand the meaning of this phrase we meet with certain puzzling facts. We find that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom in three different ways. He spoke of the Kingdom as existing in the past. He said that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets were in the Kingdom (Lk.13:28; Matt.8:11). Clearly therefore the Kingdom goes far back into history. He spoke of the Kingdom as present. "The Kingdom of God," he said, "is in the midst of you" (Lk.17:21). The Kingdom of God is therefore a present reality here and now. He spoke of the Kingdom of God as future, for he taught men to pray for the coming of the Kingdom in this his own prayer. How then can the Kingdom be past, present and future all at the one time? How can the Kingdom be at one and the same time something which existed, which exists, and for whose coming it is our duty to pray?

We find the key in this double petition of the Lord's Prayer. One of the commonest characteristics of Hebrew style is what is technically known as parallelism. The Hebrew tended to say everything twice. He said it in one way, and then he said it in another way which repeated or amplified or explained the first way. Almost any verse of the Psalms will show this parallelism in action. Almost every verse of the Psalms divides in two in the middle; and the second half repeats or amplifies or explains the first half.

Let us take some examples and the thing will become clear:

"God is our refuge and strength--a very present help in trouble
(Ps.46:1).

"The Lord of Hosts is with us--the God of Jacob is our refuge
(Ps.46:7).

"The Lord is my shepherd--I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures--He leads me beside

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still waters" (Ps.23:1-2).

Let us apply this principle to these two petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Let us set them down side by side:

"Thy Kingdom come--Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."

Let us assume that the second petition explains, and amplifies, and defines the first. We then have the perfect definition of the Kingdom of God--The Kingdom of God is a society, upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. Here we have the explanation of how the Kingdom can be past, present and future all at the one time. Any man who at any time in history perfectly did God's will was within the Kingdom; any man who perfectly does God's will is within the Kingdom; but since the world is very far from being a place where God's will is perfectly and universally done, the consummation of the Kingdom is still in the future and is still something for which we must pray.

To be in the Kingdom is to obey the will of God. Immediately we see that the Kingdom is not something which primarily has to do with nations and peoples and countries. It is something which has to do with each one of us. The Kingdom is in fact the most personal thing in the world. The Kingdom demands the submission of my will, my heart, my life. It is only when each one of us makes his personal decision and submission that the Kingdom comes.

The Chinese Christian prayed the well-known prayer, "Lord, revive thy Church, beginning with me," and we might well paraphrase that and say, "Lord, bring in thy Kingdom, beginning with me." To pray for the Kingdom of Heaven is to pray that we may submit our wills entirely to the will of God.

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Matthew 6:10

GOD'S KINGDOM AND GOD'S WILL

Matthew 6:10 (Part 2)

From what we have already seen it becomes clear that the most important thing in the world is to obey the will of God; the most important words in the world are "Thy will be done." But it is equally clear that the frame of mind and the tone of voice in which these words are spoken will make a world of difference.

(i) A man may say, "Thy will be done," in a tone of defeated resignation. He may say it, not because he wishes to say it, but because he has accepted the fact that he cannot possibly say anything else; he may say it because he has accepted the fact that God is too strong for him, and that it is useless to batter his head against the walls of the universe. He may say it thinking only of the ineluctable power of God which has him in its grip. As Omar Khayyam had it:

"But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this Checkerboard of Nights and Days;
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.
The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes;
And He that Toss'd you down into the Field,
He knows about it all--He knows--HE knows!"

A man may accept the will of God for no other reason than that he has realized that he cannot do anything else.

(ii) A man may say, "Thy will be done," in a tone of bitter resentment. Swinburne spoke of men feeling the trampling of the iron feet of God. He speaks of the supreme evil, God. Beethoven died all alone; and it is said that when they found his body his lips were drawn back in a snarl and his fists were clenched as if he were shaking his fists in the very face of God and of high heaven. A man may feel that God is his enemy, and yet an enemy so strong that he cannot resist. He may therefore accept God's will, but he may accept it with bitter resentment and smouldering anger.

(iii) A man may say, "Thy will be done," in perfect love and trust. He may say it gladly and willingly, no matter what that will may be. It should be easy for the Christian to say, "Thy will be done," like that; for the Christian can be very sure of two things about God.

(a) He can be sure of the wisdom of God. Sometimes when we want something built or constructed, or altered or repaired, we take it to the craftsman and consult him about it. He makes some suggestion, and we often end up by saying, "Well, do what you think best. You are the expert." God is the expert in life, and his guidance can never lead anyone astray.

When Richard Cameron, the Scottish Covenanter, was killed his head and his hands were cut off by one Murray and taken to Edinburgh. "His father being in prison for the same cause, the enemy

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carried them to him, to add grief unto his former sorrow, and inquired at him if he knew them. Taking his son's head and hands, which were very fair (being a man of fair complexion like himself), he kissed them and said, 'I know them--I know them. They are my son's--my own dear son's. It is the Lord. Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me or mine, but hath made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days.'" When a man can speak like that, when he is quite sure that his times are in the hands of the infinite wisdom of God, it is easy to say, "Thy will be done."

(b) He can be sure of the love of God. We do not believe in a mocking and a capricious God, or in a blind and iron determinism. Thomas Hardy finishes his novel *Tess* with the grim words: "The President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess." We believe in a God whose name is love. As Whittier had it:

"I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air.
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

As Browning triumphantly declared his faith:

"God, Thou art love! I build my faith on that ...
I know thee who has kept my path and made
Light for me in the darkness, tempering sorrow
So that it reached me like a solemn joy.
It were too strange that I should doubt thy love."

And as Paul had it: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom.8:32). No man can look at the Cross and doubt the love of God, and when we are sure of the love of God, it is easy to say, "Thy will be done."

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Matthew 6:11

OUR DAILY BREAD

Matthew 6:11 (Part 1)

Give us to-day bread for the coming day.

One would have thought that this is the one petition of the Lord's Prayer about the meaning of which there could have been no possible doubt. It seems on the face of it to be the simplest and the most direct of them all. But it is the fact that many interpreters have offered many interpretations of it. Before we think of its simple and obvious meaning, let us look at some of the other explanations which have been offered.

(i) The bread has been identified with the bread of the Lord's Supper. From the very beginning the Lord's Prayer has been closely connected with the Lord's Table. In the very first orders of service which we possess it is always laid down that the Lord's Prayer should be prayed at the Lord's Table, and some have taken this petition as a prayer to be granted the daily privilege of sitting at the Table of our Lord, and of eating the spiritual food which a man receives there.

(ii) The bread has been identified with the spiritual food of the word of God. We sometimes sing the hymn:

Break thou the bread of life,
Dear Lord, to me,
As thou didst break the loaves
Beside the sea.
Beyond the sacred page
I seek thee, Lord,
My spirit pants for thee,
O living word."

So this petition has been taken to be a prayer for the true teaching, the true doctrine, the essential truth, which are in the scriptures and the word of God, and which are indeed food for a man's mind and heart and soul.

(iii) The bread has been taken to stand for Jesus himself. Jesus called himself the bread of life (Jn.6:33-35), and this has been taken to be a prayer that daily we may be fed on him who is the living bread. It was in that way that Matthew Arnold used the phrase, when he wrote his poem about the saint of God he met in the east end of London one suffocating day:

"'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen,
In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.
I met a preacher there I knew and said:
'Ill and o'er worked, how fare you in this scene?'

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'Bravely!' said he, 'for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, the living
bread.'

So then this petition has been taken as a prayer that we too might be cheered and strengthened with Christ the living bread.

(iv) This petition has been taken in a purely Jewish sense. The bread has been taken to be the bread of the heavenly kingdom. Luke tells how one of the bystanders said to Jesus: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God" (Lk.14:15). The Jews had a strange yet vivid idea. They held that when the Messiah came, and when the golden age dawned, there would be what they called the Messianic banquet, at which the chosen ones of God would sit down. The slain bodies of the monsters Behemoth and Leviathan would provide the meat and the fish courses of the banquet. It would be a kind of reception feast given by God to his own people. So, then, this has been taken to be a petition for a place at the final Messianic banquet of the people of God.

Although we need not agree that any one of these explanations is the main meaning of this petition, we need not reject any of them as false. They all have their own truth and their own relevance.

The difficulty of interpreting this petition was increased by the fact that there was very considerable doubt as to the meaning of the word *epiousios* (GSN1967), which is the word which the Revised Standard Version translates "daily." The extraordinary fact was that, until a short time ago, there was no other known occurrence of this word in the whole of Greek literature. Origen knew this, and indeed held that Matthew had invented the word. It was therefore not possible to be sure what it precisely meant. But not very long ago a papyrus fragment turned up with this word on it; and the papyrus fragment was actually a woman's shopping list! And against an item on it was the word *epiousios* (GSN1967). It was a note to remind her to buy supplies of a certain food for the coming day. So, very simply, what this petition means is: "Give me the things we need to eat for this coming day. Help me to get the things I've got on my shopping list when I go out this morning. Give me the things we need to eat when the children come in from school, and the men folk come in from work. Grant that the table be not bare when we sit down together to-day." This is a simple prayer that God will supply us with the things we need for the coming day.

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Matthew 6:11

OUR DAILY BREAD

Matthew 6:11 (Part 2)

When we see that this is a simple petition for the needs of the everyday, certain tremendous truths emerge from it.

(i) It tells us that God cares for our bodies. Jesus showed us that; he spent so much time healing men's diseases and satisfying their physical hunger. He was anxious when he thought that the crowd who had followed him out into the lonely places had a long road home, and no food to eat before they set out upon it. We do well to remember that God is interested in our bodies. Any teaching which belittles, and despises, and slanders the body is wrong. We can see what God thinks of our human bodies, when we remember that he himself in Jesus Christ took a human body upon him. It is not simply soul salvation, it is whole salvation, the salvation of body, mind and spirit, at which Christianity aims.

(ii) This petition teaches us to pray for our daily bread, for bread for the coming day. It teaches us to live one day at a time, and not to worry and be anxious about the distant and the unknown future. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray this petition, there is little doubt that his mind was going back to the story of the manna in the wilderness (Exo.16:1-21). The children of Israel were starving in the wilderness. and God sent them the manna. the food from heaven; but there was one condition--they must gather only enough for their immediate needs. If they tried to gather too much, and to store it up, it went bad. They had to be satisfied with enough for the day. As one Rabbi put it: "The portion of a day in its day, because he who created the day created sustenance for the day." And as another Rabbi had it: "He who possesses what he can eat to-day, and says, 'What shall I eat to-morrow?' is a man of little faith." This petition tells us to live one day at a time. It forbids the anxious worry which is so characteristic of the life which has not learned to trust God.

(iii) By implication this petition gives God his proper place. It admits that it is from God we receive the food which is necessary to support life. No man has ever created a seed which will grow. The scientist can analyse a seed into its constituent elements, but no synthetic seed would ever grow. All living things come from God. Our food, therefore, is the direct gift of God.

(iv) This petition very wisely reminds us of how prayer works. If a man prayed this prayer, and then sat back and waited for bread to fall into his hands, he would certainly starve. It reminds us that prayer and work go hand in hand and that when we pray we must go on to work to make our prayers come true. It is true that the living seed comes from God, but it is equally true that it is man's task to grow and to cultivate that seed. Dick Sheppard used to love a certain story. There was a man who had an allotment; he had with great toil reclaimed a piece of ground, clearing away the stones, eradicating the rank growth of weeds, enriching and feeding the ground, until it produced the loveliest flowers and vegetables. One evening he was showing a pious friend around his allotment.

The pious friend said, "It's wonderful what God can do with a bit of ground like this, isn't it?" "Yes." said the man who had put in such toil, "but you should have seen this bit of ground when God had it to himself!" God's bounty and man's toil must combine. Prayer, like faith, without works

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is dead. When we pray this petition we are recognizing two basic truths--that without God we can do nothing, and that without our effort and cooperation God can do nothing for us.

(v) We must note that Jesus did not teach us to pray: "Give me my daily bread." He taught us to pray: "Give us our daily bread." The problem of the world is not that there is not enough to go round; there is enough and to spare. The problem is not the supply of life's essentials; it is the distribution of them. This prayer teaches us never to be selfish in our prayers. It is a prayer which we can help God to answer by giving to others who are less fortunate than we are. This prayer is not only a prayer that we may receive our daily bread; it is also a prayer that we may share our daily bread with others.

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Matthew 6:12, 14-15

FORGIVENESS HUMAN AND DIVINE

Matthew 6:12,14,15 (Part 1)

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors ... For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you too; but, if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Before a man can honestly pray this petition of the Lord's Prayer he must realize that he needs to pray it. That is to say, before a man can pray this petition he must have a sense of sin. Sin is not nowadays a popular word. Men and women rather resent being called, or treated as, hell-deserving sinners.

The trouble is that most people have a wrong conception of sin. They would readily agree that the burglar, the drunkard, the murderer, the adulterer, the foul-mouthed person is a sinner. But they are guilty of none of these sins; they live decent, ordinary, respectable lives, and have never even been in danger of appearing in court, or going to prison, or getting some notoriety in the newspapers. They therefore feel that sin has nothing to do with them.

The New Testament uses five different words for sin.

(i) The commonest word is hamartia (GSN0266). This was originally a shooting word and means a missing of the target. To fail to hit the target was hamartia. Therefore sin is the failure to be what we might have been and could have been.

Charles Lamb has a picture of a man named Samuel le Grice. Le Grice was a brilliant youth who never fulfilled his promise. Lamb says that there were three stages in his career. There was a time when people said, "He will do something." There was a time when people said, "He could do something if he would." There was a time when people said, "He might have done something, if he had liked." Edwin Muir writes in his Autobiography: "After a certain age all of us, good and bad, are grief stricken because of powers within us which have never been realized: because, in other words, we are not what we should be."

That precisely is hamartia (GSN0266); and that is precisely the situation in which we are all involved. Are we as good husbands or wives as we could be? Are we as good sons or daughters as we could be? Are we as good workmen or employers as we could be? Is there anyone who will dare to claim that he is all he might have been, and has done all he could have done? When we realise that sin means the failure to hit the target, the failure to be all that we might have been and could have been, then it is clear that every one of us is a sinner.

(ii) The second word for sin is parabasis (GSN3847), which literally means a stepping across. Sin is the stepping across the line which is drawn between right and wrong.

Do we always stay on the right side of the line which divides honesty and dishonesty? Is there never any such thing as a petty dishonesty in our lives?

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Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Do we always stay on the right side of the line which divides truth and falsehood? Do we never, by word or by silence, twist or evade or distort the truth?

Do we always stay on the right side of the line which divides kindness and courtesy from selfishness and harshness? Is there never an unkind action or a discourteous word in our lives?

When we think of it in this way, there can be none who can claim always to have remained on the right side of the dividing line.

(iii) The third word for sin is *paraptoma* (GSN3900), which means a slipping across. It is the kind of slip which a man might make on a slippery or an icy road. It is not so deliberate as *parabasis* (GSN3847). Again and again we speak of words slipping out; again and again we are swept away by some impulse or passion, which has momentarily gained control of us, and which has made us lose our self-control. The best of us can slip into sin when for the moment we are off our guard.

(iv) The fourth word for sin is *anomia* (GSN0458), which means lawlessness. *Anomia* is the sin of the man who knows the right, and who yet does the wrong; the sin of the man who knows the law, and who yet breaks the law. The first of all the human instincts is the instinct to do what we like; and therefore there come into any man's life times when he wishes to kick over the traces, and to defy the law, and to do or to take the forbidden thing. In *Mandalay*, Kipling makes the old soldier say:

Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments, an' a man can raise a
thirst'

Even if there are some who can say that they have never broken any of the Ten Commandments, there are none who can say that they have never wished to break any of them.

(v) The fifth word for sin is the word *opheilema* (GSN3783) which is the word used in the body of the Lord's Prayer; and *opheilema* means a debt. It means a failure to pay that which is due, a failure in duty. There can be no man who will ever dare to claim that he has perfectly fulfilled his duty to man and to God: Such perfection does not exist among men.

So, then, when we come to see what sin really is, we come to see that it is a universal disease in which every man is involved. Outward respectability in the sight of man, and inward sinfulness in the sight of God may well go hand in hand. This, in fact, is a petition of the Lord's Prayer which every man needs to pray.

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Matthew 6:12, 14-15

FORGIVENESS HUMAN AND DIVINE

Matthew 6:12,14,15 (Part 2)

Not only does a man need to realize that he needs to pray this petition of the Lord's Prayer; he also needs to realize what he is doing when he prays it. Of all petitions of the Lord's Prayer this is the most frightening.

"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." The literal meaning is : "Forgive us our sins in proportion as we forgive those who have sinned against us." In Matt.6:14-15 Jesus says in the plainest possible language that if we forgive others, God will forgive us; but if we refuse to forgive others, God will refuse to forgive us. It is, therefore, quite clear that, if we pray this petition with an unhealed breach, an unsettled quarrel in our lives, we are asking God not to forgive us.

If we say, "I will never forgive so-and-so for what he or she has done to me," if we say, "I will never forget what so-and-so did to me," and then go and take this petition on our lips, we are quite deliberately asking God not to forgive us. As someone has put it: "Forgiveness, like peace, is one and indivisible." Human forgiveness and divine forgiveness are inextricably intercombined. Our forgiveness of our fellow-men and God's forgiveness of us cannot be separated; they are interlinked and interdependent. If we remembered what we are doing when we take this petition on our lips, there would be times when we would not dare to pray it.

When Robert Louis Stevenson lived in the South Sea Islands he used always to conduct family worship in the mornings for his household. It always concluded with the Lord's Prayer. One morning in the middle of the Lord's Prayer he rose from his knees and left the room. His health was always precarious, and his wife followed him thinking that he was ill. "Is there anything wrong?" she said. "Only this," said Stevenson, "I am not fit to pray the Lord's Prayer today." No one is fit to pray the Lord's Prayer so long as the unforgiving spirit holds sway within his heart. If a man has not put things right with his fellow-men, he cannot put things right with God.

If we are to have this Christian forgiveness in our lives, three things are necessary.

(i) We must learn to understand. There is always a reason why a person does something. If he is boorish and impolite and cross-tempered, maybe he is worried or in pain. If he treats us with suspicion and dislike, maybe he has misunderstood, or has been misinformed about something we have said or done. Maybe the man is the victim of his own environment or his own heredity. Maybe his temperament is such that life is difficult and human relations a problem for him. Forgiveness would be very much easier for us, if we tried to understand before we allowed ourselves to condemn.

(ii) We must learn to forget. So long as we brood upon a slight or an injury, there is no hope that we will forgive. We so often say, "I can't forget what so-and-so did to me," or "I will never forget how I was treated by such-and-such a person or in such-and-such a place." These are dangerous sayings, because we can in the end make it humanly impossible for us to forget. We can print the memory indelibly upon our minds.

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Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Once the famous Scottish man of letters, Andrew Lang, wrote and published a very kind review of a book by a young man. The young man repaid him with a bitter and insulting attack. About three years later Andrew Lang was staying with Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate. Bridges saw Lang reading a certain book. "Why," he said, "that's another book by that ungrateful young cub who behaved so shamefully to you." To his astonishment he found that Andrew Lang's mind was a blank on the whole affair. He had completely forgotten the bitter and insulting attack. To forgive, said Bridges, was the sign of a great man, but to forget was sublime. Nothing but the cleansing spirit of Christ can take from these memories of ours the old bitterness that we must forget.

(iii) We must learn to love. We have already seen that Christian love, agape (GSN0026), is that unconquerable benevolence, that undefeatable good-will, which will never seek anything but the highest good of others, no matter what they do to us, and no matter how they treat us. That love can come to us only when Christ, who is that love, comes to dwell within our hearts--and he cannot come unless we invite him.

To be forgiven we must forgive, and that is a condition of forgiveness which only the power of Christ can enable us to fulfill.

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Matthew 6:13

THE ORDEAL OF TEMPTATION

Matthew 6:13 (Part 1)

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.

There are two matters of meaning at which we must look before we begin to study this petition in detail.

(i) To modern ears the word tempt is always a bad word; it always means to seek to seduce into evil. But in the Bible the verb *peirazein* (GSN3985) is often better translated by the word test than by the word tempt. In its New Testament usage to tempt a person is not so much to seek to seduce him into sin, as it is to test his strength and his loyalty and his ability for service.

In the Old Testament we read the story of how God tested the loyalty of Abraham by seeming to demand the sacrifice of his only son Isaac. In the King James Version the story begins: "And it came to pass that God did tempt Abraham" (Gen.22:1). Obviously the word tempt cannot there mean to seek to seduce into sin, for that is something that God would never do. It means rather to submit to a test of loyalty and obedience. When we read the story of the temptations of Jesus, it begins: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt.4:1). If we take the word tempt there in the sense of to seduce into sin, it makes the Holy Spirit a partner in an attempt to compel Jesus to sin. Time and again in the Bible we will find that the word tempt has the idea of testing in it, at least as much as the idea of seeking to lead into sin.

Here, then, is one of the great and precious truths about temptation. Temptation is not designed to make us fall. Temptation is designed to make us stronger and better men and women. Temptation is not designed to make us sinners. It is designed to make us good. We may fail in the test, but we are not meant to. We are meant to emerge stronger and finer. In one sense temptation is not so much the penalty of being a man; it is the glory of being a man. If metal is to be used in a great engineering project, it is tested at stresses and strains far beyond those which it is ever likely to have to bear. So a man has to be tested before God can use him greatly in his service.

All that is true; but it is also true that the Bible is never in any doubt that there is a power of evil in this world. The Bible is not a speculative book, and it does not discuss the origin of that power of evil, but it knows that it is there. Quite certainly this petition of the Lord's Prayer should be translated not, "Deliver us from evil," but, "Deliver us from the Evil One." The Bible does not think of evil as an abstract principle or force, but as an active, personal power in opposition to God.

The development of the idea of Satan in the Bible is of the greatest interest. In Hebrew the word Satan simply means an adversary. It can often be used of men. A man's adversary is his Satan. In the King James Version the Philistines are afraid that David may turn out to be their Satan (1Sam.29:4); Solomon declares that God has given him such peace and prosperity that there is no Satan left to oppose him (1Kgs.5:4); David regards Abishai as his Satan (2Sam.19:22). In all these cases Satan means an adversary or opponent. From that the word Satan goes on to mean one who pleads a case against someone. Then the word leaves earth and, as it were, enters heaven. The Jews

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Matthew 6:13

had the idea that in heaven there was an angel whose charge it was to state the case against a man, a kind of prosecuting angel; and that became the function of Satan. At that stage Satan is not an evil power; he is part of the judgment apparatus of heaven.

In Jb.1:6, Satan is numbered among the sons of God: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them." At this stage Satan is the divine prosecutor of man.

But it is not so very far a step from stating a case against a man to making up a case against a man. And that is the next step. The other name of Satan is the Devil; and Devil comes from the Greek word Diabolos (GSN1228), which is the regular word for a slanderer. So Satan becomes the Devil, the slanderer par excellence, the adversary of man, the power who is out to frustrate the purposes of God and to ruin mankind. Satan comes to stand for everything which is anti-man and anti-God. It is from that ruining power that Jesus teaches us to pray to be delivered. The origin of that power is not discussed; there are no speculations. As someone has put it: "If a man wakes up and finds his house on fire, he does not sit down in a chair and write or read a treatise on the origin of fires in private houses; he attempts to try to extinguish the fire and to save his house." So the Bible wastes no time in speculations about the origin of evil.

It equips man to fight the battle against the evil which is unquestionably there.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 6:13

THE ATTACK OF TEMPTATION

Matthew 6:13 (Part 2)

Life is always under attack from temptation, but no enemy can launch an invasion until he finds a bridgehead. Where then does temptation find its bridgehead? Where do our temptations come from? To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and, if we know whence the attack is likely to come, we will have a better chance to overcome it.

(i) Sometimes the attack of temptation comes from outside us. There are people whose influence is bad. There are people in whose company it would be very difficult even to suggest doing a dishonourable thing, and there are people in whose company it is easy to do the wrong things. When Robert Burns was a young man he went to Irvine to learn flax-dressing. There he fell in with a certain Robert Brown, who was a man who had seen much of the world, and who had a fascinating and a dominating personality. Burns tells us that he admired him and strove to imitate him. Burns goes on: "He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself when Woman was the guiding star.... He spoke of a certain fashionable failing with levity, which hitherto I had regarded with horror.... Here his friendship did me a mischief." There are friendships and associations which can do us a mischief. In a tempting world a man should be very careful in his choice of friends and of the society in which he will move.

He should give the temptations which come from outside as little chance as possible.

(ii) It is one of the tragic facts of life that temptations can come to us from those who love us; and of all kinds of temptation this is the hardest to fight. It comes from people who love us and who have not the slightest intention of harming us.

The kind of thing that happens is this. A man may know that he ought to take a certain course of action; he may feel divinely drawn to a certain career; but to follow that course of action may involve unpopularity and risk; to accept that career may be to give up all that the world calls success. It may well be that in such circumstances those who love him will seek to dissuade him from acting as he knows he ought, and they will do so because they love him. They counsel caution, prudence, worldly wisdom; they want to see the one they love do well in a worldly sense; they do not wish to see him throw his chances away; and so they seek to stop him doing what he knows to be right for him.

In Gareth and Lynette Tennyson tells the story of Gareth, the youngest son of Lot and Bellicent. Gareth wishes to join his brothers in the service of King Arthur. Bellicent his mother does not wish him to go. "Hast thou no pity on my loneliness?" she asks. His father Lot is old and lies "like a log all but smouldered out." Both his brothers have gone to Arthur's court. Must he go too? If he will stay at home, she will arrange the hunt, and find him a princess for his bride, and make him happy. It was because she loved him that she wished to keep him; the tempter was speaking with the very voice of love. But Gareth answers:

"O mother,
How can you keep me tethered to you--shame.

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Matthew 6:13

Man am I grown, and man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? Follow the Christ the King.
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King--
Else, wherefore born?"

The lad went out, but the voice of love tempted him to stay.

That was what happened to Jesus. "A man's foes," said Jesus, "will be those of his own household" (Matt.10:36). They came and they tried to take him home, because they said that he was mad (Mk.3:21). To them he seemed to be throwing his life and his career away; to them he seemed to be making a fool of himself; and they tried to stop him. Sometimes the bitterest of all temptations come to us from the voice of love.

(iii) There is one very odd way in which temptation can come, especially to younger people. There is in most of us a queer streak, which, at least in certain company, makes us wish to appear worse than we are. We do not wish to appear soft and pious, namby-pamby and holy. We would rather be thought daredevil, swashbuckling adventurers, men of the world and not innocents. Augustine has a famous passage in his confessions: "Among my equals I was ashamed of being less shameless than others, when I heard them boast of their wickedness.... And I took pleasure not only in the pleasure of the deed but in the praise....

I made myself worse than I was, that I might not be reproached, and when in anything I had not sinned as the most abandoned ones, I would say that I had done what I had not done, that I might not seem contemptible." Many a man has begun on some indulgence, or introduced himself to some habit, because he did not wish to appear less experienced in worldliness than the company in which he happened to be. One of the great defences against temptation is simply the courage to be good.

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Matthew 6:13

THE ATTACK OF TEMPTATION

Matthew 6:13 (Part 3)

(iv) But temptation comes not only from outside us; it comes from inside us too. If there was nothing in us to which temptation could appeal then it would be helpless to defeat us. In every one of us there is some weak spot; and at that weak spot temptation launches its attack.

The point of vulnerability differs in all of us. What is a violent temptation to one man, leaves another man quite unmoved; and what leaves one man quite unmoved may be an irresistible temptation to another. Sir James Barrie has a play called *The Will*. Mr. Davizes, the lawyer, noticed that an old clerk, who had been in his service for many years, was looking very ill. He asked him if anything was the matter. The old man told him that his doctor had informed him that he was suffering from a fatal and incurable disease.

Mr Devizes [uncomfortably]: I'm sure it's not what you fear.

Any specialist would tell you so.

Surtees [without looking up]: I've been to one, sir--yesterday.

Mr Devizes: Well?

Surtees: It's--that, sir.

Mr Devizes: He couldn't be sure.

Surtees: Yes, sir.

Mr Devizes: An operation--

Surtees: Too late for that, he said. If I had been operated on long ago, I might have had a chance.

Mr Devizes: But you didn't have it long ago.

Surtees: Not to my knowledge, sir; but he says it was there all the same, always in me, a black spot, not as big as a pin's head, but waiting to spread and destroy me in the fulness of time.

Mr Devizes [helplessly]: It seems damnably unfair.

Surtees [humbly]: I don't know, sir. He says there is a spot of that kind in pretty nigh all of us, and, if we don't look out, it does for us in the end.

Mr Devizes: No. No. No.

Surtees: He called it the accursed thing. I think he meant we should know of it, and be on the watch.

In every man there is the weak spot, which, if he is not on the watch, can ruin him. Somewhere in every man there is the flaw, some fault of temperament which can ruin life, some instinct or passion so strong that it may at any time snap the leash, some quirk in our make-up that makes what is a pleasure to someone else a menace to us. We should realize it, and be on the watch.

(v) But, strangely enough, temptation comes sometimes not from our weakest point, but from our strongest point. If there is one thing of which we are in the habit of saying. "That is one thing anyway which I would never do," it is just there that we should be upon the watch. History is full of

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Matthew 6:13

the stories of castles which were taken just at the point where the defenders thought them so strong that no guard was necessary. Nothing gives temptation its chance like over-confidence. At our weakest and at our strongest points we must be upon the watch.

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Matthew 6:13

THE DEFENCE AGAINST TEMPTATION

Matthew 6:13 (Part 4)

We have thought of the attack of temptation; let us now assemble our defences against temptation.

(i) There is the simple defence of self-respect. When Nehemiah's life was in danger, it was suggested that he should quit his work and shut himself in the Temple until the danger was past. His answer was: "Should such a man as I flee? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in" (Neh.6:11). A man may escape many things, but he cannot escape himself. He must live with his memories, and if he has lost his self-respect life becomes intolerable. Once President Garfield was urged to take a profitable, but dishonourable, course of action. It was said, "No one will ever know." His answer was, "President Garfield will know--and I've got to sleep with him." When a man is tempted, he may well defend himself by saying, "Is a man like me going to do a thing like that?"

(ii) There is the defence of tradition. No man can lightly fail the traditions and the heritage into which he has entered, and which have taken generations to build up. When Pericles, the greatest of the statesmen of Athens, was going to address the Athenian Assembly, he always whispered to himself: "Pericles, remember that you are an Athenian and that you go to speak to Athenians."

One of the epics of the Second World War was the defence of Tobruk. The Coldstream Guards cut their way out of Tobruk, but only a handful of them survived, and even these were just shadows of men. Two hundred survivors out of two battalions were being cared for by the R.A.F. A Coldstream Guards officer was in the mess. Another officer said to him, "After all, as Foot Guards, you had no option but to have a go." And an R.A.F. man standing there said, "It must be pretty tough to be in the Brigade of Guards, because tradition compels you to carry on irrespective of circumstances."

The power of a tradition is one of the greatest things in life. We belong to a country, a school, a family, a Church. What we do affects that to which we belong. We cannot lightly betray the traditions into which we have entered.

(iii) There is the defence of those whom we love and those who love us. Many a man would sin, if the only penalty he had to bear was the penalty he would have to bear himself; but he is saved from sin because he could not meet the pain that would appear in someone's eyes, if he made shipwreck of his life.

Laura Richards has a parable like this:

"A man sat by the door of his house smoking his pipe, and his neighbour sat beside him and tempted him. 'You are poor,' said the neighbour, 'and you are out of work and here is a way of bettering yourself. It will be an easy job and it will bring in money,

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Matthew 6:13

and it is no more dishonest than things that are done every day by respectable people. You will be a fool to throw away such a chance as this. Come with me and we will settle the matter at once.' And the man listened. Just then his young wife came to the door of the cottage and she had her baby in her arms. 'Will you hold the baby for a minute,' she said. 'He is fretful and I must hang out the clothes to dry.' The man took the baby and held him on his knees. And as he held him, the child looked up, and the eyes of the child spoke: 'I am flesh of your flesh,' said the child's eyes. 'I am soul of your soul. Where you lead I shall follow. Lead the way, father. My feet come after yours.' Then said the man to his neighbour: 'Go, and come here no more.'"

A man might be perfectly willing to pay the price of sin, if that price affected only himself. But if he remembers that his sin will break someone else's heart, he will have a strong defence against temptation.

(iv) There is the defence of the presence of Jesus Christ. Jesus is not a figure in a book; he is a living presence. Sometimes we ask, "What would you do, if you suddenly found Christ standing beside you ? How would you live, if Jesus Christ was a guest in your house?" But the whole point of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ is beside us, and he is a guest in every home. His is the unescapable presence, and, therefore, we must make all life fit for him to see. We have a strong defence against temptation in the memory of the continual presence of Jesus Christ.

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Matthew 6:16-18

HOW NOT TO FAST

Matthew 6:16-18

(Part 1)

When you fast, don't put on a sad face, as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces, so that all men may see that they are fasting. This is the truth I tell you--they are paid in full. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that to men you may not look as if you were fasting, but to your Father who is in secret; and your Father, who sees what happens in secret, will give you your reward in full.

To this day fasting is an essential part of the religious life in the east. The Mohammedan strictly keeps the fast of Ramadan, which falls in the ninth month of the Mohammedan year, and which commemorates the first revelation which came to Mohammed. The fast lasts from dawn--when it is light enough to distinguish a white thread from a black thread--until sunset. Bathing, drinking, smoking, smelling perfumes, eating, every unnecessary indulgence is forbidden. Nurses and pregnant women are exempt. Soldiers and those on a journey are excused, but must at some other time fast for an equivalent number of days. If for health's sake a man must have food, he must make good his breach of the law of fasting by giving alms to the poor.

The Jewish fasting customs were exactly the same. It is to be noted that, as we have said, fasting lasted from dawn to sunset; outside that time normal meals could be eaten. For the Jew, in the time of Jesus, there was only one compulsory fast, the fast on the Day of Atonement. On that day from morning to evening, all men had "to afflict themselves" (Lev.16:31). The Jewish scribal law lays it down: "On the Day of Atonement it is forbidden to eat, or to drink, or to bathe, or to anoint oneself, or to wear sandals, or to indulge in conjugal intercourse." Even young children had to be trained to some measure of fasting on the Day of Atonement so that, when they grew up, they would be prepared to accept the national fast.

But, although there was only the one compulsory, universal day of fasting, the Jews made great use of private fasting.

There was the fasting which was connected with mourning. Between the time of death and burial mourners must abstain from all flesh and wine. There was fasting to expiate some sin. It was said, for instance, the Reuben fasted for seven years for his share in the selling of Joseph: "He drank no wine or other liquor; no flesh passed his lips, and he ate no appetising food" (The Testament of Reuben 1: 10). For the same reason, "Simeon afflicted his soul with fasting for two years, because he had hated Joseph" (The Testimony of Simeon 3: 4). In repentance of his sin with Tamar, it was said that Judah to his old age "took neither wine nor flesh, and saw no pleasure" (The Testament of Judah 15: 4). It is fair to say that Jewish thought saw no value in fasting apart from repentance. The fast was only designed to be the outer expression of an inward sorrow.

The writer of Ecclesiasticus (Sir.31:30) says, "A man who fasts to get rid of his sins, and goes again and does the same thing--who will listen to his prayer, and what profit is there in his humbling himself?"

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Matthew 6:16-18

In many cases fasting was an act of national penitence. So the whole nation fasted after the disaster of the civil war with Benjamin (Judg.20:26). Samuel made the people fast because they had strayed away after Baal (1Sam.7:6). Nehemiah made the people fast and confess their sins (Neh.9:1). Again and again the nation fasted as a sign of national penitence before God.

Sometimes fasting was a preparation for revelation. Moses in the mountain fasted for forty days and forty nights (Exo.24:15). Daniel fasted as he awaited God's word (Dn.9:3). Jesus himself fasted as he awaited the ordeal of temptation (Matt.4:2). This was a sound principle, for when the body is most disciplined, the mental and the spiritual faculties are most alert. Sometimes fasting was an appeal to God. If, for instance, the rains failed and the harvest was in jeopardy, a national fast would be called as an appeal to God.

In Jewish fasting there were really three main ideas in the minds of men.

(i) Fasting was a deliberate attempt to draw the attention of God to the person who fasted. This was a very primitive idea. The fasting was designed to attract God's attention, and to make him notice the person who thus afflicted himself.

(ii) Fasting was a deliberate attempt to prove that penitence was real. Fasting was a guarantee of the sincerity of words and prayers. It is easy to see that there was a danger here, for that which was meant to be a proof of repentance could very easily come to be regarded as a substitute for repentance.

(iii) A great deal of fasting was vicarious. It was not designed to save a man's own soul so much as to move God to liberate the nation from its distresses. It was as if specially devoted people said, "Ordinary people cannot do this. They are too involved in work and in the world. We will do this extra thing to counterbalance the necessary deficiency of piety in others."

Such then was the Jewish theory and practice of fasting.

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Matthew 6:16-18

HOW NOT TO FAST

Matthew 6:16-18

(Part 2)

High as the ideal of fasting might be, the practice of it involved certain inevitable dangers. The great danger was that a man might fast as a sign of superior piety, that his fasting might be a deliberate demonstration, not to God, but to men, of how devoted and disciplined a person he was. That is precisely what Jesus was condemning. He was condemning fasting when it was used as an ostentatious parade of piety. The Jewish days of fasting were Monday and Thursday. These were market days, and into the towns and villages, and especially into Jerusalem, there crowded the people from the country; the result was that those who were ostentatiously fasting would on those days have a bigger audience to see and admire their piety. There were many who took deliberate steps to see that others could not miss the fact that they were fasting. They walked through the streets with hair deliberately unkempt and dishevelled, with clothes deliberately soiled and disarrayed.

They even went the length of deliberately whitening their faces to accentuate their paleness. This was no act of humility; it was a deliberate act of spiritual pride and ostentation.

The wisest of the Rabbis would have condemned this as unsparingly as Jesus did. They were quite clear that fasting for its own sake was valueless. They said that a vow of abstinence was like an iron collar which prisoners had to wear; and he who imposed on himself such a vow was said to be like a man who found such a collar lying about, and who misguidedly stuck his head into it, thereby voluntarily undertaking a useless slavery. One of the finest things ever said is the Rabbinic saying, "A man will have to give an account on the judgment day for every good thing which he might have enjoyed, and did not."

Dr. Boreham has a story which is a commentary on the wrong idea of fasting. A traveller in the Rocky mountains fell in with an old Roman Catholic priest; he was amazed to find so aged a man struggling amidst the rocks and the precipices and the steep passes. The traveller asked the priest, "What are you doing here?" The old man answered, "I am seeking the beauty of the world." "But," said the traveller, "surely you have left it very late in life?" So the old man told his story. He had spent nearly all his life in a monastery; he had never been further outside it than the cloisters. He fell seriously ill, and in his illness he had a vision. He saw an angel stand beside his bed. "What have you come for?" he asked the angel. "To lead you home," the angel said. "And is it a very beautiful world to which I am going?" asked the old man. "It is a very beautiful world you are leaving," said the angel.

"And then," said the old man, "I remembered that I had seen nothing of it except the fields and the trees around the monastery." So he said to the angel, "But I have seen very little of the world which I am leaving." "Then," said the angel, "I fear you will see very little beauty in the world to which you are going." "I was in trouble," said the old man, "and I begged that I might stay for just two more years. My prayer was granted, and I am spending all my little hoard of gold, and all the time I have, in exploring the world's loveliness--and I find it very wonderful!"

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Matthew 6:16-18

It is the duty of a man to accept and enjoy the world's loveliness, and not to reject it. There is no religious value in fasting undertaken for its own sake, or as an ostentatious demonstration of superior piety.

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Matthew 6:16-18

THE TRUE FASTING

Matthew 6:16-18

(Part 3)

Although Jesus condemned the wrong kind of fasting, his words imply that there is a wise fasting, in which he expected that the Christian would take part. This is a thing of which few of us ever think. There are very few ordinary people in whose lives fasting plays any part at all. And yet there are many reasons why a wise fasting is an excellent thing.

(i) Fasting is good for health. Many of us live a life in which it is easy to get soft and flabby. It is even possible for a man to reach the stage when he lives to eat instead of eating to live. It would do a great many people a great deal of physical good to practise fasting far more than they do.

(ii) Fasting is good for self-discipline. It is easy to become almost completely self-indulgent. It is easy to come to a stage when we deny ourselves nothing which it is in our power to have or to pay for. It would do most people a great deal of good to cease for some time each week to make their wishes and their desires their master, and to exercise a stringent and an antiseptic self-discipline.

(iii) Fasting preserves us from becoming the slaves of a habit. There are not a few of us who indulge in certain habits because we find it impossible to stop them. They have become so essential that we cannot break them; we develop such a craving for certain things that what ought to be a pleasure has become a necessity; and to be cut off from the thing which we have learned so to desire can be a purgatory. If we practiced a wise fasting no pleasure would become a chain, and no habit would become a master. We would be masters of our pleasures, and not our pleasures masters of us.

(iv) Fasting preserves the ability to do without things. One of the great tests of any man's life is the number of things which he has come to regard as essential. Clearly, the fewer things we regard as essentials, the more independent we will be. When all kinds of things become essentials, we are at the mercy of the luxuries of life. It is no bad thing for a man to walk down a street of shop windows, and to look in at them, and remind himself of all the things that he can do without. Some kind of fasting preserves the ability to do without the things which should never be allowed to become essentials.

(v) Fasting makes us appreciate things all the more. It may be that there was a time in life when some pleasure came so seldom that we really enjoyed it when it did come. It may be that nowadays the appetite is blunted; the palate is dulled; the edge is gone off it. What was once a sharp pleasure has become simply a drug which we cannot do without. Fasting keeps the thrill in pleasure by keeping pleasure always fresh and new.

Fasting has gone almost completely out of the life of the ordinary person. Jesus condemned the wrong kind of fasting, but he never meant that fasting should be completely eliminated from life and living. We would do well to practise it in our own way and according to our own need. And the reason for practicing it is,

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"So that earth's bliss may be our guide,
And not our chain."

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Matthew 6:19-21

THE TRUE TREASURE

Matthew 6:19-21 (Part 1)

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy them, and where thieves dig through and steal. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy them, and where thieves do not dig through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

In the ordinary, everyday management of life it is simple wisdom to get to oneself only those things which will last. Whether we are buying a suit of clothes, or a motor car, or a carpet for the floor, or a suite of furniture, it is common sense to avoid shoddy goods, and to buy the things which have solidity and permanence and craftsmanship wrought into them. That is exactly what Jesus is saying here; he is telling us to concentrate on the things which will last.

Jesus calls up three pictures from the three great sources of wealth in Palestine.

(i) He tells men to avoid the things that the moth can destroy.

In the east, part of a man's wealth often consisted in fine and elaborate clothes. When Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, wished to make some forbidden profit out of Naaman, after his master had cured him, he asked him for a talent of silver and two festal garments (2Kgs.5:22). One of the things which tempted Achan to sin was a beautiful mantle from Shinar (Josh.7:21).

But such things were foolish things to set the heart upon, for the moths might eat at them, when they were stored away, and all their beauty and their value be destroyed. There was no permanence about possessions like that.

(ii) He tells men to avoid the things that rust can destroy.

The word translated rust is *broxis* (GSN1035). It literally means an eating away, but it is nowhere else used to mean rust. Most likely the picture is this. In the east many a man's wealth consisted in the corn and the grain that he had stored away in his great barns. But into that corn and grain there could come the worms and the rats and the mice, until the store was polluted and destroyed. In all probability, the reference is to the way in which rats, and mice, and worms, and other vermin, could get into a granary and eat away the grain.

There was no permanence about possessions like that.

(iii) He tells men to avoid the treasure,, which thieves can steal by digging through.

The word which is used for "to dig through" (the Revised Standard Version has "break in") is *diorussein* (GSN1358). In Palestine the walls of many of the houses were made of nothing stronger than baked clay; and burglars did effect an entry by literally digging through the wall. The reference here is to the man who has hoarded up in his house a little store of gold, only to find,

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Matthew 6:19-21

when he comes home one day, that the burglars have dug through his flimsy walls and that his treasure is gone.

There is no permanency about a treasure which is at the mercy of any enterprising thief.

So Jesus warns men against three kinds of pleasures and possessions.

(i) He warns them against the pleasures which will wear out like an old suit of clothes. The finest garment in the world, moths or no moths, will in the end disintegrate. All purely physical pleasures have a way of wearing out. At each successive enjoyment of them the thrill becomes less thrilling. It requires more of them to produce the same effect. They are like a drug which loses its initial potency and which becomes increasingly less effective. A man is a foolish man who finds his pleasures in things which are bound to offer diminishing returns.

(ii) He warns against the pleasures which can be eroded away. The grain store is the inevitable prey of the marauding rats and mice who nibble and gnaw away the grain. There are certain pleasures which inevitably lose their attraction as a man grows older. It may be that he is physically less able to enjoy them; it may be that as his mind matures they cease in any sense to satisfy him. In life a man should never give his heart to the joys the years can take away; he should find his delight in the things whose thrill time is powerless to erode.

(iii) He warns against the pleasures which can be stolen away. All material things are like that; not one of them is secure; and if a man builds his happiness on them, he is building on a most insecure basis. Suppose a man arranges his life in such a way that his happiness depends on his possession of money; suppose a crash comes and he wakes up to find his money gone; then, with his wealth, his happiness has gone.

If any man is wise, he will build his happiness on things which he cannot lose, things which are independent of the chances and the changes of this life. Burns wrote of the fleeting things:

"But pleasures are like poppies spread:
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white--then melts for ever."

Any one whose happiness depends on things like that is doomed to disappointment. Any man whose treasure is in things is bound to lose his treasure, for in things there is no permanence, and no thing lasts forever.

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Matthew 6:19-21

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:19-21 (Part 2)

The Jews were very familiar with the phrase treasure in heaven. They identified such treasure with two things in particular.

(i) They said that the deeds of kindness which a man did upon earth became his treasure in heaven.

The Jews had a famous story about a certain King Monobaz of Adiabene who became a convert to Judaism. "Monobaz distributed all his treasures to the poor in the year of famine. His brothers sent to him and said, 'Thy fathers gathered treasures, and added to those of their fathers, but thou hast dispersed yours and theirs.' He said to them, 'My fathers gathered treasures for below, I have gathered treasures for above; they stored treasures in a place over which the hand of man can rule, but I have stored treasures in a place over which the hand of man cannot rule; my fathers collected treasures which bear no interest, I have gathered treasures which bear interest; my fathers gathered treasures of money, I have gathered treasures in souls; my fathers gathered treasures for others, I have gathered treasures for myself; my fathers gathered treasures in this world, I have gathered treasures for the world to come.'"

Both Jesus and the Jewish Rabbis were sure that what is selfishly hoarded is lost, but that what is generously given away brings treasure in heaven.

That was also the principle of the Christian Church in the days to come. The Early Church always lovingly cared for the poor, and the sick, and the distressed, and the helpless, and those for whom no one else cared. In the days of the terrible Decian persecution in Rome, the Roman authorities broke into a Christian Church. They were out to loot the treasures which they believed the Church to possess. The Roman prefect demanded from Laurentius, the deacon: "Show me your treasures at once." Laurentius pointed at the widows and orphans who were being fed, the sick who were being nursed, the poor whose needs were being supplied, "These," he said, "are the treasures of the Church."

The Church has always believed that "what we keep, we lose, and what we spend, we have."

(ii) The Jews always connected the phrase treasure in heaven with character. When Rabbi Yose ben Kisma was asked if he would dwell in a heathen city on condition of receiving very high pay for his services, he replied that he would not dwell anywhere except in a home of the Law, "for," he said, "in the hour of a man's departure neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones accompany him, but only his knowledge of the Law, and his good works." As the grim Spanish proverb has it, "There are no pockets in a shroud."

The only thing which a man can take out of this world into the world beyond is himself; and the finer the self he brings, the greater his treasure in heaven will be.

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Matthew 6:19-21

(iii) Jesus ends this section by stating that where a man's treasure is, his heart is there also. If everything that a man values and sets his heart upon is on earth, then he will have no interest in any world beyond this world; if all through his life a man's eyes are on eternity, then he will evaluate lightly the things of this world. If everything which a man counts valuable is on this earth, then he will leave this earth reluctantly and grudgingly; if a man's thoughts have been ever in the world beyond, he will leave this world with gladness, because he goes at last to God. Once Dr. Johnson was shown through a noble castle and its grounds; when he had seen round it he turned to his companions and said, "These are the things which make it difficult to die."

Jesus never said that this world was unimportant; but he said and implied over and over again that its importance is not in itself, but in that to which it leads. This world is not the end of life, it is a stage on the way; and therefore a man should never lose his heart to this world and to the things of this world. His eyes ought to be for ever fixed on the goal beyond.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 6:22-23

THE DISTORTED VISION

Matthew 6:22-23 (Part 1)

The light of the body is the eye. So then, if your eye is generous, the whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is grudging, your whole body will be in the dark. If, then, the light which is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

The idea behind this passage is one of childlike simplicity. The eye is regarded as the window by which the light gets into the whole body. The state of a window decides what light gets into a room. If the window is clear, clean, and undistorted, the light will come flooding into the room, and will illuminate every corner of it. If the glass of the window is coloured or frosted, distorted, dirty, or obscure, the light will be hindered, and the room will not be lit up.

The amount of light which gets into any room depends on the state of the window through which it has to pass. So, then, says Jesus, the light which gets into any man's heart and soul and being depends on the spiritual state of the eye through which it has to pass, for the eye is the window of the whole body.

The view we take of people depends on the kind of eye we have. There are certain obvious things which can blind our eyes and distort our vision.

(i) Prejudice can distort our vision. There is nothing which so destroys a man's judgment as prejudice does. It prevents him from forming the clear, reasonable and logical judgment which it is the duty of any man to form. It blinds him alike to the facts and to the significance of the facts.

Almost all new discoveries have had to fight their way against unreasonable prejudice. When Sir James Simpson discovered the virtues of chloroform he had to fight against the prejudice of the medical and religious world of his day. One of his biographers writes: "Prejudice, the crippling determination to walk only in time-worn paths, and to eschew new ways, rose up against it, and did their best to smother the new-found blessing." "Many of the clergy held that to try to remove the primal curse on women was to fight against divine law:

One of the most necessary things in life is the fearless self-examination which will enable us to see when we are acting on principle and when we are the victims of our own unreasonable and unreasoning prejudices. In any man who is swayed by prejudice the eye is darkened and the vision distorted.

(ii) Jealousy can distort our vision. Shakespeare gave us the classic example of that in the tragedy of Othello. Othello, the Moor, won fame by his heroic exploits and married Desdemona, who loved him with utter devotion and complete fidelity. As general of the army of Venice, Othello promoted Cassio and passed over Iago. Iago was consumed with jealousy. By careful plotting and the manipulation of facts Iago sowed in Othello's mind the suspicion that Cassio and Desdemona were carrying on an intrigue. He manufactured evidence to prove it, and moved Othello to such a passion of jealousy that he finally murdered Desdemona by smothering her with a pillow. A. C. Bradley

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Matthew 6:22-23

writes, "Such jealousy as Othello's converts human nature into chaos, and liberates the beast in man."

Many a marriage and many a friendship have been wrecked on the rock of a jealousy which distorted perfectly innocent incidents into guilty actions, and which blinded the eye to truth and fact.

(iii) Self-conceit can distort our vision. In her biography of Mark Rutherford, Catherine Macdonald Maclean has a curiously caustic sentence about John Chapman, the bookseller and publisher, who was at one time Mark Rutherford's employer: "Handsome in the Byronic fashion and pleasant-mannered, he was exceedingly attractive to women, and he thought himself even more attractive to them than he actually was."

Self-conceit doubly affects a man's vision, for it renders him incapable of seeing himself as he really is, and incapable of seeing others as they really are. If a man is convinced of his own surpassing wisdom, he will never be able to realise his own foolishness; and if he is blind to everything except his own virtues, he will never be aware of his own faults. Whenever he compares himself with others, he will do so to his own advantage, and to their disadvantage. He will be for ever incapable of self-criticism, and therefore for ever incapable of self-improvement. The light in which he should see himself and see others will be darkness.

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Matthew 6:22-23

THE NECESSITY OF THE GENEROUS EYE

Matthew 6:22-23

(Part 2)

But here Jesus speaks of one special virtue which fills the eye with light, and one special fault which fills the eye with darkness. The King James Version speaks here about the eye being single and the eye being evil. Certainly that is the literal meaning of the Greek, but the words single and evil are here used in a special way which is common enough in the Greek in which scripture is written.

The word for single is haplous (GSN0573), and its corresponding noun is haplotes (GSN0572). Regularly in the Greek of the Bible these words mean generous and generosity. James speaks of God who gives generously (Jas.1:5), and the adverb he uses is haplos (GSN0574). Similarly in Rom.12:8, Paul urges his friends to give in liberality (haplos, GSN0574). Paul reminds the Corinthian Church of the liberality (haplotes, GSN0574) of the Churches in Macedonia, and talks about their own generosity to all men (2Cor.9:11). It is the generous eye which Jesus is commending.

The word which is in the King James Version translated evil is poneros (GSN4190). Certainly that is the normal meaning of the word; but both in the New Testament and in the Septuagint poneros (GSN4190) regularly means niggardly or grudging. Deuteronomy speaks of the duty of lending to a brother who is in need. But the matter was complicated by the fact that every seventh year was a year of release when debts were cancelled. It might, therefore, very well happen that, if the seventh year was near, a cautious man might refuse to help, lest the person helped might take advantage of the seventh year never to repay his debt. So the law lays it down: "Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing" (Deut.15:9). Clearly poneros (GSN4190) there means niggardly, grudging and ungenerous. It is the advice of the proverb: "Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy" (Prov.23:6).

That is to say, "Don't be a guest in the house of a man who grudges you every bite you eat." Another proverb has it: "A miserly man hastens after wealth" (Prov.28:22).

So Jesus is saying, "There is nothing like generosity for giving you a clear and undistorted view of life and of people; and there is nothing like the grudging and ungenerous spirit for distorting your view of life and of people."

(i) We must be generous in our judgments of others. It is characteristic of human nature to think the worst, and to find a malignant delight in repeating the worst. Every day in life the reputations of perfectly innocent people are murdered over the tea-cups by gossiping groups whose judgments are dipped in poison. The world would be saved a great deal of heartbreak, if we would put the best, and not the worst, construction on the actions of other people.

(ii) We must be generous in our actions. In her biography of Mark Rutherford, Catherine Macdonald Maclean speaks of the days when Mark Rutherford came to work in London: "It was about this time that there can be noted in him the beginning of that 'cherishing pity for the souls of

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Matthew 6:22-23

men' which was to become habitual with him.... The burning question with him, haunted as he was at times by the fate of many in the district in which he lived, was, 'What can I do? Wherein can I help them?' It seemed to him then, as always, that any kind of action was of more value than the most vehement indignation that spent itself in talk." When Mark Rutherford was with Chapman the publisher, George Eliot, or Marian Evans as her real name was, lived and worked in the same place. One thing impressed him about her: "She was poor. She had only a small income of her own; and, although she hoped to earn a livelihood as a woman of letters, her future was very uncertain. But she was fantastically generous.

She was always helping lame dogs over stiles, and the poverty of others pressed on her more than her own. She wept more bitterly because she could not adequately relieve a sister's poverty than because of any of her own privations."

It is when we begin to feel like that that we begin to see people and things clearly. It is then that our eye becomes full of light.

There are three great evils of the ungenerous spirit, of the eye that is grudging.

(i) It makes it impossible to live with ourselves. If a man is for ever envying another his success, grudging another his happiness, shutting his heart against another's need, he becomes that most pitiable of creatures--a man with a grudge. There grows within him a bitterness and a resentment which robs him of his happiness, steals away his peace, and destroys his content.

(ii) It makes it impossible to live with other people. The mean man is the man abhorred by all; the man whom all men despise is the man with the miser's heart. Charity covers a multitude of sins, but the grudging spirit makes useless a multitude of virtues. However bad the generous man may be, there are those who will love him; and however good the mean man may be, all men will detest him.

(iii) It makes it impossible to live with God. There is no one so generous as God, and, in the last analysis, there can be no fellowship between two people who guide their lives by diametrically opposite principles. There can be no fellowship between the God whose heart is afire with love, and the man whose heart is frozen with meanness.

The grudging eye distorts our vision; the generous eye alone sees clearly, for it alone sees as God sees.

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Matthew 6:24

THE EXCLUSIVE SERVICE

Matthew 6:24 (Part 1)

No man can be a slave to two owners; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will cleave to the one and despise the other. You cannot be a slave to God and to material things.

To one brought up in the ancient world this is an even more vivid saying than it is to us. The Revised Standard Version translates it: No one can serve two masters. But that is not nearly strong enough. The word which the Revised Standard Version translates "serve" is *douleuein* (GSN1398); *doulos* (GSN1401) is a slave; and *douleuein* (GSN1398) means to be a slave to. The word that the Revised Standard Version translates master is *kurios* (GSN2962), and *kurios* is the word which denotes absolute ownership. We get the meaning far better, if we translate it: No man can be a slave to two owners.

To understand all that this means and implies we must remember two things about the slave in the ancient world. First, the slave in the eyes of the law was not a person but a thing. He had absolutely no rights of his own; his master could do with him absolutely as he liked. In the eyes of the law the slave was a living tool. His master could sell him, beat him, throw him out, and even kill him. His master possessed him as completely as he possessed any of his material possessions. Second, in the ancient world a slave had literally no time which was his own. Every moment of his life belonged to his master. Under modern conditions a man has certain hours of work, and outside these hours of work his time is his own. It is indeed often possible for a man nowadays to find his real interest in life outside his hours of work. He may be a clerk in an office during the day and play the violin in an orchestra at night; and it may be that it is in his music that he finds his real life. He may work in a shipyard or in a factory during the day and run a youth club at night, and it may be that it is in the youth club that he finds his real delight and the real expression of his personality. But it was far otherwise with the slave. The slave had literally no moment of time which belonged to himself. Every moment belonged to his owner and was at his owner's disposal.

Here, then, is our relationship to God. In regard to God we have no rights of our own; God must be undisputed master of our lives. We can never ask, "What do I wish to do?" We must always ask, "What does God wish me to do?" We have no time which is our own. We cannot sometimes say, "I will do what God wishes me to do," and, at other times, say, "I will do what I like." The Christian has no time off from being a Christian; there is no time when he can relax his Christian standards, as if he was off duty. A partial or a spasmodic service of God is not enough. Being a Christian is a whole-time job. Nowhere in the Bible is the exclusive service which God demands more clearly set forth.

Jesus goes on to say, "You cannot serve God and mammon." The correct spelling is with one m. Mammon was a Hebrew word for material possessions. Originally it was not a bad word at all. The Rabbis, for instance, had a saying, "Let the mammon of thy neighbour be as dear to thee as thine own." That is to say, a man should regard his neighbours material possessions as being as sacrosanct as his own. But the word mammon had a most curious and a most revealing history. It comes from a root which means to entrust; and mammon was that which a man entrusted to a

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banker or to a safe deposit of some kind. Mammon was the wealth which a man entrusted to someone to keep safe for him. But as the years went on mammon came to mean, not that which is entrusted, but that in which a man puts his trust. The end of the process was that mammon came to be spelled with a capital M and came to be regarded as nothing less than a god.

The history of that word shows vividly how material possessions can usurp a place in life which they were never meant to have. Originally a man's material possessions were the things which he entrusted to someone else for safe-keeping; in the end they came to be the things in which a man puts his trust. Surely there is no better description of a man's god, than to say that his god is the power in whom he trusts; and when a man puts his trust in material things, then material things have become, not his support, but his god.

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Matthew 6:24

THE PLACE OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

Matthew 6:24 (Part 2)

This saying of Jesus is bound to turn our thoughts to the place which material possessions should have in life. At the basis of Jesus' teaching about possessions there are three great principles.

(i) In the last analysis all things belong to God Scripture makes that abundantly clear. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world and those who dwell therein" (Ps.24:1). "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.... If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine" (Ps.50:10,12).

In Jesus' teaching it is the master who gives his servants the talents (Matt.25:15), and the owner who gives the husbandmen the vineyard (Matt.21:33). This principle has far-reaching consequences. Men can buy and sell things; men can to some extent alter and rearrange things; but man cannot create things. The ultimate ownership of all things belongs to God. There is nothing in this world of which a man can say, "This is mine." Of all things he can only say, "This belongs to God, and God has given me the use of it."

Therefore this basic principle of life emerges. There is nothing in this world of which any man can say, "This is mine, and I will therefore do what I like with it." Of everything he must say, "This is God's, and I must use it as its owner would have it to be used." There is a story of a city child who was taken for a day in the country. For the first time in her life she saw a drift of bluebells. She turned to her teacher and said, 'Do you think God would mind, if I picked one of his flowers?' That is the correct attitude to life and all things in the world.

(ii) The second basic principle is that people are always more important than things. If possessions have to be acquired, if money has to be amassed, if wealth has to be accumulated at the expense of treating people as things, then all such riches are wrong. Whenever and wherever that principle is forgotten, or neglected, or defied, far-reaching disaster is certain to follow.

In this country we are to this day suffering in the world of industrial relationships from the fact that in the days of the industrial revolution people were treated as things. Sir Arthur Bryant in English Saga tells of some of the things which happened in those days. Children of seven and eight years of age--there is actually a case of a child of three--were employed in the mines. Some of them dragged trucks along galleries on all fours; some of them pumped out water standing knee deep in the water for twelve hours a day; some of them, called trappers, opened and shut the ventilating doors of the shafts, and were shut into little ventilating chambers for as much as sixteen hours a day. In 1815 children were working in the mills from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. without even a Saturday half-holiday, and with half an hour off for breakfast and half an hour off for dinner. In 1833 there were 84,000 children under fourteen in the factories.

There is actually a case recorded in which the children whose labour was no longer required were taken to a common and turned adrift. The owners objected to the expression "turned adrift." They said that the children had been set at liberty. They agreed that the children might find things hard. "They would have to beg their way or something of that sort." In 1842 the weavers of Burnley were

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being paid 7 1/2d. a day, and the miners of Staffordshire 2s. 6d. a day. There were those who saw the criminal folly of all this. Carlyle thundered, "If the cotton industry is founded on the bodies of rickety children, it must go; if the devil gets in your cotton-mill, shut the mill." It was pleaded that cheap labour was necessary to keep costs down. Coleridge answered, "You talk about making this article cheaper by reducing its price in the market from 8d. to 6d.

But suppose in so doing you have rendered your country weaker against a foreign foe; suppose you have demoralized thousands of your fellow-countrymen, and have sown discontent between one class of society and another, your article is tolerably dear, I take it, after all."

It is perfectly true that things are very different nowadays. But there is such a thing as racial memory. Deep in the unconscious memory of people the impression of these bad days is indelibly impressed. Whenever people are treated as things, as machines, as instruments for producing so much labour and for enriching those who employ them, then as certainly as the night follows the day disaster follows. A nation forgets at its peril the principle that people are always more important than things.

(iii) The third principle is that wealth is always a subordinate good. The Bible does not say that, "Money is the root of all evil," it says that "The love of money is the root of all evils" (1Tim.6:10). It is quite possible to find in material things what someone has called "a rival salvation." A man may think that, because he is wealthy, he can buy anything, that he can buy his way out of any situation. Wealth can become his measuring-rod; wealth can become his one desire; wealth can become the one weapon with which he faces life. If a man desires material things for an honourable independence, to help his family and to do something for his fellow-men, that is good; but if he desires it simply to heap pleasure upon pleasure, and to add luxury, if wealth has become the thing he lives for and lives by, then wealth has ceased to be a subordinate good, and has usurped the place in life which only God should occupy.

One thing emerges from all this--the possession of wealth, money, material things is not a sin, but it is a grave responsibility. If a man owns many material things it is not so much a matter for congratulation as it is a matter for prayer, that he may use them as God would have him to do.

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THE TWO GREAT QUESTIONS ABOUT POSSESSIONS

Matthew 6:24 (Part 3)

There are two great questions about possessions, and on the answer to these questions everything depends.

(i) How did a man gain his possessions? Did he gain them in a way that he would be glad that Jesus Christ should see, or did he gain them in a way that he would wish to hide from Jesus Christ?

A man may gain his possessions at the expense of honesty and honour. George Macdonald tells of a village shop-keeper who grew very rich. Whenever he was measuring cloth, he measured it with his two thumbs inside the measure so that he always gave short measure. George Macdonald says of him, "He took from his soul, and he put it in his siller-bag." A man can enrich his bank account at the expense of impoverishing his soul.

A man may gain his possessions by deliberately smashing some weaker rival. Many a man's success is founded on someone else's failure. Many a man's advancement has been gained by pushing someone else out of the way. It is hard to see how a man who prospers in such a way can sleep at nights.

A man may gain his possessions at the expense of still higher duties. Robertson Nicoll, the great editor, was born in a manse in the north-east of Scotland. His father had one passion, to buy and to read books. He was a minister and he never had more than 1200 a year. But he amassed the greatest private library in Scotland amounting to 17,000 books. He did not use them in his sermons; he was simply consumed to own and to read them. When he was forty he married a girl of twenty-four. In eight years she was dead of tuberculosis; of a family of five only two lived to be over twenty. That cancerous growth of books filled every room and every passage in the manse. It may have delighted the owner of the books, but it killed his wife and family.

There are possessions which can be acquired at too great a cost. A man must ask himself: "How do I acquire the things which I possess?"

(ii) How does a man use his possessions? There are various ways in which a man may use the things he has acquired.

He may not use them at all. He may have the miser's acquisitiveness which delights simply in possession. His possessions may be quite useless--and uselessness always invites disaster.

He may use them completely selfishly. A man may desire a bigger pay for no other reason than that he wants a bigger car, a new television set, a more expensive holiday. He may think of possessions simply and solely in terms of what they can do for him.

He may use them malignantly. A man can use his possessions to persuade someone else to do things he has no right to do, or to sell things he has no right to sell. Many a young person has been

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bribed or dazzled into sin by someone else's money. Wealth gives power, and a corrupt man can use his possessions to corrupt others--and that in the sight of God is a very terrible sin.

A man may use his possessions for his own independence and for the happiness of others. It does not need great wealth to do that, for a man can be just as generous with half a crown as with a thousand pounds. A man will not go far wrong, if he uses his possessions to see how much happiness he can bring to others. Paul remembered a saying of Jesus which everyone else had forgotten: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Ac.20:35). It is characteristic of God to give, and, if in our lives giving always ranks above receiving, we will use aright what we possess, however much or however little it may be.

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Matthew 6:25-34

THE FORBIDDEN WORRY

Matthew 6:25-34

(Part 1)

I tell you, therefore, do not worry about your life, about what you are to eat, or what you are to drink; and do not worry about your body, about what you are to wear. Is not your life more than food, and your body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air, and see that they do not sow, or reap, or gather things into store-houses, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not better than they? Who of you can add one span to his life by worrying about it? And why do you worry about clothes? Learn a lesson from the lilies of the field, from the way in which they grow. They do not toil or spin; but I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which exists to-day, and which is thrown into the oven to-morrow, shall he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So then do not worry, saying, What are we to eat? or, What are we to drink? or, What are we to wear? The Gentiles seek after all these things.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will come to you in addition. So, then, do not worry about to-morrow; to-morrow will worry about itself. Its own troubles are quite enough for the day.

We must begin our study of this passage by making sure that we understand what Jesus is forbidding and what he is demanding. The King James Version translates Jesus' commandment: Take no thought for the morrow. Strange to say, the King James Version was the first translation to translate it in that way. Wyclif had it: "Be not busy to your life." Tyndale, Crammer and the Geneva Version all had: "Be not careful for your life." They used the word careful in the literal sense of full of care. The older versions were in fact more accurate. It is not ordinary, prudent foresight, such as becomes a man, that Jesus forbids; it is worry. Jesus is not advocating a shiftless, thriftless, reckless, thoughtless, improvident attitude to life; he is forbidding a care-worn, worried fear, which takes all the joy out of life.

The word which is used is the word merimnan (GSN3309), which means to worry anxiously. Its corresponding noun is merimna (GSN3308), which means worry. In a papyrus letter a wife writes to her absent husband: "I cannot sleep at night or by day, because of the worry (merimna, GSN3308) I have about your welfare." A mother, on hearing of her son's good health and prosperity writes back: "That is all my prayer and all my anxiety (merimna, GSN3308)." Anacreon, the poet, writes: "When I drink wine, my worries (merimna, GSN3308) go to sleep." In Greek the word is the characteristic word for anxiety, and worry, and care.

The Jews themselves were very familiar with this attitude to life. It was the teaching of the great Rabbis that a man ought to meet life with a combination of prudence and serenity. They insisted, for instance, that every man must teach his son a trade, for, they said, not to teach him a trade was to teach him to steal. That is to say, they believed in taking all the necessary steps for the prudent handling of life. But at the same time, they said, "He who has a loaf in his basket, and who says, 'What will I eat tomorrow?' is a man of little faith."

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Jesus is here teaching a lesson which his countrymen well knew--the lesson of prudence and forethought and serenity and trust combined.

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Matthew 6:25-34

WORRY AND ITS CURE

Matthew 6:25-34 (Part 2)

In these ten verses Jesus sets out seven different arguments and defences against worry.

(i) He begins by pointing out (Matt.6:25) that God gave us life, and, if he gave us life, surely we can trust him for the lesser things. If God gave us life, surely we can trust him to give us food to sustain that life. If God gave us bodies, surely we can trust him for raiment to clothe these bodies. If anyone gives us a gift which is beyond price, surely we can be certain that such a giver will not be mean, and stingy, and niggardly, and careless, and forgetful about much less costly gifts. So, then, the first argument is that, if God gave us life, we can trust him for the things which are necessary to support life.

(ii) Jesus goes on to speak about the birds (Matt.6:26). There is no worry in their lives, no attempt to pile up goods for an unforeseen and unforeseeable future; and yet their lives go on. More than one Jewish Rabbi was fascinated by the way in which the animals live. "In my life," said Rabbi Simeon, "I have never seen a stag as a dryer of figs, or a lion as a porter, or a fox as a merchant, yet they are all nourished without worry. If they, who are created to serve me, are nourished without worry, how much more ought I, who am created to serve my Maker, to be nourished without worry; but I have corrupted my ways, and so I have impaired my substance." The point that Jesus is making is not that the birds do not work; it has been said that no one works harder than the average sparrow to make a living; the point that he is making is that they do not worry.

There is not to be found in them man's straining to see a future which he cannot see, and man's seeking to find security in things stored up and accumulated against the future.

(iii) In Matt.6:27, Jesus goes on to prove that worry is in any event useless. The verse can bear two meanings. It can mean that no man by worrying can add a cubit to his height; but a cubit is eighteen inches, and no man surely would ever contemplate adding eighteen inches to his height! It can mean that no man by worrying can add the shortest space to his life; and that meaning is more likely. It is Jesus' argument that worry is pointless anyway.

(iv) Jesus goes on to speak about the flowers (Matt.6:28-30), and he speaks about them as one who loved them. The lilies of the field were the scarlet poppies and anemones. They bloomed one day on the hillsides of Palestine; and yet in their brief life they were clothed with a beauty which surpassed the beauty of the robes of kings. When they died they were used for nothing better than for burning. The point is this. The Palestinian oven was made of clay. It was like a clay box set on bricks over the fire. When it was desired to raise the temperature of it especially quickly, some handfuls of dried grasses and wild flowers were flung inside the oven and set alight. The flowers had but one day of life; and then they were set alight to help a woman to heat an oven when she was baking in a hurry; and yet God clothes them with a beauty which is beyond man's power to imitate.

If God gives such beauty to a short-lived flower, how much more will he care for man? Surely the generosity which is so lavish to the flower of a day will not be forgetful of man, the crown of creation.

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(v) Jesus goes on to advance a very fundamental argument against worry. Worry, he says, is characteristic of a heathen, and not of one who knows what God is like (Matt.6:32). Worry is essentially distrust of God. Such a distrust may be understandable in a heathen who believes in a jealous, capricious, unpredictable god; but it is beyond comprehension in one who has learned to call God by the name of Father. The Christian cannot worry because he believes in the love of God.

(vi) Jesus goes on to advance two ways in which to defeat worry. The first is to seek first, to concentrate upon, the Kingdom of God. We have seen that to be in the Kingdom and to do the will of God is one and the same thing (Matt.6:10). To concentrate on the doing of, and the acceptance of, God's will is the way to defeat worry. We know how in our own lives a great love can drive out every other concern. Such a love can inspire a man's work, intensify his study, purify his life, dominate his whole being. It was Jesus; conviction that worry is banished when God becomes the dominating power of our lives.

(vii) Lastly, Jesus says that worry can be defeated when we acquire the art of living one day at a time (Matt.6:34). The Jews had a saying: "Do not worry over tomorrow's evils, for you know not what today will bring forth. Perhaps tomorrow you will not be alive, and you will have worried for a world which will not be yours." If each day is lived as it comes, if each task is done as it appears, then the sum of all the days is bound to be good. It is Jesus' advice that we should handle the demands of each day as it comes, without worrying about the unknown future and the things which may never happen.

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Matthew 6:25-34

THE FOLLY OF WORRY

Matthew 6:25-34 (Part 3)

Let us now see if we can gather up Jesus' arguments against worry.

(i) Worry is needless, useless and even actively injurious. Worry cannot affect the past, for the past is past. Omar Khayyam was grimly right:

"The moving finger writes, and, having writ,
Moves on; nor all thy piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

The past is past. It is not that a man can or ought to dissociate himself from his past; but he ought to use his past as a spur and a guide for better action in the future, and not as something about which he broods until he has worried himself into a paralysis of action.

Equally, worry about the future is useless. Alistair MacLean in one of his sermons tells of a story which he had read. A London doctor was the hero. "He was paralysed and bedridden, but almost outrageously cheerful, and his smile so brave and radiant that everyone forgot to be sorry for him. His children adored him, and when one of his boys was leaving the nest and starting forth upon life's adventure, Dr. Greatheart gave him good advice: 'Johnny,' he said, 'the thing to do, my lad, is to hold your own end up, and to do it like a gentleman, and please remember the biggest troubles you have got to face are those that never come.'" Worry about the future is wasted effort, and the future of reality is seldom as bad as the future of our fears.

But worry is worse than useless; it is often actively injurious. The two typical diseases of modern life are the stomach ulcer and the coronary thrombosis, and in many cases both are the result of worry. It is a medical fact that he who laughs most lives longest. The worry which wears out the mind wears out the body along with it. Worry affects a man's judgment, lessens his powers of decision, and renders him progressively incapable of dealing with life. Let a man give his best to every situation--he cannot give more--and let him leave the rest to God.

(ii) Worry is blind. Worry refuses to learn the lesson of nature. Jesus bids men look at the birds, and see the bounty which is behind nature, and trust the love that lies behind that bounty. Worry refuses to learn the lesson of history. There was a Psalmist who cheered himself with the memory of history: "O my God," he cries, "my soul is cast down within me." And then he goes on: "Therefore I remember Thee, from the land of Jordan, and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar" (Ps.42:6; compare Deut.3:9). When he was up against it, he comforted himself with the memory of what God had done. The man who feeds his heart on the record of what God has done in the past will never worry about the future. Worry refuses to learn the lesson of life. We are still alive and our heads are still above water; and yet if someone had told us that we would have to go through what we have actually gone through, we would have said that it was impossible.

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Matthew 6:25-34

The lesson of life is that somehow we have been enabled to bear the unbearable and to do the undoable and to pass the breaking-point and not to break. The lesson of life is that worry is unnecessary.

(iii) Worry is essentially irreligious. Worry is not caused by external circumstances. In the same circumstances one man can be absolutely serene, and another man can be worried to death. Both worry and serenity come, not from circumstances, but from the heart. Alistair MacLean quotes a story from Tauler, the German mystic. One day Tauler met a beggar. "God give you a good day, my friend," he said. The beggar answered, "I thank God I never had a bad one." Then Tauler said, "God give you a happy life, my friend." "I thank God," said the beggar, "I am never unhappy." Tauler in amazement said, "What do you mean?" "Well," said the beggar, "when it is fine, I thank God; when it rains, I thank God; when I have plenty, I thank God; when I am hungry, I thank God; and since God's will is my will, and whatever pleases him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?" Tauler looked at the man in astonishment. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am a king," said the beggar.

"Where then is your kingdom?" asked Tauler. And the beggar answered quietly: "In my heart."

Isaiah said it long ago: "Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusts in thee" (Isa.26:3). As the north country woman had it: "I am always happy, and my secret is always to sail the seas, and ever to keep the heart in port."

There may be greater sins than worry, but very certainly there is no more disabling sin. "Take no anxious thought for the morrow"--that is the commandment of Jesus, and it is the way, not only to peace, but also to power.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 7:1-5

THE ERROR OF JUDGMENT

Matthew 7:1-5 (Part 1)

Do not judge others, in order that you may not be judged; for with the standard of judgment with which you judge you will be judged; and with the measure you measure to others it will be measured to you. Why do you look for the speck of dust in your brother's eye, and never notice the plank that is in your own eye? or, how will you say to your brother: "Let me remove the speck of dust from your eye," and, see, there is a plank in your own eye? Hypocrite! first remove the plank from your own eye; then you will see clearly to remove the speck of dust from your brother's eye.

When Jesus spoke like this, as so often in the Sermon on the Mount, he was using words and ideas which were quite familiar to the highest thoughts of the Jews. Many a time the Rabbis warned people against judging others. "He who judges his neighbour favourably," they said, "will be judged favourably by God." They laid it down that there were six great works which brought a man credit in this world and profit in the world to come--study, visiting the sick, hospitality, devotion in prayer, the education of children in the Law, and thinking the best of other people. The Jews knew that kindness in judgment is nothing less than a sacred duty.

One would have thought that this would have been a commandment easy to obey, for history is strewn with the record of the most amazing misjudgments. There have been so many that one would have thought it would be a warning to men not to judge at all.

It has been so in literature. In the Edinburgh Review of November, 1814, Lord Jeffrey wrote a review of Wordsworth's newly published poem The Excursion, in which he delivered the now famous, or infamous verdict: "This will never do." In a review of Keats' Endymion, The Quarterly patronizingly noted "a certain amount of talent which deserves to be put in the right way."

Again and again men and women who became famous have been dismissed as nonentities. In his autobiography Gilbert Frankau tells how in the Victorian days his mother's house was a salon where the most brilliant people met. His mother arranged for the entertainment of her guests. Once she engaged a young Australian soprano to sing. After she had sung, Gilbert Frankau's mother said, "What an appalling voice! She ought to be muzzled and allowed to sing no more!" The young singer's name was Nellie Melba.

Gilbert Frankau himself was producing a play. He sent to a theatrical agency for a young male actor to play the leading male part. The young man was interviewed and tested. After the test Gilbert Frankau telephoned to the agent. "This man", he said, "will never do. He cannot act, and he never will be able to act, and you had better tell him to look for some other profession before he starves. By the way, tell me his name again so that I can cross him off my list." The actor was Ronald Colman who was to become one of the most famous the screen has ever known.

Again and again people have been guilty of the most notorious moral misjudgments. Collie Knox tells of what happened to himself and a friend. He himself had been badly smashed up in a flying accident while serving in the Royal Flying Corps. The friend had that very day been decorated for

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gallantry at Buckingham Palace. They had changed from service dress into civilian clothes and were lunching together at a famous London restaurant, when a girl came up and handed to each of them a white feather--the badge of cowardice.

There is hardly anyone who has not been guilty of some grave misjudgment; there is hardly anyone who has not suffered from someone else's misjudgment. And yet the strange fact is that there is hardly any commandment of Jesus which is more consistently broken and neglected.

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Matthew 7:1-5

NO MAN CAN JUDGE

Matthew 7:1-5 (Part 2)

There are three great reasons why no man should judge another.

(i) We never know the whole facts or the whole person. Long ago Hillel the famous Rabbi said, "Do not judge a man until you yourself have come into his circumstances or situation." No man knows the strength of another man's temptations. The man with the placid and equable temperament knows nothing of the temptations of the man whose blood is afire and whose passions are on a hair-trigger. The man brought up in a good home and in Christian surroundings knows nothing of the temptation of the man brought up in a slum, or in a place where evil stalks abroad. The man blessed with fine parents knows nothing of the temptations of the man who has the load of a bad heredity upon his back. The fact is that if we realized what some people have to go through, so far from condemning them, we would be amazed that they have succeeded in being as good as they are.

No more do we know the whole person. In one set of circumstances a person may be unlovely and graceless; in another that same person may be a tower of strength and beauty. In one of his novels Mark Rutherford tells of a man who married for the second time. His wife had also been married before, and she had a daughter in her teens. The daughter seemed a sullen and unlovely creature, without a grain of attractiveness in her. The man could make nothing of her. Then, unexpectedly, the mother fell ill. At once the daughter was transformed. She became the perfect nurse, the embodiment of service and tireless devotion. Her sullenness was lit by a sudden radiance, and there appeared in her a person no one would ever have dreamed was there.

There is a kind of crystal called Labrador spar. At first sight it is dull and without lustre; but if it is turned round and round, and here and there, it will suddenly come into a position where the light strikes it in a certain way and it will sparkle with flashing beauty. People are like that. They may seem unlovely simply because we do not know the whole person. Everyone has something good in him or her. Our task is not to condemn, and to judge by, the superficial unloveliness, but to look for the underlying beauty. That is what we would have others do to us, and that is what we must do to them.

(ii) It is almost impossible for any man to be strictly impartial in his judgment. Again and again we are swayed by instinctive and unreasoning reactions to people.

It is told that sometimes, when the Greeks held a particularly important and difficult trial, they held it in the dark so that judge and jury would not even see the man on trial, and so would be influenced by nothing but the facts of the case.

Montaigne has a grim tale in one of his essays. There was a Persian judge who had given a biased verdict, and he had given it under the influence of bribery. When Cambysses, the king, discovered what had happened, he ordered the judge to be executed. Then he had the skin flayed from the dead

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body and preserved; and with the skin he covered the seat of the chair on which judges sat in judgment, that it might be a grim reminder to them never to allow prejudice to affect their verdicts.

Only a completely impartial person has a right to judge. It is not in human nature to be completely impartial. Only God can judge.

(iii) But it was Jesus who stated the supreme reason why we should not judge others. No man is good enough to judge any other man. Jesus drew a vivid picture of a man with a plank in his own eye trying to extract a speck of dust from someone else's eye. The humour of the picture would raise a laugh which would drive the lesson home.

Only the faultless has a right to look for faults in others. No man has a right to criticize another man unless he is prepared at least to try to do the thing he criticizes better. Every Saturday the football terracings are full of people who are violent critics, and who would yet make a pretty poor show if they themselves were to descend to the arena. Every association and every Church is full of people who are prepared to criticize from the body of the hall, or even from an arm-chair, but who would never even dream of taking office themselves. The world is full of people who claim the right to be extremely vocal in criticism and totally exempt from action.

No man has a right to criticize others unless he is prepared to venture himself in the same situation. No man is good enough to criticize his fellow-men.

We have quite enough to do to rectify our own lives without seeking censoriously to rectify the lives of others. We would do well to concentrate on our own faults, and to leave the faults of others to God.

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Matthew 7:6

THE TRUTH AND THE HEARER

Matthew 7:6 (Part 1)

Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, and do not cast your pearls before pigs, lest they trample upon them with their feet, and turn and rend you.

This is a very difficult saying of Jesus for, on the face of it, it seems to demand an exclusiveness which is the very reverse of the Christian message. It was, in fact, a saying which was used in two ways in the early Church.

(i) It was used by the Jews who believed that God's gifts and God's grace were for Jews alone. It was used by those Jews who were the enemies of Paul, and who argued that a gentile must become circumcised and accept the Law and become a Jew before he could become a Christian. It was indeed a text which could be used--misused--in the interests of Jewish exclusiveness.

(ii) The early Church used this text in a special way. The early Church was under a double threat. It was under the threat which came from outside. The early Church was an island of Christian purity in a surrounding sea of gentile immorality; and it was always supremely liable to be infected with the taint of the world. It was under the threat which came from inside. In those early days men were thinking things out, and it was inevitable that there would be those whose speculations would wander into the pathways of heresy; there were those who tried to effect a compromise between Christian and pagan thought, and to arrive at some synthesis of belief which would satisfy both. If the Christian Church was to survive, it had to defend itself alike from the threat from outside and the threat from inside, or it would have become simply another of the many religions which competed within the Roman Empire.

In particular the early Church was very careful about whom it admitted to the Lord's Table, and this text became associated with the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper began with the announcement: "Holy things for holy people." Theodoret quotes what he says is an unwritten saying of Jesus: "My mysteries are for myself and for my people." The Apostolic Constitutions lay it down that at the beginning of the Lord's Supper the deacon shall say, "Let none of the catechumens (that is, those still under instruction), let none of the hearers (that is, those who had come to the service because they were interested in Christianity), let none of the unbelievers, let none of the heretics, stay here." There was a fencing of the Table against all but pledged Christians. The Didache, or, to give it its full name, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, which dates back to A.D.

100 and which is the first service order book of the Christian Church, lays it down: "Let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptised into the name of the Lord; for, as regards this, the Lord has said, 'Give not that which is holy unto dogs.'" It is Tertullian's complaint that the heretics allow all kinds of people, even the heathen, into the Lord's Supper, and by so doing, "That which is holy they will cast to the dogs, and pearls (although, to be sure, they are not real ones) to swine" (De Praescriptione 4 1).

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Matthew 7:6

In all these instances this text is used as a basis of exclusiveness. It was not that the Church was not missionary-minded; the Church in the early days was consumed with the desire to win everyone; but the Church was desperately aware of the utter necessity of maintaining the purity of the faith, lest Christianity should be gradually assimilated to and ultimately swallowed up in, the surrounding sea of paganism.

It is easy to see the temporary meaning of this text; but we must try to see its permanent meaning as well.

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Matthew 7:6

REACHING THOSE WHO ARE UNFIT TO HEAR

Matthew 7:6 (Part 2)

It is just possible that this saying of Jesus has become altered accidentally in its transmission. It is a good example of the Hebrew habit of parallelism which we have already met (Matt.6:10). Let us set it down in its parallel clauses:

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs;
Neither cast ye your pearls before swine."

With the exception of one word the parallelism is complete. Give is paralleled by cast; dogs by swine; but holy is not really balanced by pearls. There the parallelism breaks down. It so happens that there are two Hebrew words which are very like each other, especially when we remember that Hebrew has no written vowels. The word for holy is qadosh (HSN6918) (Q-D-SH); and the Aramaic word for an ear-ring is qadasha (Q-D-SH). The consonants are exactly the same, and in primitive written Hebrew the words would look exactly the same. Still further, in the Talmud, "an ear-ring in a swine's snout" is a proverbial phrase for something which is entirely incongruous and out of place. It is by no means impossible that the original phrase ran:

"Give not an ear-ring to the dogs;
Neither cast ye your pearls before swine,"

in which case the parallelism would be perfect.

If that is the real meaning of the phrase, it would simply mean that there are certain people who are not fit, not able, to receive the message which the Church is so willing to give. It would not then be a statement of exclusiveness; it would be the statement of a practical difficulty of communication which meets the preacher in every age. It is quite true that there are certain people to whom it is impossible to impart truth. Something has to happen to them before they can be taught. There is actually a rabbinic saying, "Even as a treasure must not be shown to everyone, so with the words of the Law; one must not go deeply into them, except in the presence of suitable people."

This is in fact a universal truth. It is not to everyone that we can talk of everything. Within a group of friends we may sit and talk about our faith; we may allow our minds to question and adventure; we may talk about the things which puzzle and perplex; and we may allow our minds to go out on the roads of speculation. But if into that group there comes a person of rigid and unsympathetic orthodoxy, he might well brand us as a set of dangerous heretics; or if there entered a simple and unquestioning soul, his faith might well be shocked and shaken. A medical film might well be to one person an eye-opening, valuable, and salutary experience; while to another it might equally produce a prurient and prying obscenity. It is told that once Dr. Johnson and a group of friends were talking and jesting as only old friends can. Johnson saw an unpleasant creature approach. "Let us be silent," he said, "a fool is coming."

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Matthew 7:6

So, then, there are some people who cannot receive Christian truth. It may be that their minds are shut; it may be that their minds are brutalised and covered over with a film of filth; it may be that they have lived a life which has obscured their ability to see the truth; it may be that they are constitutional mockers of all things holy; it may be, as sometimes happens, that we and they have absolutely no common ground on which we can argue.

A man can only understand what he is fit to understand. It is not to everyone that we can lay bare the secrets of our hearts. There are always those to whom the preaching of Christ will be foolishness, and in whose minds the truth, when expressed in words, will meet an insuperable barrier.

What is to be done with these people? Are they to be abandoned as hopeless? Is the Christian message simply to be withdrawn from them? What Christian words cannot do, a Christian life can often do. A man may be blind and impervious to any Christian argument in words; but he can have no answer to the demonstration of a Christian life.

Cecil Northcott in *A Modern Epiphany* tells of a discussion in a camp of young people where representatives of many nations were living together. "One wet night the campers were discussing various ways of telling people about Christ. They turned to the girl from Africa. 'Maria,' they asked, 'what do you do in your country?' 'Oh,' said Maria, 'we don't have missions or give pamphlets away. We just send one or two Christian families to live and work in a village, and when people see what Christians are like, then they want to be Christians too.'" In the end the only all-conquering argument is the argument of a Christian life.

It is often impossible to talk to some people about Jesus Christ. Their insensitiveness, their moral blindness, their intellectual pride, their cynical mockery, the tarnishing film, make them impervious to words about Christ. But it is always possible to show men Christ; and the weakness of the Church lies not in lack of Christian arguments, but in lack of Christian lives.

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Matthew 7:7-11

THE CHARTER OF PRAYER

Matthew 7:7-11

Keep on asking, and it will be given you; Keep on seeking, and you will find; Keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone that asks receives; And he who seeks finds; And to him who knocks it will be opened. What man is there, who, if his son will ask him for bread, will give him a stone? Or, if he will ask for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If, then, you, who are grudging, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Any man who prays is bound to want to know to what kind of God he is praying. He wants to know in what kind of atmosphere his prayers will be heard. Is he praying to a grudging God out of whom every gift has to be squeezed and coerced? Is he praying to a mocking God whose gifts may well be double-edged? Is he praying to a God whose heart is so kind that he is more ready to give than we are to ask?

Jesus came from a nation which loved prayer. The Jewish Rabbis said the loveliest things about prayer. "God is as near to his creatures as the ear to the mouth." "Human beings can hardly hear two people talking at once, but God, if all the world calls to him at the one time, hears their cry." "A man is annoyed by being worried by the requests of his friends, but with God, all the time a man puts his needs and requests before him, God loves him all the more." Jesus had been brought up to love prayer; and in this passage he gives us the Christian charter of prayer.

Jesus' argument is very simple. One of the Jewish Rabbis asked, "Is there a man who ever hates his son?" Jesus' argument is that no father ever refused the request of his son; and God the great Father will never refuse the requests of his children.

Jesus' examples are carefully chosen. He takes three examples, for Luke adds a third to the two Matthew gives. If a son asks bread, will his father give him a stone? If a son asks a fish, will his father give him a serpent? If a son asks an egg, will his father give him a scorpion? (Lk.11:12). The point is that in each case the two things cited bear a close resemblance.

The little, round, limestone stones on the seashore were exactly the shape and the colour of little loaves. If a son asks bread will his father mock him by offering him a stone, which looks like bread but which is impossible to eat?

If a son asks a fish, will his father give him a serpent? Almost certainly the serpent is an eel. According to the Jewish food laws an eel could not be eaten, because an eel was an unclean fish. "Everything in the waters that has not fins and scales is an abomination to you" (Lev.11:12). That regulation ruled out the eel as an article of diet. If a son asks for a fish, will his father indeed give him a fish, but a fish which it is forbidden to eat, and which is useless to eat? Would a father mock his son's hunger like that?

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If the son asks for an egg, will his father give him a scorpion? The scorpion is a dangerous little animal. In action it is rather like a small lobster, with claws with which it clutches its victim. Its sting is in its tail, and it brings its tail up over its back to strike its victim. The sting can be exceedingly painful, and sometimes even fatal. When the scorpion is at rest its claws and tail are folded in, and there is a pale kind of scorpion, which, when folded up, would look exactly like an egg. If a son asks for an egg, will his father mock him by handing him a biting scorpion?

God will never refuse our prayers; and God will never mock our prayers. The Greeks had their stories about the gods who answered men's prayers, but the answer was an answer with a barb in it, a double-edged gift. Aurora, the goddess of the dawn, fell in love with Tithonus a mortal youth, so the Greek story ran. Zeus, the king of the gods, offered her any gift that she might choose for her mortal lover. Aurora very naturally chose that Tithonus might live for ever; but she had forgotten to ask that Tithonus might remain for ever young; and so Tithonus grew older and older and older, and could never die, and the gift became a curse.

There is a lesson here; God will always answer our prayers; but he will answer them in his way, and his way will be the way of perfect wisdom and of perfect love. Often if he answered our prayers as we at the moment desired it would be the worst thing possible for us, for in our ignorance we often ask for gifts which would be our ruin. This saying of Jesus tells us, not only that God will answer, but that God will answer in wisdom and in love.

Although this is the charter of prayer, it lays certain obligations upon us. In Greek there are two kinds of imperative; there is the aorist imperative which issues one definite command. "Shut the door behind you," would be an aorist imperative. There is the present imperative which issues a command that a man should always do something or should go on doing something. "Always shut doors behind you," would be a present imperative. The imperatives here are present imperatives; therefore Jesus is saying, "Go on asking; go on seeking; go on knocking." He is telling us to persist in prayer; he is telling us never to be discouraged in prayer. Clearly therein lies the test of our sincerity. Do we really want a thing? Is a thing such that we can bring it repeatedly into the presence of God, for the biggest test of any desire is: Can I pray about it?

Jesus here lays down the twin facts that God will always answer our prayers in his way, in wisdom and in love; and that we must bring to God an undiscouraged life of prayer, which tests the rightness of the things we pray for, and which tests our own sincerity in asking for them.

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Matthew 7:12

THE EVEREST OF ETHICS

Matthew 7:12 (Part 1)

So, then, all the things which you wish that men should do to you, so do you too do to them; for this is the Law and the prophets.

This is probably the most universally famous thing that Jesus ever said. With this commandment the Sermon on the Mount reaches its summit. This saying of Jesus has been called "the capstone of the whole discourse." It is the topmost peak of social ethics, and the Everest of all ethical teaching.

It is possible to quote rabbinic parallels for almost everything that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount; but there is no real parallel to this saying. This is something which had never been said before. It is new teaching, and a new view of life and of life's obligations.

It is not difficult to find many parallels to this saying in its negative form. As we have seen, there were two most famous Jewish teachers. There was Shammai who was famous for his stem and rigid austerity; there was Hillel who was famous for his sweet graciousness. The Jews had a story like this: "A heathen came to Shammai and said, 'I am prepared to be received as a proselyte on the condition that you teach me the whole Law while I am standing on one leg.' Shammai drove him away with a foot-rule which he had in his hand. He went to Hillel who received him as a proselyte. He said to him, 'What is hateful to yourself, do to no other; that is the whole Law, and the rest is commentary. Go and learn.'" There is the Golden Rule in its negative form.

In the Book of Tobit there is a passage in which the aged Tobias teaches his son all that is necessary for life. One of his maxims is: "What thou thyself hatest, to no man do" (Tob.4:16).

There is a Jewish work called The Letter to Aristeas, which purports to be an account of the Jewish scholars who went to Alexandria to translate the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, and who produced the Septuagint. The Egyptian king gave them a banquet at which he asked them certain difficult questions. "What is the teaching of wisdom?" he asked. A Jewish scholar answered, "As you wish that no evil should befall you, but to be a partaker of all good things, so you should act on the same principle towards your subjects and offenders, and you should mildly admonish the noble and the good. For God draws all men unto himself by his benignity" (The Letter to Aristeas 207).

Rabbi Eliezer came nearer to Jesus' way of putting it when he said, "Let the honour of thy friend be as dear unto thee as thine own." The Psalmist again had the negative form when he said that only the man who does no evil to his neighbour can approach God (Ps.15:3).

It is not difficult to find this rule in Jewish teaching in its negative form; but there is no parallel to the positive form in which Jesus put it.

The same is true of the teaching of other religions. The negative form is one of the basic principles of Confucius. Tsze-Kung asked him, "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of

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Matthew 7:12

practice for all one's life?" Confucius said, "Is not reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

There are certain beautiful lines in the Buddhist Hymns of the Faith which come very near the Christian teaching:

"All men tremble at the rod, all men fear death;
Putting oneself in the place of others, kill not, nor cause to kin.
All men tremble at the rod, unto all men life is dear;
Doing as one would be done by, kill not nor cause to kill."

With the Greeks and the Romans it is the same. Isocrates tells how King Nicocles advised his subordinate officials: "Do not do to others the things which make you angry when you experience them at the hands of other people." Epictetus condemned slavery on the principle: "What you avoid suffering yourselves, seek not to inflict upon others." The Stoics had as one of their basic maxims: "What you do not wish to be done to you, do not do to anyone else." And it is told that the Emperor Alexander Severus had that sentence engraved upon the walls of his palace that he might never forget it as a rule of life.

In its negative form this rule is in fact the basis of all ethical teaching, but no one but Jesus ever put it in its positive form. Many voices had said, "Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you," but no voice had ever said, "Do to others what you would have them do to you."

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Matthew 7:12

THE GOLDEN RULE OF JESUS

Matthew 7:12 (Part 2)

Let us see just how the positive form of the golden rule differs from the negative form; and let us see just how much more Jesus was demanding than any teacher had ever demanded before.

When this rule is put in its negative form, when we are told that we must refrain from doing to others that which we would not wish them to do to us, it is not an essentially religious rule at all. It is simply a common-sense statement without which no social intercourse at all would be possible. Sir Thomas Browne once said, "We are beholden to every man we meet that he doth not kill us." In a sense that is true, but, if we could not assume that the conduct and the behaviour of other people to us would conform to the accepted standards of civilized life, then life would be intolerable. The negative form of the golden rule is not in any sense an extra; it is something without which life could not go on at all.

Further, the negative form of the rule involves nothing more than not doing certain things; it means refraining from certain actions. It is never very difficult not to do things. That we must not do injury to other people is not a specially religious principle; it is rather a legal principle. It is the kind of principle that could well be kept by a man who has no belief and no interest in religion at all. A man might for ever refrain from doing any injury to any one else, and yet be a quite useless citizen to his fellow-men. A man could satisfy the negative form of the rule by simple inaction; if he consistently did nothing he would never break it. And a goodness which consists in doing nothing would be a contradiction of everything that Christian goodness means.

When this rule is put positively, when we are told that we must actively do to others what we would have them do to us, a new principle enters into life, and a new attitude to our fellow-men. It is one thing to say, "I must not injure people; I must not do to them what I would object to their doing to me." That, the law can compel us to do. It is quite another thing to say, "I must go out of my way to help other people and to be kind to them, as I would wish them to help and to be kind to me." That, only love can compel us to do. The attitude which says, "I must do no harm to people," is quite different from the attitude which says, "I must do my best to help people."

To take a very simple analogy--if a man has a motor car the law can compel him to drive it in such a way that he does not injure anyone else on the road, but no law can compel him to stop and to give a weary and a foot-sore traveller a lift along the road. It is quite a simple thing to refrain from hurting and injuring people; it is not so very difficult to respect their principles and their feelings; it is a far harder thing to make it the chosen and deliberate policy of life to go out of our way to be as kind to them as we would wish them to be to us.

And yet it is just that new attitude which makes life beautiful. Jane Stoddart quotes an incident from the life of W. H. Smith. "When Smith was at the War Office, his private secretary, Mr. Fleetwood Wilson, noticed that at the end of a week's work, when his chief was preparing to leave for Greenlands on a Saturday afternoon, he used to pack a despatch-box with the papers he required to take with him, and carry it himself on his journey. Mr. Wilson remarked that Mr. Smith would

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save himself much trouble, if he did as was the practice of other ministers--leave the papers to be put in an office 'pouch' and sent by post. Mr. Smith looked rather ashamed for a moment, and then looking up at his secretary said, 'Well, my dear Wilson, that fact is this: our postman who brings the letters from Henley, has plenty to carry.

I watched him one morning coming up the approach with my heavy pouch in addition to his usual load, and I determined to save him as much as I could." An action like that shows a certain attitude to one's fellow-men. It is the attitude which believes that we should treat our fellow-men, not as the law allows, but as love demands.

It is perfectly possible for a man of the world to observe the negative form of the golden rule. He could without very serious difficulty so discipline his life that he would not do to others what he did not wish them to do to him; but the only man who can even begin to satisfy the positive form of the rule is the man who has the love of Christ within his heart. He will try to forgive as he would wish to be forgiven, to help as he would wish to be helped, to praise as he would wish to be praised, to understand as he would wish to be understood. He will never seek to avoid doing things; he will always look for things to do. Clearly this will make life much more complicated; clearly he will have much less time to spend on his own desires and his own activities, for time and time again he will have to stop what he is doing to help someone else. It will be a principle which will dominate his life at home, in the factory, in the bus, in the office, in the street, in the train, at his games, everywhere.

He can never do it until self withers and dies within his heart. To obey this commandment a man must become a new man with a new centre to his life; and if the world was composed of people who sought to obey this rule, it would be a new world.

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Matthew 7:13-14

LIFE AT THE CROSS-ROADS

Matthew 7:13-14

Go in through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the road which leads to ruin, and there are many who go in through it. Narrow is the gate and hard is the way that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

There is always a certain dramatic quality about life, for, as it has been said, "all life concentrates on man at the cross-roads." In every action of life man is confronted with a choice; and he can never evade the choice, because he can never stand still. He must always take one way or the other. Because of that, it has always been one of the supreme functions of the great men of history that they should confront men with that inevitable choice. As the end drew near, Moses spoke to the people: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil.... Therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (Deut.30:15-20). When Joshua was laying down the leadership of the nation at the end of his life, he presented them with the same choice: "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh.24:15). Jeremiah heard the voice of God saying to him, "And to this people you will say, Thus says the Lord: Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death" (Jer.21:8).

John Oxenham wrote:

"To every man there openeth
A way and ways and a way;
And the high soul treads the high way,
And the low soul gropes the low;
And in between on the misty flats
The rest drift to and fro;
But to every man there openeth
A high way and a low,
And every man decideth
The way his soul shall go."

That is the choice with which Jesus is confronting men in this passage. There is a broad and an easy way, and there are many who take it; but the end of it is ruin. There is a narrow and a hard way, and there are few who take it; but the end of it is life. Cebes, the disciple of Socrates, writes in the Tabula: "Dost thou see a little door, and a way in front of the door, which is not much crowded, but the travellers are few? That is the way that leadeth to true instruction." Let us examine the difference between the two ways.

(i) It is the difference between the hard and the easy way. There is never any easy way to greatness; greatness is always the product of toil. Hesiod, the old Greek poet, writes, "Wickedness can be had in abundance easily; smooth is the road, and very nigh she dwells; but in front of virtue the gods immortal have put sweat." Epicharmus said, "The gods demand of us toil as the price of all good things." "Knave," he warns, "yearn not for the soft things, lest thou earn the hard."

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Once Edmund Burke made a great speech in the House of Commons. Afterwards his brother Richard Burke was observed deep in thought. He was asked what he was thinking about, and answered, "I have been wondering how it has come about that Ned has contrived to monopolise all the talents of our family; but then again I remember that, when we were at play, he was always at work." Even when a thing is done with an appearance of ease, that ease is the product of unremitting toil. The skill of the master executant on the piano, or the champion player on the golf course did not come without sweat. There never has been any other way to greatness than the way of toil, and anything else which promises such a way is a delusion and a snare.

(ii) It is the difference between the long and the short way. Very rarely something may emerge complete and perfect in a flash, but far oftener greatness is the result of long labour and constant attention to detail. Horace in *The Art of Poetry*? advises Piso, when he has written something, to keep it beside him for nine years before he publishes it. He tells how a pupil used to take exercises to Quintilius, the famous critic. Quintilius would say, "Scratch it out; the work has been badly turned; send it back to the fire and the anvil." Virgil's *Aeneid* occupied the last ten years of Virgil's life; and, as he was dying, he would have destroyed it, because he thought it so imperfect, if his friends had not stopped him. Plato's *Republic* begins with a simple sentence: "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, the son of Ariston, that I might offer up prayer to the goddess." On Plato's own manuscript, in his own handwriting, there were no fewer than thirteen different versions of that opening sentence.

The master writer had laboured at arrangement after arrangement that he might get the cadences exactly right. Thomas Gray's *Elegy* written in a Country Churchyard is one of the immortal poems. It was begun in the summer of 1742; it was finally privately circulated on 12th June, 1750. Its lapidary perfection had taken eight years to produce. No one ever arrived at a masterpiece by a short-cut. In this world we are constantly faced with the short way, which promises immediate results, and the long way, of which the results are in the far distance. But the lasting things never come quickly; the long way is the best way in the end.

(iii) It is the difference between the disciplined and the undisciplined way. Nothing was ever achieved without discipline; and many an athlete and many a man has been ruined because he abandoned discipline and let himself grow slack. Coleridge is the supreme tragedy of indiscipline. Never did so great a mind produce so little. He left Cambridge University to join the army; he left the army because, in spite of all his erudition, he could not rub down a horse; he returned to Oxford and left without a degree. He began a paper called *The Watchman* which lived for ten numbers and then died. It has been said of him: "He lost himself in visions of work to be done, that always remained to be done."

Coleridge had every poetic gift but one--the gift of sustained and concentrated effort." In his head and in his mind he had all kinds of books, as he said, himself, "completed save for transcription." "I am on the eve," he says, "of sending to the press two octave volumes." But the books were never composed outside Coleridge's mind, because, he would not face the discipline of sitting down to write them out. No one ever reached any eminence, and no one having reached it ever maintained it, without discipline.

(iv) It is the difference between the thoughtful and the thoughtless way. Here we come to the heart of the matter. No one would ever take the easy, the short, the undisciplined way, if he only

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thought. Everything in this world has two aspects-- how it looks at the moment, and how it will look in the time to come. The easy way may look very inviting at the moment, and the hard way may look very daunting. The only way to get our values right is to see, not the beginning, but the end of the way, to see things, not in the light of time, but in the light of eternity.

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Matthew 7:15-20

THE FALSE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:15-20 (Part 1)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but who within are rapacious wolves. You will recognize them from their fruits. Surely men do not gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles? So every good tree produces fine fruit; but every rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce fine fruit. Every tree which does not produce fine fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then you will recognize them from their fruits.

Almost every phrase and word in this section would ring an answering bell in the minds of the Jews who heard it for the first time.

The Jews knew all about false prophets. Jeremiah, for instance, had his conflict with the prophets who said "Peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer.6:14; Jer.8:11). Wolves was the very name by which false rulers and false prophets were called. In the bad days Ezekiel had said, "Her princes in the midst of her are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood and destroying lives, to get dishonest gain" (Eze.22:27). Zephaniah drew a grim picture of the state of things in Israel, when, "Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning. Her prophets are wanton, faithless men" (Zeph.3:3). When Paul was warning the elders of Ephesus of dangers to come, as he took a last farewell of them, he said, "Fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (Ac.20:29).

Jesus said that he was sending out his disciples as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt.10:16); and he told of the Good Shepherd who protected the flock from the wolves with his life (Jn.10:12). Here indeed was a picture which everyone could recognize and understand.

He said that the false prophets were like wolves in sheep's clothing. When the shepherd watched his flocks upon the hillside, his garment was a sheepskin, worn with the skin outside and the fleece inside. But a man might wear a shepherd's dress and still not be a shepherd. The prophets had acquired a conventional dress. Elijah had a mantle (1Kgs.19:13,19), and that mantle had been a hairy cloak (2Kgs.1:8). That sheepskin mantle had become the uniform of the prophets, just as the Greek philosophers had worn the philosopher's robe. It was by that mantle that the prophet could be distinguished from other men. But sometimes that garb was worn by those who had no right to wear it, for Zechariah in his picture of the great days to come says, "He will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive" (Zech.13:4). There were those who wore a prophet's cloak, but who lived anything but a prophet's life.

There were false prophets in the ancient days, but there were also false prophets in New Testament times. Matthew was written about A.D. 85, and at that time prophets were still an institution in the Church. They were men with no fixed abode, men who had given up everything to wander throughout the country, bringing to the Churches a message which they believed to come direct from God.

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At their best the prophets were the inspiration of the Church, for they were men who had abandoned everything to serve God and the Church of God. But the office of prophet was singularly liable to abuse. There were men who used it to gain prestige, and to impose on the generosity of local congregations, and so live a life of comfortable, and even pampered, idleness. The Didache is the first order book of the Christian Church; it dates to about A.D. 100; and its regulations concerning these wandering prophets are very illuminating. A true prophet was to be held in the highest honour; he was to be welcomed; his word must never be disregarded, and his freedom must never be curtailed; but "He shall remain one day, and, if necessary, another day also; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet." He must never ask for anything but bread. "If he asks for money, he is a false prophet." Prophets all claim to speak in the Spirit, but there is one acid test: "By their characters a true and a false prophet shall be known." "Every prophet that teacheth the truth, if he do not what he teacheth, is a false prophet." If a prophet, claiming to speak in the Spirit, orders a table and a meal to be set before him he is a false prophet. "Whosoever shall say in the Spirit: Give me money or any other things, ye shall not hear him; but if he tell you to give in the matter of others who have need, let no one judge him." If a wanderer comes to a congregation, and wishes to settle there, if he has a trade, "let him work and eat." If he has no trade, "consider in your wisdom how he may not live with you as a Christian in idleness.... But if he will not do this, he is a trafficker in Christ. Beware of such" (Didache chapters 11 and 12).

Past history and present events made the words of Jesus meaningful to those who heard them for the first time, and to those to whom Matthew transmitted them.

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Matthew 7:15-20

KNOWN BY THEIR FRUITS

Matthew 7:15-20 (Part 2)

The Jews, the Greeks and the Romans all used the idea that a tree is to be judged by its fruits. "Like root, like fruit," ran the proverb. Epictetus was later to say, "How can a vine grow not like a vine but like an olive, or, how can an olive grow not like an olive but like a vine" (Epictetus, Discourses 2: 20). Seneca declared that good cannot grow from evil any more than a fig tree can from an olive.

But there is more in this than meets the eye. "Are grapes gathered from thorns?" asked Jesus. There was a certain thorn, the buckthorn, which had little black berries which closely resembled little grapes. "Or figs from thistles?" There was a certain thistle, which had a flower, which, at least at a distance, might well be taken for a fig.

The point is real, and relevant, and salutary. There may be a superficial resemblance between the true and the false prophet. The false prophet may wear the right clothes and use the right language; but you cannot sustain life with the berries of a buckthorn or the flowers of a thistle; and the life of the soul can never be sustained with the food which a false prophet offers. The real test of any teaching is: Does it strengthen a man to bear the burdens of life, and to walk in the way wherein he ought to go?

Let us then look at the false prophets and see their characteristics. If the way is difficult and the gate is so narrow that it is hard to find, then we must be very careful to get ourselves teachers who will help us to find it, and not teachers who will lure us away from it.

The basic fault of the false prophet is self-interest. The true shepherd cares for the flock more than he cares for his life; the wolf cares for nothing but to satisfy his own gluttony and his own greed. The false prophet is in the business of teaching, not for what he can give to others, but for what he can get to himself.

The Jews were alive to this danger. The Rabbis were the Jewish teachers, but it was a cardinal principle of Jewish Law that a Rabbi must have a trade by which he earned his living, and must on no account accept any payment for teaching. Rabbi Zadok said, "Make the knowledge of the Law neither a crown wherewith to make a show, nor a spade wherewith to dig." Hillel said, "He who uses the crown of the Law for external aims fades away." The Jews knew all about the teacher who used his teaching self-interestedly, for no other reason than to make a profit for himself. There are three ways in which a teacher can be dominated by self interest.

(i) He may teach solely for gain. It is told that there was trouble in the Church at Ecclefechan, where Thomas Carlyle's father was an elder. It was a dispute between the congregation and the minister on a matter of money and of salary. When much had been said on both sides, Carlyle's father rose and uttered one devastating sentence: "Give the hireling his wages, and let him go." No man can live on nothing, and few men can do their best work when the pressure of material things

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is too fiercely on them, but the great privilege of teaching is not the pay it offers, but the thrill of opening the minds of boys and girls, and young men and maidens, and men and women to the truth.

(ii) He may teach solely for prestige. A man may teach in order to help others, or he may teach to show how clever he is. Denney once said a savage thing: "No man can at one and the same time prove that he is clever and that Christ is wonderful." Prestige is the last thing that the great teachers desire. J. P. Struthers was a saint of God. He spent all his life in the service of the little Reformed Presbyterian Church when he could have occupied any pulpit in Britain. Men loved him, and the better they knew him the more they loved him. Two men were talking of him. One man knew all that Struthers had done, but did not know Struthers personally. Remembering Struthers' saintly ministry, he said, "Struthers will have a front seat in the Kingdom of Heaven." The other had known Struthers personally and his answer was: "Struthers would be miserable in a front seat anywhere." There is a kind of teacher and preacher who uses his message as a setting for himself. The false prophet is interested in self-display; the true prophet desires self-obliteration.

(iii) He may teach solely to transmit his own ideas. The false prophet is out to disseminate his version of the truth; the true prophet is out to publish abroad God's truth. It is quite true that every man must think things out for himself; but it was said of John Brown of Haddington that, when he preached, ever and again he used to pause "as if listening for a voice." The true prophet listens to God before he speaks to men. He never forgets that he is nothing more than a voice to speak for God and a channel through which God's grace can come to men. It is a teacher's duty and a preacher's duty to bring to men, not his private idea of the truth, but the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

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Matthew 7:15-20

THE FRUITS OF FALSENESS

Matthew 7:15-20 (Part 3)

This passage has much to say about the evil fruits of the false prophets. What are the false effects, the evil fruits, which a false prophet may produce?

(i) Teaching is false if it produces a religion which consists solely or mainly in the observance of externals. That is what was wrong with the Scribes and Pharisees. To them religion consisted in the observance of the ceremonial law. If a man went through the correct procedure of handwashing, if on the Sabbath he never carried anything weighing more than two figs, if he never walked on the Sabbath farther than the prescribed distance, if he was meticulous in giving tithes of everything down to the herbs of his kitchen garden, then he was a good man.

It is easy to confuse religion with religious practices. It is possible--and indeed not uncommon--to teach that religion consists in going to Church, observing the Lord's Day, fulfilling one's financial obligations to the Church, reading one's Bible. A man might do all these things and be far off from being a Christian, for Christianity is an attitude of the heart to God and to man.

(ii) Teaching is false if it produces a religion which consists in prohibitions. Any religion which is based on a series of "thou shalt not's" is a false religion. There is a type of teacher who says to a person who has set out on the Christian way: "From now on you will no longer go to the cinema; from now on you will no longer dance; from now on you will no longer smoke or use make-up; from now on you will no longer read a novel or a Sunday newspaper; from now on you will never enter a theatre."

If a man could become a Christian simply by abstaining from doing things Christianity would be a much easier religion than it is. But the whole essence of Christianity is that it does not consist in not doing things; it consists in doing things. A negative Christianity on our part can never answer the positive love of God.

(iii) Teaching is false if it produces an easy religion. There were false teachers in the days of Paul, an echo of whose teaching we can hear in Rom.6. They said to Paul: "You believe that God's grace is the biggest thing in the universe?" "Yes." "You believe that God's grace is wide enough to cover every sin?" "Yes." "Well then, if that be so, let us go on sinning to our hearts' content. God will forgive. And, after all, our sin is simply giving God's wonderful grace an opportunity to operate." A religion like that is a travesty of religion because it is an insult to the love of God.

Any teaching which takes the iron out of religion, any teaching which takes the Cross out of Christianity, any teaching which eliminates the threat from the voice of Christ, any teaching which pushes judgment into the background and makes men think lightly of sin, is false teaching.

(iv) Teaching is false if it divorces religion and life. Any teaching which removes the Christian from the life and activity of the world is false. That was the mistake the monks and the hermits made. It was their belief that to live the Christian life they must retire to a desert or to a monastery,

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Matthew 7:15-20

that they must cut themselves off from the engrossing and tempting life of the world, that they could only be truly Christian by ceasing to live in the world. Jesus said, and he prayed for his disciples, "I do not pray that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (Jn.17:15). We have heard, for instance, of a journalist who found it hard to maintain her Christian principles in the life of a daily newspaper, and who left it to take up work on a purely religious journal.

No man can be a good soldier by running away, and the Christian is the soldier of Christ. How shall the leaven ever work if the leaven refuses to be inserted into the mass? What is witness worth unless it is witness to those who do not believe? Any teaching which encourages a man to take what John Mackay called "the balcony view of life" is wrong. The Christian is not a spectator from the balcony; he is involved in the warfare of life.

(v) Teaching is false if it produces a religion which is arrogant and separatist. Any teaching which encourages a man to withdraw into a narrow sect, and to regard the rest of the world as sinners, is false teaching. The function of religion is not to erect middle walls of partition but to tear them down. It is the dream of Jesus Christ that there shall be one flock and one shepherd (Jn.10:16). Exclusiveness is not a religious quality; it is an irreligious quality. Fosdick quotes four lines of doggerel:

"We are God's chosen few,
All others will be damned;
There is no room in heaven for you;
We can't have heaven crammed."

Religion is meant to bring men closer together, not to drive men apart. Religion is meant to gather men into one family, not to split them up into hostile groups. The teaching which declares that any Church or any sect has a monopoly of the grace of God is false teaching, for Christ is not the Christ who divides, he is the Christ who unites.

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Matthew 7:21-23

ON FALSE PRETENSES

Matthew 7:21-23

Not everyone that says to me: "Lord, Lord" will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day: "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name did we not cast out devils, and in your name did we not do many deeds of power?" Then will I publicly announce to them: "I never knew you. Depart from me you doers of iniquity."

There is an apparently surprising feature about this passage. Jesus is quite ready to concede that many of the false prophets will do and say wonderful and impressive things.

We must remember what the ancient world was like. Miracles were common events. The frequency of miracles came from the ancient idea of illness. In the ancient world all illness was held to be the work of demons. A man was ill because a demon had succeeded in exercising some malign influence over him, or in winning a way into some part of his body. Cures were therefore wrought by exorcism. The result of all this was that a great deal of illness was what we would call psychological, as were a great many cures. If a man succeeded in convincing--or deluding--himself into a belief that a demon was in him or had him in his power, that man would undoubtedly be ill. And if someone could convince him that the hold of the demon was broken, then quite certainly that man would be cured.

The leaders of the Church never denied heathen miracles. In answer to the miracles of Christ, Celsus quoted the miracles attributed to Aesculapius and Apollo. Origen, who met his arguments, did not for a moment deny these miracles. He simply answered, "Such curative power is of itself neither good nor bad, but within the reach of godless as well as of honest people" (Origen: Against Celsus 3: 22). Even in the New Testament we read of Jewish exorcists who added the name of Jesus to their repertoire, and who banished devils by its aid (Ac.19:13). There was many a charlatan who rendered a lip service to Jesus Christ, and who used his name to produce wonderful effects on demon-possessed people. What Jesus is saying is that if any man uses his name on false pretenses, the day of reckoning will come. His real motives will be exposed, and he will be banished from the presence of God.

There are two great permanent truths within this passage. There is only one way in which a man's sincerity can be proved, and that is by his practice. Fine words can never be a substitute for fine deeds. There is only one proof of love, and that proof is obedience. There is no point in saying that we love a person, and then doing things which break that person's heart. When we were young maybe we used sometimes to say to our mothers, "Mother, I love you." And maybe mother sometimes smiled a little wistfully and said, "I wish you would show it a little more in the way you behave." So often we confess God with our lips and deny him with our lives. It is not difficult to recite a creed, but it is difficult to live the Christian life. Faith without practice is a contradiction in terms, and love without obedience is an impossibility.

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Matthew 7:21-23

At the back of this passage is the idea of judgment. All through it there runs the certainty that the day of reckoning comes. A man may succeed for long in maintaining the pretenses and the disguises, but there comes a day when the pretenses are shown for what they are, and the disguises are stripped away. We may deceive men with our words, but we cannot deceive God. "Thou discernest my thoughts from afar," said the Psalmist (Ps.139:2). No man can ultimately deceive the God who sees the heart.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 7:24-29

THE ONLY TRUE FOUNDATION

Matthew 7:24-29 (Part 1)

So, then, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be likened to a wise man who built his house upon the rock. And the rain came down, and the rivers swelled, and the wind blew, and fell upon that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be likened to a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And the rain came down, and the rivers swelled, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell; and its fall was great. And when Jesus had ended these words, the people were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their Scribes.

Jesus was in a double sense an expert. He was an expert in scripture. The writer of Proverbs gave him the hint for his picture: "When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established for ever" (Prov.10:25). Here is the germ of the picture which Jesus drew of the two houses and the two builders. But Jesus was also an expert in life. He was the craftsman who knew all about the building of houses, and when he spoke about the foundations of a house he knew what he was talking about. This is no illustration formed by a scholar in his study; this is the illustration of a practical man.

Nor is this a far-fetched illustration; it is a story of the kind of thing which could well happen. In Palestine the builder must think ahead. There was many a gully which in summer was a pleasant sandy hollow, but was in winter a raging torrent of rushing water. A man might be looking for a house; he might find a pleasantly sheltered sandy hollow; and he might think this a very suitable place. But, if he was a short-sighted man, he might well have built his house in the dried-up bed of a river, and, when the winter came, his house would disintegrate. Even on an ordinary site it was tempting to begin building on the smoothed-over sand, and not to bother digging down to the shelf of rock below, but that way disaster lay ahead.

Only a house whose foundations are firm can withstand the storm; and only a life whose foundations are sure can stand the test. Jesus demanded two things.

(i) He demanded that men should listen. One of the great difficulties which face us today is the simple fact that men often do not know what Jesus said or what the Church teaches. In fact the matter is worse. They have often a quite mistaken notion of what Jesus said and of what the Church teaches. It is no part of the duty of an honourable man to condemn either a person, or an institution, unheard--and that today is precisely what so many do. The first step to the Christian life is simply to give Jesus Christ a chance to be heard.

(ii) He demanded that men should do. Knowledge only becomes relevant when it is translated into action. It would be perfectly possible for a man to pass an examination in Christian Ethics with the highest distinction, and yet not to be a Christian. Knowledge must become action; theory must become practice; theology must become life. There is little point in going to a doctor, unless we are prepared to do the things we hear him say to us. There is little point in going to an expert, unless we

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Matthew 7:24-29

are prepared to act upon his advice. And yet there are thousands of people who listen to the teaching of Jesus Christ every Sunday, and who have a very good knowledge of what Jesus taught, and who yet make little or no deliberate attempt to put it into practice. If we are to be in any sense followers of Jesus we must hear and do.

Is there any word in which hearing and doing are summed up? There is such a word, and that word is obedience. Jesus demands our implicit obedience. To learn to obey is the most important thing in life.

Some time ago there was a report of the case of a sailor in the Royal Navy who was very severely punished for a breach of discipline. So severe was the punishment that in certain civilian quarters it was thought to be far too severe. A newspaper asked its readers to express their opinions about the severity of the punishment

One who answered was a man who himself had served for years in the Royal Navy. In his view the punishment was not too severe. He held that discipline was absolutely essential, for the purpose of discipline was to condition a man automatically and unquestioningly to obey orders, and on such obedience a man's life might well depend. He cited a case from his own experience. He was in a launch which was towing a much heavier vessel in a rough sea. The vessel was attached to the launch by a wire hawser. Suddenly in the midst of the wind and the spray there came a single, insistent word of command from the officer in charge of the launch. "Down!" he shouted. On the spot the crew of the launch flung themselves down. Just at that moment the wire towing-hawser snapped, and the broken parts of it whipped about like a maddened steel snake. If any man had been struck by it he would have been instantly killed. But the whole crew automatically obeyed and no one was injured.

If anyone had stopped to argue, or to ask why, he would have been a dead man. Obedience saved lives.

It is such obedience that Jesus demands. It is Jesus' claim that obedience to him is the only sure foundation for life; and it is his promise that the life which is founded on obedience to him is safe, no matter what storms may come.

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Matthew 7:24-29

LOVE IN ACTION

Matthew 7:24-29 (Part 2)

Of all the gospel writers Matthew is the most orderly. He never sets out his material haphazardly. If in Matthew one thing follows another in a certain sequence, there is always a reason for that sequence; and it is so here. In Matt.5-7 Matthew has given us the Sermon on the Mount. That is to say, in these chapters he has given us his account of the words of Jesus; and now in Matt.8 he gives us an account of the deeds of Jesus. Matt.5-7 show us the divine wisdom in speech; Matt.8 shows us the divine love in action.

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Matthew 8

LOVE IN ACTION

Matt.8 shows us the divine love in action.

Matt.8 is a chapter of miracles. Let us look at these miracles as a whole, before we proceed to deal with them in detail. In the chapter there are seven miraculous happenings.

(i) There is the healing of the leper (Matt.8:1-4). Here we see Jesus touching the untouchable. The leper was banished from the society of men; to touch him, and even to approach him, was to break the Law. Here we see the man who was kept at arm's length by all men wrapped around with pity and the compassion of the love of God.

(ii) There is the healing of the centurion's servant (Matt.8:5-13). The centurion was a Gentile, and therefore the strict orthodox Jew would have said that he was merely fuel for the fires of hell; he was the servant of a foreign government and of an occupying power and therefore the nationalistic Jew would have said that he was a candidate for assassination and not for assistance; the servant was a slave and a slave was no more than a living tool. Here we see the love of God going out to help the man whom all men hated and the slave whom all men despised.

(iii) There is the healing of Peter's wife's mother (Matt.8:14-15). This miracle took place in a humble cottage in a humble home in Palestine. There was no publicity; there was no admiring audience; there was only Jesus and the family circle. Here we see the infinite love of the God of all the universe displaying all its power when there was none but the circle of the family to see.

(iv) There was the healing of all the sick who were brought to the doors at evening time (Matt.8:16-17). Here we see the sheer universality of the love of God in action. To Jesus no one was ever a nuisance; he had no hours when he was on duty and hours when he was off duty. Any man could come to him at any time and receive the willing, gracious help of the love of God.

(v) There was the reaction of the scribe (Matt.8:18-22). On the face of it this little section appears to be out of place in a chapter on miracles; but this is the miracle of personality. That any scribe should be moved to follow Jesus is nothing less than a miracle. Somehow this scribe had forgotten his devotion to the Scribal Law; somehow although Jesus contradicted all the things to which he had dedicated his life, he saw in Jesus not an enemy but a friend, not an opponent but a master.

It must have been an instinctive reaction. Negley Farson writes of his old grandfather. When Farson was a boy, he did not know his grandfather's history and all that he had done, but, he says, "All I knew was that he made other men around him look like mongrel dogs." That scribe saw in Jesus a splendour and a magnificence he had never seen in any other man. The miracle happened, and the scribe's heart ran out to Jesus Christ.

(vi) There is the miracle of the calming of the storm (Matt.8:23-27). Here we see Jesus dealing with the waves and the billows which threaten to engulf a man. As Pusey had it when his wife died, "All through that time it was as if there was a hand beneath my chin to bear me up." Here is the love of God bringing peace and serenity into tumult and confusion.

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(vii) There is the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (Matt.8:28-34). In the ancient world people believed that all illness was due to the action of devils. Here we see the power of God dealing with the power of the devil; here we see God's goodness invading earth's evil, God's love going out against evil's malignancy and malevolence. Here we see the goodness and the love which save men triumphantly overcoming the evil and the hatred which ruin men.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 8:1-4

THE LIVING DEATH

Matthew 8:1-4 (Part 1)

When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and, look you, a leper came to him, and remained kneeling before him. "Lord," he said, "you can cleanse me, if you are willing to do so." Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. "I am willing," he said, "be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him: "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and bring the gift which Moses ordered, so that they will be convinced that you are cured."

In the ancient world leprosy was the most terrible of all diseases. E. W. G. Masterman writes: "No other disease reduces a human being for so many years to so hideous a wreck."

It might begin with little nodules which go on to ulcerate. The ulcers develop a foul discharge; the eyebrows fall out; the eyes become staring; the vocal chords become ulcerated, and the voice becomes hoarse, and the breath wheezes. The hands and feet always ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of that kind of leprosy is nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma and ultimately death.

Leprosy might begin with the loss of all sensation in some part of the body; the nerve trunks are affected; the muscles waste away; the tendons contract until the hands are like claws. There follows ulceration of the hands and feet. Then comes the progressive loss of fingers and toes. Until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off. The duration of that kind of leprosy is anything from twenty to thirty years. It is a kind of terrible progressive death in which a man dies by inches.

The physical condition of the leper was terrible; but there was something which made it worse. Josephus tells us that lepers were treated "as if they were, in effect, dead men." Immediately leprosy was diagnosed, the leper was absolutely and completely banished from human society. "He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean; he shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp" (Lev.13:46). The leper had to go with rent clothes, dishevelled hair, with a covering upon his upper lip, and, as he went, he had to cry: "Unclean, unclean" (Lev.13:45). In the middle ages, if a man became a leper, the priest donned his stole and took his crucifix, and brought the man into the church, and read the burial service over him. For all human purposes the man was dead.

In Palestine in the time of Jesus the leper was barred from Jerusalem and from all walled towns. In the synagogue there was provided for him a little isolated chamber, ten feet high and six feet wide, called the Mechitsah. The Law enumerated sixty-one different contacts which could defile, and the defilement involved in contact with a leper was second only to the defilement involved in contact with a dead body. If a leper so much as put his head into a house, that house became unclean even to the roof beams. Even in an open place it was illegal to greet a leper. No one might come nearer to a leper than four cubits--a cubit is eighteen inches. If the wind was blowing towards a person from a leper, the leper must stand at least one hundred cubits away. One Rabbi would not

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Matthew 8:1-4

even eat an egg bought in a street where a leper had passed by. Another Rabbi actually boasted that he flung stones at lepers to keep them away.

Other Rabbis hid themselves, or took to their heels, at the sight of a leper even in the distance.

There never has been any disease which so separated a man from his fellow-men as leprosy did. And this was the man whom Jesus touched. To a Jew there would be no more amazing sentence in the New Testament than the simple statement: "And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched the leper."

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Matthew 8:1-4

COMPASSION BEYOND THE LAW

Matthew 8:1-4 (Part 2)

In this story we must note two things--the leper's approach and Jesus' response. In the leper's approach there were three elements.

(i) The leper came with confidence. He had no doubt that, if Jesus willed, Jesus could make him clean.

No leper would ever have come near an orthodox scribe or Rabbi; he knew too well that he would be stoned away; but this man came to Jesus. He had perfect confidence in Jesus' willingness to welcome the man anyone else would have driven away. No man need ever feel himself too unclean to come to Jesus Christ.

He had perfect confidence in Jesus' power. Leprosy was the one disease for which there was no prescribed rabbinic remedy. But this man was sure that Jesus could do what no one else could do. No man need ever feel himself incurable in body or unforgivable in soul while Jesus Christ exists.

(ii) The leper came with humility. He did not demand healing; he only said, "If you will, you can cleanse me." It was as if he said, "I know I don't matter; I know that other men will flee from me and will have nothing to do with me; I know that I have no claim on you; but perhaps in your divine condescension you will give your power even to such as I am:" It is the humble heart which is conscious of nothing but its need that finds its way to Christ.

(iii) The leper came with reverence. The King James Version says that he worshipped Jesus. The Greek verb is *proskunein* (GSN4352), and that word is never used of anything but worship of the gods; it always describes a man's feeling and action in presence of the divine. That leper could never have told anyone what he thought Jesus was; but he knew that in the presence of Jesus he was in the presence of God. We do not need to put this into theological or philosophical terms; it is enough to be convinced that when we are confronted with Jesus Christ, we are confronted with the love and the power of Almighty God.

So to this approach of the leper there came the reaction of Jesus. First and foremost, that reaction was compassion. The Law said Jesus must avoid contact with that man and threatened him with terrible uncleanness if he allowed the leper to come within six feet of him; but Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. The medical knowledge of the day would have said that Jesus was running a desperate risk of a ghastly infection; but Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him.

For Jesus there was only one obligation in life--and that was to help. There was only one law--and that law was love. The obligation of love took precedence over all other rules and laws and regulations; it made him defy all physical risks. To a good doctor a man sick of a loathsome disease is not a disgusting spectacle; he is a human being who needs his skill. To a doctor a child sick of an infectious disease is not a menace; he is a child who needs to be helped. Jesus was like that; God is

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like that; we must be like that. The true Christian will break any convention and will take any risk to help a fellow-man in need.

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Matthew 8:1-4

TRUE PRUDENCE

Matthew 8:1-4 (Part 3)

But there remain two things in this incident which show that, while Jesus would defy the Law and risk any infection to help, he was not senselessly reckless, nor did he forget the demands of true prudence.

(i) He ordered the man to keep silence, and not to publish abroad what he had done for him. This injunction to silence is common on Jesus' lips (Matt.9:30; Matt.12:16; Matt.17:9; Mk.1:34; Mk.5:43; Mk.7:36; Mk.8:26). Why should Jesus command this silence?

Palestine was an occupied country, and the Jews were a proud race. They never forgot that they were God's chosen people. They dreamed of the day when their divine deliverer would come. But for the most part they dreamed of that day in terms of military conquest and political power. For that reason Palestine was the most inflammable country in the world. It lived amidst revolutions. Leader after leader arose, had his moment of glory and was then eliminated by the might of Rome. Now, if this leper had gone out and published abroad what Jesus had done for him, there would have been a rush to install a man with powers such as Jesus possessed as a political leader and a military commander.

Jesus had to educate men's minds, he had to change their ideas; he had somehow to enable them to see that his power was love and not force of arms. He had to work almost in secrecy until men knew him for what he was, the lover and not the destroyer of the lives of men. Jesus enjoined silence upon those he helped lest men should use him to make their own dreams come true instead of waiting on the dream of God. They had to be silent until they had learned the right things to say about him.

(ii) Jesus sent the leper to the priests to make the correct offering and to receive a certificate that he was clean. The Jews were so terrified of the infection of leprosy that there was a prescribed ritual in the very unlikely event of a cure.

The ritual is described in Lev.14. The leper was examined by a priest. Two birds were taken, and one was killed over running water. In addition there were taken cedar, scarlet and hyssop. These things were taken, together with the living bird, and dipped in the blood of the dead bird, and then the living bird was allowed to go free. The man washed himself and his clothes, and shaved himself. Seven days were allowed to pass, and then he was re-examined. He must then shave his hair, his head and his eye-brows. Certain sacrifices were then made consisting of two mate lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb; three-tenths of a deal of fine flour mingled with oil; and one log of oil. The restored leper was touched on the tip of the right ear, the right thumb, and the right great toe with blood and oil. He was finally examined for the last time, and, if the cure was real, he was allowed to go with a certificate that he was cleansed.

Jesus told this man to go through that process. There is guidance here. Jesus was telling that man not to neglect the treatment that was available for him in those days. We do not receive miracles by

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neglecting the medical and scientific treatment open to us. Men must do all men can do before God's power may cooperate with our efforts. A miracle does not come by a lazy waiting upon God to do it all; it comes from the cooperation of the faith-filled effort of man with the illimitable grace of God.

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Matthew 8:5-13

A GOOD MAN'S PLEA

Matthew 8:5-13 (Part 1)

When Jesus had come into Capernaum, a centurion came to him. "Lord," he appealed to him, "my servant lies at home, paralysed, suffering terribly" He said to him: "Am I to come and cure him?" "Lord," answered the centurion, "I am not worthy that you should enter my house; but, only speak a word, and my servant will be cured. For even I am a man under authority, and I have soldiers under me. I say to one soldier, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Do this!' and he does it." Jesus was amazed when he heard this, and said to those who were following him, "This is the truth I tell you--not even in Israel have I found so great a faith. I tell you that many will come from the east and west and will sit down at table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the sons of the Kingdom will be cast into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there." And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And his servant was healed at that hour.

Even in the brief appearance that he makes on the stage of the New Testament story this centurion is one of the most attractive characters in the gospels. The centurions were the backbone of the Roman army. In a Roman legion there were 6,000 men; the legion was divided into sixty centuries, each containing 100 men, and in command of each century there was a centurion. These centurions were the long-service, regular soldiers of the Roman army. They were responsible for the discipline of the regiment, and they were the cement which held the army together. In peace and in war alike the morale of the Roman army depended on them.

In his description of the Roman army Polybius describes what a centurion should be: "They must not be so much venturesome seekers after danger as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over-anxious to rush into the fight, but when hard pressed, they must be ready to hold their ground, and die at their posts." The centurions were the finest men in the Roman army.

It is interesting to note that every centurion mentioned in the New Testament is mentioned with honour. There was the centurion who recognized Jesus on the Cross as the Son of God; there was Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to the Christian Church; there was the centurion who suddenly discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen, and who rescued him from the fury of the rioting mob; there was the centurion who was informed that the Jews had planned to murder Paul between Jerusalem and Caesarea, and who took steps to foil their plans; there was the centurion whom Felix ordered to look after Paul; there was the centurion accompanying Paul on his last journey to Rome, who treated him with every courtesy, and accepted him as leader when the storm struck the ship (Matt.27:54; Ac.10:22; Ac.23:17; Ac.23:23; Ac.24:23; Ac.27:43).

But there was something very special about this centurion at Capernaum, and that was his attitude to his servant. This servant would be a slave, but the centurion was grieved that his servant was ill and was determined to do everything in his power to save him.

That was the reverse of the normal attitude of master to slave. In the Roman Empire slaves did not matter. It was of no importance to anyone if they suffered, and whether they lived or died.

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Aristotle, talking about the friendships which are possible in life, writes: "There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave."

A slave was no better than a thing. A slave had no legal rights whatsoever; his master was free to treat him, or maltreat him, as he liked. Gaius, the Roman legal expert, lays it down in his Institutes: "We may note that it is universally accepted that the master possesses the power of life and death over the slave." Varro, the Roman writer on agriculture, has a grim passage in which he divides the instruments of agriculture into three classes--the articulate, the inarticulate and the mute, "the articulate comprising the slaves, the inarticulate comprising the cattle, and the mute comprising the vehicles." The only difference between a slave and a beast or a cart was that the slave could speak.

Cato, another Roman writer on agriculture, has a passage which shows how unusual the attitude of this centurion was. He is giving advice to a man taking over a farm: "Look over the livestock, and hold a sale. Sell your oil, if the price is satisfactory, and sell the surplus of your wine and grain. Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemishes sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is superfluous." Cato's blunt advice is to throw out the slave who is sick. Peter Chrysologus sums the matter up: "Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, Knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law."

It is quite clear that this centurion was an extraordinary man. for he loved his slave. It may well be that it was his totally unusual and unexpected gentleness and love which so moved Jesus when the centurion first came to him. Love always covers a multitude of sins; the man who cares for men is always near to Jesus Christ.

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Matthew 8:5-13

THE PASSPORT OF FAITH

Matthew 8:5-13 (Part 2)

Not only was this centurion quite extraordinary in his attitude to his servant; he was also a man of a most extraordinary faith. He wished for Jesus' power to help and to heal his servant, but there was one problem. He was a Gentile and Jesus was a Jew, and, according to the Jewish law, a Jew could not enter the house of a Gentile for all Gentile dwelling-places were unclean. The Mishnah lays it down: "The dwelling-places of Gentiles are unclean." It is to that Jesus refers when he puts the question: "Am I to come and heal him?"

It was not that this law of uncleanness meant anything to Jesus; it was not that he would have refused to enter any man's dwelling; it was simply that he was testing the other's faith. It was then that the centurion's faith reached its peak. As a soldier he well knew what it was to give a command and to have that command instantly and unquestionably carried out; so he said to Jesus, "You don't need to come to my house; I am not fit for you to enter my house; all you have to do is to speak the word of command, and that command will be obeyed." There spoke the voice of faith, and Jesus laid it down that faith is the only passport to the blessedness of God.

Here Jesus uses a famous and vivid Jewish picture. The Jews believed that when the Messiah came there would be a great banquet at which all Jews would sit down to feast. Behemoth, the greatest of the land beasts, and leviathan, the greatest of the denizens of the sea, would provide the fare for the banqueters. "Thou has reserved them to be devoured by whom Thou wilt and when" (4 Ezra 6: 52). "And behemoth shall be revealed from his place, and leviathan shall ascend from the sea, those two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation, and shall have kept until that time; and then shall they be food for all that are left" (2 Baruch 29: 4).

The Jews looked forward with all their hearts to this Messianic banquet; but it never for a moment crossed their minds that any Gentile would ever sit down at it. By that time the Gentiles would have been destroyed. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste" (Isa. 60: 12). Yet here is Jesus saying that many shall come from the east and from the west, and sit down at table at that banquet.

Still worse, he says that many of the sons of the kingdom will be shut out. A son is an heir; therefore the son of the kingdom is the man who is to inherit the kingdom, for the son is always heir; but the Jews are to lose their inheritance. Always in Jewish thought "the inheritance of sinners is darkness" (Wis. 15: 11). The rabbis had a saying, "The sinners in Gehenna (GSN1067) will be covered with darkness." To the Jew the extraordinary and the shattering thing about all this was that the Gentile, whom he expected to be absolutely shut out, was to be a guest at the Messianic banquet, and the Jew, whom he expected to be welcomed with open arms, is to be shut out in the outer darkness. The tables were to be turned, and all expectations were to be reversed.

The Jew had to learn that the passport to God's presence is not membership of any nation; it is faith. The Jew believed that he belonged to the chosen people and that because he was a Jew he was therefore dear to God. He belonged to God's herrenvolk, and that was enough automatically to gain

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Matthew 8:5-13

him salvation. Jesus taught that the only aristocracy in the Kingdom of God is the aristocracy of faith. Jesus Christ is not the possession of any one race of men; Jesus Christ is the possession of every man in every race in whose heart there is faith.

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Matthew 8:5-13

THE POWER WHICH ANNIHILATES DISTANCE

Matthew 8:5-13 (Part 3)

So Jesus spoke the word and the servant of the centurion was healed. Not so very long ago this would have been a miracle at which the minds of most people would have staggered. It is not so very difficult to think of Jesus healing when he and the sufferer were in actual contact; but to think of Jesus healing at a distance, healing with a word a man he had never seen and never touched, seemed a thing almost, if not completely, beyond belief. But the strange thing is that science itself has come to see that there are forces which are working in a way which is still mysterious, but which is undeniable.

Again and again men have been confronted by a power which does not travel by the ordinary contacts and the ordinary routes and the ordinary channels.

One of the classic instances of this comes from the life of Emanuel Swedenborg. In 1759 Swedenborg was in Gotenborg. He described a fire occurring in Stockholm 300 miles away. He gave an account of the fire to the city authorities. He told them when it began, where it began, the name of the owner of the house, and when it was put out, and subsequent research proved him correct in every detail. Knowledge had come to him by a route which was not any of the routes known to men.

W. B. Yeats, the famous Irish poet, had experiences like this. He had certain symbols for certain things, and he experimented, not so much scientifically, but in everyday life, in the transmission of these symbols to other people by what might be called the sheer power of thought. He had an uncle in Sligo, who was by no means a mystical or devotional or spiritual man. He used to visit him each summer. "There are some high sandhills and low cliffs, and I adopted the practice of walking by the seashore while he walked on the cliffs of sandhills; 1, without speaking, would imagine the symbol, and he would notice what passed before his mind's eye, and in a short time he would practically never fail of the appropriate vision." Yeats tells of an incident at a London dinner party, where all the guests were intimate friends: "I had written upon a piece of paper: 'In five minutes York Powell will talk of a burning house,' thrust the paper under my neighbours plate, and imagined my fire symbol, and waited in silence.

Powell shifted the conversation from topic to topic, and within the five minutes was describing a fire he had seen as a young man."

Men have always quoted things like that, but within our own generation Dr. J. B. Rhine began definite scientific experiments in what he called Extra-Sensory Perception, a phenomenon which has become so much discussed that it is commonly called by its initial letters, ESP. Dr. Rhine has carried out, in Duke University in America, thousands of experiments which go to show that men can become aware of things by other means than the ordinary senses. A pack of twenty-five cards marked with certain symbols is used. A person is asked to name the cards as they are dealt, without seeing them. One of the students who participated in these experiments was called Hubert Pearce. On the first five thousand trials--a trial is a run through the whole pack of cards--he averaged ten correct out of twenty-five, when the laws of chance would say that four correct could be expected.

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On one occasion, in conditions of special concentration, he named the whole twenty-five cards correctly.

The mathematical odds against this feat being pure chance are 298,023,223,876,953,125 to 1.

An experimenter called Brugman carried out another experiment. He selected two subjects. He put the sender of the messages in an upstairs room and the receiver below. Between the rooms there was an opening covered by two layers of glass with an air space between, so that the sending of any message based on sound was quite impossible. Through the glass panel the sender looked at the hands of the receiver. In front of the receiver was a table with forty-eight squares. The receiver was blindfolded. Between him and the squared table was a thick curtain. He held a pointer which passed through the curtain on to the table. The experiment was that the sender had to will the receiver to move the pointer to a certain square. According to the laws of chance the receiver should have been right in four out of one hundred and eighty results. In point of fact he was right in sixty. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the mind of the sender was influencing the mind of the receiver.

It is a definitely proven fact that a certain Dr. Janet in eighteen out of twenty-five cases was able to hypnotise subjects at a distance, and he was partially successful in four other cases.

There is no doubt that mind can act on mind across the distances in a way which we are beginning to see, although yet we are far from understanding. If human minds can get to this length, how much more the mind of Jesus? The strange thing about this miracle is that modern thought, instead of making it harder, has made it easier to believe it.

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Matthew 8:14-15

A MIRACLE IN A COTTAGE

Matthew 8:14-15

And when Jesus had come into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed, ill with a fever. So he touched her hand and the fever left her. And she rose, and busied herself serving them.

When we compare Mark's narrative of events with that of Matthew, we see that this incident happened in Capernaum, on the Sabbath day, after Jesus had worshipped in the synagogue. When Jesus was in Capernaum, his headquarters were in the house of Peter, for Jesus never had any home of his own. Peter was married, and legend has it that in the after days Peter's wife was his helper in the work of the gospel. Clement of Alexandria (Stromateis 7: 6) tells us that Peter and his wife were martyred together. Peter, so the story runs, had the grim ordeal of seeing, his wife suffer before he suffered himself. "On seeing his wife led to death, Peter rejoiced on account of her call and her conveyance home, and called very encouragingly and comfortingly, addressing her by name, 'Remember thou the Lord.'"

On this occasion Peter's wife's mother was ill with a fever. There were three kinds of fever which were common in Palestine. There was a fever which was called Malta fever, and which was marked by weakness, anaemia and wasting away, and which lasted for months, and often ended in a decline which finished in death. There was what was called intermittent fever, which may well have been very like typhoid fever. And above all there was malaria. In the regions where the Jordan River entered and left the Sea of Galilee there was marshy ground; there the malarial mosquitoes bred and flourished, and both Capernaum and Tiberias were areas where malaria was very prevalent. It was often accompanied by jaundice and ague, and was a most wretched and miserable experience for the sufferer from it. It was most likely malaria from which Peter's wife's mother was suffering.

This miracle tells us much about Jesus, and not a little about the woman whom he cured.

(i) Jesus had come from the synagogue; there he had dealt with and had cured the demon-possessed man (Mk.1:21-28). As Matthew has it, he had healed the centurion's servant on the way home. Miracles did not cost Jesus nothing; virtue went out of him with every healing; and beyond a doubt he would be tired. It would be for rest that he came into Peter's house, and yet no sooner was he in it than there came still another demand on him for help and healing.

Here was no publicity; here there was no crowd to look and to admire and to be astonished. Here there was only a simple cottage and a poor woman tossing with a common fever. And yet in those circumstances Jesus put forth all his power.

Jesus was never too tired to help; the demands of human need never came to him as an intolerable nuisance. Jesus was not one of these people who are at their best in public and at their worst in private. No situation was too humble for him to help. He did not need an admiring audience to be at his best. In a crowd or in a cottage his love and his power were at the disposal of anyone who needed him.

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Matthew 8:14-15

(ii) But this miracle also tells us something about the woman whom Jesus healed. No sooner had he healed her than she busied herself in attending to his needs and to the needs of the other guests. She clearly regarded herself as "saved to serve." He had healed her; and her one desire was to use her new-found health to be of use and of service to him and to others.

How do we use the gifts of Christ? Once Oscar Wilde wrote what he himself called "the best short story in the world." W. B. Yeats quotes it in his autobiography in all of what he calls "its terrible beauty." Yeats quotes it in its original simplicity before it had been decorated and spoiled by the literary devices of its final form;

Christ came from a white plain to a purple city, and, as he passed through the first street, he heard voices overhead, and saw a young man lying drunk upon a window-sill. 'Why do you waste your soul in drunkenness?' he said. The man said, 'Lord, I was a leper, and you healed me, what else can I do?' A little farther through the town he saw a young man following a harlot, and said, 'Why do you dissolve your soul in debauchery?' And the young man answered, 'Lord, I was blind and you healed me, what else can I do?' At last, in the middle of the city, he saw an old man crouching, weeping on the ground, and, when he asked why he wept, the old man answered, 'Lord, I was dead, and you raised me into life, what else can I do but weep?'"

That is a terrible parable of how men use the gifts of Christ and the mercy of God. Peter's wife's mother used the gift of her health restored to serve Jesus and to serve others. That is the way in which we should use every gift of God.

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Matthew 8:16-17

MIRACLES IN A CROWD

Matthew 8:16-17

And, when it was late in the day, they brought to him many who were in the power of evil spirits, and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all those who were ill. This happened that the saying spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "He took our weaknesses and carried our sins."

As we have already seen, Mark's account of this series of incidents makes it clear that they happened on the Sabbath day (Mk.1:21-34). That explains why this scene happened late in the day, at the evening time. According to the Sabbath Law, which forbade all work on the Sabbath day, it was illegal to heal on the Sabbath. Steps could be taken to prevent a person from getting any worse, but no steps might be taken to make him any better. The general law was that on the Sabbath medical attention might only be given to those whose lives were actually in danger. Further, it was illegal to carry a burden on the Sabbath day, and a burden was anything which weighed more than two dried figs. It was, therefore, illegal to carry a sick person from place to place on a stretcher or in one's arms or on one's shoulders, for to do so would have been to carry a burden. Officially the Sabbath ended when two stars could be seen in the sky, for there were no clocks to tell the time in those days.

That is why the crowd in Capernaum waited until the evening time to come to Jesus for the healing which they knew he could give.

But we must think of what Jesus had been doing on that Sabbath day. He had been in the synagogue and had healed the demon-possessed man. He had sent healing to the centurion's servant. He had healed Peter's wife's mother. No doubt he had preached and taught all day; and no doubt he had encountered those who were bitter in their opposition to him. Now it was evening. God gave to men the day for work, and the evening for rest. The evening is the time of quiet when work is laid aside. But it was not so for Jesus. At the time when he might have expected rest, he was surrounded by the insistent demands of human need--and selflessly and uncomplainingly and with a divine generosity he met them all. So long as there was a soul in need there was no rest for Jesus Christ.

That scene called to Matthew's mind the saying of Isaiah (Isa.53:4) where it is said of the servant of the Lord that he bore our weaknesses and carried our sins.

The follower of Christ cannot seek for rest while there are others to be helped and healed; and the strange thing is that he will find his own weariness refreshed and his own weakness strengthened in the service of others. Somehow he will find that as the demands come, strength also comes; and somehow he will find that he is able to go on for the sake of others when he feels that he cannot take another step for himself.

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Matthew 8:18-22

THE SUMMONS TO COUNT THE COST

Matthew 8:18-22 (Part 1)

When Jesus saw the great crowds surrounding him, he gave orders to go away, across to the other side. A scribe came to him. "Teacher," he said, "I will follow you wherever you may be going." Jesus said to him: "The foxes have lairs, and the birds of the sky have places where they may lodge, but the Son of Man has nowhere where he may lay his head." Another of his disciples said: "Lord, let me first go away and bury my father." Jesus said to him: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead."

At first sight this section seems out of place in this chapter. The chapter is a chapter of miracles, and at first sight these verses do not seem to fit into a chapter which tells of a series of miraculous events. Why then does Matthew put it here?

It has been suggested that Matthew inserted this passage here because his thoughts were running on Jesus as the Suffering Servant. He has just quoted Isa.53:4: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matt.8:17), and very naturally, it is said, that picture led on in Matthew's thoughts to the picture of the one who had nowhere to lay his head. As Plummer has it, "Jesus' life began in a borrowed stable and ended in a borrowed tomb." So it is suggested that Matthew inserted this passage here because both it and the immediately preceding verses show Jesus as the Suffering Servant of God.

It may be so, but it is even more likely that Matthew inserted this passage in this chapter of miracles because he saw a miracle in it. It was a scribe who wished to follow Jesus. He gave Jesus the highest title of honour that he knew. "Teacher" he called him; the Greek is *didaskalos* (GSN1320), which is the normal translation of the Hebrew word *Rabbi* (HSN7227). To him Jesus was the greatest teacher to whom he had ever listened and whom he had ever seen.

It was indeed a miracle that any scribe should give to Jesus that title, and should wish to follow him. Jesus stood for the destruction and the end of all that narrow legalism on which scribal religion was built; and it was indeed a miracle that a scribe should come to see anything lovely or anything desirable in Jesus. This is the miracle of the impact of the personality of Jesus Christ on men.

The impact of one personality on another can indeed produce the most wonderful effects. Very often a man has been launched on a career of scholarship by the impact of the personality of a great teacher upon him; many a man has been moved to the Christian way and to a life of Christian service by the impact of a great Christian personality on his life. Preaching itself has been described and defined as "truth through personality."

W. H. Elliott in his autobiography, *Undiscovered Ends*, tells a thing about Edith Evans, the great actress: "When her husband died, she came to us, full of grief. . . . In our drawing room at Chester Square she poured out her feelings about it for an hour or so, and they were feelings that came from

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Matthew 8:18-22

springs that were very deep. Her personality filled the room. The room was not big enough! ... For days that room of ours was 'electric,' as I expressed it then. The strong vibrations had not gone."

This story is the story of the impact of the personality of Jesus on the life of a Jewish scribe. It remains true that to this day what is needed most of all is not so much to talk to men about Jesus as to confront them with Jesus, and to allow the personality of Jesus to do the rest.

But there is more than that. No sooner had the scribe undergone this reaction than Jesus told him that the foxes have their lairs and the birds of the sky have a place in the trees to rest, but the Son of Man has no place on earth to lay his head. It is as if Jesus said to this man: "Before you follow me--think what you are doing. Before you follow me--count the cost."

Jesus did not want followers who, were swept away by a moment of emotion, which quickly blazed and just as quickly died. He did not want men who were carried away by a tide of mere feeling, which quickly flowed and just as quickly ebbed. He wanted men who knew what they were doing. He talked about taking up a cross (Matt.10:38). He talked about setting himself above the dearest relationships in life (Lk.14:26); he talked about giving away everything to the poor (Matt.19:21). He was always saying to men: "Yes, I know that your heart is running out to me, but--do you love me enough for that?"

In any sphere of life men must be confronted with the facts. If a young man expresses a desire for scholarship, we must say to him: "Good, but are you prepared to scorn delights and live laborious days? "When an explorer is building up his team, he will be inundated with people offering their services, but he must weed out the romantics and the realists by saying, "Good, but are you prepared for the snow and the ice, for the swamps and the heat, for the exhaustion and the weariness of it all? "When a young person wishes to become an athlete, the trainer must say, "Good, but are you prepared for the self-denial and self-discipline that alone will win you the eminence of which you dream? "This is not to discourage enthusiasm, but it is to say that enthusiasm which has not faced the facts will soon be dead ashes instead of a flame.

No man could ever say that he followed Jesus on false pretences. Jesus was uncompromisingly honest. We do Jesus a grave disservice, if ever we lead people to believe that the Christian way is an easy way. There is no thrill like the way of Christ, and there is no glory like the end of that way; but Jesus never said it was an easy way. The way to glory always involved a cross.

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Matthew 8:18-22

THE TRAGEDY OF THE UNSEIZED MOMENT

Matthew 8:18-22 (Part 2)

But there was another man who wished to follow Jesus. He said he would follow Jesus, if he was first allowed to go and bury his father. Jesus' answer was: "Follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead." At first sight that seems a hard saying. To the Jew it was a sacred duty to ensure decent burial for a dead parent. When Jacob died, Joseph asked permission from Pharaoh to go and bury his father: "My father made me swear, saying, 'I am about to die; in my tomb which I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me.' Now therefore let me go up, I pray you, and bury my father; then I will return" (Gen.50:5). Because of the apparently stern and unsympathetic character of this saying different explanations have been given of it.

It has been suggested that in the translation into Greek of the Aramaic which Jesus used there has been a mistake; and that Jesus is saying that the man can well leave the burying of his father to the official buriers. There is a strange verse in Eze.39:15: "And when these pass through the land and any one sees a man's bone, then he shall set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog." That seems to imply a kind of official called a burier; and it has been suggested that Jesus is saying that the man can leave the burial to these officials. That does not seem a very likely explanation.

It has been suggested that this is indeed a hard saying, and that Jesus is saying bluntly that the society in which this man is living is dead in sin, and he must get out of it as quickly as possible, even if it means leaving his father still unburied, that nothing, not even the most sacred duty, must delay his embarkation on the Christian way.

But the true explanation undoubtedly lies in the way in which the Jews used this phrase -- 'I must bury my father!' -- and in the way in which it is still used in the east.

Wendt quotes an incident related by a Syrian missionary, M. Waidmeier. This missionary was friendly with an intelligent and rich young Turk. He advised him to make a tour of Europe at the close of his education, so that his education would be completed and his mind broadened. The Turk answered, "I must first of all bury my father." The missionary expressed his sympathy and sorrow that the young man's father had died. But the young Turk explained that his father was still very much alive, and that what he meant was that he must fulfil all his duties to his parents and to his relatives, before he could leave them to go on the suggested tour, that, in fact, he could not leave home until after his father's death, which might not happen for many years.

That is undoubtedly what the man in this gospel incident meant. He meant, "I will follow you some day, when my father is dead, and when I am free to go." He was in fact putting off his following of Jesus for many years to come.

Jesus was wise: Jesus knew the human heart; and Jesus knew well that, if the man did not follow him on the moment, he never would. Again and again there come to us moments of impulse when we are moved to the higher things; and again and again we let them pass without acting upon them.

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Matthew 8:18-22

The tragedy of life is so often the tragedy of the unseized moment. We are moved to some fine action, we are moved to the abandoning of some weakness or habit, we are moved to say something to someone, some word of sympathy, or warning, or encouragement; but the moment passes, and the thing is never done, the evil thing is never conquered, the word is never spoken. In the best of us there is a certain lethargy and inertia; there is a certain habit of procrastination; there is a certain fear and indecision; and often the moment of fine impulse is never turned into action and into fact.

Jesus was saying to this man: "You are feeling at the moment that you must get out of that dead society in which you move; you say you will get out when the years have passed and your father has died; get out now -- or you will never get out at all."

In his autobiography H. G. Wells told of a crucial moment in his life. He was apprenticed to a draper, and there seemed to be little or no future for him. There came to him one day what he called "an inward and prophetic voice: 'Get out of this trade before it is too late; at any cost get out of it.'" He did not wait; he got out; and that is why he became H. G. Wells.

May God give to us that strength of decision which will save us from the tragedy of the unseized moment.

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Matthew 8:23-27

THE PEACE OF THE PRESENCE

Matthew 8:23-27 (Part 1)

When he embarked on the boat, his disciples followed him. And, look you, a great upheaval arose on the sea, so that the boat was hidden by the waves; and he was sleeping. They came and wakened him. "Lord," they said, "save us; we are perishing." He said to them, "Why are you such cowards, you whose faith is little?" Then, when he had been roused from sleep, he rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. The men were amazed. "What kind of man is this," they said, "for the winds and the sea obey him?"

In one sense this was a very ordinary scene on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is small; it is only thirteen miles from north to south and eight miles from east to west at its widest. The Jordan valley makes a deep cleft in the surface of the earth, and the Sea of Galilee is part of that cleft. It is 680 feet below sea level. That gives it a climate which is warm and gracious, but it also creates dangers. On the west side there are hills with valleys and gullies; and, when a cold wind comes from the west, these valleys and gullies act like gigantic funnels. The wind, as it were, becomes compressed in them, and rushes down upon the lake with savage violence and with startling suddenness, so that the calm of one moment can become the raging storm of the next. The storms on the Sea of Galilee combine suddenness and violence in a unique way.

W. M. Thomson in *The Land and the Book* describes his experience on the shores of the Sea of Galilee:

On the occasion referred to, we subsequently pitched our tents at the shore, and remained for three days and nights exposed to this tremendous wind. We had to double-pin all the tent-ropes, and frequently were obliged to hang with our whole weight upon them to keep the quivering tabernacle from being carried up bodily into the air. . . . The whole lake, as we had it, was lashed into fury; the waves repeatedly rolled up to our tent door, tumbling over the ropes with such violence as to carry away the tent-pins. And, moreover, these winds are not only violent, but they come down suddenly, and often when the sky is perfectly clear. I once went to swim near the hot baths, and, before I was aware, a wind came rushing over the cliffs with such force that it was with great difficulty that I could regain the shore."

Dr. W. M. Christie, who spent many years in Galilee, says that during these storms the winds seem to blow from all the directions at the same time, for they rush down the narrow gorges in the hills and strike the water at an angle. He tells of one occasion:

A company of visitors were standing on the shore at Tiberias, and, noting the glassy surface of the water and the smallness of the lake, they expressed doubts as to the possibility of such

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storms as those described in the gospels. Almost immediately the wind sprang up. In twenty minutes the sea was white with foam-crested waves. Great billows broke over the towers at the corners of the city walls, and the visitors were compelled to seek shelter from the blinding spray, though now two hundred yards from the lakeside."

In less than half an hour the placid sunshine had become a raging storm.

That is what happened to Jesus and his disciples. The words in the Greek are very vivid. The storm is called a seismos (GSN4578), which is the word for an earthquake. The waves were so high that the boat was hidden (kaluplesthai, GSN2572) in the trough as the crest of the waves towered over them. Jesus was asleep. (If we read the narrative in Mk.4:1; Mk.4:35, we see that before they had set out he had been using the boat as a pulpit to address the people and no doubt he was exhausted.) In their moment of terror the disciples awoke him, and the storm became a calm.

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Matthew 8:23-27

CALM AMIDST THE STORM

Matthew 8:23-27 (Part 2)

In this story there is something very much more than the calming of a storm at sea. Suppose that Jesus did in actual physical fact still a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee somewhere round about A.D. 28, that would in truth be a very wonderful thing; but it would have very little to do with us. It would be the story of an isolated wonder, which had no relevance for us in the twentieth century. If that is all the story means, we may well ask: "Why does he not do it now? Why does he allow those who love him nowadays to be drowned in the raging of the sea without intervening to save them?" If we take the story simply as the stilling of a weather storm, it actually produces problems which for some of us break the heart.

But the meaning of this story is far greater than that--the meaning of this story is not that Jesus stopped a storm in Galilee; the meaning is that wherever Jesus is the storms of life become a calm. It means that in the presence of Jesus the most terrible of tempests turns to peace.

When the cold, bleak wind of sorrow blows, there is calm and comfort in the presence of Jesus Christ. When the hot blast of passion blows, there is peace and security in the presence of Jesus Christ. When the storms of doubt seek to uproot the very foundations of the faith, there is a steady safety in the presence of Jesus Christ. In every storm that shakes the human heart there is peace with Jesus Christ.

Margaret Avery tells a wonderful story. In a little village school in the hill country a teacher had been telling the children of the stilling of the storm at sea. Shortly afterwards there came a terrible blizzard. When school closed for the day, the teacher had almost to drag the children bodily through the tempest. They were in very real danger. In the midst of it all she heard a little boy say as if to himself: "We could be doing with that chap Jesus here now." The child had got it right; that teacher must have been a wonderful teacher. The lesson of this story is that when the storms of life shake our souls Jesus Christ is there. and in his presence the raging of the storm turns to the peace that no storm can ever take away.

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Matthew 8:28-34

THE DEMON-HAUNTED UNIVERSE

Matthew 8:28-34 (Part 1)

And, when he had come to the other side, to the territory of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, as they emerged from the tombs. They were very fierce, so that no one was able to pass by that road. And, look you, they shouted: "What have we to do with you, you Son of God? Have you come to torture us before the proper time?" A good distance away from them a herd of many pigs was grazing. The devils urged Jesus: "If you cast us out, send us into the herd of pigs." He said to them: "Begone." They came out and went into the herd of pigs. And, look you, the whole herd rushed down the cliff into the sea, and died in the waters. Those who were herding them fled, and went away into the town and related the whole story, and told of the things which had happened to the demon-possessed men. And, look you, the whole town came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they urged him to depart from their districts.

Before we begin to study this passage in detail, we may try to clear up one difficulty which meets the student of the gospels. There was clearly some uncertainty in the mind of the gospel writers as to where this incident actually happened. That uncertainty is reflected in the differences between the three gospels. In the King James Version Matthew says that this happened in the country of the Gergesenes (Matt.8:28); Mark and Luke say that it happened in the country of the Gadarenes (Mk.5:1; Lk.8:26). There are even very considerable differences between the different manuscripts of each gospel. In the Revised Standard Version, which follows the best manuscripts, and which makes use of the most up-to-date scholarship, Matthew places the incident in the country of the Gadarenes; Mark and Luke in the country of the Gerasenes.

The difficulty is that no one has ever really succeeded in identifying this place beyond doubt. Gerasa can hardly be right, for the only Gerasa of which we have any information was thirty-six miles inland, south-east of the lake, in Gilead; and it is certain that Jesus did not voyage thirty-six miles inland. Gadara is almost certainly right, because Gadara was a town six miles inland from the shores of the lake, and it would be very natural for the town burying-place and the town grazing-place to be some distance outside the town. Gergesa is very likely due to the conjecture of Origen, the great third century Alexandrian scholar. He knew that Gerasa was impossible; he doubted that Gadara was possible; and he actually knew of a village called Gergesa which was on the eastern shores of the lake, and so he conjectured that Gergesa must be the place.

The differences are simply due to the fact that those who copied the manuscripts did not know Palestine well enough to be sure where this incident actually happened.

This miracle confronts us with the idea of demon-possession which is so common in the gospels. The ancient world believed unquestioningly and intensely in evil spirits. The air was so full of these spirits that it was not even possible to insert into it the point of a needle without coming against one. Some said that there were seven and a half million of them; there were ten thousand of them on a man's right hand and ten thousand on his left; and all were waiting to work men harm. They lived in unclean places such as tombs, and places where no cleansing water was to be found. They lived in the deserts where their howling could be heard. (We still speak of a howling desert.) They were specially dangerous to the lonely traveller, to the woman in childbirth, to the newly married

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Matthew 8:28-34

bride and bridegroom, to children who were out after dark, and to voyagers by night. They were specially dangerous in the midday heat, and between sunset and sunrise.

The male demons were called shedim (HSN7700), and the female liliyn after lilith (HSN3917). The female demons had long hair, and were specially dangerous to children; that was why children had their guardian angels (compare Matt.18:10).

As to the origin of the demons different views were held. Some held that they had been there since the beginning of the world. Some held that they were the spirits of wicked, malignant people, who had died, and who even after their death still carried on their evil work. Most commonly of all they were connected with the strange old story in Gen.6:1-8. That story tells how the sinning angels came to earth and seduced mortal women. The demons were held to be the descendants of the children produced by that evil union.

To these demons all illness was ascribed. They were held to be responsible, not only for diseases like epilepsy and mental illness, but also for physical illness. The Egyptians held that the body had thirty-six different parts, and that every one could be occupied by a demon. One of their favourite ways of gaining an entry into a man's body was to lurk beside him while he ate, and so to settle on his food.

It may seem fantastic to us; but the ancient peoples believed implicitly in demons. If a man gained the idea that he was possessed by a demon, he would easily go on to produce all the symptoms of demon-possession. He could genuinely convince himself that there was a demon inside him. To this day anyone can think himself into having a pain or into the idea that he is ill; that could happen even more easily in days when there was much of what we would call superstition, and when men's knowledge was much more primitive than it is now. Even if there are no such things as demons, a man could be cured only by the assumption that for him at least the demons were the realest of all things.

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Matthew 8:28-34

THE DEFEAT OF THE DEMONS

Matthew 8:28-34 (Part 2)

When Jesus came to the other side of the lake, he was confronted by two demon-possessed men, who dwelt in the tombs, for the tombs were the natural place for the demons to inhabit. These men were so fierce that they were a danger to passers-by, and the prudent traveller would give them a very wide berth indeed.

W. M. Thomson in *The Land and the Book* tells us that he himself, in the nineteenth century, saw men who were exactly like these two demon-possessed men in the tombs at Gadara:

There are some very similar cases at the present day--furious and dangerous maniacs, who wander about the mountains and sleep in eaves and tombs. In their worst paroxysms they are quite unmanageable, and prodigiously strong.... And it is one of the most common traits of this madness that the victims refuse to wear clothes. I have often seen them absolutely naked in the crowded streets of Beirut and Sidon. There are also cases in which they run wildly about the country and frighten the whole neighbourhood."

Apart from anything else, Jesus showed a most unusual courage in stopping to speak to these two men at au.

If we really want the details of this story we have to go to Mark. Mark's narrative (Mk.5:1-19) is much longer, and what Matthew gives us is only a summary. This is a miracle story which has caused much discussion, and the discussion has centered round the destruction of the herd of pigs. Many have found it strange and have considered it heartless that Jesus should destroy a herd of animals like this. But it is almost certain that Jesus did not in fact deliberately destroy the pigs.

We must try to visualize what happened. The men were shouting and shrieking (Mk.5:7; Lk.8:28). We must remember that they were completely convinced that they were occupied by demons. Now it was normal and orthodox belief, shared by everyone, that when the Messiah and the time of judgment came, the demons would be destroyed. That is what the men meant when they asked Jesus why he had come to torture them before the proper time. They were so convinced that they were possessed by demons that nothing could have rid them of that conviction other than visible demonstration that the demons had gone out of them.

Something had to be done which to them would be unanswerable proof. Almost certainly what happened was that their shouting and shrieking alarmed the herd of pigs; and in their terror the pigs took to flight and plunged into the lake. Water was fatal to demons. Thereupon Jesus seized the chance which had come to him. "Look," he said. "Look at these swine; they are gone into the depths of the lake and your demons are gone with them for ever." Jesus knew that in no other way could he ever convince these two men that they were in fact cured. If that be so, Jesus did not

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Matthew 8:28-34

deliberately destroy the herd of swine. He used their stampede to help two poor sufferers believe in their cure.

Even if Jesus did deliberately work the destruction of this herd of pigs, it could surely never be held against him. There is such a thing as being over-fastidious. T. R. Glover spoke of people who think they are being religious when in fact they are being fastidious.

We could never compare the value of a herd of swine with the value of a man's immortal soul. It is unlikely that we refuse to eat bacon for breakfast or pork for dinner. Our sympathy with pigs does not extend far enough to prevent our eating them; are we then to complain if Jesus restored sanity to two men's minds at the cost of a herd of pigs? This is not to say that we encourage or even condone cruelty to animals. It is simply to say that we must preserve a sense of proportion in life.

The supreme tragedy of this story lies in its conclusion. Those who were herding the pigs ran back to the town and told what had happened; and the result was that the people of the town besought Jesus to leave their territory at once.

Here is human selfishness at its worst. It did not matter to these people that two men had been given back their reason; all that mattered to them was that their pigs had perished. It is so often the case that people in effect say, "I don't care what happens to anyone else, if my profits and my comfort and my ease are preserved." We may be amazed at the callousness of these people of Gadara, but we must have a care that we too do not resent any helping of others which reduces our own privileges.

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Matthew 9

THE GROWTH OF OPPOSITION

We have repeatedly seen that in Matthew's gospel there is nothing haphazard. It is carefully planned and carefully designed.

In Matt.9 we see another example of this careful planning, for here we see the first shadows of the gathering storm. We see the opposition beginning to grow; we hear the first hint of the charges which are going to be levelled against Jesus, and which are finally going to bring about his death. In this chapter four charges are made against Jesus.

(i) He is accused of blasphemy. In Matt.9:1-8 we see Jesus curing the paralytic by forgiving his sins; and we hear the scribes accusing him of blasphemy because he claimed to do what only God can do. Jesus was accused of blasphemy because he spoke with the voice of God. Blasphemia (GSN0988) literally means insult or slander; and Jesus' enemies accused him of insulting God because he arrogated to himself the very powers of God.

(ii) He is accused of immorality. In Matt.9:10-13 we see Jesus sitting at a feast with tax-gatherers and sinners. The Pharisees demanded to know the reason why he ate with such people. The implication was that he was like the company he kept.

Jesus was in effect accused of being an immoral character because he kept company with immoral characters. Once a man is disliked, it is the easiest thing in the world to misinterpret and to misrepresent everything he does.

Harold Nicolson tells of a talk he had with Stanley Baldwin. Nicolson was at the time starting out on a political career and he went to ask Mr. Baldwin, a political veteran, for any advice he might care to give. Baldwin said something like this: "You are going to try to be a statesman, and to handle the affairs of the country. Well, I have had a long experience of such a life, and I will give you three rules which you would do well to follow. First, if you are a subscriber to a press-cutting agency, cancel your subscription at once. Second, never laugh at your opponents; mistakes. Third, steel yourself to the attribution of false motives." One of the favourite weapons of any public man's enemies is the attribution of false motives to him; that is what his enemies did to Jesus.

(iii) He is accused of slackness in piety. In Matt.9:14-17 the disciples of John ask Jesus' disciples why their Master does not fast. He was not going through the orthodox motions of religion, and therefore the orthodox were suspicious of him. Any man who breaks the conventions will suffer for it; and any man who breaks the religious conventions will suffer especially. Jesus broke the orthodox conventions of ecclesiastical piety, and he was criticized for it.

(iv) He is accused of being in league with the devil. In Matt.9:31-34 we see him curing a dumb man, and his enemies ascribe the cure to an association with the devil. Whenever a new power comes into life--it has been said, for instance, of spiritual healing--there are those who will say, "We must be cautious; this may well be the work of the devil and not of God." It is the strange fact that when people meet something which they do not like, and which they do not understand, and which cuts across their preconceived notions, they very often ascribe it to the devil and not to God.

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Matthew 9

Here then we see the beginning of the campaign against Jesus. The slanderers are at work. The whispering tongues are poisoning truth and wrong motives are being ascribed. The drive to eliminate this disturbing Jesus has begun.

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Matthew 9:1-8

GET RIGHT WITH GOD

Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus embarked on the boat, and crossed to the other side, and came to his own town. And, look you, they brought to him a paralysed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, "Courage, child, your sins are forgiven." And, look you, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming." Jesus knew their thoughts. "Why," he said, "do you think evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier--to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or, to say, 'Rise and walk'? But to let you understand that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins--" then he said to the paralysed man, "Rise; lift your bed; and go to your house." And he rose and went away to his house. When the crowds saw this, they were moved to awe, and glorified God because he had given such power to men.

From Mk.2:1 we learn that this incident took place in Capernaum; and it is interesting to note that by this time Jesus had become so identified with Capernaum that it could be called his own town. At this stage in his ministry Capernaum was the centre of his work.

A paralysed man was brought to him, carried on a bed by some friends. Here is a wonderful picture of a man who was saved by the faith of his friends. Had it not been for them he would never have reached the healing presence of Jesus at all. It may well be that he had become dully resigned and defeatedly hopeless, and that they had carried him almost against his will to Jesus. However that may be, he was certainly saved by the faith of his friends.

W. B. Yeats in his play, *The Cat and the Moon*, has a sentence: "Did you ever know a holy man but has a wicked man for his comrade, and his heart's darling?" It is the very characteristic of a really holy man that he clings to a really bad or an entirely thoughtless man, until he has brought that man into the presence of Jesus. If any man has a friend who does not know Christ, or who does not care for Christ, or who is even hostile to Christ, it is his Christian duty not to let that man go until he has brought him into his presence.

We cannot force a man against his will to accept Christ. Coventry Patmore once said that we cannot teach another religious truth; we can only point out to him a way whereby he may find it for himself. We cannot make a man a Christian, but we can do everything possible to bring him into Christ's presence.

Jesus' approach to this man might seem astonishing. He began by telling him that his sins were forgiven. There was a double reason for that. In Palestine it was a universal belief that all sickness was the result of sin, and that no sickness could ever be cured until sin was forgiven. Rabbi Ami said, "There is no death without sin, and no pains without some transgression." Rabbi Alexander said, "The sick arises not from his sickness, until his sins are forgiven." Rabbi Chija ben Abba said, "No sick person is cured from sickness, until all his sins are forgiven him." This unbreakable connection between suffering and sin was part of the orthodox Jewish belief of the time of Jesus. For that reason there is no doubt at all that this man could never have been cured, until he was convinced that his sins had been forgiven.

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Matthew 9:1-8

It is most probable that he had indeed been a sinner, and that he was convinced that his illness was the result of his sin, as it may very well have been; and without the assurance of forgiveness healing could never have come to him.

In point of fact modern medicine would agree whole-heartedly that the mind can and does influence the physical condition of the body, and that a person can never have a healthy body when his mind is not in a healthy state.

Paul Tournier in A Doctor's Case Book, quotes an actual example of that: "There was, for example, the girl whom one of my friends had been treating for several months for anaemia, without much success. As a last resort my colleague decided to send her to the medical officer of the district in which she worked in order to get his permission to send her into a mountain sanatorium. A week later the patient brought word back from the medical officer. He proved to be a good fellow and he had granted the permit, but he added, 'On analysing the blood, however, I do not arrive at anything like the figures you quote.' My friend, somewhat put out, at once took a fresh sample of the blood, and rushed to his laboratory. Sure enough the blood count had suddenly changed.

'If I had not been the kind of person who keeps carefully to laboratory routine,' my friend's story goes on, 'and if I had not previously checked my figures at each of my patient's visits, I might have thought that I had made a mistake.' He returned to the patient and asked her, 'Has anything out of the ordinary happened in your life since your last visit?' 'Yes, something has happened,' she replied. 'I have suddenly been able to forgive someone against whom I bore a nasty grudge, and all at once I felt I could at last say, yes, to life!'" Her mental attitude was changed, and the very state of her blood was changed along with it. Her mind was cured, and her body was well on the way to being cured. This man in the gospel story knew that he was a sinner; because he was a sinner, he was certain that God was his enemy; because he felt God was his enemy, he was paralysed and ill. Once Jesus brought to him the forgiveness of God, he knew that God was no longer his enemy, but his friend, and therefore he was cured.

But it was the manner of the cure which scandalized the scribes. Jesus had dared to forgive sin; to forgive sin is the prerogative of God; therefore Jesus had insulted God. Jesus did not stop to argue. He joined issue with them on their own ground. "Whether," he demanded, "is it easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'" Now remember that these scribes believed that no one could get up and walk unless his sins were forgiven. If Jesus was able to make this man get up and walk, then that was unanswerable proof that the man's sins were forgiven, and that Jesus' claim was true. So Jesus demonstrated that he was able to bring forgiveness to a man's soul and health to a man's body. And it remains eternally true that we can never be right physically until we are right spiritually, that health in body and peace with God go hand in hand.

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Matthew 9:9

THE MAN WHOM ALL MEN HATED

Matthew 9:9 (Part 1)

As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man called Matthew seated at the tax-collector's table. "Follow me," he said to him; and he arose and followed him.

There was never a more unlikely candidate for the office of apostle than Matthew. Matthew was what the King James Version calls a publican; the publicani were tax-gatherers, and were so called because they dealt with public money and with public funds.

The problem of the Roman government was to devise a system whereby the taxes could be collected as efficiently and as cheaply as possible. They did so by auctioning the right to collect taxes in a certain area. The man who bought that right was responsible to the Roman government for an agreed sum; anything he could raise over and above that he was allowed to keep as commission.

Obviously this system lent itself to grave abuses. People did not really know how much they ought to pay in the days before newspapers and radio and television, nor had they any right of appeal against the tax-collector. The consequence was that many a tax-collector became a wealthy man through illegal extortion. This system had led to so many abuses that in Palestine it had been brought to an end before the time of Jesus; but taxes still had to be paid, and there were still abuses.

There were three great stated taxes. There was a ground tax by which a man had to pay one-tenth of his grain and one-fifth of his fruit and vine to the government either in cash or in kind. There was income tax, which was one per cent of a man's income. There was a poll-tax which had to be paid by every male from the age of fourteen to the age of sixty-five, and by every female from the age of twelve to sixty-five. These were statutory taxes and could not well be used by tax-collectors for private profit.

But in addition to these taxes there were all sorts of other taxes. There was a duty of anything from 2.5 per cent to 12.5 per cent on all goods imported and exported. A tax had to be paid to travel on main roads, to cross bridges, to enter market-places and towns or harbours. There was a tax on pack animals, and a tax on the wheels and axles of carts. There were purchase taxes on goods bought and sold. There were certain commodities which were government monopolies. For instance, in Egypt the trade in nitrate, beer, and papyrus was entirely in government control.

Although the old method of auctioning the taxes had been stopped, all kinds of people were needed to collect these taxes. The people who collected them were drawn from the provincials themselves. Often they were volunteers. Usually in any district one person was responsible for one tax, and it was not difficult for such a person to line his own pockets in addition to collecting the taxes which were legally due.

These tax-gatherers were universally hated. They had entered the service of their country's conquerors, and they amassed their fortunes at the expense of their country's misfortunes. They

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Matthew 9:9

were notoriously dishonest. Not only did they fleece their own countrymen, but they also did their best to swindle the government, and they made a flourishing income by taking bribes from rich people who wished to avoid taxes which they should have paid.

Every country hates its tax-gatherers, but the hatred of the Jews for them was doubly violent. The Jews were fanatical nationalists. But what roused the Jews more than anything else was their religious conviction that God alone was king, and that to pay taxes to any mortal ruler was an infringement of God's rights and an insult to his majesty. By Jewish law a tax-gatherer was debarred from the synagogue; he was included with things and beasts unclean, and Lev.20:5 was applied to them; he was forbidden to be a witness in any case, "robbers, murderers and tax-gatherers" were classed together.

When Jesus called Matthew he called a man whom all men hated. Here is one of the greatest instances in the New Testament of Jesus' power to see in a man, not only what he was, but also what he could be. No one ever had such faith in the possibilities of human nature as Jesus had.

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Matthew 9:9

A CHALLENGE ISSUED AND RECEIVED

Matthew 9:9 (Part 2)

Capernaum was in the territory of Herod Antipas, and in all probability Matthew was not directly in the service of the Romans but in the service of Herod. Capernaum was a great meeting place of roads. In particular the great road from Egypt to Damascus, the Way of the Sea, passed through Capernaum. It was there that it entered the dominion of Herod for business purposes, and no doubt Matthew was one of those customs officers who exacted duty on all goods and commodities as they entered and left the territory of Herod.

It is not to be thought that Matthew had never seen Jesus before. No doubt Matthew had heard about this young Galilean who came with a message breathtakingly new, who spoke with an authority the like of which no one had ever heard before, and who numbered amongst his friends men and women from whom the orthodox good people of the day shrank in loathing. No doubt Matthew had listened on the outskirts of the crowd, and had felt his heart stir within him. Perhaps Matthew had wondered wistfully if even yet it was not too late to set sail and to seek a newer world, to leave his old life and his old shame and to begin again. So he found Jesus standing before him; he heard Jesus issue his challenge; and Matthew accepted that challenge and rose up and left all and followed him.

We must note what Matthew lost and what Matthew found. He lost a comfortable job, but found a destiny. He lost a good income, but found honour. He lost a comfortable security, but found an adventure the like of which he had never dreamed. It may be that if we accept the challenge of Christ, we shall find ourselves poorer in material things. It may be that the worldly ambitions will have to go. But beyond doubt we will find a peace and a joy and a thrill in life that we never knew before. In Jesus Christ a man finds a wealth surpassing anything he may have to abandon for the sake of Christ.

We must note what Matthew left and what Matthew took. He left his tax-collector's table; but from it took one thing--his pen. Here is a shining example of how Jesus can use whatever gift a man may bring to him. It is not likely that the others of the Twelve were handy with a pen. Galilean fishermen would not have much skill in writing or in putting words together. But Matthew had; and this man, whose trade had taught him to use a pen, used that skill to compose the first handbook of the teaching of Jesus, which must rank as one of the most important books the world has ever read.

When Matthew left the tax-collector's table that day he gave up much in the material sense, but in the spiritual sense he became heir to a fortune.

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Matthew 9:10-13

WHERE THE NEED IS GREATEST

Matthew 9:10-13

He was sitting at table in the house, and, look you, many tax-gatherers and sinners came and sat at table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax-gatherers and sinners?" He heard this. "Those who are well," he said, "do not need a doctor, but those who are ill. Go and learn what the saying means: 'It is mercy I wish, and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to invite the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus not only call Matthew to be his man and his follower; he actually sat at table with men and women like Matthew, with tax-gatherers and sinners.

A very interesting question arises here--where was this meal Jesus ate with tax-gatherers and sinners? It is only Luke who definitely says that the meal was in the house of Matthew or Levi (compare Matt.9:10-13; Mk.2:14-17; Lk.5:27-32). As far as the narrative in Matthew and Mark goes, it could well have been in Jesus' house, or in the house where Jesus was staying. If the meal was in Jesus' house, Jesus' saying becomes even more pointed. Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

The word that is used for to call is the Greek word *kalein* (GSN2564), which is in fact the technical Greek word for inviting a guest to a house or to a meal. In the Parable of the Great Feast (Matt.22:1-10; Lk.14:15-24) we well remember how the invited guests refused their invitation, and how the poor, and the lame, and the halt, and the blind were gathered together from the highways and the byways and the hedgerows to sit at the table of the King. It may well be that Jesus is saying, "When you make a feast you invite the coldly orthodox and the piously self-righteous; when I make a feast I invite those who are most conscious of their sin and those whose need of God is greatest."

However that may be, whether this meal was in the house of Matthew or in the house where Jesus was staying, it was to the orthodox Scribes and Pharisees a most shocking proceeding. Broadly speaking, in Palestine people were divided into two sections. There were the orthodox who rigidly kept the Law in every petty detail; and there were those who did not keep its petty regulations. The second were classed as the people of the land; and it was forbidden to the orthodox to go on a journey with them, to do any business with them, to give anything to them or to receive anything from them, to entertain them as guests or to be guests in their houses. By companying with people like this Jesus was doing something which the pious people of his day would never have done.

Jesus' defence was perfectly simple; he merely said that he went where the need was greatest. He would be a poor doctor who visited only houses where people enjoyed good health; the doctor's place is where people are ill; it is his glory and his task to go to those who need him.

Diogenes was one of the great teachers of ancient Greece. He was a man who loved virtue, and a man with a caustic tongue. He was never tired of comparing the decadence of Athens, where he spent most of his time, with the strong simplicities of Sparta. One day someone said to him, "If you

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Matthew 9:10-13

think so much of Sparta and so little of Athens, why don't you leave Athens and go and stay in Sparta?" His answer was, "Whatever I may wish to do, I must stay where men need me most." It was sinners who needed Jesus, and amongst sinners he would move.

When Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners," we must understand what he was saying. He was not saying that there were some people who were so good that they had no need of anything which he could give; still less was he saying that he was not interested in people who were good. This is a highly compressed saying. Jesus was saying, "I did not come to invite people who are so self-satisfied that they are convinced they do not need anyone's help; I came to invite people who are very conscious of their sin and desperately aware of their need for a saviour." He was saying, "It is only those who know how much they need me who can accept my invitation."

Those Scribes and Pharisees had a view of religion which is by no means dead.

(i) They were more concerned with the preservation of their own holiness than with the helping of another's sin. They were like doctors who refused to visit the sick lest they should be injured by some infection. They shrank away in fastidious disgust from the sinner; they did not want anything to do with people like that. Essentially their religion was selfish; they were much more concerned to save their own souls than to save the souls of others. And they had forgotten that that was the surest way to lose their own souls.

(ii) They were more concerned with criticism than with encouragement. They were far more concerned to point out the faults of other people than to help them conquer these faults. When a doctor sees some particularly loathsome disease, which would turn the stomach of anyone else to look at, he is not filled with disgust; he is filled with the desire to help. Our first instinct should never be to condemn the sinner; our first instinct should be to help him.

(iii) They practiced a goodness which issued in condemnation rather than in forgiveness and in sympathy. They would rather leave a man in the gutter than give him a hand to get out of it. They were like doctors who were very much concerned to diagnose disease, but not in the least concerned to help cure it.

(iv) They practiced a religion which consisted in outward orthodoxy rather than in practical help. Jesus loved that saying from Hos.6:6 which said that God desired mercy and not sacrifice, for he quoted it more than once (compare Matt.12:7). A man may diligently go through all the motions of orthodox piety, but if his hand is never stretched out to help the man in need, he is not a religious man.

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Matthew 9:14-15

PRESENT JOY AND FUTURE SORROW

Matthew 9:14-15

Then the disciples of John came to him. "Why," they said, "do we and the Pharisees fast frequently, while your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "Surely the bridegroom's closest friends cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

To the Jew almsgiving, prayer and fasting were the three great works of the religious life. We have already fully described Jewish fasting when we were dealing with Matt.6:16-18. A. H. McNeile suggests that this incident may have taken place when the autumn rains had not fallen, and a public fast had been ordained.

When Jesus was asked why he and his disciples did not practice fasting, he answered with a vivid picture. The King James Version speaks of the children of the bridechamber, which is a correct literal translation of the Greek. A Jewish wedding was a time of special festivity. The unique feature of it was that the couple who were married did not go away for a honeymoon; they spent their honeymoon at home.

For a week after the wedding open house was kept; the bride and bridegroom were treated as, and even addressed as, king and queen. And during that week their closest friends shared all the joy and all the festivities with them; these closest friends were called the children of the bridechamber. On such an occasion there came into the lives of poor and simple people a joy, a rejoicing, a festivity, a plenty, that might come only once in a lifetime.

So Jesus compares himself to the bridegroom and his disciples to the bridegroom's closest friends. How could a company like that be sad and grim? This was no time for fasting, but for the rejoicing of a lifetime. There are great things in this passage.

(i) It tells us that to be with Jesus is a thing of joy; it tells us that in the presence of Jesus there is a sheer thrilling effervescence of life; it tells us that a gloom-encompassed Christianity is an impossibility. The man who walks with Christ walks in radiance of joy.

(ii) It also tells us that no joy lasts for ever. For John's disciples the time of sorrow had come, because John was already in prison. For Jesus disciples that time of sorrow would most certainly come. It is one of the great inevitabilities of life that the dearest joy must come to an end.

Epictetus said grimly: "When you are kissing your child, say to yourself: 'One day you must die.'" That is why we must know God and Jesus Christ. Jesus alone is the same yesterday, today and for ever; God alone abides amidst all the chances and the changes of life. The dearest human relationships must some day come to an end; it is only the joy of heaven which lasts for ever, and if we have it in our hearts, nothing can take it away.

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Matthew 9:14-15

(iii) This also is a challenge. It may be that at the moment the disciples did not see it, but Jesus is saying to them: "You have experienced the joy that following me can bring; can you also go through the trouble, the hardship, the suffering of a Christian's cross?" The Christian way brings its joy; but the Christian way also brings its blood and sweat and tears, which cannot take the joy away, but which, none the less, must be faced. So Jesus says, "Are you ready for both--the Christian joy and the Christian cross?"

(iv) Enshrined in this saying is the courage of Jesus. Jesus was never under any illusions; clearly at the end of the road he saw the Cross awaiting him. Here the curtain is lifted, and there is a glimpse into the mind of Jesus. He knew that for him the way of life was the way of the Cross, and yet he did not swerve one step aside from it. Here is the courage of the man who knows what God's way costs, and who yet goes on.

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Matthew 9:16-17

THE PROBLEM OF THE NEW IDEA

Matthew 9:16-17

"No one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for, if he does, the patch which he uses to fill in the hole tears the garment apart, and the rent is worse than ever. No one puts new wine into old wine-skins. If he does, the wine-skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins perish; but they put new wine into new skins, and both are preserved."

Jesus perfectly conscious that he came to men with new ideas and with a new conception of the truth, and he was well aware how difficult it is to get a new idea into men's minds. So he used two pictures which any Jew would understand.

(i) "No one," he said, "takes a piece of new and unshrunk cloth to patch an old garment. If he does, on the first occasion the garment becomes wet, the new patch shrinks, and as it shrinks, it tears the cloth apart, and the rent in the garment gapes wider than ever."

The Jews were passionately attached to things as they were. The Law was to them God's last and final word; to add one word to it, or to subtract one word from it, was a deadly sin. It was the avowed object of the Scribes and Pharisees "to build a fence around the Law." To them a new idea was not so much a mistake as a sin.

That spirit is by no means dead. Very often in a church, if a new idea or a new method or any change is suggested, the objection is promptly raised, "We never did that before."

I once heard two theologians talking together. One was a younger man who was intensely interested in all that the new thinkers have to say; the other was an older man of a rigid and conventional orthodoxy. The older man heard the young man with a kind of half-contemptuous tolerance, and finally closed the conversation by saying, "The old is better."

Throughout all its history the Church has clung to the old. What Jesus is saying is that there comes a time when patching is folly, and when the only thing to do is to scrap something entirely and to begin again. There are forms of church government, there are forms of church service, there are forms of words expressing our beliefs, which we so often try to adjust and tinker with in order to bring them up to date; we try to patch them. No one would willingly, or recklessly, or callously abandon what has stood the test of time and of the years and in which former generations have found their comfort and put their trust; but the fact remains that this is a growing and an expanding universe; and there comes a time when patches are useless, and when a man and a church have to accept the adventure of the new, or withdraw into the backwater, where they worship, not God, but the past.

(ii) No one, said Jesus, tries to put new wine into old wine-skins. In the old days men stored their wine in skins, and not in bottles. When new wine was put into a skin, the wine was still fermenting. The gases it gave off exerted pressure on the skin. In a new skin there was a certain elasticity, and no harm was done because the skin gave with the pressure. But an old skin had grown hard, and

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Matthew 9:16-17

had lost all its elasticity, and, if new and fermenting wine was put into it, it could not give to the pressure of the gases; it could only burst.

To put this into contemporary terms: our minds must be elastic enough to receive and to contain new ideas. The history of progress is the history of the overcoming of the prejudices of the shut mind. Every new idea has had to battle for its existence against the instinctive opposition of the human mind. The motor car, the railway train, the aeroplane were in the beginning regarded with suspicion. Simpson had to fight to introduce chloroform, and Lister had to struggle to introduce antiseptics. Copernicus was compelled to retract his statement that the earth went round the sun, and not the sun round the earth. Even Jonas Hanway, who brought the umbrella to this country, had to suffer a barrage of missiles and insults when he first walked down the street with it.

This dislike of the new enters into every sphere of life. Norman Marlow, an expert on railways, made many journeys on the footplate of locomotives. In his book *Footplate and Signal Cabin* he tells of a journey he made not long after the amalgamation of the railways. Locomotives which had been used on one branch of the railways were being tested out on other lines. He was on the footplate of a Manchester to Penzance express, a "Jubilee" class 4-6-0. The driver was a Great Western Railway driver who had been used to driving locomotives of the "Castle" class. "The driver did nothing but discourse with moody eloquence on the wretchedness of the engine he was driving" as compared with the "Castle" engines. He refused to use the technique necessary for the new engine, although he had been instructed in it, and knew it perfectly well. He insisted on driving his "Jubilee" as if it had been a "Castle" and grumbled all the way that he could not get better speed than 50 miles an hour.

He was used to "Castles" and with him nothing else had a chance. At Crewe a new driver took over, a man who was quite prepared to adopt the necessary new technique, and soon he had the "Jubilee" travelling at 80 miles per hour. Even in engine-driving men resented new ideas.

Within the Church this resentment of the new is chronic, and the attempt to pour new things into old moulds is almost universal. We attempt to pour the activities of a modern congregation into an ancient church building which was never meant for them. We attempt to pour the truth of new discoveries into creeds which are based on Greek metaphysics. We attempt to pour modern instruction into outworn language which cannot express it. We read God's word to twentieth century men and women in Elizabethan English, and seek to present the needs of the twentieth century man and woman to God in prayer language which is four hundred years old.

It may be that we would do well to remember that when any living thing stops growing, it starts dying. It may be that we need to pray that God would deliver us from the shut mind.

It so happens that we are living in an age of rapid and tremendous changes. Viscount Samuel was born in 1870, and he begins his autobiography with a description of the London of his childhood. "We had no motor-cars, or motor-buses, or taxis, or tube railways; there were no bicycles except the high 'pennyfarthings'; there were no electric light or telephones, no cinemas or broadcasts." That was just a century ago. We are living in a changing and an expanding world. It is Jesus' warning that the Church dare not be the only institution which lives in the past.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 9:18-31

THE IMPERFECT FAITH AND THE PERFECT POWER

Matthew 9:18-31

Before we deal with this passage in detail, we must look at it as a whole; for in it there is something wonderful.

It has three miracle stories in it, the healing of the ruler's daughter (Matt.9:18-19; Matt.9:23-26); the healing of the woman with the issue of blood (Matt.9:20-22); and the healing of the two blind men (Matt.9:27-31). Each of these stories has something in common. Let us look at them one by one.

(i) Beyond doubt the ruler came to Jesus when everything else had failed. He was, as we shall see, a ruler of the synagogue, that is to say, he was a pillar of Jewish orthodoxy. He was one of the men who despised and hated Jesus, and who would have been glad to see him eliminated. No doubt he tried every kind of doctor, and every kind of cure; and only in sheer desperation, and as a last resort, did he come to Jesus at all.

That is to say, the ruler came to Jesus from a very inadequate motive. He did not come to Jesus as a result of an outflow of the love of his heart; he came to Jesus because he had tried everything and everyone else, and because there was nowhere else to go. Faber somewhere makes God say of a straying child of God:

"If goodness lead him not; Then weariness may toss him to my breast."

This man came to Jesus simply because desperation drove him there.

(ii) The woman with the issue of blood crept up behind Jesus in the crowd and touched the hem of his cloak. Suppose we were reading that story with a detached and critical awareness, what would we say that woman showed? We would say that she showed nothing other than superstition. To touch the edge of Jesus' cloak is the same kind of thing as to look for healing power in the relics and the handkerchiefs of saints.

This woman came to Jesus with what she would call a very inadequate faith. She came with what seems much more like superstition than faith.

(iii) The two blind men came to Jesus, crying out: "Have pity on us, you Son of David." Son of David was not a title that Jesus desired; Son of David was the kind of title that a Jewish nationalist might use. So many of the Jews were waiting for a great leader of the line of David who would be the conquering general who would lead them to military and political triumph over their Roman masters. That is the idea which lies behind the title Son of David.

So these blind men came to Jesus with a very inadequate conception of who he was. They saw in him no more than the conquering hero of David's line.

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Matthew 9:18-31

Here is an astonishing thing. The ruler came to Jesus with an inadequate motive; the woman came to Jesus with an inadequate faith; the blind men came to Jesus with an inadequate conception of who he was, or, if we like to put it so, with an inadequate theology;; and yet they found his love and power waiting for their needs. Here we see a tremendous thing. It does not matter how we come to Christ, if only we come. No matter how inadequately and how imperfectly we come, his love and his arms are open to receive us.

There is a double lesson here. It means that we do not wait to ask Christ's help until our motives, our faith, our theology are perfect; we may come to him exactly as we are. And it means that we have no right to criticize others whose motives we suspect, whose faith we question, and whose theology we believe to be mistaken. It is not how we come to Christ that matters; it is that we should come at all, for he is willing to accept us as we are, and able to make us what we ought to be.

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Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26

THE AWAKENING TOUCH

Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26

While he was saying these things, look you, a ruler came and knelt before him in worship; "My daughter," he said, "has just died. But come and lay your hand upon her, and she will live:" Jesus rose and went with him, and his disciples came too. ... And Jesus came to the house of the ruler, and he saw the flute-players and the tumult of the crowd. "Leave us:" he said, "for the maid is not dead; she is asleep:" And they laughed at him. When the crowd had been put out, he went in and took her hand, and the maid arose. And the report of this went out to the whole country.

Matthew tells this story much more briefly than the other gospel writers do. If we want further details of it we must read it in Mk.5:21-43 and in Lk.8:40-56. There we discover that the ruler's name was Jairus, and that he was a ruler of the synagogue (Mk.5:22; Lk.8:41).

The ruler of the synagogue was a very important person. He was elected from among the elders. He was not a teaching or a preaching official; he had "the care of the external order in public worship, and the supervision of the concerns of the synagogue in general." He appointed those who were to read and to pray in the service, and invited those who were to preach. It was his duty to see that nothing unfitting took place within the synagogue: and the care of the synagogue buildings was in his oversight. The whole practical administration of the synagogue was in his hands.

It is clear that such a man would come to Jesus only as a last resort. He would be one of those strictly orthodox Jews who regarded Jesus as a dangerous heretic; and it was only when everything else had failed that he turned in desperation to Jesus. Jesus might well have said to him, "When things were going well with you, you wanted to kill me; now that things are going ill, you are appealing for my help." And Jesus might well have refused help to a man who came like that. But he bore no grudge; here was a man who needed him, and Jesus' one desire was to help. Injured pride and the unforgiving spirit had no part in the mind of Jesus.

So Jesus went with the ruler of the synagogue to his house, and there he found a scene like pandemonium. The Jews set very high the obligation of mourning over the dead. "Whoever is remiss," they said, "in mourning over the death of a wise man deserves to be burned alive." There were three mourning customs which characterized every Jewish household of grief.

There was the rending of garments. There were no fewer than thirty-nine different rules and regulations which laid down how garments should be rent. The rent was to be made standing. Clothes were to be rent to the heart so that the skin was exposed. For a father or mother the rent was exactly over the heart; for others it was on the right side. The rent must be big enough for a fist to be inserted into it. For seven days the rent must be left gaping open; for the next thirty days it must be loosely stitched so that it could still be seen; only then could it be permanently repaired. It would obviously have been improper for women to rend their garments in such a way that the breast was exposed. So it was laid down that a woman must rend her inner garment in private; she must then reverse the garment so that she wore it back to front; and then in public she must rend her outer garment.

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Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26

There was wailing for the dead. In a house of grief an incessant wailing was kept up. The wailing was done by professional wailing women. They still exist in the east and W. M. Thomson in *The Land and the Book* describes them: "There are in every city and community women exceedingly cunning in this business. They are always sent for and kept in readiness. When a fresh company of sympathisers comes in, these women make haste to take up a wailing, that the newly-come may the more easily unite their tears with the mourners. They know the domestic history of every person, and immediately strike up an impromptu lamentation, in which they introduce the names of their relatives who have recently died, touching some tender chord in every heart; and thus each one weeps for his own dead, and the performance, which would otherwise be difficult or impossible, comes easy and natural."

There were the flute-players. The music of the flute was especially associated with death. The Talmud lays it down: "The husband is bound to bury his dead wife, and to make lamentations and mourning for her, according to the custom of all countries. And also the very poorest amongst the Israelites will not allow her less than two flutes and one wailing woman; but, if he be rich, let all things be done according to his qualities." Even in Rome the flute-players were a feature of days of grief. There were flute-players at the funeral of the Roman Emperor Claudius, and Seneca tells us that they made such a shrilling that even Claudius himself, dead though he was, might have heard them. So insistent and so emotionally exciting was the wailing of the flute that Roman law limited the number of flute-players at any funeral to ten.

We can then picture the scene in the house of the ruler of the synagogue. The garments were being rent; the wailing women were uttering their shrieks in an abandonment of synthetic grief; the flutes were shrilling their eerie sound. In that house there was all the pandemonium of eastern grief.

Into that excited and hysterical atmosphere came Jesus. Authoritatively he put them all out. Quietly he told them that the maid was not dead but only asleep, and they laughed him to scorn. It is a strangely human touch this. The mourners were so luxuriating in their grief that they even resented hope.

It is probable that when Jesus said the maid was asleep, he meant exactly what he said. In Greek as in English a dead person was often said to be asleep. In fact the word cemetery comes from the Greek word *koimeterion* (compare *koimao*, GSN2837), and means a place where people sleep. In Greek there are two words for to sleep; the one is *koimasthai* (GSN2837), which is very commonly used both of natural sleep and of the sleep of death; the other is *katheudein* (GSN2518), which is not used nearly so frequently of the sleep of death, but which much more usually means natural sleep. It is *katheudein* (GSN2518) which is used in this passage.

In the east cataleptic coma was by no means uncommon. Burial in the east follows death very quickly, because the climate makes it necessary. Tristram writes: "Interments always take place at latest on the evening of the day of death, and frequently at night, if the deceased have lived till after sunset." Because of the commonness of this state of coma, and because of the commonness of speedy burial, not infrequently people were buried alive, as the evidence of the tombs shows. It

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may well be that here we have an example, not so much of divine healing as of divine diagnosis; and that Jesus saved this girl from a terrible end.

One thing is certain, Jesus that day in Capernaum rescued a Jewish maid from the grasp of death.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 9:20-22

ALL HEAVEN'S POWER FOR ONE

Matthew 9:20-22

And, look you, a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him, and touched the tassel of his cloak. For she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be cured." Jesus turned and saw her. "Courage, daughter!" He said. "Your faith has brought you healing." And the woman was cured from that hour.

From the Jewish point of view this woman could not have suffered from any more terrible or humiliating disease than an issue of blood. It was a trouble which was very common in Palestine. The Talmud sets out no fewer than eleven different cures for it. Some of them were tonics and astringents which may well have been effective; others were merely superstitious remedies. One was to carry the ashes of an ostrich-egg in a linen bag in summer, and in a cotton bag in winter; another was to carry about a barleycorn which had been found in the dung of a white she-ass. When Mark tells this story, he makes it clear that this woman had tried everything, and had gone to every available doctor, and was worse instead of better (Mk.5:26).

The horror of the disease was that it rendered the sufferer unclean. The Law laid it down: "If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean. Every bed on which she lies, all the days of her discharge, shall be to her as the bed of her impurity; and everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her impurity. And whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the evening (Lev.15:25-27).

That is to say, a woman with an issue of blood was unclean; everything and everyone she touched was infected with that uncleanness. She was absolutely shut off from the worship of God and from the fellowship of other men and women. She should not even have been in the crowd surrounding Jesus, for, if they had known it, she was infecting with her uncleanness everyone whom she touched. There is little wonder that she was desperately eager to try anything which might rescue her from her life of isolation and humiliation.

So she slipped up behind Jesus and touched what the King James Version calls the hem of his garment. The Greek word is kraspedon (GSN2899), the Hebrew is zizith, and the Revised Standard Version translates it fringe.

These fringes were four tassels of hyacinth blue worn by a Jew on the corners of his outer garment. They were worn in obedience to the injunction of the Law in Num.15:37-41 and Deut.22:12. Matthew again refers to them in Matt.14:36 and Matt.23:5. They consisted of four threads passing through the four corners of the garment and meeting in eight. One of the threads was longer than the others. It was twisted seven times round the others, and a double knot formed; then eight times, then eleven times, then thirteen times. The thread and the knots stood for the five books of the Law.

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Matthew 9:20-22

The idea of the fringe was two-fold. It was meant to identify a Jew as a Jew, and as a member of the chosen people, no matter where he was; and it was meant to remind a Jew every time he put on and took off his clothes that he belonged to God. In later times, when the Jews were universally persecuted, the tassels were worn on the undergarment, and today they are worn on the prayer-shawl which a devout Jew wears when he prays.

It was the tassel on the robe of Jesus that this woman touched.

When she touched it, it was as if time stood still. It was as if we were looking at a motion-picture and suddenly the picture stopped, and left us looking at one scene. The extraordinary, and the movingly beautiful thing, about this scene is that all at once amidst that crowd Jesus halted; and for the moment it seemed that for him no one but that woman and nothing but her need existed. She was not simply a poor woman lost in the crowd; she was someone to whom Jesus gave the whole of himself.

For Jesus no one is ever lost in the crowd, because Jesus is like God. W. B. Yeats once wrote in one of his moments of mystical beauty: "The love of God is infinite for every human soul, because every human soul is unique; no other can satisfy the same need in God." God gives all of himself to each individual person.

The world is not like that. The world is apt to divide people into those who are important and those who are unimportant.

In *A Night to Remember* Walter Lord tells in detail the story of the sinking of the Titanic in April, 1912. There was an appalling loss of life, when that new and supposedly unsinkable liner hit an iceberg in the middle of the Atlantic. After the tragedy had been announced, the New York newspaper, *The American*, devoted a leader to it. The leader was devoted entirely to the death of John Jacob Astor, the millionaire; and at the end of it, almost casually, it was mentioned that 1,800 others were also lost. The only one who really mattered, the only one with real news value, was the millionaire. The other 1,800 were of no real importance.

Men can be like that, but God can never be like that. Bain, the psychologist, said in a very different connection that the sensualist has what he calls "a voluminous tenderness." In the highest and the best sense there is a voluminous tenderness in God. James Agate said of G. K. Chesterton: "Unlike some thinkers, Chesterton understood his fellow-men; the woes of a jockey were as familiar to him as the worries of a judge. . . Chesterton, more than any man I have ever known, had the common touch. He would give the whole of his attention to a boot-black. He had about him that bounty of heart which men call kindness, and which makes the whole world kin." That is the reflection of the love of God which allows no man to be lost in the crowd.

This is something to remember in a day and an age when the individual is in danger of getting lost. Men tend to become numbers in a system of social security; they tend as members of an association or union to almost lose their right to be individuals at all. W. B. Yeats said of Augustus John, the famous artist and portrait painter: "He was supremely interested in the revolt from all that

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Matthew 9:20-22

makes one man like another." To God one man is never like another; each is His individual child, and each has all God's love and all God's power at his disposal.

To Jesus this woman was not lost in the crowd; in her hour of need, to him she was all that mattered. Jesus is like that for every one of us.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 9:27-31

FAITH'S TEST AND FAITH'S REWARD

Matthew 9:27-31

And, as he passed on from there, two blind men followed him, shouting. "Have pity on us," they said, "you Son of David." When he came into the house, the blind men came to him. Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they said. Then he touched their eyes. "Be it to you," he said, "according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly commanded them, "See, let no one know of this." But they went out and spread abroad the story of him all over the country.

Blindness was a distressingly common disease in Palestine. It came partly from the glare of the eastern sun on unprotected eyes, and partly because people knew nothing of the importance of cleanliness and hygiene. In particular the clouds of unclean flies carried infections which led to loss of sight.

The name by which these two blind men addressed Jesus was Son of David. When we study the occurrences of that title within the gospels, we find that it is almost always used by crowds or by people who knew Jesus only, as it were, at a distance (Matt.15:22; Matt.20:30-31; Mk.10:47; Mk.12:35-37). The term Son of David describes Jesus in the popular conception of the Messiah. For centuries the Jews had awaited the promised deliverer of David's line, the leader who would not only restore their freedom, but who would lead them to power and glory and greatness. It was in that way that these blind men thought of Jesus; they saw in him the wonder-worker who would lead the people to freedom and to conquest. They came to Jesus with a very inadequate idea of who and what he was, and yet he healed them. The way in which Jesus dealt with them is illuminating.

(i) Clearly he did not answer their shouts at once. Jesus wished to be quite sure that they were sincere and earnest in their desire for what he could give them. It might well have been that they had taken up a popular cry just because everyone else was shouting, and that, as soon as Jesus had passed by, they would simply forget. He wanted first of all to be sure that their request was genuine, and that their sense of need was real.

After all there were advantages in being a beggar; a man was rid of all the responsibility of working and of making a living.

There are advantages in being an invalid.

There are people who in actual fact do not wish their chains to be broken. W. B. Yeats tells of Lionel Johnson, the scholar and poet. Johnson was an alcoholic. He had, as he said himself, "a craving that made every atom of his body cry out." But, when it was suggested that he should undergo treatment to overcome this craving, his answer quite frankly was: "I do not want to be cured."

There are not a few people who in their heart of hearts do not dislike their weakness; and there are many people, who, if they were honest, would have to say that they do not wish to lose their

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Matthew 9:27-31

sins. Jesus had first of all to be sure that these men sincerely and earnestly desired the healing he could give.

(ii) It is interesting to note that Jesus in effect compelled these people to see him alone. Because he did not answer them in the streets, they had to come to him in the house. It is the law of the spiritual life that sooner or later a man must confront Jesus alone. It is all very well to take a decision for Jesus on the flood tide of emotion at some great gathering, or in some little group which is charged with spiritual power. But after the crowd a man must go home and be alone; after the fellowship he must go back to the essential isolation of every human soul; and what really matters is not what a man does in the crowd, but what he does when he is alone with Christ. Jesus compelled these men to face him alone.

(iii) Jesus asked these men only one question: "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" The one essential for a miracle is faith. There is nothing mysterious or theological about this. No doctor can cure a sick person who goes to him in a completely hopeless frame of mind. No medicine will do a man any good if he thinks he might as well be drinking water. The way to a miracle is to place one's life in the hands of Jesus Christ, and say, "I know that you can make me what I ought to be."

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Matthew 9:32-34

THE TWO REACTIONS

Matthew 9:32-34

As they were going away, look you, they brought to him a dumb man who was demon-possessed; and, when the demon had been expelled from him, he spoke. And the crowds were amazed. "Nothing like this," they said, "was ever seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "He casts out the demons by the power of the prince of the demons."

There are few passages which show better than this the impossibility of an attitude of neutrality towards Jesus. Here we have the picture of two reactions to him. The attitude of the crowds was amazed wonder; the attitude of the Pharisees was virulent hatred. It must always remain true that what the eye sees depends upon what the heart feels.

The crowds looked on Jesus with wonder, because they were simple people with a crying sense of need; and they saw that in Jesus their need could be supplied in the most astonishing way. Jesus will always appear wonderful to the man with a sense of need; and the deeper the sense of need the more wonderful Jesus will appear to be.

The Pharisees saw Jesus as one who was in league with all the powers of evil. They did not deny his wondrous powers; but they attributed them to his complicity with the prince of the devils. This verdict of the Pharisees was due to certain attitudes of mind.

(i) They were too set in their ways to change. As we have seen, so far as they were concerned not one word could be added or subtracted from the Law. To them all the great things belonged to the past. To them to change a tradition or a convention was a deadly sin. Anything that was new was wrong. And when Jesus came with a new interpretation of what real religion was, they hated him, as they had hated the prophets long ago.

(ii) They were too proud in their self-satisfaction to submit. If Jesus was right, they were wrong. The Pharisees were so well satisfied with themselves that they saw no need to change; and they hated anyone who wished to change them. Repentance is the gate whereby all men must enter the Kingdom; and repentance means the recognition of the error of our ways, the realization that in Christ alone there is life, and the surrender to him and to his will and power, whereby alone we can be changed.

(iii) They were too prejudiced to see. Their eyes were so blinded by their own ideas that they could not see in Jesus Christ the truth and the power of God.

The man with a sense of need will always see wonders in Jesus Christ, The man who is so set in his ways that he will not change, the man who is so proud in his self-righteousness that he cannot submit, the man who is so blinded by his prejudices that he cannot see, will always resent and hate and seek to eliminate him.

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Matthew 9:35

THE THREEFOLD WORK

Matthew 9:35

And Jesus made a tour of all the towns and villages, teaching in synagogues, and heralding forth the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every illness.

Here in one sentence we see the threefold activity which was the essence of the life of Jesus.

(i) Jesus was the herald. The herald is the man who brings a message from the king: Jesus was the one who brought a message from God. The duty of the herald is the proclamation of certainties; preaching must always be the proclamation of certainties. No church can ever be composed of people who are certain, as it were, by proxy. It is not only the preacher who must be certain. The people must be certain too.

There never was a time when this certainty was more needed than it is today. Geoffrey Heawood, headmaster of a great English public school, has written that the great tragedy and problem of this age is that we are standing at the cross-roads, and the signposts have fallen down.

Beverley Nichols once wrote a book composed of interviews with famous people. One of the interviews was with Hilaire Belloc, one of the most famous of English Roman Catholics. After the interview Nichols wrote: "I was sorry for Mr. Belloc because I felt that he had nailed at least some of his colours to the wrong mast; but I was still sorrier for myself and for my own generation, because I knew that we had no colours of any kind to nail to any mast."

We live in an age of uncertainty, an age when people have ceased to be sure of anything. Jesus was the herald of God, who came proclaiming the certainties by which men live; and we too must be able to say, "I know whom I have believed."

(ii) Jesus was teacher. It is not enough to proclaim the Christian certainties and let it go at that; we must also be able to show the significance of these certainties for life and for living. The importance and the problem of this lie in the fact that we teach Christianity, not by talking about it, but by living it. It is not the Christian's duty to discuss Christianity with others, so much as it is to show them what Christianity is.

A writer who lived in India writes like this: "I remember a British battalion, which like most battalions came to parade service because they had to, sang hymns they liked, listened to the preacher if they thought him interesting, and left the Church alone for the rest of the week. But their rescue work at the time of the Quetta earthquake so impressed a Brahmin that he demanded immediate baptism, because only the Christian religion could make men behave like that."

The thing which taught that Brahmin what Christianity was like was Christianity in action. To put this at its highest: our duty is not to talk to men about Jesus Christ, but to show him to them. A saint has been defined as someone in whom Christ lives again. Every Christian must be a teacher, and he must teach others what Christianity is, not by his words, but by his life.

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Matthew 9:35

(iii) Jesus was healer. The gospel which Jesus brought did not stop at words; it was translated into deeds. If we read through the gospels, we will see that Jesus spent far more time healing the sick, and feeding the hungry, and comforting the sorrowing than he did merely talking about God. He turned the words of Christian truth into the deeds of Christian love. We are not truly Christian until our Christian belief issues in Christian action. The priest would have said that religion consists of sacrifice; the Scribe would have said that religion consists of Law; but Jesus Christ said that religion consists of love.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 9:36

THE DIVINE COMPASSION

Matthew 9:36

When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion to the depths of his being, for they were bewildered and dejected, like sheep who have no shepherd.

When Jesus saw the crowd of ordinary men and women, he was moved with compassion. The word which is used for moved with compassion (splangchnistheis, GSN4697) is the strongest word for pity in the Greek language. It is formed from the word splangchna (GSN4698), which means the bowels, and it describes the compassion which moves a man to the deepest depths of his being. In the gospels, apart from its use in some of the parables, it is used only of Jesus (Matt.9:36; Matt.14:14; Matt.15:32; Matt.20:34; Mk.1:41; Lk.7:13). When we study these passages, we are able to see the things which moved Jesus most of all.

(i) He was moved to compassion by the world's pain.

He was moved with compassion for the sick (Matt.14:14); for the blind (Matt.20:34); for those in the grip of the demons (Mk.9:22). In all our afflictions he is afflicted. He could not see a sufferer but he longed to ease the pain.

(ii) He was moved to compassion by the world's sorrow.

The sight of the widow at Nain, following the body of her son out to burial, moved his heart (Lk.7:13). He was filled with a great desire to wipe the tear from every eye.

(iii) He was moved to compassion by the world's hunger.

The sight of the tired and hungry crowds was a call upon his power (Matt.15:32). No Christian can be content to have too much while others have too little.

(iv) He was moved to compassion by the world's loneliness.

The sight of a leper, banished from the society of his fellow-men, living a life which was a living death of loneliness and universal abandonment, called forth his pity and his power (Mk.1:41).

(v) He was moved to compassion by the world's bewilderment.

That is what moved Jesus on this occasion. The common people were desperately longing for God; and the Scribes and the Pharisees, the priests and the Sadducees, the pillars of orthodox religion of his day, had nothing to offer them. The orthodox teachers had neither guidance, nor comfort, nor strength to give. Milton, in Lycidas, describes almost savagely the religious leaders who have nothing to offer:

"Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 9:36

A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs!
... Their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw,
The hungry sheep took up and are not fed."

The words that are used to describe the state of the common people are vivid words. The word that we have translated bewildered is *skulmenoi* (GSN4660; compare GSN4661). It can describe a corpse which is rayed and mangled; someone who is plundered by rapacious men, or vexed by those without pity, or treated with wanton insolence; someone who is utterly wearied by a journey which seems to know no end. The word that we have translated dejected is *errimenoi*. It means laid prostrate. It can describe a man prostrated with drink, or a man laid low with mortal wounds.

The Jewish leaders, who should have been giving men strength to live, were bewildering men with subtle arguments about the Law, which had no help and comfort in them. When they should have been helping men to stand upright, they were bowing them down under the intolerable weight of the Scribal Law. They were offering men a religion which was a handicap instead of a support. We must always remember that Christianity exists, not to discourage, but to encourage; not to weigh men down with burdens, but to lift them up with wings.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 9:37-38

THE WAITING HARVEST

Matthew 9:37-38

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest."

Here is one of the most characteristic things Jesus ever said. When he and the orthodox religious leaders of his day looked on the crowd of ordinary men and women, they saw them in quite different ways. The Pharisees saw the common people as chaff to be destroyed and burned up; Jesus saw them as a harvest to be reaped and to be saved. The Pharisees in their pride looked for the destruction of sinners; Jesus in love died for the salvation of sinners.

But here also is one of the great Christian truths and one of the supreme Christian challenges. That harvest will never be reaped unless there are reapers to reap it. It is one of the blazing truths of Christian faith and life that Jesus Christ needs men. When he was upon this earth, his voice could reach so few. He was never outside Palestine, and there was a world which was waiting. He still wants men to hear the good news of the gospel, but they will never hear unless other men will tell them. He wants all men to hear the good news; but they will never hear it unless there are those who are prepared to cross the seas and the mountains and bring the good news to them.

Nor is prayer enough. A man might say, "I will pray for the coming of Christ's Kingdom every day in life." But in this, as in so many things, prayer without works is dead. Martin Luther had a friend who felt about the Christian faith as he did. The friend was also a monk. They came to an agreement. Luther would go down into the dust and heat of the battle for the Reformation in the world; the friend would stay in the monastery and uphold Luther's hands in prayer. So they began that way. Then, one night, the friend had a dream. He saw a vast field of corn as big as the world; and one solitary man was seeking to reap it--an impossible and a heartbreaking task. Then he caught a glimpse of the reaper's face; and the reaper was Martin Luther; and Luther's friend saw the truth in a flash. "I must leave my prayers," he said, "and get to work." And so he left his pious solitude, and went down to the world to labour in the harvest.

It is the dream of Christ that every man should be a missionary and a reaper. There are those who cannot do other than pray, for life has laid them helpless, and their prayers are indeed the strength of the labourers. But that is not the way for most of us, for those of us who have strength of body and health of mind. Not even the giving of our money is enough. If the harvest of men is ever to be reaped, then every one of us must be a reaper, for there is someone whom each one of us could--and must--bring to God.

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Matthew 10:1-4

THE MESSENGERS OF THE KING

Matthew 10:1-4 (Part 1)

And when he had summoned his twelve disciples, he gave them power over unclean spirits, so that they were able to cast them out, and so that they were able to heal every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first and foremost Simon, who is called Peter. and Andrew, his brother; James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew, the tax-collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean and Judas Iscariot, who was also his betrayer.

Methodically, and yet with a certain drama, Matthew unfolds his story of Jesus. In the story of the Baptism Matthew shows us Jesus accepting his task. In the story of the Temptations Matthew shows us Jesus deciding on the method which he will use to embark upon his task. In the Sermon on the Mount we listen to Jesus' words of wisdom. In Matt.8 we look on Jesus' deeds of power. In Matt.9 we see the growing opposition gathering itself against Jesus. And now we see Jesus choosing his men.

If a leader is about to embark upon any great undertaking, the first thing that he must do is to choose his staff. On them the present effect and the future success of his work both depend. Here Jesus is choosing his staff, his right-hand men, his helpers in the days of his flesh, and those who would carry on his work when he left this earth and returned to his glory.

There are two facts about men which are bound to strike us at once.

(i) They were very ordinary men. They had no wealth; they had no academic background; they had no social position. They were chosen from the common people, men who did the ordinary things, men who had no special education, men who had no social advantages.

It has been said that Jesus is looking, not so much for extraordinary men, as for ordinary men who can do ordinary things extraordinarily well. Jesus sees in every man, not only what that man is, but also what he can make him. Jesus chose these men, not only for what they were, but also for what they were capable of becoming under his influence and in his power.

No man need ever think that he has nothing to offer Jesus, for Jesus can take what the most ordinary man can offer and use it for greatness.

(ii) They were the most extraordinary mixture. There was, for instance, Matthew, the tax-gatherer. All men would regard Matthew as a quisling, as one who had sold himself into the hands of his country's masters for gain, the very reverse of a patriot and a lover of his country. And with Matthew there was Simon the Cananaean. Luke (Lk.6:16) calls him Simon Zelotes, which means Simon the Zealot.

Josephus (Antiquities, 8. 1. 6.) describes these Zealots; he calls them the fourth party of the Jews; the other three parties were the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. He says that they had

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Matthew 10:1-4

"an inviolable attachment to liberty," and that they said that "God is to be their ruler and Lord." They were prepared to face any kind of death for their country, and did not shrink to see their loved ones die in the struggle for freedom. They refused to give to any earthly man the name and the title of king. They had an immovable resolution which would undergo any pain. They were prepared to go the length of secret murder and stealthy assassination to seek to rid their country of foreign rule. They were the patriots par excellence among the Jews, the most nationalist of all the nationalists.

The plain fact is that if Simon the Zealot had met Matthew the tax-gatherer anywhere else than in the company of Jesus, he would have stuck a dagger in him. Here is the tremendous truth that men who hate each other can learn to love each other when they both love Jesus Christ. Too often religion has been a means of dividing men. It was meant to be--and in the presence of the living Jesus it was--a means of bringing together men who without Christ were sundered from each other.

We may ask why Jesus chose twelve special apostles. The reason is very likely because there were twelve tribes; just as in the old dispensation there had been twelve tribes of Israel, so in the new dispensation there are twelve apostles of the new Israel. The New Testament itself does not tell us very much about these men. As Plummer has it: "In the New Testament it is the work, and not the workers, that is glorified." But, although we do not know much about them, the New Testament is very conscious of their greatness in the Church, for the Revelation tells us that the twelve foundation stones of the Holy City are inscribed with their names (Rev.21:14). These men, simple men with no great background, men from many differing spheres of belief, were the very foundation stones on which the Church was built. It is on the stuff of common men and women that the Church of Christ is founded.

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Matthew 10:1-4

THE MAKING OF THE MESSENGERS

Matthew 10:1-4 (Part 2)

When we put together the three accounts of the calling of the Twelve (Matt.10:1-4; Mk.3:13-19; Lk.6:13-16) certain illuminating facts emerge.

(i) He chose them. Lk.6:13 says that Jesus called his disciples, and chose from them twelve. It is as if Jesus' eyes moved over the crowds who followed him, and the smaller band who stayed with him when the crowds had departed, and as if all the time he was searching for the men to whom he could commit his work. As it has been said, "God is always looking for hands to use." God is always saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isa.6:8).

There are many tasks in the Kingdom, the task of him who must go out and the task of him who must stay at home, the task of him who must use his hands and the task of him who must use his mind, the task which will fasten the eyes of all upon the doer and the task which no one will ever see. And always Jesus' eyes are searching the crowds for those who will do his work.

(ii) He called them. Jesus does not compel a man to do his work; he offers him work to do. Jesus does not coerce; he invites. Jesus does not make conscripts; he seeks volunteers. As it has been put, a man is free to be faithful and free to be faithless. But to every man there comes the summons which he can accept or refuse.

(iii) He appointed them. The King James Version has it that he ordained them (Mk.3:14). The word which is translated ordain is the simple Greek word poiein (GSN4160), which means to make or to do; but which is often technically used for appointing a man to some office. Jesus was like a king appointing his men to be his ministers; he was like a general allocating their tasks to his commanders. It was not a case of drifting unconsciously into the service of Jesus Christ; it was a case of definitely being appointed to it. A man might well be proud, if he is appointed to some earthly office by some earthly king; how much more shall he be proud when he is appointed by the King of kings?

(iv) These men were appointed from amongst the disciples. The word disciple means a learner. The men whom Christ needs and desires are the men who are willing to learn. The shut mind cannot serve him. The servant of Christ must be willing to learn more every day. Each day he must be a step nearer Jesus and a little nearer God.

(v) The reasons why these men were chosen are equally significant. They were chosen to be with him (Mk.3:14). If they were to do his work in the world, they must live in his presence, before they went out to the world; they must go from the presence of Jesus into the presence of men.

It is told that on one occasion Alexander Whyte preached a most powerful and a most moving sermon. After the service a friend said to him: "You preached today as if you had come straight from the presence of Jesus Christ." Whyte answered: "Perhaps I did."

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Matthew 10:1-4

No work of Christ can ever be done except by him who comes from the presence of Christ. Sometimes in the complexity of the activities of the modern Church we are so busy with committees and courts and administration and making the wheels go round that we are in danger of forgetting that none of these things matters, if it is carried on by men who have not been with Christ before they have been with men.

(vi) They were called to be apostles (Mk.3:14; Lk.6:13). The word apostle literally means one who is sent out; it is the word for an envoy or an ambassador. The Christian is Jesus Christ's ambassador to men. He goes forth from the presence of Christ, bearing with him the word and the beauty of his Master.

(vii) They were called to be the heralds of Christ. In Matt.10:7 they are bidden to preach. The word is kerussein (GSN2784), which comes from the noun kerux (GSN2783), which means a herald. The Christian is the herald Christ. That is why he must begin in the presence of Christ. The Christian is not meant to bring to men his own opinions; he brings a message of divine certainties from Jesus Christ--and he cannot bring that message unless first in the presence he has received it.

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Matthew 10:5-8a

THE COMMISSION OF THE KING'S MESSENGER

Matthew 10:5-8a (Part 1)

Jesus sent out these twelve, and these were the orders he gave them: "Do not," he said, "go out on the road to the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans; but go rather to the sheep of the house of Israel who have perished. As you go make this proclamation: The Kingdom of Heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leper, cast out demons."

Here we have the beginning of the King's commission to his messengers. The word which is used in the Greek for Jesus commanding his men, or giving them orders is interesting and illuminating. It is the word *paragellein*. This word in Greek has four special usages. (i) It is the regular word of military command; Jesus was like a general sending his commanders out on a campaign, and briefing them before they went. (ii) It is the word used of calling one's friends to one's help. Jesus was like a man with a great ideal summoning his friends to make that ideal come true. (iii) It is the word which is used of a teacher giving rules and precepts to his students. Jesus was like a teacher sending his students out into the world, equipped with his teaching and his message. (iv) It is the word which is regularly used for an imperial command. Jesus was like a king despatching his ambassadors into the world to carry out his orders and to speak for him.

This passage begins with what everyone must find a very difficult instruction. It begins by forbidding the twelve to go to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans. There are many who find it very difficult to believe that Jesus ever said this at all. This apparent exclusiveness is very unlike him; and it has been suggested that this saying was put into his mouth by those who in the later days wished to keep the gospel for the Jews, the very men who bitterly opposed Paul, when he wished to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

But there are certain things to be remembered. This saying is so uncharacteristic of Jesus that no one could have invented it; he must have said it, and so there must be some explanation.

We can be quite certain it was not a permanent command. Within the gospel itself we see Jesus talking graciously and intimately to a woman of Samaria and revealing himself (Jn.4:4-42); we see him telling one of his immortal stories to her (Lk.10:30); we see him healing the daughter of Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt.15:28); and Matthew himself tells us of Jesus' final commission of his men to go out into all the world and to bring all nations into the gospel (Matt.28:19-20). What then is the explanation?

The twelve were forbidden to go to the Gentiles; that meant that they could not go north into Syria, nor could they even go east into the Decapolis, which was largely a Gentile region. They could not go south into Samaria for that was forbidden. The effect of this order was in actual fact to limit the first journeys of the twelve to Galilee. There were three good reasons for that.

(i) The Jews had in God's scheme of things a very special place; in the justice of God they had to be given the first offer of the gospel. It is true that they rejected it, but the whole of history was designed to give them the first opportunity to accept.

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Matthew 10:5-8a

(ii) The twelve were not equipped to preach to the Gentiles. They had neither the background, nor the knowledge nor the technique. Before the gospel could be effectively brought to the Gentiles a man with Paul's life and background had to emerge. A message has little chance of success, if the messenger is ill-equipped to deliver it. If a preacher or teacher is wise, he will realize his limitations, and will see clearly what he is fitted and what he is not fitted to do.

(iii) But the great reason for this command is simply this--any wise commander knows that he must limit his objectives. He must direct his attack at one chosen point. If he diffuses his forces here, there and everywhere, he dissipates his strength and invites failure. The smaller his forces the more limited his immediate objective must be. To attempt to attack on too broad a front is simply to court disaster. Jesus knew that, and his aim was to concentrate his attack on Galilee, for Galilee, as we have seen, was the most open of all parts of Palestine to a new gospel and a new message (compare on Matt.4:12-17). This command of Jesus was a temporary command. He was the wise commander who refused to diffuse and dissipate his forces; he skilfully concentrated his attack on one limited objective in order to achieve an ultimate and universal victory.

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Matthew 10:5-8a

THE WORDS AND WORKS OF THE KING'S MESSENGER

Matthew 10:5-8a (Part 2)

The King's messengers had words to speak and deeds to do.

(i) They had to announce the imminence of the Kingdom. As we have seen (compare on Matt.6:10-11) the Kingdom of God is a society on earth, where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. Of all persons who ever lived in the world Jesus was, and is, the only person who ever perfectly did, and obeyed, and fulfilled, God's will. Therefore in him the Kingdom had come. It is as if the messengers of the King were to say, "Look! You have dreamed of the Kingdom, and you have longed for the Kingdom. Here in the life of Jesus is the Kingdom. Look at him, and see what being in the Kingdom means." In Jesus the Kingdom of God had come to men.

(ii) But the task of the twelve was not confined to speaking words; it involved doing deeds. They had to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse the lepers, to cast out demons. All these injunctions are to be taken in a double sense. They are to be taken physically, because Jesus Christ came to bring health and healing to the bodies of men. But they are also to be taken spiritually. They describe the change wrought by Jesus Christ in the souls of men.

(a) They were to heal the sick. The word used for sick is very suggestive. It is a part of the Greek verb *asthenein* (GSN0770), the primary meaning of which is to be weak; *asthenes* (GSN0772) is the standard Greek adjective for weak. When Christ comes to a man, he strengthens the weak will, he buttresses the weak resistance, he nerves the feeble arm for fight, he confirms the weak resolution. Jesus Christ fills our human weakness with his divine power.

(b) They were to raise the dead. A man can be dead in sin. His will to resist can be broken; his vision of the good can be darkened until it does not exist; he may be helplessly and hopelessly in the grip of his sins, blind to goodness and deaf to God. When Jesus Christ comes into a man's life, he resurrects him to goodness, he revitalizes the goodness within us which our sinning has killed.

(c) They were to cleanse the lepers. As we have seen, the leper was regarded as polluted. Leviticus says of him, "He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean; he shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp" (Lev.13:46). 2Kgs.7:3-4 shows us the lepers who only in the day of deadly famine dared to enter into the city. 2Kgs.15:5 tells us how Azariah the king was smitten with leprosy, and to the day of his death he had to live in a leper house, separated from all men. It is interesting to note that even in Persia this pollution of the leper was believed in. Herodotus (1: 138) tells us that, "if a man in Persia has the leprosy he is not allowed to enter into a city or to have any dealings with any other Persians; he must, they say, have sinned against the sun."

So, then, the twelve were to bring cleansing to the polluted. A man can stain his life with sin; he can pollute his mind, his heart, his body with the consequences of his sin. His words, his actions, his influence can become so befouled that they are an unclean influence on all with whom he

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Matthew 10:5-8a

comes into contact. Jesus Christ can cleanse the soul that has stained itself with sin; he can bring to men the divine antiseptic against sin; he cleanses human sin with the divine purity.

(d) They were to cast out demons. A demon-possessed man was a man in the grip of an evil power; he was no longer master of himself and of his actions; the evil power within had him in its mastery. A man can be mastered by evil; he can be dominated by evil habits; evil can have a mesmeric fascination for him. Jesus comes not only to cancel sin, but to break the power of cancelled sin. Jesus Christ brings to men enslaved by sin the liberating power of God.

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Matthew 10:8b-10

THE EQUIPMENT OF THE KING'S MESSENGER

Matthew 10:8b-10

"Freely you have received; freely give. Do not set out to get gold or silver or bronze for your purses; do not take a bag for the journey, nor two tunics, nor shoes, nor a staff. The workman deserves his sustenance."

This is a passage in which every sentence and every phrase would ring an answering bell in the mind of the Jews who heard it. In it Jesus was giving to his men the instructions which the Rabbis at their best gave to their students and disciples.

"Freely you have received," says Jesus, "freely give." A Rabbi was bound by law to give his teaching freely and for nothing; the Rabbi was absolutely forbidden to take money for teaching the Law which Moses had freely received from God. In only one case could a Rabbi accept payment. He might accept payment for teaching a child, for to teach a child is the parent's task, and no one else should be expected to spend time and labour doing what is the parent's own duty to do; but higher teaching had to be given without money and without price.

In the Mishnah the Law lays it down that, if a man takes payment for acting as a judge, his judgments are invalid; that, if he takes payment for giving evidence as a witness, his witness is void. Rabbi Zadok said, "Make not the Law a crown wherewith to aggrandize thyself, nor a spade wherewith to dig." Hillel said, "He who makes a worldly use of the crown of the Law shall waste away. Hence thou mayest infer that whosoever desires a profit for himself from the words of the Law is helping on his own destruction." It was laid down: "As God taught Moses gratis--so do thou."

There is a story of Rabbi Tarphon. At the end of the fig harvest he was walking in a garden; and he ate some of the figs which had been left behind. The watchmen came upon him and beat him. He told them who he was, and because he was a famous Rabbi they let him go. All his life he regretted that he had used his status as a Rabbi to help himself. "Yet all his days did he grieve, for he said, 'Woe is me, for I have used the crown of the Law for my own profit!'"

When Jesus told his disciples that they had freely received and must freely give, he was telling them what the teachers of his own people had been telling their students for many a day. If a man possesses a precious secret it is surely his duty, not to hug it to himself until he is paid for it, but willingly to pass it on. It is a privilege to share with others the riches God has given us.

Jesus told the twelve not to set out to acquire gold or silver or bronze for their purses, the Greek literally means for their girdles. The girdle, which the Jew wore round his waist, was rather broad; and at each end for part of its length it was double; money was carried in the double part of the girdle; so that the girdle was the usual purse of the Jew. Jesus told the twelve not to take a bag for the journey. The bag may be one of two things. It may simply be a bag like a haversack in which provisions would ordinarily have been carried. But there is another possibility. The word is pera

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Matthew 10:8b-10

(GSN4082), which can mean a beggar's collecting bag; sometimes the wandering philosophers took a collection in such a bag after addressing the crowd.

In all these instructions Jesus was not laying upon his men a deliberate and calculated discomfort. He was once again speaking words which were very familiar to a Jew. The Talmud tells us that: "No one is to go to the Temple Mount with staff, shoes, girdle of money, or dusty feet." The idea was that when a man entered the temple, he must make it quite clear that he had left everything which had to do with trade and business and worldly affairs behind. What Jesus is saying to his men is: "You must treat the whole world as the Temple of God. If you are a man of God, you must never give the impression that you are a man of business, out for what you can get." Jesus' instructions mean that the man of God must show by his attitude to material things that his first interest is God.

Finally, Jesus says that the workman deserves his sustenance. Once again the Jews would recognize this. It is true that a Rabbi might not accept payment, but it is also true that it was considered at once a privilege and an obligation to support a Rabbi, if he was truly a man of God. Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob said: "He who receives a Rabbi in his house, or as his guest, and lets him have his enjoyment from his possessions, the scripture ascribes it to him as if he had offered the continual offerings." Rabbi Jochanan laid it down that it was the duty of every Jewish community to support a Rabbi, and the more so because a Rabbi naturally neglects his own affairs to concentrate on the affairs of God.

Here then is the double truth; the man of God must never be over-concerned with material things, but the people of God must never fail in their duty to see that the man of God receives a reasonable support. This passage lays an obligation on teacher and on people alike.

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Matthew 10:11-15

THE CONDUCT OF THE KING'S MESSENGER

Matthew 10:11-15

"When you enter into any city or village, make inquiries as to who in it is worthy, and stay there until you go out of it. When you come into a household, give your greetings to it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not receive you, and will not listen to your words, when you leave that house or that city, shake off the dust of it from your feet. This is the truth I tell you--it will be easier for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that city."

Here is a passage full of the most practical advice for the King's messengers.

When they entered a city or a village, they were to seek a house that is worthy. The point is that if they took up their residence in a house which had an evil reputation for morals or for conduct or for fellowship, it would seriously hinder their usefulness. They were not to identify themselves with anyone who might prove to be a handicap. That is not for a moment to say that they were not to seek to win such people for Christ, but it is to say that the messenger of Christ must have a care whom he makes his intimate friend.

When they entered a house, they were to stay there until they moved on to another place. This was a matter of courtesy. They might well be tempted, after they had won certain supporters and converts in a place, to move on to a house which could provide more luxury, more comfort, and better entertainment. The messenger of Christ must never give the impression that he courts people for the sake of material things, and that his movements are dictated by the demands of his own comfort.

The passage about giving a greeting, and, as it were, taking the greeting back again, is typically eastern. In the east a spoken word was thought to have a kind of active and independent existence. It went out from the mouth as independently as a bullet from a gun. This idea emerges regularly in the Old Testament, especially in connection with words spoken by God. Isaiah hears God say, "By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return" (Isa.45:23). "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa.55:11). Zechariah sees the flying scroll, and hears the voice: "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land" (Zech.5:3).

To this day in the east, if a man speaks his blessing to a passer-by, and then discovers that the passer-by is of another faith, he will come and take his blessing back again. The idea here is that the messengers of the King can send their blessing to rest upon a house, and, if the house is unworthy of it, can, as it were, recall it.

If in any place their message is refused, the messengers of the King were to shake the dust of that place off their feet and to move on. To the Jew the dust of a Gentile place or road was defiling; therefore, when the Jew crossed the border of Palestine, and entered into his own country, after a

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Matthew 10:11-15

journey in Gentile lands, he shook the dust of the Gentile roads off his feet that the last particle of pollution might be cleansed away. So Jesus said, "If a city or a village will not receive you, you must treat it like a Gentile place." Again, we must be clear as to what Jesus is saying. In this passage there is both a temporary and an eternal truth.

(i) The temporary truth is this, Jesus was not saying that certain people had to be abandoned as being outside the message of the gospel and beyond the reach of grace. This was an instruction like the opening instruction not to go to the Gentiles and to the Samaritans. It came from the situation in which it was given. It was simply due to the time factor; time was short; as many as possible must hear the proclamation of the Kingdom; there was not time then to argue with the disputatious and to seek to win the stubborn; that would come later. At the moment the disciples had to tour the country as quickly as possible, and therefore they had to move on when there was no immediate welcome for the message which they brought.

(ii) The permanent truth is this. It is one of the great basic facts of life that time and time again an opportunity comes to a man--and does not come back. To those people in Palestine there was coming the opportunity to receive the gospel, but if they did not take it, the opportunity might well never return. As the proverb has it: "Three things come not back--the spoken word, the spent arrow, and the lost opportunity."

This happens in every sphere of life. In his autobiography, *Chiaroscuro*, Augustus John tells of an incident and adds a laconic comment. He was in Barcelona: "It was time to leave for Marseilles. I had sent forward my baggage and was walking to the station, when I encountered three Gitanas engaged in buying flowers at a booth. I was so struck by their beauty and flashing elegance that I almost missed my train. Even when I reached Marseilles and met my friend, this vision still haunted me, and I positively had to return. But I did not find these gypsies again. One never does." The artist was always looking for glimpses of beauty to transfer to his canvas--but he knew well that if he did not paint the beauty when he found it, all the chances were that he would never catch that glimpse again. The tragedy of life is so often the tragedy of the lost opportunity.

Finally, it is said that it will be easier for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for the town or the village which has refused the message of Christ and the Kingdom. Sodom and Gomorrah are in the New Testament proverbial for wickedness (Matt.11:23-24; Lk.10:12-13; Lk.17:29; Rom.9:29; 2Pet.2:6; Jd.7). It is interesting and relevant to note that just before their destruction Sodom and Gomorrah had been guilty of a grave and vicious breach of the laws of hospitality (Gen.19:1-11). They, too, had rejected the messengers of God. But, even at their worst, Sodom and Gomorrah had never had the opportunity to reject the message of Christ and his Kingdom. That is why it would be easier for them at the last than for the towns and villages of Galilee; for it is always true that the greater the privilege has been the greater the responsibility is.

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Matthew 10:16-22

THE CHALLENGE OF THE KING TO HIS MESSENGERS

Matthew 10:16-22 (Part 1)

Look you, it is I who am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Show yourself as wise as serpents, and as pure as doves. Beware of men! For they will hand you over to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, that you make your witness to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry how you are to speak, or what you are to say. What you are to speak will be given to you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and father will hand over child. Children will rise up against parents, and will murder them; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Before we deal with this passage in detail, we may note two things about it in general.

When we were studying the Sermon on the Mount, we saw that one of Matthew's great characteristics was his love of orderly arrangement. We saw that it was Matthew's custom to collect in one place all the material on any given subject, even if it was spoken by Jesus on different occasions. Matthew was the systematizer of his material. This passage is one of the instances where Matthew collects his material from different times. Here he collects the things which Jesus said on various occasions about persecution.

There is no doubt that even when Jesus sent out his men for the first time, he told them what to expect. But at the very beginning Matthew relates how Jesus told his men not to go at that time to the Gentiles or to the Samaritans; and yet in this passage Matthew shows us Jesus foretelling persecution and trial before rulers and kings, that is to say, far beyond Palestine. The explanation is that Matthew collects Jesus' references to persecution and he puts together both what Jesus said when he sent his men out on their first expedition and what Jesus told them after his resurrection, when he was sending them out into all the world. Here we have the words, not only of Jesus of Galilee, but also of the Risen Christ.

Further, we must note that in these words Jesus was making use of ideas and pictures which were part and parcel of Jewish thought. We have seen again and again how it was the custom of the Jews, in their pictures of the future, to divide time into two ages. There was the present age, which is wholly bad; there was the age to come, which would be the golden age of God; and in between there was the Day of the Lord, which would be a terrible time of chaos and destruction and judgment. Now in Jewish thought one of the ever-recurring features of the Day of the Lord was that it would split friends and kindred into two, and that the dearest bonds of earth would be destroyed in bitter enmities.

"All friends shall destroy each other" (2Esdr.5:9). "At that time shall friends make war one against another like enemies" (2Esdr.6:24). "And they will strive with one another, the young with the old, and the old with the young, the poor with the rich, and the lowly with the great, and the beggar with the prince" (Jubilees 23: 19). "And they will hate one another, and provoke one another

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Matthew 10:16-22

to fight; and the mean will rule over the honourable, and those of low degree shall be extolled above the famous" (Bar.70:3). "And they shall begin to fight among themselves, and their right hand shall be strong against themselves, and a man shall not know his brother, nor a son his father or his mother, till there be no number of the corpses through their slaughter" (Enoch 56: 7).

"And in those days the destitute shall go forth and carry off their children, and they shall abandon them, so that their children shall perish through them; yea they shall abandon their children that are still sucklings, and not return to them; and shall have no pity on their loved ones" (Enoch 99: 5).

"And in those days in one place the fathers together with their sons shall be smitten and brothers one with another shall fall in death till the streams flow with their blood. For a man shall not withhold his hand from slaying his sons and his sons' sons, and the sinner shall not withhold his hand from his honoured brother; from dawn to sunset they shall slay each other."(Enoch 100: 1-2).

All these quotations are taken from the books which the Jews wrote and knew and loved, and on which they fed their hearts and their hopes, in the days between the Old and the New Testaments. Jesus knew these books; his men knew these books; and when Jesus spoke of the terrors to come, and of the divisions which would tear apart the closest ties of earth, he was in effect saying: "The Day of the Lord has come." And his men would know that he was saying this, and would go out in the knowledge that they were living in the greatest days of history.

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Matthew 10:16-22

THE KING'S HONESTY TO HIS MESSENGERS

Matthew 10:16-22 (Part 2)

No one can read this passage without being deeply impressed with the honesty of Jesus. He never hesitated to tell men what they might expect, if they followed him. It is as if he said, "Here is my task for you--at its grimmest and at its worst--do you accept it?" Plummer comments: "This is not the world's way to win adherents." The world will offer a man roses, roses all the way, comfort, ease, advancement, the fulfilment of his worldly ambitions. Jesus offered his men hardship and death. And yet the proof of history is that Jesus was right. In their heart of hearts men love a call to adventure.

After the siege of Rome, in 1849, Garibaldi issued the following proclamation to his followers: "Soldiers, all our efforts against superior forces have been unavailing. I have nothing to offer you but hunger and thirst, hardship and death; but I call on all who love their country to join with me"--and they came in their hundreds.

After Dunkirk, Churchill offered his country "blood, toil, sweat and tears".

Prescott tells how Pizarro, that reckless adventurer, offered his little band the tremendous choice between the known safety of Panama, and the as yet unknown splendour of Peru. He took his sword and traced a line with it on the sand from east to west: "Friends and comrades!" he said, "on that side are toil, hunger, nakedness, the drenching storm, desertion and death; on this side, ease and pleasure. There lies Peru with its riches; here, Panama and its poverty. Choose each man what best becomes a brave Castilian. For my part I go south" and he stepped across the line. And thirteen men, whose names are immortal, chose adventure with him.

When Shackleton proposed his march to the South Pole he asked for volunteers for that trek amidst the blizzards across the polar ice. He expected to have difficulty but he was inundated with letters, from young and old, rich and poor, the highest and the lowest, all desiring to share in that great adventure.

It may be that the Church must learn again that we will never attract men to an easy way; it is the call of the heroic which ultimately speaks to men's hearts.

Jesus offered his men three kinds of trial.

(i) The state would persecute them; they would be brought before councils and kings and governors. Long before this Aristotle had wondered if a good man could ever really be a good citizen, for, he said, it was the duty of the citizen ever to support and to obey the state, and there were times when the good man would find that impossible. When Christ's men were brought to court and to judgment, they were not to worry about what they would say; for God would give them words. "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak," God had promised Moses (Exo.4:12). It was not the humiliation which the early Christians dreaded, not even the cruel pain and the agony. But many of them feared that their own unskillfulness in words and defence

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Matthew 10:16-22

might injure rather than commend the faith. It is the promise of God that when a man is on trial for his faith, the words will come to him.

(ii) The Church would persecute them; they would be scourged in the synagogues. The Church does not like to be upset, and has its own ways of dealing with disturbers of the peace. The Christians were, and are, those who turn the world upside down (Ac.17:6). It has often been true that the man with a message from God has had to undergo the hatred and the enmity of a fossilized orthodoxy. (iii) The family would persecute them; their nearest and dearest would think them mad, and shut the door against them. Sometimes the Christian is confronted with the hardest choice of all--the choice between obedience to Christ and obedience to kindred and to friends. Jesus warned his men that in the days to come they might well find state and Church and family conjoined against them.

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Matthew 10:16-22

THE REASONS FOR THE PERSECUTION OF THE KING'S MESSENGER

Matthew 10:16-22 (Part 3)

Looking at things from our own point of view, we find it hard to understand why any government should wish to persecute the Christians, whose only aim was to live in purity, in charity, and in reverence. But in later days the Roman government had what it considered good reason for persecuting the Christians

(i) There were certain slanders current about the Christians. They were accused of being cannibals because of the words of the sacrament, which spoke of eating Christ's body and drinking his blood. They were accused of immorality because the title of their weekly feast was the agape (GSN0026), the love feast. They were accused of incendiarism because of the pictures which the Christian preachers drew of the coming of the end of the world. They were accused of being disloyal and disaffected citizens because they would not take the oath to the godhead of the Emperor.

(ii) It is doubtful if even the heathen really believed these slanderous charges. But there were other charges which were more serious. The Christians were accused of "tampering with family relationships." It was the truth that Christianity often split families, as we have seen. And to the heathen, Christianity appeared to be something which divided parents and children, and husbands and wives.

(iii) A real difficulty was the position of slaves in the Christian Church. In the Roman Empire there were 60,000,000 slaves. It was always one of the terrors of the Empire that these slaves might rise in revolt. If the structure of the Empire was to remain intact they must be kept in their place; nothing must be done by anyone to encourage them to rebel, or the consequences might be terrible beyond imagining.

Now the Christian Church made no attempt to free the slaves, or to condemn slavery; but it did, within the Church at least, treat the slaves as equals. Clement of Alexandria pleaded that "slaves are like ourselves," and the golden rule applied to them. Lactantius wrote: "Slaves are not slaves to us. We deem them brothers after the Spirit, in religion fellow-servants." It is a notable fact that, although there were thousands of slaves in the Christian Church, the inscription slave is never met with in the Roman Christian tombs.

Worse than that, it was perfectly possible for a slave to hold high office in the Christian Church. In the early second century two bishops of Rome, Callistus and Pius, had been slaves. And it was not uncommon for elders and deacons to be slaves.

And still worse, in A.D. 220 Callistus, who, as we have seen, had been a slave, declared that henceforth the Christian Church would sanction the marriage of a highborn girl to a freed man, a marriage which was in fact illegal under Roman law, and, therefore, not a marriage at all.

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Matthew 10:16-22

In its treatment of slaves the Christian Church must necessarily have seemed to the Roman authorities a force which was disrupting the very basis of civilization, and threatening the very existence of the Empire by giving slaves a position which they should never have had, as Roman law saw it.

(iv) There is no doubt that Christianity seriously affected certain vested interests connected with heathen religion. When Christianity came to Ephesus, the trade of the silversmiths was dealt a mortal blow, for far fewer desired to buy the images which they fashioned (Ac.19:24-27). Pliny was governor of Bithynia in the reign of Trajan, and in a letter to the Emperor (Pliny: Letters, 10: 96) he tells how he had taken steps to check the rapid growth of Christianity so that "the temples which had been deserted now begin to be frequented; the sacred festivals, after a long intermission, are revived; while there is a general demand for sacrificial animals, which for some time past have met with few purchasers." It is clear that the spread of Christianity meant the abolition of certain trades and activities; and those who lost their trade and lost their money not unnaturally resented it.

Christianity preaches a view of man which no totalitarian state can accept. Christianity deliberately aims to obliterate certain trades and professions and ways of making money. It still does--and therefore the Christian is still liable to persecution for his faith.

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Matthew 10:23

THE PRUDENCE OF THE KING'S MESSENGER

Matthew 10:23 (Part 1)

"When they persecute you in one city, flee into another. This is the truth I tell you--you will not complete your tour of the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man shall come."

This passage counsels a wise and a Christian prudence. In the days of persecution a certain danger always threatened the Christian witness. There always were those who actually courted martyrdom; they were wrought up to such a pitch of hysterical and fanatical enthusiasm that they went out of their way to become martyrs for the faith. Jesus was wise. He told his men that there must be no wanton waste of Christian lives; that they must not pointlessly and needlessly throw their lives away. As some one has put it, the life of every Christian witness is precious. and must not be recklessly thrown away. "Bravado is not martyrdom." Often the Christians had to die for their faith, but they must not throw away their lives in a way that did not really help the faith. As it was later said, a man must contend lawfully, for the faith.

When Jesus spoke like this, he was speaking in a way which Jews would recognize and understand. No people were ever more persecuted than the Jews have always been; and no people were ever clearer as to where the duties of the martyr lay. The teaching of the great Rabbis was quite clear. When it was a question of public sanctification or open profanation of God's name, duty was plain--a man must be prepared to lay down his life. But when that public declaration was not in question, a man might save his life by breaking the law; but for no reason must he commit idolatry, unchastity. or murder.

The case the Rabbis cited was this: suppose a Jew is seized by a Roman soldier, and the soldier says mockingly, and with no other intention than to humiliate and to make a fool of the Jew: "Eat this pork." Then the Jew may eat, for "God's laws are given for life and not for death." But suppose the Roman says: "Eat this pork as a sign that you renounce Judaism; eat this pork as a sign that you are ready to worship Jupiter and the Emperor," the Jew must die rather than eat. In any time of official persecution the Jew must die rather than abandon his faith. As the Rabbis said, "The words of the Law are only firm in that man who would die for their sake."

The Jew was forbidden to throw away his life in a needless act of pointless martyrdom; but when it came to a question of true witness, he must be prepared to die.

We do well to remember that, while we are bound to accept martyrdom for our faith, we are forbidden to court martyrdom. If suffering for the faith comes to us in the course of duty, it must be accepted; but it must not be needlessly invited; to invite it does more harm than good to the faith we bear. The self-constituted martyr is much too common in all human affairs.

It has been said that there is sometimes more heroism in daring to fly from danger than in stopping to meet it. There is real wisdom in recognizing when to escape. Andre Maurois in *Why France Fell* tells of a conversation he had with Winston Churchill. There was a time at the beginning of the Second World War when Great Britain seemed strangely inactive and unwilling to

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act. Churchill said to Maurois: "Have you observed the habits of lobsters?" "No," answered Maurois to this somewhat surprising question. Churchill went on: "Well, if you have the opportunity, study them. At certain periods in his life the lobster loses his protective shell. At this moment of moulting even the bravest crustacean retires into a crevice in the rock, and waits patiently until a new carapace has time to grow. As soon as this new armour has grown strong, he sallies out of the crevice, and becomes once more a fighter, lord of the seas.

England, through the faults of imprudent ministers, has lost its carapace; we must wait in our crevice until the new one has time to grow strong." This was a time when inaction was wiser than action; and when to escape was wiser than to attack.

If a man is weak in the faith, he will do well to avoid disputations about doubtful things, and not to plunge into them. If a man knows that he is susceptible to a certain temptation, he will do well to avoid the places where that temptation will speak to him, and not to frequent them. If a man knows that there are people who anger and irritate him, and who bring the worst out of him, he will be wise to avoid their society, and not to seek it. Courage is not recklessness; there is no virtue in running needless risks; God's grace is not meant to protect the foolhardy, but the prudent.

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Matthew 10:23

THE COMING OF THE KING

Matthew 10:23 (Part 2)

This passage contains one strange saying which we cannot honestly neglect. Matthew depicts Jesus as sending out his men, and, as he does so, saying to them, "You win not complete your tour of the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man shall come." On the face of it that seems to mean that before his men had completed their preaching tour, his day of glory and his return to power would have taken place. The difficulty is just this—that did not in fact happen, and, if at that moment, Jesus had that expectation, he was mistaken. If he said this in this way, he foretold something which actually did not happen. But there is a perfectly good and sufficient explanation of this apparent difficulty.

The people of the early Church believed intensely in the second coming of Jesus, and they believed it would happen soon, certainly within their own lifetime. There could be nothing more natural than that, because they were living in days of savage persecution, and they were longing for the day of their release and their glory. The result was that they fastened on every possible saying of Jesus which could be interpreted as foretelling his triumphant and glorious return, and sometimes they quite naturally used things which Jesus said, and read into them something more definite than was originally there.

We can see this process happening within the pages of the New Testament itself. There are three versions of the one saying of Jesus. Let us set them down one after another:

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom (Matt.16:28).

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.9:1).

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God (Lk.9:27).

Now it is clear that these are three versions of the same saying. Mark is the earliest gospel, and therefore Mark's version is most likely to be strictly accurate. Mark says that there were some listening to Jesus who would not die until they saw the Kingdom of God coming with power. That was gloriously true, for within thirty years of the Cross the message of Crucified and Risen Christ had swept across the world and had reached Rome, the capital of the world. Indeed men were being swept into the Kingdom; indeed the Kingdom was coming with power. Luke transmits the saying in the same way as Mark.

Now look at Matthew. His version is slightly different; he says that there are some who will not die until they see the Son of Man coming in power. That, in fact, did not happen. The explanation is that Matthew was writing between A.D. 80 and 90, in days when terrible persecution was raging. Men were clutching at everything which promised release from agony; and he took a saying which

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foretold the spread of the Kingdom and turned it into a saying which foretold the return of Christ within a lifetime--and who shall blame him?

That is what Matthew has done here. Take this saying in our passage and write it as Mark or Luke would have written it: "You will not complete your tour of the cities of Israel, into the Kingdom of God shall come." That was blessedly true, for as the tour went on, men's hearts opened to Jesus Christ, and they took him as Master and Lord.

In a passage like this we must not think of Jesus as mistaken; we must rather think that Matthew read into a promise of the coming of the Kingdom a promise of the second coming of Jesus Christ. And he did so because, in days of terror, men clutched at the hope of Christ; and Christ did come to them in the Spirit, for no man ever suffered alone for Christ.

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Matthew 10:24-25

THE KING'S MESSENGER AND THE KING'S SUFFERINGS

Matthew 10:24-25

"The scholar is not above his teacher, nor is the slave above his master. It is enough for the scholar that he should be as his teacher, and the servant that he should be as his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzeboul, how much more shall they so call the members of his household."

It is Jesus' warning to his disciples that they must expect what happened to him to happen to them. The Jews well knew this sentence: "It is enough for the slave to be as his master." In the later days they were to use it in a special way. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed, and destroyed so completely that a plough was drawn across the devastation. The Temple of God and the Holy City were in ruins. The Jews were dispersed throughout the world, and many of them mourned and lamented about the terrible fate which had befallen them personally. It was then that the Rabbis said to them: "When God's Temple has been destroyed, how can any individual Jew complain about his personal misfortunes?"

In this saying of Jesus there are two things.

(i) There is a warning. There is the warning that, as Christ had to carry a cross, so also the individual Christian must carry a cross. The word that is used for members of his household is the one Greek word *oikiakoi* (GSN3615). This word has a technical use; it means the members of the household of a government official: that is to say, the official's staff. It is as if Jesus said, "If I, the leader and commander, must suffer, you who are the members of my staff cannot escape." Jesus calls us, not only to share his glory, but to share his warfare and his agony; and no man deserves to share the fruits of victory, if he refuses to share the struggle of which these fruits are the result.

(ii) There is the statement of a privilege. To suffer for Christ is to share the work of Christ; to have to sacrifice for the faith is to share the sacrifice of Christ. When Christianity is hard, we can say to ourselves, not only, "Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod," we can also say, "Brothers, we are treading where the feet of Christ have trod."

There is always a thrill in belonging to a noble company. Eric Linklater in his autobiography tells of his experience in the disastrous March retreat in the First World War. He was with the Black Watch, and they had emerged from the battle with one officer, thirty men, and a piper left of the battalion. "The next day, marching peacefully in the morning light of France along a pleasant road we encountered the tattered fragments of a battalion of the Foot Guards, and the piper, putting breath into his bag, and playing so that he filled the air like the massed bands of the Highland Division, saluted the tall Coldstreamers, who had a drum or two and some instruments of brass, that made also a gallant music. Stiffly we passed each other, swollen of chest, heads tautly to the right, kilts swinging to the answer of the swagger of the Guards, and the Red Hackle in our bonnets, like the monstrosity of a bruised but resilient faith. We were bearded and stained with mud.

The Guards--the fifty men that were left of a battalion--were button-bright and clean shaved--we were a tatter-demolition crew from the coal mines of Fife and the back streets of Dundee, but we trod

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Matthew 10:24-25

quick-stepping to the brawling tune of 'Hietan' Laddie', and suddenly I was crying with a fool's delight and the sheer gladness of being in such company." It is one of life's great thrills to have the sense of belonging to a goodly company and a goodly fellowship.

When Christianity costs something we are closer than ever we were to the fellowship of Jesus Christ; and if we know the fellowship of his sufferings, we shall also know the power of his resurrection.

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Matthew 10:26-31

THE KING'S MESSENGER'S FREEDOM FROM FEAR

Matthew 10:26-31 (Part 1)

"Do not fear them; for there is nothing which is covered which shall not be unveiled, and there is nothing hidden which shall not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light. What you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim on the housetops. Do not fear those who can kill the body, but who cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are two sparrows not sold for a penny, and not one of them shall light on the ground without your Father's knowledge? The hairs of your head are all numbered. So then do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Three times in this short passage Jesus bids his disciples not to be afraid. In the King's messenger there must be a certain courageous fearlessness which marks him out from other men.

(i) The first commandment is in Matt.10:26-27, and it speaks of a double fearlessness.

(a) They are not to be afraid because there is nothing covered that will not be unveiled, and nothing hidden which will not be known. The meaning of that is that the truth will triumph. "Great is the truth," ran the Latin proverb, "and the truth will prevail." When James the Sixth threatened to hang or exile Andrew Melville, Melville's answer was: "You cannot hang or exile the truth." When the Christian is involved in suffering and sacrifice and even martyrdom for his faith, he must remember that the day will come when things will be seen as they really are; and then the power of the persecutor and the heroism of Christian witness will be seen at their true value, and each will have its true reward.

(b) They are not to be afraid to speak with boldness the message they have received. What Jesus has told them, they must tell to men. Here in this one verse (Matt.10:27) lies the true function of the preacher.

First, the preacher must listen; he must be in the secret place with Christ, that in the dark hours Christ may speak to him, and that in the loneliness Christ may whisper in his ear. No man can speak for Christ unless Christ has spoken to him; no man can proclaim the truth unless he has listened to the truth; for no man can tell that which he does not know

In the great days in which the Reformation was coming to birth, Colet invited Erasmus to come to Oxford to give a series of lectures on Moses or Isaiah; but Erasmus knew he was not ready. He wrote back: "But I who have learned to live with myself, and know how scanty my equipment is, can neither claim the learning required for such a task, nor do I think that I possess the strength of mind to sustain the jealousy of so many men, who would be eager to maintain their own ground. The campaign is one that demands, not a tyro, but a practiced general. Neither should you call me immodest in declining a position which it would be most immodest for me to accept. You are not acting wisely, Colet, in demanding water from a pumice stone, as Plautus said. With what effrontery shall I teach what I have never learned? How am I to warm the coldness of others, when I am shivering myself?"

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Matthew 10:26-31

He who would teach and preach must first in the secret place listen and learn.

Second, the preacher must speak what he has heard from Christ, and he must speak even if his speaking is to gain him the hatred of men, and even if, by speaking, he takes his life in his hands.

Men do not like the truth, for, as Diogenes said, truth is like the light to sore eyes. Once Latimer was preaching when Henry the king was present. He knew that he was about to say something which the king would not relish. So in the pulpit he soliloquized aloud with himself. "Latimer! Latimer! Latimer!" he said, "be careful what you say. Henry the king is here." He paused, and then he said, "Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! be careful what you say. The King of kings is here."

The man with a message speaks to men, but he speaks in the presence of God. It was said of John Knox, as they buried him, "Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man."

The Christian witness is the man who knows no fear, because he knows that the judgments of eternity will correct the judgments of time. The Christian preacher and teacher is the man who listens with reverence and who speaks with courage, because he knows that, whether he listens or speaks, he is in the presence of God.

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Matthew 10:26-31

THE KING'S MESSENGER'S FREEDOM FROM FEAR--THE COURAGE OF THE RIGHT

Matthew 10:26-31 (Part 2)

(ii) The second commandment is in Matt.10:28. To put it very simply, what Jesus is saying is that no punishment that men can ever lay upon a man can compare with the ultimate fate of one who has been guilty of infidelity and disobedience to God. It is true that men can kill a man's physical body; but God can condemn a man to the death of the soul. There are three things that we must note here.

(a) Some people believe in what is called conditioned immortality. This belief holds that the reward of goodness is that the soul climbs up and up until it is one with all the immortality, the bliss and the blessedness of God; and that the punishment of the evil man, who will not mend his ways in spite of all God's appeals to him, is that his soul goes down and down and down until it is finally obliterated and ceases to be. We cannot erect a doctrine on a single text, but that is something very like what Jesus is saying here.

The Jews knew the awfulness of the punishment of God.

For thou hast power over life and death.
And thou leadest down to the gates of Hades, and leadest up again.
But though a man can kill by his wickedness,
Yet the spirit that is gone forth he bringeth not back,
Neither giveth release to the soul that Hades has received
(Wis.16:13-14).

During the killing times of the Maccabean struggle, the seven martyred brothers encouraged each other by saying, "Let us not fear him who thinketh he kills; for a great struggle and pain of the soul awaits in eternal torment those who transgress the ordinance of God"(4 Maccabees 13: 14-15).

We do well to remember that the penalties which men can exact are as nothing to the penalties which God can exact and to the rewards which he can give.

(b) The second thing which this passage teaches is that there is still left in the Christian life a place for what we might call a holy fear.

The Jews well knew this fear of God. One of the rabbinic stories tells how Rabbi Jochanan was ill. "His disciples went in to visit him. On beholding them he began to weep. His disciples said to him, 'O Lamp of Israel, righthand pillar, mighty hammer! Wherefore dost thou weep?' He replied to them, 'If I was being led into the presence of a human king who today is here and tomorrow in the grave, who, if he were wrathful against me, his anger would not be eternal, who, if he imprisoned me, the imprisonment would not be eternal, who, if he condemned me to death, the death would not be for ever, and whom I can appease with words and bribe with money even then I would weep.'

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But now, when I am being led into the presence of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is he, who lives and endures for all eternity, who, if he be wrathful against me, his anger is eternal, who, if he imprisoned me, the imprisonment would be for ever, who, if he condemned me to death, the death would be for ever, and whom I cannot appease with words or bribe with money--nay more, when before me lie two ways, one the way of the Garden of Eden and the other the way of Gehenna, and I know not in which I am to be led--shall I not weep?"

It is not that the Jewish thinkers forgot that there is love, and that love is the greatest of all things. "The reward of him who acts from love," they said, "is double and quadruple. Act from love, for there is no love where there is fear, or fear where there is love, except in relation to God." The Jews were always sure that in relation to God there was both fear and love. "Fear God and love God, the Law says both; act from both love and fear; from love, for, if you would hate, no lover hates; from fear, for, if you would kick, no fearer kicks." But the Jew never forgot--and neither must we--the sheer holiness of God.

And for the Christian the matter is even more compelling, for our fear is not that God will punish us, but that we may grieve his love. The Jew was never in any danger of sentimentalizing the love of God, and neither was Jesus. God is love, but God is also holiness, for God is God; and there must be a place in our hearts and in our thought both for the love which answers God's love, and the reverence, the awe and the fear which answer God's holiness.

(c) Further, this passage tells us that there are things which are worse than death; and disloyalty is one of them. If a man is guilty of disloyalty, if he buys security at the expense of dishonour, life is no longer tolerable. He cannot face men; he cannot face himself; and ultimately he cannot face God. There are times when comfort, safety, ease, life itself can cost too much.

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Matthew 10:26-31

THE KING'S MESSENGER'S FREEDOM FROM FEAR--GOD CARES!

Matthew 10:26-31 (Part 3)

(iii) The third commandment not to fear is in Matt.10:31; and it is based on the certainty of the detailed care of God. If God cares for the sparrows, surely he will care for men.

Matthew says that two sparrows are sold for a penny and yet not one of them falls to the ground without the knowledge of God. Luke gives us that saying of Jesus in a slightly different form: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God?" (Lk.12:6). The point is this--two sparrows were sold for one penny. (The coin is the assarion, which was one-sixteenth of a denarius; a denarius was approximately four new pence; therefore the assarion was about one quarter of one new penny). But if the purchaser was prepared to spend two pennies, he got, not four sparrows, but five. The extra one was thrown into the bargain as having no value at all. God cares even for the sparrow which is thrown into the bargain, and which on man's counting has no value at all. Even the forgotten sparrow is dear to God.

The thing is even more vivid than that. The Revised Standard Version--and it is a perfectly correct translation of the Greek--has it that not one sparrow will fall to the ground without the knowledge of God. In such a context the word "fall" makes us naturally think of death; but in all probability the Greek is a translation of an Aramaic word which means to light upon the ground. It is not that God marks the sparrow when the sparrow falls dead; it is far more; it is that God marks the sparrow every time it lights and hops upon the ground. So it is Jesus' argument that, if God cares like that for sparrows, much more will he care for men.

Once again the Jews would well understand what Jesus was saying. No nation ever had such a conception of the detailed care of God for his creation. Rabbi Chanina said, "No man hurts his finger here below, unless it is so disposed for him by God." There was a rabbinic saying, "God sits and feeds the world, from the horns of the buffalo to the eggs of the louse." Hillel has a wonderful interpretation of Ps.136. That psalm begins by telling the story in lyric poetry about the God who is the God of creation, the God who made the heavens and the earth, and the sun and the moon and the stars (Ps.136:1-9); then it goes on to tell the story about the God who is the God of history, the God who rescued Israel from Egypt and who fought her battles for her (Ps.136:11-24); then finally it goes on to speak of God as the God "who gives food to all flesh" (Ps.136:25). The God who made the world and who controls all history is the God who gives men food.

The coming of our daily bread is just as much an act of God as the act of creation and the saving power of the deliverance from Egypt. God's love for men is seen not only in the omnipotence of creation and in the great events of history; it is seen also in the day--today nourishment of the bodies of men.

The courage of the King's messenger is founded on the conviction that, whatever happens, he cannot drift beyond the love of God. He knows that his times are for ever in God's hands; that God will not leave him or forsake him; that he is surrounded for ever by God's care. If that is so--whom then shall we be afraid?

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 10:32-33

THE LOYALTY OF THE KING'S MESSENGER AND ITS REWARD

Matthew 10:32-33

"I too will acknowledge before my Father every one who acknowledges me before men. I too will deny before my Father who is in heaven every one who denies me before men."

Here is laid down the double loyalty of the Christian life. If a man is loyal to Jesus Christ in this life, Jesus Christ will be loyal to him in the life to come. If a man is proud to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is his Master, Jesus Christ will be proud to acknowledge that he is his servant.

It is the plain fact of history that if there had not been men and women in the early Church who in face of death and agony refused to deny their Master, there would be no Christian Church today. The Church of today is built on the unbreakable loyalty of those who held fast to their faith.

Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, writes to Trajan, the Roman Emperor, about how he treated the Christians within his province. Anonymous informers laid information that certain people were Christian. Pliny tells how he gave these men the opportunity to invoke the gods of Rome, to offer wine and frankincense to the image of the Emperor, and how he demanded that as a final test they should curse the name of Christ. And then he adds: "None of these acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be compelled to do." Even the Roman governor confesses his helplessness to shake the loyalty of those who are truly Christian.

It is still possible for a man to deny Jesus Christ.

(i) We may deny him with our words. It is told of J. P. Mahaffy, the famous scholar and man of the world from Trinity College, Dublin, that when he was asked if he was a Christian, his answer was: "Yes, but not offensively so." He meant that he did not allow his Christianity to interfere with the society he kept and the pleasure he loved. Sometimes we say to other people, practically in so many words, that we are Church members, but not to worry about it too much; that we have no intention of being different; that we are prepared to take our full share in all the pleasures of the world; and that we do not expect people to take any special trouble to respect any vague principles that we may have.

The Christian can never escape the duty of being different from the world. It is not our duty to be conformed to the world; it is our duty to be transformed from it.

(ii) We can deny him by our silence. A French writer tells of bringing a young wife into an old family. The old family had not approved of the marriage, although they were too conventionally polite ever to put their objections into actual words and criticisms. But the young wife afterwards said that her whole life was made a misery by "the menace of things unsaid." There can be a menace of things unsaid in the Christian life. Again and again life brings us the opportunity to speak some word for Christ, to utter some protest against evil, to take some stand, and to show what side we are on. Again and again on such occasions it is easier to keep silence than to speak.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 10:32-33

But such a silence is a denial of Jesus Christ. It is probably true that far more people deny Jesus Christ by cowardly silence than by deliberate words.

(iii) We can deny him by our actions. We can live in such a way that our life is a continuous denial of the faith which we profess. He who has given his allegiance to the gospel of purity may be guilty of all kinds of petty dishonesties, and breaches of strict honour. He who has undertaken to follow the Master who bade him take up a cross can live a life which is dominated by attention to his own ease and comfort. He who has entered the service of him who himself forgave and who bade his followers to forgive can live a life of bitterness and resentment and variance with his fellow-men. He whose eyes are meant to be on that Christ who died for love of men can live a life in which the idea of Christian service and Christian charity and Christian generosity are conspicuous by their absence.

A special prayer was composed for the Lambeth Conference of 1948:

"Almighty God, give us grace to be not only hearers, but doers of thy holy word, not only to admire, but to obey thy doctrine, not only to profess, but to practice thy religion, not only to love, but to live thy gospel. So grant that what we learn of thy glory we may receive into our hearts, and show forth in our lives: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

That is a prayer which every one of us would be well to remember and continually to use.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 10:34-39

THE WARFARE OF THE KING'S MESSENGER

Matthew 10:34-39 (Part 1)

"Do not think that I came to send peace on earth: I did not come to send peace, but a sword. I came to set a man at variance against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies shall be the members of his own household. He that loves father or mother more than he loves me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me: He who finds his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it."

Nowhere is the sheer honesty of Jesus more vividly displayed than it is here. Here he sets the Christian demand at its most demanding and at its most uncompromising. He tells his men exactly what they may expect, if they accept the commission to be messengers of the King. Here in this passage Jesus offers four things.

(i) He offers a warfare; and in that warfare it will often be true that a man's foes will be those of his own household.

It so happens that Jesus was using language which was perfectly familiar to the Jew. The Jews believed that one of the features of the Day of the Lord, the day when God would break into history, would be the division of families. The Rabbis said: "In the period when the Son of David shall come, a daughter will rise up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." "The son despises his father, the daughter rebels against the mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and the man's enemies are they of his own household." It is as if Jesus said, "The end you have always been waiting for has come; and the intervention of God in history is splitting homes and groups and families into two."

When some great cause emerges, it is bound to divide people; there are bound to be those who answer, and those who refuse, the challenge. To be confronted with Jesus is necessarily to be confronted with the choice whether to accept him or to reject him; and the world is always divided into those who have accepted Christ and those who have not.

The bitterest thing about this warfare was that a man's foes would be those of his own household. It can happen that a man loves his wife and his family so much that he may refuse some great adventure, some avenue of service, some call to sacrifice, either because he does not wish to leave them, or because to accept it would involve them in danger.

T. R. Glover quotes a letter from Oliver Cromwell to Lord Wharton. The date is 1st January, 1649, and Cromwell had in the back of his mind that Wharton might be so attached to his home and to his wife that he might refuse to hear the call to adventure and to battle, and might choose to stay at home: "My service to the dear little lady; I wish you make her not a greater temptation than she is. Take heed of all relations. Mercies should not be temptations; yet we too often make them so."

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 10:34-39

It has happened that a man has refused God's call to some adventurous bit of service, because he allowed personal attachments to immobilize him. Lovelace, the cavalier poet, writes to his Lucasta, Going to the Wars:

"Tell me not (Sweet) I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast, and quiet mind,
To war and arms I fly.
True; a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.
Yet this inconstancy is such,
As you too shall adore.
I could not love thee (Dear) so much,
Loved I not honour more."

It is very seldom that any man is confronted with this choice; he may well go through life and never face it; but the fact remains that it is possible for a man's loved ones to become in effect his enemies, if the thought of them keeps him from doing what he knows God wants him to do.

(ii) He offers a choice; and a man has to choose sometimes between the closest ties of earth and loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Bunyan knew all about that choice. The thing which troubled him most about his imprisonment was the effect it would have upon his wife and children. What was to happen to them, bereft of his support? "The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place, as the pulling the flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor family was like to meet with, should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. O the thought of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break up my heart to pieces.... But yet, recalling myself, thought I, I must venture you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you; O I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet thought I, I must do it, I must do it."

Once again, this terrible choice will come very seldom; in God's mercy to many of us it may never come; but the fact remains that all loyalties must give place to loyalty to god.

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Matthew 10:34-39

THE COST OF BEING A MESSENGER OF THE KING

Matthew 10:34-39 (Part 2)

(iii) Jesus offers a cross. People in Galilee well knew what a cross was. When the Roman general, Varus, had broken the revolt of Judas of Galilee, he crucified two thousand Jews, and placed the crosses by the wayside along the roads to Galilee. In the ancient days the criminal did actually carry the crossbeam of his cross to the place of crucifixion, and the men to whom Jesus spoke had seen people staggering under the weight of their crosses and dying in agony upon them.

The great men, whose names are on the honour roll of faith, well knew what they were doing. After his trial in Scarborough Castle, George Fox wrote, "And the officers would often be threatening me, that I should be hanged over the wall ... they talked much then of hanging me. But I told them, 'If that was it they desired, and it was permitted them, I was ready.'" When Bunyan was brought before the magistrate, he said, "Sir, the law (the law of Christ) hath provided two ways of obeying: The one to do that which I in my conscience do believe that I am bound to do, actively; and where I cannot obey it actively, there I am willing to lie down and to suffer what they shall do unto me."

The Christian may have to sacrifice his personal ambitions, the ease and the comfort that he might have enjoyed, the career that he might have achieved; he may have to lay aside his dreams, to realize that shining things of which he has caught a glimpse are not for him. He will certainly have to sacrifice his will, for no Christian can ever again do what he likes; he must do what Christ likes. In Christianity there is always some cross, for it is the religion of the Cross.

(iv) He offers adventure. He told them that the man who found his life would lose it; and the man who lost his life would find it.

Again and again that has been proved true in the most literal way. It has always been true that many a man might easily have saved his life; but, if he had saved it, he would have lost it, for no one would ever have heard of him, and the place he holds in history would have been lost to him.

Epictetus says of Socrates: "Dying, he was saved, because he did not flee." Socrates could easily have saved his life, but, if he had done so, the real Socrates would have died, and no man would ever have heard of him.

When Bunyan was charged with refusing to come to public worship and with running forbidden meetings of his own, he thought seriously whether it was his duty to flee to safety, or to stand by what he believed to be true. As all the world knows, he chose to take his stand. T. R. Glover closes his essay on Bunyan thus: "And supposing he had been talked round and had agreed no longer 'devilishly and perniciously to abstain from coming to Church to hear divine service,' and to be no longer 'an upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventicles to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of the kingdom contrary to the laws of our sovereign lord the king?' Bedford might have kept a tinker the more--and possibly none of the best at that, for there is nothing to show that renegades make good tinkers--and what would England have lost?"

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Matthew 10:34-39

There is no place for a policy of safety first in the Christian life. The man who seeks first ease and comfort and security and the fulfillment of personal ambition may well get all these things--but he will not be a happy man; for he was sent into this world to serve God and his fellow-men. A man can hoard life, if he wishes to do so. But that way he will lose all that makes life valuable to others and worth living for himself. The way to serve others, the way to fulfil God's purpose for us, the way to true happiness is to spend life selflessly, for only thus will we find life, here and hereafter.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 10:40-42

THE REWARD OF THOSE WHO WELCOME THE KING'S MESSENGER

Matthew 10:40-42

He who receives you, receives me; and he who receives me, receives him that sent me. He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones a drink of cold water because he is a disciple--this is the truth I tell you--he will not lose his reward.

When Jesus said this, he was using a way of speaking which the Jews regularly used. The Jew always felt that to receive a person's envoy or messenger was the same as to receive the person himself. To pay respect to an ambassador was the same as to pay respect to the king who had sent him. To welcome with love the messenger of a friend was the same as to welcome the friend himself. The Jew always felt that to honour a person's representative was the same as to honour the person whose representative he was. This was particularly so in regard to wise men and to those who taught God's truth. The Rabbis said: "He who shows hospitality to the wise is as if he brought the first-fruits of his produce unto God." "He who greets the learned is as if he greeted God." If a man is a true man of God, to receive him is to receive the God who sent him.

This passage sets out the four links in the chain of salvation.

(i) There is God out of whose love the whole process of salvation began. (ii) There is Jesus who brought that message to men. (iii) There is the human messenger, the prophet who speaks, the good man who is an example, the disciple who learns, who in turn all pass on to others the good news which they themselves have received. (iv) There is the believer who welcomes God's men and God's message and who thus finds life to his soul.

In this passage there is something very lovely for every simple and humble soul.

(i) We cannot all be prophets, and preach and proclaim the word of God, but he who gives God's messenger the simple gift of hospitality will receive no less a reward than the prophet himself. There is many a man who has been a great public figure; there is many a man whose voice has kindled the hearts of thousands of people; there is many a man who has carried an almost intolerable burden of public service and public responsibility, all of whom would gladly have borne witness that they could never have survived the effort and the demands of their task, were it not for the love and the care and the sympathy and the service of someone at home, who was never in the public eye at all. When true greatness is measured up in the sight of God, it will be seen again and again that the man who greatly moved the world was entirely dependent on someone who, as far as the world is concerned, remained unknown. Even the prophet must get his breakfast, and have his clothes attended to.

Let those who have the often thankless task of making a home, cooking meals, washing clothes, shopping for household necessities, caring for children, never think of it as a dreary and weary round. It is God's greatest task; and they will be far more likely to receive the prophet's reward than those whose days are filled with committees and whose homes are comfortless.

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Matthew 10:40-42

(ii) We cannot all be shining examples of goodness; we cannot all stand out in the world's eye as righteous; but he who helps a good man to be good receives a good man's reward.

H. L. Gee has a lovely story. There was a lad in a country village who, after a great struggle, reached the ministry. His helper in his days of study had been the village cobbler. The cobbler, like so many of his trade, was a man of wide reading and far thinking, and he had done much for the lad. In due time the lad was licensed to preach. And on that day the cobbler said to him, "It was always my desire to be a minister of the gospel, but the circumstances of my life made it impossible. But you are achieving what was closed to me. And I want you to promise me one thing--I want you to let me make and cobble your shoes--for nothing--and I want you to wear them in the pulpit when you preach, and then I'll feel you are preaching the gospel that I always wanted to preach standing in my shoes." Beyond a doubt the cobbler was serving God as the preacher was, and his reward would one day be the same.

(iii) We cannot all teach the child; but there is a real sense in which we can all serve the child. We may not have either the knowledge or the technique to teach, but there are simple duties to be done, without which the child cannot live. It may be that in this passage it is not so much children in age of whom Jesus is thinking as children in the faith. It seems very likely that the Rabbis called their disciples the little ones. It may be that in the technical, academic sense we cannot teach, but there is a teaching by life and example which even the simplest person can give to another.

The great beauty of this passage is its stress on simple things.

The Church and Christ will always need their great orators, their great shining examples of sainthood, their great teachers. those whose names are household words; but the Church and Christ will also always need those in whose homes there is hospitality, on whose hands there is all the service which makes a home, and in whose hearts there is the caring which is Christian love; and, as Mrs. Browning said, "All service ranks the same with God."

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 11

THE SIX ACCENTS IN THE VOICE OF JESUS

Matt.11 is a chapter in which Jesus is speaking all the time; and, as he speaks to different people and about different things, we hear the accent of his voice vary and change. It will be of the greatest interest to look one by one at the six accents in the voice of Jesus.

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Matthew 11:1-6

THE ACCENT OF CONFIDENCE

Matthew 11:1-6

And when Jesus had completed his instructions to the twelve disciples, he left there to go on teaching and to go on making his proclamation in their towns.

When John had heard in prison about the things that the Anointed One of God was doing, he sent to him and asked him through his disciples: "Are you the One who is to come, or, must we go on expecting another?" "Go back," said Jesus, "and give John the report of what you are hearing and seeing. The blind are having their sight restored, and the lame are walking; the lepers are being cleansed, and the deaf are hearing; the dead are being raised up, and the poor are receiving the good news. And blessed is the man who does not take offence at me."

The career of John had ended in disaster. It was not John's habit to soften the truth for any man; and he was incapable of seeing evil without rebuking it. He had spoken too fearlessly and too definitely for his own safety.

Herod Antipas of Galilee had paid a visit to his brother in Rome. During that visit he seduced his brother's wife. He came home again, dismissed his own wife, and married the sister-in-law whom he had lured away from her husband. Publicly and sternly John rebuked Herod. It was never safe to rebuke an eastern despot and Herod took his revenge; John was thrown into the dungeons of the fortress of Machaerus in the mountains near the Dead Sea.

For any man that would have been a terrible fate, but for John the Baptist it was worse than for most. He was a child of the desert; all his life he had lived in the wide open spaces, with the clean wind on his face and the spacious vault of the sky for his roof. And now he was confined within the four narrow walls of an underground dungeon. For a man like John, who had perhaps never lived in a house, this must have been agony.

In Carlisle Castle there is a little cell. Once long ago they put a border chieftain in that cell and left him for years. In that cell there is one little window, which is placed too high for a man to look out of when he is standing on the floor. On the ledge of the window there are two depressions worn away in the stone. They are the marks of the hands of that border chieftain, the places where, day after day, he lifted himself up by his hands to look out on the green dales across which he would never ride again.

John must have been like that; and there is nothing to wonder at, and still less to criticize, in the fact that questions began to form themselves in John's mind. He had been so sure that Jesus was the One who was to come. That was one of the commonest titles of the Messiah for whom the Jews waited with such eager expectation (Mk.11:9; Lk.13:35; Lk.19:38; Heb.10:37; Ps.118:26). A dying man cannot afford to have doubts; he must be sure; and so John sent his disciples to Jesus with the question: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" There are many possible things behind that question.

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Matthew 11:1-6

(i) Some people think that the question was asked, not for John's sake at all, but for the sake of his disciples. It may be that when John and his disciples talked in prison, the disciples questioned whether Jesus was really he who was to come, and John's answer was: "If you have any doubts, go and see what Jesus is doing and your doubts will be at an end." If that is the case, it was a good answer. If anyone begins to argue with us about Jesus, and to question his supremacy, the best of all answers is not to counter argument with argument, but to say, "Give your life to him; and see what he can do with it." The supreme argument for Christ is not intellectual debate, but experience of his changing power.

(ii) It may be that John's question was the question of impatience. His message had been a message of doom (Matt.3:7-12). The axe was at the root of the tree; the winnowing process had begun; the divine fire of cleansing judgment had begun to burn. It may be that John was thinking: "When is Jesus going to start on action? When is he going to blast his enemies? When is the day of God's holy destruction to begin?" It may well be that John was impatient with Jesus because he was not what he expected him to be. The man who waits for savage wrath will always be disappointed in Jesus, but the man who looks for love will never find his hopes defeated.

(iii) Some few have thought that this question was nothing less than the question of dawning faith and hope. He had seen Jesus at the Baptism; in prison he had thought more and more about him; and the more he thought the more certain he was that Jesus was he who was to come; and now he put all his hopes to the test in this one question. It may be that this is not the question of a despairing and an impatient man, but the question of one in whose eyes the light of hope shone, and who asked for nothing but confirmation of that hope.

Then came Jesus' answer; and in his answer we hear the accent of confidence. Jesus' answer to John's disciples was: "Go back, and don't tell John what I am saying; tell him what I am doing. Don't tell John what I am claiming; tell him what is happening." Jesus demanded that there should be applied to him the most acid of tests, that of deeds. Jesus was the only person who could ever demand without qualification to be judged, not by what he said, but by what he did. The challenge of Jesus is still the same. He does not so much say, "Listen to what I have to tell you," as, "Look what I can do for you; see what I have done for others."

The things that Jesus did in Galilee he still does. In him those who were blind to the truth about themselves, about their fellow-men and about God, have their eyes opened; in him those whose feet were never strong enough to remain in the right way are strengthened; in him those who were tainted with the disease of sin are cleansed; in him those who were deaf to the voice of conscience and of God begin to listen; in him those who were dead and powerless in sin are raised to newness and loveliness of life; in him the poorest man inherits the riches of the love of God.

Finally comes the warning, "Blessed is he who takes no offence at me." This was spoken to John; and it was spoken because John had only grasped half the truth. John preached the gospel of divine holiness with divine destruction; Jesus preached the gospel of divine holiness with divine love. So Jesus says to John, "Maybe I am not doing the things you expected me to do. But the powers of evil are being defeated not by irresistible power, but by unanswerable love." Sometimes a man can be offended at Jesus because Jesus cuts across his ideas of what religion should be.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 11:7-11

THE ACCENT OF ADMIRATION

Matthew 11:7-11

When they were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. "What did you go out to the desert to see?" he said. "Was it a reed shaken by the wind? If it was not that, what did you go out to see? Was it to see a man clothed in luxurious clothes? Look you, the people who wear luxurious clothes are in kings' houses. If it was not that, what did you go out to see? Was it to see a prophet? Indeed it was, I tell you, and something beyond a prophet. This is he of whom it stands written: 'Look you, I am sending before you my messenger, who will prepare your way before you.' This is the truth I tell you--amongst those born of women no greater figure than John the Baptizer has ever emerged in history. But the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is."

There are few men to whom Jesus paid so tremendous a tribute as he did to John the Baptizer. He begins by asking the people what they went into the desert to see when they streamed out to John.

(i) Did they go out to see a reed shaken by the wind? That can mean one of two things: (a) Down by the banks of the Jordan the long cane grass grew; and the phrase a shaken reed was a kind of proverb for the commonest of sights. When the people flocked to see John, were they going out to see something as ordinary as the reeds swaying in the wind on Jordan's banks? (b) A shaken reed can mean a weak vacillator, one who could no more stand foursquare to the winds of danger than a reed by the river's bank could stand straight when the wind blew.

Whatever else the people flocked out to the desert to see, they certainly did not go to see an ordinary person. The very fact that they did go out in their crowds showed how extraordinary John was, for no one would cross the street, let alone tramp into the desert, to see a commonplace kind of person. Whatever else they went out to see, they did not go to see a weak vacillator. Mr. Pliables do not end in prison as martyrs for the truth. John was neither as ordinary as a shaken reed, nor as spineless as the reed which sways with every breeze.

(ii) Did they go out to see a man clothed in soft and luxurious garments? Such a man would be a courtier; and, whatever else John was, he was not a courtier. He knew nothing of the courtier's art of the flattery of kings; he followed the dangerous occupation of telling the truth to kings. John was the ambassador of God, not the courtier of Herod.

(iii) Did they go out to see a prophet? The prophet is the forthteller of the truth of God. The prophet is the man in the confidence of God. "Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Am.3:7). The prophet is two things--he is the man with a message from God, and he is the man with the courage to deliver that message. The prophet is the man with God's wisdom in his mind, God's truth on his lips, and God's courage in his heart. That most certainly John was.

(iv) But John was something more than a prophet. The Jews had, and still have, one settled belief. They believed that before the Messiah came, Elijah would return to herald his coming. To this day, when the Jews celebrate the Passover Feast, a vacant chair is left for Elijah. "Behold I will send you

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Matthew 11:7-11

Elijah the prophet, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Mal.4:5). Jesus declared that John was nothing less than the divine herald whose duty and privilege it was to announce the coming of the Messiah. John was nothing less than the herald of God, and no man could have a greater task than that.

(v) Such was the tremendous tribute of Jesus to John, spoken with the accent of admiration. There had never been a greater figure in all history; and then comes the startling sentence: "But he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he."

Here there is one quite general truth. With Jesus there came into the world something absolutely new. The prophets were great; their message was precious; but with Jesus there emerged something still greater, and a message still more wonderful. C. G. Montefiore, himself a Jew and not a Christian, writes: "Christianity does mark a new era in religious history and in human civilization. What the world owes to Jesus and to Paul is immense; things can never be, and men can never think, the same as things were, and as men thought, before these two great men lived." Even a non-Christian freely admits that things could never be the same now that Jesus had come.

But what was it that John lacked? What is it that the Christian has that John could never have? The answer is simple and fundamental. John had never seen the Cross. Therefore one thing John could never know--the full revelation of the love of God. The holiness of God he might know; the justice of God he might declare; but the love of God in all its fulness he could never know. We have only to listen to the message of John and the message of Jesus. No one could call John's message a gospel, good news; it was basically a threat of destruction. It took Jesus and his Cross to show to men the length, breadth, depth and height of the love of God. It is a most amazing thing that it is possible for the humblest Christian to know more about God than the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The man who has seen the Cross has seen the heart of God in a way that no man who lived before the Cross could ever see it. Indeed the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than any man who went before.

So John had the destiny which sometimes falls to men; he had the task of pointing men to a greatness into which he himself did not enter. It is given to some men to be the signposts of God. They point to a new ideal and a new greatness which others will enter into, but into which they will not come. It is very seldom that any great reformer is the first man to toil for the reform with which his name is connected. Many who went before him glimpsed the glory, often laboured for it, and sometimes died for it.

Someone tells how from the windows of his house every evening he used to watch the lamp-lighter go along the streets lighting the lamps--and the lamp-lighter was himself a blind man. He was bringing to others the light which he himself would never see. Let a man never be discouraged in the Church or in any other walk of life, if the dream he has dreamed and for which he has toiled is never worked out before the end of the day. God needed John; God needs his signposts who can point men on the way, although they themselves cannot ever reach the goal.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 11:12-15

VIOLENCE AND THE KINGDOM

Matthew 11:12-15

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by storm, and the violent take it by force. For up to John all the prophets and the Law spoke with the voice of prophecy; and, if you are wiping to accept the fact, this is Elijah who was destined to come. He who has ears to hear let him hear."

In Matt.11:12 there is a very difficult saying, "The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force." Luke has this saying in another form (Lk.16:16): "Since then the good news of the Kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently." It is clear that at some time Jesus said something in which violence and the kingdom were connected, something which was a dark and a difficult saying, which no one at the time fully understood. Certainly Luke and Matthew understood it in different ways.

Luke says that every man storms his way into the Kingdom; he means, as Denney said, that the "Kingdom of heaven is not for the well-meaning but for the desperate," that no one drifts into the Kingdom, that the Kingdom only opens its doors to those who are prepared to make as great an effort to get into it as men do when they storm a city.

Matthew says that from the time of John until now the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force. The very form of that expression seems to look back over a considerable time. It indeed sounds much more like a comment of Matthew than a saying of Jesus. It sounds as if Matthew was saying: "From the days of John, who was thrown into prison, right down to our own times the Kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and persecution at the hands of violent men."

It is likely that we will get the full meaning of this difficult saying by putting together the recollection of Luke and Matthew. What Jesus may well have said is: "Always my Kingdom will suffer violence; always savage men will try to break it up, and snatch it away and destroy it; and therefore only the man who is desperately in earnest, only the man in whom the violence of devotion matches and defeats the violence of persecution will in the end enter into it." It may well be that this saying of Jesus was originally at one and the same time a warning of violence to come and a challenge to produce a devotion which would be even stronger than the violence.

It seems strange to find in Matt.11:13 that the Law is said to speak with the voice of prophecy; but it was the Law itself which confidently declared that the voice of prophecy would not die. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brethren." "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth" (Deut.18:15,18). It was because he broke the Law, as they saw it, that the orthodox Jews hated Jesus; but, if they had only had eyes to see it, both the Law and the prophets pointed to him.

Once again Jesus tells the people that John is the herald and the forerunner whom they have awaited so long--if they are willing to accept the fact. There is all the tragedy of the human

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Matthew 11:12-15

situation in that last phrase. The old proverb has it that you can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. God can send his messenger but men can refuse to recognize him, and God can send his truth but men can refuse to see it. God's revelation is powerless without man's response. That is why Jesus ends with the appeal that he who has ears should use them to hear.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 11:16-19

THE ACCENT OF SORROWFUL REBUKE

Matthew 11:16-19

"To what will I compare this generation? It is like children in the market-place, calling to their companions, and saying, 'We piped to you and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'The man is mad.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look you, a gluttonous man and a wine-drinker, the friend of tax-collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is shown to be right by her deeds."

Jesus was saddened by the sheer perversity of human nature. To him men seemed to be like children playing in the village square. One group said to the other: "Come on and let's play at weddings," and the others said, "We don't feel like being happy today." Then the first group said, "All right; come on and let's play at funerals," and the others said, "We don't feel like being sad today." They were what the Scots call contrary. No matter what was suggested, they did not want to do it; and no matter what was offered, they found a fault in it.

John came, living in the desert, fasting and despising food, isolated from the society of men; and they said of him, "The man is mad to cut himself off from human society and human pleasures like that." Jesus came, mixing with all kinds of people, sharing in their sorrows and their joys, accompanying with them in their times of joy; and they said of him, "He is a socialite; he is a party-goer; he is the friend of outsiders with whom no decent person would have anything to do." They called John's asceticism madness; and they called Jesus' sociability laxness of morals. They could find a ground of criticism either way. The plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening to it. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticisms; they will criticize the same person, and the same institution, from quite opposite grounds.

If people are determined to make no response they will remain stubbornly unresponsive no matter what invitation is made to them. Grown men and women can be very like spoiled children who refuse to play no matter what the game is.

Then comes Jesus' final sentence in this section: "Wisdom is shown to be right by her deeds." The ultimate verdict lies not with the cantankerous and perverse critics but with events. The Jews might criticize John for his lonely isolation, but John had moved men's hearts to God as they had not been moved for centuries; the Jews might criticize Jesus for mixing too much in ordinary life and with ordinary people, but in him people were finding a new life and a new goodness and a new power to live as they ought and a new access to God.

It would be well if we were to stop judging people and churches by our own prejudices and perversities; and if we were to begin to give thanks for any person and any church who can bring people nearer to God, even if their methods are not the methods which suit us.

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Matthew 11:20-24

THE ACCENT OF HEARTBROKEN CONDEMNATION

Matthew 11:20-24

Then he began to reproach the cities in which the most numerous of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. "Alas for you Chorazin! Alas for you Bethsaida! For, if the deeds of power which happened in you had happened in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. But I tell you, it will be easier for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you! And you Capernaum, is it not true that you have been lifted up to heaven? You will go down to Hell, for, if the deeds of power which happened in you had happened amongst the men of Sodom, they would have survived to this day. But I tell you--it will be easier for the land of the men of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

When John came to the end of his gospel, he wrote a sentence in which he indicated how impossible it was ever to write a complete account of the life of Jesus: "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (Jn.21:25). This passage of Matthew is one of the proofs of that saying.

Chorazin was probably a town an hour's journey north of Capernaum; Bethsaida was a fishing village on the west bank of Jordan, just as the river entered the northern end of the lake. Clearly the most tremendous things happened in these towns, and yet we have no account of them whatever. There is no record in the gospels of the work that Jesus did, and of the wonders he performed in these places, and yet they must have been amongst his greatest. A passage like this shows us how little we know of Jesus; it shows us--and we must always remember it--that in the gospels we have only the barest selection of Jesus' works. The things we do not know about Jesus far outnumber the things we do know.

We must be careful to catch the accent in Jesus' voice as he said this. The Revised Standard Version has it: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!" The Greek word for woe which we have translated "alas" is *ouai* (GSN3759); and *ouai* expresses sorrowful pity at least as much as it does anger. This is not the accent of one who is in a temper because his self-esteem has been touched; it is not the accent of one who is blazingly angry because he has been insulted. It is the accent of sorrow, the accent of one who offered men the most precious thing in the world and saw it disregarded. Jesus' condemnation of sin is holy anger, but the anger comes, not from outraged pride, but from a broken heart.

What then was the sin of Chorazin, of Bethsaida, of Capernaum, the sin which was worse than the sin of Tyre and Sidon, and of Sodom and Gomorrah? It must have been very serious for again and again Tyre and Sidon are denounced for their wickedness (Isa.23; Jer.25:22; Jer.47:4; Eze.26:3-7; Eze.28:12-22), and Sodom and Gomorrah were and are a byword for iniquity.

(i) It was the sin of the people who forgot the responsibilities of privilege. To the cities of Galilee had been given a privilege which had never come to Tyre and Sidon, or to Sodom and Gomorrah, for the cities of Galilee had actually seen and heard Jesus. We cannot condemn a man who never

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Matthew 11:20-24

had the chance to know any better; but if a man who has had every chance to know the right does the wrong, then he does stand condemned. We do not condemn a child for that for which we would condemn an adult; we would not condemn a savage for conduct which we would condemn in a civilized man; we do not expect the person brought up in the handicaps of a city slum to live the life of a person brought up in a good and comfortable home. The greater our privileges have been, the greater is our condemnation if we fail to shoulder the responsibilities and accept the obligations which these privileges bring with them.

(ii) It was the sin of indifference. These cities did not attack Jesus Christ; they did not drive him from their gates; they did not seek to crucify him; they simply disregarded him. Neglect can kill as much as persecution can. An author writes a book; it is sent out for review; some reviewers may praise it, others may damn it; it does not matter so long as it is noticed; the one thing which will kill a book stone dead is if it is never noticed at all for either praise or blame.

An artist drew a picture of Christ standing on one of London's famous bridges. He is holding out his hands in appeal to the crowds, and they are drifting past without a second look; only one girl, a nurse, gives him any response. Here we have the modern situation in so many countries today. There is no hostility to Christianity; there is no desire to destroy it; there is blank indifference. Christ is relegated to the ranks of those who do not matter. Indifference, too, is a sin, and the worst of all, for indifference kills.

It does not burn a religion to death; it freezes it to death. It does not behead it; it slowly suffocates the life out of it.

(iii) And so we are face to face with one great threatening truth--it is also a sin to do nothing. There are sins of action, sins of deed; but there is also a sin of inaction, and of absence of deeds. The sin of Chorazin, of Bethsaida, and of Capernaum was the sin of doing nothing. Many a man's defence is: "But I never did anything." That defence may be in fact his condemnation.

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Matthew 11:25-27

THE ACCENT OF AUTHORITY

Matthew 11:25-27

At that time Jesus said: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the clever, and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for thus it was your will in your sight. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wishes to reveal his knowledge."

Here Jesus is speaking out of experience, the experience that the Rabbis and the wise men rejected him, and the simple people accepted him. The intellectuals had no use for him; but the humble welcomed him. We must be careful to see clearly what Jesus meant here. He is very far from condemning intellectual power; what he is condemning is intellectual pride. As Plummer has it, "The heart, not the head, is the home of the gospel." It is not cleverness which shuts out; it is pride. It is not stupidity which admits; it is humility. A man may be as wise as Solomon, but if he has not the simplicity, the trust, the innocence of the childlike heart, he shuts himself out.

The Rabbis themselves saw the danger of this intellectual pride; they recognized that often simple people were nearer God than the wisest Rabbi. They had a parable like this. Once Rabbi Berokah of Chuza was in the market of Lapet, and Elijah appeared to him. The Rabbi asked, "Is there among the people in this market-place anyone who is destined to share in the life of the world to come?" At first Elijah said there was none. Then he pointed at one man, and said that that man would share in the life of the world to come. Rabbi Berokah went to the man and asked him what he did. "I am a jailer," said the man, "and I keep men and women separate. At night I place my bed between the men and the women so that no wrong will be committed." Elijah pointed at two other men, and said that they too would share in the life to come. Rabbi Berokah asked them what they did. "We are merry-makers," they said. "When we see a man who is downcast, we cheer him up. Also when we see two people quarrelling with one another, we try to make peace between them." The men who did the simple things, the jailer who kept his charges in the right way, the men who brought a smile and peace, were in the kingdom.

Again, the Rabbis had a story like this: "An epidemic once broke out in Sura, but in the neighbourhood of Rab's residence (a famous Rabbi) it did not appear. The people thought that this was due to Rab's merits, but in a dream they were told ... that it happened because of the merits of a man who willingly lent hoe and shovel to someone who wished to dig a grave. A fire once broke out in Drokeret, but the neighbourhood of Rabbi Huna was spared. The people thought it was due to the merits of Rabbi Huna,...but they were told in a dream that it was due to the merits of a certain woman, who used to heat her oven and place it at the disposal of her neighbours." The man who lent his tools to someone in need, the woman who helped her neighbours as she could had no intellectual standing, but their simple deeds of human love had won them the approval of God. Academic distinctions are not necessarily distinctions in the sight of God.

"Still to the lowly soul
He doth himself impart,

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Matthew 11:25-27

And for his dwelling and his throne
Chooseth the pure in heart."

This passage closes with the greatest claim that Jesus ever made, the claim which is the centre of the Christian faith, that he alone can reveal God to men. Other men may be sons of God; he is The Son. John put this in a different way, when he tells us that Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn.14:9). What Jesus says is this: "If you want to see what God is like, if you want to see the mind of God, the heart of God, the nature of God, if you want to see God's whole attitude to men--look at me!" It is the Christian conviction that in Jesus Christ alone we see what God is like; and it is also the Christian conviction that Jesus can give that knowledge to anyone who is humble enough and trustful enough to receive it.

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Matthew 11:28-30

THE ACCENT OF COMPASSION

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to me, all you who are exhausted and weighted down beneath your burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus spoke to men desperately trying to find God and desperately trying to be good, who were finding the tasks impossible and who were driven to weariness and to despair.

He says, "Come unto me all you who are exhausted." His invitation is to those who are exhausted with the search for the truth. The Greeks had said, "It is very difficult to find God, and, when you have found him, it is impossible to tell anyone else about him." Zophar demanded of Job: "Can you find out the deep things of God?" (Jb.11:7). It is Jesus' claim that the weary search for God ends in himself. W. B. Yeats, the great Irish poet and mystic, wrote: "Can one reach God by toil? He gives himself to the pure in heart. He asks nothing but our attention." The way to know God is not by mental search, but by giving attention to Jesus Christ, for in him we see what God is like.

He says, "Come unto me all you who are weighted down beneath your burdens." For the orthodox Jew religion was a thing of burdens. Jesus said of the Scribes and Pharisees: "They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matt.23:4). To the Jew religion was a thing of endless rules. A man lived his life in a forest of regulations which dictated every action of his life. He must listen for ever to a voice which said, "Thou shalt not."

Even the Rabbis saw this. There is a kind of rueful parable put into the mouth of Korah, which shows just how binding and constricting and burdensome and impossible the demands of the Law could be. "There was a poor widow in my neighbourhood who had two daughters and a field. When she began to plough, Moses (i.e. the Law of Moses) said, 'You must not plough with an ox and an ass together.' When she began to sow, he said, 'You must not sow your field with mingled seed.' When she began to reap and to make stacks of corn, he said, 'When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it' (Deut.24:19), and 'you shall not reap your field to its very border' (Lev.19:9). She began to thresh, and he said, 'Give me the heave-offering, and the first and second tithe.' She accepted the ordinance and gave them all to him.

What did the poor woman then do? She sold her field, and bought two sheep, to clothe herself from their fleece, and to have profit from their young. When they bore their young, Aaron (i.e. the demands of the priesthood) came and said, 'Give me the first-born.' So she accepted the decision, and gave them to him. When the shearing time came, and she sheared them, Aaron came and said, 'Give me the first of the fleece of the sheep' (Deut.18:4). Then she thought: 'I cannot stand up against this man. I will slaughter the sheep and eat them.' Then Aaron came and said, 'Give me the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach' (Deut.18:3). Then she said, 'Even when I have killed them I am not safe from you. Behold they shall be devoted.' Then Aaron said, 'In that case they belong entirely to me' (Num.18:14). He took them and went away and left her weeping with her

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Matthew 11:28-30

two daughters." The story is a parable of the continuous demands that the Law made upon men in every action and activity of life.

These demands were indeed a burden.

Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders. The Jews used the phrase the yoke for entering into submission to. They spoke of the yoke of the Law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the Kingdom, the yoke of God. But it may well be that Jesus took the words of his invitation from something much nearer home than that.

He says, "My yoke is easy." The word "easy" is in Greek *chrestos* (GSN5543), which can mean well-fitting. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all Galilee, and that from all over the country men came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth may well have been: "My yokes fit well." It may well be that Jesus is here using a picture from the carpenter's shop in Nazareth where he had worked throughout the silent years.

Jesus says, "My yoke fits well." What he means is: "The life I give you is not a burden to gall you; your task is made to measure to fit you." Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.

Jesus says, "My burden is light." As a Rabbi had it: "My burden is become my song." It is not that the burden is easy to carry; but it is laid on us in love; it is meant to be carried in love; and love makes even the heaviest burden light. When we remember the love of God, when we know that our burden is to love God and to love men, then the burden becomes a song. There is an old story which tells how a man came upon a little boy carrying a still smaller boy, who was lame, upon his back. "That's a heavy burden for you to carry," said the man. "That's no' a burden," came the answer. "That's my wee brother." The burden which is given in love and carried in love is always light.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 12

CRISIS

In Matt.12 we read the history of a series of crucial events in the life of Jesus. In every man's life there are decisive moments, times and events on which the whole of his life hinges. This chapter presents us with the story of such a period in the life of Jesus. In it we see the orthodox Jewish religious leaders of the day coming to their final decision regarding Jesus--and that was rejection. It was not only rejection in the sense that they would have nothing to do with him; it was rejection in the sense that they came to the conclusion that nothing less than his complete elimination would be enough.

Here in this chapter we see the first definite steps, the end of which could be nothing other than the Cross. The characters are painted clear before us. On the one hand there are the Scribes and the Pharisees, the representatives of orthodox religion. We can see four stages in their increasing attitude of malignant hostility to Jesus.

(i) In Matt.12:1-8, the story of how the disciples plucked the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, we see growing suspicion. The Scribes and Pharisees regarded with growing suspicion a teacher who was prepared to allow his followers to disregard the minutia of the Sabbath Law. This was the kind of thing which could not be allowed to spread unchecked.

(ii) In Matt.12:9-14, the story of the healing of the man with the paralysed hand on the Sabbath day, we see active and hostile investigation. It was not by chance that the Scribes and Pharisees were in the synagogue on that Sabbath. Luke says they were there to watch Jesus (Lk.6:7). From that time on Jesus would have to work always under the malignant eye of the orthodox leaders. They would do his steps, like private detectives, seeking the evidence on which they could level a charge against him.

(iii) In Matt.12:22-32, the story of how the orthodox leaders charged Jesus with healing by the power of the devil, and of how he spoke to them of the sin which has no forgiveness, we see the story of deliberate and prejudiced blindness. From that time on nothing Jesus could ever do would be right in the eyes of these men. They had so shut their eyes to God that they were completely incapable of ever seeing his beauty and his truth. Their prejudiced blindness had launched them on a path from which they were quite incapable of ever turning back.

(iv) In Matt.12:14 we see evil determination. The orthodox were not now content to watch and criticize; they were preparing to act. They had gone into council to find a way to put an end to this disturbing Galilaean. Suspicion, investigation, blindness were on the way to open action.

In face of all this the answer of Jesus is clearly delineated. We can see five ways in which he met this growing opposition.

(i) He met it with courageous defiance. In the story of the healing of the man with the paralysed hand (Matt.12:9-14) we see him deliberately defying the Scribes and Pharisees. This thing was not done in a corner; it was done in a crowded synagogue. It was not done in their absence; it was done

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Matthew 12

when they were there with deliberate intent to formulate a charge against him. So far from evading the challenge, Jesus is about to meet it head on.

(ii) He met it with warning. In Matt.12:22-32 we see Jesus giving the most terrible of warnings. He is warning those men that, if they persist in shutting their eyes to the truth of God, they are on the way to a situation where, by their own act, they will have shut themselves out from the grace of God. Here Jesus is not so much on the defence as on the attack. He makes quite clear where their attitude is taking them.

(iii) He met it with a staggering series of claims. He is greater than the Temple (Matt.12:6), and the Temple was the most sacred place in all the world. He is greater than Jonah, and no preacher ever produced repentance so amazingly as Jonah did (Matt.12:41). He is greater than Solomon, and Solomon was the very acme of wisdom (Matt.12:42). His claim is that there is nothing in spiritual history than which he is not greater. There are no apologies here; there is the statement of the claims of Christ at their highest.

(iv) He met it with the statement that his teaching is essential. The point of the strange parable of the Empty House (Matt.12:43-45) is that the Law may negatively empty a man of evil, but only the gospel can fill him with good. The Law therefore simply leaves a man an empty invitation for all evil to take up its residence within his heart; the gospel so fills him with positive goodness that evil cannot enter in. Here is Jesus, claim that the gospel can do for men what the Law can never do.

(v) Finally, he met it with an invitation. Matt.12:46-50 are in essence an invitation to enter into kinship with him. These verses are not so much a disowning of Jesus' own kith and kin as an invitation to all men to enter into kinship with him, through the acceptance of the will of God, as that will has come to men in him. They are an invitation to abandon our own prejudices and self-will and to accept Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. If we refuse, we drift farther away from God; if we accept, we enter into the very family and heart of God.

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Matthew 12:1-8

BREAKING THE SABBATH LAW

Matthew 12:1-8 (Part 1)

At that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look you, your disciples are doing that which it is not permitted to do on the Sabbath day." He said to them, "Have you not read what David and his friends did, when he was hungry--how he went into the house of God and ate the shewbread, which it was not permissible for him, nor for his friends to eat, but which the priests alone may eat? Or, have you not read in the Law that the priests profane the Sabbath, and yet remain blameless? I tell you that something greater than the Temple is here. But, if you had known the meaning of the saying, 'It is mercy that I wish, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned those who are blameless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

(The last phrase should perhaps be translated: "For man is master of the Sabbath.")

In Palestine in the time of Jesus the cornfields and the cultivated lands were laid out in long narrow strips; and the ground between the strips was always a right of way. It was on one of these strips between the cornfields that the disciples and Jesus were walking when this incident happened.

There is no suggestion that the disciples were stealing. The Law expressly laid it down that the hungry traveller was entitled to do just what the disciples were doing, so long as he only used his hands to pluck the ears of corn, and did not use a sickle: "When you go into your neighbours standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbours standing grain" (Deut.23:25). W. M. Thomson in *The Land and the Book* tells how, when he was travelling in Palestine, the same custom still existed. One of the favourite evening dishes for the traveller is parched corn. "When travelling in harvest time," Thomson writes, "my muleteers have very often prepared parched corn in the evenings after the tent has been pitched. Nor is the gathering of these green ears for parching ever regarded as stealing...."

So, also, I have seen my muleteers, as we passed along the wheat fields, pluck off the ears, rub them in their hands, and eat the grains unroasted, just as the apostles are said to have done."

In the eyes of the Scribes and Pharisees, the fault of the disciples was not that they had plucked and eaten the grains of corn, but that they had done so on the Sabbath. The Sabbath Law was very complicated and very detailed. The commandment forbids work on the Sabbath day; but the interpreters of the Law were not satisfied with that simple prohibition. Work had to be defined. So thirty-nine basic actions were laid down, which were forbidden on the Sabbath, and amongst them were reaping, winnowing and threshing, and preparing a meal. The interpreters were not even prepared to leave the matter there. Each item in the list of forbidden works had to be carefully defined. For instance, it was forbidden to carry a burden. But what is a burden? A burden is anything which weighs as much as two dried figs. Even the suggestion of work was forbidden; even anything which might symbolically be regarded as work was prohibited.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 12:1-8

Later the great Jewish teacher, Maimonides, was to say, "To pluck ears is a kind of reaping." By their conduct the disciples were guilty of far more than one breach of the Law. By plucking the corn they were guilty of reaping; by rubbing it in their hands they were guilty of threshing; by separating the grain and the chaff they were guilty of winnowing; and by the whole process they were guilty of preparing a meal on the Sabbath day, for everything which was to be eaten on the Sabbath had to be prepared the day before.

The orthodox Jews took this Sabbath Law with intense seriousness. The Book of Jubilee has a chapter (chapter 50) about the keeping of the Sabbath. Whoever lies with his wife, or plans to do anything on the Sabbath, or plans to set out on a journey (even the contemplation of work is forbidden), or plans to buy or sell, or draws water, or lifts a burden is condemned. Any man who does any work on the Sabbath (whether the work is in his house or in any other place), or goes a journey, or tills a farm, any man who lights a fire or rides any beast, or travels by ship at sea, any man who strikes or kills anything, any man who catches an animal, a bird, or a fish, any man who fasts or who makes war on a Sabbath--the man who does these things shall die. To keep these commandments was to keep the Law of God; to break them was to break the Law of God.

There is no doubt whatever that, from their own point of view, the Scribes and Pharisees were entirely justified in finding fault with the disciples for breaking the Law, and with Jesus for allowing them, if not encouraging them, to do so.

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Matthew 12:1-8

THE CLAIM OF HUMAN NEED

Matthew 12:1-8 (Part 2)

To meet the criticism of the Scribes and Pharisees Jesus put forward three arguments.

(i) He quoted the action of David (1Sam.21:1-6) on the occasion when David and his young men were so hungry that they went into the tabernacle--not the Temple, because this happened in the days before the Temple was built--and ate the shewbread, which only the priests could eat. The shewbread is described in Lev.24:5-9. It consisted of twelve loaves of bread, which were placed every week in two rows of six in the Holy Place. No doubt they were a symbolic offering in which God was thanked for his gift of sustaining food. These loaves were changed every week, and the old loaves became the perquisite of the priests and could only be eaten by them. On this occasion, in their hunger, David and his young men took and ate those sacred loaves, and no blame attached to them. The claims of human need took precedence over any ritual custom.

(ii) He quoted the Sabbath work of the Temple. The Temple ritual always involved work--the kindling of fires, the slaughter and the preparation of animals, the lifting of them on to the altar, and a host of other things. This work was actually doubled on the Sabbath, for on the Sabbath the offerings were doubled (compare e.g. Num.28:9). Any one of these actions would have been illegal for any ordinary person to perform on the Sabbath day. To light a fire, to slaughter an animal, to lift it up on to the altar would have been to break the Law, and hence to profane the Sabbath. But for the priests it was perfectly legal to do these things, for the Temple worship must go on. That is to say, worship offered to God took precedence of the Sabbath rules and regulations.

(iii) He quoted God's word to Hosea the prophet: "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice" (Hos.6:6). What God desires far more than ritual sacrifice is kindness, the spirit which knows no law other than that it must answer the call of human need.

In this incident Jesus lays it down that the claim of human need must take precedence of all other claims. The claims of worship, the claims of ritual, the claims of liturgy are important but prior to any of them is the claim of human need.

One of the modern saints of God is Father George Potter who, out of the derelict Church of St. Chrysostom's in Peckham, made a shining light of Christian worship and Christian service. To further the work he founded the Brotherhood of the Order of the Holy Cross, whose badge was the towel which Jesus Christ wore when he washed his disciples' feet. There was no service too menial for the brothers to render; their work for the outcast and for homeless boys with a criminal record or criminal potentialities is beyond all praise. Father Potter held the highest possible ideas of worship; and yet when he is explaining the work of the Brotherhood he writes of anyone who wishes to enter into its triple vow of poverty, chastity and obedience: "He mustn't sulk if he cannot get to Vespers on the Feast of St. Thermogene. He may be sitting in a police court waiting for a 'client'. . . . He mustn't be the type who goes into the kitchen and sobs just because we run short of incense. . . .

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We put prayer and sacraments first. We know we cannot do our best otherwise, but the fact is that we have to spend more time at the bottom of the Mount of Transfiguration than at the top." He tells about one candidate who arrived, when he was just about to give his boys a cup of cocoa and put them to bed. "So I said, 'Just clean round the bath will you while it's wet?' He stood aghast and stuttered, 'I didn't expect to clean up after dirty boys!' Well, well! His life of devoted service to the Blessed Master lasted about seven minutes. He did not unpack." Florence Allshorn, the great principal of a women's missionary college, tells of the problem of the candidate who always discovers that her time for quiet prayer has come just when there are greasy dishes to be washed in not very warm water.

Jesus insisted that the greatest ritual service is the service of human need. It is an odd thing to think that, with the possible exception of that day in the synagogue at Nazareth, we have no evidence that Jesus ever conducted a church service in all his life on earth, but we have abundant evidence that he fed the hungry and comforted the sad and cared for the sick. Christian service is not the service of any liturgy or ritual; it is the service of human need. Christian service is not monastic retreat; it is involvement in all the tragedies and problems and demands of the human situation. Whittier had it rightly:

"O brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother!
Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there;
To worship rightly is to love each other,
Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.
For he whom Jesus loved hath truly spoken;
The holier worship which he deigns to bless
Restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken,
And feeds the widow and the fatherless.
Follow with reverent steps the great example
Of Him whose holy work was doing good;
So shall the wide earth seem our Father's temple,
Each loving life a psalm of gratitude."

That is what we mean--or ought to mean--when we say, "Let us worship God!"

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Matthew 12:1-8

MASTER OF THE SABBATH

Matthew 12:1-8 (Part 3)

There remains in this passage one difficulty which it is not possible to solve with absolute certainty. The difficulty lies in the last phrase, "For the Son of man is lord of the sabbath." This phrase can have two meanings.

(i) It may mean that Jesus is claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath, in the sense that he is entitled to use the Sabbath as he thinks fit. We have seen that the sanctity of the work of the Temple surpassed and over-rode the Sabbath rules and regulations; Jesus has just claimed that something greater than the Temple is here in him; therefore he has the right to dispense with the Sabbath regulations and to do as he thinks best on the Sabbath day. That may be said to be the traditional interpretation of this sentence, but there are real difficulties in it.

(ii) On this occasion Jesus is not defending himself for anything that he did on the Sabbath; he is defending his disciples; and the authority which he is stressing here is not so much his own authority as the authority of human need. And it is to be noted that when Mark tells of this incident he introduces another saying of Jesus as part of the climax of it: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk.2:27).

To this we must add the fact that in Hebrew and Aramaic the phrase son of man is not a title at all, but simply a way of saying a man. When the Rabbis began a parable, they often began it: "There was a son of man who..."; when we would simply say, "There was a man who . . ." The Psalmist writes, "What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (Ps.8:4). Again and again the Ezekiel God addresses Ezekiel as son of man. "And he said to me: 'Son of man, stand upon your feet and I will speak with you'" (Eze.2:1; compare Eze.2:6; Eze.2:8; Eze.3:1,4; Eze.3:17,25). In all these cases son of man, spelled without the capital letters, simply means man.

In the (early and best) Greek manuscripts of the New Testament all the words were written completely in capital letters. In these manuscripts (called uncials) it would not be possible to tell where special capitals are necessary. Therefore, in Matt.12:8, it may well be that son of man should be written without capital letters, and that the phrase does not refer to Jesus but simply to man.

If we consider that what Jesus is pressing is the claims of human need; if we remember that it is not himself but his disciples that he is defending; if we remember that Mark tells us that he said that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath; then we may well conclude that what Jesus said here is: "Man is not the slave of the Sabbath; he is the master of it, to use it for his own good." Jesus may well be rebuking the Scribes and Pharisees for enslaving themselves and their fellow-men with a host of tyrannical regulations; and he may well be here laying down the great principle of Christian freedom, which applies to the Sabbath as it does to all other things in life.

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Matthew 12:9-14

LOVE AND LAW

Matthew 12:9-14 (Part 1)

He left there and went into their synagogue. And, look you, there was a man there with a withered hand. So they asked him, "Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath?" They asked this question in order that they might find an accusation against him. "What man will there be of you," he said, "who will have a sheep, and, if the sheep falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, will not take a grip of it, and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep? So, then, it is permitted to do a good thing on the Sabbath day." Then he said to the man, "Stretch forth your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored, sound as the other. So the Pharisees went away and conferred against him, to find a way to destroy him.

This incident is a crucial moment in the life of Jesus. He deliberately and publicly broke the Sabbath Law; and the result was a conference of the orthodox leaders to search out a way to eliminate him.

We will not understand the attitude of the orthodox unless we understand the amazing seriousness with which they took the Sabbath Law. That Law forbade all work on the Sabbath day, and so the orthodox Jews would literally die rather than break it.

In the time of the rising under Judas Maccabaeus certain Jews sought refuge in the caves in the wilderness. Antiochus sent a detachment of men to attack them; the attack was made on the Sabbath day; and these insurgent Jews died without even a gesture of defiance or defence, because to fight would have been to break the Sabbath. 1 Maccabees tells how the forces of Antiochus "gave them battle with all speed. Howbeit they answered them not, neither cast they a stone at them, nor stopped the places where they lay hid; but said: 'Let us die in our innocency: heaven and earth shall testify for us, that ye put us to death wrongfully.' So they rose up against them in battle on the Sabbath, and they slew them with their wives and children and cattle, to the number of a thousand people" (1Macc.2:31-38). Even in a national crisis, even to save their lives, even to protect their nearest and their dearest, the Jews would not fight on the Sabbath.

It was because the Jews insisted on keeping the Sabbath Law that Pompey was able to take Jerusalem. In ancient warfare it was the custom for the attacker to erect a huge mound which overlooked the battlements of the besieged city and from the height of the mound to bombard the defences. Pompey built his mound on the Sabbath days when the Jews simply looked on and refused to lift a hand to stop him. Josephus says, "And had it not been for the practice, from the days of our forefathers, to rest on the seventh day, this bank could never have been perfected, by reason of the opposition the Jews would have made; for though our Law gave us leave then to defend ourselves against those that begin to fight with us and assault us (this was a concession), yet it does not permit us to meddle with our enemies while they do anything else" (Josephus: Antiquities, 14. 4. 2.).

Josephus recalls the amazement of the Greek historian Agatharchides at the way in which Ptolemy Lagos was allowed to capture Jerusalem. Agatharchides wrote: "There are a people called

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Jews, who dwell in a city the strongest of an cities, which the inhabitants call Jerusalem, and are accustomed to rest on every seventh day; at which time they make no use of their arms, nor meddle with husbandry, nor take care of any of the affairs of life, but spread out their hands in their holy places, and pray till evening time. Now it came to pass that when Ptolemy the son of Lagos came into this city with his army, these men, in observing this mad custom of theirs, instead of guarding the city, suffered their country to submit itself to a bitter lord; and their Law was openly proved to have commanded a foolish practice.

This accident taught an other men but the Jews to disregard such dreams as these were, and not to follow the like idle suggestions delivered as a Law, when in such uncertainty of human reasonings they are at a loss what they should do" (Josephus: Against Apion, 1: 22). The rigorous Jewish observance of the Sabbath seemed to other nations nothing short of insanity, since it could lead to such amazing national defeats and disasters.

It was that absolutely immovable frame of mind that Jesus was up against. The Law quite definitely forbade healing on the Sabbath. It was true that the Law clearly laid it down that "every case when life is in danger supersedes the Sabbath Law." This was particularly the case in diseases of the ear, the nose, the throat and the eyes. But even then it was equally clearly laid down that steps could be taken to keep a man from getting worse, but not to make him better. So a plain bandage might be put on a wound, but not a medicated bandage, and so on.

In this case there was no question of the paralysed man's life being in danger; as far as danger went, he would be in no worse condition the next day. Jesus knew the Law; he knew what he was doing; he knew that the Pharisees were waiting and watching; and yet he healed the man. Jesus would accept no law which insisted that a man should suffer, even without danger to life, one moment longer than necessary. His love for humanity far surpassed his respect for ritual Law.

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Matthew 12:9-14

THE CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Matthew 12:9-14 (Part 2)

Jesus went into the synagogue, and in it was a man with a paralysed hand. Our gospels tell us nothing more about this man, but the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which was one of the early gospels which did not succeed in gaining an entry to the New Testament, tells us that he came to Jesus with the appeal: "I was a stone mason, seeking my living with my hands. I pray you, Jesus, to give me back my health, so that I shall not need to beg for food in shame."

But the Scribes and Pharisees were there, too. They were not concerned with the man with the paralysed hand; they were concerned only with the minutiae of their rules and regulations. So they asked Jesus: "Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath day?" Jesus knew the answer to that question perfectly well; he knew that, as we have seen, unless there was actual danger to life, healing was forbidden, because it was regarded as an act of work.

But Jesus was wise. If they wished to argue about the Law, he had the skill to meet them on their own ground. "Tell me," he said, "suppose a man has a sheep, and that sheep falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not go and haul the sheep out of the pit?" That was, in fact, a case for which the Law provided. If an animal fell into a pit on the Sabbath, then it was within the Law to carry food to it, which in any other case would have been a burden, and to render it all assistance. "So," said Jesus, "it is permitted to do a good thing on the Sabbath; and, if it is permitted to do a good thing to a sheep, how much more must it be lawful to do it for a man, who is of so much more value than any animal."

Jesus reversed the argument. "If," he argued, "it is right to do good on the Sabbath, then to refuse to do good is evil." It was Jesus' basic principle that there is no time so sacred that it cannot be used for helping a fellow-man who is in need. We win not be judged by the number of church services we have attended, or by the number of chapters of the Bible we have read, or even by the number of the hours we have spent in prayer, but by the number of people we have helped, when their need came crying to us. To this, at the moment, the Scribes and Pharisees had nothing to answer, for their argument had recoiled on their own head.

So Jesus healed this man, and in healing him gave him three things.

(i) He gave him back his health. Jesus is vitally interested in the bodies of men. Paul Tournier, in his book *A Doctor's Case Book*, has some great things to pass on about healing and God. Professor Courvoisier writes that the vocation of medicine is "a service to which those are called, who, through their studies and the natural gifts with which the Creator has endowed them ... are specially fitted to tend the sick and to heal them. Whether or not they are aware of it, whether or not they are believers, this is from the Christian point of view fundamental, that doctors are, by their profession, fellow-workers with God." "Sickness and healing," said Dr. Pouyanne, "are acts of grace." "The doctor is an instrument of God's patience," writes Pastor Alain Perrot. "Medicine is a dispensation of the grace of God, who in his goodness takes pity on men and provides remedies for the evil

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Matthew 12:9-14

consequences of their sin." Calvin described medicine as a gift from God. He who heals men is helping God.

The cure of men's bodies is just as much a God-given task as the cure of men's souls; and the doctor in his practice is just as much a servant of God as the minister in his parish.

(ii) Because Jesus gave this man back his health, he also gave him back his work. Without work to do a man is half a man; it is in his work that he finds himself and his satisfaction. Over the years idleness can be harder than pain to bear; and, if there is work to do, even sorrow loses at least something of its bitterness. One of the greatest things that any human being can do for any other is to give him work to do.

(iii) Because Jesus gave this man back his health and his work, he gave him back his self-respect. We might well add a new beatitude: Blessed are those who give us back our self respect. A man becomes a man again when, on his two feet and with his own two hands, he can face life and with independence provide for his own needs and for the needs of those dependent on him.

We have already said that this incident was crisis. At the end of it the Scribes and Pharisees began to plot the death of Jesus. In a sense the highest compliment you can pay a man is to persecute him. It shows that he is regarded not only as dangerous but as effective. The action of the Scribes and Pharisees is the measure of the power of Jesus Christ. True Christianity may be hated, but it can never be disregarded.

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Matthew 12:15-21

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Matthew 12:15-21

Because Jesus knew this, he withdrew from there: and many followed him and he healed them all; and he strictly enjoined them not to surround him with publicity. All this happened that there might be fulfilled the word which came through Isaiah and which says: "Look you, my servant, whom I have chosen! My beloved one in whom my soul finds delight! I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will tell the nations what justice is. He will not strive, nor will he cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break the crushed reed, and he will not quench the smoking wick, till he sends forth his conquering judgment, and in his name shall the Gentiles hope."

Two things here about Jesus show that he never confounded recklessness with courage. First, for the time being, he withdrew. The time for the head-on clash had not yet come. He had work to do before the Cross took him to its arms. Second, he forbade men to surround him with publicity. He knew only too well how many false Messiahs had arisen; he knew only too well how inflammable the people were. If the idea got around that someone with marvellous powers had emerged, then certainly a political rebellion would have arisen and lives would have been needlessly lost. He had to teach men that Messiahship meant not crushing power but sacrificial service, not a throne but a cross, before they could spread his story abroad.

The question which Matthew uses to sum up the work of Jesus is from Isa.42:1-4. In a sense it is a curious quotation, because in the first instance it referred to Cyrus, the Persian king (compare Isa.45:1). The original point of the quotation was this. Cyrus was sweeping onwards in his conquests; and the prophet saw those conquests as within the deliberate and definite plan of God. Although he did not know it, Cyrus, the Persian, was the instrument of God. Further, the prophet saw Cyrus as the gentile conqueror, as indeed he was. But although the original words referred to Cyrus, the complete fulfilment of the prophecy undoubtedly came in Jesus Christ. In his day the Persian king mastered the eastern world, but the true Master of all the world is Jesus Christ. Let us then see how wonderfully Jesus satisfied this forecast of Isaiah.

(i) He will tell the nations what justice is. Jesus came to bring men justice. The Greeks defined justice as giving to God and to men that which is their due. Jesus showed men how to live in such a way that both God and men receive their proper place in our lives. He showed us how to behave both towards God and towards men.

(ii) He will not strive, nor cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. The word that is used for to cry aloud is the word that is used for the barking of a dog, the croaking of a raven, the bawling of a drunken man, the uproar of a discontented audience in a theatre. It means that Jesus would not brawl with men. We know all about the quarrels of conflicting parties, in which each tries to shout the other down. The hatred of theologians, the odium theologicum is one of the tragedies of the Christian Church. We know all about the oppositions of politicians and of ideologies. In Jesus there is the quiet, strong serenity of one who seeks to conquer by love, and not by strife of words.

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(iii) He will not break the crushed reed nor quench the smoking wick. The reed may be bruised and hardly able to stand erect; the wick may be weak and the light may be but a flicker. A man's witness may be shaky and weak; the light of his life may be but a flicker and not a flame; but Jesus did not come to discourage, but to encourage. He did not come to treat the weak with contempt, but with understanding; he did not come to extinguish the weak flame, but to nurse it back to a clearer and a stronger light. The most precious thing about Jesus is the fact that he is not the great discourager, but the great encourager.

(iv) In him the Gentiles will hope. With Jesus there came into the world the invitation, not to a nation but to all men, to share in and to accept the love of God. In him God was reaching out to every one with the offer of his love.

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Matthew 12:22-29

SATAN'S DEFENCES ARE BREACHED

Matthew 12:22-29 (Part 1)

Then there was brought to him a man possessed by a devil, blind and dumb; and he cured him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw. The crowds were beside themselves with amazement. "Surely," they said, "this cannot be the Son of David?" But, when they heard it, the Pharisees said, "The only way in which this fellow casts out devils, is by the help of Beelzeboul, the prince of the devils." When he saw what they were thinking, Jesus said to them, "Every kingdom which has reached a state of division against itself is laid waste; and any city or region which has reached a state of division against itself will not stand. If Satan is casting out Satan, he is in a state of division against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand? Further, if I cast out devils by the power of Beelzeboul, by whose power do your sons cast them out? They do cast them out, and therefore they convict you of hypocrisy in the charge which you level against me.

But, if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. Or, how can anyone enter into the house of a strong man, and seize his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? Then he will be able to seize his house."

In the eastern world it was not only mental and psychological illness which was ascribed to the influence of demons and devils; all illness was ascribed to their malignant power. Exorcism was therefore very commonly practised; and was in fact frequently completely effective.

There is nothing in that to be surprised at. When people believe in demon-possession, it is easy to convince themselves that they are so possessed; when they come under that delusion, the symptoms of demon-possession immediately arise. Even amongst ourselves anyone can think himself into having a headache, or can convince himself that he has the symptoms of an illness. When a person under such a delusion was confronted with an exorcist in whom he had confidence, often the delusion was dispelled and a cure resulted. In such cases if a man was convinced he was cured, he was cured.

In this instance Jesus cured a man who was deaf and dumb and whose infirmity was attributed to demon-possession. The people were amazed. They began to wonder if this Jesus could be the Son of David, so long promised and so long expected, the great Saviour and Liberator. Their doubt was due to the fact that Jesus was so unlike the picture of the Son of David in which they had been brought up to believe. Here was no glorious prince with pomp and circumstance; here was no rattle of swords nor army with banners; here was no fiery cross calling men to war; here was a simple carpenter from Galilee, in whose words was wisdom gentle and serene, in whose eyes was compassion, and in whose hands was mysterious power.

All the time the Scribes and Pharisees were looking grimly on. They had their own solution of the problem. Jesus was casting out devils because he was in league with the prince of devils. Jesus had three unanswerable replies to that charge.

(i) If he was casting out devils by the help of the prince of devils, it could only mean that in the demonic kingdom there was schism. If the prince of devils was actually lending his power to the

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destruction of his own demonic agents, then there was civil war in the kingdom of evil, and that kingdom was doomed. Neither a house nor a city nor a district can remain strong when it is divided against itself. Dissension within is the end of power. Even if the Scribes and Pharisees were right, Satan's days were numbered.

(ii) We take Jesus' third argument second, because there is so much to be said about the second that we wish to take it separately. Jesus said, "If I am casting out devils--and that you do not, and cannot, deny--it means that I have invaded the territory of Satan, and that I am actually like a burglar despoiling his house. Clearly no one can get into a strong man's house until the strong man is bound and rendered helpless. Therefore the very fact that I have been able so successfully to invade Satan's territory is proof that he is bound and powerless to resist." The picture of the binding of the strong man is taken from Isa.49:24-26.

There is one question which this argument makes us wish to ask. When was the strong man bound? When was the prince of the devils fettered in such a way that Jesus could make this breach in his defences? Maybe there is no answer to that question; but if there is, it is that Satan was bound during Jesus' temptations in the wilderness.

It sometimes happens that, although an army is not completely put out of action, it suffers such a defeat that its fighting potential is never quite the same again. Its losses are so great, its confidence is so shaken, that it is never again the force it was. When Jesus faced the Tempter in the wilderness and conquered him, something happened. For the first time Satan found someone whom not all his wiles could seduce, and whom not all his attacks could conquer. From that time the power of Satan has never been quite the same. He is no longer the all-conquering power of darkness; he is the defeated power of sin. The defences are breached; the enemy is not yet conquered; but his power can never be the same again and Jesus can help others win the victory he himself won.

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Matthew 12:22-29

THE JEWISH EXORCISTS

Matthew 12:22-29 (Part 2)

(iii) Jesus' second argument, to which we now come, was that the Jews themselves practised exorcism; there were Jews who expelled demons and wrought cures. If he was practising exorcism by the power of the prince of devils, then they must be doing the same, for they were dealing with the same diseases and they had at least sometimes the same effect. Let us then look at the customs and the methods of the Jewish exorcists, for they were a remarkable contrast to the methods of Jesus.

Josephus, a perfectly reputable historian, says that the power to cast out demons was part of the wisdom of Solomon, and he describes a case which he himself saw (Josephus: Antiquities 8. 2. 5.): "God also enabled Solomon to learn that skill which expels demons, which is a science useful and health-bringing to men. He composed such incantations also, by which distempers are alleviated. And he left behind him also the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons so that they never return, and this method of cure is of great force unto this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was Eleazar, releasing people who were demoniacal in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers. The manner of the cure was this.

He put a ring that had a root which was one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon in the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he adjured the demon to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed. And when Eleazar would persuade and demonstrate to the spectators that he had such a power, he set a little way off a cup or basin full of water, and commanded the demon, as he went out of the man, to overturn it, and thereby to let the spectators know that he had left the man; and when this was done, the skill and wisdom of Solomon was shown very manifestly." Here was the Jewish method; here was the whole paraphernalia of magic. How different the serene word of power which Jesus uttered!

Josephus has further information about how the Jewish exorcists worked. A certain root was much used in exorcism. Josephus tells about it: "In the valley of Macherus there is a certain root called by the same name. Its colour is like to that of flame, and towards evening it sends out a certain ray like lightning. It is not easily taken by such as would do so, but recedes from their hands, nor will it yield itself to be taken quietly until either the urine of a woman, or her menstrual blood, be poured upon it; nay, even then it is certain death to those who touch it, unless anyone take and hang the root itself down from his hand, and so carry it away.

It may also be taken another way without danger, which is this: they dig a trench all round about it, till the hidden part of the root be very small; they then tie a dog to it, and when the dog tries hard to follow him that tied him, this root is easily plucked up, but the dog dies immediately, as if it were instead of the man that would take the plant away; nor after this need anyone be afraid of taking it into their hands. Yet after all these pains in getting it, it is only valuable on account of one virtue which it possesses, that if it be brought to sick persons, it drives away those called demons" (Josephus: Wars of the Jews 7. 6. 3.). What a difference between Jesus' word of power, and this witch-doctoring which the Jewish exorcist used!

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Matthew 12:22-29

We may add one more illustration of Jewish exorcism. It comes from the apocryphal book of Tobit. Tobit is told by the angel that he is to marry Sara, the daughter of Raguel. She is a beautiful maiden with a great dowry, and she herself is good. She has been in turn married to seven different men, all of whom perished on their wedding night, because Sara was loved by a wicked demon, who would allow none to approach her. Tobit is afraid, but the angel tells him, "On the night when thou shalt come into the marriage chamber, thou shalt take the ashes of perfume, and shalt lay them upon some of the heart and liver of the fish, and shalt make a smoke with it; and the devil shall smell it and flee away, and never come again any more" (Tob.6:16). So Tobit did and the devil was banished for ever (Tob.8:1-4).

These were the things the Jewish exorcists did, and, as so often, they were a symbol. Men sought their deliverance from the evils and the sorrows of humanity in their magic and their incantations. Maybe even these things for a little while, in the mercy of God, brought some relief; but in Jesus there came the word of God with its serene power to bring to men the perfect deliverance which they had wistfully and even desperately sought, and which, until he came, they had never been able to find.

One of the most interesting things in the whole passage is Jesus' saying, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt.12:28). It is significant to note that the sign of the coming of the Kingdom was not full churches and great revival meetings, but the defeat of pain.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 12:30

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF NEUTRALITY

Matthew 12:30

"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad."

The picture of gathering and scattering may come from either of two backgrounds. It may come from harvesting; he who is not sharing in gathering the harvest is scattering the grain abroad, and is therefore losing it to the wind. It may come from shepherding; he who is not helping to keep the flock safe by bringing it into the fold is driving it out to the dangers of the hills.

In this one piercing sentence Jesus lays down the impossibility of neutrality. W. C. Allen writes: "In this war against Satan's strongholds there are only two sides, for Christ or against him, gathering with him or scattering with Satan." We may take a very simple analogy. We may apply this saying to ourselves and to the Church. If our presence does not strengthen the Church, then our absence is weakening it. There is no halfway house. In all things a man has to choose his side; abstention from choice, suspended action, is no way out, because the refusal to give one side assistance is in fact the giving of support to the other.

There are three things which make a man seek this impossible neutrality.

(i) There is the sheer inertia of human nature. It is true of so many people that the only thing they desire is to be left alone. They automatically shrink away from anything which is disturbing, and even choice is a disturbance.

(ii) There is the sheer cowardice of human nature. Many a man refuses the way of Christ because he is afraid to take the stand which Christianity demands. The basic thing that stops him is the thought of what other people will say. The voice of his neighbours is louder in his ears than the voice of God.

(iii) There is the sheer flabbiness of human nature. Most people would rather have security than adventure, and the older they grow the more that is so. A challenge always involves adventure; Christ comes to us with a challenge, and often we would rather have the comfort of selfish inaction than the adventure of action for Christ.

The saying of Jesus--"He who is not with me is against me"--presents us with a problem, for both Mark and Luke have a saying which is the very reverse, "He that is not against us is for us" (Mk.9:40; Lk.9:50). But they are not so contradictory as they seem. It is to be noted that Jesus spoke the second of them when his disciples came and told him that they had sought to stop a man from casting out devils in his name, because he was not one of their company. So a wise suggestion has been made. "He that is not with me is against me," is a test that we ought to apply to ourselves. Am I truly on the Lord's side, or, am I trying to shuffle through life in a state of cowardly neutrality? "He that is not against us is for us," is a test that we ought to apply to others. Am I given to condemning everyone who does not speak with my theology and worship with my liturgy and share my ideas? Am I limiting the Kingdom of God to those who think as I do?

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Matthew 12:30

The saying in this present passage is a test to apply to ourselves; the saying in Mark and Luke is a test to apply to others; for we must ever judge ourselves with sternness and other people with tolerance.

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Matthew 12:31-33

THE SIN BEYOND FORGIVENESS

Matthew 12:31-33 (Part 1)

"That is why I tell you that every sin and every blasphemy will be forgiven to men; but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. If anyone speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but if anyone speaks a word against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this world or in the world to come. Either assume that the tree is good and the fruit is good, or assume that the tree is rotten and the fruit is rotten. For the tree is known by its fruits."

It is startling to find words about an unforgivable sin on the lips of Jesus the Saviour of men. So startling is this that some wish to take away the sharp definiteness of the meaning. They argue that this is only another example of that vivid Eastern way of saying things, as, for example, when Jesus said that a man must hate father and mother truly to be his disciple, and that it is not to be understood in all its awful literalness, but simply means that the sin against the Holy Spirit is supremely terrible.

In support certain Old Testament passages are quoted. "But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken his commandment, that person shall be entirely cut off" (Num.15:30-31). "Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever" (1Sam.3:14). "The Lord of hosts has revealed himself in my ears. 'Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you till you die,' says the Lord God of hosts" (Isa.22:14).

It is claimed that these texts say much the same as Jesus said, and that they are only insisting on the grave nature of the sin in question. We can only say that these Old Testament texts do not have the same air nor do they produce the same impression. There is something very much more alarming in hearing words about a sin which has no forgiveness from the lips of him who was the incarnate love of God.

There is one section in this saying which is undoubtedly puzzling. In the Revised Standard Version Jesus is made to say that a sin against the Son of man is forgivable, whereas a sin against the Holy Spirit is not forgivable. If that is to be taken as it stands, it is indeed a hard saying. Matthew has already said that Jesus is the touchstone of all truth (Matt.10:32-33); and it is difficult to see what the difference between the two sins is.

But it may well be that at the back of this there is a misunderstanding of what Jesus said. We have already seen (compare notes on Matt.12:1-8) that the Hebrew phrase a son of man means simply a man, and that the Jews used this phrase when they desired to speak of any man. When we would say, "There was a man. . .," the Jewish Rabbi would say, "There was a son of man...." It may well be that what Jesus said was this: "If any man speaks a word against a man, it will be forgiven; but if any man speaks a word against the Holy Spirit it will not be forgiven."

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 12:31-33

It is quite possible that we may misunderstand a merely human messenger from God; but we cannot misunderstand--except deliberately--when God speaks to us through his own Holy Spirit. A human messenger is always open to misconstruction; but the divine messenger speaks so plainly that he can only be wilfully misunderstood. It certainly makes this passage easier to understand, if we regard the difference between the two sins as a sin against God's human messenger, which is serious, but not unforgivable, and a sin against God's divine messenger, which is completely wilful, and which, as we shall see, can end by becoming unforgivable.

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Matthew 12:31-33

THE LOST AWARENESS

Matthew 12:31-33 (Part 2)

Let us then try to understand what Jesus meant by the sin against the Holy Spirit. One thing is necessary. We must grasp the fact that Jesus was not speaking about the Holy Spirit in the full Christian sense of the term. He could not have been, for Pentecost had to come before the Holy Spirit came upon men in all his power and light and fulness. This must be interpreted in light of the Jewish conception of the Holy Spirit.

According to Jewish teaching the Holy Spirit had two supreme functions. First, the Holy Spirit brought God's truth to men; second, the Holy Spirit enabled men to recognize and to understand that truth when they saw it. So then a man, as the Jews saw it, needed the Holy Spirit, both to receive and to recognize God's truth. We may express this in another way. There is in man a Spirit-given faculty which enables him to recognize goodness and truth when he sees them.

Now we must take the next step in our attempt to understand what Jesus meant. A man can lose any faculty if he refuses to use it. This is true in any sphere of life. It is true physically; if a man ceases to use certain muscles, they will atrophy. It is true mentally; many a man at school or in his youth has acquired some slight knowledge of, for example, French or Latin or music; but that knowledge is long since gone because he did not exercise it. It is true of all kinds of perception. A man may lose all appreciation of good music, if he listens to nothing but cheap music; he may lose the ability to read a great book, if he reads nothing but ephemeral productions; he may lose the faculty of enjoying clean and healthy pleasure, if he for long enough finds his pleasure in things which are degraded and soiled.

Therefore a man can lose the ability to recognize goodness and truth when he sees them. If he for long enough shuts his eyes and ears to God's way, if he for long enough turns his back upon the messages which God is sending him, if he for long enough prefers his own ideas to the ideas which God is seeking to put into his mind, in the end he comes to a stage when he cannot recognize God's truth and God's beauty and God's goodness when he sees them. He comes to a stage when his own evil seems to him good, and when God's good seems to him evil.

That is the stage to which these Scribes and Pharisees had come. They had so long been blind and deaf to the guidance of God's hand and the promptings of God's Spirit, they had insisted on their own way so long, that they had come to a stage when they could not recognize God's truth and goodness when they saw them. They were able to look on incarnate goodness and call it incarnate evil; they were able to look on the Son of God and call him the ally of the devil. The sin against the Holy Spirit is the sin of so often and so consistently refusing God's will that in the end it cannot be recognized when it comes even full-displayed.

Why should that sin be unforgivable? What differentiates it so terribly from all other sins? The answer is simple. When a man reaches that stage, repentance is impossible. If a man cannot recognize the good when he sees it, he cannot desire it. If a man does not recognize evil as evil, he cannot be sorry for it, and wish to depart from it. And if he cannot, in spite of failures, love the

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Matthew 12:31-33

good and hate the evil, then he cannot repent; and if he cannot repent, he cannot be forgiven, for repentance is the only condition of forgiveness. It would save much heartbreak if people would realize that the one man who cannot have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit is the man who fears he has, for the sin against the Holy Spirit can be truly described as the loss of all sense of sin.

It was to that stage the Scribes and Pharisees had come. They had so long been deliberately blind and deliberately deaf to God that they had lost the faculty of recognizing him when they were confronted with him. It was not God who had banished them beyond the pale of forgiveness; they had shut themselves out. Years of resistance to God had made them what they were.

There is a dreadful warning here. We must so heed God all our days that our sensitivity is never blunted, our awareness is never dimmed, our spiritual hearing never becomes spiritual deafness. It is a law of life that we will hear only what we are listening for and only what we have fitted ourselves to hear.

There is a story of a country man who was in the office of a city friend, with the roar of the traffic coming through the windows. Suddenly he said, "Listen!" "What is it?" asked the city man. "A grasshopper," said the country man. Years of listening to the country sounds had attuned his ears to the country sounds, sounds that a city man's ear could not hear at all. On the other hand, let a silver coin drop, and the chink of the silver would have immediately reached the ears of the money-maker, while the country man might never have heard it at all. Only the expert, the man who has made himself able to hear it, will pick out the note of each individual bird in the chorus of the birds. Only the expert, the man who has made himself able to hear it, will distinguish the different instruments in the orchestra and catch a lonely wrong note from the second violins.

It is the law of life that we hear what we have trained ourselves to hear; day by day we must listen to God, so that day by day God's voice may become, not fainter and fainter until we cannot hear it at all, but clearer and clearer until it becomes the one sound to which above all our ears are attuned.

So Jesus finishes with the challenge: "If I have done a good deed, you must admit that I am a good man; if I have done a bad deed, then you may think me a bad man. You can only tell a tree's quality by its fruits, and a man's character by his deeds." But what if a man has become so blind to God that he cannot recognize goodness when he sees it?

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Matthew 12:34-37

HEARTS AND WORDS

Matthew 12:34-37

"You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil speak good things? For it is from the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks. The good man brings out good things from his good treasure house; and the evil man brings out evil things out of his evil treasure house. I tell you that every idle word which men shall speak, of that word shall they render accounts in the day of judgment; for by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

It is little wonder that Jesus chose to speak here about the awful responsibility of words. The Scribes and Pharisees had just spoken the most terrible words. They had looked on the Son of God and called him the ally of the devil. Such words were dreadful words indeed. So Jesus laid down two laws.

(i) The state of a man's heart can be seen through the words he speaks. Long ago Menander the Greek dramatist said: "A man's character can be known from his words." That which is in the heart can come to the surface only through the lips; a man can produce through his lips only what he has in his heart. There is nothing so revealing as words. We do not need to talk to a man long before we discover whether he has a mind that is wholesome or a mind that is dirty; we do not need to listen to him long before we discover whether he has a mind that is kind or a mind that is cruel; we do not need to listen for long to a man who is preaching or teaching or lecturing to find out whether his mind is clear or whether it is muddled. We are continually revealing what we are by what we say.

(ii) Jesus laid it down that a man would specially render account for his idle words. The word that it used for idle is *aergos* (GSN0692); *ergon* (GSN2041) is the Greek for a deed; and the prefix "a"--means "without"; *aergos* (GSN0692) described that which was not meant to produce anything. It is used, for instance of a barren tree, of fallow land, of the Sabbath day when no work could be done, of an idle man. Jesus was saying something which is profoundly true. There are in fact two great truths here.

(a) It is the words which a man speaks without thinking, the words which he utters when the conventional restraints are removed, which really show what he is like. As Plummer puts it, "The carefully spoken words may be a calculated hypocrisy." When a man is consciously on his guard, he will be careful what he says and how he says it; but when he is off his guard, his words reveal his character. It is quite possible for a man's public utterances to be fine and noble, and for his private conversation to be coarse and salacious. In public he carefully chooses what he says; in private he takes the sentinels away, and any word leaves the gateway of his lips. It is so with anger; a man will say in anger what he really thinks and what he has often wanted to say, but which the cool control of prudence has kept him from saying.

Many a man is a model of charm and courtesy in public, when he knows he is being watched and is deliberately careful about his words; while in his own house he is a dreadful example of irritability, sarcasm, temper, criticism, querulous complaint because there is no one to hear and to see. It is a humbling thing--and a warning thing--to remember that the words which show what we are are the words we speak when our guard is down.

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(b) It is often these words which cause the greatest damage. A man may say in anger things he would never have said if he was in control of himself. He may say afterwards that he never meant what he said; but that does not free him from the responsibility of having said it; and the fact that he has said it often leaves a wound that nothing will cure, and erects a barrier that nothing will take away. A man may say in his relaxed moment a coarse and questionable thing that he would never have said in public--and that very thing may lodge in someone's memory and stay there unforgotten. Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher, said, "Choose rather to fling a chance stone than to speak a chance word." Once the hurting word or the soiling word is spoken nothing will bring it back; and it pursues a course of damage wherever it goes.

Let a man examine himself. Let him examine his words that he may discover the state of his heart. And let him remember that God does not judge him by the words he speaks with care and deliberation, but by the words he speaks when the conventional restraints are gone and the real feelings of his heart come bubbling to the surface.

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Matthew 12:38-42

THE ONLY SIGN

Matthew 12:38-42

Then the Scribes and Pharisees answered him: "Teacher," they said, "we wish to see a sign from you." He answered, "It is an evil and apostate generation which seeks a sign. No sign will be given to it, except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For, as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. At the judgment the men of Nineveh will be witnesses against this generation, and they will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and, look you, something more than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise in judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon and, look you, something more than Solomon is here!"

"The Jews," said Paul, "demand signs" (1Cor.1:22). It was characteristic of the Jews that they asked signs and wonders from those who claimed to be the messengers of God. It was as if they said, "Prove your claims by doing something extraordinary." Edersheim quotes a passage from the Rabbinic stories to illustrate the kind of thing that popular opinion expected from the Messiah: "When a certain Rabbi was asked by his disciples about the time of the Messiah's coming, he said, 'I am afraid you will also ask me for a sign.' When they promised that they would not do so, he told them that the gate of Rome would fall and be rebuilt, and fall again, when there would not be time to restore it before the Son of David came. On this they pressed him in spite of his remonstrance for a sign. A sign was given them, that the waters which issued from the cave of Banias were turned into blood.

"Again, when the teaching of Rabbi Eliezer was challenged, he appealed to certain signs. First, a locust bean tree moved at his bidding, one hundred, or according to some, four hundred cubits. Next the channels of water were made to flow backwards. The walls of the academy leaned forward, and were only arrested at the bidding of another Rabbi. Lastly Eliezer exclaimed: 'If the Law is as I teach, let it be proved from heaven.' A voice came from the sky saying, 'What have you to do with Rabbi Eliezer, for the instruction is as he teaches?'"

That is the kind of sign that the Jews desired. They did so because they were guilty of one fundamental mistake. They desired to see God in the abnormal; they forgot that we are never nearer God, and God never shows himself to us so much and so continually as in the ordinary things of every day.

Jesus calls them an evil and adulterous generation. The word adulterous is not to be taken literally; it means apostate. Behind it there is a favourite Old Testament prophetic picture. The relationship between Israel and God was conceived of as a marriage bond with God the husband and Israel the bride. When therefore Israel was unfaithful and gave her love to other gods, the nation was said to be adulterous and to go a-whoring after strange gods. Jer.3:6-11 is a typical passage. There the nation is said to have gone up into every high mountain, and under every green tree, and to have played the harlot. Even when Israel had been put away for infidelity by God, Judah did not take the warning and still played the harlot. Her whoredoms defiled the land, and she

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Matthew 12:38-42

committed adultery with stone and tree. The word describes something worse than physical adultery; it describes that infidelity to God from which all sin, physical and spiritual, springs.

Jesus says that the only sign which will be given to this nation is the sign of Jonah the prophet. Here we have a problem. Matthew says that the sign is that, as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, the Son of man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. It is to be noted that these are not the words of Jesus, but the explanation of Matthew. When Luke reports this incident (Lk.11:29-32) he makes no mention at all of Jonah being in the belly of the whale. He simply says that Jesus said, "For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation" (Lk.11:30).

The fact is that Matthew understood wrongly the point of what Jesus said; and in so doing he made a strange mistake for Jesus was not in the heart of the earth for three nights, but only for two. He was laid in the earth on the night of the first Good Friday and rose on the morning of the first Easter Sunday. The point is that to the Ninevites Jonah himself was God's sign, and Jonah's words were God's message.

Jesus is saying, "You are asking for a sign--I am God's sign. You have failed to recognize me. The Ninevites recognized God's warning in Jonah; the Queen of Sheba recognized God's wisdom in Solomon. In me there has come to you a greater wisdom than Solomon ever had, and a greater message than Jonah ever brought--but you are so blind that you cannot see the truth and so deaf that you cannot hear the warning. And for that very reason the day will come when these people of old time who recognized God when they saw him will be witnesses against you, who had so much better a chance, and failed to recognize God because you refused to do so."

Here is a tremendous truth--Jesus is God's sign, just as Jonah was God's message to the Ninevites and Solomon God's wisdom to the Queen of Sheba. The one real question in life is: "What is our reaction when we are confronted with God in Jesus Christ?" Is that reaction bleak hostility, as it was in the case of the Scribes and Pharisees? Or, is it humble acceptance of God's warning and God's truth as it was in the case of the people of Nineveh, and of the Queen of Sheba? The all-important question is: "What do you think of the Christ?"

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 12:43-45

THE PERIL OF THE EMPTY HEART

Matthew 12:43-45

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it goes through waterless places, seeking for rest, and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will go back to my house, from which I came out,' and when it comes, it finds it empty, swept and in perfect order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and take up their residence there. So the last state of that man becomes worse than the first; so it will be with this evil generation."

There is a whole world of the most practical truth in this compact and eerie little parable about the haunted house.

(i) The evil spirit is banished from the man, not destroyed. That is to say that, in this present age, evil can be conquered, driven away--but it cannot be destroyed. It is always looking for the opportunity to counter-attack and regain the ground that is lost. Evil is a force which may be at bay but is never eliminated.

(ii) That is bound to mean that a negative religion can never be enough. A religion which consists in thou shalt nots will end in failure. The trouble about such a religion is that it may be able to cleanse a man by prohibiting all his evil actions, but it cannot keep him cleansed.

Let us think of this in actual practice. A drunkard may be reformed; he may decide that he will no longer spend his time in the public house; but he must find something else to do; he must find something to fill up his now empty time, or he will simply slip back into his evil ways. A man whose constant pursuit has been pleasure, may decide that he must stop; but he must find something else to do to fill up his time, or he will simply, through the very emptiness of his life, drift back to his old pursuits. A man's life must not only be sterilized from evil; it must be fructified to good. It will always remain true that "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." And if one kind of action is banished from life, another kind must be substituted for it, for life cannot remain empty.

(iii) It therefore follows that the only permanent cure for evil action is Christian action. Any teaching which stops at telling a man what he must not do is bound to be a failure; it must go on to tell him what he must do. The one fatal disease is idleness; even a sterilized idleness will soon be infected. The easiest way to conquer the weeds in a garden is to fill the garden with useful things. The easiest way to keep a life from sin is to fill it with healthy action.

To put it quite simply, the Church will most easily keep her converts when she gives them Christian work to do. Our aim is not the mere negative absence of evil action; it is the positive presence of work for Christ. If we are finding the temptations of evil very threatening, one of the best ways to conquer them is to plunge into activity for God and for our fellow-men.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 12:46-50

TRUE KINSHIP

Matthew 12:46-50

While he was still speaking to the crowds, look you, his mother and his brothers stood outside, for they were seeking an opportunity to speak to him. Someone said to him: "Look you, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, seeking an opportunity to speak to you." He answered the man who had spoken to him: "Who is my mother? And who are my brothers?" And he stretched out his hand towards his disciples. "See," he said, "my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

It was one of the great human tragedies of Jesus' life that, during his lifetime, his nearest and dearest never understood him. "For even his brothers," says John, "did not believe in him" (Jn.7:5). Mark tells us that when Jesus set out on his public mission, his friends tried to restrain him, for they said that he was mad (Mk.3:21). He seemed to them to be busily engaged in throwing his life away in a kind of insanity.

It has often been the case that, when a man embarked on the way of Jesus Christ, his nearest and dearest could not understand him, and were even hostile to him. "A Christian's only relatives," said one of the early martyrs, "are the saints." Many of the early Quakers had this bitter experience. When Edward Burrough was moved to the new way, "his parents resenting his 'fanatical spirit' drove him forth from his home." He pleaded humbly with his father: "Let me stay and be your servant. I will do the work of the hired lad for thee. Let me stay!" But, as his biographer says, "His father was adamant, and much as the boy loved his home and its familiar surroundings, he was to know it no more."

True friendship and true love are founded on certain things without which they cannot exist.

(i) Friendship is founded on a common ideal. People who are very different in their background, their mental equipment, and even their methods, can be firm friends, if they have a common ideal, for which they work, and towards which they press.

(ii) Friendship is founded on a common experience, and on the memories which come from it. It is when two people have together passed through some great experience and when they can together look back on it, that real friendship begins.

(iii) True love is founded on obedience. "You are my friends," said Jesus, "if you do what I command you" (Jn.15:14). There is no way of showing the reality of love unless by the spirit of obedience.

For all these reasons true kinship is not always a matter of a flesh and blood relationship. It remains true that blood is a tie that nothing can break and that many a man finds his delight and his peace in the circle of his family. But it is also true that sometimes a man's nearest and dearest are the people who understand him least, and that he finds his true fellowship with those who work for a common ideal and who share a common experience. This certainly is true--even if a Christian

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Matthew 12:46-50

finds that those who should be closest to him are those who are most out of sympathy with him, there remains for him the fellowship of Jesus Christ and the friendship of all who love the Lord.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 13

MANY THINGS IN PARABLES

Matt.13 is a very important chapter in the pattern of the gospel.

(i) It shows a definite turning-point in the ministry of Jesus. At the beginning of his ministry we find him teaching in the synagogues; but now we find him teaching on the seashore. The change is very significant. It was not that the door of the synagogue was as yet finally shut to him, but it was closing. Even yet in the synagogue he would find a welcome from the common people; but the official leaders of Jewish orthodoxy were now in open opposition to him. When he entered a synagogue now, it would not be to find only an eager crowd of listeners; it would be also to find a bleak-eyed company of Scribes and Pharisees and elders weighing and sifting every word to find a charge against him, and watching every action to turn it into an accusation.

It is one of the supreme tragedies that Jesus was banished from the Church of his day; but that could not stop him from bringing his invitation to men; for when the doors of the synagogue were closed against him, he took to the temple of the open air, and taught men in the village streets, and on the roads, and by the lake-side, and in their own homes. The man who has a real message to deliver, and a real desire to deliver it, will always find a way of giving it to men.

(ii) The great interest of this chapter is that here we see Jesus beginning to use to the full his characteristic method of teaching in parables. Even before this he had used a way of teaching which had the germ of the parable in it. The simile of the salt and the light (Matt.5:13-16), the picture of the birds and the lilies (Matt.6:26-30), the story of the wise and the foolish builder (Matt.7:24-27), the illustration of the garments and the wine-skins (Matt.9:16-17), the picture of the children playing in the market-place (Matt.11:16-17) are all embryo parables. They are truth in pictures.

But it is in this chapter that we find Jesus' way of using parables fully developed and at its most vivid. As someone has said, "Whatever else is true of Jesus, it is certainly true that he was one of the world's supreme masters of the short story." Before we begin to study these parables in detail, let us ask why Jesus used this method and what are the great teaching advantages which it offers.

(a) The parable always makes truth concrete. There are very few people who can grasp and understand abstract ideas; most people think in pictures. We could for long enough try to put into words what beauty is, and at the end of it no one would be very much the wiser; but if we can point at someone and say, "That is a beautiful person," no more description is needed. We might try for long enough to define goodness and in the end leave no clear idea of goodness in people's minds; but everyone recognizes a good person and good deed when he sees them. In order to be understood, every great word must become flesh, every great idea must take form and shape in a person; and the first great quality of a parable is that it makes truth into a picture which all men can see and understand.

(b) It has been said that all great teaching begins from the here and now in order to get to the there and then. If a man wishes to teach people about things which they do not understand, he must begin from things which they do understand. The parable begins with material which every man understands because it is within his own experience, and from that it leads him on to things which

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he does not understand, and opens his eyes to things which he has failed to see. The parable opens a man's mind and eyes by beginning from where he is and leading him on to where he ought to be.

(e) The great teaching virtue of the parable is that it compels interest. The surest way to interest people is to tell them stories. The parable puts truth in the form of a story; the simplest definition of a parable is in fact that it is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." People will not listen, and their attention cannot be retained, unless they are interested; with simple people it is stories which awaken and maintain interest, and the parable is a story.

(d) The parable has the great virtue that it enables and compels a man to discover truth for himself. It does not do a man's thinking for him; it says, "Here is a story. What is the truth in it? What does it mean for you? Think it out for yourself"

There are some things which a man cannot be told; he must discover them for himself. Walter Pater once said that you cannot tell a man the truth; you can only put him into a position in which he can discover it for himself. Unless we discover truth for ourselves, it remains a second-hand and external thing; and further, unless we discover truth for ourselves, we will almost certainly forget it quickly. The parable, by compelling a man to draw his own conclusions and to do his own thinking, at one and the same time makes truth real to him and fixes it in his memory.

(e) The other side of that is that the parable conceals truth from those who are either too lazy to think or too blinded by prejudice to see. It puts the responsibility fairly and squarely on the individual. It reveals truth to him who desires truth; it conceals truth from him who does not wish to see the truth.

(1) One final thing must be remembered. The parable, as Jesus used it, was spoken; it was not read. Its impact had to be immediate, not the result of long study with commentaries and dictionaries. It made truth flash upon a man as the lightning suddenly illuminates a pitch-dark night. In our study of the parables that means two things for us.

First, it means that we must amass every possible detail about the background of life in Palestine, so that the parable will strike us as it did those who heard it for the first time. We must think and study and imagine ourselves back into the minds of those who were listening to Jesus.

Second, it means that generally speaking a parable will have only one point. A parable is not an allegory; an allegory is a story in which every possible detail has an inner meaning; but an allegory has to be read and studied; a parable is heard. We must be very careful not to make allegories of the parables and to remember that they were designed to make one stabbing truth flash out at a man the moment he heard it.

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Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

THE SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW

Matthew 13:1-9; Matthew 13:18-23 (Part 1)

On that day, when he had gone out from the house, Jesus sat on the seashore; and such great crowds gathered to hear him that he went into a boat, and sat there; and the whole crowd took their stand on the seashore; and he spoke many things in parables to them. "Look!" he said, "the sower went out to sow; and, as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside: and the birds came and devoured it. But some seed fell upon stony ground, where it had not much earth; and, because it had no depth of earth, it sprang up immediately; but when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered away because it had no root. Other seed fell upon thorns, and the thorns came up, and choked the life out of it. But others fell on good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who has ears, let him hear."

"Listen then to the meaning of the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes, and snatches away that which was sown in his heart. This is represented by the picture of the seed which was sown by the wayside. The picture of the seed which was sown on the stony ground represents the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root in himself, and is at the mercy of the moment, and so, when affliction and persecution come, because of the word, he at once stumbles. The picture of the seed which is sown among the thorns represents the man who hears the word, but the cares of this world and the seduction of riches choke the word, and it bears no crop. The picture of the seed which was sown on the good ground represents the man who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and produces some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold."

Here is a picture which anyone in Palestine would understand. Here we actually see Jesus using the here and now to get to the there and then. There is a point which the Revised Standard Version obscures. The Revised Standard Version has: "A sower went out to sow." The Greek is not a sower, but: "The sower went out to sow."

What in all likelihood happened was that, as Jesus was using the boat by the lakeside as a pulpit, in one of the fields near the shore a sower was actually sowing, and Jesus took the sower, whom they could all see, as a text, and began: "Look at the sower there sowing his seed in that field!" Jesus began from something which at the moment they could actually see to open their minds to truth which as yet they had never seen.

In Palestine there were two ways of sowing seed. It could be sown by the sower scattering it broadcast as he walked up and down the field. Of course, if the wind was blowing, in that case some of the seed would be caught by the wind and blown into all kinds of places, and sometimes out of the field altogether. The second way was a lazy way, but was not uncommonly used. It was to put a sack of seed on the back of an ass, to tear or cut a hole in the corner of the sack, and then to walk the animal up and down the field while the seed ran out. In such a case some of the seed might well dribble out while the animal was crossing the pathway and before it reached the field at all.

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Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

In Palestine the fields were in long narrow strips; and the ground between the strips was always a right of way. It was used as a common path; and therefore it was beaten as hard as a pavement by the feet of countless passers-by. That is what Jesus means by the wayside. If seed fell there, and some was bound to fall there in whatever way it was sown, there was no more chance of its penetrating into the earth than if it had fallen on the road.

The stony ground was not ground filled with stones; it was what was common in Palestine, a thin skin of earth on top of an underlying shelf of limestone rock. The earth might be only a very few inches deep before the rock was reached. On such ground the seed would certainly germinate; and it would germinate quickly, because the ground grew speedily warm with the heat of the sun. But there was no depth of earth and when it sent down its roots in search of nourishment and moisture, it would meet only the rock, and would be starved to death, and quite unable to withstand the heat of the sun.

The thorny ground was deceptive. When the sower was sowing, the ground would look clean enough. It is easy to make a garden look clean by simply turning it over; but in the ground still lay the fibrous roots of the couch grass and the bishop weed and all the perennial pests, ready to spring to life again. Every gardener knows that the weeds grow with a speed and a strength that few good seeds can equal. The result was that the good seed and the dormant weeds grew together; but the weeds were so strong that they throttled the life out of the seed.

The good ground was deep and clean and soft; the seed could gain an entry; it could find nourishment; it could grow unchecked; and in the good ground it brought forth an abundant harvest.

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Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

THE WORD AND THE HEARER

Matthew 13:1-9; Matthew 13:18-23 (Part 2)

This parable is really aimed at two sets of people.

(a) It is aimed at the hearers of the word. It is fairly frequently held by scholars that the interpretation of the parable in Matt.13:18-23 is not the interpretation of Jesus himself, but the interpretation of the preachers of the early Church, and that it is not in fact correct. It is said that it transgresses the law that a parable is not an allegory, and that it is too detailed to be grasped by listeners at first hearing. If Jesus was really pointing at an actual sower sowing seed, that does not seem a valid objection; and, in any event, the interpretation which identifies the different kinds of soil with different kinds of hearers has always held its place in the Church's thought, and must surely have come from some authoritative source. If so, why not from Jesus himself?

If we take the parable as a warning to hearers, it means that there are different ways of accepting the word of God, and the fruit which it produces depends on the heart of him who accepts it. The fate of any spoken word depends on the hearer. As it has been said, "A jest's prosperity lies not in the tongue of him who tells it, but in the ear of him who hears it." A jest will succeed when it is told to a man who has a sense of humour and is prepared to smile. A jest will fad when it is told to a humourless creature or to a man grimly determined not to be amused. Who then are the hearers described and warned in this parable?

(i) There is the hearer with the shut mind. There are people into whose minds the word has no more chance of gaining entry than the seed has of settling into the ground that has been beaten hard by many feet. There are many things which can shut a man's mind. Prejudice can make a man blind to everything he does not wish to see. The unteachable spirit can erect a barrier which cannot easily be broken down. The unteachable spirit can result from one of two things. It can be the result of pride which does not know that it needs to know; and it can be the result of the fear of new truth and the refusal to adventure on the ways of thought. Sometimes an immoral character and a man's way of life can shut his mind. There may be truth which condemns the things he loves and which accuses the things he does; and many a man refuses to listen to or to recognize the truth which condemns him, for there are none so blind as those who deliberately will not see.

(ii) There is the hearer with the mind like the shallow ground. He is the man who fails to think things out and think them through.

Some people are at the mercy of every new craze. They take a thing up quickly and just as quickly drop it. They must always be in the fashion. They begin some new hobby or begin to acquire some new accomplishment with enthusiasm, but the thing becomes difficult and they abandon it, or the enthusiasm wanes and they lay it aside. Some people's lives are littered with things they began and never finished. A man can be like that with the word. When he hears it he may be swept off his feet with an emotional reaction; but no man can live on an emotion. A man has a mind and it is a moral obligation to have an intelligent faith. Christianity has its demands, and

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these demands must be faced before it can be accepted. The Christian offer is not only a privilege, it is also a responsibility. A sudden enthusiasm can always so quickly become a dying fire.

(iii) There is the hearer who has so many interests in life that often the most important things, get crowded out. It is characteristic of modern life that it becomes increasingly crowded and increasingly fast. A man becomes too busy to pray; he becomes so preoccupied with many things that he forgets to study the word of God: he can become so involved in committees and good works and charitable services that he leaves himself no time for him from whom all love and service come. His business can take such a grip of him that he is too tired to think of anything else. It is not the things which are obviously bad which are dangerous. It is the things which are good, for the "second best is always the worst enemy of the best." It is not even that a man deliberately banishes prayer and the Bible and the Church from his life; it can be that he often thinks of them and intends to make time for them, but somehow in his crowded life never gets round to it.

We must be careful to see that Christ is not shouldered out of the topmost niche in life.

(iv) There is the man who is like the good ground. In his reception of the word there are four stages. Like the good ground, his mind is open. He is at all times willing to learn. He is prepared to hear. He is never either too proud or too busy to listen. Many a man would have been saved all kinds of heartbreak, if he had simply stopped to listen to the voice of a wise friend, or to the voice of God. He understands. He has thought the thing out and knows what this means for him, and is prepared to accept it. He translates his hearing into action. He produces the good fruit of the good seed. The real hearer is the man who listens, who understands, and who obeys.

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Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

NO DESPAIR

Matthew 13:1-9; Matthew 13:18-23 (Part 3)

(b) We said this parable had a double impact. We have looked at the impact it was designed to have on those who hear the word. But it was equally designed to have an impact on those who preach the word. Not only was it meant to say something to the listening crowds; it was also meant to say something to the inner circle of the disciples.

It is not difficult to see that in the hearts of the disciples there must sometimes have been a certain discouragement. To them Jesus was everything, the wisest and the most wonderful of all. But, humanly speaking, he had very little success. The doors of the synagogue were shutting against him. The leaders of orthodox religion were his bitterest critics and were obviously out to destroy him. True, the crowds came to hear him, but there were so few who were really changed, and so many who came to reap the benefit of his healing power, and, who, when they had received it, went away and forgot. There were so many who came to Jesus only for what they could get. The disciples were faced with a situation in which Jesus seemed to rouse nothing but hostility in the leaders of the Church, and nothing but a very evanescent response in the crowd. It is nothing surprising if in the hearts of the disciples there was sometimes deep disappointment. What then does the parable say to the preacher who is discouraged?

Its lesson is clear--the harvest is sure. For discouraged preachers of the word the lesson is in the climax of the parable, in the picture of the seed which brought forth abundant fruit. Some seed may fall by the wayside and be snatched away by the birds; some seed may fall on the shallow ground and never come to maturity; some seed may fall among the thorns and be choked to death; but in spite of all that the harvest does come. No farmer expects every single seed he sows to germinate and bring forth fruit. He knows quite well that some will be blown away by the wind, and some will fall in places where it cannot grow; but that does not stop him sowing. Nor does it make him give up hope of the harvest. The farmer sows in the confidence that, even if some of the seed is wasted, none the less the harvest will certainly come.

So then this is a parable of encouragement to those who sow the seed of the word.

(i) When a man sows the seed of the word, he does not know what he is doing or what effect the seed is having. H. L. Gee tells this story. In the church where he worshipped there was a lonely old man, old Thomas. He had outlived all his friends and hardly anyone knew him. When Thomas died, Gee had the feeling that there would be no one to go to the funeral so he decided to go, so that there might be someone to follow the old man to his last resting-place.

There was no one else and it was a wild, wet day. The funeral reached the cemetery; and at the gate there was a soldier waiting. He was an officer, but on his raincoat there were no rank badges. The soldier came to the graveside for the ceremony; when it was over he stepped forward and before the open grave swept his hand to a salute that might have been given to a king. H. L. Gee walked away with this soldier, and as they walked, the wind blew the soldier's raincoat open to reveal the shoulder badges of a brigadier.

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The brigadier said to Gee: "You will perhaps be wondering what I am doing here. Years ago Thomas was my Sunday School teacher; I was a wild lad and a sore trial to him. He never knew what he did for me, but I owe everything I am or will be to old Thomas, and today I had to come to salute him at the end." Thomas did not know what he was doing. No preacher or teacher ever does. It is our task to sow the seed, and to leave the rest to God.

(ii) When a man sows the seed, he must not look for quick results. There is never any haste in nature's growth. It takes a long, long time before an acorn becomes an oak; and it may take a long, long time before the seed germinates in the heart of a man. But often a word dropped into a man's heart in his boyhood lies dormant until some day it awakens and saves him from some great temptation or even preserves his soul from death. We live in an age which looks for quick results, but in the sowing of the seed we must sow in patience and, in hope, and sometimes must leave the harvest to the years.

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Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35

THE TRUTH AND THE LISTENER

Matthew 13:10-17; Matthew 13:34-35 (Part 1)

The disciples came and said to him: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" "To you," he answered them, "it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom, which only a disciple can understand, but to them it has not been so given. For it will be given to him who already has, and he will have an overflowing knowledge. But what he has will be taken away from him who has not. It is for that reason that I speak to them in parables, for although they can see, they do not see; and although they can hear, they do not hear or understand. There is being fulfilled in them Isaiah's prophecy which says, 'You will certainly hear, but you will not understand; and you will certainly look, but you will not see; for the heart of this people has grown fat, and they hear dully with their ears, and their eyes are smeared, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I will heal them.

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears because they hear. 'This is the truth I tell you-- many prophets and righteous men longed to see things that you are seeing, and did not see them, and to hear the things that you are hearing, and did not hear them.'"

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowds in parables, and it was not his custom to speak to them without a parable. He did this that that which was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled: "I will open my mouth in parables: I will utter things which have been hidden since the foundation of the world."

This is a passage full of difficult things; and we must take time to try to seek out its meaning. First of all there are two general things at the beginning which, if we understand them, will go far to light up the whole passage.

The Greek word in Matt.13:11, which I have translated secrets (as the Revised Standard Version also does), is *mysteria* (GSN3466). This means literally mysteries which is, in fact, how the King James Version renders it. In New Testament times this word mystery was used in a special and a technical way. To us a mystery means simply something dark and difficult and impossible to understand, something mysterious. But in New Testament times it was the technical name for something which was unintelligible to the outsider but crystal clear to the man who had been initiated.

In the time of Jesus in both Greece and Rome the most intense and real religion was found in what were known as the Mystery Religions. These religions had all a common character. They were in essence passion plays in which was told in drama the story of some god or goddess who had lived and suffered and died and who had risen again to blessedness. The initiate was given a long course of instruction in which the inner meaning of the drama was explained to him; that course of instruction extended over months and even years. Before he was allowed finally to see the drama he had to undergo a period of fasting and abstinence. Everything was done to work him up to a state of emotion and of expectation. He was then taken to see the play; the atmosphere was carefully constructed; there was cunning lighting; there were incenses and perfumes; there was sensuous music; there was in many cases a noble liturgy.

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The drama was then played out; and it was intended to produce in the worshipper a complete identification with the god whose story was told on the stage. The worshipper was intended literally to share in the divinity's life and sufferings and death and resurrection, and therefore shared in his immortality. The cry of the worshipper in the end was: "I am Thou, and Thou art I."

We take an actual example. One of the most famous of all the mysteries was the mystery of Isis. Osiris was a wise and good king. Seth, his wicked brother, hated him, and with seventy-two conspirators persuaded him to come to a banquet. There he persuaded him to enter a cunningly wrought coffin which exactly fitted him. When Osiris was in the coffin, the lid was snapped down and the coffin was flung into the Nile. After long and weary search, Isis, the faithful wife of Osiris, found the coffin and brought it home in mourning. But when she was absent from home, the wicked Seth came again, stole the body of Osiris, cut it into fourteen pieces, and scattered it throughout all Egypt. Once again Isis set out on her weary and sorrowful quest. After long search she found all the pieces; by a wondrous power the pieces were fitted together and Osiris rose from the dead; and he became for ever afterwards the immortal king of the living and the dead.

It is easy to see how moving a story that could be made to one who had undergone a long instruction, to one who saw it in the most carefully calculated setting. There is the story of the good king; there is the attack of sin; there is the sorrowing search of love; there is the triumphant finding of love; there is the raising to a life which has conquered death. It was with that experience that the worshipper was meant to identify himself, and he was supposed to emerge from it, in the famous phrase of the Mystery Religions, "reborn for eternity".

That is a mystery; something meaningless to the outsider, but supremely precious to the initiate. In point of fact the Lord's Supper is like that. To one who has never seen such a thing before, it will look like a company of men eating little pieces of bread and drinking little sips of wine, and it might even appear ridiculous. But to the man who knows what he is doing, to the man initiated into its meaning, it is the most precious and the most moving act of worship in the church.

So Jesus says to his disciples: "Outsiders cannot understand what I say; but you know me; you are my disciples; you can understand." Christianity can be understood only from the inside. It is only after personal encounter with Jesus Christ that a man can understand. To criticize from outside is to criticize in ignorance. It is only the man who is prepared to become a disciple who can enter into the most precious things of the Christian faith.

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Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35

LIFE'S STERN LAW

Matthew 13:10-17; Matthew 13:34-35 (Part 2)

The second general thing is the saying in Matt.13:12 that still more will be given to the man who has, and even what he has will be taken away from the man who has not. At first sight this seems nothing less than cruel; but so far from being cruel, it simply states a truth which is an inescapable law of life.

In every sphere of life more is given to the man who has, and what he has is taken away from the man who has not. In the world of scholarship the student who labours to amass knowledge is capable of acquiring more knowledge. It is to him that the research, the advanced courses, the deeper things are given; and that is so because by his diligence and fidelity he has made himself fit to receive them. On the other hand, the student who is lazy and refuses to work inevitably loses even the knowledge which he has.

Many a person in childhood and schooldays had a smattering of Latin or of French or of some other language, and in later life lost every word, because he never made any attempt to develop or use them. Many a person had some skill in a craft or game and lost it, because he neglected it. The diligent and hard-working person is in a position to be given more and more; the lazy person may well lose even what he has. Any gift can be developed; and, since nothing in life stands still, if a gift is not developed, it is lost.

It is so with goodness. Every temptation we conquer makes us more able to conquer the next and every temptation to which we fail makes us less able to withstand the next attack. Every good thing we do, every act of self-discipline and of service, makes us better able for the next; and every time we fail to use such an opportunity we make ourselves less able to seize the next when it comes.

Life is always a process of gaining more or losing more. Jesus laid down the truth that the nearer a man lives to him, the nearer to the Christian ideal he will grow. And the more a man drifts away from Christ, the less he is able to reach to goodness; for weakness, like strength, is an increasing thing.

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Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35

MAN'S BLINDNESS AND GOD'S PURPOSE

Matthew 13:10-17; Matthew 13:34-35 (Part 3)

Matt.13:13-17 of this passage are among the most difficult verses in the whole gospel narrative. And the fact that they appear differently in the different gospels shows how much that difficulty was felt in the early Church. Being the earliest gospel, we would expect Mark to be the nearest to the actual words of Jesus. It (Mk.4:11-12) has:

To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven.

If these verses be taken at their superficial value with no attempt to understand their real meaning, they make the extraordinary statement that Jesus spoke to men in parables in order that they might not understand, and in order to prevent them turning to God and finding forgiveness.

Matthew is later than Mark and makes one significant change:

This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

As Matthew has it, Jesus spoke in parables because men were too blind and deaf to glimpse the truth in any other way.

It is to be noted that this saying of Jesus leads into a quotation from Isa.6:9-10. That was another passage which caused a great deal of heart-searching. In the Revised Standard Version, which is a literal translation of the Hebrew, it runs:

Go, and say to this people: "Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive." Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.

Again it sounds as if God had deliberately blinded the eyes and deafened the ears and hardened the hearts of the people, so that they would be unable to understand. The nation's lack of understanding is made to seem a deliberate act of God.

Just as Matthew toned down Mark, so the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, and the version which most Jews used in the time of Jesus, toned down the original Hebrew:

Go, say to this people: "Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not

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understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive." For the heart of this people has become gross, and with their ears they hear heavily, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

The Septuagint, so to speak, removes the responsibility from God and lays it fairly and squarely upon the people.

What is the explanation of all this? We may be certain of one thing--whatever else this passage means, it cannot mean that Jesus deliberately delivered his message in such a way that people would fail to understand it. Jesus did not come to hide the truth from men; he came to reveal it. And beyond a doubt there were times when men grasped that truth.

When the orthodox Jewish leaders heard the threat of the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, they understood all right, and recoiled in horror from its message to say: "God forbid!" (Lk.20:16). And in Matt.13:34-35 of this present passage Jesus quotes a saying of the Psalmist:

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us.

That is a quotation from Ps.78:1-3, and in it the Psalmist knows that what he is saying will be understood, and that he is recalling men to truth that both they and their fathers have known.

The truth is that the words of Isaiah, and the use that Jesus made of them, must be read with insight and with an attempt to put ourselves in the position both of Isaiah and of Jesus. These words tell of three things.

(i) They tell of a prophet's bewilderment. The prophet brought a message to people which to him was crystal clear; and he was bewildered that they could not understand it. That is repeatedly the experience of both the preacher and the teacher. Often when we preach or teach or discuss things with people, we try to tell them something which to us is relevant, vivid, of absorbing interest and of paramount importance, and they hear it with a complete lack of interest, understanding, and urgency. And we are amazed and bewildered that what means so much to us apparently means nothing at all to them, that what kindles a fire in our bones leaves them stone cold, that what thrills and moves our hearts leaves them icily indifferent. That is the experience of every teacher and preacher and evangelist.

(ii) They tell of a prophet's despair. It was Isaiah's feeling that his preaching was actually doing more harm than good, that he might as well speak to a brick wall, that there was no way into the mind and the heart of this deaf and blind people, that, as far as any effects went, they seemed to be getting worse instead of better. Again that is the experience of every teacher and preacher. There

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are times when those whom we seek to win seem, in spite of all our efforts, to be getting further away from, instead of nearer to, the Christian way. Our words go whistling down the wind; our message meets the impenetrable barrier of men's indifference; the result of all our work seems less than nothing, for at the end of it men seem further away from God than they were at the beginning.

(iii) But these words tell of something more than a prophet's bewilderment and a prophet's despair; they also tell of a prophet's ultimate faith. Here we find ourselves face to face with a Jewish conviction apart from which much of what the prophet, and of what Jesus, and of what the early Church said is not fully intelligible.

To put it simply, it was a primary article of Jewish belief that nothing in this world happens outside the will of God; and when they said nothing they meant literally nothing. It was just as much God's will when men did not listen as when they did; it was just as much God's will when men refused to understand the truth as when they welcomed it. The Jew clung fast to the belief that everything had its place in the purpose of God and that somehow God was weaving together success and failure, good and evil in a web of his designing.

The ultimate purpose of everything was good. It is exactly this thought that Paul plays on in Rom.9:11. These are the chapters which tell how the Jews, the chosen people of God, actually refused God's truth and crucified God's son when he came to them. That sounds inexplicable. But what was the result of it? The gospel went out to the Gentiles; and the ultimate result is that the Gentiles will some day gather in the Jews. The apparent evil is gathered up in a larger good, for all is within the plan of God.

That is what Isaiah was feeling. At first he was bewildered and in despair; then the light came and in effect he said "I cannot understand the conduct of this people; but I know that all this failure is somehow in the ultimate purpose of God, and he will use it for his own ultimate glory and for the ultimate good of men." Jesus took these words of Isaiah and used them to encourage his disciples; he said in effect, "I know that this looks disappointing; I know how you are feeling when men's minds and hearts refuse to receive the truth and when their eyes refuse to recognize it; but in this, too, there is purpose--and some day you will see it."

Here is our own great encouragement. Sometimes we see our harvest and we are glad; sometimes there seems to be nothing but barren ground, nothing but total lack of response, nothing but failure. That may be so to human eyes and human minds, but at the back of it there is a God who is fitting even that failure into the divine plan of his omniscient mind and his omnipotent power. There are no failures and there are no loose ends in the ultimate plan of God.

Barclay's Commentary Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

THE ACT OF AN ENEMY

Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 13:36-43 (Part 1)

Jesus put forward another parable. "The Kingdom of Heaven," he said to them, "is like what happened when a man sowed good seed in his field. When men slept, his enemy came and sowed darnel in the middle of the corn, and went away. When the green grain grew, and when it began to produce its crop, then the darnel appeared. The servants of the master of the house came to him and said, 'Sir, did we not sow good seed in your field? From where, then, did it get the darnel?' 'An enemy has done this,' he said to them. The servants said to him, 'Do you wish us to go and collect the darnel?' But he said, 'No; for if you gather the darnel the danger is that you may root up the corn at the same time. Let them both grow together until the harvest time; and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather the darnel and bind them into bundles for burning. But gather the corn into my storehouse."'"

When he had sent the crowds away, he went into the house. His disciples came to him. "Explain to us," they said, "The parable of the darnel in the field." He answered: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed stands for the sons of the Kingdom; the darnel is the sons of the evil one. The enemy who sowed it is the devil. The harvest is the end of this age; the reapers are the angels. Just as the darnel is gathered and burned with fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather all the stumbling-blocks, and all those who act lawlessly, out of the Kingdom, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; and weeping and gnashing of teeth will be there. Then the righteous will shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Who has ears let him hear."

The pictures in this parable would be clear and familiar to a Palestinian audience. Tares were one of the curses against which a farmer had to labour. They were a weed called bearded darnel (*Lolium Temulentum*). In their early stages the tares so closely resembled the wheat that it was impossible to distinguish the one from the other. When both had headed out it was easy to distinguish them; but by that time their roots were so intertwined that the tares could not be weeded out without tearing the wheat out with them.

Thomson in *The Land and the Book* tells how he saw the tares in the Wady Hamam: "The grain is just in the proper stage of development to illustrate the parable. In those parts where the grain has headed out, the tares have done the same, and there a child cannot mistake them for wheat or barley; but when both are less developed, the closest scrutiny will often fail to detect them. I cannot do it at all with any confidence. Even the farmers, who in this country generally weed their fields, do not attempt to separate the one from the other. They would not only mistake good grain for them, but very commonly the roots of the two are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them without plucking up both. Both, therefore, must be left to grow together until the time of harvest."

The tares and the wheat are so like each other that the Jews called the tares bastard wheat. The Hebrew for tares is *zunim*, whence comes the Greek *zizanion* (GSN2215); *zunim* is said to be connected with the word *zanah* (HSN2181), which means to commit fornication; and the popular

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Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

story is that the tares took their origin in the time of wickedness which preceded the flood, for at that time the whole creation, men, animals and plants, all went astray, and committed fornication and brought forth contrary to nature. In their early stages the wheat and the tares so closely resembled each other that the popular idea was that the tares were a kind of wheat which had gone wrong.

The wheat and tares could not be safely separated when both were growing, but in the end they had to be separated, because the grain of the bearded darnel is slightly poisonous. It causes dizziness and sickness and is narcotic in its effects, and even a small amount has a bitter and unpleasant taste. In the end it was usually separated by hand. Levison describes the process: "Women have to be hired to pick the darnel grain out of the seed which is to be milled.... As a rule the separation of the darnel from the wheat is done after the threshing. By spreading the grain out on a large tray which is set before the women, they are able to pick out the darnel, which is a seed similar in shape and size to wheat, but slate-grey in colour."

So then the darnel in its early stages was indistinguishable from the wheat, but in the end it had to be laboriously separated from it, or the consequences were serious.

The picture of a man deliberately sowing darnel in someone else's field is by no means only imagination. That was actually sometimes done. To this day in India one of the direst threats which a man can make to his enemy is "I will sow bad seed in your field." And in codified Roman law this crime is forbidden and its punishment laid down.

The whole series of pictures within this parable was familiar to the people of Galilee who heard it for the first time.

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Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

THE TIME FOR JUDGMENT

Matthew 13:24-30; Matthew 13:36-43 (Part 2)

It may well be said that in its lessons this is one of the most practical parables Jesus ever told.

(i) It teaches us that there is always a hostile power in the world, seeking and waiting to destroy the good seed. Our experience is that both kinds of influence act upon our lives, the influence which helps the seed of the word to flourish and to grow, and the influence which seeks to destroy the good seed before it can produce fruit at all. The lesson is that we must be for ever on our guard.

(ii) It teaches us how hard it is to distinguish between those who are in the Kingdom and those who are not. A man may appear to be good and may in fact be bad; and a man may appear to be bad and may yet be good. We are much too quick to classify people and label them good or bad without knowing all the facts.

(iii) It teaches us not to be so quick with our judgments. If the reapers had had their way, they would have tried to tear out the darnel and they would have torn out the wheat as well. Judgment had to wait until the harvest came. A man in the end will be judged, not by any single act or stage in his life, but by his whole life. Judgment cannot come until the end. A man may make a great mistake, and then redeem himself and, by the grace of God, atone for it by making the rest of life a lovely thing. A man may live an honourable life and then in the end wreck it all by a sudden collapse into sin. No one who sees only part of a thing can judge the whole; and no one who knows only part of a man's life can judge the whole man.

(iv) It teaches us that judgment does come in the end. Judgment is not hasty, but judgment comes. It may be that, humanly speaking, in this life the sinner seems to escape the consequences, but there is a life to come. It may be that, humanly speaking, goodness never seems to enter into its reward, but there is a new world to redress the balance of the old.

(v) It teaches us that the only person with the right to judge is God. It is God alone who can discern the good and the bad; it is God alone who sees all of a man and all of his life. It is God alone who can judge.

So, then, ultimately this parable is two things--it is a warning not to judge people at all, and it is a warning that in the end there comes the judgment of God.

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Matthew 13:31-32

THE SMALL BEGINNING

Matthew 13:31-32

Jesus put forward another parable to them: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, and, when it has grown, it is the greatest of herbs, and it becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches."

The mustard plant of Palestine was very different from the mustard plant which we know in this country. To be strictly accurate the mustard seed is not the smallest of seeds; the seed of the cypress tree, for instance, is still smaller; but in the east it was proverbial for smallness. For example, the Jews talked of a drop of blood as small as a mustard seed; or, if they were talking of some tiny breach of the ceremonial law, they would speak of a defilement as small as a mustard seed; and Jesus himself used the phrase in this way when he spoke of faith as a grain of mustard seed (Matt.17:20).

In Palestine this little grain of mustard seed did grow into something very like a tree. Thomson in *The Land and the Book* writes: "I have seen this plant on the rich plain of Akkar as tall as the horse and his rider." He says, "With the help of my guide, I uprooted a veritable mustard-tree which was more than twelve feet high." In this parable there is no exaggeration at all.

Further, it was a common sight to see such mustard bushes or trees surrounded with a cloud of birds, for the birds love the little black seeds of the tree, and settle on the tree to eat them.

Jesus said that his Kingdom was like the mustard seed and its growth into a tree. The point is crystal clear. The Kingdom of Heaven starts from the smallest beginnings, but no man knows where it will end. In eastern language and in the Old Testament itself one of the commonest pictures of a great empire is the picture of a great tree, with the subject nations depicted as birds finding rest and shelter within its branches (Eze.31:6). This parable tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven begins very small but that in the end many nations will be gathered within it.

It is the fact of history that the greatest things must always begin with the smallest beginnings.

(i) An idea which may well change civilization begins with one man. In the British Empire it was William Wilberforce who was responsible for the freeing of the slaves. The idea of that liberation came to him when he read an exposure of the slave trade by Thomas Clarkson. He was a close friend of Pitt, then Prime Minister, and one day he was sitting with him and George Grenville in Pitt's garden at Holwood. It was a scene of beauty, with the Vale of Keston opening out before them, but the thoughts of Wilberforce were not on that but on the blots of the world. Suddenly Pitt turned to him: "Wilberforce," he said, "why don't you give a notice of a motion on the slave-trade?" An idea was sown in the mind of one man, and that idea changed life for hundreds of thousands of people. An idea must find a man willing to be possessed by it; but when it finds such a man an unstoppable tide begins to flow.

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(ii) A witness must begin with one man. Cecil Northcott tells in one of his books that a group of young people from many nations were discussing how the Christian gospel might be spread. They talked of propaganda, of literature, of all the ways of disseminating the gospel in the twentieth century. Then the girl from Africa spoke. "When we want to take Christianity to one of our villages," she said, "we don't send them books. We take a Christian family and send them to live in the village and they make the village Christian by living there." In a group or society, or school or factory, or shop or office, again and again it is the witness of one individual which brings in Christianity. The one man or woman set on fire for Christ is the person who kindles others.

(iii) A reformation begins with one person. One of the great stories of the Christian Church is the story of Telemachus. He was a hermit of the desert, but something told him--the call of God--that he must go to Rome. He went. Rome was nominally Christian, but even in Christian Rome the gladiatorial games went on, in which men fought with each other, and crowds roared with the lust for blood. Telemachus found his way to the games. Eighty thousand people were there to spectate. He was horrified. Were these men slaughtering each other not also children of God? He leaped from his seat, right into the arena, and stood between the gladiators. He was tossed aside. He came back. The crowd were angry; they began to stone him. Still he struggled back between the gladiators. The prefect's command rang out; a sword flashed in the sunlight, and Telemachus was dead. Suddenly there was a hush; suddenly the crowd realized what had happened; a holy man lay dead.

Something happened that day to Rome, for there were never again any gladiatorial games. By his death one man had let loose something that cleansed an empire. Someone must begin a reformation; he need not begin it in a nation; he may begin it in his home or where he works. If he begins it no man knows where it will end.

(iv) But this was one of the most personal parables Jesus ever spoke. Sometimes his disciples must have despaired. Their little band was so small and the world was so wide. How could they ever win and change it. Yet with Jesus an invincible force entered the world. Hugh Martin quotes H. G. Wells as saying, "His is easily the dominant figure in history.... A historian without any theological bias whatever should find that he simply cannot portray the progress of humanity honestly without giving a foremost place to a penniless teacher from Nazareth." In this parable Jesus is saying to his disciples, and to his followers today, that there must be no discouragement, that they must serve and witness each in his place, that each one must be the small beginning from which the Kingdom grows until the kingdoms of the earth finally become the Kingdom of God

"Though few and small and weak your bands,
Strong in your Captain's strength,
Go to the conquest of all lands;
All must be His at length."

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Matthew 13:33

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF CHRIST

Matthew 13:33 (Part 1)

He spoke another parable to them: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened."

In this chapter there is nothing more significant than the sources from which Jesus drew his parables. In every case he drew them from the scenes and activities of everyday life. He began with things which were entirely familiar to his hearers in order to lead them to things which had never yet entered their minds. He took the parable of the sower from the farmer's field and the parable of the mustard seed from the husbandman's garden; he took the parable of the wheat and the tares from the perennial problem which confronts the farmer in his struggle with the weeds, and the parable of the drag-net from the seashore of the Sea of Galilee. He took the parable of the hidden treasure from the everyday task of digging in a field, and the parable of the pearl of great price from the world of commerce and trade. But in this parable of the leaven Jesus came nearer home than in any other because he took it from the kitchen of an ordinary house.

In Palestine bread was baked at home; three measures of meal was, as Levinson points out, just the average amount which would be needed for a baking for a fairly large family, like the family at Nazareth. Jesus took his parable of the Kingdom from something that he had often seen his mother, Mary, do. Leaven was a little piece of dough kept over from a previous baking, which had fermented in the keeping.

In Jewish language and thought leaven is almost always connected with an evil influence; the Jews connected fermentation with putrefaction and leaven stood for that which is evil (compare Matt.16:6; 1Cor.5:6-8; Gal.5:9). One of the ceremonies of preparation for the Passover Feast was that every scrap of leaven had to be sought out from the house and burned. It may well be that Jesus chose this illustration of the Kingdom deliberately. There would be a certain shock in hearing the Kingdom of God compared to leaven; and the shock would arouse interest and rivet attention, as an illustration from an unusual and unexpected source always does.

The whole point of the parable lies in one thing--the transforming power of the leaven. Leaven changed the character of a whole baking. Unleavened bread is like a water biscuit, hard, dry, unappetizing and uninteresting; bread baked with leaven is soft and porous and spongy, tasty and good to eat. The introduction of the leaven causes a transformation in the dough; and the coming of the Kingdom causes a transformation in life.

Let us gather together the characteristics of this transformation.

(i) Christianity transformed life for the individual man. In 1Cor.6:9-10, Paul gathers together a list of the most terrible and disgusting kinds of sinners, and then, in the next verse, there comes the tremendous statement: "And such were some of you." As Denney had it, we must never forget that the function and the power of Christ is to make bad men good. The transformation of Christianity

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begins in the individual life, for through Christ the victim of temptation can become the victor over it.

(ii) There are four great social directions in which Christianity transformed life. Christianity transformed life for women. The Jew in his morning prayer thanked God that he had not made him a Gentile, a slave or a woman. In Greek civilization the woman lived a life of utter seclusion, with nothing to do beyond the household tasks. K. J. Freeman writes of the life of the Greek child or young man even in the great days of Athens, "When he came home, there was no home life. His father was hardly ever in the house. His mother was a nonentity, living in the women's apartments; he probably saw little of her." In the eastern lands it was often possible to see a family on a journey. The father would be mounted on an ass; the mother would be walking, and probably bent beneath a burden. One demonstrable historical truth is that Christianity transformed life for women.

(iii) Christianity transformed life for the weak and the ill. In heathen life the weak and the ill were considered a nuisance. In Sparta a child, when he was born, was submitted to the examiners; if he was fit, he was allowed to live; if he was weakly or deformed, he was exposed to death on the mountain side. Dr. A. Rendle Short points out that the first blind asylum was founded by Thalasius, a Christian monk; the first free dispensary was founded by Apollonius, a Christian merchant; the first hospital of which there is any record was founded by Fabiola, a Christian lady. Christianity was the first faith to be interested in the broken things of life.

(iv) Christianity transformed life for the aged. Like the weak, the aged were a nuisance. Cato, the Roman writer on agriculture, gives advice to anyone who is taking over a farm: "Look over the livestock and hold a sale. Sell your oil, if the price is satisfactory, and sell the surplus of your wine and grain. Set worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, wool, hides, an old wagon, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is superfluous." The old, whose day's work was done, were fit for nothing else than to be discarded on the rubbish heaps of life. Christianity was the first faith to regard men as persons and not instruments capable of doing so much work.

(v) Christianity transformed life for the child. In the immediate background of Christianity, the marriage relationship had broken down, and the home was in peril. Divorce was so common that it was neither unusual nor particularly blameworthy for a woman to have a new husband every year. In such circumstances children were a disaster; and the custom of simply exposing children to death was tragically common. There is a well-known letter from a man Hilarion, who was gone off to Alexandria, to his wife Alis, whom he has left at home. He writes to her: "If--good luck to you--you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out." In modern civilization life is almost butt round the child; in ancient civilization the child had a very good chance of dying before it had begun to live.

Anyone who asks the question: "What has Christianity done for the world?" has delivered himself into a Christian debator's hands. There is nothing in history so unanswerably demonstrable as the transforming power of Christianity and of Christ on the individual life and on the life of society.

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Matthew 13:33

THE WORKING OF THE LEAVEN

Matthew 13:33 (Part 2)

There remains only one question in regard to this parable of the leaven. Almost all scholars would agree that it speaks of the transforming power of Christ and of his Kingdom in the life of the individual and of the world; but there is a difference of opinion as to how that transforming power works.

(i) It is sometimes said that the lesson of this parable is that the Kingdom works unseen. We cannot see the leaven working in the dough, any more than we can see a flower growing, but the work of the leaven is always going on. Just so, it is said, we cannot see the work of the Kingdom, but always the Kingdom is working and drawing men and the world ever nearer to God.

This, then, would be a message of encouragement. It would mean that at all times we must take the long view, that we must not compare things of the present day with last week, month, or even last year, but that we must look back down the centuries, and then we will see the steady progress of the Kingdom. As A. H. Clough had it:

"Say not, 'The struggle nought availeth;
The labour and the wounds are vain;
The enemy faints not nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.'
If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase even now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.
And, not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward, look! the land is bright."

On this view the parable teaches that with Jesus Christ and his gospel a new force has been let loose in the world, and that, silently but inevitably, that force is working for righteousness in the world and God indeed is working his purpose out as year succeeds to year.

(ii) But it has sometimes been said, as for instance by C. H. Dodd, that the lesson of the parable is the very opposite of this, and that, so far from being unseen, the working of the Kingdom can be plainly seen. The working of the leaven is plain for all to see. Put the leaven into the dough, and the leaven changes the dough from a passive lump into a seething, bubbling, heaving mass. Just so the working of the Kingdom is a violent and disturbing force plain for all to see. When Christianity

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came to Thessalonica the cry was: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Ac.17:6). The action of Christianity is disruptive, disturbing, violent in its effect.

There is undeniable truth there. It is true that men crucified Jesus Christ because he disturbed all their orthodox habits and conventions; again and again it has been true that Christianity has been persecuted because it desired to take both men and society and remake them. It is abundantly true that there is nothing in this world so disturbing as Christianity; that is, in fact, the reason why so many people resent it and refuse it, and wish to eliminate it.

When we come to think of it, we do not need to choose between these two views of the parable, because they are both true. There is a sense in which the Kingdom, the power of Christ, the Spirit of God, is always working, whether or not we see that work; and there is a sense in which it is plain to see. Many an individual life is manifestly and violently changed by Christ; and at the same time there is the silent operation of the purposes of God in the long road of history.

We may put it in a picture like this. The Kingdom, the power of Christ, the Spirit of God, is like a great river, which for much of its course glides on beneath the ground unseen, but which ever and again comes to the surface in all its greatness, plain for all to see. This parable teaches both that the Kingdom is for ever working unseen, and that there are times in every individual life and in history when the work of the Kingdom is so obvious, and so manifestly powerful, that all can see it.

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Matthew 13:44

ALL IN THE DAY'S WORK

Matthew 13:44

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure which lay hidden in a field. A man found it, and hid it; and, as a result of his joy, away he goes, and sells everything that he has, and buys the field."

Although this parable sounds strange to us, it would sound perfectly natural to people in Palestine in the days of Jesus, and even to this day it paints a picture which people in the East would know well.

In the ancient world there were banks, but not banks such as ordinary people could use. Ordinary people used the ground as the safest place to keep their most cherished belonging. In the parable of the talents the worthless servant hid his talent in the ground, lest he should lose it (Matt.25:25). There was a rabbinic saying that there was only one safe repository for money--the earth.

This was still more the case in a land where a man's garden might at any time become a battlefield. Palestine was probably the most fought over country in the world; and, when the tide of war threatened to flow over them, it was common practice for people to hide their valuables in the ground, before they took to flight, in the hope that the day would come when they could return and regain them. Josephus speaks of "the gold and the silver and the rest of that most precious furniture which the Jews had, and which the owners treasured up underground against the uncertain fortunes of war."

Thomson in *The Land and the Book*, which was first published in 1876, tells of a case of treasure discovery which he himself came upon in Sidon. There was in that city a famous avenue of acacia trees. Certain workmen, digging in a garden on that avenue, uncovered several copper pots full of gold coins. They had every intention of keeping the find to themselves; but there were so many of them, and they were so wild with excitement, that their treasure trove was discovered and claimed by the local government. The coins were all coins of Alexander the Great and his father Philip. Thomson suggests that, when Alexander unexpectedly died in Babylon, news came through to Sidon, and some Macedonian officer or government official buried these coins with the intention of appropriating them in the chaos which was bound to follow Alexander's death.

Thomson goes on to tell how there are even people who make it their life's business to search for hidden treasure, and that they get into such a state of excitement that they have been known to faint at the discovery of one single coin. When Jesus told this story, he told the kind of story that anyone would recognize in Palestine and in the east generally.

It may be thought that in this parable Jesus glorifies a man who was guilty of very sharp practice in that he hid the treasure, and then took steps to possess himself of it. There are two things to be said about that. First, although Palestine in the time of Jesus was under the Romans and under Roman law, in the ordinary, small, day to day things it was traditional Jewish law which was used; and in regard to hidden treasure Jewish Rabbinic law was quite clear: "What finds belong to the finder, and what finds must one cause to be proclaimed? These finds belong to the finder--if a man

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finds scattered fruit, scattered money...these belong to the finder." In point of fact this man had a prior right to what he had found.

Second, even apart from that, when we are dealing with any parable, the details are never meant to be stressed; the parable has one main point, and to that point everything else is subservient. In this parable the great point is the joy of the discovery that made the man willing to give up everything to make the treasure indubitably his own. Nothing else in the parable really matters.

(i) The lesson of this parable is, first, that the man found the precious thing, not so much by chance, as in his day's work. It is true to say that he stumbled all unexpectedly upon it, but he did so when he was going about his daily business. And it is legitimate to infer that he must have been going about his daily business with diligence and efficiency, because he must have been digging deep, and not merely scraping the surface, in order to strike against the treasure. It would be a sad thing, if it were only in churches, in so-called holy places, and on so-called religious occasions that we found God, and felt close to him.

There is an unwritten saying of Jesus which never found its way into any of the gospels, but which rings true: "Raise the stone and thou shalt find me; cleave the wood and I am there." When the mason is working on the stone, when the carpenter is working with the wood, Jesus Christ is there. True happiness, true satisfaction, the sense of God, the presence of Christ are all to be found in the day's work, when that day's work is honestly and conscientiously done. Brother Lawrence, great saint and mystic, spent much of his working life in the monastery kitchen amidst the dirty dishes, and he could say, "I felt Jesus Christ as close to me in the kitchen as ever I did at the blessed sacrament."

(ii) The lesson of this parable is, second, that it is worth any sacrifice to enter the Kingdom. What does it mean to enter the Kingdom? When we were studying the Lord's Prayer (Matt.6:10), we found that we could say that the Kingdom of God is a state of society upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. Therefore to enter the Kingdom is to accept and to do God's will. So, then, it is worth anything to do God's will. Suddenly, as the man discovered the treasure, there may flash upon us, in some moment of illumination, the conviction of what God's will is for us. To accept it may be to give up certain aims and ambitions which are very dear, to abandon certain habits and ways of life which are very difficult to lay down, to take on a discipline and self-denial which are by no means easy, in a word, to take up our cross and follow after Jesus. But there is no other way to peace of mind and heart in this life and to glory in the life to come. It is indeed worth giving up everything to accept and to do the will of God.

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Matthew 13:45-46

THE PRECIOUS PEARL

Matthew 13:45-46

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant who was seeking goodly pearls. When he had found a very valuable pearl, he went away and sold everything he had, and bought it."

In the ancient world pearls had a very special place in men's hearts. People desired to possess a lovely pearl, not only for its money value, but for its beauty. They found a pleasure in simply handling it and contemplating it. They found an aesthetic joy simply in possessing and looking at a pearl. The main sources of pearls in those days were the shores of the Red Sea and far-off Britain itself, but a merchant would scour the markets of the world to find a pearl which was of surpassing beauty. There are certain most suggestive truths hidden in this parable.

(i) It is suggestive to find the Kingdom of Heaven compared to a pearl. To the ancient peoples, as we have just seen, a pearl was the loveliest of all possessions; that means that the Kingdom of Heaven is the loveliest thing in the world. Let us remember what the Kingdom is. To be in the Kingdom is to accept and to do the will of God. That is to say, to do the will of God is no grim, grey, agonizing thing; it is a lovely thing. Beyond the discipline, beyond the sacrifice, beyond the self-denial, beyond the cross, there lies the supreme loveliness which is nowhere else. There is only one way to bring peace to the heart, joy to the mind, beauty to the life, and that is to accept and to do the will of God.

(ii) It is suggestive to find that there are other pearls but only one pearl of great price. That is to say, there are many fine things in this world and many things in which a man can find loveliness. He can find loveliness in knowledge and in the reaches of the human mind, in art and music and literature and all the triumphs of the human spirit; he can find loveliness in serving his fellow-men, even if that service springs from humanitarian rather than from purely Christian motives; he can find loveliness in human relationships. These are all lovely, but they are all lesser loveliness. The supreme beauty lies in the acceptance of the will of God. This is not to belittle the other things; they too are pearls; but the supreme pearl is the willing obedience which makes us friends of God.

(iii) We find in this parable the same point as in the previous one but with a difference. The man who was digging the field was not searching for treasure; it came on him all unaware. The man who was searching for pearls was spending his life in the search.

But no matter whether the discovery was the result of a moment or the result of a life-time's search, the reaction was the same--everything had to be sold and sacrificed to gain the precious thing. Once again we are left with the same truth--that, however a man discovers the will of God for himself, whether it be in the lightning flash of a moment's illumination or at the end of a long and conscious search, it is worth anything unhesitatingly to accept it.

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Matthew 13:47-50

THE CATCH AND THE SEPARATION

Matthew 13:47-50

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net which was cast into the sea, and which gathered all kinds of things. When it was full, they hauled it up on to the shore, and sat down, and collected the good contents into containers, but threw the useless contents away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come, and they will separate the evil from the righteous, and they will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there."

It was the most natural thing in the world that Jesus should use illustrations from fishing when he was speaking to fishermen. It was as if he said to them: "Look how your daffy work speaks to you of the things of heaven."

In Palestine there were two main ways of fishing. One was with the casting-net, the amphiblestron (GSN0293). It was a hand-net which was cast from the shore. Thomson describes the process: "The net is in shape like the top of a bell-tent, with a long cord fastened to the apex. This is tied to the arm, and the net so folded that, when it is thrown, it expands to its utmost circumference, around which are strung beads of lead to make it drop suddenly to the bottom. Now, see the actor; half bent, and more than half naked, he keenly watches the playful surf, and there he spies his game tumbling in carelessly toward him. Forward he leaps to meet it. Away goes the net, expanding as it flies, and its leaded circumference strikes the bottom ere the silly fish is aware that its meshes have closed around him. By the aid of the cord the fishermen leisurely draws up the net and the fish with it. This requires a keen eye, an active frame, and great skill in throwing the net. He, too, must be patient, watchful, wide awake, and prompt to seize the exact moment to throw."

The second way of fishing was with the drag-net, the sagene (GSN4522), what we would call the seine net or the trawl. This is the way referred to in this parable. The seine net was a great square net with cords at each corner, and weighted so that, at rest, it hung, as it were, upright in the water. When the boat began to move, the net was drawn into the shape of a great cone and into the cone all kinds of fish were swept.

The net was then drawn to land, and the catch was separated. The useless material was flung away; the good was put into containers. It is interesting to note that sometimes the fish were put alive into containers rifled with water. There was no other way to transport them in freshness over any time or any distance.

There are two great lessons in this parable.

(i) It is in the nature of the drag-net that it does not, and cannot, discriminate. It is bound to draw in all kinds of things in its course through the water. Its contents are bound to be a mixture. If we apply that to the Church, which is the instrument of God's Kingdom upon earth, it means that the Church cannot be discriminative but is bound to be a mixture of all kinds of people, good and bad, useless and useful.

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Matthew 13:47-50

There have always been two views of the Church--the exclusive and the inclusive. The exclusive view holds that the Church is for people who are good, people who are really and fully committed, people who are quite different from the world. There is an attraction in that view, but it is not the New Testament view, because, apart from anything else, who is to do the judging, when we are told that we must not judge? (Matt.7:1). It is not any man's place to say who is committed to Christ and who is not. The inclusive view feels instinctively that the Church must be open to all, and that, like the drag-net, so long as it is a human institution it is bound to be a mixture. That is exactly what this parable teaches.

(ii) But equally this parable teaches that the time of separation will come when the good and the bad are sent to their respective destinations. That separation, however, certain as it is, is not man's work but God's. Therefore it is our duty to gather in all who will come, and not to judge or separate, but to leave the final judgment to God.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 13:51-52

OLD GIFTS USED IN A NEW WAY

Matthew 13:51-52

Jesus said, "Have you understood an these things?" They said to him: "Yes." He said to them: "That is why every scribe, who has been instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, is like a householder who brings out of his treasure-house things new and old."

When Jesus had finished speaking about the Kingdom, he asked his disciples if they had understood. And they had understood, at least in part. Then Jesus goes on to speak about the scribe, instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, bringing out of his treasure-house things old and new. What Jesus is in effect saying is this: "You are able to understand, because you came to me with a fine heritage. You came with all the teaching of the law and the prophets. A scribe comes to me with a lifetime of study of the law and of all its commandments. That background helps you to understand. But after you have been instructed by me, you have the knowledge, not only of the things you used to know, but of things you never knew before, and even the knowledge which you had before is illuminated by what I have told to you."

There is something very suggestive here. For it means that Jesus never desired or intended that any man should forget all he knew when he came to him; but that he should see his knowledge in a new light and use it in a new service. When he does that, what he knew before becomes a greater treasure than ever it was.

Every man comes to Jesus Christ with some gift and with some ability. Jesus does not ask that he should give up his gift. So many people think that when a man declares for Christ he must give things up and concentrate upon the so-called religious things. But a scholar does not give up his scholarship when he becomes a Christian; rather he uses it for Christ. A business man need not give up his business; rather he should run it as a Christian would. One who can sing, or dance, or act, or paint need not give up his art, but must use his art as a Christian would. The sportsman need not give up his sport, but must play as a Christian would. Jesus did not come to empty life but to fill it, not to impoverish life but to enrich it. Here we see JeSus telling men, not to abandon their gifts, but to use them even more wonderfully in the light of the knowledge which he has given them.

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Matthew 13:53-58

THE BARRIER OF UNBELIEF

Matthew 13:53-58

When Jesus had concluded these parables, he left there. He went into his native place and he taught them in their synagogue. His teaching was such that they were astonished and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these powers? Is not this the son of the carpenter? Is not his mother named Mary? And are James and Joseph and Simon and Judas not his brothers? Where did he get all these things?" And they were offended at him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own native place and in his own family." And he did not do many deeds of power there because of their unbelief.

It was natural that at some time Jesus should pay a visit to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And yet it was a brave thing to do. The hardest place for a preacher to preach is the church where he was a boy; the hardest place for a doctor to practise is the place where people knew him when he was young.

But to Nazareth Jesus went. In the synagogue there was no definite person to give the address. Any distinguished stranger present might be asked by the ruler of the synagogue to speak, or anyone who had a message might venture to give it. There was no danger that Jesus would not be given the opportunity to speak. But when he did speak, all that he encountered was hostility and incredulity. They would not listen to him because they knew his father and his mother and his brothers and his sisters. They could not conceive that anyone who had lived among them had any right to speak as Jesus was speaking. The prophet, as so often happens, had no honour in his own country; and their attitude to him raised a barrier which made it impossible for Jesus to have any effect upon them.

There is a great lesson here. In any church service the congregation preaches more than half the sermon. The congregation brings an atmosphere with it. That atmosphere is either a barrier through which the preacher's word cannot penetrate; or else it is such an expectancy that even the poorest sermon becomes a living flame.

Again, we should not judge a man by his background and his family connections, but by what he is. Many a message has been killed stone dead, not because there was anything wrong with it; but because the minds of the hearers were so prejudiced against the messenger that it never had a chance.

When we meet together to listen to the word of God, we must come with eager expectancy, and must think, not of the man who speaks, but of the Spirit who speaks through him.

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Matthew 14:1-12

THE TRAGIC DRAMA OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 14:1-12 (Part 1)

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus, and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptizer. He has been raised from the dead, and because of this, these deeds of power work in him." For Herod had seized John the Baptizer, and had bound him and put him in prison, because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John insisted to him: "It is not right for you to have her." So he wished to kill him, but he was afraid of the crowd, for they regarded him as a prophet. On the occasion of Herod's birthday celebrations the daughter of Herodias danced in public and delighted Herod. Hence he affirmed with an oath that he would give her whatsoever she might ask. Urged on by her mother, she said, "Give me here and now the head of John the Baptizer on a dish." The king was distressed, but, because of his oath, and because of those who sat at table with him, he ordered the request to be granted. So he sent and had John beheaded in the prison.

And his head was brought on a dish and given to the maiden; and she brought it to her mother. His disciples came and took away the body and buried him. And they came and told Jesus about it.

In this tragic drama of the death of John the Baptist, the dramatis personae stand clearly delineated and vividly displayed.

(i) There is John himself. As far as Herod was concerned John had two faults. (a) He was too popular with the people. Josephus also tells the story of the death of John, and it is from this point of view that he tells it. Josephus writes (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18. 5. 2): "Now when many others came in crowds about him, for they were greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it was too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner out of Herod's suspicious temper to Machaerus ... and was there put to death." As Josephus read the facts, it was Herod's suspicious jealousy of John which made him kill John. Herod, like every weak and suspicious and frightened tyrant, could think of no way of dealing with a possible rival other than killing him.

(b) But the gospel writers see the story from a different point of view. As they see it, Herod killed John because he was a man who told the truth. It is always dangerous to rebuke a tyrant, and that is precisely what John did.

The facts were quite simple. Herod Antipas was married to a daughter of the king of the Nabatean Arabs. He had a brother in Rome also called Herod; the gospel writers call this Roman Herod, Philip; his full name may have been Herod Philip, or they may simply have got mixed up in the complicated marriage relationships of the Herods. This Herod who stayed in Rome was a wealthy private individual, who had no kingdom of his own. On a visit to Rome, Herod Antipas seduced his brother's wife, and persuaded her to leave his brother and to marry him. In order to do so he had to put away his own wife, with, as we shall see, disastrous consequences to himself. In doing this, apart altogether from the moral aspect of the question, Herod broke two laws. He divorced his own

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Matthew 14:1-12

wife without cause, and he married his sister-in-law, which was a marriage, under Jewish law, within the prohibited relationships. Without hesitation John rebuked him.

It is always dangerous to rebuke an eastern despot, and by his rebuke John signed his own death warrant. He was a man who fearlessly rebuked evil wherever he saw it. When John Knox was standing for his principles against Queen Mary, she demanded whether he thought it right that the authority of rulers should be resisted. His answer was: "If princes exceed their bounds, madam, they may be resisted and even deposed." The world owes much to the great men who took their lives in their hands and had the courage to tell even kings and queens that there is a moral law which they break at their peril.

(ii) There is Herodias. As we shall see, she was the ruination of Herod in every possible sense, although she was a woman not without a sense of greatness. At the moment we simply note that she was stained by a triple guilt. She was a woman of loose morals and of infidelity. She was a vindictive woman, who nursed her wrath to keep it warm, and who was out for revenge, even when she was justly condemned. And--perhaps worst of all--she was a woman who did not hesitate to use even her own daughter to realize her own vindictive ends. It would have been bad enough if she herself had sought ways of taking vengeance on the man of God who confronted her with her shame. It was infinitely worse that she used her daughter for her nefarious purposes and made her as great a sinner as herself. There is little to be said for a parent who stains a child with guilt in order to achieve some evil personal purpose.

(iii) There is Herodias' daughter, Salome. Salome must have been young, perhaps sixteen or seventeen years of age. Whatever she may later have become, in this instance she is surely more sinned against than sinning. There must have been in her an element of shamelessness. Here was a royal princess who acted as a dancing-girl. The dances which these girls danced were suggestive and immoral. For a royal princess to dance in public at all was an amazing thing. Herodias thought nothing of outraging modesty and demeaning her daughter, if only she could gain her revenge on a man who had justly rebuked her.

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Matthew 14:1-12

THE FALL OF HEROD

Matthew 14:1-12 (Part 2)

(iv) There is Herod himself. He is called the tetrarch. Tetrarch literally means the ruler of a fourth part; but it came to be used quite generally, as here, of any subordinate ruler of a section of a country. Herod the Great had many sons. When he died, he divided his territory into three, and, with the consent of the Romans, willed it to three of them. To Archelaus he left Judaea and Samaria; to Philip he left the northern territory of Trachonitis and Ituraea; to Herod Antipas--the Herod of this story--he left Galilee and Peraea. Herod Antipas was by no means an exceptionally bad king; but here he began on the road that led to his complete ruin. We may note three things about him.

(a) He was a man with a guilty conscience. When Jesus became prominent, Herod immediately leaped to the conclusion that this was John come back to life again. Origen has a most interesting suggestion about this. He points out that Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elisabeth, the mother of John, were closely related (Lk. 1:36). That is to say, Jesus and John were blood relations. And Origen speaks of a tradition which says that Jesus and John closely resembled each other in appearance. If that was the case, then Herod's guilty conscience might appear to him to have even more grounds for its fears. He is the great proof that no man can rid himself of a sin by ridding himself of the man who confronts him with it. There is such a thing as conscience, and, even if a man's human accuser is eliminated, his divine accuser is still not silenced.

(b) Herod's action was typical of a weak man. He kept a foolish oath and broke a great law. He had promised Salome to give her anything she might ask, little thinking what she would request. He knew well that to grant her request, so as to keep his oath, was to break a far greater law; and yet he chose to do it because he was too weak to admit his error. He was more frightened of a woman's tantrums than of the moral law. He was more frightened of the criticism, and perhaps the amusement, of his guests, than of the voice of conscience. Herod was a man who could take a firm stand on the wrong things, even when he knew what was right; and such a stand is the sign, not of strength, but of weakness.

(c) We have already said that Herod's action in this case was the beginning of his ruin, and so it was. The result of his seduction of Herodias and his divorce of his own wife, was that (very naturally) Aretas, the father of his wife, and the ruler of the Nabateans, bitterly resented the insult perpetrated against his daughter. He made war against Herod, and heavily defeated him. The comment of Josephus is: "Some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment for what he did against John, who was called the Baptist" (Antiquities of the Jews, 18. 5. 2). Herod was in fact only rescued by calling in the power of the Romans to clear things up.

From the very beginning Herod's illegal and immoral alliance with Herodias brought him nothing but trouble. But the influence of Herodias was not to stop there. The years went by and Caligula came to the Roman throne. The Philip who had been tetrarch of Trachonitis and Ituraea died, and Caligula gave the province to another of the Herod family named Agrippa; and with the province

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he gave him the title of king. The fact that Agrippa was called king moved Herodias to bitter envy. Josephus says, "She was not able to conceal how miserable she was, by reason of the envy she had towards him" (Antiquities of the Jews, 18. 7. 1). The consequence of her envy was that she incited Herod to go to Rome and to ask Caligula that he too should be granted the title of king, for Herodias was determined to be a queen. "Let us go to Rome," she said, "and let us spare no pains or expenses, either of savor or gold, since they cannot be kept for any better use than for the obtaining of a kingdom."

Herod was very unwilling to take action; he was naturally lazy, and he also foresaw serious trouble. But this persistent woman had her way. Herod prepared to set out to Rome; but Agrippa sent messengers to forestall him with accusations that Herod was preparing treacherously to rebel from Rome. The result was that Caligula believed Agrippa's accusations, took Herod's province from him, with all his money, and gave it to Agrippa, and banished Herod to far off Gaul to languish there in exile until he died.

So in the end it was through Herodias that Herod lost his fortune and his kingdom, and dragged out a weary existence in the far away places of Gaul. It is just here that Herodias showed her one flash of greatness and of magnanimity. She was in fact Agrippa's sister, and Caligula told her that he did not intend to take her private fortune from her and that for Agrippa's sake she need not accompany her husband into exile. Herodias answered, "Thou indeed, O Emperor, actest after a magnificent manner, and as becomes thyself, in what thou offerest me; but the love which I have for my husband hinders me from partaking of the favour of thy gift; for it is not just that I, who have been a partner in his prosperity, should forsake him in his misfortune" (Antiquities of the Jews, 8. 7. 2). And so Herodias accompanied Herod to his exile.

If ever there was proof that sin brings its own punishment, that proof lies in the story of Herod. It was an ill day when Herod first seduced Herodias. From that act of infidelity came the murder of John, and in the end disaster, in which he lost all, except the woman who loved him and ruined him.

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Matthew 14:13-21

COMPASSION AND POWER

Matthew 14:13-21 (Part 1)

When Jesus heard the news (of the death of John), he withdrew from there in a boat, into a deserted place alone. When the crowds heard of it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he had disembarked, he saw a great crowd, and he was moved with compassion for them to the depths of his being, and healed their sick. When it had become late, his disciples came to him: "The place is deserted," they said, "and the hour for the evening meal has already passed. Send the crowds away, in order that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food." But Jesus said to them, "Give them food to eat yourselves." They said to him, "We have nothing except five loaves and two fishes." He said, "Bring them here to me." So he ordered the crowds to sit down on the green grass. He took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looked up to heaven, and said a blessing, and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds; and they all ate and were satisfied.

They took up what was left over, twelve baskets full of the fragments. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, apart from women and children.

Galilee must have been a place where it was very difficult to be alone. Galilee was a small country, only 50 miles from north to south and 25 miles from east to west, and Josephus tells us that in his time within that small area there were 204 towns and villages, none with a population of less than 15,000 people. In such a thickly populated area it was not easy to get away from people for any length of time. But it was quiet on the other side of the lake, and at its widest the lake was only 8 miles wide. Jesus' friends were fisherfolk; and it was not difficult to embark on one of their boats and seek retirement on the east side of the lake. That is what Jesus did when he heard of the death of John.

There were three perfectly simple and natural reasons why Jesus should seek to be alone. He was human and he needed rest. He never recklessly ran into danger, and it was well to withdraw, lest too early he should share the fate of John. And, most of all, with the Cross coming nearer and nearer, Jesus knew that he must meet with God before he met with men. He was seeking rest for his body and strength for his soul in the lonely places.

But he was not to get it. It would be easy to see the boat set sail and to deduce where it was going; and the crowds flocked round the top of the lake and were waiting for him at the other side when he arrived. So Jesus healed them and, when the evening came, he fed them before they took the long road home. Few of Jesus' miracles are so revealing as this.

(i) It tells us of the compassion of Jesus. When he saw the crowds he was moved with compassion to the depths of his being. That is a very wonderful thing. Jesus had come to find peace and quiet and loneliness; instead he found a vast crowd eagerly demanding what he could give. He might so easily have resented them. What right had they to invade his privacy with their continual demands? Was he to have no rest and quiet, no time to himself at all?

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But Jesus was not like that. So far from finding them a nuisance, he was moved with compassion for them. Premanand, the great Christian who was once a wealthy high-caste Indian, says in his autobiography: "As in the days of old, so now our message to the non-Christian world has to be the same, that God cares." If that be so, we must never be too busy for people, and we must never even seem to find them a trouble and a nuisance. Premanand also says: "My own experience has been that when I or any other missionary or Indian priest showed signs of restlessness or impatience towards any educated and thoughtful Christian or non-Christian visitors, and gave them to understand that we were hard-pressed for time, or that it was our lunch--or tea--time and that we could not wait, then at once such enquirers were lost, and never returned again." We must never deal with people with one eye on the clock, and as if we were anxious to be rid of them as soon as we decently can.

Premanand goes on to relate an incident which, it is not too much to say, may have changed the whole course of the spread of Christianity in Bengal. "There is an account somewhere of how the first Metropolitan Bishop of India failed to meet the late Pandit Iswar Chandar Vidyasagar of Bengal through official formality. The Pandit had been sent as spokesman of the Hindu community in Calcutta, to establish friendly relations with the Bishop and with the Church. Vidyasagar, who was the founder of a Hindu College in Calcutta and a social reformer, author and educationalist of repute, returned disappointed without an interview, and formed a strong party of educated and wealthy citizens of Calcutta to oppose the Church and the Bishop, and to guard against the spread of Christianity. ... The formality observed by one known to be an official of the Christian Church turned a friend into a foe." What an opportunity for Christ was lost because someone's privacy could not be invaded except through official channels.

Jesus never found any man a nuisance, even when his whole being was crying out for rest and quiet--and neither must his followers.

(ii) In this story we see Jesus witnessing that all gifts are from God. He took the food and he said a blessing. The Jewish grace before meals was very simple: "Blessed art thou, Jehovah our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth." That would be the grace which Jesus said, for that was the grace which every Jewish family used. Here we see Jesus showing that it is God's gifts which he brings to men. The grace of gratitude is rare enough towards men; it is rarer still towards God.

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Matthew 14:13-21

THE PLACE OF THE DISCIPLE IN THE WORK OF CHRIST

Matthew 14:13-21 (Part 2)

(iii) This miracle informs us very clearly of the place of the disciple in the work of Christ. The story tells that Jesus gave to the disciples and the disciples gave to the crowd. Jesus worked through the hands of his disciples that day, and he still does.

Again and again we come face to face with this truth which is at the heart of the Church. It is true that the disciple is helpless without his Lord, but it is also true that the Lord is helpless without his disciple. If Jesus wants something done, if he wants a child taught or a person helped, he has to get a man to do it. He needs people through whom he can act, and through whom he can speak.

Very early in the days of his enquiring, Premanand came into contact with Bishop Whitley at Ranchi. He writes: "The Bishop read the Bible with me daily, and sometimes I read Bengali with him, and we talked together in Bengali. The longer I lived with the Bishop the closer I came to him, and found that his life revealed Christ to me, and his deeds and words made it easier for me to understand the mind and teaching of Christ about which I read daily in the Bible. I had a new vision of Christ, when I actually saw Christ's life of love, sacrifice and self-denial in the everyday life of the Bishop. He became actually the epistle of Christ to me."

Jesus Christ needs disciples through whom he can work and through whom his truth and his love can enter into the lives of others. He needs men to whom he can give, in order that they may give to others. Without such men he cannot get things done and it is our task to be such men for him.

It would be easy to be daunted and discouraged by a task of such magnitude. But there is another thing in this story that may lift up our hearts. When Jesus told the disciples to feed the crowd, they told him that all they had was five loaves and two fishes; and yet with what they brought to him, Jesus wrought his miracle. Jesus sets every one of us the tremendous task of communicating himself to men; but he does not demand from us splendours and magnificences that we do not possess. He says to us, "Come to me as you are, however ill-equipped; bring to me what you have, however little, and I will use it greatly in my service." Little is always much in the hands of Christ.

(iv) At the end of the miracle there is that strange little touch that the fragments were gathered up. Even when a miracle could feed men sumptuously there was no waste. There is something to note here. God gives to men with munificence, but a wasteful extravagance is never right. God's generous giving and our wise using must go hand in hand.

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Matthew 14:13-21

THE MAKING OF A MIRACLE

Matthew 14:13-21 (Part 3)

There are some people who read the miracles of Jesus, and feel no need to understand. Let them remain for ever undisturbed in the sweet simplicity of their faith. There are others who read and their minds question and they feel they must understand. Let them take no shame of it, for God comes far more than half way to meet the questing mind. But in whatever way we approach the miracles of Jesus, one thing is certain. We must never be content to regard them as something which happened; we must always regard them as something which happens. They are not isolated events in history; they are demonstrations of the always and forever operative power of Jesus Christ. There are three ways in which we can look at this miracle.

(i) We may look at it as a simple multiplication of loaves and fishes. That would be very difficult to understand; and would be something which happened once and never repeated itself. If we regard it that way, let us be content; but let us not be critical and condemnatory of anyone who feels that he must find another way.

(ii) Many people see in this miracle a sacrament. They have felt that those who were present received only the smallest morsel of food, and yet with that were strengthened for their journey and were content. They have felt that this was not a meal where people glutted their physical appetite; but a meal where they ate the spiritual food of Christ. If that be so, this is a miracle which is re-enacted every time we sit at the table of our Lord; for there comes to us the spiritual food which sends us out to walk with firmer feet and greater strength the way of life which leads to God.

(iii) There are those who see in this miracle something which in a sense is perfectly natural, and yet which in another sense is a real miracle, and which in any sense is very precious. Picture the scene. There is the crowd; it is late; and they are hungry. But was it really likely that the vast majority of that crowd would set out around the lake without any food at all? Would they not take something with them, however little? Now it was evening and they were hungry. But they were also selfish. And no one would produce what he had, lest he have to share it and leave himself without enough. Then Jesus took the lead. Such as he and his disciples had, he began to share with a blessing and an invitation and a smile. And thereupon all began to share, and before they knew what was happening, there was enough and more than enough for all.

If this is what happened, it was not the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes; it was the miracle of the changing of selfish people into generous people at the touch of Christ. It was the miracle of the birth of love in grudging hearts. It was the miracle of changed men and women with something of Christ in them to banish their selfishness. If that be so, then in the realest sense Christ fed them with himself and sent his Spirit to dwell within their hearts.

It does not matter how we understand this miracle. One thing is sure--when Christ is there, the weary find rest and the hungry soul is fed.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 14:22-27

IN THE HOUR OF TROUBLE

Matthew 14:22-27

Immediately he compelled his disciples to embark in the boat and to go on ahead to the other side, until he should send away the crowds. When he had sent away the crowds, he went up into a mountain by himself to pray. When it was late, he was there alone. The boat was by this time in the middle of the sea, battered by the waves, for the wind was contrary. About three o'clock in the morning, he came to them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were alarmed. "This is an apparition," they said, and they cried out from fear. Immediately Jesus spoke to them. "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Do not be afraid."

The lesson of this passage is abundantly clear but what actually happened is not. First of all, let us set the scene.

After the feeding of the multitude Jesus sent his disciples away. Matthew says that he compelled them to embark on the boat and go on ahead. At first sight the word compelled sounds strange; but if we turn to John's account of the incident we will most likely find the explanation. John tells us that after the feeding of the multitude, the crowd wished to come and to make him a king by force (Jn.6:15). There was a surge of popular acclamation, and in the excited state of Palestine a revolution might well have there and then begun. It was a dangerous situation, and the disciples might well have complicated it, for they, too, were still thinking of Jesus in terms of earthly power. Jesus sent away his disciples because a situation had arisen with which he could best deal alone, and in which he did not wish them to become involved.

When he was alone, he went up into a mountain to pray; and by this time the night had come. The disciples had set out back across the lake. One of the sudden storms, for which the lake was notorious, had come down, and they were struggling against the winds and the waves, and making little progress. As the night wore on, Jesus began to walk round the head of the lake to reach the other side. Matthew has already told us that, when Jesus fed the crowds, he made them sit down on the green grass. By that we know it must have been the springtime. Very likely it was near the Passover time, which was in the middle of April. If that is so, the moon would be full. In ancient times the night was divided into four watches--6 p.m. to 9 p.m., 9 p.m. to 12 midnight, 12 midnight to 3 a.m., and 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. So at three o'clock in the morning, Jesus, walking on the high ground at the north of the lake, clearly saw the boat fighting with the waves, and came down to the shore to help.

It is then that there is a real difficulty in knowing what happened. In Matt.14:25-26 we read twice about Jesus walking on the sea, and the curious thing is that the two phrases in the Greek for on the sea are different. In Matt.14:25 it is *epi* (GSN1909), *ten* (GSN3588), *thalassan* (GSN2281), which can equally mean over the sea, and towards the sea. In Matt.14:26 it is *epi* (GSN1909), *tes* (GSN3588), *thalasses* (GSN2281), which can mean on the sea, and which is actually the very same phrase which is used in Jn.21:1 for at the sea, that is by the sea-shore, of Tiberias. Still further, the word which is used for walking in both Matt.14:25-26 is *peripatein* (GSN4043), which means to walk about.

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Matthew 14:22-27

The truth is that there are two perfectly possible interpretations of this passage, so far as the actual Greek goes. It may describe a miracle in which Jesus actually walked on the water. Or, it may equally mean that the disciples' boat was driven by the wind to the northern shore of the lake, that Jesus came down from the mountain to help them when he saw them struggling in the moonlight, and that he came walking through the surf and the waves towards the boat, and came so suddenly upon them that they were terrified when they saw him. Both of these interpretations are equally valid. Some will prefer one, and some the other.

But, whatever interpretation of the Greek we choose, the significance is perfectly clear. In the hour of the disciples' need Jesus came to them. When the wind was contrary and life was a struggle, Jesus was there to help. No sooner had a need arisen, than Jesus was there to help and to save.

In life the wind is often contrary. There are times when we are up against it and life is a desperate struggle with ourselves, with our circumstances, with our temptations, with our sorrows, with our decisions. At such a time no man need struggle alone, for Jesus comes to him across the storms of life, with hand stretched out to save, and with his calm clear voice bidding us take heart and--have no fear.

It does not really matter how we take this incident; it is in any event far more than the story of what Jesus once did in a storm in far-off Palestine; it is the sign and the symbol of what he always does for his people, when the wind is contrary and we are in danger of being overwhelmed by the storms of life.

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Matthew 14:28-33

COLLAPSE AND RECOVERY

Matthew 14:28-33

Peter got down from the boat and walked on the water to come to Jesus. But, when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and, when he began to sink below the water, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and grasped him. "O man of little faith!" he said. "Why did you begin to have doubts?" And when they got into the boat, the wind sank. And those in the boat knelt in reverence before him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

There is no passage in the New Testament in which Peter's character is more fully revealed than this. It tells us three things about him.

(i) Peter was given to acting upon impulse and without thinking of what he was doing. It was his mistake that again and again he acted without fully facing the situation and without counting the cost. He was to do exactly the same when he affirmed undying and unshakable loyalty to Jesus (Matt.26:33-35), and then denied his Lord's name. And yet there are worse sins than that, because Peter's whole trouble was that he was ruled by his heart; and, however he might sometimes fail, his heart was always in the right place and the instinct of his heart was always love.

(ii) Because Peter acted on impulse, he often failed and came to grief. It was always Jesus' insistence that a man should look at a situation in all its bleak grimness before he acted (Lk.9:57-58; Matt.16:24-25). Jesus was completely honest with men; he always bade them see how difficult it was to follow him before they set out upon the Christian way. A great deal of Christian failure is due to acting upon an emotional moment without counting the cost.

(iii) But Peter never finally failed, for always in the moment of his failure he clutched at Christ. The wonderful thing about him is that every time he fell, he rose again; and that it must have been true that even his failures brought him closer and closer to Jesus Christ. As has been well said, a saint is not a man who never fails; a saint is a man who gets up and goes on again every time he falls. Peter's failures only made him love Jesus Christ the more.

These verses finish with another great and permanent truth. When Jesus got into the boat, the wind sank. The great truth is that, wherever Jesus Christ is, the wildest storm becomes a calm. Olive Wyon, in her book *Consider Him*, quotes a thing from the letters of St. Francis of Sales. St. Francis had noticed a custom of the country districts in which he lived. He had often noticed a farm servant going across a farmyard to draw water at the well; he also noticed that, before she lifted the brimming pail, the girl always put a piece of wood into it. One day he went out to the girl and asked her, "Why do you do that?" She looked surprised and answered, as if it were a matter of course, "Why? to keep the water from spilling ... to keep it steady!" Writing to a friend later on, the bishop told this story and added: "So when your heart is distressed and agitated, put the Cross into its centre to keep it steady!" In every time of storm and stress, the presence of Jesus and the love which flows from the Cross bring peace and serenity and calm.

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Matthew 14:34-36

THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

Matthew 14:34-36

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the men of that place recognized him, they sent the news that he had come to the whole surrounding countryside, and they brought to him all those who were ill, and besought him to be allowed only to touch the fringe of his robe; and all who touched him were restored to health.

This is just one of Matthew's almost colourless little connecting passages. It is a sentence or two of the gospel story that the eye might easily pass over as quite unimportant; and yet it is very revealing of Jesus.

(i) There is beauty in it. No sooner did Jesus appear anywhere than men were crowding and clamouring for his help; and he never refused it. He healed them all. There is no word here that he preached or taught at any length; there is simply the record that he healed. The most tremendous thing about Jesus was that he taught men what God was like by showing men what God was like. He did not tell men that God cared; he showed men that God cared. There is little use preaching the love of God in words without showing the love of God in action.

(ii) But there is also pathos here. No one can read this passage without seeing in it the grim fact that there were hundreds and thousands of people who desired Jesus only for what they could get out of him. Once they had received the healing which they sought, they were not really prepared to go any further. It has always been the case that people have wanted the privilege of Christianity without its responsibilities. It has always been the case that so many of us remember God only when we need him. Ingratitude towards God and towards Jesus Christ is the ugliest of all sins; and there is no sin of which men are more often and more consistently guilty.

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Matthew 15:1-9

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN

Matthew 15:1-9 (Part 1)

Then the Pharisees and Scribes from Jerusalem approached Jesus. "Why," they said, "do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? They do so transgress, because they do not wash their hands before they eat bread." Jesus answered them: "Why do you too transgress God's commandment, because of your tradition? For God said, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'He who curses his father and mother, let him die'; but, as for you, you say, 'Whoever says to his father or his mother: "That by which you might have been helped by me is a dedicated gift," will certainly not honour his father and his mother, and is yet guiltless.' You have annulled the commandment of God through your tradition. Hypocrites, Isaiah in his prophecy described you well: 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. It is in vain that they reverence me; for it is man-made commandments that they teach as their teaching.'"

It is not too much to say that, however difficult and obscure this passage may seem to us, it is one of the most important passages in the whole gospel story. It represents a head-on clash between Jesus and the leaders of orthodox Jewish religion. Its opening sentence makes it clear that the Scribes and Pharisees had come all the way from Jerusalem to Galilee to put their questions to Jesus. On this occasion it need not be thought that the questions are malicious. The Scribes and Pharisees are not ill-naturedly seeking to entangle Jesus. They are genuinely bewildered; and in a very short time they are going to be genuinely outraged and shocked; for the basic importance of this passage is that it is not so much a clash between Jesus and the Pharisees in a personal way; it is something far more--it is the collision of two views of religion and two views of the demands of God.

Nor was there any possibility of a compromise, or even a working agreement, between these two views of religion. Inevitably the one had to destroy the other. Here, then, embedded in this passage, is one of the supreme religious contests in history. To understand it we must try to understand the background of Jewish Pharisaic and Scribal religion.

In this passage there meets us the whole conception of clean and unclean. We must be quite clear that this idea of cleanness and uncleanness has nothing to do with physical cleanness, or, except distantly, with hygiene. It is entirely a ceremonial matter. For a man to be clean was for him to be in a state where he might worship and approach God; for him to be unclean was for him to be in a state where such a worship and such an approach were impossible.

This uncleanness was contracted by contact with certain persons or things. For instance, a woman was unclean if she had a haemorrhage, even if that haemorrhage was her normal monthly period; she was unclean for a stated time after she had had a child; every dead body was unclean, and to touch it was to become unclean; every Gentile was unclean.

This uncleanness was transferable; it was, so to speak, infectious. For instance, if a mouse touched an earthenware vessel, that vessel was unclean and unless it was ritually washed and cleansed, everything put into it was unclean. The consequence was that anyone who touched that

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Matthew 15:1-9

vessel, or who ate or drank from its contents became unclean; and in turn anyone who touched the person who had so become unclean also became unclean.

This is not only a Jewish idea; it occurs in other religions. To a high-caste Indian anyone not belonging to his own caste is unclean; if that person becomes a Christian, he is still more seriously unclean. Premanand tells us what happened to himself. He became a Christian; his family ejected him. Sometimes he used to come back to see his mother, who was broken-hearted at what she considered his apostasy, but still loved him dearly. Premanand says: "As soon as my father came to know that I was visiting my mother in the daytime while he was away at the office, he ordered the door-keeper, a stalwart up-country man, Ram Rup ... not to allow me to enter the house." Ram Rup was persuaded to slacken his vigilance. "At last my mother won over Ram Rup, the door-keeper, and I was allowed to enter her presence. The prejudice was so great that even the menial Hindu servants of the house would not wash the plates on which I was fed by my mother. Sometimes my aunt would purify the place and the seat on which I had sat by sprinkling Ganges water, or water mixed with cow dung." Premanand was unclean, and everything he touched became unclean.

We must note that there was nothing moral about this. The touching of certain things produced uncleanness; and this uncleanness debarred from the society of men and the presence of God. It was as if some special infection hung like an aura about certain persons and things. We may understand this a little better if we remember that even in western civilization this idea is not completely dead, although it works here mainly in reverse. There are still those who find in a four-leafed clover, or in some metal or wooden charm, or in a black cat, something which brings good fortune.

So, here is an idea which sees in religion something which consists in avoiding contact with certain things and people because they are unclean; and, then, if that contact should have been made, in taking the necessary ritual cleansing measures to rid oneself of the contracted uncleanness. But we must pursue this a little further.

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Matthew 15:1-9

THE FOODS WHICH ENTER INTO A MAN

Matthew 15:1-9 (Part 2)

The laws of cleanness and uncleanness had a further wide area of application. They laid down what a man might eat, and what he might not eat. Broadly speaking all fruit and vegetables were clean. But, in regard to living creatures, the laws were strict. These laws are in Lev.11.

We may briefly summarize them. Of beasts only those can be eaten who part the hoof and chew the cud. That is why no Jew can eat the flesh of the pig, the rabbit, or the hare. In no case may the flesh of an animal which has died a natural death be eaten (Deut.14:21). In all cases the blood must be drained from the carcass; the orthodox Jew still buys his meat from a kosher butcher, who sells only meat so treated. Ordinary fat upon the flesh might be eaten, but the fat on the kidneys and on the entrails of the abdomen, which we call suet, might not be eaten. In regard to sea food, only sea creatures which have both fins and scales may be eaten. This means that shellfish, such as lobsters, are unclean. All insects are unclean, with one exception, locusts. In the case of animals and fish there is a standard test, as we have seen, of what might be eaten, and what might not be eaten. In the case of birds there is no such test; and the list of unclean and forbidden birds is in Lev.11:13-21.

There were certain identifiable reasons for all this.

(i) The refusal to touch dead bodies, or to eat the flesh of an animal which had died from natural causes, may well have had something to do with the belief in evil spirits. It would be easy to think of a demon as taking up residence in such a body, and so gaining entry into the body of the eater.

(ii) Certain animals were sacred in other religions; for instance, the cat and the crocodile were sacred to the Egyptians; and it would be very natural for the Jews to regard as unclean any animal which another nation worshipped. The animal would then be reckoned a kind of idol and therefore dangerously unclean.

(iii) As Dr. Rendle Short points out in his most helpful book, *The Bible and Modern Medicine*, certain of the regulations were in fact wise from the point of view of health and hygiene. Dr. Short writes: "True, we eat the pig, the rabbit and the hare, but these animals are liable to parastic infections and are safe only if the food is well-cooked. The pig is an unclean feeder, and harbours two worms, trichina and a tape worm, which may be passed on to man. The danger is minimal under present conditions in this country, but it would have been far otherwise in Palestine of old, and such food was better avoided." The prohibition of eating anything with blood in it comes from the fact that the blood is the life in Jewish thought. This is a natural thought, for, as blood flows away, life ebbs away. And the life belongs to God, and to God alone. The same idea explains the prohibition of eating the fat. The fat is the richest part of the carcase, and the richest part must be given to God.

In some cases, although they are few, there was sound sense behind the prohibitions and the food laws.

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Matthew 15:1-9

(iv) There remain a large number of cases in which things and beasts and animals were unclean for no reason at all except that they were. Taboos are always inexplicable; they are simply superstitions, by which certain living things came to be connected with good or with bad fortune, with cleanness or uncleanness.

These things would not in themselves matter very much, but the trouble and the tragedy were that they had become to the Scribes and Pharisees matters of life and death. To serve God, to be religious, was to observe these good laws. If we put it in the following way, we will see the result. To the Pharisaic mind the prohibition of eating rabbit's or pig's flesh was just as much a commandment of God as the prohibition of adultery; it was therefore just as much a sin to eat pork or rabbit as to seduce a woman and enjoy illegal sexual intercourse. Religion had got itself mixed up with all kinds of external rules and regulations; and, since it is much easier both to observe rules and regulations and to check up on those who do not, these rules and regulations had become religion to the orthodox Jews.

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Matthew 15:1-9

THE WAYS OF CLEANSING

Matthew 15:1-9 (Part 3)

Now we come to the particular impact of this on the passage we are studying. It was clearly impossible to avoid all kinds of ceremonial uncleanness. A man might himself avoid unclean things, but how could he possibly know when on the street he had touched someone who was unclean? This was further complicated by the fact that there were Gentiles in Palestine, and the very dust touched by a Gentile foot became unclean.

To combat uncleanness an elaborate system of washings was worked out. These washings became ever more elaborate. At first there was a hand-washing on rising in the morning. Then there grew up an elaborate system of hand-washing whose use was at first confined to the priests in the Temple before they ate that part of the sacrifice which was their perquisite. Later these complicated washings came to be demanded by the strictest of the orthodox Jews for themselves and for all who claimed to be truly religious.

Edersheim in *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* outlines the most elaborate of these washings. Water jars were kept ready to be used before a meal. The minimum amount of water to be used was a quarter of a log, which is defined as enough to fill one and a half egg-shells. The water was first poured on both hands, held with the fingers pointed upwards, and must run up the arm as far as the wrist. It must drop off from the wrist, for the water was now itself unclean, having touched the unclean hands, and, if it ran down the fingers again, it would again render them unclean. The process was repeated with the hands held in the opposite direction, with the fingers pointing down; and then finally each hand was cleansed by being rubbed with the fist of the other. A really strict Jew would do all this, not only before a meal, but also between each of the courses.

The question of the Jewish orthodox leaders to Jesus is:

"Why do your disciples not observe the laws of washing which our tradition lays down?"

They speak of the tradition of the elders. To the Jew the Law had two sections. There was the written Law which was contained in scripture itself; and there was the oral Law, which consisted of the developments, such as those in hand-washing, which the Scribes and the experts had worked out through the generations; and all these developments were the tradition of the elders, and were regarded as just as much, if not more, binding than the written Law. Again we must stop to remember the salient point--to the orthodox Jew all this ritual ceremony was religion; this is what, as they believed, God demanded. To do these things was to please God, and to be a good man. To put it in another way, all this business of ritual washing was regarded as just as important and just as binding as the Ten Commandments themselves. Religion had become identified with a host of external regulations. It was as important to wash the hands in a certain way as to obey the commandment: "Thou shalt not covet."

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Matthew 15:1-9

BREAKING GOD'S LAW TO KEEP MAN'S LAW

Matthew 15:1-9 (Part 4)

Jesus did not answer the question of the Pharisees directly. What he did was to take an example of the operation of the oral and ceremonial law to show how its observance so far from being obedience to the Law of God, could become actual contradiction of that Law.

Jesus says that the Law of God lays it down that a man shall honour his father and his mother; then he goes on to say that if a man says, "It is a gift," he is free from the duty of honouring his father and his mother. If we look at the parallel passage in Mark, we see that the phrase is: "It is Corban (korban, GSN2878; HSN7133)." What is the meaning of this obscure passage to us? In point of fact it can have two meanings, because Corban (korban, GSN2878) has two meanings.

(i) Corban (korban, GSN2878) can mean that which is dedicated to God. Now suppose that a man had a father or mother in poverty and in need; and suppose that his poor parent came to him with a request for help. There was a way in which the man could avoid giving any help. He could, as it were, officially dedicate all his money and all his property to God and to the Temple; his property would then be Corban (korban, GSN2878), God-dedicated; then he could say to his father or mother: "I'm very sorry, I can give you nothing; all my belongings are dedicated to God." He could use a ritual practice to evade the basic duty of helping and honouring his father and mother. He could take a scribal regulation to wipe out one of the Ten Commandments.

(ii) But Corban (korban, GSN2878) has another meaning, and it may well be that it is this second meaning which is at issue here. Corban (korban, GSN2878) was used as an oath. A man might say to his father or mother: "Corban (korban, GSN2878), if anything I have will ever be used to help you." Now suppose this man to have remorse of conscience; suppose him to have made the refusal in a moment of anger, or temper, or even of irritation; suppose him to have second and kinder and more filial thoughts, and to feel that after all there was a duty to help his parents. In such a case any reasonable person would say that that man had undergone a genuine repentance, and that his change of mind was a good thing; and that since he was now prepared to do the right thing and obey the Law of God he should be encouraged to follow that line.

The strict Scribe said, "No. Our Law says that no oath can ever be broken." He would quote Num.30:2: "When a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." The Scribe would legalistically argue: "You took an oath; and for no reason can you ever break it." That is to say, the Scribe would hold a man to a reckless oath, taken in a moment of passion, an oath which actually compelled a man to break the higher law of humanity and of God.

That is what Jesus meant. He meant: "You are using your scribal interpretations, your traditions, to compel a man to dishonour his father and mother, even when he himself has repented and has seen the better way."

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Matthew 15:1-9

The strange and tragic thing was that the Scribes and Pharisees of the day were actually going against what the greatest Jewish teachers had said. Rabbi Eliezer said, "The door is opened for a man on account of his father and his mother," and he meant that, if any man had sworn an oath which dishonoured his father and his mother, and had then repented of it, the door was open to him to change his mind and to take a different way, even if an oath had been sworn. As so often, Jesus was not presenting men with unknown truth; he was reminding them of things that God had already told them, and that they had already known but had forgotten, because they had come to prefer their own man-made ingenuities to the great simplicities of the Law of God.

Here is the clash and the collision; here is the contest between two kinds of religion and two kinds of worship. To the Scribes and Pharisees religion was the observance of certain outward rules and regulations and rituals, such as the correct way to wash the hands before eating; it was the strict observance of a legalistic outlook on all life. To Jesus religion was a thing which had its seat in the heart; it was a thing which issued in compassion and kindness, which are above and beyond the law.

To the Scribes and Pharisees worship was ritual, ceremony law; to Jesus worship was the clean heart and the loving life. Here is the clash. And that clash still exists. What is worship? Even today there are many who would say that worship is not worship unless it is carried out by a priest ordained in a certain succession, in a building consecrated in a certain way, and from a liturgy laid down by a certain Church. And all these things are externals.

One of the greatest definitions of worship ever laid down was laid down by William Temple: "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." We must have a care lest we stand aghast at the apparent blindness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, lest we are shocked by their insistence on outward ceremonial, and at the same time be ourselves guilty of the same fault in our own way. Religion can never be founded on any ceremonies or ritual; religion must always be founded on personal relationships between man and God.

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Matthew 15:10-20

THE REAL GOODNESS AND THE REAL EVIL

Matthew 15:10-20

Jesus called the crowd and said to them: "Listen and understand. It is not that which goes into the mouth which defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, that defiles a man." Then his disciples came to him and said, "Do you know that when the Pharisees heard your saying, they were shocked by it?" He answered: "Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant will be rooted up. Let them be. They are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both of them will fall into the ditch." Peter said to him, "Tell us what this dark saying means." He said, "Are you even yet without understanding? Do you not know that everything which goes into a man's mouth goes down into the stomach, and is evacuated out into the drain? But that which comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and it is these things which defile a man. For from the heart come pernicious thoughts, acts of murder, adultery, theft, false witness, slander. It is these things which defile a man. To eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

It may well be held that for a Jew this was the most startling thing Jesus ever said. For in this saying he does not only condemn Scribal and Pharisaic ritual and ceremonial religion; he actually wipes out large sections of the book of Leviticus. This is not a contradiction of the tradition of the elders alone; this is a contradiction of scripture itself. This saying of Jesus cancels all the food laws of the Old Testament. Quite possibly these laws might still stand as matters of health and hygiene and common-sense and medical wisdom; but they could never again stand as matters of religion. Once and for all Jesus lays it down that what matters is not the state of a man's ritual observance, but the state of a man's heart.

No wonder the Scribes and Pharisees were shocked. The very ground of their religion was cut from beneath their feet. This statement was not simply alarming; it was revolutionary. If Jesus was right, their whole theory of religion was wrong. They identified religion and pleasing God with the observing of rules and regulations which had to do with cleanness and with uncleanness, with what a man ate and with how he washed his hands before he ate it; Jesus identified religion with the state of a man's heart, and said bluntly that these Pharisaic and Scribal regulations had nothing to do with religion. Jesus said that the Pharisees were blind guides who had no idea of the way to God, and that, if people followed them, all they could expect was to stray off the road and to fall into the ditch. And Jesus was profoundly right.

(i) If religion consists in external regulations and observances it is two things. It is far too easy. It is very much easier to abstain from certain foods and to wash the hands in a certain way than it is to love the unlovely and the unlovable, and to help the needy at the cost of one's own time and money and comfort and pleasure.

We have still not fully learned this lesson. To go to church regularly, to give liberally to the church, to be a member of a Bible reading circle are all external things. They are means towards religion; but they are not religion. We can never too often remind ourselves that religion consists in personal relationships and in an attitude to God and our fellow-men.

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Matthew 15:10-20

Further, if religion consists in external observances, it is quite misleading. Many a man has a faultless life in externals but has the bitterest and the most evil thoughts within his heart. The teaching of Jesus is that not all the outward observances in the world can atone for a heart where pride and bitterness and lust hold sway.

(ii) It is Jesus' teaching that the part of a man that matters is his heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt.5:8). As Burns had it in the Epistle to Davie:

"The heart aye's the part aye
That makes us right or wrang."

What matters to God is not so much how we act, but why we act; not so much what we actually do, but what we wish in our heart of hearts to do. "Man," as Aquinas had it, "sees the deed, but God sees the intention."

It is Jesus' teaching--and it is a teaching which condemns every one of us--that no man can call himself good because he observes external rules and regulations; he can call himself good only when his heart is pure. That very fact is the end of pride, and the reason why every one of us can say only, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

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Matthew 15:21-28

FAITH TESTED AND FAITH ANSWERED

Matthew 15:21-28 (Part 1)

And Jesus left there, and withdrew to the districts of Tyre and Sidon. And, look you, a Canaanite woman from these parts came and cried, "Have pity upon me, Sir, Son of David! My daughter is grievously afflicted by a demon." But he answered her not a word. His disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she is shrieking behind us." Jesus answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." She came and knelt in entreaty before him. "Lord," she said, "help me!" Jesus answered, "It is not right to take the children's bread, and to throw it to the pet dogs." She said, "True, Lord, but even the dogs eat of the pieces which fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was restored to health from that hour.

There are tremendous implications in this passage. Apart from anything else, it describes the only occasion on which Jesus was ever outside of Jewish territory. The supreme significance of the passage is that it fore-shadows the going out of the gospel to the whole world; it shows us the beginning of the end of all the barriers.

For Jesus this was a time of deliberate withdrawal. The end was coming near; and he wished some time of quiet when he could prepare for the end. It was not so much that he wished to prepare himself, although that purpose was also in his mind, but rather that he wished some time in which he could prepare his disciples against the day of the Cross. There were things which he must tell them, and which he must compel them to understand.

There was no place in Palestine where he could be sure of privacy; wherever he went, the crowds would find him. So he went right north through Galilee until he came to the land of Tyre and Sidon where the Phoenicians dwelt. There, at least for a time, he would be safe from the malignant hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees, and from the dangerous popularity of the people, for no Jew would be likely to follow him into Gentile territory.

This passage shows us Jesus seeking a time of quiet before the turmoil of the end. This is not in any sense a picture of him running away; it is a picture of him preparing himself and his disciples for the final and decisive battle which lay so close ahead.

But even in these foreign parts Jesus was not to be free from the clamant demand of human need. There was a woman who had a daughter who was grievously afflicted. She must have heard somehow of the wonderful things which Jesus could do; and she followed him and his disciples crying desperately for help. At first Jesus seemed to pay no attention to her. The disciples were embarrassed. "Give her what she wants," they said, "and be rid of her." The reaction of the disciples was not really compassion at all; it was the reverse; to them the woman was a nuisance, and all they wanted was to be rid of her as quickly as possible. To grant a request to get rid of a person who is, or may become, a nuisance is a common enough reaction; but it is very different from the response of Christian love and pity and compassion.

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Matthew 15:21-28

But to Jesus there was a problem here. That he was moved with compassion for this woman we cannot for a moment doubt. But she was a Gentile. Not only was she a Gentile; she belonged to the old Canaanite stock, and the Canaanites were the ancestral enemies of the Jews. Even at that very time, or not much later, Josephus could write: "Of the Phoenicians, the Tyrians have the most ill-feeling towards us." We have already seen that, if Jesus was to have any effect, he had to limit his objectives like a wise general. He had to begin with the Jews; and here was a Gentile crying for mercy. There was only one thing for him to do; he must awaken true faith in the heart of this woman.

So Jesus at last turned to her: "It is not right to take the children's bread and to throw it to the pet dogs." To call a person a dog was a deadly and a contemptuous insult. The Jew spoke with arrogant insolence about "Gentile dogs," "infidel dogs," and later "Christian dogs." In those days the dogs were the unclean scavengers of the street-lean, savage, often diseased. But there are two things to remember.

The tone and the look with which a thing is said make all the difference. A thing which seems hard can be said with a disarming smile. We can call a friend "an old villain", or "a rascal", with a smile and a tone which take an the sting out of it and fill it with affection. We can be quite sure that the smile on Jesus' face and the compassion in his eyes robbed the words of all insult and bitterness.

Second, it is the diminutive word for dogs (kunaria, GSN2952) which is used, and the kunaria (GSN2952) were not the street dogs, but the little household pets, very different from the pariah dogs who roamed the streets and probed in the refuse heaps.

The woman was a Greek; she was quick to see, and she had all a Greek's ready wit. "True," she said, "but even the dogs get their share of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." And Jesus' eyes lit up with joy at such an indomitable faith; and he granted her the blessing and the healing which she so much desired.

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Matthew 15:21-28

THE FAITH WHICH WON THE BLESSING

Matthew 15:21-28 (Part 2)

There are certain things about this woman which we must note.

(i) First and foremost, she had love. As Bengel said of her, "She made the misery of her child her own." Heathen she might be, but in her heart there was that love for her child which is always the reflection of God's love for his children. It was love which made her approach this stranger; it was love which made her accept his silence and yet still appeal; it was love which made her suffer the apparent rebuffs; it was love which made her able to see the compassion beyond and behind the words of Jesus. The driving force of this woman's heart was love; and there is nothing stronger and nothing nearer God than that very thing.

(ii) This woman had faith. (a) It was a faith which grew in contact with Jesus. She began by calling him Son of David; that was a popular title, a political title. It was a title which looked on Jesus as a great and powerful wonder worker, but which looked on him in terms of earthly power and glory. She came asking a boon of one whom she took to be a great and powerful man. She came with a kind of superstition as she might have come to any magician. She ended by calling Jesus Lord.

Jesus, as it were, compelled her to look at himself, and in him she saw something that was not expressible in earthly terms at all, but was nothing less than divine. That is precisely what Jesus wanted to awaken in her before he granted her request. He wanted her to see that a request to a great man must be turned into a prayer to the living God. We can see this woman's faith growing as she is confronted with Christ, until she glimpsed him, however distantly, for what he was.

(b) It was a faith which worshipped. She began by following; she ended upon her knees, She began with a request; she ended in prayer. Whenever we come to Jesus, we must come first with adoration of his majesty, and only then with the statement of our own need.

(iii) This woman had indomitable persistence. She was undiscourageable. So many people, it has been said, pray really because they do not wish to miss a chance. They do not really believe in prayer; they have only the feeling that something might just possibly happen. This woman came because Jesus was not just a possible helper; he was her only hope. She came with a passionate hope, a clamant sense of need, and a refusal to be discouraged. She had the one supremely effective quality in prayer--she was in deadly earnest. Prayer for her was no ritual form; it was the outpouring of the passionate desire of her soul, which somehow felt that she could not--and must not--and need not--take no for an answer.

(iv) This woman had the gift of cheerfulness. She was in the midst of trouble; she was passionately in earnest; and yet she could smile. She had a certain sunny-heartedness about her. God loves the cheerful faith, the faith in whose eyes there is always the light of hope, the faith with a smile which can light the gloom.

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Matthew 15:21-28

This woman brought to Christ a gallant and an audacious love, a faith which grew until it worshipped at the feet of the divine, an indomitable persistence springing from an unconquerable hope, a cheerfulness which would not be dismayed. That is the approach which cannot help finding an answer to its prayers.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 15:29-39

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Matthew 15:29-39 (Part 1)

And Jesus left there, and went to the Sea of Galilee; and he went up into a mountain, and he was sitting there; and great crowds came to him, bringing with them people who were lame and blind and deaf and maimed, and laid them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the crowd were amazed when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed restored to soundness, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they praised the God of Israel.

Jesus called his disciples to him. "My heart is sorry for the crowd," he said, "because they have stayed with me now for three days, and they have nothing to eat. I do not wish to send them away hungry in case they collapse on the road." The disciples said to him, "Where could we find enough loaves in a desert place to satisfy such a crowd?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few little fishes." He gave orders to the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and, when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And they gathered what remained of the fragments, seven hampers full. Those who ate were four thousand men, apart from women and children. When he had sent the crowds away, he embarked on the boat, and went to the district of Magadan.

We have already seen that when Jesus set out on his journey to the districts of the Phoenicians, he was entering upon a period of deliberate withdrawal that he might prepare himself and his disciples for the last days which lay ahead. One of the difficulties about the gospels is that they do not give us any definite indication of times and dates; these we have to work out for ourselves, using such hints as the story may give us. When we do, we find that Jesus' period of retreat with his disciples was very much longer than we might think from a casual reading of the story.

When Jesus fed the five thousand (Matt.14:15-21; Mk.6:31-44), it was the spring time, for at no other time would the grass be green in that hot land (Matt.14:19; Mk.6:39). After his discussions with the Scribes and Pharisees he withdrew to the districts of Tyre and Sidon (Mk.7:24; Matt.15:21). That in itself was no small journey on foot.

For the next note of time and place we go to Mk.7:31 "Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis." That was a strange way of travelling. Sidon is north of Tyre; the Sea of Galilee is south of Tyre; and the Decapolis was a confederation of ten Greek cities on the east of the Sea of Galilee. That is to say Jesus went north in order to go south. It is as if to get from one end of the base of a triangle to the other he went right round by the apex. It is as if he went from Edinburgh to Glasgow by way of Perth, or from Bristol to London by way of Manchester. It is clear that Jesus deliberately lengthened out this journey to have as long as possible with his disciples before the last journey to Jerusalem.

Finally he came to the Decapolis, where, as we learn from Mark (Mk.7:31), the incidents of our passage happened. Here we get our next hint. On this occasion when the crowd were bidden to sit

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down, they sat on the ground (epi (GSN1909), ten (GSN3588), gen (GSN1093), on the earth; it was by this time high summer and the grass was scorched, leaving only the bare earth.

That is to say, this northern journey took Jesus almost six months. We know nothing about what happened in the course of these six months; but we can be perfectly sure that they were the most important six months through which the disciples ever lived; for in them Jesus deliberately taught and instructed them, and opened their minds to the truth. It is a thing to remember that the disciples had six months apart with Jesus before the testing time came.

Many scholars think that the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand are different versions of the same incident; but that is not so. As we have seen, the date is different; the first took place in the spring, the second in the summer. The people and the place are different. The feeding of the four thousand took place in Decapolis. Decapolis literally means ten cities, and the Decapolis was a loose federation of ten free Greek cities. On this occasion there would be many Gentiles present, perhaps more Gentiles than Jews. It is that fact that explains the curious phrase in Matt. 15:31, "They glorified the God of Israel." To the Gentile crowds this was a demonstration of the power of the God of Israel. There is another curious little hint of difference. In the feeding of the five thousand the baskets which were used to take up the fragments are called kophinoi (GSN2894); in the feeding of the four thousand they are called sphurides (GSN4711).

The kophinos (GSN2894) was a narrow-necked, flask-shaped basket which Jews often carried with them, for a Jew often carried his own food, lest he should be compelled to eat food which had been touched by Gentile hands and was therefore unclean. The sphuris (GSN4711) was much more like a hamper; it could be big enough to carry a man, and it was a kind of basket that a Gentile would use.

The wonder of this story is that in these healings and in this feeding of the hungry, we see the mercy and the compassion of Jesus going out to the Gentiles. Here is a kind of symbol and foretaste that the bread of God was not to be confined to the Jews; that the Gentiles were also to have their share of him who is the living bread.

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Matthew 15:29-39

THE GRACIOUSNESS OF JESUS

Matthew 15:29-39 (Part 2)

In this passage we see fully displayed the graciousness and the sheer kindness of Jesus Christ. We see him relieving every kind of human need.

(i) We see him curing physical disability. The lame, the maimed, the blind and the dumb are laid at his feet and cured. Jesus is infinitely concerned with the bodily pain of the world; and those who bring men health and healing are still doing the work of Jesus Christ.

(ii) We see him concerned for the tired. The people are tired and he wants to strengthen their feet for a long, hard road. Jesus is infinitely concerned for the world's wayfarers, for the world's toilers, for those whose eyes are weary and whose hands are tired.

(iii) We see him feeding the hungry. We see him giving all he has to relieve physical hunger and physical need. Jesus is infinitely concerned for men's bodies, just as he is for their souls.

Here we see the power and the compassion of God going out to meet the many needs of the human situation.

In writing of this passage Edersheim has a lovely thought: he points out that in three successive stages of his ministry, Jesus ended each stage by setting a meal before his people. First, there was the feeding of the five thousand; that came at the end of his ministry in Galilee, for Jesus was never to teach and preach and heal in Galilee again. Second, there was this feeding of the four thousand. This came at the end of his brief ministry to the Gentiles, beyond the bounds of Palestine--first in the districts of Tyre and Sidon and then in the Decapolis. Third and last, there was the Last Supper in Jerusalem, when Jesus came to the final stage of the days of his flesh.

Here indeed is a lovely thought. Jesus always left men with strength for the way; always he gathered men to him to feed them with the living bread. Always he gave them himself before he moved on. And still he comes to us offering us also the bread which will satisfy the immortal hunger of the human soul, and in the strength of which we shall be able to go all the days of our life.

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Matthew 16:1-4

BLIND TO THE SIGNS

Matthew 16:1-4

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to him, trying to put him to the test, and asked him to show them a sign from Heaven. He answered them: "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fine weather, because the sky is red.' And early in the morning you say, 'It will be stormy today, because the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. An evil and apostate generation seeks for a sign. No sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." And he left them and went away.

Hostility, like necessity, makes strange bedfellows. It is an extraordinary phenomenon to find a combination of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They stood for both beliefs and policies which were diametrically opposed. The Pharisees lived life according to the minutiae of the oral and the scribal law; the Sadducees rejected the oral and the scribal law completely, and accepted only the written words of the Bible as their law of life. The Pharisees believed in angels and in the resurrection of the body and the Sadducees did not, an opposition which Paul made use of when he was on trial before the Sanhedrin (Ac.23:6-10).

And--in this case most important of all--the Pharisees were not a political party and were prepared to live under any government which would allow them to observe their own religious principles; the Sadducees were the small, wealthy aristocracy, who were the collaborationist party and were quite prepared to serve and cooperate with the Roman government, in order to retain their wealth and their privileges. Further, the Pharisees looked for and longed for the Messiah; the Sadducees did not. It would have been well-nigh impossible to find two more different sects and parties; and yet they came together in their envenomed desire to eliminate Jesus. All error has this in common--that it is hostile to Christ.

The demand of the Pharisees and the Sadducees was for a sign. As we have already seen, the Jews had a way of wishing a prophet or a leader to authenticate his message by some abnormal and extraordinary sign (Matt.12:38-40). It is Jesus' reply that the sign was there, if they could only see it. They were weather-wise. They knew the same weather saying that we ourselves know:

"A red sky at night is the shepherd's delight;
A red sky in the morning is the shepherd's warning."

They knew very well that a red sky in the evening presaged fine weather; and that a red sky in the morning was the warning of a storm to come. But they were blind to the signs of the times.

Jesus told them that the only sign they would receive was the sign of Jonah. We have already seen what the sign of Jonah was (Matt.12:38-40). Jonah was the prophet who converted the people of Nineveh and turned them from their evil ways towards God. Now the sign which turned the people of Nineveh to God was not the fact that Jonah was swallowed by the great sea monster. Of that they knew nothing; and Jonah never used it as a means of appeal. The sign of Jonah was Jonah himself and his message from God. It was the emergence of the prophet and the message which he brought which changed life for the people of Nineveh.

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So what Jesus is saying is that God's sign is Jesus himself and his message. It is as if he said to them: "In me you are confronted with God and with the truth of God. What more could you possibly need? But you are so blind that you cannot see it." There is truth and there is warning here. Jesus Christ is God's last word. Beyond him the revelation of God cannot go. Here is God plain for all to see. Here is God's message plain for all to hear. Here is God's sign to man. It is the warning truth that, if Jesus cannot appeal to men, nothing can. If Jesus cannot convince men, no one can. If men cannot see God in Jesus, they cannot see God in anything or anyone. When we are confronted with Jesus Christ, we are confronted with God's final word and God's ultimate appeal. If that is so, what can be left for the man who throws away that last chance, who refuses to listen to that last word, who rejects that last appeal?

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Matthew 16:5-12

THE DANGEROUS LEAVEN

Matthew 16:5-12

When the disciples came to the other side, they had forgotten to take loaves with them. Jesus said to them, "See that you beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They argued amongst themselves: "He must be saying this because we did not bring loaves." Jesus knew what they were thinking. "Why," he said, "are you arguing among yourselves, you of little faith, because you have no loaves? Do you not yet understand, and do you not remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? And do you not remember the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many hampers you took up? How is it that you do not understand that it was not about loaves that I spoke to you? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees!" Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven that is in loaves, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

We are presented here with a passage of very great difficulty. In fact, we can only guess at its meaning.

Jesus and his disciples had set out for the other side of the lake and the disciples had forgotten to take any bread with them. For some reason they were quite disproportionately worried and disturbed by this omission. Jesus said to them: "See that you beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Now the word leaven has two meanings. It has its physical and literal meaning, a little piece of fermented dough, without which bread cannot be baked. It was in that sense that the disciples understood Jesus to speak about leaven. With their minds fixed on the forgotten loaves, all that they could think of was that he was warning them against a certain kind of dangerous leaven. They had forgotten to bring bread which meant that, if they were to obtain any, they must buy it from the Gentiles on the other side of the lake. Now no Jew who was strictly orthodox could eat any bread which had been baked or handled by a Gentile. Therefore the problem of getting bread on the other side of the lake was insoluble.

The disciples may well have thought that Jesus was saying, "You have forgotten the bread which is clean; take care when you get to the other side of the lake that you do not pollute yourselves by buying bread with defiling leaven in it."

The disciples' minds were running on nothing but bread. So Jesus asked them to remember. "Remember," he said, "the feeding of the five thousand and of the four thousand; and remember the plenty there was to eat, and the abundance which was left over. And when you remember these things, surely you will stop fussing about trifles. You have surely seen that in my presence these trifling problems have already been solved and can be solved again. Stop worrying and trust me."

That was put so bluntly and so clearly that the disciples were bound to understand. Then Jesus repeated his warning: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees!" Leaven has a second meaning which is metaphorical and not literal and physical. It was the Jewish metaphorical expression for an evil influence. To the Jewish mind leaven was always symbolic of evil. It is fermented dough; the Jew identified fermentation with putrefaction; leaven stood for all that was

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Matthew 16:5-12

rotten and bad. Leaven has the power to permeate any mass of dough into which it is inserted. Therefore leaven stood for an evil influence liable to spread through life and to corrupt it.

Now the disciples understood. They knew that Jesus was not talking about bread at all; but he was warning them against the evil influence of the teaching and the beliefs of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

What would be in Jesus' mind when he warned against the evil influence of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees? That is something which we can only surmise; but we do know the characteristics of the minds of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

(i) The Pharisees saw religion in terms of laws and commandments and rules and regulations. They saw religion in terms of outward ritual and outward purity. So Jesus is saying, "Take care lest you make your religion a series of 'thou shalt not's' in the way the Pharisees do. Take care that you do not identify religion with a series of outward actions, and forget that what matters is the state of a man's heart." This is a warning against living in legalism and calling it religion; it is a warning against a religion which looks on a man's outward actions and forgets the inner state of his heart.

(ii) The Sadducees had two characteristics, which were closely connected. They were wealthy and aristocratic, and they were deeply involved in politics. So Jesus may well have been saying, "Take care that you never identify the kingdom of heaven with outward goods, and that you never pin your hopes of bringing it in to political action." This may well be a warning against giving material things too high a place in our scheme of values and against thinking that men can be reformed by political action. Jesus may well have been reminding men that material prosperity is far from being the highest good, and that political action is far from producing the most important results. The true blessings are the blessings of the heart; and the true change is not the change of outward circumstances but the change of the hearts of men.

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Matthew 16:13-16

THE SCENE OF THE GREAT DISCOVERY

Matthew 16:13-16 (Part 1)

When Jesus had come into the districts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" They said, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "And you--who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Anointed One, the Son of the living God."

Here we have the story of another withdrawal which Jesus made. The end was coming very near and Jesus needed all the time alone with his disciples that he could gain. He had so much to say to them and so much to teach them, although there were many things which then they could not bear and could not understand.

To that end he withdrew to the districts of Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi lies about twenty-five miles north-east of the Sea of Galilee. It was outside the domain of Herod Antipas, who was the ruler of Galilee, and within the area of Philip the Tetrarch. The population was mainly non-Jewish, and there Jesus would have peace to teach the Twelve.

Confronting Jesus at this time was one clamant and demanding problem. His time was short; his days in the flesh were numbered. The problem was--was there anyone who understood him? Was there anyone who had recognized him for who and what he was? Were there any who, when he was gone from the flesh, would carry on his work, and labour for his kingdom? Obviously that was a crucial problem, for it involved the very survival of the Christian faith. If there were none who had grasped the truth, or even glimpsed it, then all his work was undone; if there were some few who realized the truth, his work was safe. So Jesus was determined to put all to the test and ask his followers who they believed him to be.

It is of the most dramatic interest to see where Jesus chose to ask this question. There can have been few districts with more religious associations than Caesarea Philippi.

(i) The area was scattered with temples of the ancient Syrian Baal worship. Thomson in *The Land and the Book* enumerates no fewer than fourteen such temples in the near neighbourhood. Here was an area where the breath of ancient religion was in the very atmosphere. Here was a place beneath the shadow of the ancient gods.

(ii) Not only the Syrian gods had their worship here. Hard by Caesarea Philippi there rose a great hill, in which was a deep cavern; and that cavern was said to be the birthplace of the great god Pan, the god of nature. So much was Caesarea Philippi identified with that god that its original name was Panias, and to this day the place is known as Banias. The legends of the gods of Greece gathered around Caesarea Philippi.

(iii) Further, that cave was said to be the place where the sources of the Jordan sprang to life. Josephus writes: "This is a very fine cave in a mountain, under which there is a great cavity in the earth; and the cavern is abrupt, and prodigiously deep, and full of still water. Over it hangs a vast

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Matthew 16:13-16

mountain, and under the cavern arise the springs of the River Jordan." The very idea that this was the place where the River Jordan took its rise would make it redolent of all the memories of Jewish history. The ancient faith of Judaism would be in the air for anyone who was a devout and pious Jew.

(iv) But there was something more. In Caesarea Philippi there was a great temple of white marble built to the godhead of Caesar. It had been built by Herod the Great. Josephus says: "Herod adorned the place, which was already a very remarkable one, still further by the erection of this temple, which he dedicated to Caesar." In another place Josephus describes the cave and the temple: "And when Caesar had further bestowed on Herod another country, he built there also a temple of white marble, hard by the fountains of Jordan. The place is called Panium, where there is the top of a mountain which is raised to an immense height, and at its side, beneath, or at its bottom, a dark cave opens itself; within which there is a horrible precipice that descends abruptly to a vast depth. It contains a mighty quantity of water, which is immovable; and when anyone lets down anything to measure the depth of the earth beneath the water, no length of cord is sufficient to reach it." Later it was Philip, Herod's son, who further beautified and enriched the temple, changed the name of Panias to Caesarea--Caesar's town--and added his own name--Philippi, which means of Philip--to distinguish it from the Caesarea on the coasts of the Mediterranean. Still later, Herod Agrippa was to call the place Neroneas in honour of the Emperor Nero. No one could look at Caesarea Philippi, even from the distance, without seeing that pile of glistening marble, and thinking of the might and of the divinity of Rome.

Here indeed is a dramatic picture. Here is a homeless, penniless Galilaean carpenter, with twelve very ordinary men around him. At the moment the orthodox are actually plotting and planning to destroy him as a dangerous heretic. He stands in an area littered with the temples of the Syrian gods; in a place where the ancient Greek gods looked down; in a place where the history of Israel crowded in upon the minds of men; where the white marble splendour of the home of Caesar--worship dominated the landscape and compelled the eye. And there--of all places--this amazing carpenter stands and asks men who they believe him to be, and expects the answer, The Son of God. It is as if Jesus deliberately set himself against the background of the world's religions in all their history and their splendour, and demanded to be compared with them and to have the verdict given in his favour. There are few scenes where Jesus' consciousness of his own divinity shines out with a more dazzling light.

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Matthew 16:13-16

THE INADEQUACY OF HUMAN CATEGORIES

Matthew 16:13-16 (Part 2)

So then at Caesarea Philippi Jesus determined to demand a verdict from his disciples. He must know before he set out from Jerusalem and the Cross if anyone had even dimly grasped who and what he was. He did not ask the question directly; he led up to it. He began by asking what people were saying about him, and who they took him to be.

Some said that he was John the Baptist. Herod Antipas was not the only man who felt that John the Baptist was so great a figure that it might well be that he had come back from the dead.

Others said that he was Elijah. In doing so, they were saying two things about Jesus. They were saying that he was as great as the greatest of the prophets, for Elijah had always been looked on as the summit and the prince of the prophetic line. They were also saying that Jesus was the forerunner of the Messiah. As Malachi had it, the promise of God was: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Mal.4:5). To this day the Jews expect the return of Elijah before the coming of the Messiah, and to this day they leave a chair vacant for Elijah when they celebrate the Passover, for when Elijah comes, the Messiah will not be far away. So the people looked on Jesus as the herald of the Messiah and the forerunner of the direct intervention of God.

Some said that Jesus was Jeremiah. Jeremiah had a curious place in the expectations of the people of Israel. It was believed that, before the people went into exile, Jeremiah had taken the ark and the altar of incense out of the Temple, and hidden them away in a lonely cave on Mount Nebo; and that, before the coming of the Messiah, he would return and produce them, and the glory of God would come to the people again (2Macc.2:1-12). In 2Esdr.2:18 the promise of God is: "For thy help I will send my servants Isaiah and Jeremiah."

There is a strange legend of the days of the Maccabean wars. Before the battle with Nicanor, in which the Jewish commander was the great Judas Maccabaeus, Onias, the good man who had been high priest, had a vision. He prayed for victory in the battle. "This done, in like manner there appeared a man with grey hairs, and exceeding glorious, who was of a wonderful and excellent majesty. Then Onias answered saying: 'This is a lover of the brethren, who prayeth much for the people, and for the holy city, to wit, Jeremiah, the prophet of God.' Whereupon Jeremiah, holding forth his right hand, gave to Judas a sword of gold, and, in giving it to him, spake thus: 'Take this holy sword, a gift from God, with which thou shalt wound the adversaries of my people Israel'" (2Macc.15:1-14). Jeremiah also was to be the forerunner of the coming of the Messiah, and his country's help in time of trouble.

When the people identified Jesus with Elijah and with Jeremiah they were, according to their lights, paying him a great compliment and setting him in a high place, for Jeremiah and Elijah were none other than the expected forerunners of the Anointed One of God. When they arrived, the Kingdom would be very near indeed.

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Matthew 16:13-16

When Jesus had heard the verdicts of the crowd, he asked the all-important question: "And you--who do you say I am?" At that question there may well have been a moment's silence, while into the minds of the disciples came thoughts which they were almost afraid to express in words; and then Peter made his great discovery and his great confession; and Jesus knew that his work was safe because there was at least someone who understood.

It is interesting to note that each of the three gospels has its own version of the saying of Peter. Matthew has:

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Mark is briefest of all (Mk.8:29):

You are the Christ.

Luke is clearest of all (Lk.9:20):

You are the Christ of God.

Jesus knew now that there was at least someone who had recognized him for the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the Son of the living God. The word Messiah and the word Christ are the same; the one is the Hebrew and the other is the Greek for The Anointed One. Kings were ordained to office by anointing, as they still are. The Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One is God's King over men.

Within this passage there are two great truths.

(i) Essentially Peter's discovery was that human categories, even the highest, are inadequate to describe Jesus Christ. When the people described Jesus as. Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets they thought they were setting Jesus in the highest category they could find. It was the belief of the Jews that for four hundred years the voice of prophecy had been silent; and they were saying that in Jesus men heard again the direct and authentic voice of God. These were great tributes; but they were not great enough; for there are no human categories which are adequate to describe Jesus Christ.

Once Napoleon gave his verdict on Jesus. "I know men," he said, "and Jesus Christ is more than a man." Doubtless Peter could not have given a theological account and a philosophic expression of what he meant when he said that Jesus was the Son of the living God; the one thing of which Peter was quite certain was that no merely human description was adequate to describe him.

(ii) This passage teaches that our discovery of Jesus Christ must be a personal discovery. Jesus' question is: "You--what do you think of me?" When Pilate asked him if he was the king of the Jews, his answer was: "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" (Jn.18:33-34).

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Matthew 16:13-16

Our knowledge of Jesus must never be at second hand. A man might know every verdict ever passed on Jesus; he might know every Christology that the mind of man had ever thought out; he might be able to give a competent summary of the teaching about Jesus of every great thinker and theologian--and still not be a Christian. Christianity never consists in knowing about Jesus; it always consists in knowing Jesus. Jesus Christ demands a personal verdict. He did not ask only Peter, he asks every man: "You--what do you think of me?"

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Matthew 16:17-19

THE GREAT PROMISE

Matthew 16:17-19 (Part 1)

Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but my Father who is in Heaven. And I tell you, that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatever you bind on earth will remain bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth will remain loosed in heaven."

This passage is one of the storm-centres of New Testament interpretation. It has always been difficult to approach it calmly and without prejudice, for it is the Roman Catholic foundation of the position of the Pope and of the Church. It is taken by the Roman Catholic Church to mean that to Peter were given the keys which admit or exclude a man from heaven, and that to Peter was given the power to absolve or not to absolve a man from his sins. It is further argued by the Roman Catholic Church that Peter, with these tremendous rights, became the bishop of Rome; and that this power descended to all the bishops of Rome; and that it exists today in the Pope, who is the head of the Church and the Bishop of Rome.

It is easy to see how impossible any such doctrine is for a Protestant believer; and it is also easy to see how Protestant and Roman Catholic alike may approach this passage, not with the single-hearted desire to discover its meaning, but with the determination to yield nothing of his own position, and, if possible, to destroy the position of the other. Let us then try to find its true meaning.

There is a play on words. In Greek Peter is Petros (GSN4074) and a rock is petra (GSN4073). Peter's Aramaic name was Kephaz (HSN3710), and that also is the Aramaic for a rock. In either language there is here a play upon words. Immediately Peter had made his great discovery and confession, Jesus said to him: "You are petros (GSN4074), and on this petra (GSN4073) I will build my Church."

Whatever else this is, it is a word of tremendous praise. It is a metaphor which is by no means strange or unusual to Jewish thought.

The Rabbis applied the word rock to Abraham. They had a saying: "When the Holy One saw Abraham who was going to arise, he said, 'Lo, I have discovered a rock (petra, GSN4073) to found the world upon.' Therefore he called Abraham rock (tsuwr, HSN6697), as it is said: 'Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn.'" Abraham was the rock on which the nation and the purpose of God were founded.

Even more the word rock (tsuwr, HSN6697) is again and again applied to God himself. "He is the Rock; his work is perfect" (Deut.32:4). "For their rock is not as our Rock" (Deut.32:31). "There is no rock like our God" (1Sam.2:2). "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer" (2Sam.22:2). The same phrase occurs in Ps.18:2. "Who is a rock, except our God?" (Ps.18:31). The same phrase is in 2Sam.22:32.

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Matthew 16:17-19

One thing is clear. To call anyone a rock was the greatest of compliments; and no Jew who knew his Old Testament could ever use the phrase without his thoughts turning to God, who alone was the true rock of his defence and salvation. What then did Jesus mean when in this passage he used the word rock? To that question at least four answers have been given.

(i) Augustine took the rock to mean Jesus himself. It is as if Jesus said: "You are Peter; and on myself as rock I will found my Church; and the day will come when, as the reward of your faith, you will be great in the Church."

(ii) The second explanation is that the rock is the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God. To Peter that great truth had been divinely revealed. The fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is indeed the foundation stone of the Church's faith and belief, but it hardly seems to bring out the play on words which is here.

(iii) The third explanation is that the rock is Peter's faith. On the faith of Peter the Church is founded. That faith was the spark which was to kindle the faith of the world-wide Church. It was the initial impetus which was one day to bring the universal Church into being.

(iv) The last interpretation is still the best. It is that Peter himself is the rock, but in a special sense. He is not the rock on which the Church is founded; that rock is God. He is the first stone of the whole Church. Peter was the first man on earth to discover who Jesus was; he was the first man to make the leap of faith and see in him the Son of the living God. In other words, Peter was the first member of the Church, and, in that sense, the whole Church is built on him. It is as if Jesus said to Peter: "Peter, you are the first man to grasp who I am; you are therefore the first stone, the foundation stone, the very beginning of the Church which I am founding." And in ages to come, everyone who makes the same discovery as Peter is another stone added into the edifice of the Church of Christ.

Two things help to make this clear.

(i) Often the Bible uses pictures for the sake of one definite point. The details of the picture are not to be stressed; it is one point which is being made. In connection with the Church the New Testament repeatedly uses the picture of building, but it uses that picture for many purposes and from many points of view. Here Peter is the foundation, in the sense that he is the one person on whom the whole Church is built, for he was the first man to discover who Jesus was. In Eph.2:20 the prophets and the apostles are said to be the foundation of the Church. It is on their work and on their witness and on their fidelity that the Church on earth, humanly speaking, depends. In the same passage, Jesus Christ is the chief corner-stone; he is the force who holds the Church together. Without him the whole edifice would disintegrate and collapse. In 1Pet.2:4-8 all Christians are living stones who are to be built into the fabric of the Church. In 1Cor.3:11 Jesus is the only foundation, and no man can lay any other.

It is clear to see that the New Testament writers took the picture of building and used it in many ways. But at the back of it all is always the idea that Jesus Christ is the real foundation of the Church, and the only power who holds the Church together. When Jesus said to Peter that on him

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Matthew 16:17-19

he would found his Church, he did not mean that the Church depended on Peter, as it depended on himself and on God the Rock. He did mean that the Church began with Peter; in that sense Peter is the foundation of the Church; and that is an honour that no man can take from him.

(ii) The second point is that the very word Church (ekklesia, GSN1577) in this passage conveys something of a wrong impression. We are apt to think of the Church as an institution and an organization with buildings and offices, and services and meetings, and organizations and all kinds of activities. The word that Jesus almost certainly used was qahal (HSN6951), which is the word the Old Testament uses for the congregation of Israel, the gathering of the people of the Lord. What Jesus said to Peter was: "Peter, you are the beginning of the new Israel, the new people of the Lord, the new fellowship of those who believe in my name." Peter was the first of the fellowship of believers in Christ. It was not a Church in the human sense, still less a Church in a denominational sense, that began with Peter. What began with Peter was the fellowship of all believers in Jesus Christ, not identified with any Church and not limited to any Church, but embracing all who love the Lord.

So then we may say that the first part of this controversial passage means that Peter is the foundation stone of the Church in the sense that he was the first of that great fellowship who joyfully declare their own discovery that Jesus Christ is Lord; but that, in the ultimate sense, it is God himself who is the rock on which the Church is built.

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Matthew 16:17-19

THE GATES OF HELL

Matthew 16:17-19 (Part 2)

Jesus goes on to say that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against his Church. What does that mean? The idea of gates prevailing is not by any means a natural or an easily understood picture. Again there is more than one explanation.

(i) It may be that the picture is the picture of a fortress. This suggestion may find support in the fact that on the top of the mountain overlooking Caesarea Philippi there stand today the ruins of a great castle which may well have stood there in all its glory in the time of Jesus. It may be that Jesus is thinking of his Church as a fortress, and the forces of evil as an opposing fortress; and is saying that the embattled might of evil will never prevail against the Church.

(ii) Richard Glover has an interesting explanation. In the ancient east the Gate was always the place, especially in the little towns and villages, where the elders and the rulers met and dispensed counsel and justice. For instance, the law is laid down that, if a man has a rebellious and disobedient son, he must bring him "to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives" (Deut.21:19), and there judgment will be given and justice done. In Deut.25:7 the man with a certain problem is told to "go up to the gate to the elders." The gate was the scene of simple justice where the elders met. So the gate may have come to mean the place of government. For long, for instance, the government of Turkey was called the Sublime Porte (porte being the French for gate). So then the phrase would mean: The powers, the government of Hades will never prevail against the Church.

(iii) There is a third possibility. Suppose we go back to the idea that the rock on which the Church is founded is the conviction that Jesus is none other than the Son of the living God. Now Hades was not the place of punishment, but the place where, in primitive Jewish belief, all the dead went. Obviously, the function of gates is to keep things in, to confine them, shut them up, control them. There was one person whom the gates of Hades could not shut in; and that was Jesus Christ. He burst the bonds of death. As the writer of Acts has it, "It was not possible for him to be held by death.... Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption" (Ac.2:24,27). So then this may be a triumphant reference to nothing less than the coming Resurrection. Jesus may be saying: "You have discovered that I am the Son of the living God. The time will soon come when I will be crucified, and the gates of Hades will close behind me. But they are powerless to shut me in.

The gates of Hades have no power against me the Son of the living God."

However we take it, this phrase triumphantly expresses the indestructibility of Christ and his Church.

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Matthew 16:17-19

THE PLACE OF PETER

Matthew 16:17-19 (Part 3)

We now come to two phrases in which Jesus describes certain privileges which were given to and certain duties which were laid on Peter.

(i) He says that he will give to Peter the keys of the Kingdom. This is an obviously difficult phrase; and we will do well to begin by setting down the things about it of which we can be sure.

(a) The phrase always signified some kind of very special power. For instance, the Rabbis had a saying: "The keys of birth, of the rain, and of the resurrection of the dead belong to God." That is to say, only God has the power to create life, to send the rain, and to raise the dead to life again. The phrase always indicates a special power.

(b) In the New Testament this phrase is regularly attached to Jesus. It is in his hands, and no one else's, that the keys are. In Rev.1:18 the risen Christ says: "I am the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." Again in Rev.3:7 the Risen Christ is described as, "The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens." This phrase must be interpreted as indicating a certain divine right, and whatever the promise made to Peter, it cannot be taken as annulling, or infringing, a right which belongs alone to God and to the Son of God.

(c) All these New Testament pictures and usages go back to a picture in Isaiah (Isa.22:22). Isaiah describes Eliakim, who will have the key of the house of David on his shoulder, and who alone will open and shut. Now the duty of Eliakim was to be the faithful steward of the house. It is the steward who carries the keys of the house, who in the morning opens the door, and in the evening shuts it, and through whom visitors gain access to the royal presence. So then what Jesus is saying to Peter is that in the days to come, he will be the steward of the Kingdom. And in the case of Peter the whole idea is that of opening, not shutting, the door of the Kingdom.

That came abundantly true. At Pentecost, Peter opened the door to three thousand souls (Ac.2:41). He opened the door to the Gentile centurion Cornelius, so that it was swinging on its hinges to admit the great Gentile world (Ac.10). Ac.15 tells how the Council of Jerusalem opened wide the door for the Gentiles, and how it was Peter's witness which made that possible (Ac.15:14; Simeon is Peter). The promise that Peter would have the keys to the Kingdom was the promise that Peter would be the means of opening the door to God for thousands upon thousands of people in the days to come. But it is not only Peter who has the keys of the Kingdom; every Christian has; for it is open to every one of us to open the door of the Kingdom to some other and so to enter into the great promise of Christ.

(ii) Jesus further promised Peter that what he bound would remain bound, and what he loosed would remain loosed. Richard Glover takes this to mean that Peter would lay men's sins, bind them, to men's consciences, and that he would then loose them from their sins by telling them of the love

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Matthew 16:17-19

and the forgiveness of God. That is a lovely thought, and no doubt true, for such is the duty of every Christian preacher and teacher, but there is more to it than that.

To loose and to bind were very common Jewish phrases. They were used especially of the decisions of the great teachers and the great Rabbis. Their regular sense, which any Jew would recognize was to allow and to forbid. To bind something was to declare it forbidden; to loose was to declare it allowed. These were the regular phrases for taking decisions in regard to the law. That is in fact the only thing these phrases in such a context would mean. So what Jesus is saying to Peter is: "Peter, you are going to have grave and heavy responsibilities laid upon you. You are going to have to take decisions which will affect the welfare of the whole Church. You will be the guide and the director of the infant Church. And the decisions you give will be so important, that they will affect the souls of men in time and in eternity."

The privilege of the keys meant that Peter would be the steward of the household of God, opening the door for men to enter into the Kingdom. The duty of binding and loosing meant that Peter would have to take decisions about the Church's life and practice which would have the most far-reaching consequences. And indeed, when we read the early chapters of Acts, we see that in Jerusalem that is precisely what Peter did.

When we paraphrase this passage which has caused so much argument and controversy, we see that it deals, not with ecclesiastical forms but with the things of salvation. Jesus said to Peter: "Peter, your name means a rock, and your destiny is to be a rock. You are the first man to recognize me for what I am, and therefore you are the first stone in the edifice of the fellowship of those who are mine. Against that fellowship the embattled powers of evil will no more prevail than they will be able to hold me captive in death. And in the days to come, you must be the steward who will unlock the doors of the Kingdom that Jew and Gentile may come in; and you must be the wise administrator and guide who will solve the problems and direct the work of the infant and growing fellowship."

Peter had made the great discovery; and Peter was given the great privilege and the great responsibility. It is a discovery which everyone must make for himself; and, when he has made it, the same privilege and the same responsibility are laid upon him.

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Matthew 16:20-23

THE GREAT REBUKE

Matthew 16:20-23 (Part 1)

He gave orders to his disciples to tell no one that he was God's Anointed One. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised on the third day. Peter caught hold of him, and began to urge upon him: "God forbid that this should happen to you! This must never come to you!" He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are putting a stumbling-block in my way. Your ideas are not God's but men's."

Although the disciples had grasped the fact that Jesus was God's Messiah, they still had not grasped what that great fact meant. To them it meant something totally different from what it meant to Jesus. They were still thinking in terms of a conquering Messiah, a warrior king, who would sweep the Romans from Palestine and lead Israel to power. That is why Jesus commanded them to silence. If they had gone out to the people and preached their own ideas, all they would have succeeded in doing would have been to raise a tragic rebellion; they could have produced only another outbreak of violence doomed to disaster. Before they could preach that Jesus was the Messiah, they had to learn what that meant. In point of fact, Peter's reaction shows just how far the disciples were from realizing just what Jesus meant when he claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God.

So Jesus began to seek to open their eyes to the fact that for him there was no way but the way of the Cross. He said that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of the "elders and chief priests and scribes." These three groups of men were in fact the three groups of which the Sanhedrin was composed. The elders were the respected men of the people; the chief priests were predominantly Sadducees; and the scribes were Pharisees. In effect, Jesus is saying that he must suffer at the hands of the orthodox religious leaders of the country.

No sooner had Jesus said that than Peter reacted with violence. Peter had been brought up on the idea of a Messiah of power and glory and conquest. To him the idea of a suffering Messiah, the connection of a cross with the work of the Messiah, was incredible. He "caught hold" of Jesus. Almost certainly the meaning is that he flung a protecting arm round Jesus, as if to hold him back from a suicidal course. "This," said Peter, "must not and cannot happen to you." And then came the great rebuke which makes us catch our breath--"Get behind me, Satan!" There are certain things which we must grasp in order to understand this tragic and dramatic scene.

We must try to catch the tone of voice in which Jesus spoke. He certainly did not say it with a snarl of anger in his voice and a blaze of indignant passion in his eyes. He said it like a man wounded to the heart, with poignant grief and a kind of shuddering horror. Why should he react like that?

He did so because in that moment there came back to him with cruel force the temptations which he had faced in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry. There he had been tempted to take the way of power. "Give them bread, give them material things," said the tempter, "and they will

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Matthew 16:20-23

follow you." "Give them sensations," said the tempter, "give them wonders, and they will follow you Compromise with the world," said the tempter. "Reduce your standards, and they will follow you." It was precisely the same temptations with which Peter was confronting Jesus an over again.

Nor were these temptations ever wholly absent from the mind of Jesus. Luke sees far into the heart of the Master. At the end of the temptation story, Luke writes: "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Lk.4:13). Again and again the tempter launched this attack. No one wants a cross; no one wants to die in agony; even in the Garden that same temptation came to Jesus, the temptation to take another way.

And here Peter is offering it to him now. The sharpness and the poignancy of Jesus' answer are due to the fact that Peter was urging upon him the very things which the tempter was always whispering to him, the very things against which he had to steel himself. Peter was confronting Jesus with that way of escape from the Cross which to the end beckoned to him.

That is why Peter was Satan. Satan literally means the Adversary. That is why Peter's ideas were not God's but men's. Satan is any force which seeks to deflect us from the way of God; Satan is any influence which seeks to make us turn back from the hard way that God has set before us; Satan is any power which seeks to make human desires take the place of the divine imperative.

What made the temptation more acute was the fact that it came from one who loved him. Peter spoke as he did only because he loved Jesus so much that he could not bear to think of him treading that dreadful path and dying that awful death. The hardest temptation of all is the one which comes from protecting love. There are times when fond love seeks to deflect us from the perils of the path of God; but the real love is not the love which holds the knight at home, but the love which sends him out to obey the commandments of the chivalry which is given, not to make life easy, but to make life great. It is quite possible for love to be so protecting that it seeks to protect those it loves from the adventure of the warfare of the soldier of Christ, and from the strenuousness of the pathway of the pilgrim of God. What really wounded Jesus' heart and what really made him speak as he did, was that the tempter spoke to him that day through the fond but mistaken love of Peter's hot heart.

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Matthew 16:20-23

THE CHALLENGE BEHIND THE REBUKE

Matthew 16:20-23 (Part 2)

Before we leave this passage, it is interesting to look at two very early interpretations of the phrase: "Get behind me, Satan!" Origen suggested that, Jesus was saying to Peter: "Peter, your place is behind me, not in front of me. It is your place to follow me in the way I choose, not to try to lead me in the way you would like me to go." If the phrase can be interpreted in that way, something at least of its sting is removed, for it does not banish Peter from Christ's presence; rather it recalls him to his proper place, as a follower walking in the footsteps of Jesus. It is true for all of us that we must ever take the way of Christ and never seek to compel him to take our way.

A further development comes when we closely examine this saying of Jesus in the light of his saying to Satan at the end of the temptations as Matthew records it in Matt.4:10. Although in the English translations the two passages sound different they are almost, but not quite, the same. In Matt.4:10 the Revised Standard Version translates: "Begone, Satan!" and the Greek is: "Hupage (GSN5217) Satana (GSN4566)." In the Revised Standard Version translation of Matt.16:23, Jesus says to Peter: "Get behind me, Satan," and the Greek is: "Hupage (GSN5217) opiso (GSN3694) mou (GSN3450), Satana (GSN4566)."

The point is that Jesus' command to Satan is simply: "Begone!" while his command to Peter is: "Begone behind me!" that is to say, "Become my follower again." Satan is banished from the presence of Christ; Peter is recalled to be Christ's follower. The one thing that Satan could never become is a follower of Christ; in his diabolical pride he could never submit to that; that is why he is Satan. On the other hand, Peter might be mistaken and might fail and might sin, but for him there was always the challenge and the chance to become a follower again. It is as if Jesus said to Peter: "At the moment you have spoken as Satan would. But that is not the real Peter speaking. You can redeem yourself. Come behind me, and be my follower again, and even yet, all will be well." The basic difference between Peter and Satan is precisely the fact that Satan would never get behind Jesus. So long as a man is prepared to try to follow, even after he has fallen, there is still for him the hope of glory here and hereafter.

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Matthew 16:24-26

THE GREAT CHALLENGE

Matthew 16:24-26 (Part 1)

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and let him follow me. For whoever wishes to keep his life safe, will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it. For what shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world at the penalty of the price of his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?"

Here we have one of the dominant and ever-recurring themes of Jesus' teaching. These are things which Jesus said to men again and again (Matt.10:37-39; Mk.8:34-37; Lk.9:23-27; Lk.14:25-27; Lk.17:33; Jn.12:25). Again and again he confronted them with the challenge of the Christian life. There are three things which a man must be prepared to do, if he is to live the Christian life.

(i) He must deny himself. Ordinarily we use the word self-denial in a restricted sense. We use it to mean giving up something. For instance, a week of self-denial may be a week when we do without certain pleasures or luxuries in order to contribute to some good cause. But that is only a very small part of what Jesus meant by self-denial. To deny oneself means in every moment of life to say no to self and yes to God. To deny oneself means once, finally and for all to dethrone self and to enthrone God. To deny oneself means to obliterate self as the dominant principle of life, and to make God the ruling principle, more, the ruling passion, of life. The life of constant self-denial is the life of constant assent to God.

(ii) He must take up his cross. That is to say, he must take up the burden of sacrifice. The Christian life is the life of sacrificial service. The Christian may have to abandon personal ambition to serve Christ; it may be that he will discover that the place where he can render the greatest service to Jesus Christ is somewhere where the reward will be small and the prestige non-existent. He will certainly have to sacrifice time and leisure and pleasure in order to serve God through the service of his fellow-men.

To put it quite simply, the comfort of the fireside, the pleasure of a visit to a place of entertainment, may well have to be sacrificed for the duties of the eldership, the calls of the youth club, the visit to the home of some sad or lonely soul. He may well have to sacrifice certain things he could well afford to possess in order to give more away. The Christian life is the sacrificial life.

Luke, with a flash of sheer insight, adds one word to this command of Jesus: "Let him take up his cross daily." The really important thing is not the great moments of sacrifice, but a life lived in the constant hourly awareness of the demands of God and the need of others. The Christian life is a life which is always concerned with others more than it is concerned with itself.

(iii) He must follow Jesus Christ. That is to say, he must render to Jesus Christ a perfect obedience. When we were young we used to play a game called "Follow my Leader." Everything the leader did, however difficult, and, in the case of the game, however ridiculous, we had to copy.

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Matthew 16:24-26

The Christian life is a constant following of our leader, a constant obedience in thought and word and action to Jesus Christ. The Christian walks in the footsteps of Christ, wherever he may lead.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 16:24-26

LOSING AND FINDING LIFE

Matthew 16:24-26 (Part 2)

There is all the difference in the world between existing and living. To exist is simply to have the lungs breathing and the heart beating; to live is to be alive in a world where everything is worth while, where there is peace in the soul, joy in the heart, and a thrill in every moment. Jesus here gives us the recipe for life as distinct from existence.

(i) The man who plays for safety loses life. Matthew was writing somewhere between A.D. 80 and 90. He was therefore writing in some of the bitterest days of persecution. He was saying: "The time may well come when you can save your life by abandoning your faith; but if you do, so far from saving life, in the real sense of the term you are losing life." The man who is faithful may die but he dies to live; the man who abandons his faith for safety may live, but he lives to die.

In our day and generation it is not likely to be a question of martyrdom, but it still remains a fact that, if we meet life in the constant search for safety, security, ease and comfort, if every decision is taken from worldly-wise and prudential motives, we are losing all that makes life worth while. Life becomes a soft and flabby thing, when it might have been an adventure. Life becomes a selfish thing, when it might have been radiant with service. Life becomes an earthbound thing when it might have been reaching for the stars. Someone once wrote a bitter epitaph on a man: "He was born a man and died a grocer." Any trade or profession might be substituted for the word grocer. The man who plays for safety ceases to be a man, for man is made in the image of God.

(ii) The man who risks all--and maybe looks as if he had lost all--for Christ, finds life. It is the simple lesson of history that it has always been the adventurous souls, bidding farewell to security and safety, who wrote their names on history and greatly helped the world of men. Unless there had been those prepared to take risks, many a medical cure would not exist. Unless there had been those prepared to take risks, many of the machines which make life easier would never have been invented. Unless there were mothers prepared to take risks, no child would ever be born. It is the man who is prepared "to bet his life that there is a God" who in the end finds life.

(iii) Then Jesus speaks with warning: "Suppose a man plays for safety; suppose he gains the whole world; then suppose that he finds that life is not worth living, what can he give to get life back again?" And the grim truth is that he cannot get life back again. In every decision of life we are doing something to ourselves; we are making ourselves a certain kind of person; we are building up steadily and inevitably a certain kind of character; we are making ourselves able to do certain things and quite unable to do others. It is perfectly possible for a man to gain all the things he set his heart upon, and then to awaken one morning to find that he has missed the most important things of all.

The world stands for material things as opposed to God; and of all material things there are three things to be said. (a) No one can take them with him at the end; he can take only himself; and if he degraded himself in order to get them, his regret will be bitter. (b) They cannot help a man in the shattering days of life. Material things will never mend a broken heart or cheer a lonely soul. (c) If

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Matthew 16:24-26

by any chance a man gained his material possessions in a way that is dishonourable, there will come a day when conscience will speak, and he will know hell on this side of the grave.

The world is full of voices crying out that he is a fool who sells real life for material things.

(iv) Finally Jesus asks: "What will a man give in exchange for his soul?" The Greek is, "What antallagma (GSN0465) will a man give for his soul?" Antallagma (GSN0465) is an interesting word. In the book of Ecclesiasticus we read: "There is no antallagma (GSN0465) for a faithful friend," and, "There is no antallagma (GSN0465) for a disciplined soul" (Ecc.6:15; Ecc.26:14). It means that there is no price which will buy a faithful friend or a disciplined soul. So then this final saying of Jesus can mean two things.

(a) It can mean: Once a man has lost his real life, because of his desire for security and for material things, there is no price that he can pay to get it back again. He has done something to himself which cannot ever be fully obliterated.

(b) It can mean: A man owes himself and everything else to Jesus Christ; and there is nothing that a man can give to Christ in place of his life. It is quite possible for a man to try to give his money to Christ and to withhold his life. It is still more possible for a man to give lip-service to Christ and to withhold his life. Many a person gives his weekly freewill offering to the Church, but does not attend; obviously that does not satisfy the demands of church membership. The only possible gift to the Church is ourselves; and the only possible gift to Christ is our whole life. There is no substitute for it. Nothing less will do.

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Matthew 16:27-28

THE WARNING AND THE PROMISE

Matthew 16:27-28

"For the Son of Man will come with the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he will render to each man in accordance with his way of action. This is the truth I tell you--there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom."

There are two quite distinct sayings here.

(i) The first is a warning, the warning of inevitable judgment. Life is going somewhere--and life is going to judgment. In any sphere of life there inevitably comes the day of reckoning. There is no escape from the fact that Christianity teaches that after life there comes the judgment; and when we take this passage in conjunction with the passage which goes before, we see at once what the standard of judgment is. The man who selfishly hugs life to himself, the man whose first concern is his own safety, his own security and his own comfort, is in heaven's eyes the failure, however rich and successful and prosperous he may seem to be. The man who spends himself for others, and who lives life as a gallant adventure, is the man who receives heaven's praise and God's reward.

(ii) The second is a promise. As Matthew records this phrase, it reads as if Jesus spoke as if he expected his own visible return in the lifetime of some of those who were listening to him. If Jesus said that he was mistaken. But we see the real meaning of what Jesus said when we turn to Mark's record of it. Mark has: And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mk.9:1).

It is of the mighty working of his Kingdom that Jesus is speaking; and what he said came most divinely true. There were those standing there who saw the coming of Jesus in the coming, of the Spirit at the day of Pentecost. There were those who were to see Gentile and Jew swept into the Kingdom; they were to see the tide of the Christian message sweep across Asia Minor and cover Europe until it reached Rome. Well within the life-time of those who heard Jesus speak, the Kingdom came with power.

Again, this is to be taken closely with what goes before. Jesus warned his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and that there he must suffer many things and die. That was the shame; but the shame was not the end. After the Cross there came the Resurrection. The Cross was not to be the end; it was to be the beginning of the unleashing of that power which was to surge throughout the whole world. This is a promise to the disciples of Jesus Christ that nothing men can do can hinder the expansion of the Kingdom of God.

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Matthew 17:1-8

THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

Matthew 17:1-8 (Part 1)

Six days after, Jesus took Peter, and James, and John his brother, and brought them by themselves to a high mountain, and his appearance was changed in their presence. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as the light. And, look you, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is a fine thing for us to be here. I will make three booths, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, look you, a shining cloud overshadowed them; and, look you, there came a voice out of the cloud saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him!" When the disciples heard that, they fell on their faces and were exceedingly afraid. Jesus came and touched them and said, "Rise, and do not be afraid." They lifted up their eyes, and saw no one, except Jesus alone.

The great moment of Caesarea Philippi was followed by the great hour on the Mount of Transfiguration. Let us first look at the scene where this time of glory came to Jesus and his three chosen disciples. There is a tradition which connects the Transfiguration with Mount Tabor, but that is unlikely. The top of Mount Tabor was an armed fortress and a great castle; it seems almost impossible that the Transfiguration could have happened on a mountain which was a fortress. Much more likely the scene of the Transfiguration was Mount Hermon. Hermon was fourteen miles from Caesarea Philippi. Hermon is 9,400 feet high, 11,000 feet above the level of the Jordan valley, so high that it can actually be seen from the Dead Sea, at the other end of Palestine, more than one hundred miles away.

It cannot have been on the very summit of the mountain that this happened. The mountain is too high for that. Canon Tristram tells how he and his party ascended it. They were able to ride practically to the top, and the ride took five hours. Activity is not easy on so high a summit. Tristram says, "We spent a great part of the day on the summit, but were before long painfully affected by the rarity of the atmosphere."

It was somewhere on the slopes of the beautiful and stately Mount Hermon that the Transfiguration happened. It must have happened in the night. Luke tells us that the disciples were weighted down with sleep (Lk.9:32). It was the next day when Jesus and his disciples came back to the plain to find the father of the epileptic boy waiting for them (Lk.9:37). It was some time in the sunset, or the late evening, or the night, that this amazing vision took place.

Why did Jesus go there? Why did he make this expedition to these lonely mountain slopes? Luke gives us the clue. He tells us that Jesus was praying (Lk.9:29).

We must put ourselves, as far as we can, in Jesus' place. By this time he was on the way to the Cross. Of that he was quite sure; again and again he told his disciples that it was so. At Caesarea Philippi we have seen him facing one problem and dealing with one question. We have seen him seeking to find out if there was anyone who had recognized him for who and what he was.

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Matthew 17:1-8

We have seen that question triumphantly answered, for Peter had grasped the great fact that Jesus could only be described as the Son of God. But there was an even greater question than that which Jesus had to solve before he set out on the last journey.

He had to make quite sure, sure beyond all doubt, that he was doing what God wished him to do. He had to make certain that it was indeed God's will that he should go to the Cross. Jesus went up Mount Hermon to ask God: "Am I doing your will in setting my face to go to Jerusalem?" Jesus went up Mount Hermon to listen for the voice of God. He would take no step without consulting God. How then could he take the biggest step of all without consulting him? Of everything Jesus asked one question and only one question: "Is it God's will for me?" And that is the question he was asking in the loneliness of the slopes of Hermon.

It is one of the supreme differences between Jesus and us, that Jesus always asked: "What does God wish me to do." we nearly always ask: "What do I wish to do?" We often say that the unique characteristic of Jesus was that he was sinless. What do we mean by that? We mean precisely this, that Jesus had no will but the will of God. The hymn of the Christian must always be:

"Thy way, not mine, O lord,
However dark it be!
Lead me by thine own hand;
Choose out the path for me.
I dare not choose my lot,
I would not if I might:
Choose thou for me, my God,
So shall I walk aright.
Not mine, not mine the choice
In things or great or small;
Be thou my Guide, my Strength,
My Wisdom and my All."

When Jesus had a problem, he did not seek to solve it only by the power of his own thought; he did not take it to others for human advice; he took it to the lonely place and to God.

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Matthew 17:1-8

THE BENEDICTION OF THE PAST

Matthew 17:1-8 (Part 2)

There on the mountain slopes two great figures appeared to Jesus--Moses and Elijah.

It is fascinating to see in how many respects the experience of these two great servants of God matched the experience of Jesus. When Moses came down from the mountain of Sinai, he did not know that the skin of his face shone (Exo.34:29). Both Moses and Elijah had their most intimate experiences of God on a mountain top. It was into Mount Sinai that Moses went to receive the tables of the law (Exo.31:18). It was on Mount Horeb that Elijah found God, not in the wind, and not in the earthquake, but in the still small voice (1Kgs.19:9-12). It is a strange thing that there was something awesome about the deaths of both Moses and Elijah. Deut.34:5-6 tells of the lonely death of Moses on Mount Nebo.

It reads as if God himself was the burier of the great leader of the people: "And he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows the place of his burial to this day." As for Elijah, as the old story has it, he took his departure from the astonished Elisha in a chariot and horses of fire (2Kgs.2:11). The two great figures who appeared to Jesus as he was setting out for Jerusalem were men who seemed too great to die.

Further, as we have already seen, it was the consistent Jewish belief that Elijah was to be forerunner and herald of the Messiah, and it was also believed by at least some Jewish teachers that, when the Messiah came, he would be accompanied by Moses.

It is easy to see how appropriate this vision of Moses and Elijah was. But none of these reasons is the real reason why the vision of Moses and Elijah came to Jesus.

Once again we must turn to Luke's account of the Transfiguration. He tells us that Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus, as the Revised Standard Version has it, "of his departure which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Lk.9:31). The word which is used for departure in the Greek is very significant. It is *exodos* (GSN1841), which is exactly the same as the English word *exodus*.

The word *exodus* has one special connection; it is the word which is always used of the departure of the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt, into the unknown way of the desert, which in the end was going to lead them to the Promised Land. The word *exodus* is the word which describes what we might well call the most adventurous journey in human history, a journey in which a whole people in utter trust in God went out into the unknown. That is precisely what Jesus was going to do. In utter trust in God he was going to set out on the tremendous adventure of that journey to Jerusalem, a journey beset with perils, a journey involving a cross, but a journey issuing in glory.

In Jewish thought these two figures, Moses and Elijah, always stood for certain things. Moses was the greatest of all the law-givers; he was supremely and uniquely the man who brought God's law to men. Elijah was the greatest of all the prophets; in him the voice of God spoke to men with unique directness. These two men were the twin peaks of Israel's religious history and achievement.

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Matthew 17:1-8

It is as if the greatest figures in Israel's history came to Jesus, as he was setting out on the last and greatest adventure into the unknown, and told him to go on. In them all history rose up and pointed Jesus on his way. In them all history recognized Jesus as its own consummation. The greatest of the law-givers and the greatest of the prophets recognized Jesus as the one of whom they had dreamed, as the one whom they had foretold. Their appearance was the signal for Jesus to go on.

So, then, the greatest human figures witnessed to Jesus that he was on the right way and bade him go out on his adventurous exodus to Jerusalem and to Calvary.

But there was more than that; not only did the greatest law-giver and the greatest prophet assure Jesus that he was right; the very voice of God came telling him that he was on the right way. All the gospel writers speak of the luminous cloud which overshadowed them. That cloud was part of Israel's history. All through that history the luminous cloud stood for the shechinah, which was nothing less than the glory of Almighty God.

In Exodus we read of the pillar of cloud which was to lead the people on their way (Exo.13:21-22). Again in Exodus we read of the building and the completing of the Tabernacle; and at the end of the story there come the words: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exo.40:34). It was in the cloud that the Lord descended to give the tables of the law to Moses (Exo.34:5). Once again we meet this mysterious, luminous cloud at the dedication of Solomon's Temple: "And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord" (1Kgs.8:10-11; compare 2Chr.5:13-14; 2Chr.7:2). All through the Old Testament there is this picture of the cloud, in which was the mysterious glory of God.

We are able to add another vivid fact to this. Travellers tell us of a curious and characteristic phenomenon connected with Mount Hermon. Edersheim writes: "A strange peculiarity has been noticed about Hermon in the extreme rapidity of the formation of cloud upon the summit. In a few minutes a thick cap forms over the top of the mountain, and as quickly disperses, and entirely disappears." No doubt on this occasion there came a cloud on the slopes of Hermon; and no doubt at first the disciples thought little enough of it, for Hermon was notorious for the clouds which came and went. But something happened; it is not for us to guess what happened; but the cloud became luminous and mysterious, and out of it there came the voice of the divine majesty, setting God's seal of approval on Jesus his Son. And in that moment Jesus' prayer was answered; he knew beyond a doubt that he was right to go on.

The Mount of Transfiguration was for Jesus a spiritual mountain peak. His exodus lay before him. Was he taking the right way? Was he right to adventure out to Jerusalem and the waiting arms of the Cross? First, there came to him the verdict of history, the greatest of the law-givers and the greatest of the prophets, to tell him to go on. And then, even greater still by far, there came the voice which gave him nothing less than the approval of God. It was the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration which enabled Jesus inflexibly to walk the way to the Cross.

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Matthew 17:1-8

THE INSTRUCTION OF PETER

Matthew 17:1-8 (Part 3)

But the episode of the Transfiguration did something not only for Jesus but for the disciples also.

(i) The minds of the disciples must have been stiff hurt and bewildered by the insistence of Jesus that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and to die. It must have looked to them as if there was nothing but black shame ahead. But start to finish, the whole atmosphere of the Mountain of Transfiguration is glory. Jesus' face shone like the sun, and his garments glistened and gleamed like the light.

The Jews well knew the promise of God to the victorious righteous: "Their face shall shine as the sun" (2Esdr.7:97). No Jew could ever have seen that luminous cloud without thinking of the shechinah, the glory of God resting upon his people. There is one very revealing little touch in this passage. No fewer than three times in its eight brief verses there occurs the little interjection: "Behold! Look you!" It is as if Matthew could not even tell the story without a catch of the breath at the sheer staggering wonder of it.

Here surely was something which would lift up the hearts of the disciples and enable them to see the glory through the shame; the triumph through the humiliation; the crown beyond the Cross. It is obvious that even yet they did not understand; but it must surely have given them some little glimmering that the Cross was not all humiliation, that somehow it was tinged with glory, that somehow glory was the very atmosphere of the exodus to Jerusalem and to death.

(ii) Further, Peter must have learned two lessons that night. When Peter woke to what was going on, his first reaction was to build three tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. He was always the man for action; always the man who must be doing something. But there is a time for stillness; there is a time for contemplation, for wonder, for adoration, for awed reverence in the presence of the supreme glory. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps.46:10). It may be that sometimes we are too busy trying to do something when we would be better to be silent, to be listening, to be wondering, to be adoring in the presence of God. Before a man can fight and adventure upon his feet, he must wonder and pray upon his knees.

(iii) But there is a converse of that. It is quite clear that Peter wished to wait upon the mountain slopes. He wished that great moment to be prolonged. He did not want to go down to the everyday and common things again but to remain for ever in the sheen of glory.

That is a feeling which everyone must know. There are moments of intimacy, of serenity, of peace, of nearness to God, which everyone has known and wished to prolong. As A. H. McNeile has it: "The Mountain of Transfiguration is always more enjoyable than the daily ministry or the way of the Cross."

But the Mountain of Transfiguration is given to us only to provide strength for the daily ministry and to enable us to walk the way of the Cross. Susanna Wesley had a prayer: "Help me, Lord, to

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Matthew 17:1-8

remember that religion is not to be confined to the church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in thy presence." The moment of glory does not exist for its own sake; it exists to clothe the common things with a radiance they never had before.

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Matthew 17:9-13, 22-23

TEACHING THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Matthew 17:9-13; Matt 17:22-23

As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus gave them strict injunctions: "Tell no man about the vision until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." The disciples asked him, "Why then do the Scribes say that Elijah must first come?" He answered, "It is true that they say that Elijah is to come and will restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him what they wished. So also the Son of Man is to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them about John the Baptizer.

When they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised." And they were exceedingly distressed.

Here again is an injunction to secrecy, and it was much needed. The great danger was that men should proclaim Jesus as Messiah without knowing who and what the Messiah was. Their whole conception both of the forerunner and of the Messiah had to be radically and fundamentally changed.

It was going to take a long time for the idea of a conquering Messiah to be unlearned; it was so ingrained into the Jewish mind that it was difficult--almost impossible--to alter it. Matt.17:9-13 are a very difficult passage. Behind them there is this idea. The Jews were agreed that, before the Messiah came, Elijah would return to be his herald and his forerunner. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes." So writes Malachi, and then he goes on: "And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse" (Mal.4:5-6). Bit by bit this idea of the coming of Elijah gathered detail, until the Jews came to believe that not only would Elijah come, but he would restore all things before the Messiah came, that he would, we might put it, make the world fit for the Messiah to enter into.

The idea was that Elijah would be a great and terrible reformer, who would walk throughout the world destroying all evil and setting things to rights. The result was that both the forerunner and the Messiah were thought of in terms of power.

Jesus corrects this. "The Scribes," he said, "say that Elijah will come like a blast of cleansing and avenging fire. He has come; but his way was the way of suffering and of sacrifice, as must also be the way of the Son of Man." Jesus has laid it down that the way of God's service is never the way which blasts men out of existence, but always the way which woos them with sacrificial love.

That is what the disciples had to learn; and that is why they had to be silent until they had learned. If they had gone out preaching a conquering Messiah there could have been nothing but tragedy. It has been computed that in the century previous to the Crucifixion no fewer than 200,000 Jews lost their lives in futile rebellions. Before men could preach Christ, they must know who and what Christ was; and until Jesus had taught his followers the necessity of the Cross, they had to be silent

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Matthew 17:9-13, 22-23

and to learn. It is not our ideas, it is Christ's message, that we must bring to men; and no man can teach others until Jesus Christ has taught him.

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Matthew 17:14-20

THE ESSENTIAL FAITH

Matthew 17:14-20

When they came to the crowd, a man came to him and fell at his feet and said, "Sir, have pity on my son, for he is an epileptic, and he suffers severely; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water; and I brought him to your disciples, and they were not able to cure him." Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to me!" And Jesus spoke sternly to him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured from that hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and said, "Why were we not able to cast out the demon?" Jesus said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith. This is the truth I tell you--if you have your faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Be removed from here,' and it will remove. So nothing will be impossible to you."

No sooner had Jesus come down from the heavenly glory than he was confronted with an earthly problem and a practical demand. A man had brought his epileptic boy to the disciples in the absence of Jesus. Matthew describes the boy by the verb *seleniazesthai* (GSN4583), which literally means to be moonstruck. As was inevitable in that age, the father attributed the boy's condition to the malign influence of evil spirits. So serious was his condition that he was a danger to himself and to everyone else. We can almost hear the sigh of relief as Jesus appeared, and at once he took a grip of a situation which had got completely out of hand. With one strong, stem word he bade the demon be gone and the boy was cured. This story is full of significant things.

(i) We cannot but be moved by the faith of the boy's father. Even though the disciples had been given power to cast out devils (Matt.10:1), here was a case in which they had signally and publicly failed. And yet in spite of the failure of the disciples, the father never doubted the power of Jesus. It is as if he said: "Only let me get at Jesus himself, and my problems will be solved and my need will be met."

There is something very poignant about that; and there is something which is very universal and very modern. There are many who feel that the Church, the professed disciples of Jesus in their own day and generation, has failed and is powerless to deal with the ills of the human situation; and yet at the back of their minds there is the feeling: "If we could only get beyond his human followers, if we could only get behind the facade of ecclesiasticism and the failure of the Church, if we could only get at Jesus himself, we would receive the things we need." It is at once our condemnation and our challenge that, even yet, though men have lost their faith in the Church, they have never lost a wistful faith in Jesus Christ.

(ii) We see here the constant demands made upon Jesus. Straight from the glory of the mountain top, he was met by human suffering. Straight from hearing the voice of God, he came to hear--the clamant demand of human need. The most Christ-like person in the world is the man who never finds his fellow-man a nuisance. It is easy to feel Christian in the moment of prayer and meditation; it is easy to feel close to God when the world is shut out. But that is not religion--that is escapism. Real religion is to rise from our knees before God to meet men and the problems of the human situation. Real religion is to draw strength from God in order to give it to others. Real religion

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Matthew 17:14-20

involves both meeting God in the secret place and men in the market place. Real religion means taking our own needs to God, not that we may have peace and quiet and undisturbed comfort, but that we may be enabled graciously, effectively and powerfully to meet the needs of others. The wings of the dove are not for the Christian who would follow his Master in going about doing good.

(iii) We see here the grief of Jesus. It is not that Jesus says that he wants to be quit of his disciples. It is that he says, "How long must I be with you before you will understand?" There is nothing more Christlike than patience. When we are like to lose our patience at the follies and the foolishness of men, let us call to mind God's infinite patience with the wanderings and the disloyalties and the unteachability of our own souls.

(iv) We see here the central need of faith, without which nothing can happen. When Jesus spoke about removing mountains he was using a phrase which the Jews knew well. A great teacher, who could really expound and interpret scripture and who could explain and resolve difficulties, was regularly known as an uprooter, or even a pulverizer, of mountains. To tear up, to uproot, to pulverize mountains were all regular phrases for removing difficulties. Jesus never meant this to be taken physically and literally. After all, the ordinary man seldom finds any necessity to remove a physical mountain. What he meant was: "If you have faith enough, all difficulties can be solved, and even the hardest task can be accomplished." Faith in God is the instrument which enables men to remove the hills of difficulty which block their path.

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Matthew 17:24-27

THE TEMPLE TAX

Matthew 17:24-27 (Part 1)

When they came to Capernaum, those who received the half-shekel Temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" Peter said, "He does pay it." When he had gone into the house, before he could speak, Jesus said to him, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do earthly kings take tax and tribute? From their sons or from strangers?" When he said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "So then the sons are free. But, so as not to set a stumbling-block in anyone's way, go to the sea, and cast a hook into it, and take the first fish which comes up; and when you have opened its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take it and give it to them for me and for you."

The Temple at Jerusalem was a costly place to run. There were the daily morning and evening sacrifices which each involved the offering of a year-old lamb. Along with the lamb were offered wine and flour and oil. The incense which was burned every day had to be bought and prepared. The costly hangings and the robes of the priests constantly wore out; and the robe of the High Priest was itself worth a king's ransom. All this required money.

So, on the basis of Exo.30:13, it was laid down that every male Jew over twenty years of age must pay an annual Temple tax of one half-shekel. In the days of Nehemiah, when the people were poor, it was one-third of a shekel. One half-shekel was equal to two Greek drachmae (GSN1406); and the tax was commonly called the didrachm (GSN1323), as it is called in this passage. The value of the tax was about 8 pence; and that sum must be evaluated in the light of the fact that a working man's wage in Palestine in the time of Jesus was only 3 1/2 pence. The tax was in fact the equivalent of two days' pay. It brought into the Temple treasury no less than about 76,000 British pounds a year. Theoretically the tax was obligatory and the Temple authorities had power to distrain upon a man's goods, if he failed to pay.

The method of collection was carefully organized. On the first of the month Adar, which is March of our year, announcement was made in all the towns and villages of Palestine that the time to pay the tax had come. On the fifteenth of the month, booths were set up in each town and village, and at the booths the tax was paid. If the tax was not paid by the twenty-fifth of Adar, it could only be paid direct to the Temple in Jerusalem.

In this passage we see Jesus paying this Temple tax. The tax authorities came to Peter and asked him if his Master paid his taxes. There is little doubt that the question was asked with malicious intent and that the hope was that Jesus would refuse to pay; for, if he refused, the orthodox would have a ground of accusation against him. Peter's immediate answer was that Jesus did pay. Then he went and told Jesus of the situation, and Jesus used a kind of parable in Matt.17:25-26.

The picture drawn has two possibilities but in either case the meaning is the same.

(i) In the ancient world conquering and colonizing nations had little or no idea of governing for the benefit of subject peoples. Rather, they considered that the subject peoples existed to make

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Matthew 17:24-27

things easier for them. The result was that a king's own nation never paid tribute, if there were any nations subject to it. It was the subject nations who bore the burden and who paid the tax. So Jesus may be saying, "God is the King of Israel; but we are the true Israel, for we are the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven; outsiders may have to pay; but we are free."

(ii) The picture is more likely a much simpler one than that. If any king imposed taxes on a nation, he certainly did not impose them on his own family. It was indeed for the support of his own household that the taxes were imposed. The tax in question was for the Temple, which was the house of God. Jesus was the Son of God. Did he not say when his parents sought him in Jerusalem: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk.2:49). How could the Son be under obligation to pay the tax which was for his own Father's house?

None the less Jesus said that they must pay, not because of the compulsion of the law, but because of a higher duty. He said they must pay "lest we should offend them." The New Testament always uses the verb to offend (skandalizein, GSN4624) and the noun offence (skandalon, GSN4625) in a special way. The verb never means to insult or to annoy or to injure the pride of. It always means to put a stumbling-block in someone's way, to cause someone to trip up and to fall. Therefore Jesus is saying: "We must pay so as not to set a bad example to others. We must not only do our duty, we must go beyond duty, in order that we may show others what they ought to do." Jesus would allow himself nothing which might make someone else think less of the ordinary obligation of life. In life there may sometimes be exemptions we could claim; there may be things we could quite safely allow ourselves to do. But we must claim nothing and allow ourselves nothing which might possibly be a bad example to someone else.

We may well ask why is it that this story was ever transmitted at all? For reasons of space the gospel writers had to select their material. Why select this story? Matthew's gospel was written between A.D. 80 and 90. Now just a little before that time Jews and Jewish Christians had been faced with a very real and a very disturbing problem. We saw that every male Jew over twenty had to pay the Temple tax; but the Temple was totally destroyed in A.D. 70, never to be rebuilt. After the destruction of the Temple, Vespasian, the Roman emperor, enacted that the half-shekel Temple tax should now be paid to the treasury of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.

Here indeed was a problem. Many of the Jews and of the Jewish Christians were violently inclined to rebel against this enactment. Any such widespread rebellion would have had disastrous consequences, for it would have been utterly crushed at once, and would have gained the Jews and the Christians the reputation of being bad and disloyal and disaffected citizens.

This story was put into the gospels to tell the Christians, especially the Jewish Christians, that, however unpleasant they might be, the duties of a citizen must be shouldered. It tells us that Christianity and good citizenship go hand in hand. The Christian who exempts himself from the duties of good citizenship is not only failing in citizenship, he is also failing in Christianity.

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Matthew 17:24-27

HOW TO PAY OUR DEBTS

Matthew 17:24-27 (Part 2)

Now we come to the story itself. If we take it with a bald and crude literalism, it means that Jesus told Peter to go and catch a fish, and that he would find a stater in the fish's mouth which would be sufficient to pay the tax for both of them. It is not irrelevant to note that the gospel never tells us that Peter did so. The story ends with Jesus' saying.

Before we begin to examine the story we must remember that all oriental people love to say a thing in the most dramatic and vivid way possible; and that they love to say a thing with the flash of a smile. This miracle is difficult on three grounds.

(i) God does not send a miracle to enable us to do what we can quite well do for ourselves. That would be to harm us and not to help us. However poor the disciples were, they did not need a miracle to enable them to earn two half-shekels. It was not beyond human power to earn such a sum.

(ii) This miracle transgresses the great decision of Jesus that he would never use his miraculous power for his own ends. He could have turned stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger--but he refused. He could have used his power to enhance his own prestige as a wonder-worker--but he refused. In the wilderness Jesus decided once and for all that he would not and could not selfishly use his power. If this story is taken with a crude literalism, it does show Jesus using his divine power to satisfy his own personal needs--and that is what Jesus would never do.

(iii) If this miracle is taken literally, there is a sense in which it is even immoral. Life would become chaotic if a man could pay his debts by finding coins in fishes' mouths. Life was never meant to be arranged in such a way that men could meet their obligations in such a lazy and effortless way. "The gods," said one of the great Greeks, "have ordained that sweat should be the price of all things." That is just as true for the Christian thinker as it was for the Greek.

If all this is so, what are we to say? Are we to say that this is a mere legendary story, mere imaginative fiction, with no truth behind it at all? Far from it. Beyond a doubt something happened.

Let us remember again the Jewish love of dramatic vividness. Undoubtedly what happened was this. Jesus said to Peter: "Yes, Peter. You're right. We, too, must pay our just and lawful debts. Well, you know how to do it. Back you go to the fishing for a day. You'll get plenty of money in the fishes' mouths to pay our dues! A day at the fishing will soon produce all we need."

Jesus was saying, "Back to your job, Peter; that's the way to pay your debts." So the typist will find a new coat in the keys of her typewriter. The motor mechanic will find food for himself and his wife and family in the cylinder of the motor car. The teacher will find money to pay his way in the blackboard and the chalk. The clerk will find enough to support himself and his dear ones in the ledger and in the account sheets.

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When Jesus said this, he said it with that swift smile of his and with his gift for dramatic language. He was not telling Peter literally to get coins in fishes' mouths. He was telling him that in his day's work he would get what he needed to pay his way.

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Matthew 18

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Matt.18 is a most important chapter for Christian Ethics, because it deals with those qualities which should characterize the personal relationships of the Christian. We shall be dealing in detail with these relationships as we study the chapter section by section; but before we do so, it will be well to look at the chapter as a whole. It singles out seven qualities which should mark the personal relationships of the Christian.

(i) First and foremost, there is the quality of humility (Matt.18:1-4). Only the person who has the humility of the child is a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. Personal ambition, personal prestige, personal publicity, personal profit are motives which can find no place in the life of the Christian. The Christian is the man who forgets self in his devotion to Jesus Christ and in his service of his fellow-men.

(ii) Second, there is the quality of responsibility (Matt.18:5-7). The greatest of all sins is to teach another to sin, especially if that other should be a weaker, a younger, and a less-experienced brother. God's sternest judgment is reserved for those who put a stumbling-block in the way of others. The Christian is constantly aware that he is responsible for the effect of his life, his deeds, his words, his example on other people.

(iii) There follows the quality of self-renunciation (Matt.18:8-10). The Christian is like an athlete for whom no training is too hard, if by it he may win the prize; he is like the student who will sacrifice pleasure and leisure to reach the crown. The Christian is ready surgically to excise from life everything which would keep him from rendering a perfect obedience to God.

(iv) There is individual care (Matt.18:11-14). The Christian realizes that God cares for him individually, and that he must reflect that individual care in his care for others. He never thinks in terms of crowds; he thinks in terms of persons. For God no man is unimportant and no one is lost in the crowd; for the Christian every man is important and is a child of God, who, if lost, must be found. The individual care of the Christian is in fact the motive and the dynamic of evangelism.

(v) There is the quality of discipline (Matt.18:15-20). Christian kindness and Christian forgiveness do not mean that a man who is in error is to be allowed to do as he likes. Such a man must be guided and corrected and, if need be, disciplined back into the right way. But that discipline is always to be given in humble love and not in self-righteous condemnation. It is always to be given with the desire for reconciliation and never with the desire for vengeance.

(vi) There is the quality of fellowship (Matt.18:19-20). It might even be put that Christians are people who pray together. They are people who in fellowship seek the win of God, who in fellowship listen and worship together. Individualism is the reverse of Christianity.

(vii) There is the spirit of forgiveness (Matt.18:23-35); and the Christian's forgiveness of his fellow-men is founded on the fact that he himself is a forgiven man. He forgives others even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven him.

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Matthew 18:1-4

THE MIND OF A CHILD

Matthew 18:1-4

On that day the disciples came to Jesus. "Who, then," they said, "is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus called a little child and made him stand in the middle of them, and said, "This is the truth I tell you--unless you turn and become as children, you will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever humbles himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Here is a very revealing question, followed by a very revealing answer. The disciples asked who was the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus took a child and said that unless they turned and became as this little child, they would not get into the Kingdom at all.

The question of the disciples was: "Who will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" and the very fact that they asked that question showed that they had no idea at all what the Kingdom of Heaven was. Jesus said, "Unless you turn." He was warning them that they were going in completely the wrong direction, away from the Kingdom of Heaven and not towards it. In life it is all a question of what a man is aiming at; if he is aiming at the fulfilment of personal ambition, the acquisition of personal power, the enjoyment of personal prestige, the exaltation of self, he is aiming at precisely the opposite of the Kingdom of Heaven; for to be a citizen of the Kingdom means the complete forgetting of self, the obliteration of self, the spending of self in a life which aims at service and not at power. So long as a man considers his own self as the most important thing in the world, his back is turned to the Kingdom; if he wants ever to reach the Kingdom, he must turn round and face in the opposite direction.

Jesus took a child. There is a tradition that the child grew to be Ignatius of Antioch, who in later days became a great servant of the Church, a great writer, and finally a martyr for Christ. Ignatius was surnamed Theophoros, which means God--carried, and the tradition grew up that he had received that name because Jesus carried him on his knee. It may be so. Maybe it is more likely that it was Peter who asked the question, and that it was Peter's little boy whom Jesus took and set in the midst, because we know that Peter was married (Matt.8:14; 1Cor.9:5).

So Jesus said that in a child we see the characteristics which should mark the man of the Kingdom. There are many lovely characteristics in a child--the power to wonder, before he has become deadeningly used to the wonder of the world; the power to forgive and to forget, even when adults and parents treat him unjustly as they so often do; the innocence, which, as Richard Glover beautifully says, brings it about that the child has only to learn, not to unlearn; only to do, not to undo. No doubt Jesus was thinking of these things; but wonderful as they are they are not the main things in his mind. The child has three great qualities which make him the symbol of those who are citizens of the Kingdom.

(i) First and foremost, there is the quality which is the keynote of the whole passage, the child's humility. A child does not wish to push himself forward; rather, he wishes to fade into the background. He does not wish for prominence; he would rather be left in obscurity. It is only as he

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Matthew 18:1-4

grows up, and begins to be initiated into a competitive world, with its fierce struggle and scramble for prizes and for first places, that his instinctive humility is left behind.

(ii) There is the child's dependence. To the child a state of dependence is perfectly natural. He never thinks that he can face life by himself. He is perfectly content to be utterly dependent on those who love him and care for him. If men would accept the fact of their dependence on God, a new strength and a new peace would enter their lives.

(iii) There is the child's trust. The child is instinctively dependent, and just as instinctively he trusts his parents that his needs will be met. When we are children, we cannot buy our own food or our own clothes, or maintain our own home; yet we never doubt that we will be clothed and fed, and that there will be shelter and warmth and comfort waiting for us when we come home. When we are children we set out on a journey with no means of paying the fare, and with no idea of how to get to our journey's end, and yet it never enters our heads to doubt that our parents will bring us safely there.

The child's humility is the pattern of the Christian's behaviour to his fellow-men, and the child's dependence and trust are the pattern of the Christian's attitude towards God, the Father of all.

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Matthew 18:5-7, 10

CHRIST AND THE CHILD

Matthew 18:5-7,10 (Part 1)

"Whoever receives one such little child in my name, receives me. But whoever puts a stumbling-block in the way of one of these little ones, who believe in me, it is better for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned far out in the open sea. Alas for the world because of stumbling-blocks! Stumbling-blocks are bound to come; but alas for the man by whom the stumbling-block comes!"

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my Father who is in heaven."

There is a certain difficulty of interpretation in this passage which must be borne in mind. As we have often seen, it is Matthew's consistent custom to gather together the teaching of Jesus under certain great heads; he arranges it systematically. In the early part of this chapter he is collecting Jesus's teaching about children; and we must remember that the Jews used the word child in a double sense. They used it literally of the young child; but regularly a teacher's disciples were called his sons or his children. Therefore a child also means a beginner in the faith, one who has just begun to believe, one who is not yet mature and established in the faith, one who has just begun on the right way and who may very easily be deflected from it. In this passage very often the child means both the young child and the beginner on the Christian way.

Jesus says that whoever receives one such little child in his name receives himself. The phrase in my name can mean one of two things. (i) It can mean for my sake. The care of children is something which is carried out for the sake of none other than Jesus Christ. To teach a child, to bring up a child in the way he ought to go, is something which is done not only for the sake of the child, but for the sake of Jesus himself. (ii) It can mean with a blessing. It can mean receiving the child, and, as it were, naming the name of Jesus over him. He who brings Jesus and the blessing of Jesus to a child is doing a Christlike work.

To receive the child is also a phrase which is capable of bearing more than one meaning. (i) It can mean, not so much to receive a child, as to receive a person who has this childlike quality of humility. In this highly competitive world it is very easy to pay most attention to the person who is pugnacious and aggressive and self-assertive and full of self-confidence. It is easy to pay most attention to the person who, in the worldly sense of the term, has made a success of life. Jesus may well be saying that the most important people are not the thrusters and those who have climbed to the top of the tree by pushing everyone else out of the way, but the quiet, humble, simple people, who have the heart of a child.

(ii) It can mean simply to welcome the child, to give him the care and the love and the teaching which he requires to make him into a good man. To help a child to live well and to know God better is to help Jesus Christ.

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(iii) But this phrase can have another and very wonderful meaning. It can mean to see Christ in the child. To teach unruly, disobedient, restless little children can be a wearing job. To satisfy the physical needs of a child, to wash his clothes and bind his cuts and soothe his bruises and cook his meals may often seem a very unromantic task; the cooker and the sink and the work-basket have not much glamour; but there is no one in all this world who helps Jesus Christ more than the teacher of the little child and the harassed, hard-pressed mother in the home. All such will find a glory in the grey, if in the child they sometimes glimpse none other than Jesus himself.

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Matthew 18:5-7, 10

THE TERRIBLE RESPONSIBILITY

Matthew 18:5-7, 10 (Part 2)

But the great keynote of this passage is the terrible weight of responsibility it leaves upon every one of us.

(i) It stresses the terror of teaching another to sin. It is true to say that no man sins uninvited; and the bearer of the invitation is so often a fellow-man. A man must always be confronted with his first temptation to sin; he must always receive his first encouragement to do the wrong thing; he must always experience his first push along the way to the forbidden things. The Jews took the view that the most unforgivable of all sins is to teach another to sin; and for this reason--a man's own sins can be forgiven, for in a sense they are limited in their consequences; but if we teach another to sin, he in his turn may teach still another, and a train of sin is set in motion with no foreseeable end.

There is nothing in this world more terrible than to destroy someone's innocence. And, if a man has any conscience left, there is nothing which will haunt him more. Someone tells of an old man who was dying; he was obviously sorely troubled. At last they got him to tell why. "When we were boys at play," he said, "one day at a cross-roads we reversed a signpost so that its arms were pointing the opposite way, and I've never ceased to wonder how many people were sent in the wrong direction by what we did." The sin of all sins is to teach another to sin.

(ii) It stresses the terror of the punishment of those who teach another to sin. If a man teaches another to sin, it would be better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.

The millstone in this case is a mulos (GSN3458), onikos (GSN3684). The Jews ground corn by crushing it between two circular stones. This was done at home; and in any cottage such a mill could be seen. The upper stone, which turned round upon the lower was equipped with a handle, and it was commonly of such a size that the housewife could easily turn it, for it was she who did the grinding of the corn for the household needs. But a mulos onikos (GSN3684) was a grinding-stone of such a size that it needed an ass pulling it (onos (GSN3688) is the Greek for an ass and mulos (GSN3458) is the Greek for a millstone) to turn it round at all. The very size of the millstone shows the awfulness of the condemnation.

Further, in the Greek it is said, not so much that the man would be better to be drowned in the depths of the sea, but that it would be better if he were drowned far out in the open sea. The Jew feared the sea; for him Heaven was a place where there would be no more sea (Rev.21:1). The man who taught another to sin would be better to be drowned far out in the most lonely of all waste places. Moreover, the very picture of drowning had its terror for the Jew. Drowning was sometimes a Roman punishment, but never Jewish. To the Jew it was the symbol of utter destruction. When the Rabbis taught that heathen and Gentile objects were to be utterly destroyed they said that they must be "cast into the salt sea." Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews 14. 15. 10) has a terrible account

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of a Galilaean revolt in which the Galilaeans took the supporters of Herod and drowned them in the depths of the Sea of Galilee. The very phrase would paint to the Jew a picture of utter destruction. Jesus' words are carefully chosen to show the fate that awaits a man who teaches another to sin.

(iii) It has a warning to silence all evasion. This is a sin-stained world and a tempting world; no one can go out into it without meeting seductions to sin. That is specially so if he goes out from a protected home where no evil influence was ever allowed to play upon him. Jesus says, "That is perfectly true; this world is full of temptations; that is inevitable in a world into which sin has entered; but that does not lessen the responsibility of the man who is the cause of a stumbling-block being placed in the way of a younger person or of a beginner in the faith."

We know that this is a tempting world; it is therefore the Christian's duty to remove stumbling-blocks, never to be the cause of putting them in another's way. This means that it is not only a sin to put a stumbling-block in another's way; it is also a sin even to bring that person into any situation, or circumstance, or environment where he may meet with such a stumbling-block. No Christian can be satisfied to live complacently and lethargically in a civilization where there are conditions of living and housing and life in general where a young person has no chance of escaping the seductions of sin.

(iv) Finally it stresses the supreme importance of the child. "Their angels," said Jesus, "always behold the face of my Father who is in Heaven." In the time of Jesus the Jews had a very highly-developed angelology. Every nation had its angel; every natural force, such as the wind and the thunder and the lightning and the rain, had its angel. They even went the length of saying, very beautifully, that every blade of grass had its angel. So, then, they believed that every child had his guardian angel.

To say that these angels behold the face of God in heaven means that they always have the right of direct access to God. The picture is of a great royal court where only the most favoured courtiers and ministers and officials have direct access to the king. In the sight of God the children are so important that their guardian angels always have the right of direct access to the inner presence of God.

For us the great value of a child must always lie in the possibilities which are locked up within him. Everything depends on how he is taught and trained. The possibilities may never be realized; they may be stifled and stunted; that which might be used for good may be deflected to the purposes of evil; or they may be unleashed in such a way that a new tide of power floods the earth.

Away back in the eleventh century Duke Robert of Burgundy was one of the great warrior and knightly figures. He was about to go off on a campaign. He had a baby son who was his heir; and, before he departed, he made his barons and nobles come and swear fealty to the little infant, in the event of anything happening to himself. They came with their waving plumes and their clanking armour and knelt before the child. One great baron smiled and Duke Robert asked him why. He said, "The child is so little." "Yes," said Duke Robert, "he's little--but he'll grow." Indeed he grew, for that baby became William the Conqueror of England.

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In every child there are infinite possibilities for good or ill. It is the supreme responsibility of the parent, of the teacher, of the Christian Church, to see that his dynamic possibilities for good are realized. To stifle them, to leave them untapped, to twist them into evil powers, is sin.

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Matthew 18:8-9

THE SURGICAL EXCISION

Matthew 18:8-9

"If your hand or your foot proves a stumbling-block to you, cut it off and throw it away from you. It is the fine thing for you to enter into life maimed or lame, rather than to be cast into everlasting fire with two hands or two feet. And if your eye proves a stumbling-block to you, pluck it out and throw it away from you. It is the fine thing for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than to be cast into the Gehenna of fire with two eyes."

There are two senses in which this passage may be taken. It may be taken purely personally. It may be saying that it is worth any sacrifice and any self-renunciation to escape the punishment of God.

We have to be clear what that punishment involves. It is here called everlasting and this word everlasting occurs frequently in Jewish ideas of punishment. The word is *aionios* (GSN0166). The Book of Enoch speaks about eternal judgment, about judgment for ever, about punishment and torture for ever, about the fire which burns for ever. Josephus calls hell an everlasting prison. The Book of Jubilees speaks about an eternal curse. The Book of Baruch says that "there will be no opportunity of returning, nor a limit to the times." There is a Rabbinic tale of Rabbi Jochanan ben Zaccai who wept bitterly at the prospect of death. On being asked why, he answered. "All the more I weep now that they are about to lead me before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He, who lives and abides for ever and for ever and for ever; whose wrath, if he be wrathful, is an eternal wrath; and, if he bind me, his binding is an eternal binding; and if he kills me, his killing is an eternal killing; whom I cannot placate with words, nor bribe with wealth."

All these passages use the word *aionios* (GSN0166); but we must be careful to remember what it means. It literally means belonging to the ages; there is only one person to whom the word *aionios* (GSN0166) can properly be applied, and that is God. There is far more in *aionios* (GSN0166) than simply a description of that which has no end. Punishment which is *aionios* (GSN0166) is punishment which it befits God to give and punishment which only God can give. When we think of punishment, we can only say, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Our human pictures, and our human time-scheme, fail; this is in the hands of God.

But there is one clue which we do have. This passage speaks of the Gehenna (GSN1067) of fire. Gehenna (GSN1067) was the valley of Hinnom, a valley below the mountain of Jerusalem. It was for ever accursed, because it was the place where, in the days of the kingdom, the renegade Jews had sacrificed their children in the fire to the pagan god Moloch. Josiah had made it a place accursed. In later days it became the refuse dump of Jerusalem; a kind of vast incinerator. Always the refuse was burning there, and a pall of smoke and a glint of smouldering fire surrounded it.

Now, what was this Gehenna (GSN1067), this Valley of Hinnom? It was the place into which everything that was useless was cast and there destroyed. That is to say, God's punishment is for those who are useless, for those who make no contribution to life, for those who hold life back instead of urging life on, for those who drag life down instead of lifting life up, for those who are

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Matthew 18:8-9

the handicaps of others and not their inspirations. It is again and again New Testament teaching that uselessness invites disaster. The man who is useless, the man who is an evil influence on others, the man who cannot justify the simple fact of his existence, is in danger of the punishment of God, unless he excises from his life those things which make him the handicap he is.

But it is just possible that this passage is not to be taken so much personally as in connection with the Church. Matthew has already used this saying of Jesus in a different context in Matt.5:30. Here there may be a difference. The whole passage is about children, and perhaps especially about children in the faith. This passage may be saying, "If in your Church there is someone who is an evil influence, if there is someone who is a bad example to those who are young in the faith, if there is someone whose life and conduct is damaging the body of the Church, he must be rooted out and cast away." That may well be the meaning. The Church is the Body of Christ; if that body is to be healthy and health-giving, that which has the seeds of cancerous and poisonous infection in it must be even surgically removed.

One thing is certain, in any person and in any Church, whatever is a seduction to sin must be removed, however painful the removal may be, for if we allow it to flourish a worse punishment will follow. In this passage there may well be stressed both the necessity of self-renunciation for the Christian individual and discipline for the Christian Church.

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Matthew 18:12-14

THE SHEPHERD AND THE LOST SHEEP

Matthew 18:12-14

"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine, and go out to the hills, and will he not seek the wandering one? And if he finds it--this is the truth I tell you--he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine who never wandered away. So it is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish."

This is surely the simplest of all the parables of Jesus, for it is the simple story of a lost sheep and a seeking shepherd. In Judaea it was tragically easy for sheep to go astray. The pasture land is on the hill country which runs like a backbone down the middle of the land. This ridge-like plateau is narrow, only a few miles across. There are no restraining walls. At its best, the pasture is sparse. And, therefore, the sheep are ever liable to wander; and, if they stray from the grass of the plateau into the gullies and the ravines at each side, they have every chance of finishing up on some ledge from which they cannot get up or down, and of being marooned there until they die.

The Palestinian shepherds were experts at tracking down their lost sheep. They could follow their track for miles; and they would brave the cliffs and the precipice to bring them back.

In the time of Jesus the flocks were often communal flocks; they belonged, not to an individual, but to a village. There were, therefore, usually two or three shepherds with them. That is why the shepherd could leave the ninety-nine. If he had left them with no guardian he would have come back to find still more of them gone; but he could leave them in the care of his fellow-shepherds, while he sought the wanderer. The shepherds always made the most strenuous and the most sacrificial efforts to find a lost sheep. It was the rule that, if a sheep could not be brought back alive, then at least, if it was at all possible, its fleece or its bones must be brought back to prove that it was dead.

We can imagine how the other shepherds would return with their flocks to the village fold at evening time, and how they would tell that one shepherd was still out on the mountain-side seeking a wanderer. We can imagine how the eyes of the people would turn ever and again to the hillside watching for the shepherd who had not come home; and we can imagine the shout of joy when they saw him striding along the pathway with the weary wanderer slung across his shoulder, safe at last; and we can imagine how the whole village would welcome him, and gather round with gladness to hear the story of the sheep who was lost and found. Here we have what was Jesus's favourite picture of God and of God's love. This parable teaches us many things about that love.

(i) The love of God is an individual love. The ninety-and-nine were not enough; one sheep was out on the hillside and the shepherd could not rest until he had brought it home. However large a family a parent has, he cannot spare even one; there is not one who does not matter. God is like that; God cannot be happy until the last wanderer is gathered in.

(ii) The love of God is a patient love. Sheep are proverbially foolish creatures. The sheep has no one but itself to blame for the danger it had got itself into. Men are apt to have so little patience

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Matthew 18:12-14

with the foolish ones. When they get into trouble, we are apt to say, "It's their own fault; they brought it on themselves; don't waste any sympathy on fools." God is not like that. The sheep might be foolish but the shepherd would still risk his life to save it. Men may be fools but God loves even the foolish man who has no one to blame but himself for his sin and his sorrow.

(iii) The love of God is a seeking love. The shepherd was not content to wait for the sheep to come back; he went out to search for it. That is what the Jew could not understand about the Christian idea Of God. The Jew would gladly agree that, if the sinner came crawling wretchedly home, God would forgive. But we know that God is far more wonderful than that, for in Jesus Christ, he came to seek for those who wander away. God is not content to wait until men come home; he goes out to search for them no matter what it costs him.

(iv) The love of God is a rejoicing love. Here there is nothing but joy. There are no recriminations; there is no receiving back with a grudge and a sense of superior contempt; it is all joy. So often we accept a man who is penitent with a moral lecture and a clear indication that he must regard himself as contemptible, and the practical statement that we have no further use for him and do not propose to trust him ever again. It is human never to forget a man's past and always to remember his sins against him. God puts our sins behind his back; and when we return to him, it is all joy.

(v) The love of God is a protecting love. It is the love which seeks and saves. There can be a love which ruins; there can be a love which softens; but the love of God is a protecting love which saves a man for the service of his fellow-men, a love which makes the wanderer wise, the weak strong, the sinner pure, the captive of sin the free man of holiness, and the vanquished by temptation its conqueror.

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Matthew 18:15-18

SEEKING THE STUBBORN

Matthew 18:15-18

"If your brother sins against you, go, and try to convince him of his error between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. If he will not listen to you, take with you one or two more, that the whole matter may be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the Church. And if he refuses to listen to the Church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. This is the truth I tell you--all that you bind upon earth will remain bound in heaven; and all that you loose upon earth will remain loosed in heaven."

In many ways this is one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the whole of Matthew's gospel. Its difficulty lies in the undoubted fact that it does not ring true; it does not sound like Jesus; it sounds much more like the regulations of an ecclesiastical committee.

We may go further. It is not possible that Jesus said this in its present form. Jesus could not have told his disciples to take things to the Church, for it did not exist; and the passage implies a fully developed and organized Church with a system of ecclesiastical discipline. What is more, it speaks of tax-collectors and Gentiles as irreclaimable outsiders. Yet Jesus was accused of being the friend of tax-gatherers and sinners; and he never spoke of them as hopeless outsiders, but always with sympathy and love, and even with praise (compare Matt.9:10ff; Matt.11:19; Lk.18:10ff; and especially Matt.21:31ff, where it is actually said that the tax-gatherers and harlots will go into the Kingdom before the orthodox religious people of the time). Further, the whole tone of the passage is that there is a limit to forgiveness, that there comes a time when a man may be abandoned as beyond hope, counsel which it is impossible to think of Jesus giving.

And the last verse actually seems to give the Church the power to retain and to forgive sins. There are many reasons to make us think that this, as it stands, cannot be a correct report of the words of Jesus, but an adaptation made by the Church in later days, when Church discipline was rather a thing of rules and regulations than of love and forgiveness.

Although this passage is certainly not a correct report of what Jesus said, it is equally certain that it goes back to something he did say. Can we press behind it and come to the actual commandment of Jesus? At its widest what Jesus was saying was, "If anyone sins against you, spare no effort to make that man admit his fault, and to get things right again between you and him." Basically it means that we must never tolerate any situation in which there is a breach of personal relationships between us and another member of the Christian community.

Suppose something does go wrong, what are we to do to put it right? This passage presents us with a whole scheme of action for the mending of broken relationships within the Christian fellowship.

(i) If we feel that someone has wronged us, we should immediately put our complaint into words. The worst thing that we can do about a wrong is to brood about it. That is fatal. It can poison the whole mind and life, until we can think of nothing else but our sense of personal injury. Any such

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Matthew 18:15-18

feeling should be brought out into the open, faced, and stated, and often the very stating of it will show how unimportant and trivial the whole thing is.

(ii) If we feel that someone has wronged us, we should go to see him personally. More trouble has been caused by the writing of letters than by almost anything else. A letter may be misread and misunderstood; it may quite unconsciously convey a tone it was never meant to convey. If we have a difference with someone, there is only one way to settle it--and that is face to face. The spoken word can often settle a difference which the written word would only have exacerbated.

(iii) If a private and personal meeting fails of its purpose, we should take some wise person or persons with us. Deut.19:15 has it: "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained." That is the saying which Matthew has in mind. But in this case the taking of the witnesses is not meant to be a way of proving to a man that he has committed an offence. It is meant to help the process of reconciliation. A man often hates those whom he has injured most of all; and it may well be that nothing we can say can win him back. But to talk matters over with some wise and kindly and gracious people present is to create a new atmosphere in which there is at least a chance that we should see ourselves "as others see us." The Rabbis had a wise saying, "Judge not alone, for none may judge alone save One (that is God)."

(iv) If that still fails, we must take our personal troubles to the Christian fellowship. Why? Because troubles are never settled by going to law, or by Christless argument. Legalism merely produces further trouble. It is in an atmosphere of Christian prayer, Christian love and Christian fellowship that personal relationships may be righted. The clear assumption is that the Church fellowship is Christian, and seeks to judge everything, not in the light of a book of practice and procedure, but in the light of love.

(v) It is now we come to the difficult part. Matthew says that, if even that does not succeed, then the man who has wronged us is to be regarded as a Gentile and a tax-collector. The first impression is that the man must be abandoned as hopeless and irreclaimable, but that is precisely what Jesus cannot have meant. He never set limits to human forgiveness. What then did he mean?

We have seen that when he speaks of tax-gatherers and sinners he always does so with sympathy and gentleness and an appreciation of their good qualities. It may be that what Jesus said was something like this: "When you have done all this, when you have given the sinner every chance, and when he remains stubborn and obdurate, you may think that he is no better than a renegade tax-collector, or even a godless Gentile. Well, you may be right. But I have not found the tax-gatherers and the Gentiles hopeless. My experience of them is that they, too, have a heart to be touched; and there are many of them, like Matthew and Zacchaeus, who have become my best friends. Even if the stubborn sinner is like a tax-collector or a Gentile, you may still win him, as I have done."

This, in fact, is not an injunction to abandon a man; it is a challenge to win him with the love which can touch even the hardest heart. It is not a statement that some men are hopeless; it is a statement that Jesus Christ has found no man hopeless--and neither must we.

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Matthew 18:15-18

(vi) Finally, there is the saying about loosing and binding. It is a difficult saying. It cannot mean that the Church can remit or forgive sins, and so settle a man's destiny in time or in eternity. What it may well mean is that the relationships which we establish with our fellow-men last not only through time but into eternity--therefore we must get them right.

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Matthew 18:19-20

THE POWER OF THE PRESENCE

Matthew 18:19-20

"Again, I tell you, that if two of you agree upon earth upon any matter for which you are praying, you will receive it from my Father who is in Heaven. Where two or three are assembled together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Here is one of these sayings of Jesus, whose meaning we need to probe or we will be left with heartbreak and great disappointment. Jesus says that, if two upon earth agree upon any matter for which they are praying, they will receive it from God. If that is to be taken literally, and without any qualification, it is manifestly untrue. Times without number two people have agreed to pray for the physical or the spiritual welfare of a loved one and their prayer has not, in the literal sense, been answered. Times without number God's people have agreed to pray for the conversion of their own land or the conversion of the heathen and the coming of the Kingdom, and even yet that prayer is far from being fully answered. People agree to pray--and pray desperately--and do not receive that for which they pray. There is no point in refusing to face the facts of the situation, and nothing but harm can result from teaching people to expect what does not happen. But when we come to see what this saying means, there is a precious depth in it.

(i) First and foremost, it means that prayer must never be selfish and that selfish prayer cannot find an answer. We are not meant to pray only for our own needs, thinking of nothing and no one but ourselves; we are meant to pray as members of a fellowship, in agreement, remembering that life and the world are not arranged for us as individuals but for the fellowship as a whole. It would often happen that, if our prayers were answered, the prayers of someone else would be disappointed. Often our prayers for our success would necessarily involve someone else's failure. Effective prayer must be the prayer of agreement, from which the element of selfish concentration on our own needs and desires has been quite cleansed away.

(ii) When prayer is unselfish, it is always answered. But here as everywhere we must remember the basic law of prayer; that law is that in prayer we receive, not the answer which we desire, but the answer which God in his wisdom and his love knows to be best. Simply because we are human beings, with human hearts and fears and hopes and desires, most of our prayers are prayers for escape. We pray to be saved from some trial, some sorrow, some disappointment, some hurting and difficult situation. And always God's answer is the offer not of escape, but of victory. God does not give us escape from a human situation; he enables us to accept what we cannot understand; he enables us to endure what without him would be unendurable; he enables us to face what without him would be beyond all facing. The perfect example of all this is Jesus in Gethsemane. He prayed to be released from the dread situation which confronted him, he was not released from it; but he was given power to meet it, to endure it, and to conquer it. When we pray unselfishly, God sends his answer--but the answer is always his answer and not necessarily ours.

(iii) Jesus goes on to say that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there in the midst of them. The Jews themselves had a saying, "Where two sit and are occupied with the study of the Law, the glory of God is among them." We may take this great promise of Jesus into two spheres.

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Matthew 18:19-20

(a) We may take it into the sphere of the Church. Jesus is just as much present in the little congregation as in the great mass meeting. He is just as much present at the Prayer Meeting or the Bible Study Circle with their handful of people as in the crowded arena. He is not the slave of numbers. He is there wherever faithful hearts meet, however few they may be, for he gives all of himself to each individual person.

(b) We may take it into the sphere of the home. One of the earliest interpretations of this saying of Jesus was that the two or three are father, mother, and child, and that it means that Jesus is there, the unseen guest in every home.

There are those who never give of their best except on the so-called great occasion; but for Jesus Christ every occasion where even two or three are gathered in his name is a great occasion.

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Matthew 18:21-35

HOW TO FORGIVE

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I tell you not up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. That is why the Kingdom of Heaven can be likened to what happened when a king wished to make a reckoning with his servants. When he began to make a reckoning one debtor was brought to him who owed him 2,400,000 British pounds. Since he was quite unable to pay, his master ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children, and all his possessions, and payment to be made. The servant fell on his face and besought him: 'Sir, have patience with me, and I will pay you in full.' The master of the servant was moved with compassion, and let him go, and forgave him the debt. When that servant went out, he found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him £5. He caught hold of him and seized him by the throat: 'Pay what you owe,' he said. The fellow-servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you in full.' But he refused. Rather, he went away and flung him into prison, until he should pay what was due. So, when his fellow-servants saw what had happened, they were very distressed; and they went and informed their master of all that had happened. Then the master summoned him, and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt when you besought me to do so. Ought you not to have had pity on your fellow-servant, as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry with him and handed him over to the torturers, until he should pay all that was due.

"Even so shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you do not each one forgive his brother from your hearts."

We owe a very great deal to the fact that Peter had a quick tongue. Again and again he rushed into speech in such a way that his impetuosity drew from Jesus teaching which is immortal. On this occasion Peter thought that he was being very generous. He asked Jesus how often he ought to forgive his brother, and then answered his own question by suggesting that he should forgive seven times.

Peter was not without warrant for this suggestion. It was Rabbinic teaching that a man must forgive his brother three times. Rabbi Jose ben Hanina said, "He who begs forgiveness from his neighbour must not do so more than three times." Rabbi Jose ben Jehuda said, "If a man commits an offence once, they forgive him; if he commits an offence a second time, they forgive him; if he commits an offence a third time, they forgive him; the fourth time they do not forgive." The Biblical proof that this was correct was taken from Amos. In the opening chapters of Amos there is a series of condemnations on the various nations for three transgressions and for four (Am.1:3,6,9; Am.1:11,13; Am.2:1,4,6). From this it was deduced that God's forgiveness extends to three offences and that he visits the sinner with punishment at the fourth. It was not to be thought that a man could be more gracious than God, so forgiveness was limited to three times.

Peter thought that he was going very far, for he takes the Rabbinic three times, multiplies it by two for good measure adds one, and suggests, with eager self-satisfaction, that it will be enough if he forgives seven times. Peter expected to be warmly commended; but Jesus's answer was that the

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Matthew 18:21-35

Christian must forgive seventy times seven. In other words there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness.

Jesus then told the story of the servant forgiven a great debt who went out and dealt mercilessly with a fellow-servant who owed him a debt that was an infinitesimal fraction of what he himself had owed; and who for his mercilessness was utterly condemned. This parable teaches certain lessons which Jesus never tired of teaching.

(i) It teaches that lesson which runs through all the New Testament--a man must forgive in order to be forgiven. He who will not forgive his fellow-men cannot hope that God will forgive him. "Blessed are the merciful," said Jesus, "for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt.5:7). No sooner had Jesus taught his men his own prayer, than he went on to expand and explain one petition in it: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt.6:14-15). As James had it, "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy" (Jas.2:13). Divine and human forgiveness go hand in hand.

(ii) Why should that be so? One of the great points in this parable is the contrast between the two debts.

The first servant owed his master 10,000 talents; a talent was the equivalent of 240 British pounds; therefore 10,000 talents is 2,400,000 British pounds. That is an incredible debt. It was more than the total budget of the ordinary province. The total revenue of the province which contained Idumaea, Judaea and Samaria was only 600 talents; the total revenue of even a wealthy province like Galilee was only 300 talents. Here was a debt which was greater than a king's ransom. It was this that the servant was forgiven.

The debt which a fellow-servant owed him was a trifling thing; it was 100 denarii (GSN1220); a denarius (GSN1220) was worth about 4 pence in value; and therefore the total debt was less than 5 British pounds. It was approximately one five-hundred-thousandth of his own debt.

A. R. S. Kennedy drew this vivid picture to contrast the debts. Suppose they were paid in sixpences. The 100 denarii debt could be carried in one pocket. The ten thousand talent debt would take to carry it an army of about 8,600 carriers, each carrying a sack of sixpences 60 lbs. in weight; and they would form, at a distance of a yard apart, a line five miles long! The contrast between the debts is staggering. The point is that nothing men can do to us can in any way compare with what we have done to God; and if God has forgiven us the debt we owe to him, we must forgive our fellow-men the debts they owe to us. Nothing that we have to forgive can even faintly or remotely compare with what we have been forgiven.

"Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone."

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Matthew 18:21-35

We have been forgiven a debt which is beyond all paying--for the sin of man brought about the death of God's own Son--and, if that is so, we must forgive others as God has forgiven us, or we can hope to find no mercy.

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Matthew 19:1-9

JEWISH MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Matthew 19:1-9 (Part 1)

When Jesus had finished these words, he left Galilee, and came into the districts of Judaea which are on the far side of the Jordan. Many crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

Pharisees came to him, trying to test him. "It is lawful," they said, "for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and he said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? They are therefore no longer two, but one flesh. What, then, God has joined together, let no man separate." They said to him, "Why, then, did Moses lay it down to give her a bill of divorcement, and to divorce her?" He said to them, "It was to meet the hardness of your heart that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives; but in the beginning that was not the state of things which was intended. I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except on the ground of fornication, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her who has been divorced commits adultery."

Here Jesus is dealing with what was in his day, as it is in our own, a vexed and burning question. Divorce was something about which there was no unanimity among the Jews; and the Pharisees were deliberately trying to involve Jesus in controversy.

No nation has ever had a higher view of marriage than the Jews. Marriage was a sacred duty. To remain unmarried after the age of twenty, except in order to concentrate upon the study of the Law, was to break a positive commandment to "be fruitful and multiply." He who had no children "slew his own posterity," and "lessened the image of God upon earth." "When husband and wife are worthy, the glory of God is with them."

Marriage was not to be entered into carelessly or lightly. Josephus outlines the Jewish approach to marriage, based on the Mosaic teaching (Antiquities of the Jews 4. 8. 23). A man must marry a virgin of good parentage. He must never corrupt another man's wife; and he must not marry a woman who had been a slave or a harlot. If a man accused his wife of not being a virgin when he married her, he must bring proofs of his accusation. Her father or brother must defend her. If the girl was vindicated he must take her in marriage, and could never again put her away, except for the most flagrant sin. If the accusation was proved to have been reckless and malicious, the man who made it must be beaten with forty stripes save one, and must pay fifty shekels to the girl's father. But if the charge was proved and the girl found guilty, if she was one of the ordinary people, the law was that she must be stoned to death, and if she was the daughter of a priest, she must be burned alive.

If a man seduced a girl who was espoused to be married, and the seduction took place with her consent, both he and she must be put to death. If in a lonely place or where there was no help present, the man forced the girl into sin, the man alone was put to death. If a man seduced an unespoused girl, he must marry her, or, if her father was unwilling for him to marry her, he must pay the father fifty shekels.

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Matthew 19:1-9

The Jewish laws of marriage and of purity aimed very high. Ideally divorce was hated. God had said, "I hate divorce" (Mal.2:16). It was said that the very altar wept tears when a man divorced the wife of his youth.

But ideal and actuality did not go hand in hand. In the situation there were two dangerous and damaging elements.

First, in the eyes of Jewish law a woman was a thing. She was the possession of her father, or of her husband as the case might be; and, therefore, she had, technically, no legal rights at all. Most Jewish marriages were arranged either by the parents or by professional match-makers. A girl might be engaged to be married in childhood, and was often engaged to be married to a man whom she had never seen. There was this safeguard--when she came to the age of twelve she could repudiate her father's choice of husband. But in matters of divorce, the general law was that the initiative must lie with the husband. The law ran: "A woman may be divorced with or without her consent, but a man can be divorced only with his consent." The woman could never initiate the process of divorce; she could not divorce, she had to be divorced.

There were certain safeguards. If a man divorced his wife on any other grounds than those of flagrant immorality, he must return her dowry; and this must have been a barrier to irresponsible divorce. The courts might put pressure on a man to divorce his wife, in the case, for instance, of refusal to consummate the marriage, of impotence, or of proved inability to support her properly. A wife could force her husband to divorce her, if he contracted a loathsome disease, such as leprosy, or if he was a tanner, which involved the gathering of dog's dung, or if he proposed to make her leave the Holy Land. But, by and large, the law was that the woman had no legal rights, and the right to divorce lay entirely with the husband.

Second, the process of divorce was fatally easy. That process was founded on the passage in the Mosaic Law to which Jesus' questioners referred: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house..." (Deut.24:1). The bill of divorcement was a simple, one-sentence statement that the husband dismissed his wife. Josephus writes, "He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men) let him, in writing, give assurance that he will never use her as his wife any more; for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband." The one safeguard against the dangerous ease of the divorce process was the fact that, unless the woman was a notorious sinner, her dowry must be returned.

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Matthew 19:1-9

JEWISH GROUNDS OF DIVORCE

Matthew 19:1-9 (Part 2)

One of the great problems of Jewish divorce lies within the Mosaic enactment. That enactment states that a man may divorce his wife, "if she finds no favour in his eyes, because he has found some indecency in her." The question is--how is the phrase some indecency to be interpreted?

On this point the Jewish Rabbis were violently divided, and it was here that Jesus' questioners wished to involve him. The school of Shammai were quite clear that a matter of indecency meant fornication, and fornication alone, and that for no other cause could a wife be put away. Let a woman be as mischievous as Jezebel, so long as she did not commit adultery she could not be put away. On the other hand, the school of Hillel interpreted this matter of indecency in the widest possible way. They said that it meant that a man could divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner, if she spun, or went with unbound hair, or spoke to men in the streets, if she spoke disrespectfully of his parents in his presence, if she was a brawling woman whose voice could be heard in the next house. Rabbi Akiba even went the length of saying that the phrase if she finds no favour in his eyes meant that a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman whom he liked better and considered more beautiful.

The tragedy was that, as was to be expected, it was the school of Hillel whose teachings prevailed; the marriage bond was often lightly held, and divorce on the most trivial ground was sadly common.

To complete the picture certain further facts must be added. It is relevant to note that under Rabbinic law divorce was compulsory for two reasons. It was compulsory for adultery. "A woman who has committed adultery must be divorced." Second, divorce was compulsory for sterility. The object of marriage was the procreation of children; and if after ten years a couple were still childless divorce was compulsory. In this case the woman might remarry, but the same regulation governed the second marriage.

Two further interesting Jewish regulations in regard to divorce must be added. First, desertion was never a cause for divorce. If there was desertion, death must be proved. The only relaxation was that, whereas all other facts needed the corroboration of two witnesses in Jewish law, one witness was enough to prove the death of a partner in marriage who had vanished and not come back.

Secondly, strangely enough, insanity was not a ground of divorce. If the wife became insane, the husband could not divorce her, for, if she was divorced, she would have no protector in her helplessness. There is a certain poignant mercy in that regulation. If the husband became insane, divorce was impossible, for in that case he was incapable of writing a bill of divorcement, and without such a bill, initiated by him, there could be no divorce.

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Matthew 19:1-9

When Jesus was asked this question, at the back of it was a situation which was vexed and troubled. He was to answer it in a way which came as a staggering surprise to both parties in the dispute, and which suggested a radical change in the whole situation.

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Matthew 19:1-9

THE ANSWER OF JESUS

Matthew 19:1-9 (Part 3)

In effect, the Pharisees were asking Jesus whether he favoured the strict view of Shammai or the laxer view of Hillel; and thereby seeking to involve him in controversy.

Jesus' answer was to take things back to the very beginning, back to the ideal of creation. In the beginning, he said, God created Adam and Eve, man and woman. Inevitably, in the very circumstances of the creation story, Adam and Eve were created for each other and for no one else; their union was necessarily complete and unbreakable. Now, says Jesus, these two are the pattern and the symbol of all who were to come. As A. H. McNeile puts it, "Each married couple is a reproduction of Adam and Eve, and their union is therefore no less indissoluble."

The argument is quite clear. In the case of Adam and Eve divorce was not only inadvisable; it was not only wrong; it was completely impossible, for the very simple reason that there was no one else whom either of them could possibly marry. Therefore Jesus was laying down the principle that an divorce is wrong. Thus early we must note that it is not a law; it is a principle, which is a very different thing.

Here, at once, the Pharisees saw a point of attack. Moses (Deut.24:1) had said that, if a man wished to divorce his wife because she had found no favour in his eyes, and because of some matter of indecency in her, he could give her a bill of divorce and the marriage was dissolved. Here was the very chance the Pharisees wanted. They could now say to Jesus, "Are you saying Moses was wrong? Are you seeking to abrogate the divine law which was given to Moses? Are you setting yourself above Moses as a law-giver?"

Jesus' answer was that what Moses said was not in fact a law, but nothing more than a concession. Moses did not command divorce; at the best he only permitted it in order to regulate a situation which would have become chaotically promiscuous. The Mosaic regulation was only a concession to fallen human nature. In Gen.2:23-24, we have the ideal which God intended, the ideal that two people who marry should become so indissolubly one that they are one flesh. Jesus' answer was: "True, Moses permitted divorce; but that was a concession in view of a lost ideal. The ideal of marriage is to be found in the unbreakable, perfect union of Adam and Eve. That is what God meant marriage to be."

It is now that we are face to face with one of the most real and most acute difficulties in the New Testament. What did Jesus mean? There is even a prior question--what did Jesus say? The difficulty is--and there is no escaping it--that Mark and Matthew report the words of Jesus differently.

Matthew has:

I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery (Matt.19:9).

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Matthew 19:1-9

Mark has:

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery (Mk.10:11-12).

Luke has still another version of this saying:

Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery. (Lk.16:18).

There is the comparatively small difficulty that Mark implies that a woman can divorce her husband, a process which, as we have seen, was not possible under Jewish law. But the explanation is that Jesus must have well known that under Gentile law a woman could divorce her husband and in that particular clause he was looking beyond the Jewish world. The great difficulty is that both Mark and Luke make the prohibition of divorce absolute; with them there are no exceptions whatsoever. But Matthew has one saving clause--divorce is permitted on the ground of adultery. In this case there is no real escape from a decision. The only possible way out would be to say that in point of fact, under Jewish law, divorce for adultery was in any event compulsory, as we have seen, and that therefore Mark and Luke did not think that they need mention it; but then so was divorce for sterility.

In the last analysis we must choose between Matthew's version of this saying and that of Mark and Luke. We think there is little doubt that the version of Mark and Luke is right. There are two reasons. Only the absolute prohibition of separation will satisfy the ideal of the Adam and Eve symbolic complete union. And the staggered words of the disciples imply this absolute prohibition, for, in effect, they say (Matt.19:10) that if marriage is as binding as that, it is safer not to marry at all. There is little doubt that here we have Jesus laying down the principle--mark again, not, the law--that the ideal of marriage is a union which cannot be broken. There is much more to be said--but here the ideal, as God meant it, is laid down, and Matthew's saving clause is a later interpretation inserted in the light of the practice of the Church when he wrote.

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Matthew 19:1-9

THE HIGH IDEAL

Matthew 19:1-9 (Part 4)

Let us now go on to see the high ideal of the married state which Jesus sets before those who are willing to accept his commands. We will see that the Jewish ideal gives us the basis of the Christian ideal. The Jewish term for marriage was Kiddushin. Kiddushin meant sanctification or consecration. It was used to describe something which was dedicated to God as his exclusive and peculiar possession. Anything totally surrendered to God was kiddushin. This meant that in marriage the husband was consecrated to the wife, and the wife to the husband. The one became the exclusive possession of the other, as much as an offering became the exclusive possession of God. That is what Jesus meant when he said that for the sake of marriage a man would leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife; and that is what he meant when he said that man and wife became so totally one that they could be called one flesh.

That was God's ideal of marriage as the old Genesis story saw it (Gen.2:24), and that is the ideal which Jesus restated. Clearly that idea has certain consequences.

(i) This total unity means that marriage is not given for one act in life, however important that act may be, but for all. That is to say that, while sex is a supremely important part of marriage, it is not the whole of it. Any marriage entered into simply because an imperious physical desire can be satisfied in no other way is foredoomed to failure. Marriage is given, not that two people should do one thing together, but that they should do all things together.

(ii) Another way to put this is to say that marriage is the total union of two personalities. Two people can exist together in a variety of ways. One can be the dominant partner to such an extent that nothing matters but his wishes and his convenience and his aims in life, while the other is totally subservient and exists only to serve the desires and the needs of the other. Again, two people can exist in a kind of armed neutrality, where there is continuous tension and continuous opposition, and continuous collision between their wishes. Life can be one long argument, and the relationship is based at best on an uneasy compromise. Again, two people can base their relationship on a more or less resigned acceptance of each other. To all intents and purposes, while they live together, each goes his or her own way, and each has his or her own life. They share the same house but it would be an exaggeration to say that they share the same home.

Clearly none of these relationships is the ideal. The ideal is that in the marriage state two people find the completing of their personalities. Plato had a strange idea. He has a kind of legend that originally human beings were double what they are now. Because their size and strength made them arrogant, the gods cut them in halves; and real happiness comes when the two halves find each other again, and marry, and so complete each other.

Marriage should not narrow life; it should complete it. For both partners it must bring a new fulness, a new satisfaction, a new contentment into life. It is the union of two personalities in which the two complete each other. That does not mean that adjustments, and even sacrifices, have not to be made; but it does mean that the final relationship is fuller, more joyous, more satisfying than any life in singleness could be.

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Matthew 19:1-9

(iii) We may put this even more practically--marriage must be a sharing of all the circumstances of life. There is a certain danger in the delightful time of courtship. In such days it is almost inevitable that the two people will see each other at their best. These are days of glamour. They see each other in their best clothes; usually they are bent on some pleasure together; often money has not yet become a problem. But in marriage two people must see each other when they are not at their best; when they are tired and weary; when children bring the upset to a house and home that children must bring; when money is tight, and food and clothes and bills become a problem; when moonlight and roses become the kitchen sink and walking the floor at night with a crying baby. Unless two people are prepared to face the routine of life as well as the glamour of life together, marriage must be a failure.

(iv) From that there follows one thing, which is not universally true, but which is much more likely than not to be true. Marriage is most likely to be successful after a fairly long acquaintanceship, when the two people involved really know each other's background. Marriage means constantly living together. It is perfectly possible for ingrained habits, unconscious mannerisms, ways of upbringing to collide. The fuller the knowledge people have of each other before they decide indissolubly to link their lives together the better. This is not to deny that there can be such a thing as love at first sight, and that love can conquer all things, but the fact is that the greater mutual knowledge people have of each other the more likely they are to succeed in making their marriage what it ought to be.

(v) All this leads us to a final practical conclusion--the basis of marriage is togetherness, and the basis of togetherness is nothing other than considerateness. If marriage is to succeed, the partners must always be thinking more of each other than of themselves. Selfishness is the murderer of any personal relationship; and that is truest of all when two people are bound together in marriage.

Somerset Maugham tells of his mother. She was lovely and charming and beloved by all. His father was not by any means handsome, and had few social and surface gifts and graces. Someone once said to his mother, "When everyone is in love with you, and when you could have anyone you liked, how can you remain faithful to that ugly little man you married?" She answered simply: "He never hurts my feelings." There could be no finer tribute.

The true basis of marriage is not complicated and recondite--it is simply the love which thinks more of the happiness of others than it thinks of its own, the love which is proud to serve, which is able to understand, and therefore always able to forgive. That is to say, it is the Christlike love, which knows that in forgetting self it will find self, and that in losing itself it will complete itself

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Matthew 19:10-12

THE REALIZATION OF THE IDEAL

Matthew 19:10-12 (Part 1)

His disciples said to him, "If the only reason for divorce between a man and his wife stands thus, it is not expedient to marry." He said to them, "Not all can receive this saying, but only those to whom it has been granted to do so. There are eunuchs who were born so from their mothers' womb; and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let him who is able to receive this saying, receive it."

Here we come to the necessary amplification of what has gone before. When the disciples heard the ideal of marriage which Jesus set before them, they were daunted. Many a rabbinic saying would come into the mind of the disciples. The Rabbis had many sayings about unhappy marriages. "Among those who will never behold the face of Gehinnom is he who has had a bad wife." Such a man is saved from hell because he has expiated his sins on earth! "Among those whose life is not life is the man who is ruled by his wife." "A bad wife is like leprosy to her husband. What is the remedy? Let him divorce her and be cured of his leprosy." It was even laid down: "If a man has a bad wife, it is a religious duty to divorce her."

To men who had been brought up to listen to sayings like that the uncompromising demand of Jesus was an almost frightening thing. Their reaction was that, if marriage is so final and binding a relationship and if divorce is forbidden, it is better not to marry at all, for there is no escape route as they understood it--from an evil situation. Jesus gives two answers.

(i) He says quite clearly that not everyone can in fact accept this situation but only those to whom it has been granted to do so. In other words, only the Christian can accept the Christian ethic. Only the man who has the continual help of Jesus Christ and the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit can build up the personal relationship which the ideal of marriage demands. Only by the help of Jesus Christ can he develop the sympathy, the understanding, the forgiving spirit, the considerate love, which true marriage requires. Without that help these things are impossible. The Christian ideal of marriage involves the prerequisite that the partners are Christian.

Here is a truth which goes far beyond this particular application of it. We continually hear people say, "We accept the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount; but why bother about the divinity of Jesus, and his Resurrection, and his risen presence, and his Holy Spirit, and all that kind of thing? We accept that he was a good man, and that his teaching is the highest teaching ever given. Why not leave it at that, and get on with the living out of that teaching and never mind the theology?" The answer is quite simple. No one can live out Jesus Christ's teaching without Jesus Christ. And if Jesus was only a great and good man, even if he was the greatest and the best of men, then at most he is only a great example. His teaching becomes possible only in the conviction that he is not dead but present here to help us to carry it out. The teaching of Christ demands the presence of Christ; otherwise it is only an impossible--and a torturing--ideal.

So, then, we have to face the fact that Christian marriage is possible only for Christians.

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(ii) The passage finishes with a very puzzling verse about eunuchs. It is quite possible that Jesus said this on some other occasion, and that Matthew puts it here because he is collecting Jesus' teaching on marriage, for it was always Matthew's custom to gather together teaching on a particular subject.

A eunuch is a man who is unsexed. Jesus distinguishes three classes of people. There are those who, through some physical imperfection or deformity, can never be capable of sexual intercourse. There are those who have been made eunuchs by men. This represents customs which are strange to western civilization. Quite frequently in royal palaces servants, especially those who had to do with the royal harem, were deliberately castrated. Also, quite frequently priests who served in temples were castrated; this, for instance, is true of the priests who served in the Temple of Diana in Ephesus.

Then Jesus talks about those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of God. We must be quite clear that this is not to be taken literally. One of the tragedies of the early Church was the case of Origen. When he was young he took this text quite literally and castrated himself, although he came to see that he was in error. Clement of Alexandria comes nearer it. He says, "The true eunuch is not he who cannot, but he who will not indulge in fleshly pleasures." By this phrase Jesus meant those who for the sake of the Kingdom deliberately bade farewell to marriage and to parenthood and to human physical love.

How can that be? It can happen that a man has to choose between some call to which he is challenged and human love. It has been said, "He travels the fastest who travels alone." A man may feel that he can do the work of some terrible slum parish only by living in circumstances in which marriage and a home are impossible. He may feel that he must accept some missionary call to a place where he cannot in conscience take a wife and beget children. He may even find that he is in love and then is offered an exacting task which the person he loves refuses to share. Then he must choose between human love and the task to which Christ calls him.

Thank God it is not often that such a choice comes to a man; but there are those who have taken upon themselves voluntarily vows of chastity, celibacy, purity, poverty, abstinence, continence. That will not be the way for the ordinary man, but the world would be a poorer place were it not for those who accept the challenge to travel alone for the sake of the work of Christ.

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Matthew 19:10-12

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Matthew 19:10-12 (Part 2)

It would be wrong to leave this matter without some attempt to see what it actually means for the question of divorce at the present time.

We may at the beginning note this. What Jesus laid down was a principle and not a law. To turn this saying of Jesus into a law is gravely to misunderstand it. The Bible does not give us laws; it gives principles which we must prayerfully and intelligently apply to any given situation.

Of the Sabbath the Bible says, "In it you shall not do any work" (Exo.20:10). In point of fact we know that a complete cessation of work was never possible in any civilization. In an agricultural civilization cattle had still to be tended and cows had to be milked no matter what the day was. In a developed civilization certain public services must go on, or transport will stand still and water, light, and heat will not be available. In any home, especially where there are children, there has to be a certain amount of work.

A principle can never be quoted as a final law; a principle must always be applied to the individual situation. We cannot therefore settle the question of divorce simply by quoting the words of Jesus. That would be legalism; we must take the words of Jesus as a principle to apply to the individual cases as they meet us. That being so, certain truths emerge.

(i) Beyond all doubt the ideal is that marriage should be an indissoluble union between two people, and that marriage should be entered into as a total union of two personalities, not designed to make one act possible, but designed to make all life a satisfying and mutually completing fellowship. That is the essential basis on which we must proceed.

(ii) But life is not, and never can be, a completely tidy and orderly business. Into life there is bound to come sometimes the element of the unpredictable. Suppose, then, that two people enter into the marriage relationship; suppose they do so with the highest hopes and the highest ideals; and then suppose that something unaccountably goes wrong, and that the relationship which should be life's greatest joy becomes hell upon earth. Suppose all available help is called in to mend this broken and terrible situation. Suppose the doctor is called in to deal with physical things; the psychiatrist to deal with psychological things; the priest or the minister to deal with spiritual things. Suppose the trouble still to be there; suppose one of the partners to the marriage to be so constituted physically, mentally or spiritually that marriage is an impossibility, and suppose that discovery could not have been made until the experiment itself had been made--are then these two people to be for ever fettered together in a situation which cannot do other than bring a lifetime of misery to both?

It is extremely difficult to see how such reasoning can be called Christian; it is extremely hard to see Jesus legalistically condemning two people to any such situation. This is not to say that divorce should be made easy, but it is to say that when all the physical and mental and spiritual resources have been brought to bear on such a situation, and the situation remains incurable and even

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dangerous, then the situation should be ended; and the Church, so far from regarding people who have been involved in such a situation as being beyond the pale, should do everything it can in strength and tenderness to help them. There does not seem any other way than that in which to bring the real Spirit of Christ to bear.

(iii) But in this matter we are face to face with a most tragic situation. It often happens that the things which wreck marriage are in fact the things which the law cannot touch. A man in a moment of passion and failure of control commits adultery and spends the rest of his life in shame and in sorrow for what he did. That he should ever repeat his sin is the least likely thing in the world. Another man is a model of rectitude in public; to commit adultery is the last thing he would do; and yet by a day-to-day sadistic cruelty, a day-to-day selfishness, a day-to-day criticism and sarcasm and mental cruelty, he makes life a hell for those who live with him; and he does it with callous deliberation.

We may well remember that the sins which get into the newspapers and the sins whose consequences are most glaringly obvious need not be in the sight of God the greatest sins. Many a man and many a woman wreck the marriage relationship and yet present to the outer world a front of unimpeachable rectitude.

This whole matter is one to which we might well bring more sympathy and less condemnation, for of all things the failure of a marriage must least be approached in legalism and most in love. In such a case it is not a so-called law that must be conserved; it is human heart and soul. What is wanted is that there should be prayerful care and thought before the married state is entered upon; that if a marriage is in danger of failure every possible medical, psychological and spiritual resource should be mobilized to save it; but, that if there is something beyond the mending, the situation should be dealt with not with rigid legalism, but with understanding love.

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Matthew 19:13-15

JESUS' WELCOME FOR THE CHILDREN

Matthew 19:13-15

Children were brought to him, that he might lay his hands on them, and pray for them. The disciples spoke sternly to them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as they are." And after he had laid his hands on them, he went away from there.

It may well be said that here we have the loveliest incident in the gospel story. The characters all stand out clear and plain, although it only takes two verses to tell it.

(i) There are those who brought the children. No doubt these would be their mothers.

No wonder they wished Jesus to lay his hands on them. They had seen what these hands could do; had seen them touch disease and pain away; had seen them bring sight to the blind eyes, and peace to the distracted mind; and they wanted hands like that to touch their children. There are few stories which show so clearly the sheer loveliness of the life of Jesus. Those who brought the children would not know who Jesus was; they would be well aware that Jesus was anything but popular with the Scribes and the Pharisees, and the Priests and the Sadducees and the leaders of orthodox religion; but there was a loveliness on him.

Premanand tells of a thing his mother once said to him. When Premanand became a Christian his family cast him off, and the doors were shut against him; but sometimes he used to slip back to see his mother. She was broken-hearted that he had become a Christian, but she did not cease to love him. She told him that when she was carrying him in her womb a missionary gave her a copy of one of the gospels. She read it; she still had it. She told her son that she had no desire to become a Christian, but that sometimes, in those days before he was born, she used to long that he might grow up to be a man like this Jesus.

There is a loveliness on Jesus Christ that anyone can see. It is easy to think of these mothers in Palestine feeling that the touch of a man like that on their children's heads would bring a blessing, even if they did not understand why.

(ii) There are the disciples. The disciples sound as if they were rough and stern; but, if they were, it was love that made them so. Their one desire was to protect Jesus.

They saw how tired he was; they saw what healing cost him. He was talking to them so often about a cross, and they must have seen on his face the tension of his heart and soul. All that they wanted was to see that Jesus was not bothered. They could only think that at such a time as this the children were a nuisance to the Master. We must not think of them as hard; we must not condemn them; they wished only to save Jesus from another of those insistent demands which were always laying their claims upon his strength.

(iii) There is Jesus himself. This story tells us much about him.

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Matthew 19:13-15

He was the kind of person children loved. George Macdonald used to say that no man could be a follower of Jesus if the children were afraid to play at his door. Jesus was certainly no grim ascetic, if the children loved him.

Further, to Jesus no one was unimportant. Some might say, "It's only a child; don't let him bother you." Jesus would never say that. No one was ever a nuisance to Jesus. He was never too tired, never too busy to give all of himself to anyone who needed it. There is a strange difference between Jesus and many a famous preacher or evangelist. It is often next door to impossible to get into the presence of one of these famous ones. They have a kind of retinue and bodyguard which keep the public away lest the great man be wearied and bothered. Jesus was the opposite of that. The way to his presence was open to the humblest person and to the youngest child.

(iv) There are the children. Jesus said of them that they were nearer God than anyone else there. The child's simplicity is, indeed, closer to God than anything else. It is life's tragedy that, as we grow older, we so often grow further from God rather than nearer to him.

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Matthew 19:16-22

THE GREAT REFUSAL

Matthew 19:16-22

And, look you, a man came to him and said, "Teacher, what good thing am I to do to possess eternal life?" He said to him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "What kind of commandments?" Jesus said, "'You must not kill; you must not commit adultery; you must not steal; honour your father and your mother.' And, 'You must love your neighbour as yourself.'" The young man said, "I have observed all these things. What am I still lacking?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me!" When the young man heard that saying, he went away in sorrow, for he had many possessions.

Here is one of the best-known and best-loved stories in the gospel history. One of the most interesting things about it is the way in which most of us, quite unconsciously, unite different details of it from the different gospels in order to get a complete picture. We usually call it the story of the Rich Young Ruler. All the gospels tell us that this man was rich, for therein is the point of the story. But only Matthew says that he was young (Matt.19:20); and only Luke says that he was a ruler (Lk.18:18). It is interesting to see how, quite unconsciously, we have created for ourselves a composite picture composed of elements taken from all three gospels (Matt.19:16-22; Mk.10:17-22; Lk.18:18-23).

There is another interesting point about this story. Matthew alters the question put to Jesus by this man. Both Mark and Luke say that the question was: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Mk.10:18; Lk.18:19). Matthew says that the question was: "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good" (Matt.19:17). (The text of the King James Version is in error here, as reference to any of the newer and more correct translations will show.) Matthew's is the latest of the first three gospels, and his reverence for Jesus is such that he cannot bear to show Jesus asking the question: "Why do you call me good?" That almost sounds to him as if Jesus was refusing to be called good, so he alters it into: "Why do you ask me about what is good?" in order to avoid the seeming irreverence.

This story teaches one of the deepest of all lessons for it has within it the whole basis of the difference between the right and the wrong idea of what religion is.

The man who came to Jesus was seeking for what he called eternal life. He was seeking for happiness, for satisfaction, for peace with God. But his very way of phrasing his question betrays him. He asks, "What must I do?" He is thinking in terms of actions. He is like the Pharisees; thinking in terms of keeping rules and regulations. He is thinking of piling up a credit balance-sheet with God by keeping the works of the law. He clearly knows nothing of a religion of grace. So Jesus tries to lead him on to a correct view.

Jesus answers him in his own terms. He tells him to keep the commandments. The young man asks what kind of commandments Jesus means. Thereupon Jesus cites five of the ten

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Matthew 19:16-22

commandments. Now there are two important things about the commandments which Jesus chooses to cite.

First, they are all commandments from the second half of the decalogue, the half which deals, not with our duty to God, but with our duty to men. They are the commandments which govern our personal relationships, and our attitude to our fellow-men.

Second, Jesus cites one commandment, as it were, out of order. He cites the command to honour parents last, when in point of fact it ought to come first. It is clear that Jesus wishes to lay special stress on that commandment. Why? May it not be that this young man had grown rich and successful in his career, and had then forgotten his parents, who may have been very poor. He may well have risen in the world, and have been half-ashamed of the folks in the old home; and then he may have justified himself perfectly legally by the law of Korban, which Jesus had so unsparingly condemned (Matt. 15:1-6; Mk. 7:9-13). These passages show that he could well have done that, and still have legally claimed to have obeyed the commandments. In the very commandments which he cites Jesus is asking this young man what his attitude to his fellow-men and to his parents was, asking what his personal relationships were like.

The young man's answer was that he had kept the commandments; and yet there was still something which he knew he ought to have and which he had not got. So Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor and follow him.

It so happens that we have another account of this incident in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which was one of the very early gospels which failed to be included in the New Testament. Its account gives us certain very valuable additional information. Here it is:

"The second of the rich men said to him, 'Master, what good thing can I do and live?' He said unto him, 'O man, fulfil the law and the prophets.' He answered him, 'I have kept them.' He said unto him, 'Go, sell all that thou ownest, and distribute it unto the poor, and, come, follow me.' But the rich man began to scratch his head, and it pleased him not. And the Lord said unto him, 'How sayest thou, I have kept the law and the prophets? For it is written in the law: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; and lo, many of thy brethren, sons of Abraham, are clad in filth, dying of hunger, and thine house is full of many good things, and nought at an goeth out of it unto them.'"

Here is the key to the whole passage. The young man claimed to have kept the law. In the legal sense that might be true; but in the spiritual sense it was not true, because his attitude to his fellow-men was wrong. In the last analysis his attitude was utterly selfish. That is why Jesus confronted him with the challenge to sell all and to give to the poor. This man was so shackled to his possessions that nothing less than surgical excision of them would suffice. If a man looks on his possessions as given to him for nothing but his own comfort and convenience, they are a chain

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which must be broken; if he looks on his possessions as a means to helping others, they are his crown.

The great truth of this story lies in the way it illumines the meaning of eternal life. Eternal life is life such as God himself lives. The word for eternal is *aionios* (GSN0166), which does not mean lasting for ever; it means such as befits God, or such as belongs to God, or such as is characteristic of God. The great characteristic of God is that he so loved and he gave. Therefore the essence of eternal life is not a carefully calculated keeping of the commandments and the rules and the regulations; eternal life is based on an attitude of loving and sacrificial generosity to our fellow-men. If we would find eternal life, if we would find happiness, joy, satisfaction, peace of mind and serenity of heart, it shall not be by piling up a credit balance with God through keeping commandments and observing rules and regulations; it shall be through reproducing God's attitude of love and care to our fellow-men.

To follow Christ and in grace and generosity to serve the men for whom Christ died are one and the same thing.

In the end the young man turned away in great distress. He refused the challenge, because he had great possessions. His tragedy was that he loved things more than he loved people; and he loved himself more than he loved others. Any man who puts things before people and self before others, must turn his back on Jesus Christ.

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Matthew 19:23-26

THE PERIL OF RICHES

Matthew 19:23-26

Jesus said to the disciples, "This is the truth I tell you--it is with difficulty that a rich man shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Again I say unto you--it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." When the disciples heard this, they were exceedingly astonished. "What rich man, then," they said, "can be saved?" Jesus looked at them, "With men," he said, "this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The case of the Rich Young Ruler shed a vivid and a tragic light on the danger of riches; here was a man who had made the great refusal because he had great possessions. Jesus now goes on to underline that danger. "It is difficult," he said, "for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

To illustrate how difficult that was he used a vivid simile. He said that it was as difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as it was for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Different interpretations have been given of the picture which Jesus was drawing.

The camel was the largest animal which the Jews knew. It is said that sometimes in walled cities there were two gates. There was the great main gate through which all trade and traffic moved. Beside it there was often a little low and narrow gate. When the great main gate was locked and guarded at night, the only way into the city was through the little gate, through which even a man could hardly pass erect. It is said that sometimes that little gate was called "The Needle's Eye." So it is suggested that Jesus was saying that it was just as difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as for a huge camel to get through the little gate through which a man can hardly pass.

There is another, and very attractive, suggestion. The Greek word for camel is *kamelos* (GSN2574); the Greek word for a ship's hawser is *kamilos*. It was characteristic of later Greek that the vowel sounds tended to lose their sharp distinctions and to approximate to each other. In such Greek there would be hardly any discernible difference between the sound of "i" and "e"; they would both be pronounced as *ee* is in English. So, then, what Jesus may have said is that it was just as difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven as it would be to thread a darning-needle with a ship's cable or hawser. That indeed is a vivid picture.

But the likelihood is that Jesus was using the picture quite literally, and that he was actually saying that it was as hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as it was for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Wherein then lies this difficulty? Riches have three main effects on a man's outlook.

(i) Riches encourage a false independence. If a man is well-supplied with this world's goods, he is very apt to think that he can well deal with any situation which may arise.

There is a vivid instance of this in the letter to the Church of Laodicaea in the Revelation. Laodicaea was the richest town in Asia Minor. She was laid waste by an earthquake in A.D. 60.

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Matthew 19:23-26

The Roman government offered aid and a large grant of money to repair her shattered buildings. She refused it, saying that she was well able to handle the situation by herself. "Laodicaea," said Tacitus, the Roman historian, "rose from the ruins entirely by her own resources and with no help from us." The Risen Christ hears Laodicaea say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" (Rev.3:17).

It was Walpole who coined the cynical epigram that every man has his price. If a man is wealthy he is apt to think that everything has its price, that if he wants a thing enough he can buy it, that if any difficult situation descends upon him he can buy his way out of it. He can come to think that he can buy his way into happiness and buy his way out of sorrow. So he comes to think that he can well do without God and is quite able to handle life by himself. There comes a time when a man discovers that that is an illusion, that there are things which money cannot buy, and things from which money cannot save him. But always there is the danger that great possessions encourage that false independence which thinks--until it learns better--that it has eliminated the need for God.

(ii) Riches shackle a man to this earth. "Where your treasure is," said Jesus, "there will your heart be also" (Matt.6:21). If everything a man desires is contained within this world, if all his interests are here, he never thinks of another world and of a hereafter. If a man has too big a stake on earth, he is very apt to forget that there is a heaven. After a tour of a certain wealthy and luxurious castle and estate, Dr. Johnson grimly remarked: "These are the things which make it difficult to die." It is perfectly possible for a man to be so interested in earthly things that he forgets heavenly things, to be so involved in the things that are seen that he forgets the things that are unseen--and therein lies tragedy, for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are unseen are eternal.

(iii) Riches tend to make a man selfish. However much a man has, it is human for him to want still more, for, as it has been epigrammatically said, "Enough is always a little more than a man has." Further, once a man has possessed comfort and luxury, he always tends to fear the day when he may lose them. Life becomes a strenuous and worried struggle to retain the things he has. The result is that when a man becomes wealthy, instead of having the impulse to give things away, he very often has the impulse to cling on to them. His instinct is to amass more and more for the sake of the safety and the security which he thinks they will bring. The danger of riches is that they tend to make a man forget that he loses what he keeps, and gains what he gives away.

But Jesus did not say that it was impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Zacchaeus was one of the richest men in Jericho, yet, all unexpectedly, he found the way in (Lk.19:9). Joseph of Arimathaea was a rich man (Matt.27:57); Nicodemus must have been very wealthy, for he brought spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus, which were worth a king's ransom (Jn.19:39). It is not that those who have riches are shut out. It is not that riches are a sin--but they are a danger. The basis of all Christianity is an imperious sense of need; when a man has many things on earth, he is in danger of thinking that he does not need God; when a man has few things on earth, he is often driven to God because he has nowhere else to go.

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Matthew 19:27-30

A WISE ANSWER TO A MISTAKEN QUESTION

Matthew 19:27-30

Then Peter said to him, "Look you, we have left everything and have followed you. What then will we get?" Jesus said to him, "When all things are reborn, and when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you too, who have followed me, will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Anyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands for my name, will receive them a hundred times over, and he will enter into possession of eternal life. But many who were first will be last, and many who were last will be first."

It would have been very easy for Jesus to dismiss Peter's question with an impatient rebuke. In a sense, it was entirely the wrong question to ask. To put it bluntly, Peter was asking, "What do we get out of following you?" Jesus could well have said that anyone who followed him in that kind of spirit had no idea what following him meant at all. And yet it was a natural question. True, it had its implicit rebuke in the parable which followed; but Jesus did not scold Peter. He took his question, and out of it laid down three great laws of the Christian life.

(i) It is always true that he who shares Christ's campaign will share Christ's victory. In human warfare it has been too often true that the common soldiers who fought the battles were forgotten once the warfare was ended, and the victory won, and their usefulness past. In human warfare it has been too often true that men who fought to make a country in which heroes might live found that that same country had become a place where heroes might starve. It is not so with Jesus Christ. He who shares Christ's warfare will share Christ's triumph; and he who bears the Cross will wear the crown.

(ii) It is always true that the Christian will receive far more than ever he has to give up; but what he receives is not new material possessions, but a new fellowship, human and divine.

When a man becomes a Christian he enters into a new human fellowship; so long as there is a Christian Church, a Christian should never be friendless. If his Christian decision has meant that he has had to give up friends, it ought also to mean that he has entered into a wider circle of friendship than ever he knew before. It ought to be true that there is hardly a town or village or city anywhere where the Christian can be lonely. For where there is a Church, there is a fellowship into which he has a right to enter. It may be that the Christian who is a stranger is too shy to make that entry as he ought; it may be that the Church in the place where he is a stranger has become too much of a private clique to open its arms and its doors to him. But if the Christian ideal is being realized there is no place in the world with a Christian Church where the individual Christian should be friendless or lonely. Simply to be a Christian means to have entered into a fellowship which goes out to the ends of the earth.

Further, when a man becomes a Christian, he enters into a new divine fellowship. He enters into possession of eternal life, the life which is the very life of God. From other things a Christian may be separated, but he can never be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord.

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Matthew 19:27-30

(iii) Finally, Jesus lays it down that there will be surprises in the final assessment. God's standards of judgment are not men's, if for no other reason than that God sees into the hearts of men. There is a new world to redress the balance of the old; there is eternity to adjust the misjudgments of time. And it may be that those who were humble on earth will be great in heaven, and that those who were great in this world will be humbled in the world to come.

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Matthew 20:1-16

THE MASTER SEEKS HIS WORKERS

Matthew 20:1-16 (Part 1)

"For the situation in the Kingdom of Heaven is like what happened when a householder went out first thing in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. When he had come to an agreement with them that they would work for 4 pence a day, he sent them into his vineyard. He went out again about nine o'clock in the morning, and saw others standing idle in the market-place. He said to them, 'Go you also into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' And they went. He went out again about twelve o'clock midday, and about three o'clock in the afternoon, and did the same. About five o'clock in the evening he went out and found others standing there, and said to them, 'Why are you standing here the whole day idle?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'Go you also to the vineyard.' When evening came, the master of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the workers, and give them their pay, beginning from the last and going on until you come to the first.' So, when those who had been engaged about five o'clock in the afternoon, came, they received 4 pence each. Those who had come first thought that they would receive more; but they too received 4 pence each. When they received it, they grumblingly complained against the master. 'These last,' they said, 'have only worked for one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden and the hot wind of the day.' He answered one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not come to an agreement with me to work for 4 pence? Take what is yours and go! It is my will to give to this last man the same as to you. Can I not do what I like with my own money? Or, are you grudging because I am generous?' Even so the last shall be first, and the first shall be last."

This parable may sound to us as if it described a purely imaginary situation, but that is far from being the case. Apart from the method of payment, the parable describes the kind of thing that frequently happened at certain times in Palestine. The grape harvest ripened towards the end of September, and then close on its heels the rains came. If the harvest was not ingathered before the rains broke, then it was ruined; and so to get the harvest in was a frantic race against time. Any worker was welcome, even if he could give only an hour to the work.

The pay was perfectly normal; a denarius or a drachma was the normal day's wage for a working man; and, even allowing for the difference in modern standards and in purchasing power, 4 pence a day was not a wage which left any margin.

The men who were standing in the market-place were not street-corner idlers, lazing away their time. The market-place was the equivalent of the labour exchange. A man came there first thing in the morning, carrying his tools, and waited until someone hired him. The men who stood in the market-place were waiting for work, and the fact that some of them stood on until even five o'clock in the evening is the proof of how desperately they wanted it.

These men were hired labourers; they were the lowest class of workers, and life for them was always desperately precarious. Slaves and servants were regarded as being at least to some extent attached to the family; they were within the group; their fortunes would vary with the fortunes of

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Matthew 20:1-16

the family, but they would never be in any imminent danger of starvation in normal times. It was very different with the hired day-labourers. They were not attached to any group; they were entirely at the mercy of chance employment; they were always living on the semi-starvation line. As we have seen, the pay was 4 pence a day; and, if they were unemployed for one day, the children would go hungry at home, for no man ever saved much out of 4 pence a day. With them, to be unemployed for a day was disaster.

The hours in the parable were the normal Jewish hours. The Jewish day began at sunrise, 6 a.m., and the hours were counted from then until 6 p.m., when officially the next day began. Counting from 6 a.m. therefore, the third hour is 9 a.m., the sixth hour is twelve midday, and the eleventh hour is 5 p.m.

This parable gives a vivid picture of the kind of thing which could happen in the market-place of any Jewish village or town any day, when the grape harvest was being rushed in to beat the rains.

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Matthew 20:1-16

WORK AND WAGES IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Matthew 20:1-16 (Part 2)

C. G. Montefiore calls this parable "one of the greatest and most glorious of all." It may indeed have had a comparatively limited application when it was spoken for the first time; but it contains truth which goes to the very heart of the Christian religion. We begin with the comparatively limited significance it originally had.

(i) It is in one sense a warning to the disciples. It is as if Jesus said to them, "You have received the great privilege of coming into the Christian Church and fellowship very early, right at the beginning. In later days others will come in. You must not claim a special honour and a special place because you were Christians before they were. All men, no matter when they come, are equally precious to God."

There are people who think that, because they have been members of a Church for a long time, the Church practically belongs to them and they can dictate its policy. Such people resent what seems to them the intrusion of new blood or the rise of a new generation with different plans and different ways. In the Christian Church seniority does not necessarily mean honour.

(ii) There is an equally definite warning to the Jews. They knew that they were the chosen people, nor would they ever willingly forget that choice. As a consequence they looked down on the Gentiles. Usually they hated and despised them, and hoped for nothing but their destruction. This attitude threatened to be carried forward into the Christian Church. If the Gentiles were to be allowed into the fellowship of the Church at all, they must come in as inferiors.

"In God's economy," as someone has said, "there is no such thing as a most favoured nation clause." Christianity knows nothing of the conception of a herrenvolk, a master race. It may well be that we who have been Christian for so long have much to learn from those younger Churches who are late-comers to the fellowship of the faith.

(iii) These are the original lessons of this parable, but it has very much more to say to us.

In it there is the comfort of God. It means that no matter when a man enters the Kingdom, late or soon, in the first flush of youth, in the strength of the midday, or when the shadows are lengthening, he is equally dear to God. The Rabbis had a saying, "Some enter the Kingdom in an hour; others hardly enter it in a lifetime." In the picture of the holy city in the Revelation there are twelve gates. There are gates on the East which is the direction of the dawn, and whereby a man may enter in the glad morning of his days; there are gates on the West which is the direction of the setting sun, and whereby a man may enter in his age. No matter when a man comes to Christ, he is equally dear to him.

May we not go even further with this thought of comfort? Sometimes a man dies full of years and full of honour, with his day's work ended and his task completed. Sometimes a young person dies almost before the door of life and achievement have opened at all. From God they will both receive

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the same welcome, for both Jesus Christ is waiting, and for neither, in the divine sense, has life ended too soon or too late.

(iv) Here, also, is the infinite compassion of God. There is an element of human tenderness in this parable.

There is nothing more tragic in this world than a man who is unemployed, a man whose talents are rusting in idleness because there is nothing for him to do. Hugh Martin reminds us that a great teacher used to say that the saddest words in all Shakespeare's plays are the words: "Othello's occupation's gone." In that market-place men stood waiting because no one had hired them; in his compassion the master gave them work to do. He could not bear to see them idle.

Further, in strict justice the fewer hours a man worked, the less pay he should have received. But the master well knew that 4p a day was no great wage; he well knew that, if a workman went home with less, there would be a worried wife and hungry children; and therefore he went beyond justice and gave them more than was their due.

As it has been put, this parable states implicitly two great truths which are the very charter of the working man--the right of every man to work and the right of every man to a living wage for his work.

(v) Here also is the generosity of God. These men did not all do the same work; but they did receive the same pay. There are two great lessons here. The first is, as it has been said, "All service ranks the same with God." It is not the amount of service given, but the love in which it is given which matters. A man out of his plenty may give us a gift of a hundred pounds, and in truth we are grateful; a child may give us a birthday or Christmas gift which cost only a few pence but which was laboriously and lovingly saved up for--and that gift, with little value of its own, touches our heart far more. God does not look on the amount of our service. So long as it is all we have to give, all service ranks the same with God.

The second lesson is even greater--all God gives is of grace. We cannot earn what God gives us; we cannot deserve it; what God gives us is given out of the goodness of his heart; what God gives is not pay, but a gift; not a reward, but a grace.

(vi) Surely that brings us to the supreme lesson of the parable--the whole point of work is the spirit in which it is done. The servants are clearly divided into two classes. The first came to an agreement with the master; they had a contract; they said, "We work, if you give us so much pay." As their conduct showed, all they were concerned with was to get as much as possible out of their work. But in the case of those who were engaged later, there is no word of contract; all they wanted was the chance to work and they willingly left the reward to the master.

A man is not a Christian if his first concern is pay. Peter asked: "What do we get out of it?" The Christian works for the joy of serving God and his fellow-men. That is why the first will be last and the last will be first. Many a man in this world, who has earned great rewards, will have a very low place in the Kingdom because rewards were his sole thought. Many a man, who, as the world

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counts it, is a poor man, will be great in the Kingdom, because he never thought in terms of reward but worked for the thrill of working and for the joy of serving. It is the paradox of the Christian life that he who aims at reward loses it, and he who forgets reward finds it.

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Matthew 20:17-19

TOWARDS THE CROSS

Matthew 20:17-19

As he was going up to Jerusalem, Jesus took the twelve disciples apart, and said to them, while they were on the road, "Look you, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the Scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify; and on the third day he will be raised."

This is the third time that Jesus warned his disciples that he was on the way to the Cross (Matt.16:21; Matt.17:22-23). Both Mark and Luke add their own touches to the story, to show that on this occasion there was in the atmosphere of the apostolic band a certain tenseness and a certain foreboding of tragedy to come. Mark says that Jesus was walking ahead by himself, and that the disciples were amazed and afraid (Mk.10:32-34). They did not understand what was happening, but they could see in every line of Jesus' body the struggle of his soul. Luke, too, tells how Jesus took the disciples to himself alone that he might try to compel them to understand what lay ahead (Lk.18:31-34). There is here the first decisive step to the last act of the inescapable tragedy. Jesus deliberately and open-eyed sets out for Jerusalem and the Cross.

There was a strange inclusiveness in the suffering to which Jesus looked forward; it was a suffering in which no pain of heart or mind or body was to be lacking.

He was to be betrayed into the hands of the chief priests and Scribes; there we see the suffering of the heart broken by the disloyalty of friends. He was to be condemned to death; there we see the suffering of injustice, which is very hard to bear. He was to be mocked by the Romans; there we see the suffering of humiliation and of deliberate insult. He was to be scourged; few tortures in the world compared with the Roman scourge, and there we see the suffering of physical pain. Finally, he was to be crucified; there we see the ultimate suffering of death. It is as if Jesus was going to gather in upon himself every possible kind of physical and emotional and mental suffering that the world could inflict.

Even at such a time that was not the end of his words, for he finished with the confident assertion of the Resurrection. Beyond the curtain of suffering lay the revelation of glory; beyond the Cross was the Crown; beyond the defeat was triumph; and beyond death was life.

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Matthew 20:20-28

THE FALSE AND THE TRUE AMBITION

Matthew 20:20-28 (Part 1)

At that time the mother of Zebedee's sons came to him with her sons, kneeling before him, and asking something from him. He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to him, "Speak the word that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left, in your Kingdom." Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup which I have to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He said to them, "My cup you are to drink; but to sit on my right hand and my left is not mine to give, but that belongs to those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard about this, they were angry with the two brothers. Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

It shall not be so among you, but whoever wishes to prove himself great among you must be your servant; and whoever wishes to occupy the foremost place will be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Here we see the worldly ambition of the disciples in action. There is one very revealing little difference between Matthew's and Mark's account of this incident. In Mk.10:35-45 it is James and John who come to Jesus with this request. In Matthew it is their mother. The reason for the change is this--Matthew was writing twenty-five years later than Mark; by that time a kind of halo of sanctity had become attached to the disciples. Matthew did not wish to show James and John guilty of worldly ambition, and so he puts the request into the mouth of their mother rather than of themselves.

There may have been a very natural reason for this request. It is probable that James and John were closely related to Jesus. Matthew, Mark and John all give lists of the women who were at the Cross when Jesus was crucified. Let us set them down.

Matthew's list is:

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt.27:56).

Mark's list is:

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joses, and Salome (Mk.15:40).

John's list is:

Jesus' mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

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Mary Magdalene is named in all the lists; Mary the mother of James and Joses must be the same person as Mary the wife of Clopas; therefore the third woman is described in three different ways. Matthew calls her the mother of the sons of Zebedee; Mark calls her Salome; and John calls her Jesus' mother's sister. So, then, we learn that the mother of James and John was named Salome, and that she was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. That means that James and John were full cousins of Jesus; and it may well have been that they felt that this close relationship entitled them to a special place in his Kingdom.

This is one of the most revealing passages in the New Testament. It sheds light in three directions.

First, it sheds a light on the disciples. It tells us three things about them. It tells us of their ambition. They were still thinking in terms of personal reward and personal distinction; and they were thinking of personal success without personal sacrifice. They wanted Jesus with a royal command to ensure for them a princely life. Every man has to learn that true greatness lies, not in dominance, but in service; and that in every sphere the price of greatness must be paid.

That is on the debit side of the account of the disciples; but there is much on the credit side. There is no incident which so demonstrates their invincible faith in Jesus. Think of when this request was made. It was made after a series of announcements by Jesus that ahead of him lay an inescapable Cross; it was made at a moment when the air was heavy with the atmosphere of tragedy and the sense of foreboding. And yet in spite of that the disciples are thinking of a Kingdom. It is of immense significance to see that, even in a world in which the dark was coming down, the disciples would not abandon the conviction that the victory belonged to Jesus. In Christianity there must always be this invincible optimism in the moment when things are conspiring to drive a man to despair.

Still further, here is demonstrated the unshakable loyalty of the disciples. Even when they were bluntly told that there lay ahead a bitter cup, it never struck them to turn back; they were determined to drink it. If to conquer with Christ meant to suffer with Christ, they were perfectly willing to face that suffering.

It is easy to condemn the disciples, but the faith and the loyalty which lay behind the ambition must never be forgotten.

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Matthew 20:20-28

THE MIND OF JESUS

Matthew 20:20-28 (Part 2)

Second, this passage sheds a light upon the Christian life. Jesus said that those who would share his triumph must drink his cup. What was that cup? It was to James and John that Jesus spoke. Now life treated James and John very differently. James was the first of the apostolic band to die a martyr (Ac.12:2). For him the cup was martyrdom. On the other hand, by far the greater weight of tradition goes to show that John lived to a great old age in Ephesus and died a natural death when he must have been close on a hundred years old. For him the cup was the constant discipline and struggle of the Christian life throughout the years.

It is quite wrong to think that for the Christian the cup must always mean the short, sharp, bitter, agonizing struggle of martyrdom; the cup may well be the long routine of the Christian life, with all its daily sacrifice, its daily struggle, and its heart-breaks and its disappointments and its tears. A Roman coin was once found with the picture of an ox on it; the ox was facing two things--an altar and a plough; and the inscription read: "Ready for either." The ox had to be ready either for the supreme moment of sacrifice on the altar or the long labour of the plough on the farm. There is no one cup for the Christian to drink. His cup may be drunk in one great moment; his cup may be drunk throughout a lifetime of Christian living. To drink the cup simply means to follow Christ wherever he may lead, and to be like him in any situation life may bring.

Third, this passage sheds a light on Jesus. It shows us his kindness. The amazing thing about Jesus is that he never lost patience and became irritated. In spite of all he had said, here were these men and their mother still chattering about posts in an earthly government and kingdom. But Christ does not explode at their obtuseness, or blaze at their blindness, or despair at their unteachableness. In gentleness, in sympathy, and in love, with never an impatient word, he seeks to lead them to the truth.

It shows us his honesty. He was quite clear that there was a bitter cup to be drunk and did not hesitate to say so. No man can ever claim that he began to follow Jesus under false pretences. He never failed to tell men that, even if life ends in crown-wearing, it continues in cross-bearing.

It shows us his trust in men. He never doubted that James and John would maintain their loyalty. They had their mistaken ambitions; they had their blindness; they had their wrong ideas; but he never dreamed of writing them off as bad debts. He believed that they could and would drink the cup, and that in the end they would still be found at his side. One of the great fundamental facts to which we must hold on, even when we hate and loathe and despise ourselves, is that Jesus believes in us. The Christian is a man put upon his honour by Jesus.

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Matthew 20:20-28

THE CHRISTIAN REVOLUTION

Matthew 20:20-28 (Part 3)

The request of James and John not unnaturally annoyed the other disciples. They did not see why the two brothers should steal a march on them, even if they were the cousins of Jesus. They did not see why they should be allowed to stake their claims to preeminence. Jesus knew what was going on in their minds; and he spoke to them words which are the very basis of the Christian life. Out in the world, said Jesus, it is quite true that the great man is the man who controls others; the man to whose word of command others must leap; the man who with a wave of his hand can have his slightest need supplied. Out in the world there was the Roman governor with his retinue and the eastern potentate with his slaves. The world counts them great. But among my followers service alone is the badge of greatness. Greatness does not consist in commanding others to do things for you; it consists in doing things for others; and the greater the service, the greater the honour. Jesus uses a kind of gradation.

"If you wish to be great," he says, "be a servant; if you wish to be first of all be a slave." Here is the Christian revolution; here is the complete reversal of all the world's standards. A complete new set of values has been brought into life.

The strange thing is that instinctively the world itself has accepted these standards. The world knows quite well that a good man is a man who serves his fellow-men. The world will respect, and admire, and sometimes fear, the man of power; but it will love the man of love. The doctor who will come out at any time of the day or night to serve and save his patients; the parson who is always on the road amongst his people; the employer who takes an active interest in the lives and troubles of his employees; the person to whom we can go and never be made to feel a nuisance--these are the people whom all men love, and in whom instinctively they see Jesus Christ.

When that great saint Toyohiko Kagawa first came into contact with Christianity, he felt its fascination, until one day the cry burst from him: "O God, make me like Christ." To be like Christ he went to live in the slums, even though he himself was suffering from tuberculosis. It seemed the last place on earth to which a man in his condition should have gone.

Cecil Northcott in Famous Life Decisions tells of what Kagawa did. He went to live in a six foot by six-foot hut in a Tokyo slum. "On his first night he was asked to share his bed with a man suffering from contagious itch. That was a test of his faith. Would he go back on his point of no return? No. He welcomed his bed-fellow. Then a beggar asked for his shirt and got it. Next day he was back for Kagawa's coat and trousers, and got them too. Kagawa was left standing in a ragged old kimono. The slum dwellers of Tokyo laughed at him, but they came to respect him. He stood in the driving rain to preach, coughing all the time. 'God is love,' he shouted. 'God is love. Where love is, there is God.' He often fell down exhausted, and the rough men of the slums carried him gently back to his hut."

Kagawa himself wrote: "God dwells among the lowliest of men. He sits on the dust heap among the prison convicts. He stands with the juvenile delinquents. He is there with the beggars. He is among the sick, he stands with the unemployed. Therefore let him who would meet God visit the

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Matthew 20:20-28

prison cell before going to the temple. Before he goes to Church let him visit the hospital. Before he reads his Bible let him help the beggar."

Therein is greatness. The world may assess a man's greatness by the number of people whom he controls and who are at his beck and call; or by his intellectual standing and his academic eminence; or by the number of committees of which he is a member; or by the size of his bank balance and the material possessions which he has amassed; but in the assessment of Jesus Christ these things are irrelevant. His assessment is quite simply--how many people has he helped?

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Matthew 20:20-28

THE LORDSHIP OF THE CROSS

Matthew 20:20-28 (Part 4)

What Jesus calls upon his followers to do he himself did. He came not to be served, but to serve. He came to occupy not a throne, but a cross. It was just because of this that the orthodox religious people of his time could not understand him. All through their history the Jews had dreamed of the Messiah; but the Messiah of whom they had dreamed was always a conquering king, a mighty leader, one who would smash the enemies of Israel and reign in power over the kingdoms of the earth. They looked for a conqueror; they received one broken on a cross. They looked for the raging Lion of Judah; they received the gentle Lamb of God. Rudolf Bultmann writes: "In the Cross of Christ Jewish standards of judgment and human notions of the splendour of the Messiah are shattered." Here is demonstrated the new glory and the new greatness of suffering love and sacrificial service. Here is royalty and kingship restated and remade.

Jesus summed up his whole life in one poignant sentence: "The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many." It is worth stopping to see what the crude hands of theology have done with that lovely saying. Very early men began to say, "Jesus gave his life a ransom for many. Well, then, to whom was the ransom paid?" Origen has no doubt that the ransom was paid to the devil. "The ransom could not have been paid to God; it was therefore paid to the Evil One, who was holding us fast until the ransom should be given to him, even the life of Jesus." Gregory of Nyssa saw the glaring fault in that theory. It puts the Devil on a level with God; it means that the Devil could dictate his terms to God, before he would let men go. So Gregory of Nyssa has a strange idea. The devil was tricked by God. He was tricked by the seeming helplessness of Jesus; he took Jesus to be a mere man; he tried to retain hold of Jesus, and in trying to do so, he lost his power and was broken for ever.

Gregory the Great took the picture to even more grotesque, almost revolting, lengths. The Incarnation, he said, was a divine stratagem to catch the great leviathan. The deity of Christ was the hook; his flesh was the bait; the bait was dangled before leviathan; he swallowed it and was taken. The limit was reached by Peter the Lombard. "The cross," he said, "was a mousetrap (muscipula) to catch the devil, baited with the blood of Christ."

All this is what happens when men take the poetry of love and try to turn it into man-made theories. Jesus came to give his life a ransom for many. What does it mean? It means quite simply this. Men were in the grip of a power of evil which they could not break; their sins dragged them down; their sins separated them from God; their sins wrecked life for themselves and for the world and for God himself. A ransom is something paid or given to liberate a man from a situation from which it is impossible for him to free himself. Therefore what this saying means is quite simply--it cost the life and the death of Jesus Christ to bring men back to God.

There is no question of to whom the ransom was paid. There is simply the great, tremendous truth that without Jesus Christ and his life of service and his death of love, we could never have found our way back to the love of God. Jesus gave everything to bring men back to God; and we must walk in the steps of him who loved to the uttermost.

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Matthew 20:29-34

LOVE'S ANSWER TO NEED'S APPEAL

Matthew 20:29-34

When they were leaving Jericho, a great crowd followed him. And, look you, two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted out, "Lord, have pity on us, you Son of David!" The crowd rebuked them, so that they might be silent. Jesus stood and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he said. "Lord," they said, "what we want is that our eyes should be opened." Jesus was moved with compassion to the depths of his being, and touched their eyes; and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

Here is the story of two men who found their way to a miracle. It is a very significant story, for it paints a picture of the spirit and of the attitude of mind and heart to which the most precious gifts of God are open.

(i) These two blind men were waiting, and when their chance came they seized it with both hands. No doubt they had heard of the wondrous power of Jesus; and no doubt they wondered if that power might ever be exercised for them. Jesus was passing by. If they had let him pass, their chance would have gone by for ever; but when the chance came they seized it.

There are a great many things which have to be done at the moment or they will never be done. There are a great many decisions which have to be taken. on the spot or they will never be taken. The moment to act goes past; the impulse to decide fades. After Paul had preached on Mars Hill, there were those who said, "We will hear you again about this" (Ac.17:32). They put it off until a more convenient time, but so often the more convenient time never comes.

(ii) These two blind men were undiscourageable. The crowd commanded them to stop their shouting; they were making a nuisance of themselves. It was the custom in Palestine for a Rabbi to teach as he walked along the road; and no doubt those around Jesus could not hear what Jesus was saying for this clamorous uproar. But nothing would stop the two blind men; for them it was a matter of sight or blindness, and nothing was going to keep them back.

It often happens that we are easily discouraged from seeking the presence of God. It is the man who will not be kept from Christ who in the end finds him.

(iii) These two blind men had an imperfect faith but they were determined to act on the faith they had. It was as Son of David that they addressed Jesus. That meant that they did believe him to be the Messiah, but it also meant that they were thinking of Messiahship in terms of kingly and of earthly power. It was an imperfect faith but they acted on it; and Jesus accepted it.

However imperfect it may be, if faith is there, Jesus accepts it.

(iv) These two blind men were not afraid to bring a great request. They were beggars; but it was not money they asked for, it was nothing less than sight.

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No request is too great to bring to Jesus.

(v) These two blind men were grateful. When they had received the boon for which they craved, they did not go away and forget; they followed Jesus.

So many people, both in things material and in things spiritual, get what they want, and then forget even to say thanks. Ingratitude is the ugliest of all sins. These blind men received their sight from Jesus, and then they gave to him their grateful loyalty. We can never repay God for what he has done for us but we can always be grateful to him.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 21:1-11

THE BEGINNING OF THE LAST ACT OF THE DRAMA

Matthew 21:1-11 (Part 1)

When they had come near to Jerusalem, and when they had come to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent on two disciples ahead. "Go into the village which is facing you," he said, "and immediately you will find an ass tethered, and a colt with her. Loose them, and bring them to me. And, if anyone says anything to you, say, 'The Master needs them.' Immediately he will send them on." This was done that there might be fulfilled that which was spoken through the prophet, when he said, "Say to the daughter of Sion, Look you, your king comes to you, gentle, and riding upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of a beast who bears the yoke." So the disciples went, and they carried out Jesus' orders, and they brought the ass and the colt, and put their cloaks upon them; and he took his seat on them. The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road.

Others cut down branches from the trees and strewed them on the road; and the crowds who went in front and followed behind kept shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes. Hosanna in the highest!" As he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. "Who is this?" they asked; and the crowds said, "This is the prophet, Jesus, who comes from Nazareth in Galilee."

With this passage we embark on the last act in the drama of the life of Jesus; and here indeed is a dramatic moment.

It was the Passover time, and Jerusalem and the whole surrounding neighbourhood was crowded with pilgrims. Thirty years later a Roman governor was to take a census of the lambs slain in Jerusalem for the Passover and find that the number was not far off a quarter of a million. It was the Passover regulation that there must be a party of a minimum of ten for each lamb which means that at that Passover time more than two and a half million people had crowded their way into Jerusalem. The law was that every adult male Jew who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem must come to the Passover; but not only the Jews of Palestine, Jews from every corner of the world made their way to the greatest of their national festivals. Jesus could not have chosen a more dramatic moment; it was into a city surging with people keyed up with religious expectations that he came.

Nor was this a sudden decision of Jesus, taken on the moment. It was something which he had prepared in advance. The whole tone of the story shows that he was carrying out plans which he had made ahead. He sent his disciples into "the village" to collect the ass and her foal. Matthew mentions Bethphage only (the pronunciation is not Bethphage with the age as in the English word page; the "e" at the end is pronounced as "ae"; the word is Bethphagae). But Mark also mentions Bethany (Mk.11:1). No doubt the village was Bethany. Jesus had already arranged that the ass and her foal should be waiting for him, for he must have had many friends in Bethany; and the phrase, "The Master needs them," was a password by which their owner would know that the hour which Jesus had arranged had come.

So Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The fact that the ass had never been ridden before made it specially suitable for sacred purposes. The red heifer which was used in the ceremonies of cleansing must be a beast "upon which a yoke has never come" (Num.19:2; Deut.21:3); the cart on which the ark of

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Matthew 21:1-11

the Lord was carried had to be a vehicle which had never been used for any other purpose (1Sam.6:7). The special sacredness of the occasion was underlined by the fact that the ass had never been ridden by any man before.

The crowd received Jesus like a king. They spread their cloaks in front of him. That is what his friends had done when Jehu was proclaimed king (2Kgs.9:13). They cut down and waved the palm branches. That is what they did when Simon Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem after one of his most notable victories (1Macc.13:51).

They greeted him as they would greet a pilgrim, for the greeting: "Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord" (Psalm 118:26) was the greeting which was addressed to pilgrims as they came to the Feast.

They shouted "Hosanna!" We must be careful to see what this word means. Hosanna means Save now! and it was the cry for help which a people in distress addressed to their king or their god. It is really a kind of quotation from Ps.118:25: "Save us, we beseech Thee, O Lord." The phrase, "Hosanna in the highest!" must mean, "Let even the angels in the highest heights of heaven cry unto God, Save now!"

It may be that the word hosanna had lost some of its original meaning; and that it had become to some extent only a cry of welcome and of acclamation, like "Hail!"; but essentially it is a people's cry for deliverance and for help in the day of their trouble; it is an oppressed people's cry to their saviour and their king.

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Matthew 21:1-11

THE INTENTION OF JESUS

Matthew 21:1-11 (Part 2)

We may then take it that Jesus' actions in this incident were planned and deliberate. He was following a method of awakening men's minds which was deeply interwoven with the methods of the prophets. Again and again in the religious history of Israel, when a prophet felt that words were of no avail against a barrier of indifference or incomprehension, he put his message into a dramatic act which men could not fail to see and to understand. Out of many Old Testament instances we choose two of the most outstanding.

When it became clear that the kingdom would not stand the excesses and extravagances of Rehoboam, and that Jeroboam was marked out as the rising power, the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite chose a dramatic way of foretelling the future. He clad himself in a new garment; he went out and he met Jeroboam alone; he took the new garment and tore it into twelve pieces; then of the pieces he gave to Jeroboam ten and two of the pieces he kept; and by this dramatic action he made it clear that ten of the twelve tribes were about to revolt in support of Jeroboam, while only two would remain faithful to Rehoboam (1Kgs.11:29-32). Here is the prophetic message delivered in dramatic action.

When Jeremiah was convinced that Babylon was about to conquer Palestine in spite of the easy optimism of the people, he made bonds and yokes and sent them to Edom, to Moab, to Ammon, to Tyre and to Sidon; and put a yoke upon his own neck that all might see it. By this dramatic action he made it clear that, as he saw it, nothing but slavery and servitude lay ahead (Jer.27:1-6); and when Hananiah, the false prophet with the mistaken optimism, wished to show that he thought Jeremiah's gloomy foreboding altogether wrong, he took the yoke from Jeremiah's neck and broke it (Jer.28:10-11).

It was the custom of the prophets to express their message in dramatic action when they felt that words were not enough. And that was what Jesus was doing when he entered Jerusalem.

There are two pictures behind Jesus' dramatic action.

(i) There is the picture of Zech.9:9, in which the prophet saw the king coming to Jerusalem, humble and riding upon an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass. In the first instance, Jesus' dramatic action is a deliberate Messianic claim. He was here offering himself to the people, at a time when Jerusalem was surging with Jews from all over the country and from all over the world, as the Anointed One of God. Just what Jesus meant by that claim we shall go on to see; but that he made the claim there is no doubt.

(ii) There may have been another intention in Jesus' mind. One of the supreme disasters of Jewish history was the capture of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes about 175 B.C. Antiochus was determined to stamp out Judaism and to introduce into Palestine Greek ways of life and worship. He deliberately profaned the Temple, offering swine's flesh on the altar, making sacrifices to Olympian Zeus, and even turning the Temple chambers into public brothels. It was then that the

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Maccabees rose against him, and ultimately rescued their native land. In due time Jerusalem was retaken and the desecrated Temple was restored and purified and rededicated. In 2Macc.10:7 we read of the rejoicing of that great day: "Therefore they bare branches, and fair boughs, and palms also, and sang psalms unto Him that had given them good success in cleansing His place." On that day the people carried the palm branches and sung their psalms; it is an almost exact description of the actions of the crowd who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem.

It is at least possible that Jesus knew this, and that he entered into Jerusalem with the deliberate intention of cleansing God's house as Judas Maccabaeus had done two hundred years before. That was in fact what Jesus did. He may well be saying in dramatic symbol, not only that he was the Anointed One of God, but also that he had come to cleanse the House of God from the abuses which defiled it and its worship. Had not Malachi said that the Lord would suddenly come to his Temple (Mal.3:1)? And, in his vision of judgment had not Ezekiel seen the terrible judgment of God begin at the sanctuary (Eze.9:6)?

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Matthew 21:1-11

THE CLAIM OF THE KING

Matthew 21:1-11 (Part 3)

To conclude our study of this incident, let us look at Jesus in its setting. It shows us three things about him.

(i) It shows us his courage. Jesus knew full well that he was entering a hostile city. However enthusiastic the crowd might be, the authorities hated him and had sworn to eliminate him; and with them lay the last word. Almost any man in such a case would have considered discretion the better part of valour; and, if he had come to Jerusalem at all, would have slipped in under cover of night and kept prudently to the back streets until he reached his shelter. But Jesus entered Jerusalem in a way that deliberately set himself in the centre of the stage and deliberately riveted every eye upon himself. All through his last days there is in his every action a kind of magnificent and sublime defence; and here he begins the last act with a flinging down of the gauntlet, a deliberate challenge to the authorities to do their worst.

(ii) It shows us his claim. Certainly it shows us his claim to be God's Messiah, God's Anointed One; very probably it shows us his claim to be the cleanser of the Temple. If Jesus had been content to claim to be a prophet, the probability is that he need never have died. But he could be satisfied with nothing less than the topmost place. With Jesus it is all or nothing. Men must acknowledge him as king, or not receive him at all.

(iii) Equally it shows us his appeal. It was not the kingship of the throne which he claimed; it was the kingship of the heart. He came humbly and riding upon an ass. We must be careful to see the real meaning of that. In western lands the ass is a despised beast; but in the east the ass could be a noble animal. Often a king came riding upon an ass, but when he did, it was the sign that he came in peace. The horse was the mount of war; the ass was the mount of peace. So when Jesus claimed to be king, he claimed to be the king of peace. He showed that he came, not to destroy, but to love; not to condemn, but to help; not in the might of arms, but in the strength of love.

So here, at one and the same time, we see the courage of Christ, the claim of Christ, and the appeal of Christ. It was a last invitation to men to open, not their palaces but their hearts to him.

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Matthew 21:12-14

THE SCENE IN THE TEMPLE

Matthew 21:12-14 (Part 1)

And Jesus entered into the precincts of the Temple of God, and cast out all who were selling and buying in the Temple precincts, and overturned the tables of the money-changers, and of those who were selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it 'a robbers' cave.'"

And the blind and the lame came to him in the Temple and he healed them.

If the entry into Jerusalem had been defiance, here is defiance added to defiance. To see this scene unfolding before our eyes we need to visualize the picture of the Temple.

There are in the New Testament two words which are translated Temple, and rightly so, but there is a clear distinction between them. The Temple itself is called the naos (GSN3485). It was a comparatively small building, and contained the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies into which only the High Priest might enter, and he only on the great Day of Atonement. But the naos (GSN3485) itself was surrounded by a vast space which was occupied by successive and ascending courtyards. First there was the Court of the Gentiles, into which anyone might come, and beyond which it was death for a Gentile to penetrate. Then there came the Court of the Women, entered by the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, into which any Israelite might come. Next there came the Court of the Israelites, entered by the gate called Nicanor's Gate, a great gate of Corinthian bronze which needed twenty men to open and shut it. It was in this court that the people assembled for the Temple services.

Lastly there came the Court Of the Priests, into which only the priests might enter; in it there stood the great altar of the burnt-offering, the altar of the incense, the seven-branched lamp-stand, the table of the shewbread, and the great brazen laver; and at the back of it there stood the naos (GSN3485) itself. This whole area, including all the courts, is also in the Revised Standard Version called the Temple; the Greek is hieron (GSN2411). It is better to keep a distinction between the two words; and to retain the word Temple for the Temple proper, that is the naos (GSN3485), and to use the term the Temple Precincts, for the whole area, that is the word hieron (GSN2411).

The scene of this incident was the Court of the Gentiles into which anyone might come. It was always crowded and busy; but at Passover, with pilgrims there from all over the world, it was thronged to capacity. There would, even at any time, be many Gentiles there, for the Temple at Jerusalem was famous throughout the world, so that even the Roman writers described it as one of the world's most amazing buildings.

In this Court of the Gentiles two kinds of trading were going on. There was the business of money-changing. Every Jew had to pay a temple tax of one half-shekel, and that tax had to be paid near to the Passover time. A month before, booths were set up in all the towns and villages, and the money could be paid there, but after a certain date it could be paid only in the Temple itself; and it would be there that the vast majority of pilgrim Jews from other lands paid it. This tax had to be paid in certain currency, although for general purposes all kinds of currencies were equally valid in

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Palestine. It must not be paid in ingots of silver, but in stamped currency; it must not be paid in coins of inferior alloy or coins which had been clipped, but in coins of high-grade silver. It could be paid in shekels of the sanctuary, in Galilaean half-shekels, and especially in Tyrian currency which was of a very high standard.

The function of the money-changers was to change unsuitable currency into the correct currency. That seems on the face of it to be an entirely necessary function; but the trouble was that these money-changers charged the equivalent of 1p for changing the currency at all; and, if the coin was of greater value than a half-shekel, they charged another 1p for giving back the surplus change. That is to say, many a pilgrim had not only to pay his half-shekel--which was about 7 pence in value--but another 2 pence also in changing dues; and this has to be evaluated against a background where a working man's wage was about 3 pence a day.

This surplus charge was called the qolbon (compare kollubistes, GSN2855). It did not by any means all go into the money-changer's pockets; some of it was classed as freewill offerings; some of it went to the repair of the roads; some of it went to purchase the gold plates with which it was planned entirely to cover the Temple proper; and some of it found its way into the Temple treasury. The whole matter was not necessarily an abuse; but the trouble was that it lent itself to abuse. It lent itself to the exploitation of the pilgrims who had come to worship, and there is no doubt that the Temple money-changers made large profits out of it.

The selling of doves was worse. For most visits to the Temple some kind of offering was essential. Doves, for instance, were necessary when a woman came for purification after childbirth, or when a leper came to have his cure attested and certified (Lev.12:8; Lev.14:22; Lev.15:14; Lev.15:29). It was easy enough to buy animals for sacrifice outside the Temple; but any animal offered in sacrifice must be without blemish. There were official inspectors of the animals, and it was to all intents and purposes certain that they would reject an animal bought outside and would direct the worshipper to the Temple stalls and booths.

No great harm would have been done if the prices had been the same inside and outside the Temple, but a pair of doves could cost as little as 4 pence outside the Temple and as much as 75 pence inside the Temple. This was an old abuse. A certain Rabbi, Simon ben Gamaliel, was remembered with gratitude because "he had caused doves to be sold for silver coins instead of gold." Clearly he had attacked this abuse. Further, these stalls where the victims were sold were called the Bazaars of Annas, and were the private property of the family of the High Priest of that name.

Here, again, there was no necessary abuse. There must have been many honest and sympathetic traders. But abuse readily and easily crept in. Burkitt can say that "the Temple had become a meeting place of scamps," the worst kind of commercial monopoly and vested interest. Sir George Adam Smith can write: "In those days every priest must have been a trader." There was every danger of shameless exploitation of poor and humble pilgrims--and it was that exploitation which raised the wrath of Jesus.

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Matthew 21:12-14

THE WRATH AND THE LOVE

Matthew 21:12-14 (Part 2)

There is hardly anywhere in the gospel story where we need to make a more deliberate and more conscious effort to be fair than in this passage. It is easy to use it as a basis for a complete condemnation of the whole Temple worship. There are two things to be said.

There were many traders and hucksters in the Temple Court, but there were also many whose hearts were set on God. As Aristotle said long ago, a man and an institution must be judged at their best, and not at their worst.

The other thing to be said is simply this--let the man and the Church without sin cast the first stone. The traders were not all exploiters, and even those who seized the opportunity of making a quick profit were not all simply money-grabbers. The great Jewish scholar Israel Abrahams has a comment on the too common Christian treatment of this passage: "When Jesus overturned the money-changers and ejected the sellers of doves from the Temple, he did a service to Judaism. . . . But were the money-changers and the dove-sellers the only people who visited the Temple? And was everyone who bought or sold a dove a mere formalist? Last Easter I was in Jerusalem, and along the facade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre I saw the stalls of the vendors of sacred relics, of painted beads and inscribed ribbons, of coloured candles, gilded crucifixes, and bottles of Jordan water. There these Christians babbled and swayed and bargained, a crowd of buyers and sellers in front of the Church sacred to the memory of Jesus. Would, I thought, that Jesus were come again to overthrow these false servants of his, even as he overthrew his false brothers in Israel long ago."

This incident shows us certain things about Jesus.

(i) It shows us one of the fiercest manifestations of his anger directed against those who exploited their fellow-men, and especially against those who exploited them in the name of religion. It was Jeremiah who had said that men made the Temple a den of thieves (Jer.7:11). Jesus could not bear to see simple people exploited for profit.

Too often the Church has been silent in such a situation; it has a duty to protect those who in a highly competitive economic situation cannot protect themselves.

(ii) It shows us his anger was specially directed against those who made it impossible for simple people to worship in the House of God. It was Isaiah who said that God's House was a House of Prayer for all peoples (Isa.56:7). The Court of the Gentiles was, in fact, the only part of the Temple into which Gentiles might come. It is not to be thought that every Gentile came to sight-see. Some, at least, must have come with haunting longings in their souls to worship and to pray. But in that uproar of buying and selling and bargaining and auctioneering prayer was impossible. Those who sought God's presence were being debarred from it by the very people of God's House.

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God will never hold guiltless those who make it impossible for others to worship him. It can happen yet. A spirit of bitterness, a spirit of argument, a spirit of strife can get into a Church, which makes worship impossible. Men and office-bearers can become so concerned with their rights and their wrongs, their dignities and their prestiges, their practice and their procedure, that in the end no one can worship God in the atmosphere which is created. Even ministers of God can be more concerned with imposing their ways of doing things on a congregation than with preaching the gospel, and the end is a service with an atmosphere which makes true worship impossible. The worship of God and the disputes of men can never go together. Let us remember the wrath of Jesus at those who blocked the approach to God for their fellow-men.

(iii) There remains one thing to note. Our passage ends with Jesus healing the blind and the lame in the Temple Court. They were still there; Jesus did not clear everyone out. Only those with guilty consciences fled before the eyes of his wrath. Those who needed him stayed.

Need is never sent empty away by Jesus Christ. Jesus' anger was never merely negative; it never stopped with the attack on that which was wrong; it always went on to the positive helping of those who were in need. In the truly great man anger and love go hand in hand. There is anger at those who exploit the simple and bar the seeker; but there is love for those whose need is great. The destructive force of anger must always go hand in hand with the healing power of love.

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Matthew 21:15-17

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SIMPLE IN HEART

Matthew 21:15-17

When the chief priests and Scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children shouting in the Temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were angry. "Do you hear what these are saying?" they said. Jesus said to them, "Yes! Have you never read: 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have the perfect praise'?" And he left them, and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there.

Some scholars have found difficulty with this passage. It is said that it is unlikely that there would be crowds of children in the Temple Court; and that, if the children were there at all, the Temple police would have dealt swiftly and efficiently with them if they had dared to cry out as this passage says they did. Now earlier in the story Luke has an incident where the disciples are depicted as shouting their glad cries to Jesus, and where the authorities are described as trying to silence them (Lk.19:39-40). Very often a Rabbi's disciples were called his children. We see, for instance, the phrase my little children occurring in the writings of John. So it is suggested that Luke and Matthew are really telling the same story and that the children are in fact the disciples of Jesus.

No such explanation is necessary. The use that Matthew makes of the quotation from Ps.8:2 makes it clear that he had real children in mind; and, in any event, things were happening that day in the Temple Court which had never happened before. It was not every day that the traders and the money-changers were sent packing; and it was not every day that the blind and the lame were healed. Maybe ordinarily it would have been impossible for the children to shout like this, but this was no ordinary day.

When we take this story just as it stands and listen again to the fresh, clear voices of the children shouting their praises, we are faced with one great fact. There are truths which only the simple in heart can see and which are hidden from the wise and the learned and the sophisticated. There are many times when heaven is nearer the child than it is to the cleverest men.

Thorwaldsen, the great sculptor, once carved a statue of Jesus. He wished to see if the statue would cause the right reaction in those who saw it. He brought a little child to look at the statue and asked him: "Who do you think that is?" The child answered: "It is a great man." Thorwaldsen knew that he had failed; so he scrapped his statue and began again. Again when he had finished, he brought the child and asked the same question: "Who do you think that is?" The child smiled and answered: "That is Jesus who said: 'Let the children come to me.'" Thorwaldsen knew that this time he had succeeded. The statue had passed the test of a child's eyes.

That is no bad test. George Macdonald once said that he placed no value on the alleged Christianity of a man at whose door, or at whose garden gate, the children were afraid to play. If a child thinks a person good, the likelihood is that he is good; if a child shrinks away, a man may be great but certainly he is not Christlike. Somewhere Barrie draws a picture of a mother putting her little one to bed at night and looking down on him when he is half asleep, with an unspoken question in her eyes and in her heart: "My child, have I done well today?" The goodness which can

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meet the clear gaze of a child and stand the test of a child's simplicity is goodness indeed. It was but natural that the children should recognize Jesus when the scholars were blind.

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Matthew 21:18-22

THE WAY OF THE FIG TREE

Matthew 21:18-22 (Part 1)

When Jesus was returning to the city early in the morning, he was hungry. When he saw a fig tree by the roadside, he went up to it, and found nothing but leaves. He said to it, "Let no fruit come from you any more for ever!" And immediately the fig tree withered away. When the disciples saw it, they were astonished. "How did the fig tree immediately wither away?" they said. Jesus answered them: "This is the truth I tell you--if you have faith, and, if you do not doubt, not only will you do what happened to the fig tree, but you will even say to this mountain: 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and it will happen. All that you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive."

Few honest readers of the Bible would deny that this is perhaps the most uncomfortably difficult passage in the New Testament. If it be taken with complete literalism, it shows Jesus in an action which is an acute shock to our whole conception of him. It must, therefore, be approached with a real desire to find out the truth which lies behind it and with the courage to think our way through it.

Mark also tells this story (Mk.11:12-14; Mk.11:20-21) but with one basic difference. In Matthew the withering of the fig tree takes place at once. (The King James Version has: "And presently the fig tree withered away." In Elizabethan English presently meant immediately, at that present moment. The Greek is parachrema (GSN3916), which the Revised Standard Version translates at once, and which Moffatt translates instantly.) On the other hand, in Mark nothing happened to the tree immediately, and it is only next morning, when they are passing on the same road, that the disciples see that the tree has withered away. From the existence of these two versions of the story, it is quite clear that some development has taken place; and, since Mark's is the earliest gospel, it is equally clear that his version must be nearer to the actual historical facts.

It is necessary to understand the growing and fruit-bearing habits of fig trees. The fig tree was the favourite of all trees. The picture of the Promised Land was the picture of "a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees" (Deut.8:8). Pomegranates and figs were part of the treasures which the spies brought back to show the rich fertility of the land (Num.13:23). The picture of peace and prosperity which is common to every part of the old Testament is the picture of a time when every man will sit under his own vine and his own fig tree (1Kgs.4:25; Mic.4:4; Zech.3:10). The picture of the wrath of God is the picture of a day when he would smite and destroy the fig trees (Ps.105:33; Jer.8:13; Hos.2:12). The fig tree is the very symbol of fertility and peace and prosperity.

The tree itself is a handsome tree; it can be three feet thick in its trunk. It grows to a height of from fifteen to twenty feet; and the spread of its thick branches can be twenty-five to thirty feet. It was, therefore, much valued for its shade. In Cyprus the cottages have their fig trees at the door, and Tristram tells how often he sheltered under them and found coolness on the hottest day. Very commonly the fig tree grows overshadowing wells so that there is shade and water in the one place. Often it was the shade of the fig tree which was a man's private room for meditation and prayer; and that is why Nathanael was amazed that Jesus had marked him under the fig tree (Jn.1:48).

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But it is the fig tree's habit of fruit-bearing which is relevant here. The fig tree is unique in that it bears two full crops in the year. The first is borne on the old wood. Quite early in the year little green knobs appear at the end of the branches. They are called Paggim and they will one day be the figs. These fruit buds come in April but they are quite uneatable. Bit by bit the leaves and the flowers open out, and another unique thing about the fig is that it is in full fruit and full leaf and full flower all at the same time; that happens by June. No fig tree ever bore fruit in April; that is far too early. The process is then repeated with the new wood; and the second crop comes in September.

The strangest thing about this story is twofold. First, it tells of a fig tree in full leaf in April. Jesus was at Jerusalem for the Passover; the Passover fell on 15th April; and this incident happened a week before. The second thing is that Jesus looked for figs on a tree where no figs could possibly be; and Mark says, "For it was not the season for figs" (Mk.11:13).

The difficulty of this story is not so much a difficulty of possibility. It is a moral difficulty; and it is twofold. First, we see Jesus blasting a fig tree for not doing what it was not able to do. The tree could not have borne fruit in the second week of April, and yet we see Jesus destroying it for not doing that very thing. Second, we see Jesus using his miraculous powers for his own ends. That is precisely what in the temptations in the wilderness he determined never to do. He would not turn stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger. The plain truth is this--if we had read of anyone else blasting a fig tree for not bearing figs in April, we would have said it was the act of ill-tempered petulance, springing from personal disappointment. In Jesus that is inconceivable; therefore there must be some explanation. What is it?

Some have found an explanation on the following lines. In Luke there is the parable of the fig tree which failed to bear fruit. Twice the gardener pleaded for mercy for it; twice mercy and delay were granted; in the end it was still fruitless and was therefore destroyed (Lk.13:6-9). The curious thing is that Luke has the parable of the barren fig tree, but he has not this incident of the withering of the fig tree; Matthew and Mark have this incident of the withering of the fig tree, but they have not the parable of the barren fig tree. It looks very much as if the gospel writers felt that if they included the one they did not need to include the other. It is suggested that the parable of the barren fig tree has been misunderstood and been turned into an actual incident. Confusion has changed a story Jesus told into an action Jesus did. That is by no means impossible; but it seems to us that the real explanation must be sought elsewhere. And now we go on to seek it.

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Matthew 21:18-22

PROMISE WITHOUT PERFORMANCE

Matthew 21:18-22 (Part 2)

When we were studying the story of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, we saw that frequently the prophets made use of symbolic actions; that when they felt that words would not penetrate, they did something dramatic to drive a lesson home. Let us suppose that some such symbolic action is at the back of this story.

Jesus, let us suppose, was on his way to Jerusalem. By the wayside he saw a tree in full leaf. It was perfectly legitimate for him to pluck the figs from it, if there had been any. Jewish law allowed that (Deut.23:24-25); and Thomson in *The Land and the Book* tells us that even in modern times the wayside fig tree is open to all. Jesus went up to the fig tree, well knowing that there could be no fruit, and well knowing that there must be something radically wrong with it. One of two things could have happened. The fig tree could have reverted to its wild state, just as roses revert to briars. Or, it could be in some way diseased. Then Jesus said: "This tree will never bear fruit; it will certainly wither." It was the statement of a man who knew nature, because he had lived with nature. And on the next day it was clear that the diagnosis of his expert eye of Jesus was exactly right.

If this was a symbolic action, it was meant to teach something. What it was meant to teach was two things about the Jewish nation.

(i) It taught that uselessness invites disaster. That is the law of life. Anything which is useless is on the way to elimination; any thing can justify its existence only by fulfilling the end for which it was created. The fig tree was useless; therefore it was doomed.

The nation of Israel had been brought into existence for one reason and one reason only--that from it there might come God's Anointed One. He had come; the nation had failed to recognize him; more, they were about to crucify him. The nation had failed in its function which was to welcome God's Son--therefore the nation was doomed.

Failure to realize the purpose of God brings necessary disaster. Everyone in this world is judged in terms of usefulness. Even if a person is helpless on a bed, he can be of the greatest use by patient example and by prayer. No one need be useless; and he who is useless is heading for disaster.

(ii) It taught that profession without practice is condemned. The tree had leaves; the leaves were a claim to have figs; the tree had no figs; its claim was false; therefore it was doomed. The Jewish nation professed faith in God; but in practice they were out for the blood of God's Son; therefore they stood condemned.

Profession without practice was not only the curse of the Jews; it has been throughout the ages the curse, of the Church. During his early days in South Africa--in Pretoria--Gandhi enquired into Christianity. For several Sundays he attended a Christian Church, but, he says, "the congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious; they were not an assembly of devout souls, but appeared rather to be worldly-minded people going to Church for recreation and in conformity to

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custom." He, therefore, concluded that there was nothing in Christianity which he did not already possess--and so Gandhi was lost to the Christian Church with incalculable consequences to India and to the world.

Profession without practice is something of which we are all more or less guilty. It does incalculable harm to the Christian Church; and it is doomed to disaster, for it produces a faith which cannot do anything else but wither away.

We may well believe that Jesus used the lesson of a diseased and degenerate fig tree to say to the Jews--and to us--that uselessness invites disaster, and profession without practice is doomed. That is surely what this story means, for we cannot think of Jesus as literally and physically blasting a fig tree for failing to bear fruit at a season when fruit was impossible.

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Matthew 21:18-22

THE DYNAMIC OF PRAYER

Matthew 21:18-22 (Part 3)

This passage concludes with certain words of Jesus about the dynamic of prayer. If these words are misunderstood, they can bring nothing but heartbreak; but if they are correctly understood, they can bring nothing but power.

In them Jesus says two things; that prayer can remove mountains, and that, if we ask in belief, we will receive. It is abundantly clear that these promises are not to be taken physically and literally. Neither Jesus himself nor anyone else ever removed a physical, geographical mountain by prayer. Moreover, many and many a person has prayed with passionate faith that something may happen or that something may not happen, that something may be given or that someone may be spared from death, and in the literal sense of the words that prayer has not been answered. What then is Jesus promising us through prayer?

(i) He promises that prayer gives us the ability to do. Prayer is never the easy way out; never simply pushing things on to God for him to do them for us. Prayer is power. It is not asking God to do something; it is asking him to make us able to do it ourselves. Prayer is not taking the easy way; it is the way to receive power to take the hard way. It is the channel through which comes power to tackle and remove mountains of difficulty by ourselves with the help of God. If it were simply a method of getting things done for us, prayer would be very bad for us, for it would make us flabby and lazy and inefficient. Prayer is the means whereby we receive power to do things for ourselves. Therefore, no man should pray and then sit and wait; he must pray and then rise and work; but he will find that, when he does, a new dynamic enters his life, and that in truth with God all things are possible, and with God the impossible becomes that which can be done.

(ii) Prayer is the ability to accept, and in accepting, to transform. It is not meant to bring deliverance from a situation; it is meant to bring the ability to accept it and transform it. There are two great examples of that in the New Testament.

The one is the example of Paul. Desperately he prayed that he might be delivered from the thorn in his flesh. He was not delivered from that situation; he was made able to accept it; and in that very situation he discovered the strength that was made perfect in his weakness and the grace which was sufficient for all things--and in that strength and grace the situation was not only accepted, but also transformed into glory (2Cor.12:1-10).

The other is Jesus himself. In Gethsemane he prayed that the cup might pass from him and he be delivered from the agonizing situation in which he found himself; that request could not be granted, but in that prayer he found the ability to accept the situation; and, in being accepted, the situation was transformed, and the agony of the Cross led straight to the glory of the Resurrection. We must always remember that prayer does not bring deliverance from a situation; it brings conquest of it. Prayer is not a means of running away from a situation; it is a means whereby we may gallantly face it.

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(iii) Prayer brings the ability to bear. It is natural and inevitable that, in our human need and with our human hearts and our human weakness, there should be things which we feel we cannot bear. We see some situation developing; we see some tragic happening approaching with a grim inevitability; we see some task looming ahead which is obviously going to demand more than we have to give to it. At such a time our inevitable feeling is that we cannot bear this thing. Prayer does not remove the tragedy; it does not give us escape from the situation; it does not give us exemption from the task; but it does make us able to bear the unbearable, to face the unfaceable, to pass the breaking point and not to break.

So long as we regard prayer as escape, nothing but bewildered disappointment can result; but when we regard it as the way to conquest and the divine dynamic, things happen.

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Matthew 21:23-27

THE EXPEDIENT IGNORANCE

Matthew 21:23-27

When Jesus had come into the Temple precincts, the chief priests and elders of the people came to him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?" Jesus answered them, "I will ask you one question, and if you give me an answer to it, I too will tell you by what authority I do these things. Whence was the baptism of John? Was it from heaven? Or, was it from men?" They debated within themselves. "If," they said, "we say 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe in him?' But, if we say, 'From men,' we fear the crowd, for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." So he too said to them, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."

When we think of the extraordinary things Jesus had been doing, we cannot be surprised that the Jewish authorities asked him what right he had to do them. At the moment Jesus was not prepared to give them the direct answer that his authority came from the fact that he was the Son of God. To do so would have been to precipitate the end. There were actions still to be done and teaching still to be given. It sometimes takes more courage to bide one's time and to await the necessary moment, than it does to throw oneself on the enemy and invite the end. For Jesus everything had to be done in God's time; and the time for the final crisis had not yet come.

So he countered the question of the Jewish authorities with a question of his own, one which placed them in a dilemma. He asked them whether John's ministry came from heaven or from men, whether it was divine or merely human in its origin. Were those who went out to be baptized at the Jordan responding to a merely human impulse or were they in fact answering a divine challenge? The dilemma of the Jewish authorities was this. If they said that the ministry of John was from God, then they had no alternative to admitting that Jesus was the Messiah, for John had borne definite and unmistakable witness to that fact. On the other hand, if they denied that John's ministry came from God, then they would have to bear the anger of the people, who were convinced that he was the messenger of God.

For a moment the Jewish chief priests and elders were silent. Then they gave the lamest of all lame answers. They said, "We do not know." If ever men stood self-condemned, they did. They ought to have known; it was part of the duty of the Sanhedrin, of which they were members, to distinguish between true and false prophets; and they were saying that they were unable to make that distinction. Their dilemma drove them into a shameful self-humiliation.

There is a grim warning here. There is such a thing as the deliberately assumed ignorance of cowardice. If a man consults expediency rather than principle, his first question will be, not, "What is the truth?" but, "What is it safe to say?" Again and again his worship of expediency will drive him to a cowardly silence. He will lamely say, "I do not know the answer," when he well knows the answer, but is afraid to give it. The true question is not: "What is it safe to say?" but, "What is it right to say?"

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The deliberately assumed ignorance of fear, the cowardly silence of expediency are shameful things. If a man knows the truth, he is under obligation to tell it, though the heavens should fall.

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Matthew 21:28-32

THE BETTER OF TWO BAD SONS

Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus said: "What do you think? A man had two children, He went to the first and said, 'Child, go and work in my vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not.' But afterwards he changed his mind and went. He went to the second and spoke to him in the same way. He answered, 'Certainly, sir.' And he did not go. Which of these two did the will of his father?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them: "This is the truth I tell you--the tax-collectors and harlots go into the Kingdom of Heaven before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe in him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe in him. And when you saw this, you did not even then change your minds, and so come to believe in him."

The meaning of this parable is crystal clear. The Jewish leaders are the people who said they would obey God and then did not. The tax-gatherers and the harlots are those who said that they would go their own way and then took God's way.

The key to the correct understanding of this parable is that it is not really praising anyone. It is setting before us a picture of two very imperfect sets of people, of whom one set were none the less better than the other. Neither son in the story was the kind of son to bring full joy to his father. Both were unsatisfactory; but the one who in the end obeyed was incalculably better than the other. The ideal son would be the son who accepted the father's orders with obedience and with respect and who unquestioningly and fully carried them out. But there are truths in this parable which go far beyond the situation in which it was first spoken.

It tells us that there are two very common classes of people in this world. First, there are the people whose profession is much better than their practice. They will promise anything; they make great protestations of piety and fidelity; but their practice lags far behind. Second, there are those whose practice is far better than their profession. They claim to be tough, hardheaded materialists, but somehow they are found out doing kindly and generous things, almost in secret, as if they were ashamed of it. They profess to have no interest in the Church and in religion, and yet, when it comes to the bit, they live more Christian lives than many professing Christians.

We have all of us met these people, those whose practice is far away from the almost sanctimonious piety of their profession, and those whose practice is far ahead of the sometimes cynical, and sometimes almost irreligious, profession which they make. The real point of the parable is that, while the second class are infinitely to be preferred to the first, neither is anything like perfect. The really good man is the man in whom profession and practice meet and match.

Further, this parable teaches us that promises can never take the place of performance, and fine words are never a substitute for fine deeds. The son who said he would go, and did not, had all the outward marks of courtesy. In his answer he called his father "Sir" with all respect. But a courtesy which never gets beyond words is a totally illusory thing. True courtesy is obedience, willingly and graciously given. On the other hand the parable teaches us that a man can easily spoil a good thing by the way he does it. He can do a fine thing with a lack of graciousness and a lack of winsomeness

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which spoil the whole deed. Here we learn that the Christian way is in performance and not promise, and that the mark of a Christian is obedience graciously and courteously given.

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Matthew 21:33-46

THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD

Matthew 21:33-46 (Part 1)

Jesus said, "Listen to another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and surrounded it with a hedge, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and gave it out to cultivators and went away. When the time of the fruits had come, he dispatched his servants to the cultivators, to receive his fruits; and the cultivators took his servants, and beat one of them, and killed another of them, and stoned another of them. Again he dispatched other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. Afterwards he dispatched his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the cultivators saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and let us take the inheritance.' And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to these cultivators?" They said to him, "He will bring these evil men to an evil end, and he will give out the vineyard to other cultivators, who will pay him the fruits at their correct time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the headstone of the corner. This is the doing of the Lord, and it is amazing in our eyes? That is why I tell you that the Kingdom of God will be taken from you, and will be given to a nation which produces its fruits. And he who falls against the stone will be broken; and it will shatter to powder him on whom it falls.'"

When the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables, they knew that he was speaking about them. They tried to find a way to lay hold on him, but they were afraid of the crowds, for they regarded him as a prophet.

In interpreting a parable it is normally a first principle that every parable has only one point and that the details are not to be stressed. Normally to try to find a meaning for every detail is to make the mistake of treating the parable as an allegory. But in this case it is different. In this parable the details do have a meaning and the chief priests and the Pharisees well knew what Jesus was meaning this parable to say to them.

Every detail is founded on what, for those who heard it, was familiar fact. The Jewish nation as the vineyard of God was a familiar prophetic picture. "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel" (Isa.5:7). The hedge was a thick-set thorn hedge, designed to keep out both the wild boars who might ravage the vineyard, and the thieves who might steal the grapes. Every vineyard had its wine press. The wine press consisted of two troughs either hollowed out of the rock, or built of bricks; the one was a little higher than the other, and was connected with the lower one by a channel. The grapes were pressed in the higher trough and the juice ran off into the lower trough. The tower served a double purpose. It served as a watch-tower, from which to watch for thieves when the grapes were ripening; and it served as a lodging for those who were working in the vineyard.

The actions of the owner of the vineyard were an quite normal. In the time of Jesus, Palestine was a troubled place with little luxury; it was, therefore, very familiar with absentee landlords, who let out their estates and were interested only in collecting the rental at the right time. The rent might be

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paid in any of three ways. It might be a money rent; it might be a fixed amount of the fruit, no matter what the crop might be; and it might be an agreed percentage of the crop.

Even the action of the cultivators was not out of the common. The country was seething with economic unrest; the working people were discontented and rebellious; and the action of the cultivators in seeking to eliminate the son was not by any means impossible.

As we have said, it would be easy for those who heard this parable to make the necessary identifications. Before we treat it in detail, let us set these identifications down. The vineyard is the nation of Israel, and its owner is God. The cultivators are the religious leaders of Israel, who as it were had charge for God of the welfare of the nation. The messengers who were sent successively are the prophets sent by God and so often rejected and killed. The son who came last is none other than Jesus himself. Here in a vivid story Jesus set out at one and the same time the history and the doom of Israel.

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Matthew 21:33-46

PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Matthew 21:33-46 (Part 2)

This parable has much to tell us in three directions.

(i) It has much to tell us about God.

(a) It tells of God's trust in men. The owner of the vineyard entrusted it to the cultivators. He did not even stand over them to exercise a police-like supervision. He went away and left them with their task. God pays men the compliment of entrusting them with his work. Every task we receive is a task given us to do by God.

(b) It tells of God's patience. The master sent messenger after messenger. He did not come with sudden vengeance when one messenger had been abused and ill-treated. He gave the cultivators chance after chance to respond to his appeal. God bears with men in all their sinning and will not cast them off.

(c) It tells of God's judgment. In the end the master of the vineyard took the vineyard from the cultivators and gave it to others. God's sternest judgment is when he takes out of our hands the task which he meant us to do. A man has sunk to his lowest level when he has become useless to God.

(ii) It has much to tell us about men.

(a) It tells of human privilege. The vineyard was equipped with everything--the hedge, the wine press, the tower--which would make the task of the cultivators easy and enable them to discharge it well. God does not only give us a task to do; he also gives us the means whereby to do it.

(b) It tells of human freedom. The master left the cultivators to do the task as they liked. God is no tyrannical task-master; he is like a wise commander who allocates a task and then trusts a man to do it.

(c) It tells of human answerability. To all men comes a day of reckoning. We are answerable for the way in which we have carried out the task God gave us to do.

(d) It tells of the deliberateness of human sin. The cultivators carry out a deliberate policy of rebellion and disobedience towards the master. Sin is deliberate opposite to God; it is the taking of our own way when we know quite well what the way of God is.

(iii) It has much to tell us about Jesus.

(a) It tells of the claim of Jesus. It shows us quite clearly Jesus lifting himself out of the succession of the prophets. Those who come before him were the messengers of God; no one could deny them that honour; but they were servants; he was the Son. This parable contains one of the

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clearest claims Jesus ever made to be unique, to be different from even the greatest of those who went before.

(b) It tells of the sacrifice of Jesus. It makes it clear that Jesus knew what lay ahead. In the parable the hands of wicked men killed the son. Jesus was never in any doubt of what lay ahead. He did not die because he was compelled to die; he went willingly and open-eyed to death.

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Matthew 21:33-46

THE SYMBOL OF THE STONE

Matthew 21:33-46 (Part 3)

The parable concludes with the picture of the stone. There are two pictures really.

(i) The first is quite clear. It is the picture of a stone which the builders rejected but became the most important stone in the whole building. The picture is from Ps.118:22: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." Originally the Psalmist meant this as a picture of the nation of Israel. Israel was the nation which was despised and rejected. The Jews were hated by all men. They had been servants and slaves of many nations; but none the less the nation which all men despised was the chosen people of God.

It may be that men reject Christ, and refuse him, and seek to eliminate him, but they will yet find that the Christ whom they rejected is the most important person in the world. It was Julian, the Roman Emperor, who tried to turn the clock back, tried to banish Christianity, and to bring back the old pagan gods. He failed and failed completely; and at the end of it the dramatist makes him say, "To shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche was not for me." The man upon the Cross has become the Judge and King of all the world.

(ii) The second "stone" picture is in Matt.21:44, although it is to be noted that some manuscripts omit this verse altogether. This is a more difficult picture--of a stone which breaks a man, if he stumbles against it, and which crushes a man to powder, if it falls upon him. It is a composite picture, put together from three Old Testament passages. The first is Isa.8:13-15: "The Lord of hosts him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken." The second is Isa.28:16: "Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation." The third is Dn.2:34; Dn.2:44-45 where there is a strange picture of a stone, cut without hands, which broke in pieces the enemies of God.

The idea behind this is that all these Old Testament pictures of a stone are summed up in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the foundation stone on which everything is built, and the corner stone which holds everything together. To refuse his way is to batter one's head against the walls of the law of God. To defy him is in the end to be crushed out of life. However strange these pictures may seem to us, they were familiar to every Jew who knew the prophets.

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Matthew 22:1-10

JOY AND JUDGMENT

Matthew 22:1-10

Jesus again answered them in parables: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the situation which arose when a man who was a king arranged a wedding for his son. He sent his servants to summon those who had been invited to the wedding, and they refused to come. He again sent other servants. 'Tell those who have been invited,' he said, 'look you, I have my meal all prepared; my oxen and my specially fattened animals have been killed; and everything is ready. Come to the wedding.' But they disregarded the invitation and went away, one to his estate, and another to his business. The rest seized the servants and treated them shamefully and killed them. The king was angry, and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set fire to their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready. Those who have been invited did not deserve to come. Go, then, to the highways and invite to the wedding all you may find.' So the servants went out to the roads, and collected all whom they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was supplied with guests."

Matt.22:1-14 form not one parable, but two; and we will grasp their meaning far more easily and far more fully if we take them separately.

The events of the first of the two were completely in accordance with normal Jewish customs. When the invitations to a great feast, like a wedding feast, were sent out, the time was not stated; and when everything was ready the servants were sent out with a final summons to tell the guests to come. So, then, the king in this parable had long ago sent out his invitations; but it was not till everything was prepared that the final summons was issued--and insultingly refused. This parable has two meanings.

(i) It has a purely local meaning. Its local meaning was a driving home of what had already been, said in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen; once again it was an accusation of the Jews. The invited guests who when the time came refused to come, stand for the Jews. Ages ago they had been invited by God to be his chosen people; yet when God's son came into the world, and they were invited to follow him they contemptuously refused. The result was that the invitation of God went out direct to the highways and the byways; and the people in the highways and the byways stand for the sinners and the Gentiles, who never expected an invitation into the Kingdom.

As the writer of the gospel saw it, the consequences of the refusal were terrible. There is one verse of the parable which is strangely out of place; and that because it is not part of the original parable as Jesus told it, but an interpretation by the writer of the gospel. That is Matt.22:7, which tells how the king sent his armies against those who refused the invitation, and burned their city.

This introduction of armies and the burning of the city seems at first sight completely out of place taken in connexion with invitations to a wedding feast. But Matthew was composing his gospel some time between A.D. 80 and 90. What had happened during the period between the actual life of Jesus and now? The answer is--the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Rome in A.D. 70. The Temple was sacked and burned and the city destroyed stone from stone, so that a plough was

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Matthew 22:1-10

drawn across it. Complete disaster had come to those who refused to recognize the Son of God when he came.

The writer of the gospel adds as his comment the terrible things which did in fact happen to the nation which would not take the way of Christ. And it is indeed the simple historical fact that if the Jews had accepted the way of Christ, and had walked in love, in humility and in sacrifice they would never have been the rebellious, warring people who finally provoked the avenging wrath of Rome, when Rome could stand their political machinations no longer.

(ii) Equally this parable has much to say on a much wider scale.

(a) It reminds us that the invitation of God is to a feast as joyous as a wedding feast. His invitation is to joy. To think of Christianity as a gloomy giving up of everything which brings laughter and sunshine and happy fellowship is to mistake its whole nature. It is to joy that the Christian is invited; and it is joy he misses, if he refuses the invitation.

(b) It reminds us that the things which make men deaf to the invitation of Christ are not necessarily bad in themselves. One man went to his estate; the other to his business. They did not go off on a wild carousal or an immoral adventure. They went off on the, in itself, excellent task of efficiently administering their business life. It is very easy for a man to be so busy with the things of time that he forgets the things of eternity, to be so preoccupied with the things which are seen that he forgets the things which are unseen, to hear so insistently the claims of the world that he cannot hear the soft invitation of the voice of Christ. The tragedy of life is that it is so often the second bests which shut out the bests, that it is things which are good in themselves which shut out the things that are supreme. A man can be so busy making a living that he fails to make a life; he can be so busy with the administration and the organization of life that he forgets life itself.

(c) It reminds us that the appeal of Christ is not so much to consider how we will be punished as it is to see what we will miss, if we do not take his way of things. Those who would not come were punished, but their real tragedy was that they lost the joy of the wedding feast. If we refuse the invitation of Christ, some day our greatest pain will lie, not in the things we suffer, but in the realization of the precious things we have missed.

(d) It reminds us that in the last analysis God's invitation is the invitation of grace. Those who were gathered in from the highways and the byways had no claim on the king at all; they could never by any stretch of imagination have expected an invitation to the wedding feast, still less could they ever have deserved it. It came to them from nothing other than the wide-armed, open-hearted, generous hospitality of the king. It was grace which offered the invitation and grace which gathered men in.

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Matthew 22:11-14

THE SCRUTINY OF THE KING

Matthew 22:11-14

The king came in to see those who were sitting at table, and he saw there a man who was not wearing a wedding garment. "Friend," he said to him, "how did you come here with no wedding garment?" The man was struck silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hands and feet, and throw him out into the outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth there. For many are called, but few are chosen."

This is a second parable, but it is also a very close continuation and amplification of the previous one. It is the story of a guest who appeared at a royal wedding feast without a wedding garment.

One of the great interests of this parable is that in it we see Jesus taking a story which was already familiar to his hearers and using it in his own way. The Rabbis had two stories which involved kings and garments. The first told of a king who invited his guests to a feast, without telling them the exact date and time; but he did tell them that they must wash, and anoint, and clothe themselves that they might be ready when the summons came. The wise prepared themselves at once, and took their places waiting at the palace door, for they believed that in a palace a feast could be prepared so quickly that there would be no long warning. The foolish believed that it would take a long time to make the necessary preparations and that they would have plenty of time. So they went, the mason to his lime, the potter to his clay, the smith to his furnace, the fuller to his bleaching-ground, and went on with their work. Then, suddenly, the summons to the feast came without any warning. The wise were ready to sit down, and the king rejoiced over them, and they ate and drank. But those who had not arrayed themselves in their wedding garments had to stand outside, sad and hungry, and look on at the joy that they had lost. That rabbinic parable tells of the duty of preparedness for the summons of God, and the garments stand for the preparation that must be made.

The second rabbinic parable told how a king entrusted to his servants royal robes. Those who were wise took the robes, and carefully stored them away, and kept them in all their pristine loveliness. Those who were foolish wore the robes to their work, and soiled and stained them. The day came when the king demanded the robes back. The wise handed them back fresh and clean; so the king laid up the robes in his treasury and bade them go in peace. The foolish handed them back stained and soiled. The king commanded that the robes should be given to the fuller to cleanse, and that the foolish servants should be cast into prison. This parable teaches that a man must hand back his soul to God in all its original purity; but that the man who has nothing but a stained soul to render back stands condemned.

No doubt Jesus had these two parables in mind when he told his own story. What, then, was he seeking to teach? This parable also contains both a local and a universal lesson.

(i) The local lesson is this. Jesus has just said that the king, to supply his feast with guests, sent his messengers out into the highways and byways to gather all men in. That was the parable of the open door. It told how the Gentiles and the sinners would be gathered in. This parable strikes the

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Matthew 22:11-14

necessary balance. It is true that the door is open to an men, but when they come they must bring a life which seeks to fit the love which has been given to them. Grace is not only a gift; it is a grave responsibility. A man cannot go on living the life he lived before he met Jesus Christ. He must be clothed in a new purity and a new holiness and a new goodness. The door is open, but the door is not open for the sinner to come and remain a sinner, but for the sinner to come and become a saint.

(ii) This is the permanent lesson. The way in which a man comes to anything demonstrates the spirit in which he comes. If we go to visit in a friend's house, we do not go in the clothes we wear in the shipyard or the garden. We know very well that it is not the clothes which matter to the friend. It is not that we want to put on a show. It is simply a matter of respect that we should present ourselves in our friend's house as neatly as we can. The fact that we prepare ourselves to go there is the way in which we outwardly show our affection and our esteem for our friend. So it is with God's house. This parable has nothing to do with the clothes in which we go to church; it has everything to do with the spirit in which we go to God's house. It is profoundly true that church-going must never be a fashion parade.

But there are garments of the mind and of the heart and of the soul--the garment of expectation, the garment of humble penitence, the garment of faith, the garment of reverence--and these are the garments without which we ought not to approach God. Too often we go to God's house with no preparation at all; if every man and woman in our congregations came to church prepared to worship, after a little prayer, a little thought, and a little self-examination, then worship would be worship indeed--the worship in which and through which things happen in men's souls and in the life of the Church and in the affairs of the world.

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Matthew 22:15-22

HUMAN AND DIVINE RIGHT

Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees came, and tried to form a plan to ensnare him in his speech. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are true, and that you teach the way of God in truth, and that you never allow yourself to be swayed by any man, for you are no respecter of persons. Tell us, then, your opinion--is it right to pay tribute to Caesar, or not?" Jesus was well aware of their malice. "Hypocrites," he said, "why do you try to test me? Show me the tribute coin." They brought him a denarius. "Whose image is this," he said to them, "and whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they said to him. "Well then," he said to them, "render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things which are God's." When they heard this answer, they were amazed, and left him and went away.

Up to this point we have seen Jesus, as it were, on the attack. He had spoken three parables in which he had plainly indicted the orthodox Jewish leaders. In the parable of the two sons (Matt.21:28-32) the Jewish leaders appear under the guise of the unsatisfactory son who did not do his father's will. In the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt.21:33-46) they are the wicked husbandmen. In the parable of the king's feast (Matt.22:1-14) they are the condemned guests.

Now we see the Jewish leaders launching their counterattack; and they do so by directing at Jesus carefully formulated questions. They ask these questions in public, while the crowd look on and listen, and their aim is to make Jesus discredit himself by his own words in the presence of the people. Here, then, we have the question of the Pharisees, and it was subtly framed. Palestine was an occupied country and the Jews were subject to the Roman Empire; and the question was: "Is it, or is it not, lawful to pay tribute to Rome?"

There were, in fact, three regular taxes which the Roman government exacted. There was a ground tax; a man must pay to the government one tenth of the grain, and one fifth of the oil and wine which he produced; this tax was paid partly in kind, and partly in a money equivalent. There was income tax, which was one per cent of a man's income. There was a poll tax; this tax had to be paid by every male person from the age of fourteen to the age of sixty-five, and by every female person from the age of twelve to sixty-five; it amounted to one denarius (GSN1220)--that is what Jesus called the tribute coin--and was the equivalent of about 4p, a sum which is to be evaluated in the awareness that 3p was the usual day's wage for a working-man. The tax in question here is the poll tax.

The question which the Pharisees asked set Jesus a very real dilemma. If he said that it was unlawful to pay the tax, they would promptly report him to the Roman government officials as a seditious person and his arrest would certainly follow. If he said that it was lawful to pay the tax, he would stand discredited in the eyes of many of the people. Not only did the people resent the tax as everyone resents taxation; they resented it even more for religious reasons. To a Jew God was the only king; their nation was a theocracy; to pay tax to an earthly king was to admit the validity of his kingship and thereby to insult God. Therefore the more fanatical of the Jews insisted that any tax

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paid to a foreign king was necessarily wrong. Whichever way Jesus might answer--so his questioners thought--he would lay himself open to trouble.

The seriousness of this attack is shown by the fact that the Pharisees and the Herodians combined to make it, for normally these two parties were in bitter opposition. The Pharisees were the supremely orthodox, who resented the payment of the tax to a foreign king as an infringement of the divine right of God. The Herodians were the party of Herod, king of Galilee, who owed his power to the Romans and who worked hand in glove with them. The Pharisees and the Herodians were strange bed-fellows indeed; their differences were for the moment forgotten in a common hatred of Jesus and a common desire to eliminate him. Any man who insists on his own way, no matter what it is, will hate Jesus.

This question of tax-paying was not of merely historical interest. Matthew was writing between A.D. 80 and 90. The Temple had been destroyed in A.D. 70. So long as it stood, every Jew had been bound to pay the half-shekel Temple tax. After the destruction of the Temple, the Roman government demanded that that tax should be paid to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. It is obvious how bitter a regulation that was for a Jew to stomach. The matter of taxes was a real problem in the actual ministry of Jesus; and it was still a real problem in the days of the early Church.

But Jesus was wise. He asked to see a denarius, which was stamped with the Emperor's head. In the ancient days coinage was the sign of kingship. As soon as a king came to the throne he struck his own coinage; even a pretender would produce a coinage to show the reality of his kingship; and that coinage was held to be the property of the king whose image it bore. Jesus asked whose image was on the coin. The answer was that Caesar's head was on it. "Well then," said Jesus, "give it back to Caesar; it is his. Give to Caesar what belongs to him; and give to God what belongs to him."

With his unique wisdom Jesus never laid down rules and regulations; that is why his teaching is timeless and never goes out of date. He always lays down principles. Here he lays down a very great and very important one.

Every Christian man has a double citizenship. He is a citizen of the country in which he happens to live. To it he owes many things. He owes the safety against lawless men which only settled government can give; he owes all public services. To take a simple example, few men are wealthy enough to have a lighting system or a cleansing system or a water system of their own. These are public services. In a welfare state the citizen owes still more to the state--education, medical services, provision for unemployment and old age. This places him under a debt of obligation. Because the Christian is a man of honour, he must be a responsible citizen; failure in good citizenship is also failure in Christian duty. Untold troubles can descend upon a country or an industry when Christians refuse to take their part in the administration and leave it to selfish, self-seeking, partisan, and unchristian men. The Christian has a duty to Caesar in return for the privileges which the rule of Caesar brings to him.

But the Christian is also a citizen of heaven. There are matters of religion and of principle in which the responsibility of the Christian is to God. It may well be that the two citizenships will

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never clash; they do not need to. But when the Christian is convinced that it is God's will that something should be done, it must be done; or, if he is convinced that something is against the will of God, he must resist it and take no part in it. Where the boundaries between the two duties lie, Jesus does not say. That is for a man's own conscience to test. But a real Christian--and this is the permanent truth which Jesus here lays down--is at one and the same time a good citizen of his country and a good citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. He will fail in his duty neither to God nor to man. He will, as Peter said, "Fear God. Honour the emperor" (1Pet.2:17).

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Matthew 22:23-33

THE LIVING GOD OF LIVING MEN

Matthew 22:23-33

On that day the Sadducees, who deny that there is any resurrection, came to him, and questioned him. "Teacher," they said, "Moses said, 'If anyone dies without children, his brother shall marry his wife, and shall raise up a family for his brother.' Amongst us there were seven brothers. The first married and died, and, since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened with the second and the third, right to the end of the seven of them. Last of all the woman died. Of which of the seven will she be the wife in the resurrection? For they all had her." Jesus answered: "You are in error, because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. In the resurrection they neither marry nor are married, but they are as the angels in heaven. Now, in regard to the resurrection of the dead, have you never read what God said, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' God is not the God of dead men, but of those who live." When the crowds heard this answer, they were amazed at his teaching.

When the Pharisees had made their counter-attack on Jesus and been routed, the Sadducees took up the battle.

The Sadducees were not many in number; but they were the wealthy, the aristocratic, and the governing class. The chief priests, for instance, were Sadducees. In politics they were collaborationist; quite ready to cooperate with the Roman government, if cooperation was the price of the retention of their own privileges. In thought they were quite ready to open their minds to Greek ideas. In their Jewish belief they were traditionalists. They refused to accept the oral and scribal law, which to the Pharisees was of such paramount importance. They went even further; the only part of scripture which they regarded as binding was the Pentateuch, the Law par excellence, the first five books of the Old Testament. They did not accept the prophets or the poetical books as scripture at all. In particular they were at variance with the Pharisees in that they completely denied any life after death, a belief on which the Pharisees insisted. The Pharisees indeed laid it down that any man who denied the resurrection of the dead was shut out from God.

The Sadducees insisted that the doctrine of life after death could not be proved from the Pentateuch. The Pharisees said that it could and it is interesting to look at the proofs which they adduced. They cited Num.18:28 which says, "You shall give the Lord's offering to Aaron the priest." That is permanent regulation; the verb is in the present tense; therefore Aaron is still alive! They cited Deut.31:16: "This people will rise," a peculiarly unconvincing citation, for the second half of the verse goes on, "and play the harlot after the strange gods of the land"! They cited Deut.32:39: "I kill and I make alive." Outside the Pentateuch they cited Isa.26:19: "Thy dead shall live." It cannot be said that any of the citations of the Pharisees were really convincing; and no real argument for the resurrection of the dead had ever been produced from the Pentateuch.

The Pharisees were very definite about the resurrection of the body. They discussed recondite points--Would a man rise clothed or unclothed? If clothed, would he rise with the clothes in which he died, or other clothes? They used 1Sam.28:14 (the witch of Endor's raising of the spirit of

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Samuel at the request of Saul) to prove that after death men retain the appearance they had in this world. They even argued that men rose with the physical defects with which, and from which they died--otherwise they would not be the same persons! All Jews would be resurrected in the Holy Land, so they said that under the earth there were cavities and, when a Jew was buried in a foreign land, his body rolled through these cavities until it reached the homeland. The Pharisees held as a primary doctrine the bodily resurrection of the dead; the Sadducees completely denied it.

The Sadducees produced a question which, they believed, reduced the doctrine of the resurrection of the body to an absurdity. There was a Jewish custom called Levirate Marriage. How far it was ever carried out in practice is very doubtful. If a man died childless, his brother was under obligation to marry the widow, and to beget children for his brother; such children were legally regarded as the brother's children. If the man refused to marry the widow, they must both go to the elders. The woman must loosen the man's shoe, spit in his face, and curse him; and the man was thereafter under a stigma of refusal (Deut.25:5-10). The Sadducees cited a case of Levirate Marriage in which seven brothers, each dying childless, one after another married the same woman; and then asked, "When the resurrection takes place, whose wife will this much-married woman be?" Here indeed was a catch question.

Jesus began by laying down one principle--the whole question starts from a basic error, the error of thinking of heaven in terms of earth, and of thinking of eternity in terms of time. Jesus' answer was that anyone who reads scripture must see that the question is irrelevant, for heaven is not going to be simply a continuation or an extension of this world. There will be new and greater relationships which will far transcend the physical relationships of time.

Then Jesus went on to demolish the whole Sadducean position. They had always held that there was no text in the Pentateuch which could be used to prove the resurrection of the dead. Now, what was one of the commonest titles of God in the Pentateuch? "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob." God cannot be the God of dead men and of mouldering corpses. The living God must be the God of living men. The Sadducean case was shattered. Jesus had done what the wisest Rabbis had never been able to do. Out of Scripture itself he had confuted the Sadducees, and had shown them that there is a life after death which must not be thought of in earthly terms. The crowds were amazed at a man who was a master of argument like this, and even the Pharisees can hardly have forbore to cheer.

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Matthew 22:34-40

DUTY TO GOD AND DUTY TO MAN

Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. One of them, who was an expert in the Law, asked him a question as a test: "What commandment in the Law is greatest?" He said to him, "You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your whole soul, and your whole mind." This is the great and the chief commandment; and the second is like it, "You must love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments the whole Law and the prophets depend."

In Matthew this question looks like a return to the attack on the part of the Pharisees; but in Mark the atmosphere is different. As Mark tells the story (Mk.12:28-34) the scribe did not ask Jesus this question to trip him up. He asked it in gratitude that Jesus had confuted the Sadducees and to enable Jesus to demonstrate how well he could answer; and the passage ends with the scribe and Jesus very close to each other.

We may well say that here Jesus laid down the complete definition of religion.

(i) Religion consists in loving God. The verse which Jesus quotes is Deut.6:5. That verse was part of the Shema, the basic and essential creed of Judaism, the sentence with which every Jewish service still opens, and the first text which every Jewish child commits to memory. It means that to God we must give a total love, a love which dominates our emotions, a love which directs our thoughts, and a love which is the dynamic of our actions. All religion starts with the love which is total commitment of life to God.

(ii) The second commandment which Jesus quotes comes from Lev.19:18. Our love for God must issue in love for men. But it is to be noted in which order the commandments come; it is love of God first, and love of man second. It is only when we love God that man becomes lovable. The Biblical teaching about man is not that man is a collection of chemical elements, not that man is part of the brute creation, but that man is made in the image of God (Gen.1:26-27). It is for that reason that man is lovable. The true basis of all democracy is in fact the love of God. Take away the love of God and we can become angry at man the unteachable; we can become pessimistic about man the unimprovable; we can become callous to man the machine-minder. The love of man is firmly grounded in the love of God.

To be truly religious is to love God and to love the men whom God made in his own image; and to love God and man, not with a nebulous sentimentality, but with that total commitment which issues in devotion to God and practical service of men.

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Matthew 22:41-46

NEW HORIZONS

Matthew 22:41-46

When the Pharisees had come together, Jesus asked them a question: "What is your opinion about The Anointed One? Whose son is he?" "David's son," they said. He said to them, "How, then, does David in the Spirit call Him Lord, when he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand till I put your enemies beneath your feet.' If David calls Him Lord, how is he his son?" And no one was able to give him any answer. And from that day no one any longer dared to ask him a question.

To us this may seem one of the most obscure things which Jesus ever said. This may be so, but none the less it is a most important statement. Even if, at first sight, we do not fully grasp its meaning, we can still feel the air of awe and astonishment and mystery which it has about it.

We have seen again and again that Jesus refused to allow his followers to proclaim him as the Messiah until he had taught them what Messiahship meant. Their ideas of Messiahship needed the most radical change.

The commonest title of the Messiah was Son of David. Behind it lay the expectation that there would one day come a great prince of the line of David who would shatter Israel's enemies and lead the people to the conquest of all nations. The Messiah was most commonly thought of in nationalistic, political, military terms of power and glory. This is another attempt by Jesus to alter that conception.

He asked the Pharisees whose son they understood the Messiah to be: they answered, as he knew they would, "David's son." Jesus then quotes Psalm I 10:1: "The Lord says to my Lord; Sit at my right hand." All accepted that as a Messianic text. In it the first Lord is God; the second Lord is the Messiah. That is to say David calls the Messiah Lord. But, if the Messiah is David's son, how could David call his own son Lord?

The clear result of the argument is that it is not adequate to call the Messiah Son of David. He is not David's son; he is David's Lord. When Jesus healed the blind men, they called him Son of David (Matt.20:30). When he entered Jerusalem the crowds hailed him as Son of David (Matt.21:9). Jesus is here saying, "It is not enough to call the Messiah Son of David. It is not enough to think of him as a Prince of David's line and an earthly conqueror. You must go beyond that, for the Messiah is David's Lord."

What did Jesus mean? He can have meant only one thing--that the true description of him is Son of God. Son of David is not an adequate title; only Son of God will do. And, if that be so, Messiahship is not to be thought of in terms of Davidic conquest, but in terms of divine and sacrificial love. Here, then, Jesus makes his greatest claim. In him there came, not the earthly conqueror who would repeat the military triumphs of David, but the Son of God who would demonstrate the love of God upon his Cross.

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Matthew 22:41-46

There would be few that day who caught anything like all that Jesus meant; but when Jesus spoke these words, even the densest of them felt a shiver in the presence of the eternal mystery. They had the awed and the uncomfortable feeling that they had heard the voice of God, and for a moment, in this man Jesus, they glimpsed God's very face.

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Matthew 23

SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

If a man is characteristically and temperamentally an irritable, ill-tempered and irascible creature, notoriously given to uncontrolled outbursts of passionate anger, his anger is neither effective nor impressive. Nobody pays any attention to the anger of a bad-tempered man. But when a person who is characteristically meek and lowly, gentle and loving, suddenly erupts into blazing wrath, even the most thoughtless person is shocked into taking thought. That is why the anger of Jesus is so awe-inspiring a sight. It is seldom in literature that we find so unsparing and sustained an indictment as we find in this chapter when the wrath of Jesus is directed against the Scribes and Pharisees. Before we begin to study the chapter in detail, it will be well to see briefly what the Scribes and Pharisees stood for.

The Jews had a deep and lasting sense of the continuity of their religion; and we can see best what the Pharisees and Scribes stood for by seeing where they came into the scheme of Jewish religion. The Jews had a saying, "Moses received the Law and delivered it to Joshua; and Joshua to the elders; and the elders to the prophets; and the prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue." AH Jewish religion is based first on the Ten Commandments and then on the Pentateuch, the Law.

The history of the Jews was designed to make them a people of the Law. As every nation has, they had their dream of greatness. But the experiences of history had made that dream take a special direction. They had been conquered by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and Jerusalem had been left desolate. It was clear that they could not be preeminent in political power. But although political power was an obvious impossibility, they none the less possessed the Law, and to them the Law was the very word of God, the greatest and most precious possession in the world.

There came a day in their history when that preeminence of the Law was, as it were, publicly admitted; there came what one can only call a deliberate act of decision, whereby the people of Israel became in the most unique sense the people of the Law. Under Ezra and Nehemiah the people were allowed to come back to Jerusalem, and to rebuild their shattered city, and to take up their national life again. When that happened, there came a day when Ezra, the Scribe, took the book of the Law, and read it to them, and there happened something that was nothing less than a national dedication of a people to the keeping of the Law (Neh.8:1-8).

From that day the study of the Law became the greatest of all professions; and that study of the Law was committed to the men of the Great Synagogue, the Scribes.

We have already seen how the great principles of the Law were broken up into thousands upon thousands of little rules and regulations (see section on Matt.5:17-20). We have seen, for instance, how the Law said that a man must not work on the Sabbath day, and how the Scribes laboured to define work, how they laid it down how many paces a man might walk on the Sabbath, how heavy a burden he might carry, the things he might and might not do. By the time this scribal interpretation of the Law was finished, it took more than fifty volumes to hold the mass of regulations which resulted.

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Matthew 23

The return of the people to Jerusalem and the first dedication of the Law took place about 450 B.C. But it is not till long after that that the Pharisees emerge. About 175 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria made a deliberate attempt to stamp out the Jewish religion and to introduce Greek religion and Greek customs and practices. It was then that the Pharisees arose as a separate sect. The name means The Separated Ones; and they were the men who dedicated their whole life to the careful and meticulous observance of every rule and regulation which the Scribes had worked out. In face of the threat directed against it, they determined to spend their whole lives in one long observance of Judaism in its most elaborate and ceremonial and legal form. They were men who accepted the ever-increasing number of religious rules and regulations extracted from the Law.

There were never very many of them; at most there were not more than six thousand of them; for the plain fact was that, if a man was going to accept and carry out every little regulation of the Law, he would have time for nothing else; he had to withdraw himself, to separate himself, from ordinary life in order to keep the Law.

The Pharisees then were two things. First, they were dedicated legalists; religion to them was the observance of every detail of the Law. But second--and this is never to be forgotten--they were men in desperate earnest about their religion, for no one would have accepted the impossibly demanding task of living a life like that unless he had been in the most deadly earnest. They could, therefore, develop at one and the same time all the faults of legalism and all the virtues of complete self-dedication. A Pharisee might either be a desiccated or arrogant legalist, or a man of burning devotion to God.

To say this is not to pass a particularly Christian verdict on the Pharisees, for the Jews themselves passed that very verdict. The Talmud distinguishes seven different kinds of Pharisee.

(i) There was the Shoulder Pharisee. He was meticulous in his observance of the Law; but he wore his good deeds upon his shoulder. He was out for a reputation for purity and goodness. True, he obeyed the Law, but he did so in order to be seen of men.

(ii) There was the Wait-a-little Pharisee. He was the Pharisee who could always produce an entirely valid excuse for putting off a good deed. He professed the creed of the strictest Pharisees but he could always find an excuse for allowing practice to lag behind. He spoke, but he did not do.

(iii) There was the Bruised or Bleeding Pharisee. The Talmud speaks of the plague of self-afflicting Pharisees. These Pharisees received their name for this reason. Women had a very low status in Palestine. No really strict orthodox teacher would be seen talking to a woman in public, even if that woman was his own wife or sister. These Pharisees went even further; they would not even allow themselves to look at a woman on the street. In order to avoid doing so they would shut their eyes, and so bump into walls and buildings and obstructions. They thus bruised and wounded themselves, and their wounds and bruises gained them a special reputation for exceeding piety.

(iv) There was the Pharisee who was variously described as the Pestle and Mortar Pharisee, or the Hump-backed Pharisee, or the Tumbling Pharisee. Such men walked in such ostentatious humility

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Matthew 23

that they were bent like a pestle in a mortar or like a hunch-back. They were so humble that they would not even lift their feet from the ground and so tripped over every obstruction they met. Their humility was a self-advertising ostentation.

(v) There was the Ever-reckoning or Compounding Pharisee. This kind of Pharisee was for ever reckoning up his good deeds; he was for ever striking a balance sheet between himself and God, and he believed that every good deed he did put God a little further in his debt. To him religion was always to be reckoned in terms of a profit and loss account.

(vi) There was the Timid or Fearing Pharisee. He was always in dread of divine punishment. He was, therefore, always cleansing the outside of the cup and the platter, so that he might seem to be good. He saw religion in terms of judgment and life in terms of a terror-stricken evasion of this judgment.

(vii) Finally, there was the God-fearing Pharisee; he was the Pharisee who really and truly loved God and who found his delight in obedience to the Law of God, however difficult that it might be.

That was the Jew's own classification of the Pharisees; and it is to be noted that there were six bad types to one good one. There would be not a few listening to Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees who agreed with every word of it.

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Matthew 23:1-4

MAKING RELIGION A BURDEN

Matthew 23:1-4

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The Scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses's seat. Therefore do and observe everything they tell you; but do not act as they act; for they speak, but they do not do. They bind burdens that are heavy and hard to bear, and place them on men's shoulders; but they themselves refuse to lift a finger to remove them."

Here we see the lineaments of the Pharisees already beginning to appear. Here we see the Jewish conviction of the continuity of the faith. God gave the Law to Moses; Moses handed it to Joshua; Joshua transmitted it to the elders; the elders passed it down to the prophets; and the prophets gave it to the Scribes and Pharisees.

It must not for a moment be thought that Jesus is commending the Scribes and Pharisees with all their rules and regulations. What he is saying is this, "In so far as these Scribes and Pharisees have taught you the great principles of the Law which Moses received from God, you must obey them." When we were studying Matt.5:17-20 we saw what these principles were. The whole of the Ten Commandments are based on two great principles. They are based on reverence, reverence for God, for God's name, for God's day, for the parents God has given to us. They are based on respect, respect for a man's life, for his possessions, for his personality, for his good name, for oneself. These principles are eternal; and, in so far as the Scribes and Pharisees teach reverence for God and respect for men, their teaching is eternally binding and eternally valid.

But their whole outlook on religion had one fundamental effect. It made it a thing of thousands upon thousands of rules and regulations; and therefore it made it an intolerable burden. Here is the test of any presentation of religion. Does it make it wings to lift a man up, or a deadweight to drag him down? Does it make it a joy or a depression? Is a man helped by his religion or is he haunted by it? Does it carry him, or has he to carry it? Whenever religion becomes a depressing affair of burdens and prohibitions, it ceases to be true religion.

Nor would the Pharisees allow the slightest relaxation. Their whole self-confessed purpose was to "build a fence around the Law." Not one regulation would they relax or remove. Whenever religion becomes a burden, it ceases to be true religion.

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Matthew 23:5-12

THE RELIGION OF OSTENTATION

Matthew 23:5-12

They perform all their actions to be seen by men. They broaden their phylacteries; they wear outsize tassels. They love the highest places at meals, and the front seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the market-place, and to be called Rabbi by men. You must not be called Rabbi; for you have only one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one upon earth father; you have one Father--your Father in Heaven. Nor must you be called leaders; you have one leader--Christ. He who is greatest among you will be your servant. Anyone who will exalt himself will be humbled; and whoever will humble himself will be exalted."

The religion of the Pharisees became almost inevitably a religion of ostentation. If religion consists in obeying countless rules and regulations, it becomes easy for a man to see to it that everyone is aware how well he fulfils the regulations, and how perfect is his piety. Jesus selects certain actions and customs in which the Pharisees showed their ostentation.

They made broad their phylacteries. It is said of the commandments of God in Exo.13:9: "It shall be to you as a sign on your hand, and a memorial between your eyes." The same saying is repeated, "It shall be as a mark on your hand, or frontlets between your eyes" (Exo.13:16; compare Deut.6:8; Deut.11:18). In order to fulfil these commandments the Jew wore at prayer, and still wears, what are called tephillin or phylacteries. They are worn on every day except the Sabbath and special holy days. They are like little leather boxes, strapped one on the wrist and one on the forehead. The one on the wrist is a little leather box of one compartment, and inside it there is a parchment roll with the following four passages of scripture written on it--Exo.13:1-10; Exo.13:11-16; Deut.6:4-9; Deut.11:13-21. The one worn on the forehead is the same except that in it there are four little compartments, and in each compartment there is a little scroll inscribed with one of these four passages.

The Pharisees, in order to draw attention to himself, not only wore phylacteries, but wore specially big ones, so that he might demonstrate his exemplary obedience to the Law and his exemplary piety.

They wear outsize tassels; the tassels are in Greek kraspeda (GSN2899) and in Hebrew tsiytsith (HSN6734). In Num.15:37-41 and in Deut.22:12 we read that God commanded his people to make fringes on the borders of their garments, so that when they looked on them they might remember the commandments of God. These fringes were like tassels worn on the four comers of the outer garment. Later they were worn on the inner garment, and today they are perpetuated in the tassels of the prayer-shawl which the devout Jew wears at prayer. It was easy to make these tassels of specially large size so that they became an ostentatious display of piety, worn, not to remind a man of the commandments, but to draw attention to himself.

Further, the Pharisees liked to be given the principal places at meals, on the left and on the right of the host. They liked the front seats in the synagogues. In Palestine the back seats were occupied by the children and the most unimportant people; the further forward the seat, the greater the honour. The most honoured seats of all were the seats of the elders, which faced the congregation.

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Matthew 23:5-12

If a man was seated there, everyone would see that he was present and he could conduct himself throughout the service with a pose of piety which the congregation could not fail to notice. Still further., the Pharisee liked to be addressed as Rabbi and to be treated with the greatest respect. They claimed, in point of fact, greater respect than that which was given to parents, for, they said, a man's parents give him ordinary, physical life, but a man's teacher gives him eternal life. They even liked to be called father as Elisha called Elijah (2Kgs.2:12) and as the fathers of the faith were known.

Jesus insists that the Christian should remember that he has one teacher only--and that teacher is Christ; and only one Father in the faith--and that Father is God.

The whole design of the Pharisees was to dress and act in such a way as to draw attention to themselves; the whole design of the Christian should be to obliterate himself, so that if men see his good deeds, they may glorify not him, but his Father in Heaven. Any religion which produces ostentation in action and pride in the heart is a false religion.

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Matthew 23:13

SHUTTING THE DOOR

Matthew 23:13

"Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you shut the door to the Kingdom of Heaven in the face of men! You yourselves are not going into it; nor do you allow those who are trying to get into it to enter it."

Matt.23:13-26 form the most terrible and the most sustained denunciation in the New Testament. Here we hear what A. T. Robertson called "the rolling thunder of Christ's wrath." As Plummer has written, these woes are "like thunder in their unanswerable severity, and like lightning in their unsparing exposure. . . . They illuminate while they strike."

Here Jesus directs a series of seven woes against the Scribes and Pharisees. The Revised Standard Version begins every one of them: "Woe to you!" The Greek word for woe is *ouai* (GSN3759); it is hard to translate for it includes not only wrath, but also sorrow. There is righteous anger here, but it is the anger of the heart of love, broken by the stubborn blindness of men. There is not only an air of savage denunciation; there is also an atmosphere of poignant tragedy.

The word hypocrite occurs here again and again. Originally the Greek word *hupokrites* (GSN5273) meant one who answers; it then came to be specially connected with the statement and answer, the dialogue, of the stage; and it is the regular Greek word for an actor. It then came to mean an actor in the worse sense of the term, a pretender, one who acts a part, one who wears a mask to cover his true feelings, one who puts on an external show while inwardly his thoughts and feelings are very different.

To Jesus the Scribes and Pharisees were men who were acting a part. What he meant was this. Their whole idea of religion consisted in outward observances, the wearing of elaborate phylacteries and tassels, the meticulous observance of the rules and regulations of the Law. But in their hearts there was bitterness and envy and pride and arrogance. To Jesus these Scribes and Pharisees were men who, under a mask of elaborate godliness, concealed hearts in which the most godless feelings and emotions held sway. And that accusation holds good in greater or lesser degree of any man who lives life on the assumption that religion consists in external observances and external acts.

There is an unwritten saying of Jesus which says, "The key of the Kingdom they hid." His condemnation of these Scribes and Pharisees is that they are not only failing to enter the Kingdom themselves, they shut the door on the faces of those who seek to enter. What did he mean by this accusation?

We have already seen (Matt.6:10) that the best way to think of the Kingdom is to think of it as a society on earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. To be a citizen of the Kingdom, and to do God's will, are one and the same thing. The Pharisees believed that to do God's will was to observe their thousands of petty rules and regulations; and nothing could be further from that Kingdom whose basic idea is love. When people tried to find entry into the Kingdom the

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Matthew 23:13

Pharisees presented them with these rules and regulations, which was as good as shutting the door in their faces.

The Pharisees preferred their ideas of religion to God's idea of religion. They had forgotten the basic truth that, if a man would teach others, he must himself first listen to God. The gravest danger which any teacher or preacher encounters is that he should erect his own prejudices into universal principles and substitute his own ideas for the truth of God. When he does that he is not a guide, but a barrier, to the Kingdom, for, misled himself, he misleads others.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 23:15

MISSIONARIES OF EVIL

Matthew 23:15

"Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees, for you range over the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and, when that happens, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves!"

A strange feature of the ancient world was the repulsion and attraction which Judaism exercised over men at one and the same time. There was no more hated people than the Jews. Their separatism and their isolation and their contempt of other nations gained them hostility. It was, in fact, believed that a basic part of their religion was an oath that they would never under any circumstances give help to a Gentile, even to the extent of giving him directions if he asked the way. Their observance of the Sabbath gained them a reputation for laziness; their refusal of swine's flesh gained them mockery, even to the extent of the rumour that they worshipped the pig as their god. Anti-semitism was a real and universal force in the ancient world.

And yet there was an attraction. The idea of one God came as a wonderful thing to a world which believed in a multitude of gods. Jewish ethical purity and standards of morality had a fascination in a world steeped in immorality, especially for women. The result was that many were attracted to Judaism.

Their attraction was on two levels. There were those who were called the god-fearers. These accepted the conception of one God; they accepted the Jewish moral law; but they took no part in the ceremonial law and did not become circumcised. Such people existed in large numbers, and were to be found listening and worshipping in every synagogue, and indeed provided Paul with his most fruitful field for evangelization. They are, for instance, the devout Greeks of Thessalonica (Ac.17:4).

It was the aim of the Pharisees to turn these god-fearers into proselytes; the word proselyte is an English transliteration of a Greek word *proselutos* (GSN4339), which means one who has approached or drawn near. The proselyte was the full convert who had accepted the ceremonial law and circumcision and who had become in the fullest sense a Jew. As so often happens, "the most converted were the most perverted." A convert often becomes the most fanatical devotee of his new religion; and many of these proselytes were more fanatically devoted to the Jewish Law than even the Jews themselves.

Jesus accused these Pharisees of being missionaries of evil. It was true that very few became proselytes, but those who did went the whole way. The sin of the Pharisees was that they were not really seeking to lead men to God, they were seeking to lead them to Pharisaism. One of the gravest dangers which any missionary runs is that he should try to convert people to a sect rather than to a religion, and that he should be more concerned in bringing people to a Church than to Jesus Christ.

Premanand has certain things to say about this sectarianism which so often disfigures so-called Christianity: "I speak as a Christian, God is my Father, the Church is my Mother. Christian is my name; Catholic is my surname. Catholic, because we belong to nothing less than the Church

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Universal. So do we need any other names? Why go on to add Anglican, Episcopalian, Protestant, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, Baptist, and so on, and so on? These terms are divisive, sectarian, narrow. They shrivel up one's soul."

It was not to God the Pharisees sought to lead men; it was to their own sect of Pharisaism. That in fact was their sin. And is that sin even yet gone from the world, when it would still be insisted in certain quarters that a man must leave one Church and become a member of another before he can be allowed a place at the Table of the Lord? The greatest of all heresies is the sinful conviction that any Church has a monopoly of God or of his truth, or that any Church is the only gateway to God's Kingdom.

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Matthew 23:16-22

THE SCIENCE OF EVASION

Matthew 23:16-22

"Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees! Blind guides! You who say, 'If any one swears by the Temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the Temple is bound by his oath.' Foolish ones and blind! Which is the greater? The gold? Or the Temple which hallows the gold? You say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift that is on it, he is bound by his oath.' Blind ones! Which is greater? The gift? Or the altar which hallows the gift? He who swears by the altar, swears by it and all that is on it. He who swears by the Temple, swears by it, and by him who inhabits it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits upon it."

We have already seen that in matters of oaths the Jewish legalists were masters of evasion (Matt.5:33-37). The general principle of evasion was this. To the Jew an oath was absolutely binding, so long as it was a binding oath. Broadly speaking, a binding oath was an oath which definitely and without equivocation employed the name of God; such an oath must be kept, no matter what the cost. Any other oath might be legitimately broken. The idea was that, if God's name was actually used, then God was introduced as a partner into the transaction, and to break the oath was not only to break faith with men but to insult God.

The science of evasion had been brought to a high degree. It is most probable that in this passage Jesus is presenting a caricature of Jewish legalistic methods. He is saying, "You have brought evasion to such a fine art that it is possible to regard an oath by the Temple as not binding, while an oath by the gold of the Temple is binding; and an oath by the altar as not binding, while an oath by the gift on the altar is binding." This is rather to be regarded as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Jewish methods than as a literal description.

The idea behind the passage is just this. The whole idea of treating oaths in this way, the whole conception of a kind of technique of evasion, is born of a fundamental deceitfulness. The truly religious man will never make a promise with the deliberate intention of evading it; he will never, as he makes it, provide himself with a series of escape routes, which he may use if he finds his promise hard to keep.

We need not with conscious superiority condemn the Pharisaic science of evasion. The time is not yet ended when a man seeks to evade some duty on a technicality or calls in the strict letter of the law to avoid doing what the spirit of the law clearly means he ought to do.

For Jesus the binding principle was twofold. God hears every word we speak and God sees every intention of our hearts. In view of that the fine art of evasion is one to which a Christian should be foreign. The technique of evasion may suit the sharp practice of the world; but never the open honesty of the Christian mind.

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Matthew 23:23-24

THE LOST SENSE OF PROPORTION

Matthew 23:23-24

"Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint, and dill, and cummin, and let go the weightier matters of the Law--justice and mercy and fidelity. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others. Blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"

The tithe was an essential part of Jewish religious regulations. "You shall tithe all the yield of your seed, which comes forth from the field year by year" (Deut.14:22). "All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the trees is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord" (Lev.27:30). This tithe was specially for the support of the Levites, whose task it was to do the material work of the Temple. The things which had to be tithed were further defined by the Law--"Everything which is eatable, and is preserved, and has its nourishment from the soil, is liable to be tithed." It is laid down: "Of dill one must tithe the seeds, the leaves and the stalks." So, then, it was laid down that every man must lay aside one-tenth of his produce for God.

The point of Jesus' saying is this. It was universally accepted that tithes of the main crops must be given. But mint and dill and cummin are herbs of the kitchen garden and would not be grown in any quantity; a man would have only a little patch of them. All three were used in cooking, and dill and cummin had medicinal uses. To tithe them was to tithe an infinitesimally small crop, maybe not much more than the produce of one plant. Only those who were superlatively meticulous would tithe the single plants of the kitchen garden.

That is precisely what the Pharisees were like. They were so absolutely meticulous about tithes that they would tithe even one clump of mint; and yet these same men could be guilty of injustice; could be hard and arrogant and cruel, forgetting the claims of mercy; could take oaths and pledges and promises with the deliberate intention of evading them, forgetting fidelity. In other words, many of them kept the trifles of the Law and forgot the things which really matter.

That spirit is not dead; it never will be until Christ rules in the hearts of men. There is many a man who wears the right clothes to church, carefully hands in his offering to the Church, adopts the right attitude at prayer, is never absent from the celebration of the sacrament, and who is not doing an honest day's work and is irritable and bad-tempered and mean with his money. There are women who are full of good works and who serve on all kinds of committees, and whose children are lonely for them at night. There is nothing easier than to observe all the outward actions of religion and yet be completely irreligious.

There is nothing more necessary than a sense of proportion to save us from confusing religious observances with real devotion.

Jesus uses a vivid illustration. In Matt.23:24 a curious thing has happened in the King James Version. It should not be to strain at a gnat, but to strain out a gnat as in the Revised Standard Version. Originally that mistake was simply a misprint but it has been perpetuated for centuries. In

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point of fact the older versions--Tyndale, Coverdale, and the Geneva Bible--all correctly have to strain out a gnat.

The picture is this: A gnat was an insect and therefore unclean; and so was a camel. In order to avoid the risk of drinking anything unclean, wine was strained through muslin gauze so that any possible impurity might be strained out of it. This is a humorous picture which must have raised a laugh, of a man carefully straining his wine through gauze to avoid swallowing a microscopic insect and yet cheerfully swallowing a camel. It is the picture of a man who has completely lost his sense of proportion.

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Matthew 23:25-26

THE REAL CLEANNES

Matthew 23:25-26

"Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of rapacity and lust. Blind Pharisee! cleanse the inside of the cup and the plate first, that the outside of it also may be clean."

The idea of uncleanness is continually arising in the Jewish Law. It must be remembered that this uncleanness was not physical uncleanness. An unclean vessel was not in our sense of the term a dirty vessel. For a person to be ceremonially unclean meant that he could not enter the Temple or the synagogue; he was debarred from the worship of God. A man was unclean if, for instance, he touched a dead body, or came into contact with a Gentile. A woman was unclean if she had a haemorrhage, even if that haemorrhage was perfectly normal and healthy. If a person who was himself unclean touched any vessel, that vessel became unclean; and, thereafter, any other person who touched or handled the vessel became in turn unclean. It was, therefore, of paramount importance to have vessels cleansed; and the law for cleansing them is fantastically complicated. We can quote only certain basic examples of it.

An earthen vessel which is hollow becomes unclean only on the inside and not on the outside; and it can be cleansed only by being broken. The following cannot become unclean at all--a flat plate without a rim, an open coal-shovel, a grid-iron with holes in it for parching grains of wheat. On the other hand, a plate with a rim, or an earthen spice-box, or a writing-case can become unclean. Of vessels made of leather, bone, wood and glass, flat ones do not become unclean; deep ones do. If they are broken, they become clean. Any metal vessel which is at once smooth and hollow can become unclean; but a door, a bolt, a lock, a hinge, a knocker cannot become unclean. If a thing is made of wood and metal, then the wood can become unclean, but the metal cannot. These regulations seem to us fantastic, and yet these are the regulations the Pharisees meticulously kept.

The food or drink inside a vessel might have been obtained by cheating or extortion or theft; it might be luxurious and gluttonous; that did not matter, so long as the vessel itself was ceremonially clean. Here is another example of fussing about trifles and letting the weightier matters go.

Grotesque as the whole thing may seem, it can happen yet. A church can be torn in two about the colour of a carpet, or a pulpit-fall, or about the shape or metal of the cups to be used in the Sacrament. The last thing that men and women seem to learn in matters of religion is a relative sense of values; and the tragedy is that it is so often magnification of matters of no importance which wreck the peace.

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Matthew 23:27-28

DISGUISED DECAY

Matthew 23:27-28

"Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees! for you are like white-washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of dead men, and of all corruption. So you, too, outwardly look righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Here again is a picture which any Jew would understand. One of the commonest places for tombs was by the wayside. We have already seen that anyone who touched a dead body became unclean (Num.19:16). Therefore, anyone who came into contact with a tomb automatically became unclean. At one time in particular the roads of Palestine were crowded with pilgrims--at the time of the Passover Feast. For a man to become unclean on his way to the Passover Feast would be a disaster, for that meant he would be debarred from sharing in it. It was then Jewish practice in the month of Adar to whitewash all wayside tombs, so that no pilgrims might accidentally come into contact with one of them and be rendered unclean.

So, as a man journeyed the roads of Palestine on a spring day, these tombs would glint white, and almost lovely, in the sunshine; but within they were full of bones and bodies whose touch would defile. That, said Jesus, was a precise picture of what the Pharisees were. Their outward actions were the actions of intensely religious men; their inward hearts were foul and putrid with sin.

It can still happen. As Shakespeare had it, a man may smile and smile and be a villain. A man may walk with bowed head and reverent steps and folded hands in the posture of humility, and all the time be looking down with cold contempt on those whom he regards as sinners. His very humility may be the pose of pride; and, as he walks so humbly, he may be thinking with relish of the picture of piety which he presents to those who are watching him. There is nothing harder than for a good man not to know that he is good; and once he knows he is good, his goodness is gone, however he may appear to men from the outside.

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Matthew 23:29-36

THE TAIN OF MURDER

Matthew 23:29-36

Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you erect the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in the murder of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves that you are the sons of those who slew the prophets. Fill up the measure of your fathers. Serpents, brood of vipers, how are you to escape being condemned to hell fire? For this reason, look you, I send you the prophets and the wise men and the scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and pursue them with persecution from city to city, that on you there may fall the responsibility for all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of Abel, the righteous, to the blood of Zacharias, the son of Barachios, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar.

This is the truth I tell you--the responsibility for all these crimes shall fall on this generation."

Jesus is charging the Jews that the taint of murder is in their history and that that taint has not even yet worked itself out. The Scribes and Pharisees tend the tombs of the martyrs and beautify their memorials, and claim that, if they had lived in the old days, they would not have slain the prophets and the men of God. But that is precisely what they would have done, and precisely what they are going to do.

Jesus' charge is that the history of Israel is the history of the murder of the men of God. He says that the righteous men from Abel to Zacharias were murdered. Why are these two chosen? The murder of Abel by Cain everyone knows; but the murder of Zacharias is not nearly so well known. The story is told in a grim little cameo in 2Chr.24:20-22. It happened in the days of Joash. Zacharias rebuked the nation for their sin, and Joash stirred up the people to stone him to death in the very Temple court; and Zacharias died saying, "May the Lord see and avenge!" (Zacharias is called the son of Barachios, whereas, in fact, he was the son of Jehoiada, no doubt a slip of the gospel writer in retelling the story.)

Why should Zacharias be chosen? In the Hebrew Bible Genesis is the first book, as it is in ours; but, unlike our order of the books, 2 Chronicles is the last in the Hebrew Bible. We could say that the murder of Abel is the first in the Bible story, and the murder of Zacharias the last. From beginning to end, the history of Israel is the rejection, and often the slaughter, of the men of God.

Jesus is quite clear that the murder taint is still there. He knows that now he must die, and that in the days to come his messengers will be persecuted and ill-treated and rejected and slain.

Here indeed is tragedy; the nation which God chose and loved had turned their hands against him; and the day of reckoning was to come.

It makes us think. When history judges us, will its verdict be that we were the hinderers or the helpers of God? That is a question which every individual, and every nation, must answer.

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Matthew 23:37-39

THE REJECTION OF LOVE'S APPEAL

Matthew 23:37-39

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killer of the prophets, stoner of those sent to you, how often have I wished to gather your children together, as a bird gathers her nestlings under her wings--and you refused. Look you, your house is left to you desolate, for I tell you from now you will not see me until you will say, 'Blessed in the name of the Lord is he that comes.'"

Here is all the poignant tragedy of rejected love. Here Jesus speaks, not so much as the stern judge of all the earth, as the lover of the souls of men.

There is one curious light this passage throws on the life of Jesus which we may note in the passing. According to the Synoptic Gospels Jesus was never in Jerusalem after his public ministry began, until he came to this last Passover Feast. We can see here how much the gospel story leaves out, for Jesus could not have said what he says here unless he had paid repeated visits to Jerusalem and issued to the people repeated appeals. A passage like this shows us that in the gospels we have the merest sketch and outline of the life of Jesus.

This passage shows us four great truths.

(i) It shows us the patience of God. Jerusalem had killed the prophets and stoned the messengers of God; yet God did not cast her off; and in the end he sent his Son. There is a limitless patience in the love of God which bears with men's sinning and will not cast them off.

(ii) It shows us the appeal of Jesus. Jesus speaks as the lover. He will not force an entry; the only weapon he can use is the appeal of love. He stands with outstretched hands of appeal, an appeal which men have the awful responsibility of being able to accept or to refuse.

(iii) It shows us the deliberation of the sin of man. Men looked on Christ in all the splendour of his appeal--and refused him. There is no handle on the outside of the door of the human heart; it must be opened from the inside; and sin is the open-eyed deliberate refusal of the appeal of God in Jesus Christ.

(iv) It shows us the consequences of rejecting Christ. Only forty years were to pass and in A.D. 70 Jerusalem would be a heap of ruins. That disaster was the direct consequence of the rejection of Jesus Christ. Had the Jews accepted the Christian way of love and abandoned the way of power politics, Rome would never have descended on them with its avenging might. It is the fact of history--even in time--that the nation which rejects God is doomed to disaster.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 24

THE VISION OF THINGS TO COME

We have already seen that it is one of the great characteristics of Matthew that he gathers together in large blocks the teaching of Jesus about different subjects. In Matt.24 he gathers together things that Jesus said about the future and gives us the vision of things to come. In so doing Matthew weaves together sayings of Jesus about different aspects of the future; and it will make this difficult chapter very much easier to understand if we can disentangle the various strands and look at them one by one.

Matthew's interweaving of the sayings of Jesus lasts throughout Matt.23:31. It will be best if, first of all, we set down these verses as a whole; if, next, we set down the various aspects of the future with which they deal; and if, last, we try to assign each section to its place in the pattern. We cannot claim certainty or finality for the pattern which we obtain; but, the general picture will become clear.

First then, we set down the verses, and we shall number them to make easier their assignment to their place in the pattern.

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Matthew 24:1-31

THE VISION OF THE FUTURE

Matthew 24:1-31

1. When Jesus had left the precincts of the Temple, he was going away; and his disciples came to him to point out to him the 2. buildings of the Temple area. He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? This is the truth I tell you--one stone will not be left here upon another that will not be thrown down." 3. His disciples came to him privately when he was sitting on the Mount of Olives. "Tell us," they said, "when these things shall be. And tell us what will be the sign of your coming, and of the 4. consummation of the age." Jesus answered, "Be on the look-out 5. lest anyone lead you astray, for many will come in my name saying, 'I am God's Anointed One,' and they will lead many 6. astray. You will hear of wars and reports of wars. See that you are not disturbed; for these things must happen; but the end is not 7. yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various 8. places. All these things are the beginning of the agonies.

Then 9. they will deliver you to affliction, and they will kill you, and you 10. will be hated by all nations because of my name. And then many will stumble, and will betray each other, and will hate each other. 11. And many false prophets will arise, and they will lead many 12. astray. And the love of many will grow cold, because lawlessness 13. will be multiplied. But it is he who endures to the end who will be 14. saved. And the gospel will be proclaimed to the whole inhabited world, for a testimony to all nations--and then the end will come. 15. When you see the desolating abomination, which was spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the Holy Place (let him who 16. reads understand), then let him who is in Judaea flee to the 17. mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to 18. remove his goods from his house; and let him who is in the field 19. not come back to remove his cloak. Alas for those who in those days are carrying children in the womb, and who are suckling 20. children.

Pray that your flight may not be in the winter time, nor 21. on a Sabbath. For at that time there will be great affliction, such as has never happened from the beginning of the world until now, 22. and such as never will happen. And, if the days had not been shortened, no human being would have survived. But the days 23. will be shortened for the sake of the elect. At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look you, here, or here, is the Anointed One of 24. God,' do not believe him. For false Messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will produce great signs and wonders, the consequences of which will be, if possible, to lead astray the elect. 25. Look you, I have told you about these things before they happen. 26. If anyone says to you, 'Look you, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. 'Look you, he is in the inner chambers,' do not believe him. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as 28. the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man. Where the 29.

body is, there the vultures will be gathered. Immediately after the affliction of these days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the 30. powers of heaven will be shaken. Then there will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will lament, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the 31. clouds of heaven with power and much glory. And he will send his angels with a great trumpet call, and they will gather the elect from the four winds, from one boundary of heaven to the other."

THE INTERWEAVING OF THE STRANDS

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 24:1-31

There then is the composite vision of the future which Matthew collects for us; we must now try to disentangle the various strands in it. At this stage we only indicate the strands and leave fuller explanation for the detailed commentary.

(i) Some verses which foretell the terrible days of the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, the Roman general, a siege which was one of the most terrible in all history. These are Matt.24:15-22.

(ii) Some verses tell of the ultimate complete destruction of Jerusalem and its reduction to a heap of ruins. These are Matt.24:1-2.

(iii) Some verses paint pictures taken from the Jewish conception of the Day of the Lord. We have spoken about that conception before but we must briefly outline it again. The Jews divided all time into two ages--this present age, and the age to come. The present age is wholly bad and beyond all hope of human reformation. It can be mended only by the direct intervention of God. When God does intervene the golden age, the age to come, will arrive. But in between the two ages there will come the Day of the Lord, which will be a time of terrible and fearful upheaval, like the birth-pangs of a new age.

In the Old Testament itself there is many a picture of the Day of the Lord; and in the Jewish books written between the Old and the New Testaments these pictures are further developed and made still more vivid and still more terrible.

It will be a time of terror. "A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zeph.1:14-18). The pictures of that terror became ever more lurid.

It will come suddenly. "The Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1Th.5:2). "Three things," said the Rabbis, "are sudden--the coming of the Messiah, a discovery, and a scorpion."

The universe will be shattered to pieces. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood (Jl.2:30-31; Isa.13:10,13).

It will be a time of moral chaos, when moral standards will be turned upside down, and when even nature will act contrary to herself, and when wars and violence and hatred will be the common atmosphere of life.

Schurer (The Jewish People in the Time of Christ ii, 154) sums up the Jewish ideas of the day of the Lord, ideas with which Jewish literature was full and which everyone knew in the time of Jesus. "The sun and moon will be darkened, swords appear in heaven, trains of horses and foot march through the clouds. Everything in nature falls into commotion and confusion. The sun appears by night, the moon by day. Blood trickles from wood, the stone gives forth a voice, and salt is found in fresh water. Places that have been sown will appear as unsown, full barns be found empty, and the springs of wells be stopped. Among men all restraints of order will be dissolved, sin and ungodliness rule upon earth. And men will fight against each other as if stricken with madness, the

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Matthew 24:1-31

friend against the friend, the son against the father, the daughter against the mother. Nation will rise against nation, and to war shall be added earthquake, fire and famine, whereby men shall be carried off."

Such were the terrible pictures of the day of the Lord.. The verses are Matt.24:6-8 and Matt.24:29-31.

(iv) Some verses deal with the persecution which the followers of Christ will have to endure. These are Matt.24:9-10.

(v) Some verses deal with the threats which will develop against the life and purity of the Church. These are Matt.24:4-5, Matt.24:11-13 and Matt.24:23-26.

(vi) Some verses speak directly of the Second Coming of Christ. These are Matt.24:3, Matt.24:14 and Matt.24:27-28.

So, in this amazing and difficult chapter of Matthew, we have in Matt.24:1-31 a kind of sixfold vision of the future. We now go on to look at this vision, not taking the verses of the chapter consecutively, but taking together in turn those which deal with each strand.

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Matthew 24:1-2

THE DOOM OF THE HOLY CITY

Matthew 24:1-2

When Jesus had left the precincts of the Temple, he was going away; and his disciples came to him to point out to him the buildings of the Temple area. He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? This is the truth I tell you--one stone will not be left here upon another that will not be thrown down."

It may well be that at least some of the disciples had not been very often to Jerusalem. They were Galileans, men of the highlands and of the country, fishermen who knew the lakeside far better than they knew the city. Some of them at least would be like country folk come up to London for a visit, staggered by what they saw; and well they might be, for there was nothing quite like the Temple in the ancient world.

The summit of Mount Sion had been dug away to leave a plateau of 1,000 feet square. At the far end of it was the Temple itself (the naos, GSN3485). It was built of white marble plated with gold, and it shone in the sun so that a man could scarcely bear to look at it. Between the lower city and the Temple mount lay the valley of the Tyropoeon, and across this valley stretched a colossal bridge. Its arches had a span of 41 1/2 feet, and its spring stones were 24 feet long by 6 inches thick. The Temple area was surrounded by great porches, Solomon's Porch and the Royal Porch. These porches were upheld by pillars, cut out of solid blocks of marble in one piece. They were 37 1/2 feet high, and of such a thickness that three men linked together could scarcely put their arms round them. At the corners of the Temple angle stones have been found which measure from 20 to 40 feet in length, and which weigh more than 100 tons. How they were ever cut and placed in position is one of the mysteries of ancient engineering.

Little wonder that the Galilaean fishermen looked and called Jesus' attention to them.

Jesus answered that the day would come when not one of these stones would be left standing upon the other--and Jesus was right. In A.D. 70 the Romans, finally exasperated by the rebellious intransigence of the Jews, gave up all attempt at pacification and turned to destruction, and Jerusalem and the Temple were laid waste so that Jesus' prophecy literally came true.

Here speaks Jesus the prophet. Jesus knew that the way of power politics can end only in doom. The man and the nation which will not take the way of God are heading for disaster--even in material things. The man and the nation which refuse the dream of God will find their own dreams shattered also.

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Matthew 24:3, 14, 27-28

THE COMING OF THE KING

Matthew 24:3; Matthew 24:14; Matthew 24:27-28

His disciples came to him privately, when he was sitting on the Mount of Olives. "Tell us," they said, "when these things shall be. And tell us what will be the sign of your coming, and of the consummation of the age."

"The gospel will be proclaimed to the whole inhabited world, for a testimony to all nations--and then the end will come."

"For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so shall be the coming of the Son of Man. Where the body is, there the vultures will be gathered together."

Here Jesus speaks of his Second Coming directly. The New Testament does not ever use the phrase the Second Coming. The word which it uses to describe the return of Christ in glory is interesting. It is Parousia; this word has come into English as a description of the Second Coming; it is quite common in the rest of the New Testament, but in the gospels this is the only chapter in which it occurs (Matt.24:3, Matt.24:27, Matt.24:37,39). The interesting thing is that it is the regular word for the arrival of a governor into his province or for the coming of a king to his subjects. It regularly describes a coming in authority and in power.

The remainder of this chapter will have much to tell us about it, but at the moment we note that, whatever else is true about the doctrine of the Second Coming, it certainly conserves two great facts.

(i) It conserves the fact of the ultimate triumph of Christ. He whom men crucified on a cross will one day be the Lord of all men. For Jesus Christ the end is sure--and that end is his universal kingship.

(ii) It conserves the fact that history is going somewhere. Sometimes men have felt that history was plunging to an ever wilder and wilder chaos, that it is nothing more than "the record of the sins and follies of men." Sometimes men have felt that history was cyclic and that the same weary round of things would happen over and over again. The Stoics believed that there are certain fixed periods, that at the end of each the world is destroyed in a great conflagration; and that then the same story in every littlest detail takes place all over again.

As Chrysippus had it: "Then again the world is restored anew in a precisely similar arrangement as before. The stars again move in their orbits, each performing its revolution in the former period, without any variation. Socrates and Plato and each individual man will live again, with the same friends and fellow-citizens. They will go through the same experiences and the same activities. Every city and village and field will be restored, just as it was. And this restoration of the universe takes place, not once, but over and over again--indeed to all eternity, without end." This is a grim thought that men are bound to an eternal tread-mill in which there is no progress and from which there is no escape.

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Matthew 24:3, 14, 27-28

But the Second Coming has in it this essential truth--that there is "one divine far-off event, to which the whole creation moves," and that event is not dissolution but the universal and eternal rule of God.

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Matthew 24:4-5, 11-13, 23-26

THREATS TO THE FAITH

Matthew 24:4-5,11-13; Matthew 24:23-26

Jesus answered, "Be on the look-out lest anyone lead you astray, for many will come in my name saying, 'I am God's Anointed One,' and they will lead many astray.

"And many false prophets will arise, and they will lead many astray. And the love of many will grow cold, because lawlessness will be multiplied. But it is he who endures to the end who will be saved.

"At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look you, here, or here, is the Anointed One of God,' do not believe him. For false Messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will produce great signs and wonders, the consequence of which will be, if possible, to lead astray the elect. Look you, I have told you about these things before they happen. If anyone says to you, 'Look you, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. 'Look you, he is in the inner chambers,' do not believe him."

In the days to come Jesus saw that two dangers would threaten the Church.

(i) There would be the danger of false, leaders. A false leader is a man who seeks to propagate his own version of the truth rather than the truth as it is in Jesus Christ; and a man who tries to attach other men to himself rather than to Jesus Christ. The inevitable result is that a false leader spreads division instead of building up unity. The test of any leader is likeness to Christ.

(ii) The second danger is that of discouragement. There are those whose love will grow cold because of the increasing lawlessness of the world. The true Christian is the man who holds to his belief, when belief is at its most difficult; and who, in the most discouraging circumstances, refuses to believe that God's arm is shortened or his power grown less.

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Matthew 24:6-8, 29-31

THE DAY OF THE LORD

Matthew 24:6-8; Matthew 24:29-31

"You will hear of wars and reports of wars. See that you are not disturbed; for these things must happen; for the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

"Immediately after the affliction of these days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then there will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will lament, and they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and much glory. And he will send his angels with a great trumpet call, and they will gather the elect from the four winds, from one boundary of heaven to the other."

We have already seen that an essential part of the Jewish thought of the future was the Day of the Lord that day when God was going to intervene directly in history, and when the present age, with all its incurable evil, would begin to be transformed into the age to come.

Very naturally the New Testament writers to a very great extent identified the Second Coming of Jesus and the Day of the Lord; and they took over all the imagery which had to do with the Day of the Lord and applied them to the Second Coming. None of these pictures is to be taken literally; they are pictures, and they are visions; they are attempts to put the indescribable into human words and to find some kind of picture for happenings for which human language has no picture.

But from all these pictures there emerge certain great truths.

(i) They tell us that God has not abandoned the world; for all its wickedness, the world is still the scene in which God's purpose is being worked out. It is not abandonment that God contemplates; it is intervention.

(ii) They tell us that even a very crescendo of evil must not discourage us. An essential part of the Jewish picture of the Day of the Lord is that a complete breakdown of all moral standards and an apparent complete disintegration of the world must precede it. But, for all that, this is not the prelude to destruction; it is the prelude to recreation.

(iii) They tell us that both judgment and a new creation are certain. They tell us that God contemplates the world both in justice and in mercy; and that God's plan is not the obliteration of the world, but the creation of a world which is nearer to his heart's desire.

The value of these pictures is not in their details, which at best are only symbolic and which use the only pictures which the minds of men could conceive, but in the eternal truth which they conserve; and the basic truth in them is that, whatever the world is like, God has not abandoned it.

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Matthew 24:9-10

THE PERSECUTION TO COME

Matthew 24:9-10

"Then they will deliver you to affliction, and they will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. And then many will stumble and will betray each other, and will hate each other."

This passage shows the uncompromising honesty of Jesus. He never promised his disciples an easy way; he promised them death and suffering and persecution. There is a sense in which a real Church will always be a persecuted Church, so long as it exists in a world which is not a Christian world. Whence comes that persecution?

(i) Christ offers a new loyalty; and again and again he declared that this new loyalty must surpass all earthly ties. The greatest ground of hatred in the days of the early Church was the fact that Christianity split homes and families, when one member decided for Christ and the others did not. The Christian is one who is pledged to give Jesus Christ the first place in his life--and many a human clash is liable to result from that.

(ii) Christ offers a new standard. There are customs and practices and ways of life which may be all right for the world, but which are far from being all right for the Christian. For many people the difficulty about Christianity is that it is a judgment upon themselves and upon their way of life in their business or in their personal relationships. The awkward thing about Christianity is that anyone who does not wish to be changed is bound to hate it and resent it.

(iii) The Christian, if he is a true Christian, introduces into the world a new example. There is a daily beauty in his life which makes the life of others ugly. The Christian is the light of the world, not in the sense that he criticizes and condemns others, but in the sense that he demonstrates in himself the beauty of the Christ-filled life and therefore the ugliness of the Christless life.

(iv) This is all to say that Christianity brings a new conscience into life. Neither the individual Christian nor the Christian Church can ever know anything of a cowardly concealment or a cowardly silence. The Church and the individual Christian must at all times constitute the conscience of Christianity--and it is characteristic of men that there are many times when they would wish to silence conscience.

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Matthew 24:15-22

THE GRIM TERROR OF THE SIEGE

Matthew 24:15-22

"When you see the desolating abomination, which was spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the Holy Place (let him who reads understand), then let him who is in Judaea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not come down to remove his goods from his house; and let him who is in the field not come back to remove his cloak. Alas for those who in those days are carrying children in the womb, and who are suckling children. Pray that your flight may not be in the winter time, nor on a Sabbath. For at that time there will be great affliction, such as has never happened from the beginning of the world until now, and such as never will happen. And, if the days had not been shortened, no human being would have survived. But the days will be shortened for the sake of the elect."

The siege of Jerusalem was one of the most terrible sieges in all history. Jerusalem was obviously a difficult city to take, being a city set upon a hill and defended by religious fanatics; so Titus determined to starve it out.

No one quite knows what the desolating abomination is. The phrase itself comes from Dn.12:11. There it is said that the abomination that makes desolate is set up in the Temple. The Daniel reference is quite clear. About 170 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes, the king of Syria, determined to stamp out Judaism and to introduce into Judaea Greek religion and Greek practices. He captured Jerusalem, and desecrated the Temple by erecting an altar to Olympian Zeus in the Temple Court and by sacrificing swines' flesh upon it, and by turning the priests' rooms and the Temple chambers into public brothels. It was a deliberate attempt to stamp out Jewish religion.

It was the prophecy of Jesus that the same thing would happen again, and that once again the Holy Place would be desecrated, as indeed it was. Jesus saw coming upon Jerusalem a repetition of the terrible things which had happened 200 years ago; only this time there would arise no Judas Maccabaeus; this time there would be no deliverance and no purification; there would be nothing but ultimate destruction.

Jesus foretold of that siege that unless its days had been shortened, no human being could have survived it. It is strange to see how Jesus gave practical advice which was not taken, the disregarding of which multiplied the disaster. Jesus' advice was that when that day came men ought to flee to the mountains. They did not; they crammed themselves into the city and into the walls of Jerusalem from all over the country, and that very folly multiplied the grim horror of the famine of the siege a hundredfold.

When we go to the history of Josephus we see how right Jesus was about that terrible future. Josephus writes of these fearful days of siege and famine: "Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying of famine; and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the market-places like shadows, all swelled with famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them. As for burying

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Matthew 24:15-22

them, those that were sick themselves were not able to do it; and those that were hearty and well were deterred from doing it by the great multitude of those dead bodies, and by the uncertainty there was how soon they should die themselves, for many died as they were burying others, and many went to their coffins before the fatal hour was come.

Nor was there any lamentation made under these calamities, nor were heard any mournful complaints; but the famine confounded all natural passions; for those who were just, going to die looked upon those who were gone to their rest before them with dry eyes and open mouths. A deep silence, also, and a kind of deadly night had seized upon the city. . . . And every one of them died with their eyes fixed upon the Temple" (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 5. 12. 3).

Josephus tells a dreadful story of a woman who in those days actually killed and roasted and ate her suckling child (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 6. 3. 4). He tells us that even the Romans, when they had taken the city and were going through it to plunder, were so stricken with horror at the sights they saw that they could not but stay their hands. "When the Romans were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses. . . . They then stood on a horror of this sight, and went out without touching anything" (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 6. 8. 5). Josephus himself shared in the horrors of this siege, and he tells us that 97,000 were taken captive and enslaved, and 1,100,000 died.

That is what Jesus foresaw; these are the things he forewarned. We must never forget that not only men but nations need the wisdom of Christ. Unless the leaders of the nations are themselves led by Christ, they cannot do other than lead men not only to spiritual but also to physical disaster. Jesus was no impractical dreamer; he laid down the laws by which alone a nation can prosper, and by disregard of which it can do no other than miserably perish.

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Matthew 24:32-41

THE COMING OF THE KING

Matthew 24:32-41

"Learn the lesson which comes from the fig tree. Whenever the branch has become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you too see these things, know that he is near at the doors. This is the truth I tell you--this generation shall not pass away, until these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"No one knows about that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, not even the Son, but only the Father. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For, as in those days before the flood they spent their time eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and were quite unaware of what was to happen until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. At that time there will be two men in the field; one is taken, and the other is left. There will be two women grinding with the mill; one is taken, and the other is left."

Few passages confront us with greater difficulties than this. It is in two sections and they seem to contradict each other. The first (Matt.24:32-35) seems to indicate that, as a man can tell by the signs of nature when summer is on the way, so he can tell by the signs of the world when the Second Coming is on the way. Then it seems to go on to say that the Second Coming will happen within the lifetime of the generation listening to Jesus at that moment.

The second section (Matt.24:36-41) says quite definitely that no one knows the time of the Second Coming, not the angels, not even Jesus himself, but only God; and that it will come upon men with the suddenness of a rainstorm out of a blue sky.

There is a very real difficulty here which, even if we cannot completely solve it, we must nevertheless boldly face.

Let us take as our starting-point Matt.24:34: "This is the truth I tell you--this generation shall not pass away, until these things have happened." When we consider that saying, three possibilities emerge.

(a) If Jesus said it in reference to the Second Coming, he was mistaken for he did not return within the lifetime of the generation listening to his words. Many accept that point of view, believing that Jesus in his humanity had limitations of knowledge and did believe that within that generation he would return. We can readily accept that in his humanity Jesus had limitations of knowledge; but it is difficult to believe that he was in error regarding so great a spiritual truth as this.

(b) It is possible that Jesus said something like this which was changed in the transmitting. In Mk.9:1 Jesus is reported as saying, "Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power." That was gloriously and

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Matthew 24:32-41

triumphantly true. Within that generation the Kingdom of God did spread mightily until there were Christians throughout the known world.

Now the early Christians did look for the Second Coming immediately. In their situation of suffering and persecution they looked and longed for the release that the coming of their Lord would bring, and sometimes they took sayings which were intended to speak of the Kingdom and attached them to the Second Coming which is a very different thing. Something like that may have happened here. What Jesus may have said was that his kingdom would come mightily before that generation had passed away.

(e) But there is a third possibility. What if the phrase until these things have happened has no reference to the Second Coming? What if their reference is, in fact, to the prophecy with which the chapter began, the siege and fall of Jerusalem? If we accept that, there is no difficulty. What Jesus is saying is that these grim warnings of his regarding the doom of Jerusalem will be fulfilled within that very generation--and they were, in fact, fulfilled forty years later. It seems by far the best course to take Matt.24:32-35 as referring, not to the Second Coming, but to the doom of Jerusalem, for then all the difficulties in them are removed.

Matt.24:36-41 do refer to the Second Coming; and they tell us certain most important truths.

(i) They tell us that the hour of that event is known to God and to God alone. It is, therefore, clear that speculation regarding the time of the Second Coming is nothing less than blasphemy, for the man who so speculates is seeking to wrest from God secrets which belong to God alone. It is not any man's duty to speculate; it is his duty to prepare himself, and to watch.

(ii) They tell us that that time will come with shattering suddenness on those who are immersed in material things. In the old story Noah prepared himself in the calm weather for the flood which was to come, and when it came he was ready. But the rest of mankind were lost in their eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage, and were caught completely unawares, and were therefore swept away. These verses are a warning never to become so immersed in time that we forgot eternity, never to let our concern with worldly affairs, however necessary, completely distract us from remembering that there is a God, that the issues of life and death are in his hands, and that whenever his call comes, at morning, at midday, or at evening, it must find us ready.

(iii) They tell us that the coming of Christ will be a time of separation and of judgment, when he will gather to himself those who are his own.

Beyond these things we cannot go--for God has kept the ultimate knowledge to himself and his wisdom.

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Matthew 24:42-51

READY FOR THE COMING OF THE KING

Matthew 24:42-51

Watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes. Understand this--that if the householder had known at what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have been awake, and he would not have allowed him to break into his house. That is why you, too, must show yourselves ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Who, then, is the dependable and wise servant whom his master put in charge over his household staff, to give them their food at the right time? Happy is the servant whom his master, when he has come, will find acting thus. This is the truth I tell you--he will put him in charge of all his belongings. But if that bad servant says to himself, 'My master will not be back for a long time yet,' and if he begins to beat his fellow-servants, and if he eats and drinks with drunkards, then the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not expecting him, and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there."

Here is the practical outcome of all that has gone before. If the day and the hour of the coming of Christ are known to none save God, then all life must be a constant preparation for that coming. And, if that is so, there are certain basic sins.

(i) To live without watchfulness invites disaster. A thief does not send a letter saying when he is going to burgle a house; his principal weapon in his nefarious undertakings is surprise; therefore a householder who has valuables in his house must maintain a constant guard. But to get this picture right, we must remember that the watching of the Christian for the coming of Christ is not that of terror-stricken fear and shivering apprehension; it is the watching of eager expectation for the coming of glory and joy.

(ii) The spirit which leads to disaster is the spirit which says there is plenty of time. It is the comfortable delusion of the servant that he will have plenty of time to put things to rights before his master returns.

There is a fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt and ruin men. The first said, "I will tell them there is no God." Satan said, "That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God." The second said, "I will tell men there is no hell." Satan answered, "You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin." The third said, "I will tell men there is no hurry." "Go," said Satan, "and you will ruin them by the thousand." The most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time. The most dangerous day in a man's life is when he learns that there is such a word as tomorrow. There are things which must not be put off, for no man knows if for him tomorrow will ever come.

(iii) Rejection is based on failure in duty, and reward is based on fidelity. The servant who fulfilled his duty faithfully was given a still greater place; and the servant who failed was dealt with

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Matthew 24:42-51

in severity. The inevitable conclusion is that, when he comes, Jesus Christ can find us employed in no better and greater task than in doing our duty.

A negro poet writes:

"There's a king and a captain high,
And he's coming by and by,
And he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.
You can hear his legions charging in the regions of the sky,
And he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.
There's a man they thrust aside,
Who was tortured till he died,
And he'll find me hosing cotton when he comes.
He was hated and rejected,
He was scorned and crucified,
And he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.
When he comes! When he comes!
He'll be crowned by saints and angels when he comes.
They'll be shouting out Hosanna! to the man that men denied,
And I'll kneel among my cotton when he comes."

If a man is doing his duty, however simple that duty may be, on the day Christ comes there will be joy for him.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 25:1-13

THE FATE OF THE UNPREPARED

Matthew 25:1-13

What will happen in the Kingdom of Heaven is like the situation which arose when ten virgins took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish took their lamps, but did not take oil with them; but the wise took oil in their vessels together with their lamps. When the bridegroom was long in coming, all of them settled down to rest and slept. In the middle of the night the cry went up, 'Look you, the bridegroom! Go out to meet him!' Then all these virgins awoke, and they prepared their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise ones. 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps have gone out.' But the wise answered, 'No; we cannot do that in case there is not enough for us and for you. Go rather to those who sell oil, and buy it for yourselves.' While they went away to buy oil, the bridegroom came; and those who were ready entered with him into the marriage celebrations, and the door was shut. Later the rest of the virgins came too.

'Sir, sir,' they said, 'open the door to us.' But he answered, 'This is the truth I tell you--I do not know you.' Be on the watch then, for you do not know the day and the hour.'

If we look at this parable with western eyes, it may seem an unnatural and a "made-up" story. But, in point of fact, it tells a story which could have happened at any time in a Palestinian village and which could still happen today.

A wedding was a great occasion. The whole village turned out to accompany the couple to their new home, and they went by the longest possible road, in order that they might receive the glad good wishes of as many as possible. "Everyone," runs the Jewish saying, "from six to sixty will follow the marriage drum." The Rabbis agreed that a man might even abandon the study of the law to share in the joy of a wedding feast.

The point of this story lies in a Jewish custom which is very different from anything we know. When a couple married, they did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home; for a week they kept open house; they were treated, and even addressed, as prince and princess; it was the gladdest week in all their lives. To the festivities of that week their chosen friends were admitted; and it was not only the marriage ceremony, it was also that joyous week that the foolish virgins missed, because they were unprepared.

The story of how they missed it all is perfectly true to life. Dr. J. Alexander Findlay tells of what he himself saw in Palestine. "When we were approaching the gates of a Galilaean town," he writes, "I caught a sight of ten maidens gaily clad and playing some kind of musical instrument, as they danced along the road in front of our car; when I asked what they were doing, the dragoman told me that they were going to keep the bride company till her bridegroom arrived. I asked him if there was any chance of seeing the wedding, but he shook his head, saying in effect: 'It might be tonight, or tomorrow night, or in a fortnight's time; nobody ever knows for certain.' Then he went on to explain that one of the great things to do, if you could, at a middle-class wedding in Palestine was to catch the bridal party napping.

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Matthew 25:1-13

So the bridegroom comes unexpectedly, and sometimes in the middle of the night; it is true that he is required by public opinion to send a man along the street to shout: 'Behold! the bridegroom is coming!' but that may happen at any time; so the bridal party have to be ready to go out into the street at any time to meet him, whenever he chooses to come. ... Other important points are that no one is allowed on the streets after dark without a lighted lamp, and also that, when the bridegroom has once arrived, and the door has been shut, late-comers to the ceremony are not admitted." There the whole drama of Jesus' parable is re-enacted in the twentieth century. Here is no synthetic story but a slice of life from a village in Palestine.

Like so many of Jesus' parables, this one has an immediate and local meaning, and also a wider and universal meaning.

In its immediate significance it was directed against the Jews. They were the chosen people; their whole history should have been a preparation for the coming of the Son of God; they ought to have been prepared for him when he came. Instead they were quite unprepared and therefore were shut out. Here in dramatic form is the tragedy of the unpreparedness of the Jews.

But the parable has at least two universal warnings.

(i) It warns us that there are certain things which cannot be obtained at the last minute. It is far too late for a student to be preparing when the day of the examination has come. It is too late for a man to acquire a skill, or a character, if he does not already possess it, when some task offers itself to him. Similarly, it is easy to leave things so late that we can no longer prepare ourselves to meet with God. When Mary of Orange was dying, her chaplain sought to tell her of the way of salvation. Her answer was: "I have not left this matter to this hour." To be too late is always tragedy.

(ii) It warns us that there are certain things which cannot be borrowed. The foolish virgins found it impossible to borrow oil, when they discovered they needed it. A man cannot borrow a relationship with God; he must possess it for himself. A man cannot borrow a character; he must be clothed with it. We cannot always be living on the spiritual capital which others have amassed. There are certain things we must win or acquire for ourselves, for we cannot borrow them from others.

Tennyson took this parable and turned it into verse in the song the little novice sang to Guinevere the queen, when Guinevere had too late discovered the cost of sin:

"Late, late so late! and dark the night and chill!
Late, late so late! but we can enter still.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

No light had we; for that we do repent;
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!

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Matthew 25:1-13

O let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late: ye cannot enter now.

Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now."

There is no knell so laden with regret as the sound of the words too late.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 25:14-30

THE CONDEMNATION OF THE BURIED TALENT

Matthew 25:14-30

Even so, a man who was going abroad called his servants, and handed over his belongings to them. To one he gave a thousand pounds; to another five hundred pounds; to another two hundred and fifty pounds; to each according to his individual ability. So he went away. Straightway the man who had received the thousand pounds went and worked with them, and made another thousand pounds. In the same way the man who had received the five hundred pounds made another five hundred pounds of profit. But the man who had received the two hundred and fifty pounds went away and dug up the earth, and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants came, and struck a reckoning with them. The one who had received the thousand pounds came and brought another thousand pounds. 'Sir,' he said, 'you gave me a thousand pounds. Look! I have made a profit of another thousand pounds.' His master said to him, 'Well done! good and faithful servant.

You have been faithful in a few things; I will put you in charge over many things; enter into the joy of your master.' The one who had received the five hundred pounds came and said, 'Sir, you handed over to me five hundred pounds. Look! I have made a profit of another five hundred pounds.' His master said to him, 'Well done! good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge over many things.' The one who had received the two hundred and fifty pounds came also. 'Sir,' he said, 'I knew that you are a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you do not winnow. So I was afraid, and I went away and hid your two hundred and fifty pounds in the earth. Look! you have what is yours.' The master answered him, 'Evil and timid servant! You were well aware that I reap where I have not sowed, and that I gather where I have not winnowed. You ought to have put my money out to the bankers, and when I came I would have received back what is my own with interest.

Take, then, the two hundred and fifty pounds from him, and give it to him who has the two thousand pounds. For to everyone who has, it will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away from him. And cast the useless servant into the outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth there.'"

Like the preceding one this parable had an immediate lesson for those who heard it for the first time, and a whole series of permanent lessons for us today. It is always known as the Parable of the Talents; in our translation we have changed the talents into modern currency. The talent was not a coin, it was a weight; and therefore its value obviously depended on whether the coinage involved was copper, gold or silver. The commonest metal involved was silver; and the value of a talent of silver was about 240 British pounds. It is on that basis that we have made the translations of the various sums.

There can be no doubt that originally in this parable the whole attention is riveted on the useless servant. There can be little doubt that he stands for the Scribes and the Pharisees, and for their attitude to the Law and the truth of God. The useless servant buried his talent in the ground, in order that he might hand it back to his master exactly as it was. The whole aim of the Scribes and Pharisees was to keep the Law exactly as it was. In their own phrase, they sought "to build a fence

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around the Law." Any change, any development, any alteration, anything new was to them anathema. Their method involved the paralysis of religious truth.

Like the man with the talent, they desired to keep things exactly as they were--and it is for that that they are condemned. In this parable Jesus tells us that there can be no religion without adventure, and that God can find no use for the shut mind. But there is much more in this parable than that.

(i) It tells us that God gives men differing gifts. One man received five talents, another two, and another one. It is not a man's talent, which matters; what matters is how he uses it. God never demands from a man abilities which he has not got; but he does demand that a man should use to the full the abilities which he does possess. Men are not equal in talent; but men can be equal in effort. The parable tells us that whatever talent we have, little or great, we must lay it at the service of God.

(ii) It tells us that the reward of work well done is still more work to do. The two servants who had done well are not told to lean back and rest on their oars because they have done well. They are given greater tasks and greater responsibilities in the work of the master.

(iii) It tells us that the man who is punished is the man who will not try. The man with the one talent did not lose his talent; he simply did nothing with it. Even if he had adventured with it and lost it, it would have been better than to do nothing at all. It is always a temptation for the one talent man to say, "I have so small a talent and I can do so little with it. It is not worth while to try, for all the contribution I can make." The condemnation is for the man who, having even one talent, will not try to use it, and will not risk it for the common good.

(iv) It lays down a rule of life which is universally true. It tells us that to him who has more will be given, and he who has not will lose even what he has. The meaning is this. If a man has a talent and exercises it, he is progressively able to do more with it. But, if he has a talent and fails to exercise it, he will inevitably lose it. If we have some proficiency at a game or an art, if we have some gift for doing something, the more we exercise that proficiency and that gift, the harder the work and the bigger the task we will be able to tackle. Whereas, if we fail to use it, we lose it. That is equally true of playing golf or playing the piano, or singing songs or writing sermons, of carving wood or thinking out ideas. It is the lesson of life that the only way to keep a gift is to use it in the service of God and in the service of our fellow-men.

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Matthew 25:31-46

GOD'S STANDARD OF JUDGMENT

Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and an the angels with him, then he will take his seat upon the throne of his glory, and all nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate them from each other, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, enter into possession of the Kingdom which has been prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you gathered me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you came to visit me; in prison, and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we gee you hungry, and nourish you? Or thirsty, and gave you to drink? When did we see you a stranger, and gather you to us? Or naked, and clothed you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?' And the King will answer them, 'This is the truth I tell you--insomuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' then he will say to those on the left, 'Go from me, you cursed ones, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and you did not give me to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not gather me to you; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick and in prison, and you did not come to visit me.' Then these too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not render service to you?' Then he will answer them, 'This is the truth I tell you--in so far as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous will go away to eternal life."

This is one of the most vivid parables Jesus ever spoke, and the lesson is crystal clear--that God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to human need. His judgment does not depend on the knowledge we have amassed, or the fame that we have acquired, or the fortune that we have gained, but on the help that we have given. And there are certain things which this parable teaches us about the help which we must give.

(i) It must be help in simple things. The things which Jesus picks out--giving a hungry man a meal, or a thirsty man a drink, welcoming a stranger, cheering the sick, visiting the prisoner--are things which anyone can do. It is not a question of giving away thousands of pounds, or of writing our names in the annals of history; it is a case of giving simple help to the people we meet every day. There never was a parable which so opened the way to glory to the simplest people.

(ii) It must be help which is uncalculating. Those who helped did not think that they were helping Christ and thus piling up eternal merit; they helped because they could not stop themselves. It was the natural, instinctive, quite uncalculating reaction of the loving heart. Whereas, on the other hand, the attitude of those who failed to help was; "If we had known it was you we would gladly have helped; but we thought it was only some common man who was not worth helping." It is still true that there are those who will help if they are given praise and thanks and publicity; but to help like that is not to help, it is to pander to self-esteem. Such help is not generosity; it is disguised

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Matthew 25:31-46

selfishness. The help which wins the approval of God is that which is given for nothing but the sake of helping.

(iii) Jesus confronts us with the wonderful truth that all such help given is given to himself, and all such help withheld is withheld from himself. How can that be? If we really wish to delight a parent's heart, if we really wish to move him to gratitude the best way to do it is to help his child. God is the great Father; and the way to delight the heart of God is to help his children, our fellow-men.

There were two men who found this parable blessedly true. The one was Francis of Asissi; he was wealthy and high-born and high-spirited. But he was not happy. He felt that life was incomplete. Then one day he was out riding and met a leper, loathsome and repulsive in the ugliness of his disease. Something moved Francis to dismount and fling his arms around this wretched sufferer; and in his arms the face of the leper changed to the face of Christ.

The other was Martin of Tours. He was a Roman soldier and a Christian. One cold winter day, as he was entering a city, a beggar stopped him and asked for alms. Martin had no money; but the beggar was blue and shivering with cold, and Martin gave what he had. He took off his soldier's coat, worn and frayed as it was; he cut it in two and gave half of it to the beggar man. That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and all the angels and Jesus in the midst of them; and Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. One of the angels said to him, "Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak? Who gave it to you?" And Jesus answered softly, "My servant Martin gave it to me."

When we learn the generosity which without calculation helps men in the simplest things, we too will know the joy of helping Jesus Christ himself.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 26:1-5

THE BEGINNING OF THE LAST ACT OF THE TRAGEDY

Matthew 26:1-5

When Jesus had completed all these sayings, he said to his disciples. "You know that in two days time it is the Passover Feast, and the Son of Man is going to be delivered to be crucified." At that time the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the courtyard of the High Priest, who was called Caiaphas, and took counsel together to seize Jesus by guile and to kill him. They said, "Not at the time of the Feast, lest a tumult arise among the people."

Here then is the definite beginning of the last act of the divine tragedy. Once again Jesus warned his disciples of what was to come. For the last few days he had been acting with such magnificent defiance that they might have thought he proposed to defy the Jewish authorities; but here once again he makes it clear that his aim is the Cross.

At the same time the Jewish authorities were laying their plots and stratagems. Joseph Caiaphas, to give him his full name, was High Priest. We know very little about him but we do know one most suggestive fact. In the old days the office of High Priest had been hereditary and had been for life; but when the Romans took over in Palestine, High Priests came and went in rapid series, for the Romans erected and deposed High Priests to suit their own purposes. Between 37 B.C. and A.D. 67, when the last was appointed before the destruction of the Temple, there were no fewer than twenty-eight High Priests. The suggestive thing is that Caiaphas was High Priest from A.D. 18 to A.D. 36. This was an extraordinarily long time for a High Priest to last, and Caiaphas must have brought the technique of cooperating with the Romans to a fine art. And therein precisely there lay his problem.

The one thing the Romans would not stand was civil disorder. Let there be any rioting and certainly Caiaphas would lose his position. At the Passover time the atmosphere in Jerusalem was always explosive. The city was packed tight with people. Josephus tells us of an occasion when an actual census of the people was taken (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 6. 9. 3). It happened in this way.

The governor at the time was Cestius; Cestius felt that Nero did not understand the number of the Jews and the problems which they posed to any governor. So he asked the High Priests to take a census of the lambs slain for sacrifice at a certain Passover time. Josephus goes on to say, "A company of not less than ten must belong to every sacrifice (for it is not lawful for them to feast singly by themselves), and many of us are twenty in a company." It was found that on this occasion the number of lambs slain was 256,500. It is Josephus' estimate that there were in the city for that Passover some two and three-quarter million people.

It is little wonder that Caiaphas sought some stratagem to take Jesus secretly and quietly, for many of the pilgrims were Galilaeans and to them Jesus was a prophet. It was in fact his plan to leave the whole thing over until after the Passover Feast had ended, and the city was quieter; but Judas was to provide him with a solution to his problem.

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Matthew 26:6-13

LOVE'S EXTRAVAGANCE

Matthew 26:6-13

When Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster phial of very costly perfume, and poured it over his head as he reclined at table. When the disciples saw it, they were vexed. "What is the good of this waste?" they said. "For this could have been sold for much money, and the proceeds given to the poor." When Jesus knew what they were saying, he said to them, "Why do you distress the woman? It is a lovely thing that she has done to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you have not me always. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me beforehand for burial. This is the truth I tell you--wherever the gospel is preached throughout the whole world, this too that she has done shall be spoken of so that all will remember her."

This story of the anointing at Bethany is told also by Mark and by John. Mark's story is almost exactly the same; but John adds the information that the woman who anointed Jesus was none other than Mary, the sister of Martha and of Lazarus. Luke does not tell this story; he does tell the story of an anointing in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Lk.7:36-50), but in Luke's story the woman who anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with the hair of her head was a notorious sinner.

It must always remain a most interesting question whether the story Luke tells is, in fact, the same story as is told by Matthew and Mark and John. In both cases the name of the host is Simon, although in Luke he is Simon the Pharisee, and in Matthew and Mark he is Simon the leper; in John the host is not named at all, although the narrative reads as if it took place in the house of Martha and Mary and Lazarus. Simon was a very common name; there are at least ten Simons in the New Testament, and more than twenty in the history of Josephus. The greatest difficulty in identifying the stories of Luke and of the other three gospel writers is that in Luke's story the woman was a notorious sinner; and there is no indication that that was true of Mary of Bethany. And yet the very intensity with which Mary loved Jesus may well have been the result of the depths from which he had rescued her.

Whatever the answer to the question of identification, the story is indeed what Jesus called it--the story of a lovely thing; and in it are enshrined certain very precious truths.

(i) It shows us love's extravagance. The woman took the most precious thing she had and poured it out on Jesus. Jewish women were very fond of perfume; and often they carried a little alabaster phial of it round their necks. Such perfume was very valuable. Both Mark and John make the disciples say that this perfume could have been sold for three hundred denarii (GSN1220) (Mk.14:5; Jn.12:5); which means that this phial of perfume represented very nearly a whole year's wages for a working man. Or we may think of it this way. When Jesus and his disciples were discussing how the multitude were to be fed, Philip's answer was that two hundred denarii (GSN1220) would scarcely be enough to feed them. This phial of perfume, therefore, cost as much as it would take to feed a crowd of five thousand people.

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Matthew 26:6-13

It was something as precious as that which this woman gave to Jesus, and she gave it because it was the most precious thing she had. Love never calculates; love never thinks how little it can decently give; love's one desire is to give to the uttermost limits; and, when it has given all it has to give, it still thinks the gift too little. We have not even begun to be Christian if we think of giving to Christ and to his Church in terms of as little as we respectably can.

(ii) It shows us that there are times when the commonsense view of things fails. On this occasion the voice of common sense said, "What waste!" and no doubt it was right. But there is a world of difference between the economics of common sense and the economics of love. Common sense obeys the dictates of prudence; but love obeys the dictates of the heart. There is in life a large place for common sense; but there are times when only love's extravagance can meet love's demands. A gift is never really a gift when we can easily afford it; a gift truly becomes a gift only when there is sacrifice behind it, and when we give far more than we can afford.

(iii) It shows us that certain things must be done when the opportunity arises, or they can never be done at all. The disciples were anxious to help the poor; but the Rabbis themselves said, "God allows the poor to be with us always, that the opportunities for doing good may never fail." There are some things which we can do at any time; there are some things which can be done only once; and to miss the opportunity to do them then is to miss the opportunity for ever. Often we are moved by some generous impulse, and do not act upon it; and all the chances are that the circumstances, the person, the time, and the impulse, will never return. For so many of us the tragedy is that life is the history of the lost opportunities to do the lovely thing.

(iv) It tells us that the fragrance of a lovely deed lasts for ever. There are so few lovely things that one shines like a light in a dark world. At the end of Jesus' life there was so much bitterness, so much treachery, so much intrigue, so much tragedy that this story shines like an oasis of light in a darkening world. In this world there are few greater things that a man may do than leave the memory of a lovely deed.

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Matthew 26:14-16

THE TRAITOR'S BARGAIN

Matthew 26:14-16

Then one of the Twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me, if I hand him over to you?" They settled with him for a sum of thirty shekels; and from that time he sought for an opportunity to betray him.

We have seen that the Jewish authorities wished to find a way in which to arrest Jesus without provoking riotous disturbances, and now that way was presented to them by the approach of Judas. There can be only three real reasons why Judas betrayed Jesus. All other suggestions are variations of these three.

(i) It may have been because of avarice. According to Matthew and Mark it was immediately after the anointing at Bethany that Judas struck his dreadful bargain; and when John tells his story of that event, he says that Judas made his protest against the anointing because he was a thief and pilfered from the money that was in the box (Jn. 12:6). If that is so, Judas struck one of the most dreadful bargains in history. The sum for which he agreed to betray Jesus was thirty arguria (GSN0694). An argurion (GSN0694) was a shekel, and was worth about three shillings. Judas, therefore, sold Jesus for less than five pounds. If avarice was the cause of his act of treachery, it is the most terrible example in history of the depths which love of money can reach.

(ii) It may have been because of bitter hatred, based on complete disillusionment. The Jews always had their dream of power; therefore they had their extreme nationalists who were prepared to go to any lengths of murder and violence to drive the Romans from Palestine. These nationalists were called the sicarii, the dagger-bearers, because they followed a deliberate policy of assassination. It may be that Judas was such, and that he had looked on Jesus as the divinely sent leader, who, with his miraculous powers, could lead the great rebellion. He may have seen that Jesus had deliberately taken another way, the way that led to a cross. And in his bitter disappointment, Judas' devotion may have turned, first to disillusionment, and then to a hatred which drove him to seek the death of the man from whom he had expected so much. Judas may have hated Jesus because he was not the Christ he wished him to be.

(iii) It may be that Judas never intended Jesus to die. It may be that, as we have seen, he saw in Jesus the divine leader. He may have thought that Jesus was proceeding far too slowly; and he may have wished for nothing else than to force his hand. He may have betrayed Jesus with the intention of compelling him to act. That is in fact the view which best suits all the facts. And that would explain why Judas was shattered into suicide when his plan went wrong.

However we look at it, the tragedy of Judas is that he refused to accept Jesus as he was and tried to make him what he wanted him to be. It is not Jesus who can be changed by us, but we who must be changed by Jesus. We can never use him for our purposes; we must submit to be used for his. The tragedy of Judas is that of a man who thought he knew better than God.

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Matthew 26:17-19

THE ANCESTRAL FEAST

Matthew 26:17-19

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus. "Where," they said, "do you wish that we should make the necessary preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to such and such a man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, my time is near. I will keep the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" And the disciples did as Jesus instructed them, and made the preparations for the Passover.

It was for the Passover Feast that Jesus had come to Jerusalem. We have seen how crowded the city was at such a time. During the Passover Feast all Jews were supposed to stay within the boundaries of the city, but the numbers made that impossible; and for official purposes villages like Bethany, where Jesus was staying, ranked as the city.

But the Feast itself had to be celebrated within the city. The disciples wished to know what preparation they must make. Clearly Jesus had not left the matter to the last moment; he had already made his arrangements with a friend in Jerusalem, and he had already arranged a password--"The Teacher says, my time is near." So the disciples were sent on to give the password and to make all the necessary preparations.

The whole week of which the Passover Feast occupied the first evening was called The Feast of Unleavened Bread. In following the events we must remember that for the Jew the next day began at 6 o'clock in the evening. In this case the Feast of Unleavened Bread began on Thursday morning. On the Thursday morning every particle of leaven was destroyed, after a ceremonial search throughout the house.

There was a double reason for that. The Feast commemorated the greatest event in the history of Israel, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. And when the Israelites had fled from Egypt, they had to flee in such haste that they had not time to bake their bread leavened (Exo.12:34). Dough without leaven (that is, a little piece of fermented dough) cooks very quickly, but produces a substance more like a water biscuit than a loaf; and that is what unleavened bread is like. So the leaven was banished and the bread unleavened to repeat the acts of the night on which they left Egypt and its slavery behind them.

Second, in Jewish thought leaven is the symbol of corruption. As we have said, leaven is fermented dough and the Jews identified fermentation and putrefaction; so leaven stood for all that was rotten and corrupt, and was, therefore, as a sign of purification, cleansed away.

When, then, were the preparations which the disciples would make?

On the Thursday morning, they would prepare the unleavened bread and rid the house of every scrap of leaven. The other staple ingredient of the Feast was the Passover Lamb. It was indeed from the lamb that the Feast took its name. The last terrible plague which fell on the Egyptians and which compelled them to let the people go, was that the Angel of Death walked throughout the land

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Matthew 26:17-19

of Egypt and slew the firstborn son in every house. To identify their houses, the Israelites had to kill a lamb and smear the lintel and the side posts of their doors with its blood, so that the avenging angel seeing that sign would pass over that house (Exo.12:21-23). On the Thursday afternoon the lamb had to be taken to the Temple and slain, and its blood--which was the life--had to be offered to God in sacrifice.

There were four other items necessary for the Feast.

(i) A bowl of salt water had to be set upon the table, to remind them of the tears they had shed while they were slaves in Egypt and of the salt waters of the Red Sea through which God's hand had wondrously brought them.

(ii) A collection of bitter herbs had to be prepared, composed of horse-radish, chicory, endive, lettuce, horehound and the like. This was again to remind them of the bitterness of slavery, and of the bunch of hyssop with which the blood of the lamb had been smeared on the lintel and the door-posts.

(iii) There was a paste called the Charosheth. It was a mixture of apples, dates, pomegranates and nuts. It was to remind them of the clay with which they had been compelled to make bricks in Egypt, and through it there were sticks of cinnamon to remind them of the straw with which the bricks had been made.

(iv) Lastly, there were four cups of wine. These were to remind them of the four promises of Exo.6:6-7: "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians; I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment; I will take you for my people, and I will be your God."

Such then were the preparations of the Thursday morning and afternoon. These were the things that the disciples prepared; and at any time after 6 p.m., that is when Friday, the 15th Nisan, had begun, the guests might gather at the table.

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Matthew 26:20-25

LOVE'S LAST APPEAL

Matthew 26:20-25

When evening had come, Jesus was reclining at table with the twelve disciples. While they were eating he said, "This is the truth I tell you--one of you will betray me." They were greatly distressed and began one by one to say to him, "Lord, can it be I?" He answered, "He who dips his hand with me in the dish, it is he who will betray me. The Son of Man is going to go away, as it stands written concerning him, but alas for that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Master, can it be I?" He said to him, "It is you who have said it."

There are times in these last scenes of the gospel story when Jesus and Judas seem to be in a world where there is none other present except themselves. One thing is certain--Judas must have gone about his grim business with complete secrecy. He must have kept his comings and goings completely hidden, for, if the rest of the disciples had known what Judas was doing, he would never have escaped with his life.

He had concealed his plans from his fellow-disciples--but he could not conceal them from Christ. It is always the same; a man can hide his sins from his fellow-men, but he can never hide them from the eyes of Christ who sees the secrets of the heart. Jesus knew, although no other knew, what Judas was about.

And now we can see Jesus' methods with the sinner. He could have used his power to blast Judas, to paralyse him, to render him helpless, even to kill him. But the only weapon that Jesus will ever use is the weapon of love's appeal. One of the great mysteries of life is the respect that God has for the free will of man. God does not coerce; God only appeals.

When Jesus seeks to stop a man from sinning, he does two things.

First, he confronts him with his sin. He tries to make him stop and think what he is doing. He, as it were, says to him, "Look at what you are contemplating doing--can you really do a thing like that?" It has been said that our greatest security against sin lies in our being shocked by it. And again and again Jesus bids a man pause and look and realize so that he may be shocked into sanity.

Second, he confronts him with himself. He bids a man look at him, as if to say, "Can you look at me, can you meet my eyes, and go out to do the thing you purpose doing?" Jesus seeks to make a man become aware of the horror of the thing he is about to do, and of the love which yearns to stop him doing it.

It is just here that we see the real awfulness of sin in its terrible deliberation. In spite of love's last appeal Judas went on. Even when he was confronted with his sin and confronted with the face of Christ, he would not turn back. There is sin and sin. There is the sin of the passionate heart, of the man who, on the impulse of the moment, is swept into wrong doing. Let no man belittle such sin; its consequences can be very terrible. But far worse is the calculated, callous sin of deliberation,

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Matthew 26:20-25

which in cold blood knows what it is doing, which is confronted with the bleak awfulness of the deed and with the love in the eyes of Jesus, and still takes its own way. Our hearts revolt against the son or daughter who cold-bloodedly breaks a parent's heart--which is what Judas did to Jesus--and the tragedy is that this is what we ourselves so often do.

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Matthew 26:26-30

HIS BODY AND HIS BLOOD

Matthew 26:26-30

While they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it, and gave it to his disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them. "Drink all of you from it," he said, "for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, that their sins may be forgiven. I tell you that from now on I will not drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the Kingdom of my Father." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

We have already seen how the prophets, when they wished to say something in a way that people could not fail to understand, made use of symbolic actions. We have already seen Jesus using that method both in his Triumphal Entry and in the incident of the fig tree. That is what Jesus is doing here. All the symbolism and all the ritual action of the Passover Feast was a picture of what he wished to say to men, for it was a picture of what he was to do for men. What then was the picture which Jesus was using, and what is the truth which lies behind it?

(i) The Passover Feast was a commemoration of deliverance; its whole intention was to remind the people of Israel of how God had liberated them from slavery in Egypt. First and foremost then, Jesus claimed to be the great liberator. He came to liberate men from fear and from sin. He liberates men from the fears which haunt them and from the sins which will not let them go.

(ii) In particular the Passover Lamb was the symbol of safety. On that night of destruction it was the blood of the Passover Lamb which kept Israel safe. So, then, Jesus was claiming to be Saviour. He had come to save men from their sins and from their consequences. He had come to give men safety on earth and safety in heaven, safety in time and safety in eternity.

There is a word here which is a key word and enshrines the whole of Jesus' work and intention. It is the word covenant. Jesus spoke of his blood being the blood of the covenant. What did he mean by that? A covenant is a relationship between two people; but the covenant of which Jesus spoke was not between man and man; it was between God and man. That is to say, it was a new relationship between God and man. What Jesus was saying at the Last Supper was this: "Because of my life, and above all because of my death, a new relationship has become possible between you and God." It is as if he said, "You have seen me; and in me you have seen God; I have told you, I have shown you, how much God loves you; he loves you even enough to suffer this that I am going through; that is what God is like." Because of what Jesus did, the way for men is open to all the loveliness of this new relationship with God.

This passage concludes by saying that, when the company of Jesus and the disciples had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. An essential part of the Passover ritual was the singing of the Hallel. Hallel means Praise God! And the Hallel consisted of Ps.113-118, which are all praising psalms. At different points of the Passover Feast these psalms were sung in sections; and at the very end there was sung The Great Hallel, which is Ps.136. That was the hymn they sang before they went out to the Mount of Olives.

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Matthew 26:26-30

Here is another thing to note. There was one basic difference between the Last Supper and the Sacrament which we observe. The Last Supper was a real meal; it was, in fact, the law that the whole lamb and everything else must be eaten and nothing left. This was no eating of a cube of bread and drinking of a sip of wine. It was a meal for hungry men. We might well say that what Jesus is teaching men is not only to assemble in church and eat a ritual and symbolic Feast; he is telling them that every time they sit down to eat a meal, that meal is in memory of him. Jesus is not only Lord of the Communion Table; he must be Lord of the dinner table, too.

There remains one final thing. Jesus says that he will not feast with his disciples again until he does so in his Father's Kingdom. Here, indeed, is divine faith and divine optimism. Jesus was going out to Gethsemane, out to trial before the Sanhedrin, out to the Cross--and yet he is still thinking in terms of a Kingdom. To Jesus the Cross was never defeat; it was the way to glory. He was on his way to Calvary, but he was also on his way to a throne.

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Matthew 26:31-35

THE MASTER'S WARNING

Matthew 26:31-35

Then Jesus said to them, "Every one of you will be made to stumble because of me during this night; for it stands written, 'I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee." Peter answered him, "If all are made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble." Jesus said to him, "This is the truth I tell you--During this night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you." So also spoke all the disciples.

In this passage certain characteristics of Jesus are clear.

(i) We see the realism of Jesus. He knew what lay ahead. Matthew actually sees the flight of the disciples foretold in the Old Testament in Zech.13:7. Jesus was no easy optimist, who could comfortably shut his eyes to the facts. He foresaw what would inevitably happen and yet he went on.

(ii) We see the confidence of Jesus. "After I have been raised," he says, "I will go before you into Galilee." Always Jesus saw beyond the Cross. He was every bit as certain of the glory as he was of the suffering.

(iii) We see the sympathy of Jesus. He knew that his men were going to flee for their lives and abandon him in the moment of his deepest need; but he does not upbraid them, he does not condemn them, he does not heap reproaches on them, or call them useless creatures and broken reeds. So far from that, he tells them that when that terrible time is past, he will meet them again. It is the greatness of Jesus that he knew men at their worst and still loved them. He knows our human weakness; he knows how certain we are to make mistakes and to fail in loyalty; but that knowledge does not turn his love to bitterness or contempt. Jesus has nothing but sympathy for the man who in his weakness is driven to sin.

Further, this passage shows us something about Peter. Surely his fault is clear; over-confidence in himself. He knew that he loved Jesus--that was never in doubt--and he thought that all by himself he could face any situation which might arise. He thought that he was stronger than Jesus knew him to be. We shall be safe only when we replace the confidence which boasts by the humility which knows its weakness and which depends not on itself but the help of Christ.

The Romans and the Jews divided the night into four watches--6 p.m. to 9 p.m.; 9 p.m. to midnight; midnight to 3 a.m.; 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. It was between the third and the fourth watch that the cock was supposed to crow. What Jesus is saying is that before the dawn comes Peter will deny him three times.

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Matthew 26:36-46

THE SOUL'S BATTLE IN THE GARDEN

Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go away and pray in this place." So he took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be distressed and in sore trouble. Then he said to them, "My soul is much distressed with a distress like death. Stay here, and watch with me." He went a little way forward and fell on his face in prayer. "My Father," He said, "if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. But let it be not as I will, but as you will." He came to his disciples, and he found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Could you not stay awake with me for this--for one hour? Watch and pray lest you enter into testing. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak." He went away a second time and prayed. "My Father," He said, "if it is not possible for this to pass from me unless I drink it, your will be done." He came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were weighted down. He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words over again. Then he came to his disciples and said to them, "Sleep on now and take your rest. Look you, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise; let us go; look you, he who betrays me is near."

Surely this is a passage which we must approach upon our knees. Here study should pass into wondering adoration.

In Jerusalem itself there were no gardens of any size, for a city set on the top of an hill has no room for open spaces; every inch is of value for building. So, then, it came about that wealthy citizens had their private gardens on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The word Gethsemane very probably means an olive-vat, or an olive-press; and no doubt it was a garden of olives to which Jesus had the right of entry. It is a strange and a lovely thing to think of the nameless friends who rallied round Jesus in the last days. There was the man who gave him the ass on which he rode into Jerusalem; there was the man who gave him the Upper Room wherein the Last Supper was eaten; and now there is the man who gave him the right of entry to the garden on the Mount of Olives. In a desert of hatred, there were still oases of love.

Into the garden he took the three who had been with him on the Mount of Transfiguration; and there he prayed; more, he wrestled in prayer. As we look with awed reverence on the battle of Jesus' soul in the garden we see certain things.

(i) We see the agony of Jesus. He was now quite sure that death lay ahead. Its very breath was on him. No one wants to die at thirty-three; and least of all does any man want to die in the agony of a cross. Here Jesus had his supreme struggle to submit his will to the will of God. No one can read this story without seeing the intense reality of that struggle. This was no play-acting; it was a struggle in which the outcome swayed in the balance. The salvation of the world was at risk in the Garden of Gethsemane, for even then Jesus might have turned back, and God's purpose would have been frustrated.

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Matthew 26:36-46

At this moment all that Jesus knew was that he must go on, and ahead there lay a cross. In all reverence we may say that here we see Jesus learning the lesson that everyone must some day learn--how to accept what he could not understand. All he knew was that the will of God imperiously summoned him on. Things happen to every one of us in this world that we cannot understand; it is then that faith is tried to its utmost limits; and at such a time it is sweetness to the soul that in Gethsemane Jesus went through that too. Tertullian (De Bapt. 20) tells us of a saying of Jesus, which is not in any of the gospels: "No one who has not been tempted can enter the Kingdom of Heaven." That is, every man has his private Gethsemane, and every man has to learn to say, "Thy will be done."

(ii) We see the loneliness of Jesus. He took with him his three chosen disciples; but they were so exhausted with the drama of these last days and hours that they could not stay awake. And Jesus had to fight his battle all alone. That also is true of every man. There are certain things a man must face and certain decisions a man must make in the awful loneliness of his own soul; there are times when other helpers fade and comforts flee; but in that loneliness there is for us the presence of One who, in Gethsemane, experienced it and came through it.

(iii) Here we see the trust of Jesus. We see that trust even better in Mark's account, where Jesus begins his prayer: "Abba, Father" (Mk.14:36). There is a world of loveliness in this word Abba (GSN0005), which to our western ears is altogether hidden, unless we know the facts about it. Joachim Jeremias, in his book *The Parables of Jesus*, writes thus: "Jesus' use of the word Abba in addressing God is unparalleled in the whole of Jewish literature. The explanation of this fact is to be found in the statement of the fathers Chrysostom, Theodore, and Theodoret that Abba (GSN0005), (as jaba is still used today in Arabic) was the word used by a young child to its father; it was an everyday family word, which no one had ventured to use in addressing God. Jesus did. He spoke to his heavenly Father in as childlike, trustful, and intimate a way as a little child to its father."

We know how our children speak to us and what they call us who are fathers. That is the way in which Jesus spoke to God. Even when he did not fully understand, even when his one conviction was that God was urging him to a cross, he called Abba, as might a little child. Here indeed is trust, a trust which we must also have in that God whom Jesus taught us to know as Father.

(iv) We see the courage of Jesus. "Rise," said Jesus, "let us be going. He who betrays me is near." Celsus, the pagan philosopher who attacked Christianity, used that sentence as an argument that Jesus tried to run away. It is the very opposite. "Rise," he said. "The time for prayer, and the time for the garden is past, Now is the time for action. Let us face life at its grimmest and men at their worst." Jesus rose from his knees to go out to the battle of life. That is what prayer is for. In prayer a man kneels before God that he may stand erect before men. In prayer a man enters heaven that he may face the battles of earth.

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Matthew 26:47-50

THE TRAITOR'S KISS

Matthew 26:47-50

While Jesus was still speaking, there came Judas, one of the Twelve, and a great crowd with swords and cudgels, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. The traitor had given them a sign. "Whom I shall kiss," he said, "that is the man. Lay hold on him!" Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Master!" and kissed him lovingly. Jesus said to him, "Comrade, get on with the deed for which you have come!" Then they came forward, and laid hands on Jesus, and held him.

As we have already seen, the actions of Judas may spring from one of two motives. He may really, either from avarice or from disillusionment, have wished to see Jesus killed; or he may have been trying to force his hand, and may have wished not to see him killed but to compel him to act.

There is, therefore, a double way of interpreting this incident. If in Judas' heart there was nothing but black hatred and a kind of maniacal avarice, this is simply the most terrible kiss in history and a sign of betrayal. If that is so, there is nothing too terrible to be said about Judas.

But there are signs that there is more to it than that. When Judas told the armed mob that he would indicate the man whom they had come to arrest by a kiss, the word he uses is the Greek word *philein* (GSN5368), which is the normal word for a kiss; but when it is said that Judas actually did kiss Jesus, the word used is *kataphilein* (GSN2705), which is the word for a lover's kiss, and means to kiss repeatedly and fervently. Why should Judas do that?

Further, why should any identification of Jesus have been necessary? It was not identification of Jesus the authorities required; it was a convenient opportunity to arrest him. The people who came to arrest him were from the chief priests and the elders of the people; they must have been the Temple police, the only force the chief priests had at their disposal. It is incredible that the Temple police did not already know only too well the man who just days before had cleansed the Temple and driven the money-changers and the sellers of doves from the Temple court. It is incredible that they should not have known the man who had taught daily in the Temple cloisters. Having been led to the garden, they well knew the man whom they had come to arrest.

It is much more likely that Judas kissed Jesus as a disciple kissed a master and meant it; and that then he stood back with expectant pride waiting on Jesus at last to act. The curious thing is that from the moment of the kiss Judas vanishes from the scene in the garden, not to reappear until he is bent on suicide. He does not even appear as a witness at the trial of Jesus. It is far more likely that in one stunning, blinding, staggering, searing moment Judas saw how he had miscalculated and staggered away into the night a for ever broken and for ever haunted man. If this be true, at that moment Judas entered the hell which he had created for himself, for the worst kind of hell is the full realization of the terrible consequences of sin.

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Matthew 26:50-56

THE ARREST IN THE GARDEN

Matthew 26:50-56

Then they came forward and laid hands on Jesus and held him. And, look you, one of these who was with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the High Priest, and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put back your sword in its place; for all who take the sword shall perish by the sword. Or, do you not think that I am able to call on my Father, and he will on the spot send to my aid more than twelve regiments of angels? How then are the Scriptures to be fulfilled that it must happen so?" At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and cudgels to arrest me, as against a brigand? Daily I sat teaching in the Temple, and you did not lay hold on me. All this has happened that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all his disciples forsook him and fled.

It was Judas who had given the authorities the information which enabled them to find Jesus in the privacy of the Garden of Gethsemane. The forces at the disposal of the Jewish authorities were the Temple police, under the command of the Sagan, or Captain of the Temple. But the mob which surged after Judas to the Garden was more like a mob for a lynching than a detachment for an orderly arrest.

Jesus would allow no resistance. Matthew simply tells us that one of the disciples drew a knife and, prepared to resist to the death and to sell his life dearly, wounded a servant of the High Priest. When John tells the same story (Jn.18:10), he tells us that the disciple was Peter, and the servant was Malchus. The reason why John names Peter, and Matthew does not, may simply be that John was writing much later, and that when Matthew was writing it was still not safe to name the disciple who had sprung so quickly to his Master's defence. Here we have still another instance of the almost fantastic courage of Peter. He was willing to take on the mob alone; and let us always remember that it was after that, when he was a marked man, that Peter followed Jesus right into the courtyard of the High Priest's house. But in all these incidents of the last hours it is on Jesus that our attention is fastened; and here we learn two things about him.

(i) His death was by his own choice. He need never have come to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. Having come, he need never have followed his deliberate policy of magnificent defiance. Even in the Garden he could have slipped away and saved himself, for it was night, and there were many who would have smuggled him out of the city. Even here he could have called down the might of God and blasted his enemies. Every step of these last days makes it clearer and clearer that Jesus laid down his life and that his life was not taken from him. Jesus died, not because men killed him, but because he chose to die.

(ii) He chose to die because he knew that his death was the purpose of God. He took this way because it was the very thing that had been foretold by the prophets. He took it because love is the only way. "He who takes the sword will perish by the sword." Violence can beget nothing but violence; one drawn sword can produce only another drawn sword to meet it. Jesus knew that war and might settle nothing, but produce only a train of evil, and beget a grim horde of children worse than themselves. He knew that God's purpose can be worked out only by sacrificial love. And

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Matthew 26:50-56

history proved him right; for the Jews who took him with violence, and who gloried in violence, and who would gladly have dipped their swords in Roman blood, saw forty years later their city destroyed for ever, while the man who would not fight is enthroned for ever in the hearts of men.

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Matthew 26:57-58, 69-75

THE FAILURE OF COURAGE

Matthew 26:57-58, Matthew 26:69-75

Those who had laid hold of Jesus led him away to the house of Caiaphas the High Priest, where the Scribes and the elders were assembled. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the High Priest's house, and he went inside and sat down with the servants to see the end.

Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A maid-servant came up to him and said, "You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean." He denied it in the presence of them all. "I do not know," he said, "what you are saying." When he went out to the porch, another maid-servant saw him, and said to those who were there, "This man too was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." A little later those who were standing there said to Peter, "Truly you too were one of them; for your accent gives you away." Then he began to curse and to swear: "I do not know the man." And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, when he said, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

No one can read this passage without being struck with the staggering honesty of the New Testament. If ever there was an incident which one might have expected to be hushed up, this was it--and yet here it is told in all its stark shame. We know that Matthew very closely followed the narrative of Mark; and in Mark's gospel this story is told in even more vivid detail (Mk.14:66-72). We also know, as Papias tells us, that Mark's gospel is nothing other than the preaching material of Peter written down. And so we arrive at the amazing fact that we possess the story of Peter's denial because Peter himself told it to others.

So far from suppressing this story, Peter made it an essential part of his gospel; and did so for the very best of reasons. Every time he told the story, he could say, "That is the way that this Jesus can forgive. He forgave me when I failed him in his bitterest hour of need. That is what Jesus can do. He took me, Peter the coward, and used even me." We must never read this story without remembering that it is Peter himself who is telling of the shame of his own sin that all men may know the glory of the forgiving love and cleansing power of Jesus Christ.

And yet it is quite wrong to regard Peter with nothing but unsympathetic condemnation. The blazing fact is that the disaster which happened to Peter is one which could have happened only to a man of the most heroic courage. All the other disciples ran away: Peter alone did not. In Palestine the houses of the well-to-do were built in a hollow square around an open courtyard, off which the various rooms opened. For Peter to enter that courtyard in the centre of the High Priest's house was to walk into the lion's den--and yet he did it. However this story ends, it begins with Peter the one brave man.

The first denial happened in the courtyard; no doubt the maid-servant had marked Peter as one of the most prominent followers of Jesus and had recognized him. After that recognition anyone would have thought that Peter would have fled for his life; a coward would certainly have been gone into the night as quickly as he could. But not Peter; although he did retire as far as the porch.

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Matthew 26:57-58, 69-75

He was torn between two feelings. In his heart there was a fear that made him want to run away; but in his heart, too, there was a love which kept him there. Again, in the porch he was recognized; and this time he swore he did not know Jesus. And still he did not go. Here is the most dogged courage.

But Peter's second denial had given him away. From his speech it was clear that he was a Galilaean. The Galilaean spoke with a burr; so ugly was their accent that no Galilaean was allowed to pronounce the benediction at a synagogue service. Once again Peter was accused of being a follower of Jesus. Peter went further this time; not only did he swear that he did not know Jesus; he actually cursed his Master's name. But still it is clear that Peter had no intention of leaving that courtyard. And then the cock crew.

There is a distinct possibility here which would provide us with a vivid picture. It may well be that the cock-crow was not the voice of a bird; and that from the beginning it was not meant to mean that. After all, the house of the High Priest was right in the centre of Jerusalem, and there was not likely to be poultry in the centre of the city. There was, in fact, a regulation in the Jewish law that it was illegal to keep cocks and hens in the Holy City, because they defiled the holy things. But the hour of 3 a.m. was called cock-crow, and for this reason. At that hour the Roman guard was changed in the Castle of Antonia; and the sign of the changing of the guard was a trumpet call. The Latin for that trumpet call was gallicinium, which means cock-crow. It is at least possible that just as Peter made his third denial the trumpet from the castle battlements rang out over the sleeping city--the gallicinium, the cock-crow--and Peter remembered; and thereupon he went and wept his heart out.

What happened to Peter after that we do not know, for the gospel story draws a kindly veil over the agony of his shame. But before we condemn him, we must remember very clearly that few of us would ever have had the courage to be in that courtyard at all. And there is one last thing to be said--it was love which gave Peter that courage; it was love which riveted him there in spite of the fact that he had been recognized three times; it was love which made him remember the words of Jesus; it was love which sent him out into the night to weep--and it is love which covers a multitude of sins. The lasting impression of this whole story is not of Peter's cowardice, but of Peter's love.

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Matthew 26:57, 59-68

THE TRIAL BEFORE THE JEWS

Matthew 26:57, 59-68 (Part 1)

Those who had laid hold of Jesus led him away to the house of Caiaphas the High Priest, where the Scribes and the elders were assembled.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin tried to find false witness against him, in order to put him to death; but they could not find it, although many false witnesses came forward. Later two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I can destroy the Temple of God, and in three days I can build it again.'" The High Priest rose and said, "Do you make no answer? What is it that these witness against you?" But Jesus kept silent. So the High Priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us, whether you are the Anointed One of God, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "It is you who have said it. But I tell you that from now on you will see the Son of Man seated on the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of Heaven." Then the High Priest rent his garments, saying, "He has blasphemed. What further need have we of witnesses? Look you, you have now heard his blasphemy.

What is your opinion?" They answered, "He has made himself liable to the death penalty." Then they spat upon his face, and buffeted him. And some struck him on the cheek saying, "Prophecy to us, you Anointed One of God! Who is he who struck you?"

The process of the trial of Jesus is not altogether easy to follow. It seems to have fallen into three parts. The first part took place after the arrest in the Garden, during the night and in the High Priest's house, and is described in this section. The second part took place first thing in the morning, and is briefly described in Matt.27:1-2. The third part took place before Pilate and is described in Matt.27:11-26. The salient question is this--was the meeting during the night an official meeting of the Sanhedrin, hastily summoned, or was it merely a preliminary examination, in order to formulate a charge, and was the meeting in the morning the official meeting of the Sanhedrin? However that question is answered, the Jews violated their own laws in the trial of Jesus; but if the meeting in the night was a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the violation was even more extreme.

On the whole, it seems that Matthew took the night meeting to be a meeting of the Sanhedrin, for in Matt.26:59 he says that the whole Sanhedrin sought for false witness to put Jesus to death. Let us then first look at this process from the Jewish legal point of view.

The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews. It was composed of Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and elders of the people; it numbered seventy-one members; and it was presided over by the High Priest. For a trial such as this a quorum was twenty-three. It had certain regulations. All criminal cases must be tried during the daytime and must be completed during the daytime. Criminal cases could not be transacted during the Passover season at all. Only if the verdict was Not Guilty could a case be finished on the day it was begun; otherwise a night must elapse before the pronouncement of the verdict, so that feelings of mercy might have time to arise. Further, no decision of the Sanhedrin was valid unless it met in its own meeting place, the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple precincts. All evidence had to be guaranteed by two witnesses separately examined and having not contact with each other. And false witness was punishable by death.

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Matthew 26:57, 59-68

The seriousness of the occasion was impressed upon any witness in a case where life was at stake: "Forget not, O witness, that it is one thing to give evidence in a trial for money, and another in a trial for life. In a money suit, if thy witness-bearing shall do wrong, money may repair that wrong; but in this trial for life, if thou sinnest, the blood of the accused and the blood of his seed unto the end of time shall be imputed unto thee." Still further, in any trial the process began by the laying before the court of all the evidence for the innocence of the accused, before the evidence for his guilt was adduced.

These were the Sanhedrin's own rules, and it is abundantly clear that, in their eagerness to get rid of Jesus, they broke their own rules. The Jews had reached such a peak of hatred that any means were justified to put an end to Jesus.

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Matthew 26:57, 59-68

THE CRIME OF CHRIST

Matthew 26:57; Matthew 26:59-68 (Part 2)

The main business of the night meeting of the Jewish authorities was to formulate a charge against Jesus. As we have seen, all evidence had to be guaranteed by two witnesses, separately examined. For long not even two false witnesses could be found to agree. And then a charge was found, the charge that Jesus had said that he would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days.

It is clear that this charge is a twisting of certain things he did actually say. We have already seen that he foretold--and rightly--the destruction of the Temple. This had been twisted into a charge that he had said that he himself would destroy the Temple. We have seen that he foretold that he himself would be killed and would rise on the third day. This had been twisted into a charge that he had said that he would rebuild the Temple in three days.

This charge was formulated by deliberately and maliciously misrepeating and misinterpreting certain things which Jesus had said. To that charge Jesus utterly refused to reply. Therein the law was on his side, for no person on trial could either be asked, or compelled to answer, any question which would incriminate him.

It was then that the High Priest launched his vital question. We have seen that repeatedly Jesus warned his disciples to tell no man that he was the Messiah. How then did the High Priest know to ask the question the answer to which Jesus could not escape? It may well be that when Judas laid information against him, he also told the Jewish authorities about Jesus' revelation of his own Messiahship. It may well be that Judas had deliberately broken the bond of secrecy which Jesus had laid upon his disciples.

In any event, the High Priest asked the question, and asked it upon oath: "Are you the Messiah?" he demanded. "Do you claim to be the Son of God?" Here was the crucial moment in the trial. We might well say that all the universe held its breath as it waited for Jesus' answer. If Jesus said, "No," the bottom fell out of the trial; there was no possible charge against him. He had only to say, "No," and walk out a free man, and escape before the Sanhedrin could think out another way of entrapping him. On the other hand, if he said, "Yes," he signed his own death warrant. Nothing more than a simple "Yes" was needed to make the Cross a complete and inescapable certainty.

It may be that Jesus paused for a moment once again to count the cost before he made the great decision; and then he said, "Yes." He went further. He quoted Dn. 7:13 with its vivid account of the ultimate triumph and kingship of God's chosen one. He well knew what he was doing. Immediately there went up the cry of blasphemy. Garments were rent in a kind of synthetic and hysterical horror; and Jesus was condemned to death.

Then followed the spitting on him, the buffeting, the slapping of his face, the mockery. Even the externals of justice were forgotten, and the venomous hostility of the Jewish authorities broke through. That meeting in the night began as a court of justice and ended in a frenzied display of hatred, in which there was no attempt to maintain even the superficialities of impartial justice.

Barclay's Commentary
Matthew 26:57, 59-68

To this day when a man is brought face to face with Jesus Christ, he must either hate him or love him; he must either submit to him, or desire to destroy him. No man who realizes what Jesus Christ demands can possibly be neutral. He must either be his liege-man or his foe.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26

THE MAN WHO SENTENCED JESUS TO DEATH

Matthew 27:1-2; Matthew 27:11-26 (Part 1)

When the morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus, to put him to death; so they bound him, and led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor put the question to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said to him, "You say so." While he was being accused by the chief priests and the elders, he returned no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear the evidence which they are stating against you?" Jesus answered not a single word, so that the governor was much amazed. At the time of the Feast the governor was in the habit of releasing one prisoner to the crowd, a prisoner whom they wished. At that time he was holding a very well-known prisoner called Barabbas. So, when they were assembled, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you wish me to release to you? Barabbas? Or, Jesus who is called Christ?" For he was well aware that they had delivered Jesus to him because of malice. While he was sitting on his judgment seat, his wife sent a message to him.

"Have nothing to do with this just man," she said, "for today I have had an extraordinary experience in a dream because of him." The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for the release of Barabbas, and the destruction of Jesus. "Which of the two," said the governor, "am I to release to you?" "Barabbas," they said. "What then," said Pilate to them, "am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ." "Let him be crucified," they all said. "What evil has he done?" he said. They kept shouting all the more: "Let him be crucified." When Pilate saw that it was hopeless to do anything, and that rather a disturbance was liable to arise, he took water, and washed his hands in presence of the crowd. "I am innocent of the blood of this just man," he said. "You must see to it." All the people answered, "Let the responsibility for his blood be on us and on our children." Then he released Barabbas to them; but he had Jesus scourged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Matt.27:1-2 describe what must have been a very brief meeting of the Sanhedrin, held early in the morning, with a view to formulating finally an official charge against Jesus. The necessity for this lay in the fact that, while the Jews could themselves deal with an ordinary charge, they could not inflict the death penalty. That was a sentence which could be pronounced only by the Roman governor, and carried out by the Roman authorities. The Sanhedrin had therefore to formulate a charge with which they could go to Pilate and demand the death of Jesus.

Matthew does not tell us what that charge was; but Luke does. In the Sanhedrin the charge which was levelled against Jesus was a charge of blasphemy (Matt.26:65-66). But no one knew better than the Jewish authorities that that was a charge to which Pilate would not listen. He would tell them to go away and settle their own religious quarrels. So, as Luke tells us, they appeared before Pilate with a threefold charge, every item in which was a lie, and a deliberate lie. They charged Jesus first with being a revolutionary, second, with inciting the people not to pay their taxes, and third, with claiming to be a king (Lk.23:2). They fabricated three political charges, all of them conscious lies, because they knew that only on such charges would Pilate act.

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Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26

So, then, everything hung on the attitude of Pilate. What kind of man was this Roman governor?

Pilate was officially procurator of the province; and he was directly responsible, not to the Roman senate, but to the Roman Emperor. He must have been at least twenty-seven years of age, for that was the minimum age for entering on the office of procurator. He must have been a man of considerable experience, for there was a ladder of offices, including military command, up which a man must climb until he qualified to become a governor. Pilate must have been a tried and tested soldier and administrator. He became procurator of Judaea in A.D. 26 and held office for ten years, when he was recalled from his post.

When Pilate came to Judaea, he found trouble in plenty, and much of it was of his own making. His great handicap was that he was completely out of sympathy with the Jews. More, he was contemptuous of what he would have called their irrational and fanatical prejudices, and what they would have called their principles. The Romans knew the intensity of Jewish religion and the unbreakable character of Jewish belief, and very wisely had always dealt with the Jews with kid gloves. Pilate arrogantly proposed to use the mailed fist.

He began with trouble. The Roman headquarters were in Caesarea. The Roman standards were not flags; they were poles with the Roman eagle, or the image of the reigning emperor, on top. In deference to the Jewish hatred of graven images, every previous governor had removed the eagles and the images from the standards before he marched into Jerusalem on his state visits. Pilate refused to do so. The result was such bitter opposition and such intransigence that Pilate in the end was forced to yield, for it is not possible either to arrest or to slaughter a whole nation.

Later, Pilate decided that Jerusalem needed a better water supply--a wise decision. To that end he constructed a new aqueduct--but he took money from the Temple treasury to pay for it.

Philo, the great Jewish Alexandrian scholar, has a character study of Pilate--and Philo, remember, was not a Christian, but was speaking from the Jewish point of view. The Jews, Philo tells us, had threatened to exercise their right to report Pilate to the Emperor for his misdeeds. This threat "exasperated Pilate to the greatest possible degree, as he feared lest they might go on an embassy to the emperor, and might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government--his corruption, his acts of insolence, his rapine, his habit of insulting people, his cruelty, his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never-ending gratuitous and most grievous inhumanity." Pilate's reputation with the Jews stank; and the fact that they could report him made his position entirely insecure.

We follow the career of Pilate to the end. In the end he was recalled to Rome on account of his savagery in an incident in Samaria. A certain impostor had summoned the people to Mount Gerizim with the claim that he would show them the sacred vessels which Moses had hidden there. Unfortunately many of the crowd came armed, and assembled in a village called Tirabatha. Pilate fell on them and slaughtered them with quite unnecessary savagery, for it was a harmless enough movement. The Samaritans lodged a complaint with Vitellius, the legate of Syria, who was Pilate's immediate superior, and Vitellius ordered him to return to Rome to answer for his conduct.

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Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26

When Pilate was on his way to Rome, Tiberius the Emperor died; and it appears that Pilate never came to trial. Legend has it that in the end he committed suicide; his body was flung into the Tiber, but the evil spirits so troubled the river that the Romans took the body to Gaul and threw it into the Rhone. Pilate's so-called tomb is still shown in Vienne. The same thing happened there; and the body was finally taken to a place near Lausanne and buried in a pit in the mountains. Opposite Lucerne there is a hill called Mount Pilatus. Originally the mountain was called Pileatus, which means wearing a cap of clouds, but because it was connected with Pilate the name was changed to Pilatus.

Later Christian legend was sympathetic to Pilate and tended to place all the blame for the death of Jesus on the Jews. Not unnaturally, legend came to hold that Pilate's wife, who it is said was a Jewish proselyte, and was called Claudia Procula, became a Christian. It was even held that Pilate himself became a Christian; and to this day the Coptic Church ranks both Pilate and his wife as saints.

We conclude this study of Pilate with a very interesting document. Pilate must have sent a report of the trial and death of Jesus to Rome; that would happen in the normal course of administration. An apocryphal book called The Acts of Peter and Paul contains an alleged copy of that report. This report is actually referred to by Tertullian and Justin Martyr and Eusebius. The report as we have it can hardly be genuine, but it is interesting to read it:

Pontius Pilate unto Claudius greeting.

There befell of late a matter of which I myself made trial; for the Jews through envy have punished themselves and their posterity with fearful judgments of their own fault; for whereas their fathers had promises that their God would send them out of heaven his Holy One, who should of right be called king, and did promise he would send him on earth by a virgin; he then came when I was governor of Judaea, and they beheld him enlightening the blind, cleansing lepers, healing the palsied, driving devils out of men, raising the dead, rebuking the winds, walking on the waves of the sea dry-shod, and doing many other wonders, and all the people of the Jews calling him the Son of God; the chief priests therefore moved with envy against him, took him and delivered him unto me and brought against him one false accusation after another, saying that he was a sorcerer and that he did things contrary to the law..

But I, believing that these things were so, having scourged him, delivered him to their will; and they crucified him, and, when he was buried, they set their guards upon him. But while my soldiers watched him, he rose again on the third day; yet so much was the malice of the Jews kindled, that they gave money to the soldiers

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Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26

saying: Say ye that his disciples stole away his body. But they, though they took the money, were not able to keep silence concerning that which had come to pass, for they also have testified that they saw him arisen, and that they received money from the Jews. And these things have I reported unto thy mightiness for this cause, lest some other should lie unto thee, and thou shouldest deem right to believe the false tales of the Jews.

Although that report is no doubt mere legend, Pilate certainly knew that Jesus was innocent; but his past misdeeds gave the Jews a lever with which to compel him to do their will against his wishes and his sense of justice.

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Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26

PILATE'S LOSING STRUGGLE

Matthew 27:1-2; Matthew 27:11-26 (Part 2)

This whole passage gives the impression of a man fighting a losing battle. It is clear that Pilate did not wish to condemn Jesus. Certain things emerge.

(i) Pilate was clearly impressed with Jesus. Plainly he did not take the King of the Jews claim seriously. He knew a revolutionary when he saw one, and Jesus was no revolutionary. His dignified silence made Pilate feel that it was not Jesus but he himself who was on trial. Pilate was a man who felt the power of Jesus--and was afraid to submit to it. There are still those who are afraid to be as Christian as they know they ought to be.

(ii) Pilate sought some way of escape. It appears to have been the custom at the time of the Feast for a prisoner to be released. In gaol there was a certain Barabbas. He was no sneak-thief; he was most probably either a brigand or a political revolutionary.

There are two interesting speculations about him. His name Barabbas means Son of the Father; father was a title by which the greatest Rabbis were known; it may well be that Barabbas was the son of an ancient and distinguished family who had kicked over the traces and embarked on a career of magnificent crime. Such a man would make crime glamorous and would appeal to the people.

Still more interesting is the near certainty that Barabbas was also called Jesus. Some of the very oldest versions of the New Testament, for example the ancient Syriac and Armenian versions, call him Jesus Barabbas; and both Origen and Jerome knew of that reading, and felt it might be correct. It is a curious thing that twice Pilate refers to Jesus who is called Christ (Matt.27:17,22), as if to distinguish him from some other Jesus. Jesus was a common name; it is the same name as Joshua. And the dramatic shout of the crowd most likely was: "Not Jesus Christ, but Jesus Barabbas."

Pilate sought an escape, but the crowd chose the violent criminal and rejected the gentle Christ. They preferred the man of violence to the man of love.

(iii) Pilate sought to unshoulder the responsibility for condemning Jesus. There is that strange and tragic picture of him washing his hands. That was a Jewish custom. There is a strange regulation in Deut.21:1-9. If a dead body was found, and it was not known who the killer was, measurements were to be taken to find what was the nearest town or village. The elders of that town or village had to sacrifice a heifer and to wash their hands to rid them of the guilt.

Pilate was warned by his sense of justice, he was warned by his conscience, he was warned by the dream of his troubled wife; but Pilate could not stand against the mob; and Pilate made the futile gesture of washing his hands. Legend has it that to this day there are times when Pilate's shade emerges from its tomb and goes through the action of the hand-washing once again.

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Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26

There is one thing of which a man can never rid himself--and that is responsibility. It is never possible for Pilate or anyone else to say, "I wash my hands of all responsibility," for that is something that no one and nothing can take away.

This picture of Pilate provokes in our minds pity rather than loathing; for here was a man so enmeshed in his past, and so rendered helpless by it, that he was unable to take the stand he ought to take. Pilate is a figure of tragedy rather than of villainy.

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Matthew 27:3-10

THE TRAITOR'S END

Matthew 27:3-10

When Judas the traitor saw that Jesus had been condemned, he repented, and he brought the thirty shekels back to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed an innocent man." "What has that got to do with us?" they said. "It is you who must see to that." He threw the money into the Temple and went away. And when he had gone away, he hanged himself. The chief priests took the money. "We cannot," they said, "put these into the treasury, for they are the price of blood." They took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to be a burying place for strangers. That is why to this day that field is called The Field of Blood. Then there was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, when he said: "And they took the thirty shekels, the price of him on whom a price had been set by the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the field of the potter, as the Lord instructed me."

Here in all its stark grimness is the last act of the tragedy of Judas. However we interpret his mind, one thing is clear--Judas now saw the horror of the thing that he had done. Matthew tells us that Judas took the money and flung it into the Temple, and the interesting thing is that the word he uses is not the word for the Temple precincts in general (hieron, GSN2411), it is the word for the actual Temple itself (naos, GSN3485). It will be remembered that the Temple consisted of a series of courts each opening off the other. Judas in his blind despair came into the Court of the Gentiles; passed through it into the Court of the Women; passed through that into the Court of the Israelites; beyond that he could not go; he had come to the barrier which shut off the Court of the Priests with the Temple itself at the far end of it. He called on them to take the money; but they would not; and he flung it at them and went away and hanged himself.

And the priests took the money, so tainted that it could not be put into the Temple treasury, and with it bought a field to bury the unclean bodies of Gentiles who died within the city.

The suicide of Judas is surely the final indication that his plan had gone wrong. He had meant to make Jesus blaze forth as a conqueror; instead he had driven him to the Cross and life for Judas was shattered. There are two great truths about sin here.

(i) The terrible thing about sin is that we cannot put the clock back. We cannot undo what we have done. Once a thing is done nothing can alter it or bring it back.

"The Moving Finger writes; and having writ?

Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,

Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it."

No one needs to be very old to have that haunting longing for some hour to be lived over again. When we remember that no action can ever be recalled, it should make us doubly careful how we act.

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Matthew 27:3-10

(ii) The strange thing about sin is that a man can come to hate the very thing he gained by it. The very prize he won by sinning can come to disgust and to revolt and to repel him, until his one desire is to fling it from him. Most people sin because they think that if they can only possess the forbidden thing it will make them happy. But the thing which sin desired can become the thing that a man above all would rid himself of--and so often he cannot.

As we have seen, Matthew finds forecasts of the events of the life of Jesus in the most unlikely places. Here there is, in fact, an actual mistake. Matthew is quoting from memory; and the quotation which he makes is, in fact, not from Jeremiah but from Zechariah. It is from a strange passage (Zech. 11:10-14) in which the prophet tells us how he received an unworthy reward and flung it to the potter. In that old picture Matthew saw a symbolic resemblance to the thing that Judas did.

It might have been that, if Judas had remained true to Jesus, he would have died a martyr's death; but, because he wanted his own way too much, he died by his own hand. He missed the glory of the martyr's crown to find life intolerable because he had sinned.

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Matthew 27:27-31

THE SOLDIERS' MOCKERY

Matthew 27:27-31

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus to the military headquarters, and collected to him the whole of the detachment. They stripped him of his clothes and put a soldier's purple cloak upon him; and they wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put a reed in his right hand; and they knelt in front of him, and mocked him by saying, "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they spat on him, and took the reed and hit him on his head. And when they had mocked him, they took off the cloak, and clothed him in his own clothes, and led him away to crucify him.

The dreadful routine of crucifixion had now begun. The last section ended by telling us that Pilate had Jesus scourged. Roman scourging was a terrible torture. The victim was stripped; his hands were tied behind him, and he was tied to a post with his back bent double and conveniently exposed to the lash. The lash itself was a long leather thong, studded at intervals with sharpened pieces of bone and pellets of lead. Such scourging always preceded crucifixion and "it reduced the naked body to strips of raw flesh, and inflamed and bleeding weals." Men died under it, and men lost their reason under it, and few remained conscious to the end of it.

After that Jesus was handed over to the soldiers, while the last details of crucifixion were arranged, and while the cross itself was prepared. They took him to their barracks in the governor's headquarters; and they called the rest of the detachment. The detachment is called a *speira* (GSN4686); in a full *speira* there were six hundred men. It is not likely that there were as many as that in Jerusalem. These soldiers were Pilate's bodyguard who had accompanied him from Caesarea, where his permanent headquarters were.

We may shudder at what the soldiers did; but of all the parties involved in the crucifixion they were least to be blamed. They were not even stationed in Jerusalem; they had no idea who Jesus was; they certainly were not Jews, for the Jews were the only nation in the Roman Empire who were exempt from military service; they were conscripts who may well have come from the ends of the earth. They indulged in their rough horse-play; but, unlike the Jews and unlike Pilate, they acted in ignorance.

Maybe for Jesus of all things this was the easiest to bear, for, although they made a sham king of him, there was no hatred in their eyes. To them he was nothing more than a deluded Galilean going to a cross. It is not without significance that Philo tells us that in Alexandria a Jewish mob did exactly the same to an imbecile boy: "They spread a strip of linen and placed it on his head instead of a diadem ... and for a sceptre they handed up to him a small piece of native papyrus bulrush which they found thrown on the roadside. And because he was adorned as a king ... some came up as though to greet him, others as though to plead a cause." So they mocked a half-idiot lad; and that is what the soldiers took Jesus to be.

Then they prepared to lead him away to crucifixion. We are sometimes told that we should not dwell on the physical aspect of the Cross; but we cannot possibly have too vivid a picture of what Jesus did and suffered for us. Klausner, the Jewish writer, says, "Crucifixion is the most terrible

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Matthew 27:27-31

and cruel death which man has ever devised for taking vengeance on his fellow-men." Cicero called it "the most cruel and the most horrible torture." Tacitus called it "a torture only fit for slaves."

It originated in Persia; and its origin came from the fact that the earth was considered to be sacred to Ormuzd the god, and the criminal was lifted up from it that he might not defile the earth, which was the god's property. From Persia crucifixion passed to Carthage in North Africa; and it was from Carthage that Rome learned it, although the Romans kept it exclusively for rebels, runaway slaves, and the lowest type of criminal. It was indeed a punishment which it was illegal to inflict on a Roman citizen.

Klausner goes on to describe crucifixion. The criminal was fastened to his cross, already a bleeding mass from the scourging. There he hung to die of hunger and thirst and exposure, unable even to defend himself from the torture of the gnats and flies which settled on his naked body and on his bleeding wounds. It is not a pretty picture but that is what Jesus Christ suffered--willingly--for us.

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Matthew 27:32-44

THE CROSS AND THE SHAME

Matthew 27:32-44

As they were going out, they found a Cyrenian man, Simon by name, and they impressed him into their service, to bear Jesus' Cross. When they had come to the place which is called Golgotha (which means the Place of a Skull), they offered him wine mingled with gall to drink, and, when he had tasted it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots for them; and as they sat there, they watched him. Above his head they placed a written copy of the charge on which he was being executed: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Then they crucified along with him two brigands, one on the right hand and one on the left. Those who were passing by kept flinging their insults at him.

They kept shaking their heads and saying, "Destroyer of the Temple, and builder of it in three days, save yourself If you are really the Son of God, come down from the Cross." In the same way the chief priests also with the Scribes and the elders jeered at him, "He saved others," they kept saying, "He cannot save himself. He is King of Israel. Let him come down from the Cross now, and we will believe on him. He trusted in God. Let God rescue him now, if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" The brigands too who were crucified with him hurled the same reproaches at him.

The Story of the Crucifixion does not need commentary; its power resides simply in the telling. All we can do is to paint in the background in order that the picture may be as clear as possible.

When a criminal had been condemned, he was led away to crucifixion. He was placed in the centre of a hollow square of four Roman soldiers. It was the custom that he should carry the cross beam of his own cross; the upright was already waiting at the scene of execution. The charge on which he was being executed was written on a board; it was then either hung round his own neck, or carried by an officer in front of the procession; and it was later affixed to the cross itself. The criminal was led to the scene of crucifixion by as long a route as possible, so that as many as possible might see him and take warning from the grim sight.

Jesus had undergone the terrible scourging; after that he had undergone the mockery of the soldiers; before all that he had been under examination for most of the night; and he was, therefore, physically exhausted, and staggering under his Cross. The Roman soldiers well knew what to do under such circumstances. Palestine was an occupied country; all that a Roman officer had to do was to tap a Jew on the shoulder with the flat of his spear, and the man had to carry out any task, however menial and distasteful, that was laid upon him. Into the city, from one of the surrounding villages, there had come a man from far off Cyrene in North Africa, called Simon. It may be that for years he had scraped and saved to attend this one Passover--and now this terrible indignity and shame fell upon him; for he was compelled to carry the Cross of Jesus. When Mark tells the story, he identifies Simon as "the father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mk.15:21).

Such an identification can only mean that Alexander and Rufus were well known in the Church. And it must be that on that terrible day Jesus laid hold on Simon's heart. That which to Simon had seemed his day of shame became his day of glory.

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Matthew 27:32-44

The place of crucifixion was a hill called Golgotha, so named because it was shaped like a skull. When the place was reached the criminal had to be impaled upon his cross. The nails had to be driven through his hands, but commonly the feet were only loosely bound to the cross. At that moment, in order to deaden the pain, the criminal was given a drink of drugged wine, prepared by a group of wealthy women of Jerusalem as an act of mercy. A Jewish writing says, "When a man is going out to be killed, they allow him to drink a grain of frankincense in a cup of wine to deaden his senses.... Wealthy women of Jerusalem used to contribute these things and bring them." The drugged cup was offered to Jesus, but he would not drink it, for he was determined to accept death at its bitterest and at its grimmest, and to avoid no particle of pain.

We have already seen that the criminal was led to execution in the middle of a square of four Roman soldiers; criminals were crucified naked, except for a loin cloth; and the criminal's clothes became the property of the soldiers as their perquisite. Every Jew wore five articles of clothing--his shoes, his turban, his girdle, his inner garment, and his outer cloak. There were thus five articles of clothing and four soldiers. The first four articles were all of equal value; but the outer cloak was more valuable than all the others. It was for Jesus' outer cloak that the soldiers drew lots, as John tells us (Jn.19:23-24). When the soldiers had divided the clothes, they sat down, on guard until the end should come. So there was on Golgotha a group of three crosses, in the middle the Son of God, and on either side a brigand. Truly, he was with sinners in his death.

The final verses describe the taunts flung at Jesus by the passers-by, by the Jewish authorities, and by the brigands who were crucified with him. They all centred round one thing--the claims that Jesus had made and his apparent helplessness on the Cross. It was precisely there that the Jews were so wrong. They were using the glory of Christ as a means of mocking him. "Come down," they said, "and we will believe on you." But as General Booth once said, "It is precisely because he would not come down that we believe in him." The Jews could see God only in power; but Jesus showed that God is sacrificial love.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 27:45-50

THE TRIUMPH OF THE END

Matthew 27:45-50

From twelve o'clock midday darkness came over the earth until three o'clock in the afternoon. About three o'clock in the afternoon Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" (that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") Some of those who were standing there heard this, and said, "This man is calling for Elias." And immediately one of them ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, "Let be! Let us see if Elias will come to save him." When Jesus had again shouted with a great voice, he gave up his spirit.

As we have been reading the story of the Crucifixion, everything seems to have been happening very quickly; but in reality the hours were slipping past. It is Mark who is most precise in his note of time. He tells us that Jesus was crucified at the third hour, that is at nine o'clock in the morning (Mk.15:25), and that he died at the ninth hour, that is at three o'clock in the afternoon (Mk.15:34). That is to say, Jesus hung on the Cross for six hours. For him the agony was mercifully brief, for it often happened that criminals hung upon their crosses for days before death came to them.

In Matt.27:46 we have what must be the most staggering sentence in the gospel record, the cry of Jesus: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That is a saying before which we must bow in reverence, and yet at the same time we must try to understand. There have been many attempts to penetrate behind its mystery; we can look only at three.

(i) It is strange how Ps.22 runs through the whole Crucifixion narrative; and this saying is actually the first verse of that Psalm. Later on it says, "All who seek me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads;` He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" (Ps.22:7-8). Still further on we read: "They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots" (Ps.22:18). Ps.22 is interwoven with the whole Crucifixion story.

It has been suggested that Jesus was, in fact, repeating that Psalm to himself; and, though it begins in complete dejection, it ends in soaring triumph--"From thee comes my praise in the great congregation.... For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations" (Ps.22:25-31). So it is suggested that Jesus was repeating Ps.22 on the Cross, as a picture of his own situation, and as a song of his trust and confidence, well knowing that it began in the depths, but that it finished on the heights.

It is an attractive suggestion; but on a cross a man does not repeat poetry to himself, even the poetry of a psalm; and besides that, the whole atmosphere is one of unrelieved tragedy.

(ii) It is suggested that in that moment the weight of the world's sin fell upon the heart and the being of Jesus; that that was the moment when he who knew no sin was made sin for us (2Cor.5:21); and that the penalty which he bore for us was the inevitable separation from God

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Matthew 27:45-50

which sin brings. No man may say that that is not true; but, if it is, it is a mystery which we can only state and at which we can only wonder.

(iii) It may be that there is something--if we may put it so--more human here. It seems to me that Jesus would not be Jesus unless he had plumbed the uttermost depths of human experience. In human experience, as life goes on and as bitter tragedy enters into it, there come times when we feel that God has forgotten us; when we are immersed in a situation beyond our understanding and feel bereft even of God. It seems to me that that is what happened to Jesus here. We have seen in the garden that Jesus knew only that he had to go on, because to go on was God's will, and he must accept what even he could not fully understand. Here we see Jesus plumbing the uttermost depths of the human situation, so that there might be no place that we might go where he has not been before.

Those who listened did not understand. Some thought he was calling on Elijah; they must have been Jews. One of the great gods of the pagans was the sun--Helios. A cry to the sun god would have begun "Helie!" and it has been suggested that the soldiers may have thought that Jesus was crying to the greatest of the pagan gods. In any event, his cry was to the watchers a mystery.

But here is the point. It would have been a terrible thing if Jesus had died with a cry like that upon his lips--but he did not. The narrative goes on to tell us that, when he shouted with a great shout, he gave up his spirit. That great shout left its mark upon men's minds. It is in every one of the gospels (Matt.27:50; Mk.15:37; Lk.23:46). But there is one gospel which goes further. John tells us that Jesus died with a shout: "It is finished" (Jn.19:30). It is finished is in English three words; but in Greek it is one--Tetelestai (GSN5055)--as it would also be in Aramaic. And tetelestai (GSN5055) is the victor's shout; it is the cry of the man who has completed his task; it is the cry of the man who has won through the struggle; it is the cry of the man who has come out of the dark into the glory of the light, and who has grasped the crown. So, then, Jesus died a victor with a shout of triumph on his lips.

Here is the precious thing. Jesus passed through the uttermost abyss, and then the light broke. If we too cling to God, even when there seems to be no God, desperately and invincibly clutching the remnants of our faith, quite certainly the dawn will break and we will win through. The victor is the man who refuses to believe that God has forgotten him, even when every fibre of his being feels that he is forsaken. The victor is the man who will never let go his faith, even when he feels that its last grounds are gone. The victor is the man who has been beaten to the depths and still holds on to God, for that is what Jesus did.

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Matthew 27:51-56

THE BLAZING REVELATION

Matthew 27:51-56

And, look you, the veil of the Temple was rent in two from top to bottom, and the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened, and the bodies of many of God's dedicated ones were raised, and they came out of the tombs after his resurrection and came into the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and those who were watching Jesus with him saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, and they were exceedingly afraid. "Truly," they said, "this man was the Son of God."

Many women were there watching from a distance. They were the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, giving their service to him. Among them were Mary from Magdala, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

This passage falls into three sections.

(i) There is the story of the amazing things which happened as Jesus died. Whether or not we are meant to take these things literally, they teach us two great truths.

(a) The Temple veil was rent from top to bottom. That was the veil which covered the Holy of Holies; that was the veil beyond which no man could penetrate, save only the High Priest on the Day of Atonement; that was the veil behind which the Spirit of God dwelt. There is symbolism here. Up to this time God had been hidden and remote, and no man knew what he was like. But in the death of Jesus we see the hidden love of God, and the way to the presence of God once barred to all men is now opened to all men. The life and the death of Jesus show us what God is like and remove for ever the veil which hid him from men.

(b) The tombs were opened. The symbolism of this is that Jesus conquered death. In dying and in rising again he destroyed the power of the grave. Because of his life, his death and his resurrection, the tomb has lost its power, and the grave has lost its terror, and death has lost its tragedy. For we are certain that because he lives we shall live also.

(ii) There is the story of the adoration of the centurion. There is only one thing to be said about this. Jesus had said, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn.12:32). He foretold the magnetic power of the Cross; and the centurion was its first fruit. The Cross had moved him to see the majesty of Jesus as nothing else had been able to do.

(iii) There is the simple statement concerning the women who saw the end. All the disciples forsook him and fled, but the women remained. It has been said that, unlike the men, the women had nothing to fear, for so low was the public position of women that no one would take any notice of women disciples. There is more to it than that. They were there because they loved Jesus, and for them, as for so many, perfect love had cast out all fear.

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Matthew 27:57-61

THE GIFT OF A TOMB

Matthew 27:57-61

Late in the day there came a rich man from Arimathaea, Joseph by name, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and requested the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in clean linen, and laid it in a new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock. And he rolled a great stone across the door of the tomb and went away. And Mary from Magdala was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb.

According to Jewish law, even a criminal's body might not be left hanging all night, but had to be buried that day. "His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day" (Deut.21:22-23). This was doubly binding when, as in the case of Jesus, the next day was the Sabbath. According to Roman law, the relatives of a criminal might claim his body for burial, but if it was not claimed it was simply left to rot until the scavenger dogs dealt with it.

Now none of Jesus' relatives were in a position to claim his body, for they were all Galileans and none of them possessed a tomb in Jerusalem. So the wealthy Joseph from Arimathaea stepped in. He went to Pilate and asked that the body of Jesus should be given to him; and he cared for it, and put it into the rock tomb where no man had ever been laid. Joseph must be forever famous as the man who gave Jesus a tomb.

Legends have gathered around the name of Joseph and legends which are of particular interest to those who live in England. The best known is that in A.D. 61 Philip sent Joseph from Gaul to preach the gospel in England. He came bearing with him the chalice which was used at the Last Supper, and which now held the blood of Jesus shed upon the Cross. That chalice was to become the Holy Grad which is so famous in the stories of the Knights of King Arthur. When Joseph and his band of missionaries had climbed Weary-all Hill and come to the other side, they came to Glastonbury; there Joseph struck his staff into the earth and from it grew the Glastonbury Thorn. It is certainly true that for years Glastonbury was the holiest place in England; and it is still a place of pilgrimage. The story is that the original thorn was hacked down by a Puritan, but that the thorn which grows there to this day came from a shoot of it; and to this day slips of it are sent all over the world.

So, then, legend connects Joseph of Arimathaea with Glastonbury and England.

But there is a lesser-known legend, commemorated in one of the most famous, hymns and poems in the English language. It is a legend which is still current in Somerset. Joseph, so the legend runs, was a tin merchant, and came, long before he was sent by Philip, on quite frequent visits to the tin mines of Cornwall. The town of Marazion in Cornwall has another name. It is sometimes called Market Jew, and is said to have been the centre of a colony of Jews who traded in tin. The legend goes still further. Joseph of Arimathaea, it says, was the uncle of Mary, the mother of Jesus. (Can it possibly be that he did actually exercise a relative's right to claim the body of Jesus under Roman law?) And, it is said, he brought the young boy Jesus with him on one of his voyages to Cornwall.. That is what William Blake was thinking of when he wrote his famous poem:

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Matthew 27:57-61

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the Holy Lamb of God
In England's pleasant pastures seen?
And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among those dark Satanic mills?

The dark Satanic mills were the tin mines of Cornwall. It is a lovely legend which we would like to be true, for there would be a thrill in the thought that the feet of the boy Jesus once touched English earth.

It is often said that Joseph gave to Jesus a tomb after he was dead, but did not support him during his life. Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin (Lk.23:50); and Luke tells us that "he had not consented to the (council's) purpose and deed" (Lk.23:51). It is possible that the meeting of the Sanhedrin called in the house of Caiaphas in the middle of the night was selectively called? It hardly seems likely that the whole Sanhedrin could have been there. It may well be that Caiaphas summoned those whom he wished to be present and packed the meeting with his supporters, and that Joseph never even got a chance to be there.

It is certainly true that in the end Joseph displayed the greatest courage. He came out on the side of a crucified criminal; he braved the possible resentment of Pilate; and he faced the certain hatred of the Jews. It may well be that Joseph of Arimathea did everything that it was possible for him to do.

One obscure point remains. The woman who is called the other Mary is identified as Mary, the mother of Joses by Mk.15:47. We have already seen that these women were present at the Cross; their love made them follow Jesus in life and in death.

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Matthew 27:62-66

AN IMPOSSIBLE ASSIGNMENT

Matthew 27:62-66

On the next day, which is the day after the Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came to Pilate in a body. "Sir," they said, "we remember that, while he was still alive, that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' Give orders therefore that the tomb should be kept secure until the three days are ended, in case his disciples come and steal him, and say to the people, 'He has been raised from among the dead.' If that happens, the final deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said, "You have a guard. Go, and make it as secure as you can." They went and secured the tomb by setting a seal upon it as well as by placing a guard.

This passage begins in the most curious way. It says that the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate on the next day, which is the day after the Preparation. Now Jesus was crucified on the Friday. Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath. The hours from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday were called The Eve, or The Preparation. We have seen that, according to Jewish reckoning, the new day began at 6 p.m. Therefore, the Sabbath began at 6 p.m. on Friday; and the last hours of Friday were The Preparation. If this is accurate, it can only mean one thing--it must mean that the chief priests and Pharisees actually approached Pilate on the Sabbath with their request. If they did that, it is clear to see how radically they broke the Sabbath Law. If this is accurate, no other incident in the gospel story more plainly shows how desperately eager the Jewish authorities were totally to eliminate Jesus. In order to make certain that he was finally out of the way they were willing to break even their own most sacred laws.

There is a grim irony here. These Jews came to Pilate saying that Jesus had said that he would rise after three days. They did not admit that they envisaged the possibility that that might be true, but they thought the disciples might seek to steal away the body and say that a resurrection had happened. They, therefore, wished to take special steps to guard the tomb. Back comes Pilate's answer: "Make it as safe as you can." It is as if Pilate all unconsciously said, "Keep Christ in the tomb--if you can." They took their steps. The door of these rock tombs was closed by a great round stone like a cartwheel, which ran in a groove. They sealed it and they set a special guard--and they made it as safe as they could.

They had not realized one thing--that there was not a tomb in the world which could imprison the Risen Christ. Not all men's plans could bind the Risen Lord. The man who seeks to put bonds on Jesus Christ is on a hopeless assignment.

Barclay's Commentary

Matthew 28:1-10

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

Matthew 28:1-10

Late on the Sabbath, when the first day of the week was beginning to dawn, Mary from Magdala and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And, look you, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning, and his garment was as white as snow. Those who were watching were shaken with fear, and became as dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said he would. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. Go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He is risen from among the dead. And, look you, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.' Look you, I have told you." So they quickly went away from the tomb with fear and with great joy, and they ran to tell the news to his disciples. And, look you, Jesus met them. "Greetings!" he said. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Fear not! Go tell my brothers to go away into Galilee, and there they will see me."

Here we have Matthew's story of the empty tomb. And there is something peculiarly fitting in that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary should be the first to receive the news of the Risen Lord and to encounter him. They had been there at the Cross; they had been there when he was laid in the tomb; and now they were receiving love's reward; they were the first to know the joy of the Resurrection.

As we read this story of the first two people in the world to be confronted with the fact of the empty tomb and the Risen Christ, three imperatives seem to spring out of it.

(i) They are urged to believe. The thing is so staggering that it might seem beyond belief, too good to be true. The angel reminds them of the promise of Jesus, and confronts them with the empty tomb; his every word is a summons to believe. It is still a fact that there are many who feel that the promises of Christ are too good to be true. That hesitation can be dispelled only by taking him as his word.

(ii) They are urged to share. When they themselves have discovered the fact of the Risen Christ, their first duty is to proclaim it to and to share it with others. "Go, tell!" is the first command which comes to the man who has himself discovered the wonder of Jesus Christ.

(iii) They are urged to rejoice. The word with which the Risen Christ meets them is *Chairete* (GSN5463); that is the normal word of greeting; but its literal meaning is "Rejoice!" The man who has met the Risen Lord must live for ever in the joy of his presence from which nothing can part him any more.

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Matthew 28:11-15

THE LAST RESORT

Matthew 28:11-15

While they were on their way, certain of the guard came to the city and told the chief priests all that had happened. When they had met with the elders, they formed a plan. They gave a considerable amount of money to the soldiers. "Say," they said, "His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept." And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will use our influence, and we will see to it that you have nothing to worry about.' They took the money and followed their instructions. And this is the story which is repeated amongst the Jews to this day.

When some of the guard came to the chief priests and told them the story of the empty tomb, the Jewish authorities were desperately worried men. Was it possible that all their planning had come to nothing? So they formed a simple plan; they bribed the members of the guard to say that Jesus' disciples had come while they slept and had stolen his body.

It is interesting to note the means that the Jewish authorities used in their desperate attempts to eliminate Jesus. They used treachery to lay hold on him. They used illegality to try him. They used slander to charge him to Pilate. And now they were using bribery to silence the truth about him. And they failed. *Magna est veritas et praevalerebit*, ran the Roman proverb; great is the truth and it will prevail. It is the fact of history that not all men's evil machinations can in the end stop the truth. The gospel of goodness is greater than the plots of wickedness.

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Matthew 28:16-20

THE GLORY OF THE FINAL PROMISE

Matthew 28:16-20

So the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had instructed them to go. And they saw him and worshipped him; but some were not sure. Jesus came and spoke to them. "All power," he said, "is given to me in heaven and upon earth. Go, therefore, and make all nations my disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to keep all the commandments I have given you. And, look you, I am with you throughout all days until the end of the world."

Here we come to the end of the gospel story; here we listen to the last words of Jesus to his men; and in this last meeting Jesus did three things.

(i) He assured them of his power. Surely nothing was outside the power of him who had died and conquered death. Now they were the servants of a Master whose authority upon earth and in heaven was beyond all question.

(ii) He gave them a commission. He sent them out to make all the world his disciples. It may well be that the instruction to baptize is something which is a development of the actual words of Jesus. That may be argued about; the salient fact remains that the commission of Jesus is to win an men for himself.

(iii) He promised them a presence. It must have been a staggering thing for eleven humble Galilaeans to be sent forth to the conquest of the world. Even as they heard it, their hearts must have failed them. But, no sooner was the command given, than the promise followed. They were sent out--as we are--on the greatest task in history, but with them there was the greatest presence in the world.

"Though few and small and weak your bands,
Strong in your Captain's strength,
Go to the conquest of all lands;
All must be his at length."

Barclay's Commentary

Introduction to Mark

MARK, THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL

Who then was this Mark who wrote the gospel? The New Testament tells us a good deal about him. He was the son of a well-to-do lady of Jerusalem whose name was Mary, and whose house was a rallying-point and meeting place of the early church (Ac.12:12). From the very beginning Mark was brought up in the very centre of the Christian fellowship.

Mark was also the nephew of Barnabas, and when Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey they took Mark with them to be their secretary and attendant (Ac.12:25). This journey was a most unfortunate one for Mark. When they reached Perga, Paul proposed to strike inland up to the central plateau; and for some reason Mark left the expedition and went home (Ac.13:13).

He may have gone home because he was scared to face the dangers of what was notoriously one of the most difficult and dangerous roads in the world, a road hard to travel and haunted by bandits. He may have gone home because it was increasingly clear that the leadership of the expedition was being assumed by Paul and Mark may have felt with disapproval that his uncle was being pushed into the background. He may have gone home because he did not approve of the work which Paul was doing. Chrysostom--perhaps with a flash of imaginative insight--says that Mark went home because he wanted his mother!

Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey and then proposed to set out upon their second. Barnabas was anxious to take Mark with them again. But Paul refused to have anything to do with the man "who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia." (Ac.15:37-40.) So serious was the difference between them that Paul and Barnabas split company, and, so far as we know, never worked together again.

For some years Mark vanishes from history. Tradition has it that he went down to Egypt and founded the Church of Alexandria there. Whether or not that is true we do not know, but we do know that when Mark re-emerges it is in the most surprising way. We learn to our surprise that when Paul writes the letter to the Colossians from prison in Rome Mark is there with him (Col.4:10). In another prison letter, to Philemon, Paul numbers Mark among his fellow-labourers (Phm.24). And, when Paul is waiting for death and very near the end, he writes to Timothy, his right-hand man, and says, "Take Mark and bring him with you; for he is a most useful servant to me." (2Tim.4:11.) It is a far cry from the time when Paul contemptuously dismissed Mark as a quilter. Whatever had happened Mark had redeemed himself. He was the one man Paul wanted at the end.

MARK'S SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The value of any man's story will depend on the sources of his information. Where, then, did Mark get his information about the life and work of Jesus? We have seen that his home was from the beginning a Christian centre of Jerusalem. Many a time he must have heard people tell of their personal memories of Jesus. But it is most likely that he had a source of information without a superior.

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Introduction to Mark

Towards the end of the second century there was a man called Papias who liked to obtain and transmit such information as he could glean about the early days of the Church. He tells us that Mark's gospel is nothing other than a record of the preaching material of Peter, the greatest of the apostles. Certainly Mark stood so close to Peter, and so near to his heart, that Peter could call him "Mark, my son." (1Pet.5:13.) Here is what Papias says:

"Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done. For he was not a hearer of the Lord or a follower of his. He followed Peter, as I have said, at a later date, and Peter adapted his instruction to practical needs. without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically. So that Mark was not wrong in writing down some things in this way from memory, for his one concern was neither to omit nor to falsify anything that he had heard."

We may then take it that in his gospel we have what Mark remembered of the preaching material of Peter himself.

So, then, we have two great reasons why Mark is a book of supreme importance. First, it is the earliest of all the gospels; if it was written just shortly after Peter died its date will be about A.D. 65. Second, it embodies the record of what Peter preached and taught about Jesus; we may put it this way--Mark is the nearest approach we will ever possess to an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus.

THE LOST ENDING

There is a very interesting thing about Mark's gospel. In its original form it stops at Mk.16:8. We know that for two reasons. First, the verses which follow (Mk.16:9-20) are not in any of the great early manuscripts; only later and inferior manuscripts contain them. Second, the style of the Greek is so different that they cannot have been written by the same person as wrote the rest of the gospel.

But the gospel cannot have been meant to stop at Mk.16:8. What then happened? It may be that Mark died, perhaps even suffered martyrdom, before he could complete his gospel. More likely, it may be that at one time only one copy of the gospel remained, and that a copy in which the last part of the roll on which it was written had got torn off. There was a time when the church did not much use Mark, preferring Matthew and Luke. It may well be that Mark's gospel was so neglected that all copies except for a mutilated one were lost. If that is so we were within an ace of losing the gospel which in many ways is the most important of all.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MARK'S GOSPEL

Let us look at the characteristics of Mark's gospel so that we may watch for them as we read and study it.

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Introduction to Mark

(i) It is the nearest thing we will ever get to a report of Jesus' life. Mark's aim was to give a picture of Jesus as he was. Westcott called it "a transcript from life." A. B. Bruce said that it was written "from the viewpoint of loving, vivid recollection," and that its great characteristic was realism.

If ever we are to get anything approaching a biography of Jesus, it must be based on Mark, for it is his delight to tell the facts of Jesus' life in the simplest and most dramatic way.

(ii) Mark never forgot the divine side of Jesus. He begins his gospel with the declaration of faith, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He leaves us in no doubt what he believed Jesus to be. Again and again he speaks of the impact Jesus made on the mind and heart of those who heard him. The awe and astonishment which he evoked are always before Mark's mind. "They were astonished at his teaching." (Mk.1:22.) "They were all amazed." (Mk.1:27.) Such phrases occur again and again. Not only was this astonishment in the minds of the crowds who listened to Jesus; it was still more in the minds of the inner circle of the disciples. "And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'" (Mk.4:41.) "And they were utterly astounded." (Mk.6:51.) "The disciples were amazed at his words." (Mk.10:24,26.)

To Mark, Jesus was not simply a man among men; he was God among men, ever moving them to a wondering amazement with his words and deeds.

(iii) At the same time, no gospel gives such a human picture of Jesus. Sometimes its picture is so human that the later writers alter it a little because they are almost afraid to say what Mark said. To Mark Jesus is simply "the carpenter." (Mk.6:3.) Later Matthew alters that to "the carpenter's son" (Matt.13:55), as if to call Jesus a village tradesman is too daring. When Mark is telling of the temptations of Jesus, he writes, "The Spirit drove him into the wilderness." (Mk.1:12.) Matthew and Luke do not like this word drove used of Jesus, so they soften it down and say, "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness." (Matt.4:1; Lk.4:1.) No one tells us so much about the emotions of Jesus as Mark does. Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit (Mk.7:34; Mk.8:12). He was moved with compassion (Mk.6:34). He marvelled at their unbelief (Mk.6:6). He was moved with righteous anger (Mk.3:5; Mk.8:33; Mk.10:14). Only Mark tells us that when Jesus looked at the rich young ruler he loved him (Mk.10:21).

Jesus could feel the pangs of hunger (Mk.11:12). He could be tired and want to rest (Mk.6:31).

It is in Mark's gospel, above all, that we get a picture of a Jesus of like passions with us. The sheer humanity of Jesus in Mark's picture brings him very near to us.

(iv) One of the great characteristics of Mark is that over and over again he inserts the little vivid details into the narrative which are the hall-mark of an eyewitness. Both Matthew and Mark tell of Jesus taking the little child and setting him in the midst. Matthew (Matt.18:2) says, "And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them." Mark adds something which lights up the whole picture (Mk.9:36). "And he took a child and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them..." In the lovely picture of Jesus and the children, when Jesus rebuked the

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disciples for keeping the children from him, only Mark finishes, "and he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them." (Mk.10:13-16; compare Matt.19:13-15; Lk.18:15-17.) All the tenderness of Jesus is in these little vivid additions.

When Mark is telling of the Feeding of the Five Thousand he alone tells how they sat down in hundreds and in fifties, looking like vegetable beds in a garden (Mk.6:40) and immediately the whole scene rises before us. When Jesus and his disciples were on the last journey to Jerusalem, only Mark tells us, "and Jesus went before them." (Mk.10:32; compare Matt.20:17; Lk.18:31); and in that one vivid little phrase all the loneliness of Jesus stands out. When Mark is telling the story of the stilling of the storm he has one little sentence that none of the other gospel-writers have. "And he was in the hinder part of the ship asleep on a pillow" (Mk.4:38). And that one touch makes the picture vivid before our eyes.

There can be little doubt that all these details are due to the fact that Peter was an eyewitness and was seeing these things again with the eye of memory.

(v) Mark's realism and his simplicity come out in his Greek style.

(a) His style is not carefully wrought and polished. He tells the story as a child might tell it. He adds statement to statement connecting them simply with the word "and." In the third chapter of the gospel, in the Greek, there are 34 clauses or sentences one after another introduced by "and" after one principal verb. It is the way in which an eager child would tell the story.

(b) He is very fond of the words "and straightway," "and immediately." They occur in the gospel almost 30 times. It is sometimes said of a story that "it marches." But Mark's story does not so much march; he rushes on in a kind of breathless attempt to make the story as vivid to others as it is to himself.

(c) He is very fond of the historic present. That is to say, in the Greek he talks of events in the present tense instead of in the past. "And when Jesus heard it, he says to them, 'Those who are strong do not need a doctor, but those who are ill.'" (Mk.2:17.) "And when they come near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and to Bethany, to the Mount of Olives, he sends two of his disciples, and says to them, 'Go into the village opposite you...!'" (Mk.11:1-2.) "And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of The Twelve, comes." (Mk.14:43.)

Generally speaking we do not keep these historic presents in translation, because in English they do not sound well; but they show how vivid and real the thing was to Mark's mind, as if it was happening before his very eyes.

(d) He quite often gives us the very Aramaic words which Jesus used. To Jairus' daughter, Jesus said, "Talitha (GSN5008) cumi (GSN2891)." (Mk.5:41.) To the deaf man with the impediment in his speech he said, "Ephphatha (GSN2188)." (Mk.7:34.) The dedicated gift is "Corban (GSN2878)." (Mk.7:11.) In the Garden he says, "Abba (GSN0005), Father." (Mk.14:36.) On the Cross he cries, "Eloi (GSN1682) Eloi (GSN1682) lama (GSN2982) sabachthani (GSN4518)?" (Mk.15:34.)

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There were times when Peter could hear again the very sound of Jesus' voice and could not help giving the thing to Mark in the very words that Jesus spoke.

THE ESSENTIAL GOSPEL

It would not be unfair to call Mark the essential gospel. We will do well to study with loving care the earliest gospel we possess, the gospel where we hear again the preaching of Peter himself.

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Mark 1:1-4

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY

Mark 1:1-4

This is the beginning of the story of how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, brought the good news to men. There is a passage in Isaiah the prophet like this--"Lo! I send my messenger before you and he will prepare your road for you. He will be like a voice crying in the wilderness, 'Get ready the road of the Lord. Make straight the path by which he will come'." This came true when John the Baptizer emerged in the wilderness, announcing a baptism which was the sign of a repentance through which a man might find forgiveness for his sins.

Mark starts the story of Jesus a long way back. It did not begin with Jesus' birth; it did not even begin with John the Baptizer in the wilderness; it began with the dreams of the prophets long ago; that is to say, it began long, long ago in the mind of God.

The Stoics were strong believers in the ordered plan of God. "The things of God," said Marcus Aurelius, "are full of foresight. All things flow from heaven." There are things we may well learn here.

(i) It has been said that "the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts," and so are the thoughts of God. God is characteristically a God who is working his purposes out. History is not a random kaleidoscope of disconnected events; it is a process directed by the God who sees the end in the beginning.

(ii) We are within that process, and because of that we can either help or hinder it. In one sense it is as great an honour to help in some great process as it is a privilege to see the ultimate goal. Life would be very different if, instead of yearning for some distant and at present unattainable goal, we did all that we could to bring that goal nearer.

"In youth, because I could not be a singer,
I did not even try to write a song;
I set no little trees along the roadside,
Because I knew their growth would take so long.

But now from wisdom that the years have brought me,
I know that it may be a blessed thing
To plant a tree for someone else to water,
Or make a song for someone else to sing."

The goal will never be reached unless there are those who labour to make it possible.

The prophetic quotation which Mark uses is suggestive.

I send my messenger before you and he will prepare your road for you. This is from Mal.3:1. In its original context it is a threat. In Malachi's day the priests were failing in their duty. The offerings

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Mark 1:1-4

were blemished and shoddy second-bests; the service of the temple was a weariness to them. The messenger was to cleanse and purify the worship of the temple before the Anointed One of God emerged upon the earth. So then the coming of Christ was a purification of life. And the world needed that purification. Seneca called Rome "a cesspool of iniquity." Juvenal spoke of her "as the filthy sewer into which flowed the abominable dregs of every Syrian and Achaean stream." Wherever Christianity comes it brings purification.

That happens to be capable of factual demonstration. Bruce Barton tells how the first important journalistic assignment that fell to him was to write a series of articles designed to expose Billy Sunday, the evangelist. Three towns were chosen. "I talked to the merchants," Bruce Barton writes, "and they told me that during the meetings and afterward people walked up to the counter and paid bills which were so old that they had long since been written off the books." He went to visit the president of the chamber of commerce of a town that Billy Sunday had visited three years before. "I am not a member of any church," he said. "I never attend but I'll tell you one thing. If it was proposed now to bring Billy Sunday to this town, and if we knew as much about the results of his work in advance as we do now, and if the churches would not raise the necessary funds to bring him, I could raise the money in half a day from men who never go to church. He took eleven thousand dollars out of here, but a circus comes here and takes out that amount in one day and leaves nothing. He left a different moral atmosphere." The exposure that Bruce Barton meant to write became a tribute to the cleansing power of the Christian message.

When Billy Graham preached in Shreveport, Louisiana, liquor sales dropped by 40 per cent and the sale of Bibles increased 300 per cent. During a mission in Seattle, amongst the results there is stated quite simply, "Several impending divorce actions were cancelled." In Greensboro, North Carolina, the report was that "the entire social structure of the city was affected."

One of the great stories of what Christianity can do came out of the mutiny on the Bounty. The mutineers were put ashore on Pitcairn Island. There were nine mutineers, six native men, ten native women and a girl, fifteen years old. One of them succeeded in making crude alcohol. A terrible situation ensued. They all died except Alexander Smith. Smith chanced upon a Bible. He read it and he made up his mind to build up a state with the natives of that island based directly on the Bible. It was twenty years before an American sloop called at the island. They found a completely Christian community. There was no gaol because there was no crime. There was no hospital because there was no disease. There was no asylum because there was no insanity. There was no illiteracy; and nowhere in the world was human life and property so safe. Christianity had cleansed that society.

Where Christ is allowed to come the antiseptic of the Christian faith cleanses the moral poison of society and leaves it pure and clean.

John came announcing a baptism of repentance. The Jew was familiar with ritual washings. Lev.11-15 details them. "The Jew," said Tertullian, "washes himself every day because every day he is defiled." Symbolic washing and purifying was woven into the very fabric of Jewish ritual. A Gentile was necessarily unclean for he had never kept any part of the Jewish law. Therefore, when a Gentile became a proselyte, that is a convert to the Jewish faith, he had to undergo three things.

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Mark 1:1-4

First, he had to undergo circumcision, for that was the mark of the covenant people; second, sacrifice had to be made for him, for he stood in need of atonement and only blood could atone for sin; third, he had to undergo baptism, which symbolized his cleansing from all the pollution of his past life. Naturally, therefore, the baptism was not a mere sprinkling with water, but a bath in which his whole body was bathed.

The Jew knew baptism; but the amazing thing about John's baptism was that he, a Jew, was asking Jews to submit to that which only a Gentile was supposed to need. John had made the tremendous discovery that to be a Jew in the racial sense was not to be a member of God's chosen people; a Jew might be in exactly the same position as a Gentile; not the Jewish life, but the cleansed life belonged to God.

The baptism was accompanied by confession. In any return to God confession must be made to three different people.

(i) A man must make confession to himself. It is a part of human nature that we shut our eyes to what we do not wish to see, and above all to our own sins. Someone tells of a man's first step to grace. As he was shaving one morning he looked at his face in the mirror and suddenly said, "You dirty, little rat!" And from that day he began to be a changed man.

No doubt when the prodigal son left home he thought himself a fine and adventurous character. Before he took his first step back home he had to take a good look at himself and say, "I will get up and go home and say that I am an utter rotter." (Lk.15:17-18.)

There is no one in all the world harder to face than ourselves; and the first step to repentance and to a right relationship to God is to admit our sin to ourselves.

(ii) A man must make confession to those whom he has wronged. It will not be much use saying to God that we are sorry until we say we are sorry to those whom we have hurt and grieved. The human barriers have to be removed before the divine barriers can go. In the East African Church, a husband and wife were members of a group. One of them came and made confession that there was a quarrel at home. The minister at once said, "You should not have come and confessed that quarrel just now; you should have made it up and then come and confessed it."

It can often be the case that confession to God is easier than confession to men. But there can be no forgiveness without humiliation.

(iii) A man must make confession to God. The end of pride is the beginning of forgiveness. It is when a man says, "I have sinned," that God gets the chance to say, "I forgive." It is not the man who desires to meet God on equal terms who will discover forgiveness, but the man who kneels in humble contrition and whispers through his shame, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

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Mark 1:5-8

THE HERALD OF THE KING

Mark 1:5-8

And the whole country of Judea went out to him, and so did all the people of Jerusalem, and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, while they confessed their sins. John was clad in a garment of camel's hair, and he had a leather girdle round his waist, and it was his custom to eat locusts and wild honey. The burden of his proclamation was, "The one who is stronger than I is coming after me. I am not fit to stoop down and to loosen the strap of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

It is clear that the ministry of John was mightily effective, for they flocked out to listen to him and to submit to his baptism. Why was it that John made an impact such as this upon his nation?

(i) He was a man who lived his message. Not only his words, but also his whole life was a protest. Three things about him marked the reality of his protest against contemporary life.

(a) There was the place in which he stayed--the wilderness. Between the centre of Judaea and the Dead Sea lies one of the most terrible deserts in the world. It is a limestone desert; it looks warped and twisted; it shimmers in the haze of the heat; the rock is hot and blistering and sounds hollow to the feet as if there was some vast furnace underneath; it moves out to the Dead Sea and then descends in dreadful and unscalable precipices down to the shore. In the Old Testament it is sometimes called Yeshiymown (HSN3452), which means The Devastation. John was no city-dweller. He was a man from the desert and from its solitudes and its desolations. He was a man who had given himself a chance to hear the voice of God.

(b) There were the clothes he wore a garment woven of camel's hair and a leather belt about his waist. So did Elijah (2Kgs.1:8). To look at the man was to be reminded, not of the fashionable orators of the day, but of the ancient prophets who lived close to the great simplicities and avoided the soft and effeminate luxuries which kill the soul.

(c) There was the food he ate--locusts and wild honey. It so happens that both words are capable of two interpretations. The locusts may be the animals for the law allowed them to be eaten (Lev.11:22-23); but they may also be a kind of bean or nut, the carob, which was the food of the poorest of the poor. The honey may be the honey the wild bees make; or it may be a kind of sweet sap that distills from the bark of certain trees. it does not matter what the words precisely mean. In any event John's diet was of the simplest.

So John emerged. People had to listen to a man like that. It was said of Carlyle that "he preached the gospel of silence in twenty volumes." Many a man comes with a message which he himself denies. Many a man with a comfortable bank account preaches about not laying up treasures upon earth. Many a man extols the blessings of poverty from a comfortable home. But in the case of John, the man was the message, and because of that people listened.

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Mark 1:5-8

(ii) His message was effective because he told people what in their heart of hearts they knew and brought them what in the depths of their souls they were waiting for.

(a) The Jews had a saying that "if Israel would only keep the law of God perfectly for one day the Kingdom of God would come." When John summoned men to repentance he was confronting them with a decision that they knew in their heart of hearts they ought to make. Long ago Plato said that education did not consist in telling people new things; it consisted in extracting from their memories what they already knew. No message is so effective as that which speaks to a man's own conscience, and that message becomes well-nigh irresistible when it is spoken by a man who obviously has the right to speak.

(b) The people of Israel were well aware that for three hundred years the voice of prophecy had been silent. They were waiting for some authentic word from God. And in John they heard it. In every walk of life the expert is recognizable. A famous violinist tells us that no sooner had Toscanini mounted the rostrum than the orchestra felt his authority flowing over them. We recognize at once a doctor who has real skill. We recognize at once a speaker who knows his subject. John had come from God and to hear him was to know it.

(iii) His message was effective because he was completely humble. His own verdict on himself was that he was not fit for the duty of a slave. Sandals were composed simply of leather soles fastened to the foot by straps passing through the toes. The roads were unsurfaced. In dry weather they were dust heaps; in wet weather rivers of mud. To remove the sandals was the work and office of a slave. John asked nothing for himself but everything for the Christ whom he proclaimed. The man's obvious self-forgottenness, his patent yieldedness, his complete self-effacement, his utter lostness in his message compelled people to listen.

(iv) His message was effective because he pointed to something and someone beyond himself. He told men that his baptism drenched them in water, but one was coming who would drench them in the Holy Spirit; and while water could cleanse a man's body, the Holy Spirit could cleanse his life and self and heart. Dr. G. J. Jeffrey had a favourite illustration. When he was making a telephone call through the operator and there was some delay, the operator would often say, "I'm trying to connect you." Then, when the connection had been effected, the operator faded out and left him in direct contact with the person to whom he wished to speak.

John's one aim was not to occupy the centre of the stage himself, but to try to connect men with the one who was greater and stronger than he; and men listened to him because he pointed, not to himself, but to the one whom all men need.

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Mark 1:9-11

THE DAY OF DECISION

Mark 1:9-11

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan; and as soon as he came up out of the water he saw the heavens being riven asunder and the Spirit coming down upon him, as a dove might come down; and there came a voice from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; I am well pleased with you."

To any thinking person the baptism of Jesus presents a problem. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, meant for those who were sorry for their sins and who wished to express their determination to have done with them. What had such a baptism to do with Jesus? Was he not the sinless one, and was not such a baptism unnecessary and quite irrelevant as far as he was concerned? For Jesus the baptism was four things.

(i) It was the moment of decision. For thirty years he had stayed in Nazareth. Faithfully he had done his day's work and discharged his duties to his home. For long he must have been conscious that the time for him to go out had to come. He must have waited for a sign. The emergence of John was that sign. This, he saw, was the moment when he had to launch out upon his task.

In every life there come moments of decision which may be accepted or rejected. To accept them is to succeed; to reject them, or to shirk them, is to fail. As Lowell had it:

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide
In the strife of Truth with falsehood, for the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or
blight,
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right
And the choice goes by for ever 'twixt that darkness and that
light."

To every man there comes the unreturning decisive moment. As Shakespeare saw it:

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their lives
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

The undecided life is the wasted life, the frustrated life, the discontented life, and often the tragic life. As John Oxenham saw it:

"To every man there openeth
A way and ways and a way;
The high soul treads the high way,
And the low soul gropes the low,

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Mark 1:9-11

And in between on the misty flats,
The rest drift to and fro."

The drifting life can never be the happy life. Jesus knew when John emerged that the moment of decision had come. Nazareth was peaceful and home was sweet, but he answered the summons and the challenge of God.

(ii) It was the moment of identification. It is true that Jesus did not need to repent from sin; but here was a movement of the people back to God; and with that Godward movement he was determined to identify himself. A man might himself possess ease and comfort and wealth and still identify himself with a movement to bring better things to the downtrodden and the poor and the ill-housed and the over-worked and the underpaid. The really great identification is when a man identifies himself with a movement, not for his own sake, but for the sake of others. In John Bunyan's dream, Christian came in his journeying with Interpreter to the Palace which was heavily guarded and required a battle to seek an entry. At the door there sat the man with the inkhorn taking the names of those who would dare the assault.

All were hanging back, then Christian saw "a man of a very stout countenance come up to the man that sat there to write, saying, 'Set down my name, sir'." When great things are afoot the Christian is bound to say, "Set down my name, sir," for that is what Jesus did when he came to be baptized.

(iii) It was the moment of approval. No man lightly leaves his home and sets out on an unknown way. He must be very sure that he is right. Jesus had decided on his course of action, and now he was looking for the seal of the approval of God. In the time of Jesus the Jews spoke of what they called the Bath (HSN1323) Qol (HSN6963), which means, the daughter of a voice. By this time they believed in a series of heavens, in the highest of which sat God in the light to which no man could approach. There were rare times when the heavens opened and God spoke; but, to them, God was so distant that it was only the far away echo of his voice that they heard. To Jesus the voice came directly. As Mark tells the story, this was a personal experience which Jesus had and not in any sense a demonstration to the crowd. The voice did not say, "This is my beloved Son," as Matthew has it (Matt.3:17). It said, "Thou art my beloved Son," speaking direct to Jesus.

At the baptism Jesus submitted his decision to God and that decision was unmistakably approved.

(iv) It was the moment of equipment. At that time the Holy Spirit descended upon him. There is a certain symbolism here. The Spirit descended as a dove might descend. The simile is not chosen by accident. The dove is the symbol of gentleness. Both Matthew and Luke tell us of the preaching of John. (Matt.3:7-12; Lk.3:7-13.) John's was a message of the axe laid to the root of the tree, of the terrible sifting, of the consuming fire. It was a message of doom and not of good news. But from the very beginning the picture of the Spirit likened to a dove is a picture of gentleness. He will conquer, but the conquest will be the conquest of love.

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Mark 1:12-13

THE TESTING TIME

Mark 1:12-13

And immediately the Spirit thrust him into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, and all the time he was being tested by Satan. The wild beasts were his companions, and the angels were helping him.

No sooner was the glory of the hour of the Baptism over than there came the battle of the temptations. One thing stands out here in such a vivid way that we cannot miss it. It was the Spirit who thrust Jesus out into the wilderness for the testing time. The very Spirit who came upon him at his baptism now drove him out for his test.

In this life it is impossible to escape the assault of temptation; but one thing is sure--temptations are not sent to us to make us fall; they are sent to strengthen the nerve and the sinew of our minds and hearts and souls. They are not meant for our ruin, but for our good. They are meant to be tests from which we emerge better warriors and athletes of God.

Suppose a lad is a football player; suppose he is doing well in the second team and showing real signs of promise, what will the team manager do? He certainly will not send him out to play for the third team in which he could walk through the game and never break sweat; he will send him out to play for the first team where he will be tested as he never was before and have the chance to prove himself. That is what temptation is meant to do--to enable us to prove our manhood and to emerge the stronger for the fight.

Forty days is a phrase which is not to be taken literally. It is the regular Hebrew phrase for a considerable time. Moses was said to be on the mountain with God for forty days (Exo.24:18); it was for forty days that Elijah went in the strength of the meal the angel gave him (1Kgs.19:8). Just as we use the phrase ten days or so, so the Hebrews used the phrase forty days, not literally but simply to mean a fair length of time.

It was Satan who tempted Jesus. The development of the conception of Satan is very interesting.

The word Satan in Hebrew simply means an adversary; and in the Old Testament it is so used of ordinary human adversaries and opponents again and again. The angel of the Lord is the satan who stands in Balaam's way (Num.22:22); the Philistines fear that David may turn out to be their satan (1Sam.29:4); David regards Abishai as his satan (2Sam.19:22); Solomon declares that God has given him such peace and prosperity that he has no satan left to oppose him (1Kgs.5:4). The word began by meaning an adversary in the widest sense of the term.

But it takes a step on the downward path; it begins to mean one who pleads a case against a person. It is in this sense that it is used in the first chapter of Job. In that chapter Satan is no less than one of the sons of God (Jb.1:6); but his particular task was to consider men (Jb.1:7) and to search for some case that could be pleaded against them in the presence of God. He was the accuser

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of men before God. The word is so used in Jb.2:2 and Zech.3:2. The task of Satan was to say everything that could be said against a man.

The other title of Satan is the Devil; the word devil comes from the Greek diabolos (GSN1228), which literally means a slanderer. It is a small step from the thought of one who searches for everything that can be said against a man to the thought of one who deliberately and maliciously slanders man in the presence of God. But in the Old Testament Satan is still an emissary of God and not yet the malignant, supreme enemy of God. He is the adversary of man.

But now the word takes the last step on its downward course. Through their captivity the Jews learned something of Persian thought. Persian thought is based on the conception that in this universe there are two powers, a power of the light and a power of the dark, Ormuzd and Ahriman; the whole universe is a battle-ground between them and man must choose his side in that cosmic conflict. In point of fact that is precisely what life looks like and feels like. To put it in a word, in this world there is God and Gods Adversary. It was almost inevitable that Satan should come to be regarded as The Adversary par excellence. That is what his name means; that is what he always was to man; Satan becomes the essence of everything that is against God.

When we turn to the New Testament we find that it is the Devil or Satan who is behind human disease and suffering (Lk.13:16); it is Satan who seduces Judas (Lk.22:3); it is the devil whom we must fight (1Pet.5:8-9; Jas.4:7); it is the devil whose power is being broken by the work of Christ (Lk.10:1-19); it is the devil who is destined for final destruction (Matt.25:41). Satan is the power which is against God.

Here we have the whole essence of the Temptation story. Jesus had to decide how he was to do his work. He was conscious of a tremendous task and he was also conscious of tremendous powers. God was saying to him, "Take my love to men; love them till you die for them; conquer them by this unconquerable love even if you finish up upon a cross." Satan was saying to Jesus, "Use your power to blast men; obliterate your enemies; win the world by might and power and bloodshed." God said to Jesus, "Set up a reign of love." Satan said to Jesus, "Set up a dictatorship of force." Jesus had to choose that day between the way of God and the way of the Adversary of God.

Mark's brief story of the Temptations finishes with two vivid touches.

(i) The beasts were his companions. In the desert there roamed the leopard, the bear, the wild boar and the jackal. This is usually taken to be a vivid detail that adds to the grim terror of the scene. But perhaps it is not so. Perhaps this is a lovely thing, for perhaps it means that the beasts were Jesus' friends. Amidst the dreams of the golden age when the Messiah would come, the Jews dreamed of a day when the enmity between man and the beasts would no longer exist. "I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground." (Hos.2:18.) "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.... The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den; they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain." (Isa.11:6-9.) In later days St.

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Francis preached to the beasts; and it may be that here we have a first foretaste of the loveliness when man and the beasts shall be at peace. It may be that here we see a picture in which the beasts recognized, before men did, their friend and their king.

(ii) The angels were helping him. There are ever the divine reinforcements in the hour of trial. When Elisha and his servant were shut up in Dothan with their enemies pressing in upon them and no apparent way of escape, Elisha opened the young man's eyes and all around he saw the horses and the chariots of fire which belonged to God. (2Kgs.6:17.) Jesus was not left to fight his battle alone--and neither are we.

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Mark 1:14-15

THE MESSAGE OF THE GOOD NEWS

Mark 1:14-15

After John had been committed to prison, Jesus came into Galilee, announcing the good news about God, and saying, "The time that was appointed has come; and the Kingdom of God is here. Repent and believe the good news."

There are in this summary of the message of Jesus three great, dominant words of the Christian faith.

(i) There is the good news. It was preeminently good news that Jesus came to bring to men. If we follow the word euaggelion (GSN2098), good news, gospel through the New Testament we can see at least something of its content.

(a) It is good news of truth (Gal.2:5; Col.1:5). Until Jesus came, men could only guess and grope after God. "O that I knew where I might find him," cried Job (Jb.23:3). Marcus Aurelius said that the soul can see but dimly, and the word he uses is the Greek word for seeing things through water. But with the coming of Jesus men see clearly what God is like. No longer do they need to guess and grope; they know.

(b) It is good news of hope (Col.1:23). The ancient world was a pessimistic world. Seneca talked of "our helplessness in necessary things." In their struggle for goodness men were defeated. The coming of Jesus brings hope to the hopeless heart.

(c) It is good news of peace (Eph.6:15). The penalty of being a man is to have a split personality. In human nature the beast and the angel are strangely intermingled. It is told that once Schopenhauer, the gloomy philosopher, was found wandering. He was asked, "Who are you?" "I wish you could tell me," he answered. Robert Burns said of himself, "My life reminded me of a ruined temple. What strength, what proportion in some parts! What unsightly gaps, what prostrate ruins in others!" Man's trouble has always been that he is haunted both by sin and by goodness. The coming of Jesus unifies that disintegrated personality into one. He finds victory over his warring self by being conquered by Jesus Christ.

(d) It is good news of God's promise (Eph.3:6). It is true to say that men had always thought rather of a God of threats than a God of promises. All non-Christian religions think of a demanding God; only Christianity tells of a God who is more ready to give than we are to ask.

(e) It is good news of immortality (2Tim.1:10). To the pagan, life was the road to death; man was characteristically a dying man; but Jesus came with the good news that we are on the way to life rather than death.

(i) It is good news of salvation (Eph.1:13). That salvation is not merely a negative thing; it is also positive. It is not simply liberation from penalty and escape from past sin; it is the power to live life victoriously and to conquer sin. The message of Jesus is good news indeed.

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Mark 1:14-15

(ii) There is the word repent. Now repentance is not so easy as sometimes we think. The Greek word *metanoia* (GSN3341) literally means a change of mind. We are very apt to confuse two things--sorrow for the consequences of sin and sorrow for sin. Many a man is desperately sorry because of the mess that sin has got him into, but he very well knows that, if he could be reasonably sure that he could escape the consequences, he would do the same thing again. It is not the sin that he hates; it is its consequences.

Real repentance means that a man has come, not only to be sorry for the consequences of his sin, but to hate sin itself. Long ago that wise old writer, Montaigne, wrote in his autobiography, "Children should be taught to hate vice for its own texture, so that they will not only avoid it in action, but abominate it in their hearts--that the very thought of it may disgust them whatever form it takes." Repentance means that the man who was in love with sin comes to hate sin because of its exceeding sinfulness.

(iii) There is the word believe. "Believe," says Jesus, "in the good news." To believe in the good news simply means to take Jesus at his word, to believe that God is the kind of God that Jesus has told us about, to believe that God so loves the world that he will make any sacrifice to bring us back to himself, to believe that what sounds too good to be true is really true.

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Mark 1:16-20

JESUS CHOOSES HIS FRIENDS

Mark 1:16-20

While he was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother, casting their nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. So Jesus said to them, "Follow me! and I will make you fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. He went a little farther and he saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, who were in their boat, mending their nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat, with the hired servants, and went away after him.

No sooner had Jesus taken his decision and decided his method than he proceeded to build up his staff. A leader must begin somewhere. He must get to himself a little band of kindred souls to whom he can unburden his own heart and on whose hearts he may write his message. So Mark here shows us Jesus literally laying the foundations of his Kingdom and calling his first followers.

There were many fishermen in Galilee. Josephus, who, for a time, was governor of Galilee, and who is the great historian of the Jews, tells us that in his day three hundred and thirty fishing boats sailed the waters of the lake. Ordinary people in Palestine seldom ate meat, probably not more than once a week. Fish was their staple diet (Lk.11:11; Matt.7:10; Mk.6:30-44; Lk.24:42). Usually the fish was salt because there was no means of transporting fresh fish. Fresh fish was one of the greatest of all delicacies in the great cities like Rome. The very names of the towns on the lakeside show how important the fishing business was. Bethsaida (GSN0966) means House of Fish; Tarichaea means The Place of Salt Fish, and it was there that the fish were preserved for export to Jerusalem and even to Rome itself. The salt fish industry was big business in Galilee.

The fishermen used two kinds of nets, both of which are mentioned or implied in the gospels. They used the net called the sagene (GSN4522). This was a kind of seine- or trawl-net. It was let out from the end of the boat and was so weighted that it stood, as it were, upright in the water. The boat then moved forward, and, as it moved, the four corners of the net were drawn together, so that the net became like a great bag moving through the water and enclosing the fish. The other kind of net, which Peter and Andrew were using here, was called the amphiblestron (GSN0293). It was a much smaller net. It was skilfully cast into the water by hand and was shaped rather like an umbrella.

It is naturally of the greatest interest to study the men whom Jesus picked out as his first followers.

(i) We must notice what they were. They were simple folk. They did not come from the schools and the colleges; they were not drawn from the ecclesiastics or the aristocracy; they were neither learned nor wealthy. They were fishermen. That is to say, they were ordinary people. No one ever believed in the ordinary man as Jesus did. Once George Bernard Shaw said, "I have never had any feeling for the working-classes, except a desire to abolish them, and replace them by sensible people." In The Patrician John Galsworthy makes Miltoun, one of the characters, say, "The mob! How I loathe it! I hate its mean stupidity, I hate the sound of its voice, and the look on its face it's

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Mark 1:16-20

so ugly, so little!" Once in a fit of temper Carlyle declared that there were twenty-seven millions of people in England--mostly fools! Jesus did not feel like that.

Lincoln said, "God must love the common people--he made so many of them." It was as if Jesus said, "Give me twelve ordinary men and with them, if they will give themselves to me, I will change the world." A man should never think so much of what he is as of what Jesus Christ can make him.

(ii) We must notice what they were doing when Jesus called them. They were doing their day's work, catching the fish and mending the nets. It was so with many a prophet. "I am no prophet," said Amos, "nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" (Am.7:14-15.) The call of God can come to a man, not only in the house of God, not only in the secret place, but in the middle of the day's work. As MacAndrew, Kipling's Scots engineer, had it:

"From coupler flange to spindle guide
I see thy hand, O God;
Predestination in the stride
Of yon connecting rod."

The man who lives in a world that is full of God cannot ever escape him.

(iii) We must notice how he called them. Jesus' summons was, "Follow me!" It is not to be thought that on this day he stood before them for the first time. No doubt they had stood in the crowd and listened; no doubt they had stayed to talk long after the rest of the crowd had drifted away. No doubt they already had felt the magic of his presence and the magnetism of his eyes. Jesus did not say to them, "I have a theological system which I would like you to investigate; I have certain theories that I would like you to think over; I have an ethical system I would like to discuss with you." He said, "Follow me!" It all began with a personal reaction to himself; it all began with that tug on the heart which begets the unshakable loyalty. This is not to say that there are none who think themselves into Christianity; but for most of us following Christ is like falling in love.

It has been said that "we admire people for reasons; we love them without reasons." The thing happens just because they are they and we are we. "I," said Jesus, "when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself." (Jn.12:32.) In by far the greatest number of cases a man follows Jesus Christ, not because of anything that Jesus said but because of everything that Jesus is.

(iv) Lastly we must note what Jesus offered them. He offered them a task. He called them not to ease but to service. Someone has said that what every man needs is "something in which he can invest his life." So Jesus called his men, not to a comfortable ease and not to a lethargic inactivity; he called them to a task in which they would have to spend themselves and burn themselves up, and, in the end, die for his sake and for the sake of their fellow men. He called them to a task wherein they could win something for themselves only by giving their all to him and to others.

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Mark 1:21-22

JESUS BEGINS HIS CAMPAIGN

Mark 1:21-22

So they came into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath day Jesus went into the Synagogue and began to teach; and they were completely astonished at the way he taught, for he taught them like one who had personal authority, and not as the experts in the law did.

Mark's story unfolds in a series of logical and natural steps. Jesus recognized in the emergence of John God's call to action. He was baptized and received God's seal of approval and God's equipment for his task. He was tested by the devil and chose the method he would use and the way he would take. He chose his men that he might have a little circle of kindred spirits and that he might write his message upon them. And now he had to make a deliberate launching of his campaign. If a man had a message from God to give, the natural place to which he would turn would be the church where God's people met together. That is precisely what Jesus did. He began his campaign in the synagogue.

There are certain basic differences between the synagogue and the church as we know it today.

(a) The synagogue was primarily a teaching institution. The synagogue service consisted of only three things--prayer, the reading of God's word, and the exposition of it. There was no music, no singing and no sacrifice. It may be said that the Temple was the place of worship and sacrifice; the synagogue was the place of teaching and instruction. The synagogue was by far the more influential, for there was only one Temple. But the law laid it down that wherever there were ten Jewish families there must be a synagogue, and, therefore, wherever there was a colony of Jews, there was a synagogue. If a man had a new message to preach, the synagogue was the obvious place in which to preach it.

(b) The synagogue provided an opportunity to deliver such a message. The synagogue had certain officials. There was the Ruler of the synagogue. He was responsible for the administration of the affairs of the synagogue and for the arrangements for its services. There were the distributors of alms. Daily a collection was taken in cash and in kind from those who could afford to give. It was then distributed to the poor; the very poorest were given food for fourteen meals per week. There was the Chazzan. He is the man whom the King James Version describes as the minister. He was responsible for the taking out and storing away of the sacred rolls on which scripture was written; for the cleaning of the synagogue; for the blowing of the blasts on the silver trumpet which told people that the Sabbath had come; for the elementary education of the children of the community. One thing the synagogue had not and that was a permanent preacher or teacher.

When the people met at the synagogue service it was open to the Ruler to call on any competent person to give the address and the exposition. There was no professional ministry whatsoever. That is why Jesus was able to open his campaign in the synagogues. The opposition had not yet stiffened into hostility. He was known to be a man with a message; and for that very reason the synagogue of every community provided him with a pulpit from which to instruct and to appeal to men.

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Mark 1:21-22

When Jesus did teach in the synagogue the whole method and atmosphere of his teaching was like a new revelation. He did not teach like the scribes, the experts in the law. Who were these scribes?

To the Jews the most sacred thing in the world was the Torah, the Law. The core of the law is the Ten Commandments, but the Law was taken to mean the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, as they are called. To the Jews this Law was completely divine. It had, so they believed, been given direct by God to Moses. It was absolutely holy and absolutely binding. They said, "He who says that the Torah is not from God has not part in the future world." "He who says that Moses wrote even one verse of his own knowledge is a denier and despiser of the word of God."

If the Torah is so divine two things emerge. First, it must be the supreme rule of faith and life; and second, it must contain everything necessary to guide and to direct life. If that be so the Torah demands two things. First, it must obviously be given the most careful and meticulous study. Second, the Torah is expressed in great, wide principles; but, if it contains direction and guidance for all life, what is in it implicitly must be brought out. The great laws must become rules and regulations--so their argument ran.

To give this study and to supply this development a class of scholars arose. These were the Scribes, the experts in the law. The title of the greatest of them was Rabbi. The scribes had three duties.

(i) They set themselves, out of the great moral principles of the Torah, to extract rules and regulations for every possible situation in life. Obviously this was a task that was endless. Jewish religion began with the great moral laws; it ended with an infinity of rules and regulations. It began as religion; it ended as legalism.

(ii) It was the task of the scribes to transmit and to teach this law and its developments. These deduced and extracted rules and regulations were never written down; they are known as the Oral Law. Although never written down they were considered to be even more binding than the written law. From generation to generation of scribes they were taught and committed to memory. A good student had a memory which was like "a well lined with lime which loses not one drop."

(iii) The scribes had the duty of giving judgment in individual cases; and, in the nature of things, practically every individual case must have produced a new law.

Wherein did Jesus' teaching differ so much from the teaching of the Scribes? He taught with personal authority. No Scribe ever gave a decision on his own. He would always begin, "There is a teaching that..." and would then quote all his authorities. If he made a statement he would buttress it with this, that and the next quotation from the great legal masters of the past. The last thing he ever gave was an independent judgment. How different was Jesus! When he spoke, he spoke as if he needed no authority beyond himself. He spoke with utter independence. He cited no authorities and quoted no experts. He spoke with the finality of the voice of God. To the people it was like a breeze from heaven to hear someone speak like that. The terrific, positive certainty of Jesus was the

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very antithesis of the careful quotations of the Scribes. The note of personal authority rang out--and that is a note which captures the ear of every man.

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Mark 1:23-28

THE FIRST VICTORY OVER THE POWERS OF EVIL

Mark 1:23-28

There was in the synagogue a man in the grip of an unclean spirit. Immediately he broke into a shout. "What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth?" he said. "Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are you are The Holy One of God." Jesus spoke sternly to him. "Be silent," he said, "and come out of him." When the unclean spirit had convulsed the man and had cried with a great cry it came out of him. They were all so astonished that they kept asking each other, "What is this? This is a new kind of teaching. He gives his orders with authority even to unclean spirits and they obey him." And immediately the report about Jesus went out everywhere over the whole surrounding district of Galilee.

If Jesus' words had amazed the people in the synagogue, his deeds left them thunderstruck. In the synagogue there was a man in the grip of an unclean spirit. He created a disturbance and Jesus healed him.

All through the gospels we keep meeting people who had unclean spirits and who were possessed by demons or devils. What lies behind this?

The Jews, and indeed the whole ancient world, believed strongly in demons and devils. As Harnack put it, "The whole world and the circumambient atmosphere were fined with devils; not merely idolatry, but every phase and form of life was ruled by them. They sat on thrones, they hovered around cradles. The earth was literally a hell."

Dr. A. Rendle Short cites a fact which shows the intensity with which the ancient world believed in demons. In many ancient cemeteries skulls were found which had been trepanned. That is to say, a hole had been bored in the skull. In one cemetery, out of one hundred and twenty skulls, six had been trepanned. With the limited surgical technique available that was no small operation. Further, it was clear from the bone growth that the trepanning had been done during life. It was also clear that the hole in the skull was too small to be of any physical or surgical value; and it is known that the removed disc of bone was often worn as an amulet round the neck. The reason for the trepanning was to allow the demon to escape from the body of the man. If primitive surgeons were prepared to undertake that operation, and if men were prepared to undergo it, the belief in demon-possession must have been intensely real.

Where did these demons come from? There were three answers to that question. (i) Some believed that they were as old as creation itself. (ii) Some believed that they were the spirits of wicked men who had died and were still carrying on their malignant work. (iii) Most people connected the demons with the old story in Gen.6:1-8 (compare 2Pet.2:4-5).

The Jews elaborated the story in this way. There were two angels who forsook God and came to this earth because they were attracted by the beauty of mortal women. Their names were Assael and Shemachsai. One of them returned to God; the other remained on earth and gratified his lust; and the demons are the children that he begat and their children.

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The collective word for demons is mazzikin, which means one who does harm. So the demons were malignant beings intermediate between God and man who were out to work men harm.

The demons, according to Jewish belief, could eat and drink and beget children. They were terrifyingly numerous. There were, according to some, seven and a half millions of them; every man had ten thousand on his right hand and ten thousand on his left. They lived in unclean places, such as tombs and spots where there was no cleansing water. They lived in the desert where their howling could be heard--hence the phrase a howling desert. They were specially dangerous to the lonely traveller, to the woman in child-birth, to the bride and bridegroom, to children who were out after dark, and to those who voyaged at night. They were specially active in the midday heat and between sunset and sunrise. There was a demon of blindness and a demon of leprosy and a demon of heart-disease. They could transfer their malign gifts to men. For instance, the evil eye which could turn good fortune into bad and in which all believed was given to a man by the demons.

They worked along with certain animals--the serpent, the bull, the donkey and the mosquito. The male demons were known as shedim, and the female as lilin, after Lilith. The female demons had long hair and were the enemies of children. That is why children had their guardian angels (Matt.18:10).

It does not matter whether or not we believe in all this; whether it is true or not is beside the point. The point is that the people in New Testament times did. We still may use the phrase Poor devil! That is a relic of the old belief. When a man believed himself to be possessed he was "conscious of himself and also of another being who constrains and controls him from within." That explains why the demon-possessed in Palestine so often cried out when they met Jesus. They knew that Jesus was believed by some at least to be the Messiah; they knew that the reign of the Messiah was the end of the demons; and the man who believed himself to be possessed spoke as a demon when he came into the presence of Jesus.

There were many exorcists who claimed to be able to cast out demons. So real was this belief that by A.D. 340 the Christian church actually possessed an Order of Exorcists. But there was this difference--the ordinary Jewish and pagan exorcist used elaborate incantations and spells and magical rites. Jesus with one word of clear, simple, brief authority exorcised the demon from a man. No one had ever seen anything like this before. The power was not in the spell, the formula, the incantation, the elaborate rite; the power was in Jesus and men were astonished.

What are we to say to all this? Paul Tournier in A Doctor's Casebook writes, "Doubtless there are many doctors who in their straggle against disease have had, like me, the feeling that they were confronting, not something passive, but a clever and resourceful enemy." Dr. Rendle Short comes tentatively to the conclusion that "the happenings in this world, in fact, and its moral disasters, its wars and wickedness, its physical catastrophes, and its sicknesses, may be part of a great warfare due to the interplay of forces such as we see in the book of Job, the malice of the devil on one hand and the restraints imposed by God on the other."

This is a subject on which we cannot dogmatize. We may take three different positions. (i) We may relegate the whole matter of demon-possession to the sphere of primitive thought and say that

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it was a primitive way of accounting for things in the days before man knew any more about men's bodies and men's minds. (ii) We may accept the fact of demon-possession as being true in New Testament times and as being still true today. (iii) If we accept the first position we have to explain the attitude and actions of Jesus. Either he knew no more on this matter than the people of his day, and that is a thing we can easily accept for Jesus was not a scientist and did not come to teach science. Or he knew perfectly well that he could never cure the man in trouble unless he assumed the reality of the disease. It was real to the man and had to be treated as such or it could never be cured. In the end we come to the conclusion that there are some answers we do not know.

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Mark 1:29-31

A PRIVATE MIRACLE

Mark 1:29-31

And immediately, when they had come out of the synagogue, they went, along with Peter and John, into the house of Simon and Andrew. Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with an attack of fever. Immediately they spoke to Jesus about her. He went up to her and took her by the hand and raised her up, and the fever left her, and she attended to their needs.

In the synagogue Jesus had spoken and acted in the most amazing way. The synagogue service ended and Jesus went with his friends to Peter's house. According to Jewish custom the main Sabbath meal came immediately after the synagogue service, at the sixth hour, that is at 12 o'clock midday. (The Jewish day began at 6 a.m. and the hours are counted from then.) Jesus might well have claimed the right to rest after the exciting and exhausting experience of the synagogue service; but once again his power was appealed to and once again he spent himself for others. This miracle tells us something about three people.

(i) It tells us something about Jesus. He did not require an audience in order to exert his power; he was just as prepared to heal in the little circle of a cottage as in the great crowd of a synagogue. He was never too tired to help; the need of others took precedence over his own desire for rest. But above all, we see here, as we saw in the synagogue, the uniqueness of the methods of Jesus. There were many exorcists in the time of Jesus, but they worked with elaborate incantations, and formulae, and spells, and magical apparatus. In the synagogue Jesus had spoken one authoritative sentence and the healing was complete.

Here we have the same thing again. Peter's mother-in-law was suffering from what the Talmud called "a burning fever." It was, and still is, very prevalent in that particular part of Galilee. The Talmud actually lays down the methods of dealing with it. A knife wholly made of iron was tied by a braid of hair to a thorn bush. On successive days there was repeated, first, Exo.3:2-3; second, Exo.3:4; and finally Exo.3:5. Then a certain magical formula was pronounced, and thus the cure was supposed to be achieved. Jesus completely disregarded all the paraphernalia of popular magic, and with a gesture and a word of unique authority and power, he healed the woman.

The word that the Greek uses for authority in the previous passage is *exousia* (GSN1849); and *exousia* was defined as unique knowledge together with unique power; that is precisely what Jesus possessed, and that is what he was prepared to exercise in a cottage. Paul Tournier writes, "My patients very often say to me, 'I admire the patience with which you listen to everything I tell you.' It is not patience at all, but interest." A miracle to Jesus was not a means of increasing his prestige; to help was not a laborious and disagreeable duty; he helped instinctively, because he was supremely interested in all who needed his help.

(ii) It tells us something about the disciples. They had not known Jesus long, but already they had begun to take all their troubles to him. Peter's mother-in-law was ill; the simple home was upset; and it was for the disciples the most natural thing in the world to tell Jesus all about it.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 1:29-31

Paul Tournier tells how one of life's greatest discoveries came to him. He used to visit an old Christian pastor who never let him go without praying with him. He was struck by the extreme simplicity of the old man's prayers. It seemed just a continuation of an intimate conversation that the old saint was always carrying on with Jesus. Paul Tournier goes on, "When I got back home I talked it over with my wife, and together we asked God to give us also the close fellowship with Jesus the old pastor had. Since then he has been the centre of my devotion and my travelling companion. He takes pleasure in what I do (compare Ecc.9:7), and concerns himself with it. He is a friend with whom I can discuss everything that happens in my life. He shares my joy and my pain, my hopes and fears. He is there when a patient speaks to me from his heart, listening to him with me and better than I can. And when the patient is gone I can talk to him about it."

Therein there lies the very essence of the Christian life. As the hymn has it, "Take it to the Lord in prayer." Thus early the disciples had learned what became the habit of a lifetime--to take all their troubles to Jesus and to ask his help for them.

(iii) It tells us something about Peter's wife's mother. No sooner was she healed than she began to attend to their needs. She used her recovered health for renewed service. A great Scottish family has the motto "Saved to Serve." Jesus helps us that we may help others.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 1:32-34

THE BEGINNING OF THE CROWDS

Mark 1:32-34

When evening had come and when the sun had set, they kept bringing to him all those who were ill and demon-possessed. The whole city had crowded together to the door; and he healed many who were ill with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he forbade the demons to speak because they knew him.

The things that Jesus had done in Capernaum could not be concealed. The emergence of so great a new power and authority was not something which could be kept secret. So the evening found Peter's house besieged with crowds seeking Jesus' healing touch. They waited until evening because the law forbade the carrying of any burden through a town on the Sabbath day (compare Jer.17:24). That would have been to work and work was forbidden. They had, of course, no clocks or watches in those days; the Sabbath ran from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and the law was that the Sabbath was ended and the day had finished when three stars came out in the sky. So the people of Capernaum waited until the sun had set and the stars were out and then they came, carrying their sick, to Jesus; and he healed them.

Three times we have seen Jesus healing people. First he healed in the synagogue; second, he healed in the house of his friends; and now he healed in the street. Jesus recognized the claim of everyone. It was said of Dr. Johnson that to be in misfortune was to be assured of his friendship and support. Wherever there was trouble Jesus was ready to use his power. He selected neither the place nor the person; he realized the universal claim of human need.

The people flocked to Jesus because they recognized in him a man who could do things. There were plenty who could talk and expound and lecture and preach; but here was one who dealt not only in words but also in actions. It has been said that "if a man can make a better mousetrap than his neighbours, the public will beat a path to his house even if he lives in the middle of a wood." The person people want is the effective person. Jesus could, and can, produce results.

But there is the beginning of tragedy here. The crowds came, but they came because they wanted something out of Jesus. They did not come because they loved him; they did not come because they had caught a glimpse of some new vision; in the last analysis they wanted to use him. That is what nearly everyone wants to do with God and his Son. For one prayer that goes up to God in days of prosperity ten thousand go up in time of adversity. Many a man who has never prayed when the sun was shining begins to pray when the cold winds come.

Someone has said that many people regard religion as belonging "to the ambulance corps and not to the firing-line of life." Religion to them is a crisis affair. It is only when they have got life into a mess, or when life deals them some knock-out blow that they begin to remember God. We must all go to Jesus for he alone can give us the things we need for life; but if that going and these gifts do not produce in us an answering love and gratitude there is something tragically wrong. God is not someone to be used in the day of misfortune; he is someone to be loved and remembered every day of our lives.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 1:35-39

THE QUIET HOUR AND THE CHALLENGE OF ACTION

Mark 1:35-39

Very early, when it was still night, Jesus rose and went out. He went away to a deserted place and there he was praying. Simon and his friends tracked him down and said to him, "They are all searching for you," Jesus said to them, "Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, that I may proclaim the good news there too, for that is why I came forth." So he went to their synagogues, all over Galilee, proclaiming the good news as he went, and casting out demons.

Simply to read the record of the things that happened at Capernaum is to see that Jesus was left with no time alone. Now Jesus knew well that he could not live without God; that if he was going to be forever giving out, he must be at least sometimes taking in; that if he was going to spend himself for others, he must ever and again summon spiritual reinforcements to his aid. He knew that he could not live without prayer. In a little book entitled *The Practice of Prayer*, Dr. A. D. Belden has some great definitions. "Prayer may be defined as the appeal of the soul to God." Not to pray is to be guilty of the incredible folly of ignoring "the possibility of adding God to our resources." "In prayer we give the perfect mind of God an opportunity to feed our mental powers." Jesus knew this; he knew that if he was to meet men he must first meet God. If prayer was necessary for Jesus, how much more must it be necessary for us?

Even there they sought him out. There was no way in which Jesus could shut the door. Once Rose Macaulay, the novelist, said that all she demanded from this life was "a room of her own." That is precisely what Jesus never had. A great doctor has said that the duty of medicine is "sometimes to heal, often to afford relief, and always to bring consolation." That duty was always upon Jesus. It has been said that a doctor's duty is "to help men to live and to die"--and men are always living and dying. It is human nature to try to put up the barriers and to have time and peace to oneself; that is what Jesus never did. Conscious as he was of his own weariness and exhaustion, he was still more conscious of the insistent cry of human need. So when they came for him he rose from his knees to meet the challenge of his task. Prayer will never do our work for us; what it will do is to strengthen us for work which must be done.

Jesus set out on a preaching tour of the synagogues of Galilee. In Mark this tour is dismissed in one verse, but it must have taken weeks and even months to do it. As he went he preached and he healed. There were three pairs of things which Jesus never separated.

(i) He never separated words and actions. He never thought that a work was done when that work was stated; he never believed that his duty was completed when he had exhorted men to God and to goodness. Always the statement and the exhortation were put into action. Fosdick somewhere tells of a student who bought the best possible books and the best possible equipment and got a special study chair with a special bookrest to make study easy, and then sat down in the chair--and went to sleep. The man who deals in words with no actions to follow is very like that.

(ii) He never separated soul and body. There have been types of Christianity which spoke as if the body did not matter. But man is both soul and body. And the task of Christianity is to redeem the

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Mark 1:35-39

whole man and not just part of him. It is indeed blessedly true that a man may be starving, living in a hovel, in distress and pain and yet have sweet times with God; but that is no reason at all for leaving him in such a case. Missions to primitive races do not only take the Bible; they take education and medicine; they take the school and the hospital. It is quite wrong to talk about the social gospel as if it were an extra, or an option, or even a separate part of the Christian message. The Christian message is one and it preaches and works for the good of a man's body as well as the good of his soul.

(iii) Jesus never separated earth and heaven. There are those who are so concerned with heaven that they forget all about earth and so become impractical visionaries. There are those who are so concerned with earth that they forget about heaven and limit good to material good. The dream of Jesus was a time when God's will would be done in earth as it is in heaven, (Matt.6:10) and earth and heaven be one.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 1:40-45

THE LEPER IS CLEANSED

Mark 1:40-45

A leper came to him, asking him to help him and kneeling before him. "If you are willing to do so," he said, "you are able to cleanse me." Jesus was moved with pity to the depths of his being. He stretched out his hand and touched him. "I am wailing," Jesus said, "be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Immediately Jesus sent him away with a stern injunction.

"See to it," he said to him, "that you tell no man anything about this; but go and show yourself to the priest, and bring the offering for cleansing which Moses laid down, so that you may prove to them that you really are healed." He went away and began to proclaim the story at length and to spread it all over. The result was that it was not possible for Jesus to come openly into any town, but he had to stay outside in the lonely places; and they kept coming to him from all over.

In the New Testament there is no disease regarded with more terror and pity than leprosy. When Jesus sent out the Twelve he commanded them, "Heal the sick, cleanse lepers." (Matt.18:8.) The fate of the leper was truly hard. E. W. G. Masterman in his article on leprosy in the Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, from which we have drawn much of the information that follows, says, "No other disease reduces a human being for so many years to so hideous a wreck." Let us look first at the facts.

There are three kinds of leprosy. (i) There is nodular or tubercular leprosy. It begins with an unaccountable lethargy and pains in the joints. Then there appear on the body, especially on the back, symmetrical discoloured patches. On them little nodules form, at first pink, then turning brown. The skin is thickened. The nodules gather specially in the folds of the cheek, the nose, the lips and the forehead. The whole appearance of the face is changed till the man loses his human appearance and looks, as the ancients said, like a lion or a satyr. The nodules grow larger and larger; they ulcerate and from them comes a foul discharge. The eye-brows fall out; the eyes become staring; the voice becomes hoarse and the breath wheezes because of the ulceration of the vocal chords. The hands and the feet also ulcerate. Slowly the sufferer becomes a mass of ulcerated growths. The average course of the disease is nine years, and it ends in mental decay, coma and ultimately death.

the sufferer becomes utterly repulsive both to himself and to others.

(ii) There is anaesthetic leprosy. The initial stages are the same; but the nerve trunks also are affected. The infected area loses all sensation. This may happen without the sufferer knowing that it has happened; and he may not realize that it has happened until he suffers some burning or scalding and finds that there is no feeling whatsoever where pain ought to be. As the disease develops the injury to the nerves causes discoloured patches and blisters. The muscles waste away; the tendons contract until the hands become like claws. There is always disfigurement of the finger nails. There ensues chronic ulceration of the feet and of the hands and then the progressive loss of fingers and of toes, until in the end a whole hand or a whole foot may drop off. The duration of the disease is anything from twenty to thirty years. It is a kind of terrible progressive death of the body.

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Mark 1:40-45

(iii) The third kind of leprosy is a type--the commonest of all--where nodular and anaesthetic leprosy are mixed.

That is leprosy proper, and there is no doubt that there were many lepers like that in Palestine in the time of Jesus. From the description in Lev.13 it is quite clear that in New Testament times the term leprosy was also used to cover other skin diseases. It seems to have been used to include psoriasis, a disease which covers the body with white scales, and which would give rise to the phrase "a leper as white as snow." It seems also to have included ring-worm which is still very common in the East. The Hebrew word used in Leviticus for leprosy is tsara'ath (HSN6883). Now Lev.13:47 speaks of a tsara'ath (HSN6883) of garments, and a tsara'ath (HSN6883) of houses is dealt with in Lev.14:33. Such a blemish on a garment would be some kind of mould or fungus; and on a house it would be some kind of dry-rot in the wood or destructive lichen on the stone. The word tsara'ath (HSN6883), leprosy in Jewish thought, seems to have covered any kind of creeping skin disease.

Very naturally, with medical knowledge in an extremely primitive state, diagnosis did not distinguish between the different kinds of skin disease and included both the deadly and incurable and the non-fatal and comparatively harmless under the one inclusive title.

Any such skin disease rendered the sufferer unclean. He was banished from the fellowship of men; he must dwell alone outside the camp; he must go with rent clothes, bared head, a covering upon his upper lip, and as he went he must give warning of his polluted presence with the cry, "Unclean, unclean!" We see the same thing in the Middle Ages, which merely applied the Mosaic law. The priest, wearing his stole and carrying a crucifix, led the leper into the church, and read the burial service over him. The leper was a man who was already dead, though still alive. He had to wear a black garment that all might recognize and live in a leper- or lazar-house. He must not come into a church service but while the service went on he might peer through the leper "squint" cut in the walls. The leper had not only to bear the physical pain of his disease; he had to bear the mental anguish and the heart-break of being completely banished from human society and totally shunned.

If ever a leper was cured--and real leprosy was incurable, so it is some of the other skin diseases which must be referred to--he had to undergo a complicated ceremony of restoration which is described in Lev.14. He was examined by the priest. Two birds were taken and one was killed over running water. In addition there was taken cedar, scarlet and hyssop. These things and the living bird were dipped in the blood of the dead bird and then the live bird was allowed to go free. The man washed himself and his clothes and shaved himself. Seven days then elapsed and he was re-examined. He had then to shave his hair, his head, his eye-brows. Certain sacrifices were made--two male lambs without blemish and one ewe lamb; three tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil and one log of oil. The amounts were less for the poor. The restored sufferer was touched on the tip of the right ear, the right thumb and the right great toe with blood and oil. He was given a final examination and, if clear of the disease, he was snowed to go with a certificate that he was clean.

Here is one of the most revealing pictures of Jesus.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 1:40-45

(i) He did not drive away a man who had broken the law. The leper had no right to have spoken to him at all, but Jesus met the desperation of human need with an understanding compassion.

(ii) Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. He touched the man who was unclean. To Jesus he was not unclean; he was simply a human soul in desperate need.

(iii) Having cleansed him, Jesus sent him to fulfil the prescribed ritual. He fulfilled the human law and human righteousness. He did not recklessly defy the conventions, but, when need be, submitted to them.

Here we see compassion, power and wisdom all conjoined.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:1-6

A FAITH THAT WOULD NOT BE DENIED

Mark 2:1-6

When, some time afterwards, Jesus had come back to Capernaum, the news went round that he was in a house. Such crowds collected that there was no longer any room left, not even round the door. So he was speaking the word to them. A party arrived bringing to him a paralysed man carried by four men. When they could not get near him because of the crowd they unroofed part of the roof of the house in which he was, and when they had dug out part of the roof, they let down the stretcher on which the paralysed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, "Child, your sins are forgiven."

After Jesus had completed his tour of the synagogues he returned to Capernaum. The news of his coming immediately spread abroad. Life in Palestine was very public. In the morning the door of the house was opened and anyone who wished might come out and in. The door was never shut unless a man deliberately wished for privacy; an open door meant an open invitation for all to come in. In the humbler houses, such as this must have been, there was no entrance hall; the door opened directly on to the street. So, in no time, a crowd had filled the house to capacity and jammed the pavement round the door; and they were all eagerly listening to what Jesus had to say.

Into this crowd came four men carrying on a stretcher a friend of theirs who was paralysed. They could not get through the crowd at all, but they were men of resource. The roof of a Palestinian house was flat. It was regularly used as a place of rest and of quiet, and so usually there was an outside stair which ascended to it. The construction of the roof lent itself to what this ingenious four proposed to do. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, perhaps three feet apart. The space in between the beams was filled with brushwood packed tight with clay. The top was then marled over. Very largely the roof was of earth and often a flourishing crop of grass grew on the roof of a Palestinian house. It was the easiest thing in the world to dig out the rifling between two of the beams; it did not even damage the house very much, and it was easy to repair the breach again. So the four men dug out the filling between two of the beams and let their friend down direct at Jesus' feet.

When Jesus saw this faith that laughed at barriers he must have smiled an understanding smile. He looked at the man, "Child," he said, "your sins are forgiven."

It may seem an odd way to begin a cure. But in Palestine, in the time of Jesus, it was natural and inevitable. The Jews integrally connected sin and suffering. They argued that if a man was suffering he must have sinned. That is in fact the argument that Job's friends produced. "Who," demanded Eliphaz the Temanite, "that was innocent ever perished?" (Jb.4:7.) The Rabbis had a saying, "There is no sick man healed of his sickness until all his sins have been forgiven him." To this day we get the same ideas among primitive peoples. Paul Tournier writes, "Do not missionaries report that disease is a defilement in the eyes of the savage? Even converts to Christianity do not dare to go to Communion when they are ill, because they consider themselves spurned by God." To the Jews a sick man was a man with whom God was angry. It is true that a great many illnesses are due to sin; it is still truer that time and time again they are due not to the sin of the ill man, but to the sin of others.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:1-6

We do not make the close connection that the Jews did, but any Jew would have agreed that forgiveness of sins was a prior condition of cure.

It may well be, however, that there is more than this in this story. The Jews made this connection between illness and sin, and it may well be that, in this case, the man's conscience agreed. And it may well be that that consciousness of sin had actually produced the paralysis. The power of mind, especially the sub-conscious mind, over the body is an amazing thing.

The psychologists quote a case of a girl who played the piano in a cinema in the days of the silent films. Normally she was quite well, but immediately the lights went out and cigarette smoke filled the auditorium she began to be paralysed. She fought against it for long, but at last the paralysis became permanent and something had to be done. Examination revealed no physical cause whatever. Under hypnosis it was discovered that when she was very young, only a few weeks old, she had been lying in one of those elaborate old-fashioned cots with an arch of lace over it. Her mother had bent over her smoking a cigarette. The draperies had caught fire. It was immediately extinguished and no physical hurt was done to her but her sub-conscious mind was remembering this terror. The dark plus the smell of the cigarette smoke in the cinema acted on the unconscious mind and paralysed her body--and she did not know why.

The man in this story may well have been paralysed because consciously or unconsciously his conscience agreed that he was a sinner, and the thought of being a sinner brought the illness which he believed was the inevitable consequence of sin. The first thing that Jesus said to him was, "Child, God is not angry with you. It's all right." It was like speaking to a frightened child in the dark. The burden of the terror of God and estrangement from God rolled from his heart, and that very fact made the cure all but complete.

It is a lovely story because the first thing that Jesus does for everyone of us is to say, "Child, God is not angry with you. Come home, and don't be afraid."

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:7-12

THE UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT

Mark 2:7-12

Some of the experts in the law were sitting there, and they were debating within themselves, "How can this fellow speak like this? He is insulting God. Who can forgive sins except one person--God?" Jesus immediately knew in his spirit that this debate was going on in their minds, so he said to them, "Why do you debate thus in your minds? Which is easier--to say to the paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and lift your bed, and walk around'? Just to let you see that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he said to the paralysed man--"I say to you, 'Get up! Lift your bed! And go away home!'" And he raised himself, and immediately he lifted his bed, and went out in front of them all. The result was that they were all astonished, and they kept on praising God. "Never," they kept repeating, "have we seen anything like this."

Jesus, as we have seen, had already attracted the crowds. Because of that he had attracted the notice of the official leaders of the Jews. The Sanhedrin was their supreme court. One of its great functions was. to be the guardian of orthodoxy. For instance, it was the Sanhedrin's duty to deal with any man who was a false prophet. It seems that it had sent out a kind of scouting party to check up on Jesus; and they were there in Capernaum. No doubt they had annexed an honourable place in the front of the crowd and were sitting there critically watching everything that was going on.

When they heard Jesus say to the man that his sins were forgiven it came as a shattering shock. It was an essential of the Jewish faith that only God could forgive sins. For any man to claim to do so was to insult God; that was blasphemy and the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning (Lev.24:16). At the moment they were not ready to launch their attack in public, but it was not difficult for Jesus to see how their minds were working. So he determined to fling down a challenge and to meet them on their own ground.

It was their own firm belief that sin and sickness were indissolubly linked together. A sick man was a man who had sinned. So Jesus asked them: "Whether it is easier to say to this man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" Any charlatan could say, "Your sins are forgiven." There was no possibility of ever demonstrating whether his words were effective or not; such a statement was completely uncheckable. But to say, "Get up and walk" was to say something whose effectiveness would either be proved or disproved there and then. So Jesus said in effect: "You say that I have no right to forgive sins? You hold as a matter of belief that if this man is ill he is a sinner and he cannot be cured till he is forgiven? Very well, then, watch this!" So Jesus spoke the word and the man was cured.

The experts in the law were hoist with their own petard. On their own stated beliefs the man could not be cured, unless he was forgiven. He was cured, therefore he was forgiven. Therefore, Jesus' claim to forgive sin must be true. Jesus must have left a completely baffled set of legal experts; and, worse, he must have left them in a baffled rage. Here was something that must be dealt with; if this went on, all orthodox religion would be shattered and destroyed. In this incident Jesus signed his own death warrant--and he knew it.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:7-12

For all that it is an extremely difficult incident. What does it mean that Jesus can forgive sin? There are three possible ways of looking at this.

(i) We could take it that Jesus was conveying God's forgiveness to the man. After David had sinned and Nathan had rebuked him into terror and David had humbly confessed his sin, Nathan said: "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." (2Sam.12:1-13.) Nathan was not forgiving David's sin, but he was conveying God's forgiveness to David and assuring him of it. So we could say that what Jesus was doing was that he was assuring the man of God's forgiveness, conveying to him something which God had already given him. That is certainly true, but it does not read as if it was the whole truth.

(ii) We could take it that Jesus was acting as God's representative. John says: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son." (Jn.5:22.) If judgment is committed to Jesus, then so must forgiveness be. Let us take a human analogy. Analogies are always imperfect but we can think only in human terms. A man may give another man a power of attorney; that means to say that he has given that man the absolute disposal of his goods and property. He agrees that the other man should act for him, and that his actions should be regarded precisely as his own. We could take it that that is what God did with Jesus, that he delegated to him his powers and privileges, and that the word Jesus spoke was none other than the word of God.

(iii) We could take it in still another way. The whole essence of Jesus' life is that in him we see clearly displayed the attitude of God to men. Now that attitude was the very reverse of what men had thought God's attitude to be. It was not an attitude of stern, severe, austere justice, not an attitude of continual demand. It was an attitude of perfect love, of a heart yearning with love and eager to forgive. Again let us use a human analogy. Lewis Hind in one of his essays tells us of the day that he discovered his father. He had always respected and admired his father; but he had always been more than a little afraid of him. He was in church with his father one Sunday. It was a hot drowsy day. He grew sleepier and sleepier. He could not keep his eyes open as the waves of sleep engulfed him. His head nodded. He saw his father's arm go up; and he was sure that his father was going to shake or strike him. Then he saw his father smile gently and put his arm round his shoulder.

He cuddled the lad to himself so that he might rest the more comfortably and held him close with the clasp of love. That day Lewis Hind discovered that his father was not as he had thought him to be and that his father loved him. That is what Jesus did for men and for God. He literally brought men God's forgiveness upon earth. Without him they would never have even remotely known about it. "I tell you," he said to the man, "and I tell you here and now, upon earth, you are a forgiven man." Jesus showed men perfectly the attitude of God to men. He could say, "I forgive," because in him God was saying, "I forgive."

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:13-14

THE CALL OF THE MAN WHOM ALL MEN HATED

Mark 2:13-14

So Jesus went out again to the lakeside, and the whole crowd came to him, and he went on teaching them. As he walked along, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting in the office where he collected the customs duties. He said to him, "Follow me!" He rose and followed him.

Steadily and inexorably the synagogue door was shutting on Jesus. Between him and the guardians of Jewish orthodoxy war had been declared. Now he was teaching, not in the synagogue, but by the lakeside. The open air was to be his church, the blue sky his canopy, and a hillside or a fishing boat his pulpit. Here was the beginning of that dreadful situation when the Son of God was banned from the place which was regarded as the house of God.

He was walking by the lakeside and teaching. That was one of the commonest ways for a Rabbi to teach. As the Jewish Rabbis walked the roads from one place to another, or as they strolled in the open air, their disciples grouped themselves around and walked with them and listened as they talked. Jesus was doing what any Rabbi might have done.

Galilee was one of the great road centres of the ancient world. It has been said that, "Judaea is on the way to nowhere; Galilee is on the way to everywhere." Palestine was the land bridge between Europe and Africa; all land traffic must go through her. The great Road of the Sea led from Damascus, by way of Galilee, through Capernaum, down past Carmel, along the Plain of Sharon, through Gaza and on to Egypt. It was one of the great roads of the world. Another road led from Acre on the coast away across the Jordan out to Arabia and the frontiers of the empire, a road that was trodden by the regiments and the caravans.

Palestine at this time was divided up. Judaea was a Roman province under a Roman procurator; Galilee was ruled by Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great; to the east the territory which included Gaulonitis, Trachonitis and Batanaea was ruled by Philip, another of Herod's sons. On the way from Philip's territory to Herod's domains, Capernaum was the first town to which the traveller came. It was by its very nature a frontier town; because of that it was a customs' centre. In those days there were import and export taxes and Capernaum must have been the place where they were collected. That is where Matthew worked. True, he was not, like Zacchaeus, in the service of the Romans; he was working for Herod Antipas; but a hated tax-collector he was. (The King James Version calls the tax-collectors, publicans; that is because the Latin word was publicanus; the translation publican which is, of course, nowadays quite misleading, actually goes back to Wycliffe.)

This story tells us certain things both about Matthew and about Jesus.

(i) Matthew was a well-hated man. Tax-gatherers can never be a popular section of the community, but in the ancient world they were hated. People never knew just how much they had to pay; the tax-collectors extracted from them as much as they could possibly get and lined their own pockets with the surplus that remained after the demands of the law had been met. Even a

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Mark 2:13-14

Greek writer like Lucian ranks tax-gatherers with "adulterers, panderers, flatterers and sycophants." Jesus wanted the man no one else wanted. He offered his friendship to the man whom all others would have scorned to call friend.

(ii) Matthew must have been a man at that moment with an ache in his heart. He must have heard about Jesus; he must have listened often on the outskirts of the crowds to his message; and something must have stirred in his heart. Now he could not possibly have gone to the orthodox good people of his day; to them he was unclean and they would have refused to have anything to do with him.

Hugh Redwood tells of a woman in the dock district in London who came to a women's meeting. She had been living with a Chinese and had a half-caste baby whom she brought with her. She liked the meeting and came back and back again. Then the vicar came to her. "I must ask you," he said, "not to come again." The woman looked her question. "The other women," said the vicar, "say that they will stop coming if you continue to come." She looked at him with a poignant wistfulness. "Sir," she said, "I know I'm a sinner, but isn't there anywhere a sinner can go?" Fortunately the Salvation Army found that woman and she was reclaimed for Christ.

That is precisely what Matthew was up against until he found the one who came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.

(iii) This story tells us something about Jesus. It was as he walked along the lakeside that he called Matthew. As a great scholar said, "Even as he was walking along he was looking for opportunities." Jesus was never off duty. If he could find one man for God as he walked he found him. What a harvest we could gather in if we looked for men for Christ as we walked!

(iv) Of all the disciples Matthew gave up most. He literally left all to follow Jesus. Peter and Andrew, James and John could go back to the boats. There were always fish to catch and always the old trade to which to return; but Matthew burned his bridges completely. With one action, in one moment of time, by one swift decision he had put himself out of his job forever, for having left his tax-collector's job, he would never get it back. It takes a big man to make a big decision, and yet some time in every life there comes the moment to decide.

A certain famous man had the habit of going for long country walks on Dartmoor. When he came to a brook that was rather too wide to cross comfortably, the first thing he did was to throw his coat over to the other side. He made sure that there was to be no turning back. He took the decision to cross and made sure he was going to stick to it.

Matthew was the man who staked everything on Christ; and he was not wrong.

(v) From his decision Matthew got at least three things.

(a) He got clean hands. From now on he could look the world in the face. He might be very much poorer and life must be very much rougher, and the luxuries and the comforts were gone; but from now on his hands were clean and, because his hands were clean, his mind was at rest.

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Mark 2:13-14

(b) He lost one job but he got a far bigger one. It has been said that Matthew left everything but one thing--he did not leave his pen. Scholars do not think that the first gospel, as it stands, is the work of Matthew; but they do think that it embodies one of the most important documents of all history, the first written account of the teaching of Jesus, and that that document was written by Matthew. With his orderly mind, his systematic way of working, his familiarity with the pen, Matthew was, the first man to give the world a book on the teaching of Jesus.

(c) The odd thing is that Matthew's reckless decision brought him the one thing he can least have been looking for--it brought him immortal and world-wide fame. All men know the name of Matthew as one forever connected with the transmission of the story of Jesus. Had Matthew refused the call he would have had a local ill-fame as the follower of a disreputable trade which all men hated; because he answered the call he gained a world-wide fame as the man who gave to men the record of the words of Jesus. God never goes back on the man who stakes his all on him.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:15-17

WHERE THE NEED IS GREATEST

Mark 2:15-17

Jesus was sitting at a meal in Levi's house, and many tax-collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many of them, and they sought his company. When the experts in the law, who belonged to the school of the Pharisees, saw that he was eating in the company of sinners and tax-gatherers, they began to say to his disciples, "It is with tax-collectors and sinners that he is eating and drinking." Jesus heard them. "It is not those who are in good health who need a doctor," he said, "but those who are ill. I did not come to bring an invitation to people who think that they have no faults but to those who know that they are sinners."

Once again Jesus is flinging down the gauntlet of defiance.

When Matthew had yielded himself to Jesus, he invited him to his house. Naturally, having discovered Jesus for himself, he wished his friends to share his great discovery--and his friends were like himself. It could not be any other way. Matthew had chosen a job which cut him off from the society of all respectable and orthodox people, and he had to find his friends among outcasts like himself. Jesus gladly accepted that invitation; and these outcasts of society sought his company.

Nothing could better show the difference between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees and orthodox good people of the day. They were not the kind of people whose company a sinner would have sought. He would have been looked at with bleak condemnation and arrogant superiority. He would have been frozen out of such company even before he had entered it.

A clear distinction was drawn between those who kept the law and those whom they called the people of the land. The people of the land were the common mob who did not observe all the rules and the regulations of conventional Pharisaic piety. By the orthodox it was forbidden to have anything to do with these people. The strict law-keeper must have no fellowship with them at all. He must not talk with them nor go on a journey with them; as far as possible, he must not even do business with them; to marry a daughter to one of them was as bad as giving her over to a wild beast; above all, he must not accept hospitality from or give hospitality to such a person. By going to Matthew's house and sitting at his table and companying with his friends Jesus was defying the orthodox conventions of his day.

We need not for a moment suppose that all these people were sinners in the moral sense of the term. The word sinner (hamartolos, GSN0268) had a double significance. It did mean a man who broke the moral law; but it also meant a man who did not observe the scribal law. The man who committed adultery and the man who ate pork were both sinners; the man who was guilty of theft and murder and the man who did not wash his hands the required number of times and in the required way before he ate were both sinners. These guests of Matthew no doubt included many who had broken the moral law and played fast and loose with life; but no doubt they also included many whose only sin was that they did not observe the scribal rules and regulations.

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Mark 2:15-17

When Jesus was taxed with this shocking conduct his answer was quite simple. "A doctor," he said "goes where he is needed. People in good health do not need him; sick people do; I am doing just the same; I am going to those who are sick in soul and who need me most."

Mk.2:17 is a highly concentrated verse. It sounds at first hearing as if Jesus had no use for good people. But the point of it is that the one person for whom Jesus can do nothing is the person who thinks himself so good that he does not need anything done for him; and the one person for whom Jesus can do everything is the person who is a sinner and knows it and who longs in his heart for a cure. To have no sense of need is to have erected a barrier between us and Jesus; to have a sense of need is to possess the passport to his presence.

The attitude of the orthodox Jews to the sinner was really compounded of two things.

(i) It was compounded of contempt. "The ignorant man," said the Rabbis, "can never be pious." Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, was an arrogant aristocrat. One called Scythinus undertook to put his discourses into verse so that ordinary unlettered folk might read and understand them. The reaction of Heraclitus was put into an epigram. "Heraclitus am I. Why do ye drag me up and down, ye illiterate? It was not for you I toiled, but for such as understand me. One man in my sight is a match for thirty thousand, but the countless hosts do not make a single one." For the mob he had nothing but contempt. The Scribes and Pharisees despised the common man; Jesus loved him. The Scribes and Pharisees stood on their little eminence of formal piety and looked down on the sinner; Jesus came and sat beside him, and by sitting beside him lifted him up.

(ii) It was compounded of fear. The orthodox were afraid of the contagion of the sinner; they were afraid that they might be infected with sin. They were like a doctor who would refuse to attend a case of infectious illness lest he himself contracted it. Jesus was the one who forgot himself in a great desire to save others. C. T. Studd, great missionary of Christ, had four lines of doggerel that he loved to quote:

"Some want to live within the sound
Of Church or Chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell."

The man with contempt and fear in his heart can never be a fisher of men.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:18-20

THE JOYOUS COMPANY

Mark 2:18-20

The disciples of John were in the habit of fasting, as were the Pharisees. So they came to Jesus and said, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, while your disciples do not?" "Surely," Jesus said to them, "his closest friends cannot fast while the bridegroom is still with them? So long as they have the bridegroom they do not fast. But the days will come when some day the bridegroom will be taken away from them--and then, in that day, they will fast."

With the stricter Jews fasting was a regular practice. In the Jewish religion there was only one day in all the year that was a compulsory fast, and that was the Day of Atonement. The day when the nation confessed and was forgiven its sin was The Fast, par excellence. But the stricter Jews fasted on two days every week, on Mondays and Thursdays. It is to be noted that fasting was not as serious as it sounds, for the fast lasted from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and after that normal food could be eaten.

Jesus is not against fasting as such. There are very good reasons why a man might fast. He might deny himself things he likes for the sake of discipline, to be certain that he is the master of them and not they of him, to make sure that he never grows to love them so well that he can not give them up. He might deny himself comforts and pleasant things so that, after self-denial, he might appreciate them all the more. One of the best ways to learn to value our homes is to have to stay away from home for a time; and one of the best ways to appreciate God's gifts is to do without them for a period.

These are good reasons for fasting. The trouble about the Pharisees was that in far too many cases their fasting was for self-display. It was to call the attention of men to their goodness. They actually whitened their faces and went about with dishevelled garments on their fast days so that no one could miss the fact that they were fasting and so that everyone would see and admire their devotion. It was to call the attention of God to their piety. They felt that this special act of extra piety would bring them to the notice of God. Their fasting was a ritual and a self-displaying ritual at that. To be of any value, fasting must not be the result of a ritual; it must be the expression of a feeling in the heart.

Jesus used a vivid picture to tell the Pharisees why his disciples did not fast. After a Jewish wedding the couple did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home. For a week or so open house was kept and there was continual feasting and rejoicing. In a hard wrought life the wedding week was the happiest week in a man's life. To that week of happiness were invited the closest friends of the bride and the bridegroom; and they were called by the name children of the bridechamber. Jesus likened his little company to men who were children of the bridechamber, chosen guests at a wedding feast. There was actually a rabbinic ruling which said, "All in attendance on the bridegroom are relieved of all religious observances which would lessen their joy." The wedding guests were actually exempt from all fasting.

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Mark 2:18-20

This incident tells us that the characteristic Christian attitude to life is joy. The discovery of Christ and the company of Christ is the key to happiness. There was a Japanese criminal called Tockichi Ishii. He was utterly and bestially pitiless; he had brutally and callously murdered men, women and children in his career of crime. He was captured and imprisoned. Two Canadian ladies visited the prison. He could not be induced even to speak; he only glowered at them with the face of a wild beast. When they left, they left with him a copy of the Bible in the faint hope that he might read it. He read it, and the story of the crucifixion made him a changed man. "Later when the jailer came to lead the doomed man to the scaffold, he found not the surly, hardened brute he expected, but a smiling, radiant man, for Ishii the murderer had been born again." The mark of his rebirth was a smiling radiance. The life that is lived in Christ cannot be lived other than in joy.

But the story ends with a foreboding cloud across the sky. No doubt when Jesus spoke of the day when the bridegroom would be taken away his friends did not at the moment see the meaning of it. But here, right at the beginning, Jesus saw the cross ahead. Death did not take him unawares; even now he had counted the cost and chosen the way. Here is courage; here is the picture of a man who would not be deflected from the road at whose end there loomed a cross.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:21-22

THE NECESSITY OF STAYING YOUNG IN MIND

Mark 2:21-22

No one sews a patch of new cloth on to an old garment. If he does the bit that was meant to fill in the hole tears it apart--the new from the old--and the tear is made worse. No one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does the wine will burst the wineskins, and the wine will be lost as well as the wineskins. New skins for new wine!

Jesus knew quite well that he was coming with a message which was startlingly new; and he also knew that his way of life was shatteringly different from that of the orthodox rabbinic teacher. He also knew how difficult it is for the minds of men to accept and to entertain new truth; and here he uses two illustrations to show how necessary it is to have an adventurous mind.

No one ever had such a gift as Jesus for the discovery and the use of homely illustrations. Over and over again he finds in the simple things pathways and pointers to God. No one was ever such an expert in getting from the "here and now" to the "there and then." For Jesus "earth was crammed with heaven." He lived so close to God that everything spoke to him of God. Someone tells how, on Saturday afternoons, he used to go for country walks with one of the most famous of Scottish preachers. They used to have long talks together. Telling of it afterwards he said, "Wherever the conversation started, he had a way of cutting straight across country to God." Wherever Jesus' eye lighted it had a way of flashing straight on to God.

(i) He speaks of the danger of sewing a new patch on an old garment. The word used means that the new cloth was still undressed; it had never been shrunk; so when the garment got wet in the rain the new patch shrunk, and being much stronger than the old, it tore the old apart. There comes a time when the day of patching is over, and re-creating must begin. In the time of Luther it was not possible to patch up the abuses of the Roman Catholic church; the time for reformation had come. In the time of John Wesley, for Wesley at least, the time for patching the Church of England was done. He did not want to leave it, but in the end he had to, for only a new fellowship would suffice. It may well be that there are times when we try to patch, when what is wanted is the complete abandonment of the old and the acceptance of something new.

(ii) Wine was kept in wineskins. There was no such thing as a bottle in our sense of the term. When these skins were new they had a certain elasticity; as they grew old they became hard and unyielding. New wine is still fermenting; it gives off gases; these gases cause pressure; if the skin is new it will yield to the pressure, but if it is old and hard and dry it will explode and wine and skin alike will be lost. Jesus is pleading for a certain elasticity in our minds. It is fatally easy to become set in our ways. J. A. Findlay quotes a saying of one of his friends--"When you reach a conclusion you're dead." What he meant was that when our minds become fixed and settled in their ways, when they are quite unable to accept new truth and to contemplate new ways, we may be physically alive but we are mentally dead.

As they grow older almost everyone develops a constitutional dislike of that which is new and unfamiliar. We grow very unwilling to make any adjustments in our habits and ways of life. Lesslie

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Mark 2:21-22

Newbigin, who was involved in the discussions about the formation of the United Church of South India, tells how one of the things that most often held things up was that people kept asking, "Now, if we do that, just where are we going?" In the end someone had to say bluntly, "The Christian has no right to ask where he is going." Abraham went out not knowing whither he went. (Heb.11:8.) There is a great verse in that same chapter of Hebrews: "By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons; of Joseph bowing in worship over the head of his staff." (Heb.11:21.) With the very breath of death upon him the old traveller still had his pilgrim staff in his hand. To the end of the day, with the evening now upon him, he was still ready for the road.

If we are really to rise to the height of the Christian challenge, we must retain the adventurous mind. I received a letter once which ended "Yours aged 83 and still growing"--and with the inexhaustible riches of Christ before us, why not?

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 2:23-28

PIETY, REAL AND FALSE

Mark 2:23-28

One Sabbath day Jesus was going through the corn fields. His disciples began to pluck the ears of corn as they made their way along. The Pharisees began to say to him, "Look! Why are they doing what is not allowed on the Sabbath?" "Have you never read," he said, "what David did when he and his friends were in need and hungry? Have you never read how he went into the house of God, when Abiathar was High Priest, and ate the shewbread--which none is allowed to eat except the priests--and gave it to his friends as well?" "The Sabbath," he said to them, "was made for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is lord also of the Sabbath."

Once again Jesus cut right across the scribal rules and regulations. When he and his disciples were going through the corn fields one Sabbath day, his disciples began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat them. On any ordinary day the disciples were doing what was freely permitted (Deut. 23:25). So long as the traveller did not put a sickle into the field he was free to pluck the corn. But this was done on the Sabbath and the Sabbath was hedged around with literally thousands of petty rules and regulations. AH work was forbidden. Work had been classified under thirty-nine different heads and four of these heads were reaping, winnowing, threshing and preparing a meal. By their action the disciples had technically broken all these four rules and were to be classified as law-breakers. It seems fantastic to us; but to the Jewish rabbis it was a matter of deadly sin and of life and death.

The Pharisees immediately launched their accusation and pointed out that Jesus' disciples were breaking the law. They obviously expected him to stop them on the spot. Jesus answered them in their own language. He cited the story which is told in 1Sam.21:1-6. David was fleeing for his life; he came to the tabernacle in Nob; he demanded food and there was none except the shewbread. Exo.25:23-30 tells of the shewbread. It consisted of twelve loaves placed on a golden table three feet long, one and a half feet wide, and one and a half feet high. The table stood in the tabernacle in front of the Holy of Holies and the bread was a kind of offering to God. It was changed once a week; when it was changed it became the property of the priests and of the priests alone and no one else might eat it (Lev.24:9.) Yet in his time of need David took and ate that bread. Jesus showed that scripture itself supplies a precedent in which human need took precedence of human and even divine law.

"The Sabbath," he said, "was made for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the Sabbath." That was self-evident. Man was created before ever the elaborate Sabbath law came into existence. Man was not created to be the victim and the slave of Sabbath rules and regulations which were in the beginning created to make life fuller and better for man. Man is not to be enslaved by the Sabbath; the Sabbath exists to make his life better.

This passage confronts us with certain essential truths which we forget at our peril.

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Mark 2:23-28

(i) Religion does not consist in rules and regulations. To take the matter in question--Sunday observance is important but there is a great deal more to religion than Sunday observance. If a man might become a Christian simply by abstaining from work and pleasure on the Sunday, and by attending church on that day, and saying his prayers and reading his Bible, being a Christian would be a very easy thing. Whenever men forget the love and the forgiveness and the service and the mercy that are at the heart of religion and replace them by the performance of rules and regulations religion is in a decline. Christianity has at all times consisted far more in doing things than in refraining from doing things.

(ii) The first claim on any man is the claim of human need. Even the catechisms and the confessions admit that works of necessity and mercy are quite legal on the Sabbath. If ever the performance of a man's religion stops him helping someone who is in need, his religion is not religion at all. People matter far more than systems. Persons are far more important than rituals. The best way to worship God is to help men.

(iii) The best way to use sacred things is to use them to help men. That, in fact, is the only way to give them to God. One of the loveliest of all stories is that of The Fourth Wise Man. His name was Artaban. He set out to follow the star and he took with him a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl beyond price as gifts for the King. He was riding hard to meet his three friends, Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, at the agreed place. The time was short; they would leave if he was late. Suddenly he saw a dim figure on the ground before him. It was a traveller stricken with fever. If he stayed to help he would miss his friends. He did stay; he helped and healed the man. But now he was alone. He needed camels and bearers to help him across the desert because he had missed his friends and their caravan. He had to sell his sapphire to get them; and he was sad because the King would never have his gem.

He journeyed on and in due time came to Bethlehem, but again he was too late. Joseph and Mary and the baby had gone. Then there came the soldiers to carry out Herod's command that the children should be slain. Artaban was in a house where there was a little child. The tramp of the soldiers came to the door; the weeping of stricken mothers could be heard. Artaban stood in the doorway, tall and dark, with the ruby in his hand and bribed the captain not to enter. The child was saved; the mother was overjoyed; but the ruby was gone; and Artaban was sad because the King would never have his ruby.

For years he wandered looking in vain for the King. More than thirty years afterwards he came to Jerusalem. There was a crucifixion that day. When Artaban heard of the Jesus being crucified, he sounded wondrous like the King and Artaban hurried towards Calvary. Maybe his pearl, the loveliest in all the world, could buy the life of the King. Down the street came a girl fleeing from a band of soldiers. "My father is in debt," she cried, "and they are taking me to sell as a slave to pay the debt. Save me!" Artaban hesitated; then sadly he took out his pearl, gave it to the soldiers and bought the girl's freedom.

On a sudden the skies were dark; there was an earthquake and a flying tile hit Artaban on the head. He sank half-conscious to the ground. The girl pillowed his head on her lap. Suddenly his lips began to move. "Not so, my Lord. For when saw I thee anhungered and fed thee? Or thirsty, and

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gave thee drink? When saw I thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked and clothed thee? When saw I thee sick in prison, and came unto thee? Thirty and three years have I looked for thee; but I have never seen thy face, nor ministered to thee, my King." And then like a whisper from very far away, there came a voice. "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me." And Artaban smiled in death because he knew that the King had received his gifts.

The best way to use sacred things is to use them for men. It has been known for children to be barred from a church because that church was considered too ancient and sacred for such as they. It can be that a church is more concerned with the elaboration of its services than with the help of its simple folk and the relief of its poor. But the sacred things are only truly sacred when they are used for men. The shewbread was never so sacred as when it was used to feed a starving man. The Sabbath was never so sacred as when it was used to help those who needed help. The final arbiter in the use of all things is love and not law.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 3:1-6

THE CLASH OF IDEAS

Mark 3:1-6

Jesus went into the synagogue again; and there was a man there who had a hand which had withered; and they were watching him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath day, so that, if he did, they might be able to formulate a charge against him. He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Stand up and come out in to the middle of the congregation." He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day? Or to do evil? To save a life? Or to kill it?" But they remained silent. He looked round on them with anger, for he was grieved at the obtuseness of their hearts. He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out; and his hand was restored. The Pharisees immediately went out and began to concoct a plot with Herod's entourage against Jesus, with a view to killing him.

This is a crucial incident in the life of Jesus. It was already clear that he and the orthodox leaders of the Jews were quite at variance. For him to go back into the synagogue at all was a brave thing to do. It was the act of a man who refused to seek safety and who was determined to look a dangerous situation in the face. In the synagogue there was a deputation from the Sanhedrin. No one could miss them, for, in the synagogue, the front seats were the seats of honour and they were sitting there. It was the duty of the Sanhedrin to deal with anyone who was likely to mislead the people and seduce them from the right way; and that is precisely what this deputation conceived of themselves as doing. The last thing they were there to do was to worship and to learn; they were there to scrutinize Jesus' every action.

In the synagogue there was a man with a paralysed hand. The Greek word means that he had not been born that way but that some illness had taken the strength from him. The gospel according to the Hebrews, a gospel which is lost except for a few fragments, tells us that the man was a stone mason and that he besought Jesus to help him, for his livelihood was in his hands and he was ashamed to beg. If Jesus had been a cautious, prudent person he would have conveniently arranged not to see the man, for he knew that to heal him was asking for trouble.

It was the Sabbath day; all work was forbidden and to heal was to work. The Jewish law was definite and detailed about this. Medical attention could be given only if a life was in danger. To take some examples--a woman in childbirth might be helped on the Sabbath; an infection of the throat might be treated; if a wall fell on anyone, enough might be cleared away to see whether he was dead or alive; if he was alive he might be helped, if he was dead the body must be left until the next day. A fracture could not be attended to. Cold water might not be poured on a sprained hand or foot. A cut finger might be bandaged with a plain bandage but not with ointment. That is to say, at the most an injury could be kept from getting worse; it must not be made better.

It is extraordinarily difficult for us to grasp this. The best way in which we can see the strict orthodox view of the Sabbath is to remember that a strict Jew would not even defend his life on the Sabbath. In the wars of the Maccabees, when resistance broke out, some of the Jewish rebels took refuge in caves. The Syrian soldiers pursued them. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that they gave them the chance to surrender and they would not, so "they fought against them on the Sabbath

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day, and they burned them as they were in caves, without resistance and without so much as stopping up the entrances of the caves. They refused to defend themselves on that day because they were not willing to break in upon the honour they owed to the Sabbath, even in such distress; for our law requires that we rest on that day." When Pompey, the Roman general, was besieging Jerusalem, the defenders took refuge in the Temple precincts.

Pompey proceeded to build a mound which would overtop them and from which he might bombard them. He, knew the beliefs of the Jews and he built on the Sabbath day, and the Jews lifted not one hand to defend themselves or to hinder the building, although they knew that by their Sabbath inactivity they were signing their own death warrant. The Romans, who had compulsory military service, had in the end to exempt the Jews from army service because no strict Jew would fight on the Sabbath. The orthodox Jewish attitude to the Sabbath was completely rigid and unbending.

Jesus knew that. This man's life was not in the least danger. Physically he would be no worse off if he were left until to-morrow. For Jesus this was a test case, and he met it fairly and squarely. He told the man to rise and to come out of his place and stand where everyone could see him. There were probably two reasons for that. Very likely Jesus wished to make one last effort to waken sympathy for the stricken man by showing everyone his wretchedness. Quite certainly Jesus wished to take the step he was going to take in such a way that no one could possibly fail to see it.

He asked the experts in the law two questions. Is it lawful to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath day? He put them in a dilemma. They were bound to admit that it was lawful to do good; and it was a good thing he proposed to do. They were bound to deny that it was lawful to do evil; and, yet, surely it was an evil thing to leave a man in wretchedness when it was possible to help him. Then he asked, Is it lawful to save a life or to kill it? Here he was driving the thing home. He was taking steps to save this wretched man's life; they were thinking out methods of killing himself. On any reckoning it was surely a better thing to be thinking about helping a man than it was to be thinking of killing a man. No wonder they had nothing to say!

Then Jesus with a word of power healed the man; and the Pharisees went out and tried to hatch a plot with the Herodians to kill him. This shows the lengths to which the Pharisees would go. No Pharisee would normally have anything to do with a Gentile or a man who did not keep the law; such people were unclean. The Herodians were the court entourage of Herod; they were continually coming into contact with Romans. For all normal purposes the Pharisees would have considered them unclean; but now they were prepared to enter into what was for them an unholy alliance. In their hearts there was a hate which would stop at nothing.

This passage is fundamental because it shows the clash of two ideas of religion.

(i) To the Pharisee religion was ritual; it meant obeying certain rules and regulations. Jesus broke these regulations and they were genuinely convinced that he was a bad man. It is like the man who believes that religion consists in going to church, reading the Bible, saying grace at meals, having family worship, and carrying out all the external acts which are looked on as religious, and who yet never put himself out to do anything for anyone, who has no sense of sympathy, no desire to sacrifice, who is serene in his rigid orthodoxy, and deaf to the call of need and blind to the tears of the world.

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(ii) To Jesus religion was service. It was love of God and love of men. Ritual was irrelevant compared with love in action.

"Our Friend, our Brother, and our Lord,
What may Thy service be?
Nor name, nor form, nor ritual word,
But simply following Thee."

To Jesus the most important thing in the world was not the correct performance of a ritual, but the spontaneous answer to the cry of human need.

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Mark 3:7-12

IN THE MIDST OF THE CROWDS

Mark 3:7-12

So Jesus withdrew to the lakeside with his disciples, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; and from Judaea and from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea and from the Transjordan country, and from the territory round Tyre and Sidon, there came to him a great crowd of people, for they were hearing about what great things he was doing. He told his disciples to have a boat ready waiting for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; for he healed many, and the result was that all who were suffering from the scourges of disease rushed upon him to touch him. And as often as unclean spirits saw him, they kept flinging themselves down before him and shouting, "You are the Son of God." Many times he sternly forbade them to make him known.

Unless Jesus wished to be involved in a head-on collision with the authorities he had to leave the synagogues. It was not that he withdrew through fear; it was not the retreat of a man who feared to face the consequences. But his hour was not yet come. There was much that he had still to do and say before the time of final conflict.

So he left the synagogues and went out to the lakeside and the open sky. Even there the crowds flocked to him from far afield. From all over Galilee they came; many made the hundred-mile journey from Jerusalem in Judaea to see him and to listen to him. Idumaea was the ancient realm of Edom, away in the deep south, between the southern borders of Palestine and Arabia. From the east side of Jordan they came; and even from foreign territory, for people came from the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon, which lie on the Mediterranean coast, northwest of Galilee.

So large were the crowds that it became dangerous and a boat had to be kept ready, just off the shore, in case he might be overwhelmed with the crushing of the mob. His cures brought him into even greater danger; for the sick people did not even wait for him to touch them; they rushed to touch him.

At this time he was faced with one special problem, the problem of those who were possessed by demons. Let us remember that, whatever our belief about demons may be, these people were convinced they were possessed by an alien and an evil power external to themselves. They called Jesus the Son of God. What did they mean by that? They certainly did not use the term in what we might call a philosophical or a theological sense. In the ancient world Son of God was by no means an uncommon title. The kings of Egypt were said to be the sons of Ra, their god. From Augustus onwards many of the Roman Emperors were described on inscriptions as sons of God.

The Old Testament has four ways in which it uses this term. (i) The angels are the sons of God. The old story in Gen.6:2, says that the sons of God saw the daughters of men and were fatally attracted to them. Jb.1:6, tells of the day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord. It was a regular title for the angels. (ii) The nation of Israel is the son of God. God called his son out of Egypt (Hos.11:1). In Exo.4:22, God says of the nation, "Israel is my first-born son," (iii) The king of the nation is the son of God. In 2Sam.7:14, the promise to the king is, "I will be his

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Mark 3:7-12

father, and he shall be my son." (iv) In the later books, which were written between the Testaments, the good man is the son of God. In Sir.4:10, the promise to the man who is kind to the fatherless is,

"So shalt thou be a son of the Most High,
And he shall love thee more than thy mother doth."

In all these cases the term son describes someone who is specially near and close to God. We get a parallel to this which shows something of its meaning in the New Testament. Paul calls Timothy his son (1Tim.1:2; 1Tim.1:18). Timothy was no blood relation to Paul at all, but there was no one, as Paul says (Php.2:19-22), who knew his mind so well. Peter calls Mark his son (1Pet.5:13), because there was no one who could interpret his mind so well. When we meet this title in the simplicity of the gospel story we are not to think in terms of philosophy or theology or of the doctrine of the Trinity; we are to think of it as expressing the fact that Jesus' relationship to God was so close that no other word could describe it. Now these demon-possessed men felt that in them there was an independent evil spirit; they somehow felt that in Jesus was one near and kin to God; they felt that in the presence of this nearness to God the demons could not live and therefore they were afraid.

We must ask, "Why did Jesus so sternly bid them to remain silent?" The reason was very simple and very compelling. Jesus was the Messiah, God's anointed king; but his idea of Messiahship was quite different from the popular idea. He saw in Messiahship a way of service, of sacrifice and of love with a cross at the end of it. The popular idea of the Messiah was of a conquering king who, with his mighty armies, would blast the Romans and lead the Jews to world power. Therefore, if a rumour were to go out that the Messiah had arrived, the inevitable consequence would be rebellions and uprisings, especially in Galilee where the people were ever ready to follow a nationalist leader.

Jesus thought of Messiahship in terms of love; the people thought of Messiahship in terms of Jewish nationalism. Therefore, before there could be any proclamation of his Messiahship, Jesus had to educate the people into the true idea of what it meant. At this stage nothing but harm and trouble and disaster could come from the proclamation that the Messiah had arrived. It would have issued in nothing but useless war and bloodshed. First of all men had to learn the true conception of what the Messiah was; a premature announcement such as this could have wrecked Jesus' whole mission.

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Mark 3:13-19

THE CHOSEN COMPANY

Mark 3:13-19

Jesus went up into the mountain and invited to his service the men of his choice; and he appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to act as his heralds, and to have power to cast out demons. He chose Simon, and to him he gave the name of Peter; he chose James, Zebedee's son, and John, James' brother, and to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder; he chose Andrew and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas, and James, Alphaeus' son, and Thaddeus and Simon, the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Jesus had come to a very important moment in his life and work. He had emerged with his message; he had chosen his method; he had gone throughout Galilee preaching and healing. By this time he had made a very considerable impact on the public mind. Now he had to face two very practical problems. First, he had to find some way of making his message permanent if anything happened to him, and that something would happen he did not doubt. Second, he had to find some way of disseminating his message, and in an age when there was no such thing as a printed book or newspaper, and no way of reaching large numbers of people at the one time, that was no easy task. There was only one way to solve these two problems: he had to choose certain men on whose hearts and lives he could write his message and who would go out from his presence to carry that message abroad. Here we see him doing exactly that.

It is significant that Christianity began with a group. The Christian faith is something which from the beginning had to be discovered and lived out in a fellowship. The whole essence of the way of the Pharisees was that it separated men from their fellows; the very name Pharisee means the separated one; the whole essence of Christianity was that it bound men to their fellows, and presented them with the task of living with each other and for each other.

Further, Christianity began with a very mixed group. In it the two extremes met. Matthew was a tax-collector and, therefore, an outcast; he was a renegade and a traitor to his fellow countrymen. Simon the Cananaean is correctly called by Luke, Simon the Zealot; and the Zealots were a band of fiery, violent nationalists who were pledged even to murder and assassination to clear their country of the foreign yoke. The man who was lost to patriotism and the fanatical patriot came together in that group, and no doubt between them there were all kinds of backgrounds and opinions. Christianity began by insisting that the most diverse people should live together and by enabling them to do so, because they were all living with Jesus.

Judging them by worldly standards the men Jesus chose had no special qualifications at all. They were not wealthy; they had no special social position; they had no special education--they were not trained theologians; they were not high-ranking churchmen and ecclesiastics; they were twelve ordinary men. But they had two special qualifications. First, they had felt the magnetic attraction of Jesus. There was something about him that made them wish to take him as their Master. And second, they had the courage to show that they were on his side. Make no mistake, that did require courage. Here was Jesus calmly crashing through the rules and regulations; here was Jesus heading

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for an inevitable collision with the orthodox leaders; here was Jesus already branded as a sinner and labelled as a heretic; and yet they had the courage to attach themselves to him. No band of men ever staked everything on such a forlorn hope as these Galilaeans, and no band of men ever did it with more open eyes.

These twelve had all kinds of faults, but whatever else could be said about them, they loved Jesus and they were not afraid to tell the world that they loved him--and that is being a Christian.

Jesus called them to him for two purposes. First, he called them to be with him. He called them to be his steady and consistent companions. Others might come and go; the crowd might be there one day and away the next; others might be fluctuating and spasmodic in their attachment to him, but these twelve were to identify their lives with his life and live with him all the time. Second, he called them to send them out. He wanted them to be his representatives. He wanted them to tell others about him. They themselves had been won in order to win others.

For their task Jesus equipped them with two things. First, he gave them a message. They were to be his heralds. A wise man said that no one has any right to be a teacher unless he has a teaching of his own to offer, or the teaching of another that with all the passion of his heart he wishes to propagate. Men will always listen to the man with a message. Jesus gave these friends of his something to say. Second, he gave them a power. They were also to cast out demons. Because they companied with him something of his power was on their lives.

If we would learn what discipleship is we will do well to think again of these first disciples.

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Mark 3:20-21

THE VERDICT OF HIS OWN

Mark 3:20-21

Jesus went into a house; and once again so dense a crowd collected that they could not even eat bread. When his own people heard What was going on, they went out to restrain him, for they said, "He has taken leave of his senses."

Sometimes a man drops a remark which cannot be interpreted otherwise than as the product of bitter experience. Once when Jesus was enumerating the things which a man might have to face for following him, he said, "A man's foes will be those of his own household." (Matt.10:36.) His own family had come to the conclusion that he had taken leave of his senses and that it was time he was taken home. Let us see if we can understand what made them feel like that.

(i) Jesus had left home and the carpenter's business at Nazareth. No doubt it was a flourishing business from which he could at least have made a living; and quite suddenly he had flung the whole thing up and gone out to be a wandering preacher. No sensible man, they must have been thinking, would throw up a business where the money came in every week to become a vagrant who had not any place to lay his head.

(ii) Jesus was obviously on the way to a head-on collision with the orthodox leaders of his day. There are certain people who can do a man a great deal of harm, people on whose right side it is better to keep, people whose opposition can be very dangerous. No sensible man, they must have been thinking, would ever get up against the powers that be, because he would know that in any collision with them he would be bound to come off second best. No one could take on the Scribes and the Pharisees and the orthodox leaders and hope to get away with it.

(iii) Jesus had newly started a little society of his own--and a very queer society it was. There were some fishermen; there was a reformed tax-collector; there was a fanatical nationalist. They were not the kind of people whom any ambitious man would particularly want to know. They certainly were not the kind of people who would be any good to a man who was set on a career. No sensible man, they must have been thinking, would pick a crowd of friends like that. They were definitely not the kind of people a prudent man would want to get mixed up with.

By his actions Jesus had made it clear that the three laws by which men tend to organize their lives meant nothing to him.

(i) He had thrown away security. The one thing that most people in this world want more than anything else is just that. They want above all things a job and a position which are secure, and where there are as few material and financial risks as possible.

(ii) He had thrown away safety. Most people tend at all times to play safe. They are more concerned with the safety of any course of action than with its moral quality, its rightness or its wrongness. A course of action which involves risk is something from which they instinctively shrink.

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Mark 3:20-21

(iii) He had shown himself utterly indifferent to the verdict of society. He had shown that he did not much care what men said about him. In point of fact, as H. G. Wells said, for most people "the voice of their neighbours is louder than the voice of God." "What will people say?" is one of the first questions that most of us are in the habit of asking.

What appalled Jesus' friends was the risks that he was taking, risks which, as they thought, no sensible man would take.

When John Bunyan was in prison he was quite frankly afraid. "My imprisonment," he thought, "might end on the gallows for ought that I could tell." He did not like the thought of being hanged. Then came the day when he was ashamed of being afraid. "Methought I was ashamed to die with a pale face and tottering knees for such a cause as this." So finally he came to a conclusion as he thought of himself climbing up the ladder to the scaffold: "Wherefore, thought I, I am for going on and venturing my eternal state with Christ whether I have comfort here or no; if God doth not come in, thought I, I will leap off the ladder even blindfold into eternity, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell; Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me, do: if not, I will venture for thy name." That is precisely what Jesus was willing to do. I will venture for thy name. That was the essence of the life of Jesus, and that--not safety and security--should be the motto of the Christian man and the mainspring of the Christian life.

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Mark 3:22-27

ALLIANCE OR CONQUEST?

Mark 3:22-27

The experts in the law from Jerusalem came down. They said, "He has Beelzebub on his side." They said, "It is by the ruler of the demons that he casts out the demons." Jesus called them and spoke to them by way of analogy. "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan had risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand--he is finished. No one can go into the house of a strong man and plunder his gear unless he first binds the strong man--then he will plunder his house."

The orthodox officials never questioned Jesus' power to exorcise demons. They did not need to, for exorcism was a common phenomenon then, as it still is, in the East. What they did say was that Jesus' power was due to the fact that he was in league with the king of the demons, that, as one commentator puts it, "it was by the great demon he cast out the little demons." People have always believed in "black magic," and that is what they claimed Jesus was practising.

Jesus had no difficulty in exploding that argument. The essence of exorcism has always been that the exorcist calls to his aid some stronger power to drive out the weaker demon. So Jesus says: "Just think! If there is internal dissension in a kingdom, that kingdom cannot last. If there are quarrels in a house, that house will not endure long. If Satan is actually making war with his own demons then he is finished as an effective power, because civil war has begun in the kingdom of Satan." "Put it another way," Jesus said. "Suppose you want to rob a strong man. You have no hope of doing so until you have got the strong man under subjection. Once you have got him tied up you can plunder his goods--but not until then." The defeat of the demons did not show that Jesus was in alliance with Satan; it showed that Satan's defences had been breached; a stronger name had arrived; the conquest of Satan had begun. Two things emerge here.

(i) Jesus accepts life as a struggle between the power of evil and the power of God. He did not waste his time in speculations about problems to which there is no answer. He did not stop to argue about where evil came from; but he did deal with it most effectively. One of the odd things is that we spend a good deal of time discussing the origin of evil; but we spend less time working out practical methods of tackling the problem. Someone put it this way--suppose a man wakes up to find his house on fire, he does not sit down in a chair and embark upon the reading of a treatise entitled "The Origin of Fires in Private Houses." He grabs such defences as he can muster and deals with the fire. Jesus saw the essential struggle between good and evil which is at the heart of life and raging in the world. He did not speculate about it; he dealt with it and gave to others the power to overcome evil and do the right.

(ii) Jesus regarded the defeat of disease as part of the conquest of Satan. This is an essential part of Jesus' thought. He desired, and was able, to save men's bodies as well as men's souls. The doctor and the scientist who meet the challenge of disease are sharing in the defeat of Satan as much as the preacher of the word. The doctor and the minister are not doing different work but the same work. They are not rivals but allies in God's warfare against the power of evil.

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Mark 3:28-30

THE SIN FOR WHICH THERE IS NO FORGIVENESS

Mark 3:28-30

"This is the truth I tell you--all sins will be forgiven to the sons of men--I mean all the insulting things that they say; but whoever insults the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven for ever but he has made himself guilty of the sin that not even eternity can wipe out." This he said because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

If we are to understand what this terrible saying means we must first understand the circumstances in which it was said. It was said by Jesus when the Scribes and Pharisees had declared that the cures he wrought were wrought not by the power of God, but by the power of the devil. These men had been able to look at the incarnate love of God and to think it the incarnate power of Satan.

We must begin by remembering that Jesus could not have used the phrase the Holy Spirit in the fun Christian sense of the term. The Spirit in all his fullness did not come to men until Jesus had returned to his glory. It was not until Pentecost that there came to men the supreme experience of the Holy Spirit. Jesus must have used the term in the Jewish sense of the term. Now in Jewish thought the Holy Spirit had two great functions. First, he revealed God's truth to men; second, he enabled men to recognize that truth when they saw it. That will give us the key to this passage.

(i) The Holy Spirit enabled men to recognize God's truth when it entered their lives. But if a man refuses to exercise any God-given faculty he will in the end lose it. If he lives in the dark long enough he will lose the ability to see. If he stays in bed long enough he will lose the power to walk. If he refuses to do any serious study he will lose the power to study. And if a man refuses the guidance of God's Spirit often enough he will become in the end incapable of recognizing that truth when he sees it. Evil to him becomes good and good evil. He can look on the goodness of God and call it the evil of Satan.

(ii) Why should such a sin have no forgiveness? H. B. Swete says, "To identify the source of good with the impersonation of evil implies a moral wreck for which the Incarnation itself provides no remedy." A. J. Rawlinson calls it "essential wickedness," as if here we see the quintessence of all evil. Bengel said that all other sins are human but this sin is Satanic. Why should all this be so?

Consider the effect of Jesus on a man. The very first effect is to make him see his own utter unworthiness in comparison with the beauty and the loveliness of the life of Jesus. "Depart from me," said Peter, "for I am a sinful man." (Lk.5:8.) When Tokichi Ishii first read the story of the Gospel he said, "I stopped. I was stabbed to the heart as if pierced by a five-inch nail. Shall I call it the love of Christ? Shall I call it his compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that I believed and my hardness of heart was changed." The first reaction was that he was stabbed to the heart. The result of that sense of unworthiness and the result of that stabbed heart is a heartfelt penitence, and penitence is the only condition of forgiveness.

But, if a man has got himself into such a state, by repeated refusals to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, that he cannot see anything lovely in Jesus at all, then the sight of Jesus will not

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Mark 3:28-30

give him any sense of sin; because he has no sense of sin he cannot be penitent, and because he is not penitent he cannot be forgiven.

One of the Lucifer legends tells how one day a priest noticed in his congregation a magnificently handsome young man. After the service the young man stayed for confession. He confessed so many and such terrible sins that the priest's hair stood on end. "You must have lived long to have done all that," the priest said. "My name is Lucifer and I fell from heaven at the beginning of time," said the young man. "Even so," said the priest, "say that you are sorry, say that you repent and even you can be forgiven." The young man looked at the priest for a moment and then turned and strode away. He would not and could not say it; and therefore he had to go on still desolate and stiff damned.

There is only one condition of forgiveness and that is penitence. So long as a man sees loveliness in Christ, so long as he hates his sin even if he cannot leave it, even if he is in the mud and the mire, he can still be forgiven. But if a man, by repeated refusals of God's guidance, has lost the ability to recognize goodness when he sees it, if he has got his moral values inverted until evil to him is good and good to him is evil, then, even when he is confronted by Jesus, he is conscious of no sin; he cannot repent and therefore he can never be forgiven. That is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

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Mark 3:31-35

THE CONDITIONS OF KINSHIP

Mark 3:31-35

His mother and his brothers came. They stood outside and sent someone in with a message to him. The crowd were sitting round him. "Look!" they said, "your mother and your brothers are outside inquiring for you." "Who" he answered, "is my mother and my brothers?" He looked round those who were sitting in a circle round about him. "Look!" he said, "my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will, he is my brother, my sister and my mother."

Here Jesus lays down the conditions of true kinship. It is not solely a matter of flesh and blood. It can happen that a man is really nearer to someone who is no blood relation to him at all than he is to those who are bound to him by the closest ties of kin and blood. Wherein lies this true kinship?

(i) True kinship lies in a common experience, especially when it is an experience where two people have really come through things together. It has been said that two people really become friends when they are able to say to each other, "Do you remember?" and then to go on and talk about the things they have come through together. Someone once met an old negro woman. An acquaintance of hers had died. "You will be sorry," he said, "that Mrs. So-and-so is dead." "Yes," she said but without showing any great grief. "I saw you just last week," he said, "laughing and talking with each other. You must have been great friends." "Yes," she said, "I was friendly with her. I used to laugh with her; but to be real friends folk have got to weep together." That is profoundly true. The basis of true kinship lies in a common experience, and Christians have the common experience of being forgiven sinners.

(ii) True kinship lies in a common interest. A. M. Chirgwin tells us a very interesting thing in *The Bible in World Evangelism*. One of the greatest difficulties that colporteurs and distributors of the Scriptures have is not so much to sell their books as to keep people reading them. He goes on, "A colporteur in pre-Communist China had for years been in the habit of going from shop to shop and house to house. But he was often disappointed because many of his new Bible readers lost their zeal, until he hit upon the plan of putting them in touch with one another and forming them into a worshipping group which in time became a duly organized Church." Only when these isolated units became part of a group which was bound together by a common interest did real kinship come into being. Christians have that common interest because they are all people who desire to know more about Jesus Christ.

(iii) True kinship lies in a common obedience. The disciples were a very mixed group. All kinds of beliefs and opinions were mixed up among them. A tax-collector like Matthew and a fanatical nationalist like Simon the Zealot ought to have hated each other like poison and no doubt at one time did. But they were bound together because both had accepted Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. Any platoon of soldiers will be made up of men from different backgrounds and from different walks of life and holding very different opinions; yet, if they are long enough together, they will be welded into a band of comrades because of the common obedience which they all share. Men can become friends of each other when they share a common master. Men can love each other only when they all love Jesus Christ.

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(iv) True kinship lies in a common goal There is nothing for binding men together like a common aim. Here there is a great lesson for the church. A. M. Chirgwin, talking of renewed interest in the Bible, asks, does this "point to the possibility of a new approach to the ecumenical problem based on biblical rather than on ecclesiastical considerations?" The churches will never draw together so long as they argue about the ordination of their ministers, the form of church government, the administration of the sacraments and all the rest of it. The one thing on which they can all come together is the fact that all of them are seeking to win men for Jesus Christ. If kinship comes from a common goal then Christians above all men possess its secret, for all are seeking to know Christ better and to bring others within his Kingdom. Wherever else we differ, on that we can agree.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 4:1-2

TEACHING IN PARABLES

Mark 4:1-2

Jesus began again to teach by the lakeside. A very great crowd collected to hear him, so great that he had to go on board a boat and sit in it on the lake. The whole crowd was on the land facing the lake. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he began to say to them, "Listen! Look! The sower went out to sow."

In this section we see Jesus making a new departure. He was no longer teaching in the synagogue; he was teaching by the lakeside. He had made the orthodox approach to the people; now he had to take unusual methods.

We do well to note that Jesus was prepared to use new methods. He was willing to take religious preaching and teaching out of its conventional setting in the synagogue into the open air and among the crowds of ordinary men and women. John Wesley was for many years a faithful and orthodox servant of the Church of England. Down in Bristol his friend George Whitefield was preaching to the miners, to as many as twenty thousand of them at a time, in the open air; and his hearers were being converted by the hundred. He sent for John Wesley. Wesley said, "I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, a handsome pulpit." This whole business of open air preaching rather offended him.

He said himself, "I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange way--having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church." But Wesley saw that field preaching won souls and said, "I cannot argue against a matter of fact."

There must have been many amongst the orthodox Jews who regarded this new departure as stunting and sensationalism; but Jesus was wise enough to know when new methods were necessary and adventurous enough to use them. It would be well if his church was equally wise and equally adventurous.

This new departure needed a new method; and the new method Jesus chose was to speak to the people in parables. A parable is literally something thrown beside something else; that is to say, it is basically a comparison. It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Something on earth is compared with something in heaven, that the heavenly truth may be better grasped in light of the earthly illustration. Why did Jesus choose this method? And why did it become so characteristic of him that he is known forever as the master of the parable?

(i) First and foremost, Jesus chose the parabolic method simply to make people listen. He was not now dealing with an assembly of people in a synagogue who were more or less bound to remain there until the end of the service. He was dealing with a crowd in the open air who were quite free to walk away at any time. Therefore, the first essential was to interest them. Unless their interest was aroused they would simply drift away. Sir Philip Sidney speaks of the poet's secret: "With a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale that holdeth children from play and old men from the

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chimney-corner." The surest way to awaken men's interest is to tell them stories and Jesus knew that.

(ii) Further, when Jesus used the parabolic method he was using something with which Jewish teachers and audiences were entirely familiar. There are parables in the Old Testament of which the most famous is the story of the one ewe lamb that Nathan told to David when he had treacherously eliminated Uriah and taken possession of Bathsheba (2Sam.12:1-7). The Rabbis habitually used parables in their teaching. It was said of Rabbi Meir that he spoke one-third in legal decisions; one-third in exposition; and one-third in parables.

Here are two examples of Rabbinic parables. The first is the work of Rabbi Judah the Prince (c. A.D. 190). Antoninus, the Roman Emperor, asked him how there could be punishment in the world beyond, for since body and soul after their separation could not have committed sin they could blame each other for the sins committed upon earth. The Rabbi answered in a parable:

A certain king had a beautiful garden in which was excellent fruit; and over it he appointed two watchmen, one blind and one lame. The lame man said to the blind man, "I see exquisite fruit in the garden. Carry me thither that I may get it and we will eat it together." The blind man consented and both ate of the fruit. After some days the Lord of the garden came and asked the watchmen concerning the fruit. Then the lame man said, "As I have no legs I could not go to it, so it is not my fault." And the blind man said, "I could not even see it so it is not my fault." What did the Lord of the garden do? He made the blind man carry the lame and thus passed judgment on them both. So God will replace the souls in their bodies and will punish both together for their sins.

When Rabbi Chiyya's son Abin died at the early age of twenty-eight, Rabbi Zera delivered the funeral oration, which he put in the form of a parable:

A king had a vineyard for which he engaged many labourers, one of whom was specially apt and skilful. What did the king do? He took this labourer from his work, and walked through the garden conversing with him. When the labourers came for their hire in the evening the skilful labourer appeared among them and received a full day's wages from the king. The other labourers were very angry at this, and said, "We have toiled the whole day, while this man has worked but two hours. Why does the king give him the full hire even as unto us?" The king said to them, "Why are you angry? Through his skill he has done more in the two hours than you have done all day." So it is with Rabbi Abin ben Chiyya. In the twenty-eight years of his life he has learned more than others learn in a hundred years. Hence he has fulfilled his life

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Mark 4:1-2

work, and is entitled to be called to Paradise earlier than others from his work on earth; nor will he miss aught of his reward.

When Jesus used the parabolic method of teaching, he was using a method with which the Jews were familiar and which they could understand.

(iii) Still further, when Jesus used the parabolic method of teaching he was making the abstract idea concrete. Few people can grasp abstract ideas. Most people think in pictures. We could talk about beauty for long enough and no one would be any the wiser; but, if we can point to a person and say, "That is a beautiful person," beauty becomes clear. We could talk about goodness for long enough and fail to arrive at a definition of it; but every one recognizes a good deed when he sees one. There is a sense in which every word must become flesh; every idea must be actualized in a person. When the New Testament talks about faith it takes the example of Abraham so that the idea of faith becomes flesh in the person of Abraham. Jesus was a wise teacher. He knew that it was useless to expect simple minds to cope with abstract ideas; and so he put the abstract ideas into concrete stories; he showed them in action; he made them into persons, so that men might grasp and understand them.

(iv) Lastly, the great virtue of the parable is that it compels a man to think for himself. It does not do his thinking for him. It compels him to make his own deduction and to discover the truth for himself. The worst way to help a child is to do his work for him. It does not help him at all to do his sums, write his essay, work out his problems, compose his Latin prose. It does help greatly to give him the necessary help to do it for himself. That is what Jesus was aiming at. Truth has always a double impact when it is a personal discovery. Jesus did not wish to save men the mental sweat of thinking; he wished to make them think. He did not wish to make their minds lazy; he wished to make them active. He did not wish to take the responsibility from them; he wished to lay the responsibility on them. So he used the parabolic method, not to do men's thinking for them, but to encourage them to do their own thinking.

He presented them with truth which, if they would make the right effort in the right frame of mind, they could discover for themselves, and therefore possess it in a way that made it really and truly theirs.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 4:3-9

FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN

Mark 4:3-9

"Listen! Look! The sower went out to sow. As he was sowing, some seed fell along the roadside; and the birds came and devoured it. Some fell upon rocky ground where it did not have much earth; and it sprang up immediately, because it had no depth of earth, but, when the sun rose, it was scorched, and it was withered away, because it had no root. Some fell among thorns; and the thorns crowded in on it until they choked the life out of it, and it did not yield any fruit. And some fell on good ground; and, as it grew up and grew greater, it yielded fruit and bore as much as thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." And he said, "Who has ears to hear, let him hear."

We leave the interpretation of this parable until we come to the interpretation Mark gives us, and for the moment we consider it only as a specimen of Jesus' parabolic teaching in action. The scene is the lakeside; Jesus is sitting in the boat just off the shore. The shore shelves gently down to the water's edge, and makes a natural amphitheatre for the crowd. Even as he talks Jesus sees a sower busy sowing seed in the fields beside the lake. "Look!" he said, "The sower went out to sow." Herein is the whole essence of the parabolic method.

(i) Jesus started from the here and now to get to the there and then. He started from a thing that was happening at that moment on earth in order to lead men's thoughts to heaven; he started from something which all men could see to get to the things that are invisible; he started from something which all men knew to get to something which they had never as yet realized. That was the very essence of Jesus' teaching. He did not bewilder men by starting with things which were strange and abstruse and involved; he started with the simplest things that even a child could understand.

(ii) By so doing Jesus showed that he believed that there was a real kinship between earth and heaven. Jesus would not have agreed that "earth was a desert drear." He believed that in the ordinary, common, everyday things of life men could see God. As William Temple put it: "Jesus taught men to see the operation of God in the regular and the normal--in the rising of the sun and the falling of the rain and the growth of the plant." Long ago Paul had the same idea when he said that the visible world is designed to make known the invisible things of God (Rom.1:20). For Jesus this world was not a lost and evil place; it was the garment of the living God. Sir Christopher Wren lies buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, the great church that his own genius planned and built.

On his tombstone there is a simple Latin inscription which means, "If you wish to see his monument, look around you." Jesus would have said, "If you wish to see God, look around you." Jesus finds in the common things of life a countless source of signs which lead men to God if they will only read them aright.

(iii) The very essence of the parables is that they were spontaneous, extempore and unrehearsed. Jesus looks round, seeking a point of contact with the crowd. He sees the sower and on the spur of the moment that sower becomes his text. The parables were not stories wrought out in the quiet of a study; they were not carefully thought out and polished and rehearsed. Their supreme greatness is that Jesus composed these immortal short stories on the spur of the moment. They were produced by the demand of the occasion and in the cut and thrust of debate.

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Mark 4:3-9

C. J. Cadoux said of the parables: "A parable is art harnessed for service and conflict.... Here we find the reason why the parable is so rare. It requires a considerable degree of art, but art exercised under hard conditions. In the three typical parables of the Bible the speaker takes his life in his hands. Jotham (Judg.9:8-15) spoke his parable of the trees to the men of Shechem and then fled for his life. Nathan (2Sam.12:1-7), with the parable of the ewe-lamb, told an oriental despot of his sin. Jesus in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen used his own death sentence as a weapon for his cause.... In its most characteristic use the parable is a weapon of controversy, not shaped like a sonnet in undisturbed concentration but improvised in conflict to meet the unpremeditated situation.

In its highest use it shows the sensitiveness of the poet, the penetration, rapidity and resourcefulness of the protagonist, and the courage that allows such a mind to work unimpeded by the turmoil and danger of mortal conflict."

When we bear in mind that the parables of Jesus were flashed out extempore, their wonder is increased a hundredfold.

(iv) That brings us to a point we must always remember in our attempts to interpret the parables. They were, in the first instance, not meant to be read but to be heard. That is to say, in the first instance, no one could sit down and study them phrase by phrase and word by word. They were spoken not to be studied at length and at leisure, but to produce an immediate impression and reaction. That is to say, the parables must never be treated as allegories. In an allegory every part and action and detail of the story has an inner significance. The Pilgrim's Progress and the Faerie Queene are allegories; in them every event and person and detail has a symbolic meaning. Clearly an allegory is something to be read and studied and examined; but a parable is something which was heard once and once only. Therefore what we must look for in a parable is not a situation in which every detail stands for something but a situation in which one great idea leaps out and shines like a flash of lightning.

It is always wrong to attempt to make every detail of a parable mean something. It is always right to say: "What one idea would flash into a man's mind when he heard this story for the first time?"

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Mark 4:10-12

THE MYSTERY OF THE KINGDOM

Mark 4:10-12

When Jesus was alone, his own circle of people, together with the Twelve, asked him about the parables. He said to them, "To you there is given the knowledge of the Kingdom of God which only the initiated can know. To those who are outside, everything is expounded by means of parables, so that they may indeed see and yet not perceive the meaning of things, and may indeed hear and not understand, lest at any time they should turn and be forgiven."

This has always been one of the most difficult passages in all the gospels. The King James Version speaks of the mystery of the Kingdom of God. This word mystery has in Greek a technical meaning; it does not mean something which is complicated and mysterious in our sense of the term. It means something which is quite unintelligible to the person who has not been initiated into its meaning, but is perfectly plain to the person who has been so initiated.

In New Testament times in the pagan world one of the great features of popular religion was what were called the Mystery Religions. These religions promised communion with and even identity with some god, whereby all the terrors of life and of death would be taken away. Nearly all these Mystery Religions were based on the story of some god who had suffered and died and risen again; they were nearly all in the nature of passion plays.

One of the most famous was called the Mystery of Isis. Osiris was a wise and good king. Seth, his wicked brother, hated him and along with seventy-two conspirators persuaded him to come to a banquet. There he induced him to enter a cunningly made coffin which exactly fitted him. When he was inside, the lid was snapped down and the coffin was cast into the Nile. Isis, his faithful wife, after a long and weary search, found the coffin and brought it home in mourning. When she was absent the wicked Seth came again, stole away the body, cut it into fourteen pieces and scattered them throughout all Egypt. Once again Isis set out on her sad and weary search. In the end she discovered all the pieces and by her magical powers put them together and restored Osiris to life again; and from that time he became the immortal king of the living and the dead.

What happened was this. The candidate underwent a long preparation of purification and of fasting and of asceticism and of instruction as to the inner meaning of the story. Then the dramatic story with its grief and its sorrow and its resurrection and its triumphal ending was played out as a passion play. Music and incense and lighting and a splendid liturgy were all used to enhance the emotional atmosphere. As the play was played out the worshipper felt himself one with the god both in his sufferings and in his triumph. He passed through death to immortality by union with the god. The point is that to an uninitiated person the whole thing would have been meaningless; but to the initiated the thing was full of meaning which he had been taught to see.

That is the technical meaning of this Greek word *musterion* (GSN3466). When the New Testament talks of the mystery of the Kingdom, it does not mean that the Kingdom is remote and abstruse and hard to understand; but it does mean that it is quite unintelligible to the man who has

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Mark 4:10-12

not given his heart to Jesus, and that only the man who has taken Jesus as Master and Lord can understand what the Kingdom of God means.

The real difficulty of the passage lies in the section that follows. If we take it at its face value it sounds as if Jesus taught in parables deliberately to cloak his meaning, purposely to hide it from ordinary men and women. Whatever else the passage originally meant it cannot have meant that; for, if one thing is crystal clear, it is that Jesus used parables not to cloak his meaning and to hide his truth but to enable men to see it and to compel them to recognize it.

How then did this passage come to be in the form it is? It is a quotation from Isa.6:9-10. From the beginning it worried people. It was worrying them more than two hundred years before Jesus made use of it. The Hebrew literally runs (the following two translations are by W.O.E. Oesterley):

And he said, Go, and say to this people, "Go on hearkening,
but understand not; go on looking, but perceive not." Make fat the
heart of this people, and its ears make heavy, and its eyes
besmear; lest it see with its eyes, and with its ears hear, and its
heart understand, so that it should be healed again.

It seems on the face of it that God is telling Isaiah that he is to pursue a course deliberately designed to make the people fail to understand.

In the third century B.C. the Hebrew scriptures were translated into Greek, and the Greek version, the Septuagint, as it is called, became one of the most influential books in the world, for it carried the Old Testament everywhere Greek was spoken. The Septuagint translators were worried at this strange passage and they translated it differently:

And he said, Go and say to this people, "Ye shall hear indeed,
but ye shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not
perceive." For the heart of this people has become gross, and with
their ears they hear heavily, and their eyes they have closed; lest
at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their
ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted,
and I should heal them.

The Greek version does not say that God intended that the people should be so dull that they would not understand; it says that they had made themselves so dull that they could not understand--which is a very different thing. The explanation is that no man can translate or set down in print a tone of voice. When Isaiah spoke he spoke half in irony and half in despair and altogether in love. He was thinking, "God sent me to bring his truth to this people; and for all the good I am doing I might as well have been sent to shut their minds to it. I might as well be speaking to a brick wall. You would think that God had shut their minds to it."

So Jesus spoke his parables; he meant them to flash into men's minds and to illuminate the truth of God. But in so many eyes he saw a dull incomprehension. He saw so many people blinded by

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prejudice, deafened by wishful thinking, too lazy to think. He turned to his disciples and he said to them: "Do you remember what Isaiah once said? He said that when he came with God's message to God's people Israel in his day they were so dully ununderstanding that you would have thought that God had shut instead of opening their minds; I feel like that to-day." When Jesus said this, he did not say it in anger, or irritation, or bitterness, or exasperation. He said it with the wistful longing of frustrated love, the poignant sorrow of a man who had a tremendous gift to give which people were too blind to take.

If we read this, hearing not a tone of bitter exasperation, but a tone of regretful love, it will sound quite different. It will tell us not of a God who deliberately blinded men and hid his truth, but of men who were so dully uncomprehending that it seemed no use even for God to try to penetrate the iron curtain of their lazy incomprehension. God save us from hearing his truth like that!

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Mark 4:13-20

THE HARVEST IS SURE

Mark 4:13-20

"Don't you understand this parable?" he said to them. "How then will you understand all the parables? What the sower is sowing is the word. The kind of people represented by the case in which the seed fell by the side of the road, are those in whose case the word is sown, and whenever they hear it, immediately Satan comes, and snatches away the word that was sown into them. Just so, the kind of people represented by the case in which the seed was sown on the rocky ground, are those, who, whenever they hear the word, immediately gladly welcome it. They have no root in themselves, but they are quite impermanent; and then, when trouble or persecution happens because of the word, they immediately stumble and collapse. Then there are the others who are represented by the case in which the seed was sown among thorns.

These are the people who hear the word, but the anxieties of this world and the deceptive attraction of wealth and the desires for other things enter into them and choke the life out of the word, and it never gets a chance to bear fruit. The kind of people who are represented by the case in which the seed fell on good ground are such as hear the word and receive it and bring forth fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

Every detail of this parable would be real to its hearers because every detail came from everyday life. Four kinds of ground are mentioned.

(i) There was the hard ground at the side of the road. The seed might fall on this kind of ground in two ways. The fields in Palestine were in the form of long, narrow strips; these strips were divided by little grass paths, which were rights of way; the result was that they became beaten as hard as stone by the feet of those who used them. As the sower scattered his seed some might well fall there; and there it had not a chance to grow.

But there was another way of sowing. Sometimes a sack of seed was put on the back of an ass; a hole was cut in the corner of the sack; and then the beast was led up and down as the seed flowed out. Inevitably as the ass was brought along the road to the field some of the seed fell on the road; and just as inevitably the birds swooped on it and gobbled it up.

There are some people into whose hearts Christian truth can find no entry. This is due to the hearer's lack of interest; and that lack of interest comes from a failure to realize how important the Christian decision is. Christianity fails to make an impact on so many people, not because they are hostile to it, but because they are indifferent. They think that it is irrelevant to life and that they can get on well enough without it. That might be true if life was always an easy way where there were neither tensions nor tears; but in fact there comes to every man a time when he needs a power not his own. It is the tragedy of life that so many discover that too late.

(ii) There was the rocky ground. This was not ground full of stones; it was a narrow skin of earth over a shelf of limestone rock. Much of Galilee was like that. In many fields the outcrop of the rock through the shallow soil could be seen. Seed which fell there germinated all right; but because the

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soil was so shallow and held so little nourishment and moisture, the heat of the sun soon withered the sprouting seed and it died.

It is always easier to begin a thing than to finish it. A certain famous evangelist said: "We have learned that it takes about five per cent. effort to win a man to Christ, and ninety-five per cent to keep him in Christ and growing into maturity in the church." Many a man begins the Christian way only to fall out by the wayside.

There are two troubles which cause this collapse. One is the failure to think the thing out and to think it through, the failure to realize what it means and what it costs before the start is made. The other is the fact that there are thousands of people who are attracted by Christianity but who never let it get beyond the surface of their lives. The fact is that with Christianity it is a case of all or nothing. A man is safe only when he has given himself in total commitment to Christ:

"Is there a thing beneath the sun,
That strives with thee my heart to share?
Ah! tear it thence, and reign alone,
The Lord of every motion there."

(iii) There was the ground that was full of thorns. The Palestinian farmer was lazy. He cut off the top of the fibrous rooted weeds; he even burned off the top; and the field might look clean; but below the surface the roots were still there; and in due time the weeds revived in all their strength. They grew with such rapidity and such virulence that they choked the life out of the seed.

It is easy to pack life with such a multiplicity of interests that there is no time left for Christ. As the poet said, the cares of life can be like the clogging dust until "we forget because we must and not because we will." The more complicated life becomes, the more necessity there is to see that our priorities are right, for there are so many things which seek to shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche.

(iv) There was the good, clean, deep soil in which the seed flourished.

If we are really to benefit by the Christian message the parable tells us that we must do three things. (a) We must hear it; and we cannot hear unless we listen. It is characteristic of so many of us that we are so busy talking that we have no time to hear, so engaged in arguing that we have no time to listen, so occupied in advancing our own opinions that we have no time to attend to the opinions of Christ, so much on the move that we have no time for the essential stillness.

(b) We must receive it. When we hear the Christian message we must really take it into our minds. The human mind is an odd and dangerous machine. We are so constructed, in the wise providence of creation, that, whenever a foreign body threatens to enter the eye, the eye automatically closes. That is an instinctive, reflex action. Whenever the mind hears something that it does not want to hear it automatically closes its door. There are times when truth can hurt; but sometimes a distasteful drug or an unpleasant treatment must be accepted if health is to be

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preserved. To shut the mind to truth we do not want to hear is the straight road to disaster and to tragedy.

(c) We must put it into action. The yield in the parable was thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. That is a large yield but the volcanic soil of Galilee was famous for its crops. Christian truth must always emerge in action. In the last analysis the Christian is challenged, not to speculate, but to act.

All that is the meaning of this parable when we sit down and study it at leisure. But it is quite impossible that all that would flash upon men's minds as they heard it for the first time. What, then, would be the one thing which flashed out on the crowd who heard it for the first time beside the Sea of Galilee? Surely this--that, although part of the seed never grew, the fact remained that at the end of the day there was a splendid harvest. This is the parable to end despair. It may seem that much of our effort achieves no result; it may seem that much of our labour is wasted. That is how the disciples were feeling, when they saw Jesus banished from the synagogue and regarded with suspicion. In many places his message seemed to have failed, and they were discouraged and down-hearted. But this parable said to them, and says to us, "Patience! Do your work. Sow the seed. Leave the rest to God. The harvest is sure."

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Mark 4:21

THE LIGHT WHICH MUST BE SEEN

Mark 4:21

This was one of Jesus' sayings: "Surely a lamp is not brought in to be put under a peck measure or under the bed? It is not brought in to be set upon a lamp stand?"

Mk.4:21-25 are interesting because they show the problems that confronted the writers of the gospels. These verses give us four different sayings of Jesus. In Mk.4:21 there is the saying about the lamp. In Mk.4:22 there is the saying about the revealing of secret things. In Mk.4:24 there is the saying which lays it down that we shall receive back with the same measure as we have given. In Mk.4:25 there is the saying that to him who has still more will be given. In Mark these verses come one after another in immediate succession. But Mk.4:21 is repeated in Matt.5:15; Mk.4:22 is repeated in Matt.10:26; Mk.4:24 is repeated in Matt.7:2; and Mk.4:25 is repeated in Matt.13:12 and also in Matt.25:29. The four consecutive verses in Mark are scattered all over Matthew. One practical thing emerges for our study. We must not try to find any connection between them. Clearly they are quite disconnected and we must take them one by one.

How did it come about that these sayings of Jesus are given by Mark one after another and scattered by Matthew all over his gospel? The reason is just this. Jesus had a unique command of language. He could say the most vivid and pithy things. He could say things that stuck in the memory and refused to be forgotten. Further, he must have said many of these things far more than once. He was moving from place to place and from audience to audience; and he must have repeated much of his teaching wherever he went. The consequence was that men remembered the things that Jesus said--they were said with such vividness that they could not be forgotten--but they forgot the occasion on which they were said. The result was a great many of what one might call "orphan" sayings of Jesus. A saying was embedded in men's minds and remembered for ever, but the context and the occasion were forgotten. So then we have to take these vivid sayings individually and examine them.

The first was that men do not light a lamp and put it under a peck measure, which would be like putting a bowl on the top of it, nor do they put it under a bed. A lamp is meant to be seen and to make men able to see; and it is put in a place where it will be visible to all. From this saying we may learn two things.

(i) Truth is meant to be seen; it is not meant to be concealed. There may be times when it is dangerous to tell the truth; there may be times when to tell the truth is the quickest way to persecution and to trouble. But the true man and the true Christian will stand by the truth in face of all.

When Luther decided to take up his stand against the Roman Catholic Church he decided first of all to attack indulgences. Indulgences were to all intents and purposes remissions of sins while a man could buy from a priest at a price. He drew up ninety-five theses against these indulgences. And what did he do with his ninety-five theses? There was a church in Wittenberg called the Church of All Saints. It was closely connected with the University; on its door University notices

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were posted, and the subject of academic debates displayed. There was no more public notice-board in the town. To that door Luther affixed his theses. When did he do it? The day when the largest congregation came to the church was All Saints' Day, the first of November. It happened to be the anniversary of the founding of that church and many services were held and crowds came. It was on All Saints' Day that Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door.

If he had been a prudent man he would not have drawn up his ninety-five theses at all. If he had been a man with an eye on safety he would never have nailed them to the church door. And, if he must nail them to the door, with any thought of personal safety he would never have chosen All Saints' Day to make his declaration. But Luther felt that he had discovered the truth; and his one thought was to display the truth and to align his life with it.

In every walk of life there are times when we know quite well what the truth demands, what is the right thing to do, what a Christian man ought to do. In every walk of life there are times when we fail to do it, because it would be to court unpopularity and perhaps worse. We ought to remember that the lamp of truth is something to be held aloft and not concealed in the interests of a cowardly safety.

(ii) Our Christianity is meant to be seen. In the early church sometimes to show one's Christianity meant death. The Roman Empire was as vast as the world. In order to get some sort of binding unity into that vast empire Emperor worship was started. The Emperor was the embodiment of the state and he was worshipped as a god. On certain stated days it was demanded that everyone should come and sacrifice to the godhead of the Emperor. It was really a test of political loyalty. After a man had done so he got a certificate to say he had done so; and, having got that certificate, he could go away and worship any god he liked.

We still have many of these certificates. They run like this:

To those who have been put in charge of the sacrifices from Inareus Akeus from the village of Theoxenis, together with his children Alas and Hera, who stay in the village of Theadelpheia. We sacrifice regularly to the gods and now in your presence, as the regulations demand, we have sacrificed and poured our libation and have tasted the offerings, and we ask you to give us the required certificate. May you fare well.

Then there follows the attestation.

We, Serenas and Hermas, have witnessed your sacrificing.

All a Christian had to do was to go through that formal act, receive the certificate, and he was safe. And the fact of history is that thousands of Christians died rather than do so. They could have concealed the fact that they were Christians with the greatest of ease; they could have gone on being Christians, as it were, privately, with no trouble at all. But to them their Christianity was something which had to be attested and witnessed to in presence of all men. They were proud that all should know where they stood. To such we owe our Christian faith to-day.

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It is often easier to keep quiet the fact that we belong to Christ and his Church; but our Christianity should always be like the lamp that can be seen of all men.

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Mark 4:22-23

THE TRUTH THAT CANNOT BE SUPPRESSED

Mark 4:22-23

For there is nothing secret that will not be brought into the open; nothing is done that it should be hidden away, but that it should lie open for all to see. If a man has ears to hear let him hear.

It was Jesus' certain conviction that the truth cannot ultimately be hidden. This saying applies in two directions.

(i) It applies to truth itself. There is something about the truth which is indestructible. Men may refuse to face it; they may try to suppress it; they may even try to obliterate it; they may refuse to accept it but "great is the truth and in the end it will prevail."

In the early sixteenth century an astronomer called Copernicus made the discovery that the earth is not the centre of the universe, that in fact the earth goes round the sun and not the sun round the earth. He was a cautious man and for thirty years he kept this discovery to himself. Then in 1543, when death's breath was on him, he persuaded a terrified printer to print his great work, *Revolutions of Heavenly Bodies*. Soon Copernicus died but others inherited the storm.

In the early seventeenth century Galileo accepted the theory of Copernicus and stated publicly his belief in it. In 1616 he was summoned to the inquisition in Rome and his beliefs were condemned. Judgment was passed. "The first proposition that the sun is the centre and does not revolve about the earth, is foolish, absurd, false in theology, and heretical because contrary to Holy Scripture.... The second proposition, that the earth is not the centre, but revolves about the sun, is absurd, false in philosophy, and from a theological point of view at least, opposed to the true faith." Galileo gave in. It was easier to conform than to die; and for years he remained silent.

A new pope came to the papal throne and Galileo thought that Urban the Eighth was a man of wider sympathy and greater culture than his predecessor, so once again he came out into the open with his theory. He was mistaken in his hopes. This time he had to sign a recantation or undergo torture. He signed. "I, Galileo, being in my seventieth year, being a prisoner and on my knees, and before your Eminences, having before my eyes the Holy Gospel, which I touch with my hands, abjure, curse and detest the error and the heresy of the movement of the earth." His recantation saved him from death but not from prison. And in the end he was even denied burial in the family tomb.

It was not only the Roman Catholic Church which tried to avoid the truth. Luther wrote: "People gave ear to an upstart astrologer (he meant Copernicus) who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the heavens or the firmament, the sun and the moon.... This fool wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred Scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth."

But time goes on. You can threaten to torture a man for discovering the truth; you can call him a fool and try to laugh him out of court; but that does not alter the truth. "It lies not in your power,"

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said Andrew Melville, "to hang or exile the truth." Truth may be attacked, delayed, suppressed, mocked at; but time brings in its revenges and in the end truth prevails. A man must have a care that he is not fighting against the truth.

(ii) It applies to ourselves and to our own life and conduct. When a man does a wrong thing his first instinct is to hide. That is what Adam and Eve did when they broke the commandment of God (Gen.3:8). But truth has a way of emerging. In the last analysis no man can hide the truth from himself, and the man with a secret is never a happy man. The web of deception is never a permanent concealment. And, when it comes to ultimate things, no man can have any secrets from God. In the end it is literally true that there is nothing which will not be revealed in the presence of God. When we remember that, we are bound to be filled with the desire to make life such that all men may look on it and God survey it without shame to ourselves.

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Mark 4:24

THE BALANCE OF LIFE

Mark 4:24

This was another of Jesus' sayings: "Pay attention to what you hear! What you get depends on what you give. What you give you will get back, only more so."

In life there is always a balance. A man's getting will be determined by his giving.

(i) This is true of study. The more study a man is prepared to give to any subject, the more he will get from it. The ancient nation of the Parthians would never give their young men a meal until they had broken sweat. They had to work before they ate. All subjects of study are like that. They give pleasure and satisfaction in proportion to the effort that we are prepared to spend upon them. It is specially so in regard to the study of the Bible. We may sometimes feel that there are certain parts of the Bible with which we are out of sympathy; if we study these parts they will often be the very parts which end by giving us the richest harvest. A superficial study of a subject will often leave us quite uninterested whereas a really intensive study will leave us thrilled and fascinated.

(ii) It is true of worship. The more we bring to the worship of God's house the more we will get from it. When we come to worship in the house of God, there are three wrong ways in which we may come.

(a) We may come entirely to get. If we come in such a way the likelihood is that we will criticize the organist and the choir and find fault with the minister's preaching. We will regard the whole service as a performance laid on for our special entertainment. We must come prepared to give; we must remember that worship is a corporate act, and that each of us can contribute something to it. If we ask, not, "What can I get out of this service?" but, "What can I contribute to this service?" we will in the end get far more out of it than if we simply came to take.

(b) We may come without expectation. Our coming may be the result of habit and routine. It may be simply part of the time-table into which we have divided the week. But, after all, we should be coming to meet God, and when we meet him anything may happen.

(c) We may come without preparation. It is so easy to leave for the worship of God's house with no preparation of mind or heart at all because often it is a rush to get there at all. But it would make all the difference in the world, if, before we came, we were for a moment or two still and quiet and companied with God in prayer. As the Jewish Rabbis told their disciples: "They pray best together who first pray alone."

(iii) It is true of personal relationships. One of the great facts of life is that we see our reflection in other people. If we are cross and irritable and bad-tempered, we will probably find other people equally unpleasant. If we are critical and fault-finding, the chances are that we will find other people the same. If we are suspicious and distrustful, the likelihood is that others will be so to us. If we wish others to love us, we must first love them. The man who would have friends must show himself friendly. It was because Jesus believed in men that men believed in him.

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Mark 4:25

THE LAW OF INCREASE

Mark 4:25

To him who already has still more will be given: and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

This may seem a hard saying; but the whole lesson of life is that it is inevitably and profoundly true.

(i) It is true of knowledge. The more a man knows the more he is capable of knowing. A man cannot enter into the riches of Greek literature before he has ploughed his way through Greek grammar. When he has the basic grammar still more will be given to him. A man cannot really get the best out of music until he learns something of the structure of a symphony. But when he possesses that knowledge still more and more loveliness will be given to him. It is equally true that unless a man is consistently bent on the task of increasing his knowledge such knowledge as he has will in the end be taken away from him. Many a man in his youth had a working knowledge of French at school and has now forgotten even the little that he knew because he made no attempt to develop it.

The more knowledge a man has the more he can acquire. And, if he is not always out to increase it, such knowledge as he has will soon slip from his grasp. The Jewish teachers had an oddly expressive saying. They said that the scholar should be treated like a young heifer--because every day a little heavier burden should be laid upon him. In knowledge we cannot stand still; we are gaining or losing it all the time.

(ii) It is true of effort. The more physical strength a man has, the more, within the limits of his body frame, he can acquire. The more he trains his body, the more his body will be able to do. On the other hand, if he allows his physical frame to grow slack and flabby and soft he will end by losing even the fitness that he had. We would sometimes do well to remember that our bodies belong to God as much as our souls. Many a man has been hindered from doing the work he might do because he has made himself physically unfit to do it.

(iii) It is so with any skill or craft. The more a man develops the skill of his hand, or eye, or mind, the more he is able to develop it. If he is content to drift along, never trying anything new, never adopting any new technique, he remains stuck in the one job with no progress. If he neglects his particular skill he will find in the end that he has lost it altogether.

(iv) It is so with the ability to bear responsibility. The more responsibility a man shoulders the more he can shoulder; the more decisions he compels himself to take the better he is able to take them. But if a man shirks his responsibilities, if he evades his decisions and vacillates all the time, in the end he will become a flabby, spineless creature totally unfitted for responsibility and totally unable to come to any decision at all. Again and again in his parables Jesus goes on the assumption that the reward of good work is still more work to do. It is one of the essential laws of life, a law

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which a man forgets at his peril, that the more he has won the more he can win, and that, if he will not make the effort, he will lose even that which once he had won.

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Mark 4:26-29

THE UNSEEN GROWTH AND THE CERTAIN END

Mark 4:26-29

He said to them: "This is what the Kingdom of God is like. It is like what happens when a man casts seed upon the earth. He sleeps and he wakes night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows--and he does not know how it does it. The earth produces fruit with help from no one, first the shoot, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. When the time allows it, immediately he despatches the sickle, for the time to harvest has come."

This is the only parable which Mark alone relates to us. The Kingdom of God really means the reign of God; it means the day when God's will will be done as perfectly in earth as it is in heaven. That is the goal of God for the whole universe. This parable is short but it is filled with unmistakable truths.

(i) It tells us of the helplessness of man. The farmer does not make the seed grow. In the last analysis he does not even understand how it grows. It has the secret of life and of growth within itself. No man has ever possessed the secret of life; no man has ever created anything in the full sense of the term. Man can discover things; he can rearrange them; he can develop them; but create them he cannot. We do not create the Kingdom of God; the Kingdom is God's. It is true that we can frustrate it and hinder it; or we can make a situation in the world where it is given the opportunity to come more fully and more speedily. But behind all things is God and the power and will of God.

(ii) It tells us something about the Kingdom. It is a notable fact that Jesus so often uses illustrations from the growth of nature to describe the coming of the Kingdom of God.

(a) Nature's growth is often imperceptible. If we see a plant every day we cannot see its growth taking place. It is only when we see it, and then see it again after an interval of time that we notice the difference. It is so with the Kingdom. There is not the slightest doubt that the Kingdom is on the way if we compare, not to-day with yesterday, but this century with the century which went before.

When Elizabeth Fry went to Newgate Prison in 1817 she found in the women's quarters three hundred women and numberless children crammed into two small wards. They lived and cooked and ate and slept on the floor. The only attendants were one old man and his son. They crowded, half naked, almost like beasts, begging for money which they spent on drink at a bar in the prison itself. She found there a boy of nine who was waiting to be hanged for poking a stick through a window and stealing paints valued at twopence. In 1853 the Weavers of Bolton were striking for a pay of 7 1/2 d. a day; and the miners of Stafford were striking for a pay of 2 shillings 6 d. per week.

Nowadays things like that are unthinkable. Why? Because the Kingdom is on the way. The growth of the Kingdom may, like that of the plant, be imperceptible from day to day; but over the years it is plain.

(b) Nature's growth is constant. Night and day, while man sleeps, growth goes on. There is nothing spasmodic about God. The great trouble about human effort and human goodness is that

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Mark 4:26-29

they are spasmodic. One day we take one step forward; the next day we take two steps back. But the work of God goes on quietly; unceasingly God unfolds his plan.

"God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year:
God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near--
Nearer and nearer draws the time--the time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the
waters cover the sea."

(c) Nature's growth is inevitable. There is nothing so powerful as growth. A tree can split a concrete pavement with the power of its growth. A weed can push its green head through an asphalt path. Nothing can stop growth. It is so with the Kingdom. In spite of man's rebellion and disobedience, God's work goes on; and nothing in the end can stop the purposes of God.

(iii) It tells us that there is a consummation. There is a day when the harvest comes. Inevitably when the harvest comes two things happen--which are opposite sides of the same thing. The good fruit is gathered in, and the weeds and the tares are destroyed. Harvest and judgment go hand in hand. When we think of this coming day three things are laid upon us.

(a) It is a summons to patience. We are creatures of the moment and inevitably we think in terms of the moment. God has all eternity in which to work. "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past or as a watch in the night." (Ps.90:4.) Instead of our petulant, fretful, irritable human hastiness we should cultivate in our souls the patience which has learned to wait on God.

(b) It is a summons to hope. We are living to-day in an atmosphere of despair. People despair of the church; they despair of the world; they look with shuddering dread on the future. "Man," said H. G. Wells, "who began in a eave behind a windbreak will end in the disease-soaked ruins of a slum." Between the wars Sir Philip Gibbs wrote a book in which he looked forward, thinking of the possibility of a war of poison gas. He said something like this. "If I smell poison gas in High Street, Kensington, I am not going to put on a gas-mask. I am going to go out and breathe deeply of it, because I will know that the game is up." So many people feel that for humanity the game is up. Now no man can think like that and believe in God. If God is the God we believe him to be there is no room for pessimism. There may be remorse, regret; there may be penitence, contrition; there may be heart-searching, the realization of failure and of sin; but there can never be despair.

"Workman of God! O lose not heart,
But learn what God is like,
And, in the darkest battle-field,
Thou shalt know where to strike.

"For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win:
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin."

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(c) It is a summons to preparedness. If there comes the consummation we must be ready for it. It is too late to prepare for it when it is upon us. We have literally to prepare to meet our God.

If we live in patience which cannot be defeated, in hope which cannot despair, and in preparation which ever sees life in the light of eternity, we shall, by the grace of God, be ready for his consummation when it comes.

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Mark 4:30-32

FROM SMALL TO GREAT

Mark 4:30-32

He said: "How shall we find something with which to compare the Kingdom of God, or what picture will we use to represent it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown upon the ground, is the least of all the seeds upon the earth. But, when it is sown, it springs up and it becomes greater than all the herbs; and it sends out great branches so that the birds of the heaven can find a lodging under its shade."

There are in this parable two pictures which every Jew would readily recognize.

First, in Palestine a grain of mustard seed stood proverbially for the smallest possible thing. For instance, "faith as a grain of mustard seed," means "the smallest conceivable amount of faith." This mustard seed did in fact grow into something very like a tree. A traveller in Palestine speaks of seeing a mustard plant which, in its height, overtopped a horse and its rider. The birds were very fond of the little black seeds of the tree and a cloud of birds over a mustard plant was a common sight.

Second, in the Old Testament one of the commonest ways to describe a great empire was to describe it as a tree, and the tributary nations within it were said to be like birds finding shelter within the shadow of its branches (Eze.17:22ff; Eze.31:1ff; Dn.4:10; Dn.4:21). The figure of a tree with birds in the branches therefore stands for a great empire and the nations who form part of it.

(i) This parable says, Never be daunted by small beginnings. It may seem that at the moment we can produce only a very small effect; but if that small effect is repeated and repeated it will become very great. There is a scientific experiment to show the effect of dyes. A large vessel of clear water is taken and a little phial of dye. Drop by drop the dye is dropped into the clear water. At first it seems to have no effect at all and the water does not seem to be coloured in the least. Then quite suddenly the water begins to tinge with the colour; bit by bit the colour deepens, until the whole vessel is coloured. It is the repeated drops that produce the effect.

We often feel that for all that we can do, it is hardly worth while starting a thing at all. But we must remember this--everything must have a beginning. Nothing emerges full-grown. It is our duty to do what we can; and the cumulative effect of all the small efforts can in the end produce an amazing result.

(ii) This parable speaks of the empire of the church. The tree and the birds, we have seen, stand for the great empire and for all the nations who find shelter within it. The church began with an individual and it is meant to end with the world. There are two directions in which this is true.

(a) The church is an empire in which all kinds of opinions and all kinds of theologies can find a place. We have a tendency to brand as a heretic anyone who does not think as we do. John Wesley was the greatest example of tolerance in the world. "We think," he said, "and we let think." "I have no more right," he said, "to object to a man for holding a different opinion from mine than I have to

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Mark 4:30-32

differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair." Wesley had one greeting, "Is thy heart as my heart? Then give me thy hand!" It is good for a man to have the assurance that he is right, but that is no reason why he should have the conviction that everyone else is wrong.

(b) The church is an empire in which all nations meet. Once a new church was being built. One of its great features was to be a stained glass window. The committee in charge searched for a subject for the window and finally decided on the lines of the hymn,

"Around the throne of God in heaven
Thousands of children stand."

They employed a great artist to paint the picture from which the window would be made. He began the work and fell in love with the task. Finally he finished it. He went to bed and fell asleep but in the night he seemed to hear a noise in his studio; he went into the studio to investigate; and there he saw a stranger with a brush and a palette in his hands working at his picture. "Stop!" he cried. "You'll ruin my picture." "I think," said the stranger, "that you have ruined it already." "How's that?" said the artist. "Well," said the stranger, "you have many colours on your palette but you have used only one for the faces of the children. Who told you that in heaven there were only children whose faces were white?" "No one," said the artist. "I just thought of it that way." "Look!" said the stranger. "I will make some of their faces yellow, and some brown, and some black, and some red. They are all there, for they have all answered my call" "Your call?" said the artist. "Who are you?" The stranger smiled.

"Once long ago I said, 'Let the children come to me and don't stop them, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven'--and I'm still saying it." Then the artist realized that it was the Master himself, and as he did so, he vanished from his sight. The picture looked so much more wonderful now with its black and yellow and red and brown children as well as white.

In the morning the artist awoke and rushed through to his studio. His picture was just as he had left it; and he knew that it had all been a dream. Although that very day the committee was coming to examine the picture he seized his brushes and his paints, and began to paint the children of every colour and of every race throughout all the world. When the committee arrived they thought the picture very beautiful and one whispered gently, "Why! It's God's family at home."

The church is the family of God; and that church which began in Palestine, small as the mustard seed, has room in it for every nation in the world. There are no barriers in the church of God. Man made barriers and God in Christ tore them down.

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Mark 4:33-34

THE WISE TEACHER AND THE WISE SCHOLAR

Mark 4:33-34

It was with many such parables that he kept speaking the word to them, suiting his instruction to their ability to hear it. It was his custom not to speak to them without a parable; and when they were by themselves, he unfolded the meaning of everything to his own disciples.

Here we have a short but perfect definition of both the wise teacher and the wise learner. Jesus suited his instruction to the ability of those who were listening to him. That is the first essential in wise teaching.

There are two dangers that the wise teacher must at all costs avoid.

(a) He must avoid all self-display. A teacher's duty is not to draw attention to himself but to draw attention to his subject. A love of self-display can make a man attempt to scintillate at the expense of truth. It can make him think more of clever ways of saying a thing than of the thing itself. Or, it can make him so desirous of displaying his own erudition that he becomes so obscure and elaborate and involved that the ordinary man cannot understand him at all. There is no virtue in talking over the head of an audience. As someone said, "The fact that a man shoots above the target only proves that he is a bad shot." A good teacher must be in love with his subject and not in love with himself.

(b) He must avoid a sense of superiority. True teaching does not consist in telling people things. It consists in learning things together. It was Plato's idea that teaching simply meant extracting from people's minds and memories what they already knew. The teacher who stands on a pedestal and talks down will never be successful. True teaching consists in sharing and discovering truth together. It is a joint exploration of the countries of the mind.

There are certain qualities which he who would teach must ever seek to acquire.

(a) The teacher must possess understanding. One of the great difficulties of the expert is to understand why the non-expert finds a thing so difficult to understand or to do. It is necessary for the teacher to think with the learner's mind and to see with the learner's eyes, before he can really explain and impart any kind of knowledge.

(b) The teacher must possess patience. The Jewish Rabbi Hillel laid it down, "An irritable man cannot teach," and insisted that the first essential of a teacher is that he must be even-tempered. The Jews laid it down that if a teacher found that his scholars did not understand a thing he must begin again without rancour and without irritation and explain it all over again. That is precisely what Jesus did all his life.

(c) The teacher must possess kindness. Jewish teaching regulations forbade all excessive punishment. Especially they forbade all punishment which would humiliate the scholar. The teacher's duty was always to encourage, and never to discourage. Anna Buchan tells how her old grandmother had a favourite phrase, "Never daunt youth." It is easy for the teacher to use the lash

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Mark 4:33-34

of his tongue on the pupil with the, limping mind; it is often a temptation to score a cheap triumph by making such a pupil the target of such sarcasms and witticisms as will make him a laughing-stock. The teacher who is kind will never do that.

This passage also shows us the wise learner. It gives us a picture of an inner circle to whom Jesus could really and fully explain things.

(a) The wise learner does not go away to forget. He goes away to think over what he has heard. He chews it over until he has finally digested it. Epictetus, the wise Stoic teacher, used to be grieved by some of his pupils. He said that men ought to use the philosophy they learned, not to talk about, but to live by. In a crude metaphor, he said that sheep do not vomit up the grass in order to show the shepherd how much they have eaten; they digest it and use it to produce wool and milk. The wise scholar goes away, not to forget what he has learned, and not to display what he has learned, but quietly to think it over until he has discovered what it means for life and for living for him.

(b) Above all, the wise learner seeks the master's company. After Jesus had spoken the crowds dispersed; but there was a little company who lingered with him and did not want to leave him. It was to them that he unfolded the meaning of everything. In the last analysis, if a man is a really great teacher, it is not so much the man's teaching that we wish to know, but the man himself. His message will always lie not so much in what he says as in what he is. The man who wishes to learn from Christ must company with Christ. If he does that he will win, not only learning, but life itself.

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Mark 4:35-41

THE PEACE OF THE PRESENCE

Mark 4:35-41

When on that day evening had come, he said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." So they left the crowds and took him, just as he was, in their boat. And there were other boats with him. A great storm of wind got up and the waves dashed upon the boat, so that the boat was on the point of being swamped. And he was in the stern sleeping upon a pillow. They woke him. "Teacher," they said, "don't you care that we are perishing?" So, when he had been wakened, he spoke sternly to the wind and said to the sea, "Be silent! Be muzzled!" and the wind sank to rest and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were stricken with a great awe, and kept saying to each other, "Who then can this be, because the wind and the sea obey him?"

The Lake of Galilee was notorious for its storms. They came literally out of the blue with shattering and terrifying suddenness. A writer describes them like this: "It is not unusual to see terrible squalls hurl themselves, even when the sky is perfectly clear, upon these waters which are ordinarily so calm. The numerous ravines which to the north-east and east debouch upon the upper part of the lake operate as so many dangerous defiles in which the winds from the heights of Hauran, the plateaux of Trachonitis, and the summit of Mount Hermon are caught and compressed in such a way that, rushing with tremendous force through a narrow space and then being suddenly released, they agitate the little Lake of Gennesaret in the most frightful fashion." The voyager across the lake was always liable to encounter just such sudden storms as this.

Jesus was in the boat in the position in which any distinguished guest would be conveyed. We are told that, "In these boats...the place for any distinguished stranger is on the little seat placed at the stern, where a carpet and cushion are arranged. The helmsman stands a little farther forward on the deck, though near the stern, in order to have a better look-out ahead."

It is interesting to note that the words Jesus addressed to the wind and the waves are exactly the same as he addressed to the demon-possessed man in Mk.1:25. Just as an evil demon possessed that man, so the destructive power of the storm was, so people in Palestine believed in those days, the evil power of the demons at work in the realm of nature.

We do this story far less than justice if we merely take it in a literalistic sense. If it describes no more than a physical miracle in which an actual storm was stifled, it is very wonderful and it is something at which we must marvel, but it is something which happened once and cannot happen again. In that case it is quite external to us. But if we read it in a symbolic sense it is far more valuable. When the disciples realized the presence of Jesus with them the storm became a calm. Once they knew he was there fearless peace entered their hearts. To voyage with Jesus was to voyage in peace even in a storm. Now that is universally true. It is not something which happened once; it is something which still happens and which can happen for us. In the presence of Jesus we can have peace even in the wildest storms of life.

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Mark 4:35-41

(i) He gives us peace in the storm of sorrow. When sorrow comes as come it must, he tells us of the glory of the life to come. He changes the darkness of death into the sunshine of the thought of life eternal. He tells us of the love of God. There is an old story of a gardener who in his garden had a favourite flower which he loved much. One day he came to the garden to find that flower gone. He was vexed and angry and full of complaints. In the midst of his resentment he met the master of the garden and hurled his complaints at him. "Hush!" said the master, "I plucked it for myself." In the storm of sorrow Jesus tells us that those we love have gone to be with God, and gives us the certainty that we shall meet again those whom we have loved and lost awhile.

(ii) He gives us peace when life's problems involve us in a tempest of doubt and tension and uncertainty. There come times when we do not know what to do; when we stand at some cross-roads in life and do not know which way to take. If then we turn to Jesus and say to him, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" the way will be clear. The real tragedy is not that we do not know what to do; but that often we do not humbly submit to Jesus' guidance. To ask his will and to submit to it is the way to peace at such a time.

(iii) He gives us peace in the storms of anxiety. The chief enemy of peace is worry, worry for ourselves, worry about the unknown future, worry about those we love. But Jesus speaks to us of a Father whose hand will never cause his child a needless tear and of a love beyond which neither we nor those we love can ever drift. In the storm of anxiety he brings us the peace of the love of God.

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Mark 5:1-13

THE BANISHING OF THE DEMONS

Mark 5:1-13

They came to the other side of the lake, to the territory of the Gerasenes. Immediately Jesus had disembarked from the boat, there met him from the tombs a man in the grip of an unclean spirit. This man lived amongst the tombs. No one had ever been able to bind him with a chain, because he had often been bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been wrenched apart by him and the fetters shattered; and no one was strong enough to tame him. Continually, night and day, in the tombs and in the hills, he kept shrieking and gashing himself with stones. He saw Jesus when he was still a long way away, and he ran and knelt before him. "What," he said, "have you and I to do with each other, Jesus, you son of the most high God? In God's name, I adjure you, do not torture me!" For Jesus had been saying to him, "Unclean spirit, come out of the man!" "What is your name?" he asked him.

"Legion is my name," he said, "for we are many." And he kept begging Jesus with many an entreaty not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of swine was feeding on the mountain-side. "Send us into the Swine," they urged him, "that we may go into them." And Jesus permitted them to go into them. And the unclean spirits came out and entered into the swine and the herd--there were about two thousand of them--rushed down the precipice into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

Here is a vivid and rather eerie story. It is the kind of story in which we have to do our best to read between the lines, because it is thinking and speaking in terms quite familiar to people in Palestine in the days of Jesus but quite alien to us.

If this is to be taken in close connection with what goes before--and that is Mark's intention--it must have happened late in the evening or even when the night had fallen. The story becomes all the more weird and frightening when it is seen as happening in the shadows of the night.

Mk.5:35 tells us that it was late in the evening when Jesus and his friends set sail. The Lake of Galilee is 13 miles long at its longest, and 8 miles wide at its widest. At this particular part it was about 5 miles across. They had made the journey and, on the way, they had encountered the storm, and now had reached land. It was a part of the lake-side where there were many caves in the limestone rock, and many of these caves were used as tombs in which bodies were laid. At the best of times it was an eerie place; as night fell it must have been grim indeed.

Out of the tombs there came a demon-possessed man. It was a fitting place for him to be, for demons, so they believed in those days, dwelt in woods and gardens and vineyards and dirty places, in lonely and desolate spots and among the tombs. It was in the night-time and before cock-crow that the demons were specially active. To sleep alone in an empty house at night was dangerous; to greet any person in the dark was perilous, for he might be a demon. To go out at night without a lantern or a torch was to court trouble. It was a perilous place and a perilous hour, and the man was a dangerous man.

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Mark 5:1-13

How completely this man felt himself to be possessed is seen in his way of speaking. Sometimes he uses the singular, as if he himself was speaking; sometimes he uses the plural, as if all the demons in him were speaking. He was so convinced that the demons were in him, that he felt they were speaking through him. When asked his name he said his name was Legion. There were probably two reasons for that.

A legion was a Roman regiment of 6,000 troops. Very likely the man had seen one of these Roman regiments clanking along the road, and he felt that there was a whole battalion of demons inside him. In any event the Jews believed that no man would survive if he realized the number of demons with which he was surrounded. They were "like the earth that is thrown up around a bed that is sown." There were a thousand at a man's right hand and ten thousand at his left. The queen of the female spirits had no fewer than 180,000 followers. There was a Jewish saying, "A legion of hurtful spirits is on the watch for men, saying, 'When shall he fall into the hands of one of these things and be taken?'" No doubt this wretched man knew all about this, and his poor, wandering mind was certain that a mass of those demons had taken up their residence in him.

Further, Palestine was an occupied country. The legions, at their wildest and most irresponsible, could sometimes be guilty of atrocities that would make the blood run cold. It may well be that this man had seen, perhaps even witnessed his loved ones suffer from, the murder and rapine that could sometimes follow the legions. It may well be that it was some such terrible experience which had driven him insane. The word Legion conjured up for him a vision of terror and death and destruction. He was convinced that demons like that were inside him.

We shall not even begin to understand this story unless we see how serious a case of demon-possession this man was. It is clear that Jesus made more than one attempt to heal him. Mk.5:8 tells us that Jesus had begun by using his usual method--an authoritative order to the demon to come out. On this occasion that was not successful. Next, he demanded what the demon's name was. It was always supposed in those days that, if a demon's name could be discovered, it gave a certain power over it. An ancient magical formula says, "I adjure thee, every demonic spirit, Say whatsoever thou art." The belief was that if the name was known the demon's power was broken. In this case even that did not prove enough.

Jesus saw that there was only one way to cure this man--and that was to give him unanswerable demonstration that the demons had gone out of him, at least, unanswerable as far as his own mind was concerned. It does not matter whether we believe in demon-possession or not; the man believed in it. Even if it all lay in his disordered mind, the demons were terribly, real to him. Dr. Rendle Short, speaking about the supposed evil influence of the moon (Ps.121:6) which emerges in the words lunatic and moonstruck, says, "Modern science does not recognize any particular harm as coming from the moon. Yet it is a very widespread belief that the moon does affect people mentally. It is good to know that the Lord can deliver us from imaginary dangers as well as from real ones. Often the imaginary are harder to face."

This man needed deliverance; whether that deliverance was from literal demon-possession, or from an all-powerful delusion does not matter. This is where the herd of swine comes in. They were grazing on the hillside. The man felt that the demons were asking to be not totally destroyed

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 5:1-13

but sent into the swine. All the time he was uttering the shrieks and going through the paroxysms which were the sign of his malady. Suddenly, as his yells reached a new pitch of intensity, the whole herd took flight and plunged down a steep slope into the sea. There was the very proof that the man needed. This was almost the only thing on earth that could have convinced him that he was cured. Jesus, like a wise healer who understood so kindly and sympathetically the psychology of a mind diseased, used the event to help the man climb back to sanity, and his disordered mind was restored to peace.

There are ultra-fastidious people who will blame Jesus because the healing of the man involved the death of the pigs. Surely it is a singularly blind way to look at things. How could the fate of the pigs possibly be compared with the fate of a man's immortal soul? We do not, presumably, have any objections to eating meat for dinner nor refuse pork because it involved the killing of some pig. Surely if we kill animals to avoid going hungry, we can raise no objection if the saving of a man's mind and soul involved the death of a herd of these same animals. There is a cheap sentimentalism which will languish in grief over the pain of an animal and never turn a hair at the wretched state of millions of God's men and women. This is not to say that we need not care what happens to God's animal creation, for God loves every creature whom his hands have made, but it is to say that we must preserve a sense of proportion; and in God's scale of proportions, there is nothing so important as a human soul.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 5:14-17

BIDDING CHRIST BE GONE

Mark 5:14-17

The men who were feeding the pigs fled, and brought news of what had happened to the town and to the farms. They came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus, and they saw the demon-possessed man--the man who had had the legion of demons--sitting fully clothed and in his senses, and they were afraid; and those who had seen what had taken place told them what had happened to the demon-possessed man, and told them about the pigs; and they began to urge Jesus to get out of their territory.

Very naturally the men who had been in charge of the pigs went to the town and to the farms with news of this astounding happening. When the curious people arrived on the spot they found the man who had once been so mad sitting fully clothed and in full possession of his faculties. The wild and naked madman had become a sane and sensible citizen. And then comes the surprise, the paradox, the thing that no one would really expect. One would have thought that they would have regarded the whole matter with joy; but they regarded it with terror. And one would have thought that they would have urged Jesus to stay with them and exercise still further his amazing power; but they urged him to get out of their district as quickly as possible. Why? A man had been healed but their pigs had been destroyed, and therefore they wanted no more of this. The routine of life had been unsettled, and they wanted the disturbing element removed as quickly as possible.

A frequent battle-cry of the human mind is, "Please don't disturb me." On the whole, the one thing people want is to be let alone.

(i) Instinctively people say, "Don't disturb my comfort." If someone came to us and said, "I can give you a world that will be better for the mass of people in general, but it will mean that your comfort will, at least for a time, be disturbed and upset, and you will have to do with less for the sake of others," most of us would say, "I would much rather that you would leave things as they are." In point of fact that is almost precisely the situation through which we are living in the present social revolution. We are living through a time of redistribution, not only in this country but in the developing nations as well. We are living through a time when life is a great deal better than ever it was for a great many. But it has meant that life is not so comfortable as it was for quite a number of people; and for that very reason there is resentment because some of the comforts of life have gone.

There is a great deal of talk about what life owes us. Life owes us precisely nothing; the debt is all the other way round. It is we who owe life all that we have to give. We are followers of one who gave up the glory of heaven for the narrowness of earth, who gave up the joy of God for the pain of the Cross. It is human not to want to have our comfort disturbed; it is divine to be willing to be disturbed that others may have more.

(ii) Instinctively people say, "Don't disturb my possessions." Here is another aspect of the same thing. No man really willingly gives up anything he may possess. The older we get the more we want to clutch it to us. Borrow, who knew the gipsies, tells us that it is the fortune-telling gipsy's policy to promise to the young various pleasures, and to foretell to the old riches and only riches

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Mark 5:14-17

"for they have sufficient knowledge of the human heart to be aware that avarice is the last passion that becomes extinct within." We can soon see whether a man really accepts his faith and whether he really believes in his principles, by seeing if he is willing to become poorer for them.

(iii) Instinctively people say, "Don't disturb my religion."

(a) People say, "Don't let unpleasant subjects disturb the pleasant decorum of my religion." Edmund Gosse points out a curious omission in the sermons of the famous divine, Jeremy Taylor. "These sermons are amongst the most able and profound in the English language, but they hardly ever mention the poor, hardly ever refer to their sorrows, and show practically no interest in their state. The sermons were preached in South Wales where poverty abounded. The cry of the poor and the hungry, the ill-clothed and the needy ceaselessly ascended up to heaven, and called out for pity and redress, but this eloquent divine never seemed to hear it, he lived and wrote and preached surrounded by the suffering and the needy, and yet remained scarcely conscious of their existence."

It is much less disturbing to preach about the niceties of theological beliefs and doctrines than it is to preach about the needs of men and the abuses of life. We have actually known of congregations who informed ministers that it was a condition of their call that they would not preach on certain subjects. It was a notable thing that it was not what Jesus said about God that got him into trouble; it was what he said about man and about the needs of man that disturbed the orthodox of his day.

(b) People have been known to say, "Don't let personal relationships disturb my religion." James Burns quotes an amazing thing in this connection from the life of Angela di Foligras, the famous Italian mystic. She had the gift of completely withdrawing herself from this world, and of returning from her trances with tales of ineffably sweet communion with God. It was she herself who said: "In that time, and by God's will, there died my mother, who was a great hindrance unto me in following the way of God; my husband died likewise, and in a short time there died all my children. And because I had commenced to follow the aforesaid way, and had prayed God that he would rid me of them, I had great consolation of their deaths, albeit I did also feel some grief." Her family was a trouble to her religion.

There is a type of religion which is fonder of committees than it is of housework, which is more set on quiet times than it is on human service. It prides itself on serving the Church and spending itself in devotion--but in God's eyes it has got things the wrong way round.

(c) People say, "Don't disturb my beliefs." There is a type of religion which says, "What was good enough for my fathers is good enough for me." There are people who do not want to know anything new, for they know that if they did they might have to go through the mental sweat of rethinking things and coming to new conclusions. There is a cowardice of thought and a lethargy of mind and a sleep of the soul which are terrible things.

The Gerasenes banished the disturbing Christ--and still men seek to do the same.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 5:18-20

A WITNESS FOR CHRIST

Mark 5:18-20

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed kept begging him that he might be allowed to stay with him. He did not allow him, but said to him, "Go back to your home and your own people, and tell them all that the Lord has done for you." And he went away and began to proclaim the story throughout the Decapolis of all that Jesus had done for him.

The interesting thing about this passage is that it tells us that this incident happened in the Decapolis. Decapolis literally means The Ten Cities. Near to the Jordan and on its east side, there were ten cities mainly of rather a special character. They were essentially Greek. Their names were Scythopolis, which was the only one on the west side of the Jordan, Pella, Dion, Gerasa, Philadelphia, Gadara, Raphana, Kanatha, Hippos and Damascus. With the conquests of Alexander the Great there had been a Greek penetration into Palestine and Syria.

The Greek cities which had been then founded were in rather a curious position. They were within Syria; but they were very largely independent. They had their own councils and their own coinage; they had the right of local administration, not only of themselves but of an area around them; they had the right of association for mutual defence and for commercial purposes. They remained in a kind of semi-independence down until the time of the Maccabees, about the middle of the second century B.C. The Maccabees were the Jewish conquerors and they subjected most of these cities to Jewish rule.

They were liberated from Jewish rule by the Roman Emperor Pompey about 63 B.C. They were still in a curious position. They were to some extent independent, but were liable to Roman taxation and Roman military service. They were not garrisoned, but frequently were the headquarters of Roman legions in the eastern campaigns. Now Rome governed most of this part of the world by a system of tributary kings. The result was that Rome could give these cities very little actual protection; and so they banded themselves together into a kind of corporation to defend themselves against Jewish and Arab encroachment. They were stubbornly Greek. They were beautiful cities; they had their Greek gods and their Greek temples and their Greek amphitheatres; they were devoted to the Greek way of life.

Here, then, is a most interesting thing. If Jesus was in the Decapolis it is one of the first hints of things to come. There would be Jews there. but it was fundamentally a Greek area. Here is a foretaste of a world for Christ. Here is the first sign of Christianity bursting the bonds of Judaism and going out to all the world. Just how Greek these cities were and just how important they were can be seen from the fact that from Gadara alone there came Philodemus, the great Epicurean philosopher, who was a contemporary of Cicero, Meleager, the master of the Greek epigram, Menippus", the famous satirist, and Theodorus, the rhetorician, who was no less a person than the tutor of Tiberius, the reigning Roman Emperor. Something happened on that day that Jesus set foot in the Decapolis.

There is now good reason to see why Jesus sent the man back.

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Mark 5:18-20

(i) He was to be a witness for Christianity. He was to be a living, walking, vivid, unanswerable demonstration of what Christ can do for a man. Our glory must always be not in what we can do for Christ but in what Christ can do for us. The unanswerable proof of Christianity is a re-created man.

(ii) He was to be the first seed of what in time was to become a mighty harvest. The first contact with Greek civilization was made in the Decapolis. Everything must start somewhere; and the glory of all the Christianity which one day flowered in the Greek mind and genius began with a man who had been possessed by demons and whom Christ healed. Christ must always begin with someone. In our own circle and society why should he not begin with us?

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Mark 5:21-24

IN THE HOUR OF NEED

Mark 5:21-24

When Jesus had crossed over in the boat back again to the other side, a great crowd gathered together to him; and he was by the lakeside. One of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, came to him; and, when he saw Jesus, he threw himself at his feet. He pled with him, "My little daughter is lying at death's door. Come and lay your hands on her, that she may be cured and live." Jesus went away with him; and the crowd were following him, and crushing in upon him on all sides.

There are all the elements of tragedy here. It is always tragic when a child is ill. The story tells us that the ruler's daughter was twelve years of age. According to the Jewish custom a girl became a woman at twelve years and one day. This girl was just on the threshold of womanhood, and when death comes at such a time it is doubly tragic.

The story tells us something about this man who was the ruler of the synagogue. He must have been a person of some considerable importance. The ruler was the administrative head of the synagogue. He was the president of the board of elders responsible for the good management of the synagogue. He was responsible for the conduct of the services. He did not usually take part in them himself, but he was responsible for the allocation of duties and for seeing that they were carried out with all seemliness and good order. The ruler of the synagogue was one of the most important and most respected men in the community. But something happened to him when his daughter fell ill and he thought of Jesus.

(i) His prejudices were forgotten. There can be no doubt that he must have regarded Jesus as an outsider, as a dangerous heretic, as one to whom the synagogue doors were rightly closed, and one whom anyone who valued his orthodoxy would do well to avoid. But he was a big enough man to abandon his prejudices in his hour of need. Prejudice really means a judging beforehand. It is a judging before a man has examined the evidence, or a verdict given because of refusal to examine it. Few things have done more to hold things up than this. Nearly every forward step has had to fight against initial prejudice. When Sir James Simpson discovered its use as an anaesthetic, especially in the case of childbirth, chloroform was held to be, "a decoy of Satan, apparently opening itself to bless women, but in the end hardening them, and robbing God of the deep, earnest cries, that should arise to him in time of trouble." A prejudiced mind shuts out a man from many a blessing.

(ii) His dignity was forgotten. He, the ruler of the synagogue, came and threw himself at the feet of Jesus, the wandering teacher. Not a few times a man has had to forget his dignity to save his life and to save his soul.

In the old story that is precisely what Naaman had to do (2Kgs.5). He had come to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy. Elisha's prescription was that he should go and wash in the Jordan seven times. That was no way to treat the Syrian Prime Minister! Elisha had not even delivered the message personally; he had sent it by a messenger! And, had they not far better rivers in Syria than

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Mark 5:21-24

the muddy little Jordan? These were Naaman's first thoughts; but he swallowed his pride and lost his leprosy.

There is a famous story of Diogenes, the Cynic philosopher. He was captured by pirates and was being sold as a slave. As he gazed at the bystanders who were bidding for him, he looked at a man. "Sell me to that man," he said. "He needs a master." The man bought him; handed over the management of his household and the education of his children to him. "It was a good day for me," he used to say, "when Diogenes entered my household." True, but that required an abrogation of dignity.

it frequently happens that a man stands on his dignity and falls from grace.

(iii) His pride was forgotten. It must have taken a conscious effort of humiliation for this ruler of the synagogue to come and ask for help from Jesus of Nazareth. No one wishes to be indebted to anyone else: we would like to run life on our own. The very first step of the Christian life is to realize that we cannot be anything other than indebted to God.

(iv) Here we enter the realm of speculation, but it seems to me that we can say of this man that his friends were forgotten. It may well be that, to the end, they objected to him calling in Jesus. It is rather strange that he came himself and did not send a messenger. It seems unlikely that he would consent to leave his daughter when she was on the point of death. Maybe he came because no one else would go. His household were suspiciously quick to tell him not to trouble Jesus any more. It sounds almost as if they were glad not to call upon his help. It may well be that this ruler defied public opinion and home advice in order to call in Jesus. Many a man is wisest when his worldly-wise friends think he is acting like a fool.

Here was a man who forgot everything except that he wanted the help of Jesus; and because of that forgetfulness he would remember for ever that Jesus is a Saviour.

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Mark 5:25-29

A SUFFERER'S LAST HOPE

Mark 5:25-29

Now there was a woman who was suffering from a haemorrhage which had lasted for twelve years. She had gone through many things at the hands of many doctors; she had spent everything she had; and it had not helped her at all. Indeed she rather got worse and worse. When she heard the stories about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd, and she touched his robe, for she said, "If I touch even his clothes I will be cured." And immediately the fountain of her blood was staunched, and she knew in her body that she was healed from her scourge.

The woman in this story suffered from a trouble which was very common and very hard to deal with. The Talmud itself gives no fewer than eleven cures for such a trouble. Some of them are tonics and astringents; but some of them are sheer superstitions like carrying the ashes of an ostrich-egg in a linen rag in summer and a cotton rag in winter; or carrying a barley corn which had been found in the dung of a white she-ass. No doubt this poor woman had tried even these desperate remedies. The trouble was that not only did this affect a woman's health, it also rendered her continuously unclean and shut her off from the worship of God and the fellowship of her friends (Lev.15:25-27).

Mark here has a gentle jibe at the doctors. She had tried them all and had suffered much and had spent everything she had, and the result was that she was worse instead of better. Jewish literature is interesting on the subject of doctors. "I used to go to the physicians," says one person, "to be healed, and the more they anointed me with their medicaments, the more my eyes were blinded by the films, until they were totally blinded." (Tob.2:10.) There is a passage in the Mishnah, which is the written summary of the traditional law, which is talking about the trades that a man may teach his son." Rabbi Judah says: 'Ass-drivers are most of them wicked, camel-drivers are most of them proper folk, sailors are most of them saintly, the best among physicians is destined for Gehenna, and the most seemly among butchers is a partner of Amalek'." But, fortunately and justly, there are voices on the other side.

One of the greatest of all tributes to doctors is in The Book of Sirach (one of the apocryphal books written in the time between the Old and the New Testaments) in Sir.38:1-15.

"Cultivate the physician in accordance with the need of him,
For him also hath God ordained.
It is from God that the physician getteth wisdom,
And from the king he receiveth gifts.

"The skill of the physician lifteth up his head,
And he may stand before nobles.
God hath created medicines out of the earth,
And let not a discerning man reject them.

"By means of them the physician assuageth pain,
And likewise the apothecary prepareth an ointment:

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That his work may not cease,
Nor health from the face of the earth.

"And to the physician also give a place;
Nor should he be far away for of him there is need.
For there is a time when successful help is in his power;
For he also maketh supplication to God,
To make his diagnosis successful,
And the treatment that it may promote recovery."

The physicians had had no success with the treatment of this woman's case, and she had heard of Jesus. But she had this problem--her trouble was an embarrassing thing; to go in the crowd and to state it openly was something she could not face; and so she decided to try to touch Jesus in secret. Every devout Jew wore an outer robe with four tassels on it, one at each corner. These tassels were worn in obedience to the command in Num.15:38-40, and they were to signify to others, and to remind the man himself, that the wearer was a member of the chosen people of God. They were the badge of a devout Jew. It was one of these tassels that the woman slipped through the crowd and touched; and, having touched it, she was thrilled to find herself cured.

Here was a woman who came to Jesus as a last resort; having tried every other cure that the world had to offer she finally tried him. Many and many a man has come to seek the help of Jesus when he himself was at his wits' end. He may have battled with temptation until he could fight no longer and stretched out a hand, crying, "Lord, save me! I perish!" He may have struggled on with some exhausting task until he reached the breaking-point and then cried out for a strength which was not his strength. He may have laboured to attain the goodness which haunted him, only to see it recede ever farther away, until he was utterly frustrated. No man should need to be driven to Christ by the force of circumstances, and yet many come that way; and, even if it is thus we come, he will never send us empty away.

"When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

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Mark 5:30-34

THE COST OF HEALING

Mark 5:30-34

Jesus was well aware in himself that the power which issued from him had gone out of him; and immediately, in the middle of the crowd, he turned and said: "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples said to him: "Look at the crowd that are crushing you on every side--what's the point of saying, 'Who touched me?'" He kept looking all round to see who had done this. The woman was terrified and trembling. She knew well what had happened to her. She came and threw herself down before him, and told him the whole truth. "Daughter!" he said to her, "Your faith has cured you! Go, and be in good health, free from the trouble that was your scourge."

This passage tells us something about three people.

(i) It tells us something about Jesus. It tells us the cost of healing. Every time Jesus healed anyone it took something out of him. Here is a universal rule of life. We will never produce anything great unless we are prepared to put something of ourselves, of our very life, of our very soul into it. No pianist will ever give a really great performance if he glides through a piece of music with faultless technique and nothing more. The performance will not be great unless at the end of it there is the exhaustion which comes of the outpouring of self. No actor will ever give a great performance who repeats his words with every inflection right and every gesture correct like a perfectly designed automaton. His tears must be real tears; his feelings must be real feelings; something of himself must go into the acting. No preacher who ever preached a real sermon descended from his pulpit without a feeling of being drained of something.

If we are ever to help men, we must be ready to spend ourselves. It all comes from our attitude to men. Once Matthew Arnold, the great literary critic, said of the middle classes: "Look at these people; the clothes they wear; the books they read; the texture of mind that composes their thoughts; would any amount of money compensate for being like one of these?" Now the sense of that saying may or may not be true; but the point is that it was contempt that gave it birth. He looked on men with a kind of shuddering loathing; and no one who looks on men like that can ever help them.

Think on the other hand of Moses, after the people had made the golden calf when he was on the mountain top. Remember how he besought God to blot him out of the book of remembrance if only the people might be forgiven. (Exo.32:30-32.) Think of how Myers makes Paul speak when he looks upon the lost and pagan world:

"Then, with a thrill, the intolerable craving,
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call--
O to save these, to perish for their saving--
Die for their life, be offered for them all."

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Mark 5:30-34

The greatness of Jesus was that he was prepared to pay the price of helping others, and that price was the outgoing of his very life. We follow in his steps only when we are prepared to spend, not our substance, but our souls and strength for others.

(ii) It tells us something about the disciples. It shows us very vividly the limitations of what is called common sense. The disciples took the common-sense point of view. How could Jesus avoid being touched and jostled in a crowd like that? That was the sensible way to look at things. There emerges the strange and poignant fact that they had never realized that it cost Jesus anything at all to heal others.

One of the tragedies of life is the strange insensitiveness of the human mind. We so often utterly fail to realize what others are going through. Because we may have no experience of something, we never think what that something is costing someone else. Because something may be easy for us we never realize what a costly effort it may be for someone else. That is why we so often hurt worst of all those we love. A man may pray for common sense, but sometimes he would do well to pray for that sensitive, imaginative insight which can see into the hearts of others.

(iii) It tells us something about the woman. It tells us of the relief of confession. It was all so difficult; it was all so humiliating. But once she had told the whole truth to Jesus, the terror and the trembling were gone and a wave of relief flooded her heart. And when she had made her pitiful confession she found him very kind.

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness he requireth
Is to feel your need of him."

It is never hard to confess to one who understands like Jesus.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 5:35-39

DESPAIR AND HOPE

Mark 5:35-39

While he was still speaking, messages came from the household of the ruler of the synagogue. "Your daughter," they said, "has died. Why trouble the teacher any more?" Jesus overheard this message being given. He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Don't be afraid! Only keep on believing!" He allowed no one to accompany him except Peter and James and John, James' brother. They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue. He saw the uproar. He saw the people weeping and wailing. He came in. "Why," he said to them, "are you so distressed? And what are you weeping for? The little girl has not died--she is sleeping." They laughed him to scorn.

Jewish mourning customs were vivid and detailed, and practically all of them were designed to stress the desolation and the final separation of death. The triumphant victorious hope of the Christian faith was totally absent.

Immediately death had taken place a loud wailing was set up so that all might know that death had struck. The wailing was repeated at the grave side. The mourners hung over the dead body, begging for a response from the silent lips. They beat their breasts; they tore their hair; and they rent their garments.

The rending of garments was done according to certain rules and regulations. It was done just before the body was finally hid from sight. Garments were to be rent to the heart, that is, until the skin was exposed, but were not to be rent beyond the navel. For fathers and mothers the rent was on the left side, over the heart; for others it was on the right side. A woman was to rend her garments in private; she was then to reverse the inner garment, so that it was worn back to front; she then rent her outer garment, so that her body was not exposed. The rent garment was worn for thirty days. After seven days the rent might be roughly sewn up, in such a way that it was still clearly visible. After the thirty days the garment was properly repaired.

Flute-players were essential. Throughout most of the ancient world, in Rome, in Greece, in Phoenicia, in Assyria and in Palestine, the wailing of the flute was inseparably connected with death and tragedy. It was laid down that, however poor a man was, he must have at least two flute-players at his wife's funeral. W. Taylor Smith in Hastings' Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels quotes two interesting instances of the use of flute-players, which show how widespread the custom was. There were flute-players at the funeral of Claudius, the Roman Emperor. When in A.D. 67 news reached Jerusalem of the fall of Jotapata to the Roman armies, Josephus tells us that "most people engaged flute-players to lead their lamentations."

The wail of the flutes, the screams of the mourners, the passionate appeals to the dead, the rent garments, the torn hair. must have made a Jewish house a poignant and pathetic place on the day of mourning.

When death came, a mourner was forbidden to work, to anoint himself or to wear shoes. Even the poorest man must cease from work for three days. He must not travel with goods; and the

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prohibition of work extended even to his servants. He must sit with head bound up. He must not shave, or "do anything for his comfort." He must not read the Law or the Prophets, for to read these books is joy. He was allowed to read Job, Jeremiah and Lamentations. He must eat only in his own house, and he must abstain altogether from flesh and wine. He must not leave the town or village for thirty days. It was the custom not to eat at a table, but to eat sitting on the floor, using a chair as a table. It was the custom, which still survives, to eat eggs dipped in ashes and salt.

There was one curious custom. All water from the house, and from the three houses on each side, was emptied out, because it was said that the Angel of Death procured death with a sword dipped in water taken from close at hand. There was one peculiarly pathetic custom. In the case of a young life cut off too soon, if the young person had never been married, a form of marriage service was part of the burial rites. For the time of mourning the mourner was exempt from the keeping of the law, because he was supposed to be beside himself, mad with grief.

The mourner must go to the synagogue; and when he entered the people faced him and said, "Blessed is he that comforteth the mourner." The Jewish prayer book has a special prayer to be used before meat in the house of the mourner.

"Blessed art thou, O God, our Lord, King of the Universe,
God of our fathers, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier,
the Holy One of Jacob, the King of Life, who art good and doest
good; the God of truth, the righteous Judge who judgest in
righteousness, who takest the soul in judgment, and rulest alone in
the universe, who doest in it according to his will and all his ways
are in Judgment, and we are his people, and his servants, and in
everything we are bound to praise him and to bless him, who
shields all the calamities of Israel, and will shield us in this
calamity, and from this mourning will bring us to life and peace.
Comfort, O God, our Lord, all the mourners of Jerusalem that
mourn in our sorrow. Comfort them in their mourning, and make
them rejoice in their agony as a man is comforted by his mother.
Blessed art thou, O God, the Comforter of Zion, thou that buildest
again Jerusalem."

That prayer is later than New Testament times, but it is against the background of the earlier, unrestrained expressions of grief that we must read this story of the girl who had died.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 5:40-43

THE DIFFERENCE FAITH MAKES

Mark 5:40-43

But he put them all out, and he took with him the father of the little girl, and the mother and his own friends, and went into the room where the little girl was. He took the little girl by the hand, and he said to her, "Maid! I say to you, Arise!" Immediately the maid arose and walked around, for she was about twelve years of age. And immediately they were amazed with a great astonishment. He gave them strong injunctions that no one should know about this. And he ordered that something to eat should be given to her.

There is a very lovely thing here. In the gospel itself, "Maid! Arise" is "Talitha (GSN5008) Cumi (GSN2891)", which is Aramaic. How did this little bit of Aramaic get itself embedded in the Greek of the gospels? There can be only one reason. Mark got his information from Peter. For the most part, outside of Palestine at least, Peter, too, would have to speak in Greek. But Peter had been there; he was one of the chosen three, the inner circle, who had seen this happen. And he could never forget Jesus' voice. In his mind and memory he could hear that "Talitha (GSN5008) Cumi (GSN2891)" all his life. The love, the gentleness, the caress of it lingered with him forever, so much so that he was unable to think of it in Greek at all, because his memory could hear it only in the voice of Jesus and in the very words that Jesus spoke.

This passage is a story of contrasts.

(i) There is the contrast between the despair of the mourners and the hope of Jesus. "Don't bother the Teacher," they said. "There's nothing anyone can do now." "Don't be afraid," said Jesus, "only believe." In the one place it is the voice of despair that speaks; in the other the voice of hope.

(ii) There is the contrast between the unrestrained distress of the mourners and the calm serenity of Jesus. They were wailing and weeping and tearing their hair and rending their garments in a paroxysm of distress; he was calm and quiet and serene and in control.

Why this difference? It was due to Jesus' perfect confidence and trust in God. The worst human disaster can be met with courage and gallantry when we meet it with God. They laughed him to scorn because they thought his hope was groundless and his calm mistaken. But the great fact of the Christian life is that what looks completely impossible with men is possible with God. What on merely human grounds is far too good to be true, becomes blessedly true when God is there. They laughed him to scorn, but their laughter must have turned to amazed wonder when they realized what God can do. There is nothing beyond facing, and there is nothing beyond conquest--not even death--when it is faced and conquered in the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 6:1-6

WITHOUT HONOUR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

Mark 6:1-6

Jesus left there and came into his own native place, and his disciples went with him. When the Sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue. Many, as they listened, were amazed. "Where," they said, "did this man get this knowledge? What wisdom is this that has been given to him? And how can such wonderful things keep happening through his hands? Is not this the carpenter, Mary's son, the brother of James and Joses and Judah and Simon? Are his sisters not here with us?" And they took offence at him. So Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own native place, and amongst his own kinsmen and in his own family." And he was not able to do any wonderful deeds there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he was amazed by their unwillingness to believe. He made a tour of the villages teaching.

When Jesus came to Nazareth he put himself to a very severe test. He was coming to his home town; and there are no severer critics of any man than those who have known him since his boyhood. It was never meant to be a private visit simply to see his old home and his own people. He came attended by his disciples. That is to say he came as a Rabbi. The Rabbis moved about the country accompanied by their little circle of disciples, and it was as a teacher, with his disciples, that Jesus came.

He went into the synagogue and he taught. His teaching was greeted not with wonder but with a kind of contempt. "They took offence at him." They were scandalised that a man who came from a background like Jesus should say and do things such as he. Familiarity had bred a mistaken contempt.

They refused to listen to what he had to say for two reasons.

(i) They said, "Is not this the carpenter?" The word used for carpenter is tekton (GSN5045). Now tekton (GSN5045) does mean a worker in wood, but it means more than merely a joiner. It means a craftsman. In Homer the tekton (GSN5045) is said to build ships and houses and temples. In the old days, and still to-day in many places, there could be found in little towns and villages a craftsman who would build you anything from a chicken-coop to a house; the kind of man who could build a wall, mend a roof, repair a gate; the craftsman, the handy-man, who with few or no instruments and with the simplest tools could turn his hand to any job. That is what Jesus was like. But the point is that the people of Nazareth despised Jesus because he was a working-man. He was a man of the people, a layman. a simple man--and therefore they despised him.

One of the leaders of the Labour movement was that great soul Will Crooks. He was born into a home where one of his earliest recollections was seeing his mother crying because she had no idea where the next meal was to come from. He started work in a blacksmith's shop at five shillings a week. He became a fine craftsman and one of the bravest and straightest men who ever lived. He entered municipal politics and became the first Labour Mayor of any London borough. There were people who were offended when Will Crooks became Mayor of Poplar. In a crowd one day a lady

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Mark 6:1-6

said with great disgust, "They've made that common fellow, Crooks, Mayor, and he's no better than a working man." A man in the crowd--Will Crooks himself--turned round and raised his hat. "Quite right, madam," he said. "I am not better than a working man."

The people of Nazareth despised Jesus because he was a working man. To us that is his glory, because it means that God, when he came to earth, claimed no exemptions. He took upon himself the common life with all its common tasks.

The accidents of birth and fortune and pedigree have nothing to do with manhood. As Pope had it,

"Worth makes the man, and want of it the fellow;
The rest is all but leather or prunello."

As Burns had it,

"A prince can mak' a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a'that!
But an honest man's aboon his might--
Guid faith, he mauna fa'that!
For a'that, an'a'that,
Their dignities an'a'that,
The pith o' sense an'pride o'worth
Are higher rank than a'that."

We must ever beware of the temptation to evaluate men by externals and incidentals, and not by native worth.

(ii) They said, "Is not this Mary's son? Do we not know his brothers and his sisters?" The fact that they called Jesus Mary's son tells us that Joseph must have been dead. Therein we have the key to one of the enigmas of Jesus' life. Jesus was only thirty-three when he died; and yet he did not leave Nazareth until he was thirty. (Lk.3:23.) Why this long delay? Why this lingering in Nazareth while a world waited to be saved? The reason was that Joseph died young and Jesus took upon himself the support of his mother and of his brothers and sisters; and only when they were old enough to fend for themselves did he go forth. He was faithful in little, and therefore in the end God gave him much to do.

But the people of Nazareth despised him because they knew his family. Thomas Campbell was a very considerable poet. His father had no sense of poetry at all. When Thomas' first book emerged with his name on it, he sent a copy to his father. The old man took it up and looked at it. It was really the binding and not the contents at all that he was looking at. "Who would have thought," he said in wonder, "that our Tom could have made a book like that?" Sometimes when familiarity should breed a growing respect it breeds an increasing and easy-going familiarity. Sometimes we are too near people to see their greatness.

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Mark 6:1-6

The result of all this was that Jesus could do no mighty works in Nazareth. The atmosphere was wrong; and there are some things that cannot be done unless the atmosphere is right.

(i) It is still true that no man can be healed if he refuses to be healed. Margot Asquith tells of the death of Neville Chamberlain. Everyone knows how that man's policy turned out in such a way that it broke his heart. Margot Asquith met his doctor, Lord Horder. "You can't be much of a doctor," she said, "as Neville Chamberlain was only a few years older than Winston Churchill, and I should have said he was a strong man. Were you fond of him?" Lord Horder replied, "I was very fond of him. I like all unlovable men. I have seen too many of the other kind. Chamberlain suffered from shyness. He did not want to live; and when a man says that, no doctor can save him." We may call it faith; we may call it the will to live; but without it no man can survive.

(ii) There can be no preaching in the wrong atmosphere. Our churches would be different places if congregations would only remember that they preach far more than half the sermon. In an atmosphere of expectancy the poorest effort can catch fire. In an atmosphere of critical coldness or bland indifference, the most Spirit-packed utterance can fall lifeless to the earth.

(iii) There can be no peace-making in the wrong atmosphere. If men have come together to hate, they will hate. If men have come together to refuse to understand, they will misunderstand. If men have come together to see no other point of view but their own, they will see no other. But if men have come together, loving Christ and seeking to love each other, even those who are most widely separated can come together in him.

There is laid on us the tremendous responsibility that we can either help or hinder the work of Jesus Christ. We can open the door wide to him--or we can slam it in his face.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 6:7-11

HERALDS OF THE KING

Mark 6:7-11

Jesus called The Twelve to him and he began to send them out in twos. He gave them power over unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for the road except a staff. He ordered them not to take bread, or a wallet, or a copper coin in their belts. He ordered them to wear sandals and, he said, "You must not put on two tunics." He said to them, "Wherever you enter into a house, stay there, until you leave that place; and, if any place refuses to give you hospitality, and, if in any place they will not listen to you, when you leave there, shake off the dust from the soles of your feet, to bear witness to the fact that they were guilty of such conduct."

We will understand all the references in this passage better if we have in our minds a picture of what the Jew in Palestine in the time of Jesus ordinarily wore. He had five articles of dress.

(i) The innermost garment was the chiton (GSN5509), or sindon (GSN4616); or tunic. It was very simple. It was simply a long piece of cloth folded over and sewn down one side. It was long enough to reach almost to the feet. Holes were cut in the top corners for the arms. Such garments were commonly sold without any hole for the head to go through. That was to prove that the garment was in fact new, and it was to allow the buyer to arrange the neck-line as he or she wished. For instance, the neckline was different for men and women. It had to be lower in the case of women so that a mother could suckle her baby. At its simplest, this inner garment was little more than a sack with holes cut in the corners. In a more developed form it had long close-fitting sleeves; and sometimes it was opened up so that it was made to button down the front like a cassock.

(ii) The outer garment was called the himation (GSN2440). It was used as a cloak by day and as a blanket by night. It was composed of a piece of cloth seven feet from left to right and four and a half feet from top to bottom. One and a half feet at each side was folded in and in the top corner of the folded part holes were cut for the arms to go through. It was therefore almost square. Usually it was made of two strips of cloth, each seven feet by a little more than two feet, sewn together. The seam came down the back. But a specially carefully made himation (GSN2440) might be woven of one piece, as Jesus' robe was (Jn.19:23). This was the main article of dress.

(iii) There was the girdle. It was worn over the two garments we have already described. The skirts of the tunic could be hitched up under the girdle for work or for running. Sometimes the tunic was hitched above the girdle, and in the hollow place so made above the girdle a parcel or a package could be carried. The girdle was often double for the eighteen inches from each end. The double part formed a pocket in which money was carried.

(iv) There was the head-dress. It was a piece of cotton or linen about a yard square. It could be white, or blue, or black. sometimes it was made of coloured silk. It was folded diagonally and then placed on the head so that it protected the back of the neck, the cheek-bones, and the eyes from the heat and glare of the sun. It was held in place by a circlet of easily stretched, semi-elastic wool round the head.

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(v) There were the sandals. They were merely flat soles of leather, wood or matted grass. The soles had thongs at the edges through which a strap passed to hold the sandal on to the foot.

The wallet may be one of two things.

(a) It may be the ordinary travellers' bag. This was made of a kid's skin. Often the animal was skinned whole and the skin retained the original shape of the animal, legs, tail, head and all! It had a strap at each side and was slung over the shoulder. In it the shepherd, or pilgrim, or traveller carried bread and raisins, and olives, and cheese enough to last him for a day or two.

(b) There is a very interesting suggestion. The Greek word is pera (GSN4082); and it can mean a collecting-bag. Very often the priests and devotees went out with these bags to collect contributions for their temple and their god. They have been described as "pious robbers with their booty growing from village to village." There is an inscription in which a man who calls himself a slave of the Syrian goddess says that he brought in seventy bags full each journey for his lady.

If the first meaning is taken, Jesus meant that his disciples must take no supplies for the road, but must trust God for everything. If the second meaning is taken, it means that they must not be like the rapacious priests. They must go about giving and not getting.

There are two other interesting things here.

(i) It was the Rabbinic law that when a man entered the Temple courts he must put off his staff and shoes and money girdle. All ordinary things were to be set aside on entering the sacred place. It may well be that Jesus was thinking of this, and that he meant his men to see that the humble homes they were to enter were every bit as sacred as the Temple courts.

(ii) Hospitality was a sacred duty in the East. When a stranger entered a village, it was not his duty to search for hospitality; it was the duty of the village to offer it. Jesus told his disciples that if hospitality was refused, and if doors and ears were shut, they must shake off the dust of that place from their feet when they left. The Rabbinic law said that the dust of a Gentile country was defiled, and that when a man entered Palestine from another country he must shake off every particle of dust of the unclean land. It was a pictorial formal denial that a Jew could have any fellowship even with the dust of a heathen land. It is as if Jesus said, "If they refuse to listen to you, the only thing you can do is to treat them as a rigid Jew would treat a Gentile house. There can be no fellowship between them and you."

So we can see that the mark of the Christian disciple was to be utter simplicity, complete trust, and the generosity which is out always to give and never to demand.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 6:12-13

THE MESSAGE AND THE MERCY OF THE KING

Mark 6:12-13

So they went out and heralded forth the summons to repentance; and they cast out many demons, and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Here in brief summary is an account of the work that the Twelve did when Jesus sent them out.

(i) To the people they brought Jesus' message. The word used is literally that used for a herald's proclamation. When the apostles went out to preach to men, they did not create a message; they brought a message. They did not tell people what they believed and what they considered probable; they told people what Jesus had told them. It was not their opinions they brought to men; it was God's truth. The message of the prophets always began, "Thus saith the Lord." The man who would bring an effective message to others must first receive it from God.

(ii) To the people they brought the King's Message; and the King's message was, "Repent!" Clearly that was a disturbing message. To repent means to change one's mind and then to fit one's actions to this change. Repentance means a change of heart and a change of action. It is bound to hurt, for it involves the bitter realization that the way we were following is wrong. It is bound to disturb, because it means a complete reversal of life.

That is precisely why so few people do repent--for the last thing most people desire is to be disturbed. Lady Asquith, in a vivid phrase, speaks of people who "dawdle towards death." So many people do that. They resent all strenuous activity. Life for them is "a land where it is always afternoon." In some ways the positive, vivid, swashbuckling sinner who is crashing his way to some self-chosen goal is a more attractive person than the negative, nebulous, loiterer who drifts spinelessly and without direction through life.

There is a passage in the novel *Quo Vadis?* Vinicius, the young Roman, has fallen in love with a girl who is a Christian. Because he is not a Christian she will have nothing to do with him. He follows her to the secret night gathering of the little group of Christians, and there, unknown to anyone, he listens to the service. He hears Peter preach, and, as he listens, something happens to him. "He felt that if he wished to follow that teaching, he would have to place on a burning pile all his thoughts, habits and character, his whole nature up to that moment, burn them into ashes and then fill himself with a life altogether different, and an entirely new soul."

That is repentance. But what if a man has no other desire than to be left alone? The change is not necessarily from robbery, theft, murder, adultery and glaring sins. The change may be from a life that is completely selfish, instinctively demanding, totally inconsiderate, the change from a self-centred to a God-centred life--and a change like that hurts. W. M. Macgregor quotes a saying of the Bishop in *Les Misérables*. "I always bothered some of them; for through me the outside air came at them; my presence in their company made them feel as if a door had been left open and they were in a draught." Repentance is no sentimental feeling sorry; repentance is a revolutionary thing--that is why so few repent.

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(iii) To the people they brought the King's mercy. Not only did they bring this shattering demand upon men; they brought also help and healing. They brought liberation to poor, demon-possessed men and women. From the beginning Christianity has aimed to bring health to body and to soul; it has always aimed not only at soul salvation, but at whole salvation. It brought not only a hand to lift from moral wreckage, but a hand to lift from physical pain and suffering. It is most suggestive that they anointed with oil. In the ancient world oil was regarded as a panacea. Galen, the great Greek doctor, said, "Oil is the best of all instruments for healing diseased bodies." In the hands of the servants of Christ the old cures acquired a new virtue. The strange thing is that they used the things which men's limited knowledge knew at that time; but the spirit of Christ gave the healer a new power and the old cure a new virtue. the power of God became available in common things to the faith of men.

So the Twelve brought to men the message and the mercy of the King, and that remains the church's task today and every day.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 6:14-15

THREE VERDICTS ON JESUS

Mark 6:14-15

King Herod heard about Jesus, for his name was known everywhere. He said, "John the Baptizer has risen from the dead. That is why these wonderful powers work through him." Others said, "It is Elijah." Others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the famous prophets."

By this time news of Jesus had penetrated all over the country. The tale had reached the ears of Herod. The reason why he had not up to this time heard of Jesus may well be due to the fact that his official residence in Galilee was in Tiberias. Tiberias was largely a Gentile city, and, as far as we know, Jesus never set foot in it. But the mission of the Twelve had taken Jesus' fame all over Galilee, so that his name was upon every lip. In this passage we have three verdicts upon Jesus.

(i) There is the verdict of a guilty conscience. Herod had been guilty of allowing the execution of John the Baptizer, and now he was haunted by what he had done. Whenever a man does an evil thing, the whole world becomes his enemy. Inwardly, he cannot command his thoughts; and, whenever he allows himself to think, his thoughts return to the wicked thing that he has done. No man can avoid living with himself; and when his inward self is an accusing self, life becomes intolerable. Outwardly, he lives in the fear that he will be found out and that some day the consequences of his evil deed will catch up on him.

Some time ago a convict escaped from a Glasgow prison. After forty-eight hours of liberty he was recaptured, cold and hungry and exhausted. He said that it was not worth it. "I didn't have a minute," he said. "Hunted, hunted all the time. You don't have a chance. You can't stop to eat. You can't stop to sleep."

Hunted--that is the word which so well describes the life of the man who has done some evil thing. When Herod heard of Jesus, the first thing that flashed into his mind was that this was John the Baptizer whom he had killed, come back to reckon with him. Because the sinning life is the haunted life, sin is never worth the cost.

(ii) There is the verdict of the nationalist. Some thought that this Jesus was Elijah come again. The Jews waited for the Messiah. There were many ideas about the Messiah, but the commonest of all was that he would be a conquering king who would first give the Jews back their liberty and who would then lead them on a triumphant campaign throughout the world. It was an essential part of that belief that, before the coming of the Messiah, Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, would come again to be his herald and his forerunner. Even to this day, when the Jews celebrate the Passover Feast, they leave at the table an empty chair called Elijah's chair. They place it there with a glass of wine before it, and at one part of their service they go to the door and fling it wide open that Elijah may come in and bring at last the long-awaited news that the Messiah has come.

This is the verdict of the man who desires to find in Jesus the realization of his own ambitions. He thinks of Jesus, not as someone to whom he must submit and whom he must obey; he thinks of Jesus as someone he can use. Such a man thinks more of his own ambitions than of the will of God.

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Mark 6:14-15

(iii) There is the verdict of the man who is waiting for the voice of God. There were those who saw in Jesus a prophet. In those days the Jews were pathetically conscious that for three hundred years the voice of prophecy had been silent. They had listened to the arguments and the legal disputations of the Rabbis; they had listened to the moral lectures of the synagogue; but it was three long centuries since they had listened to a voice which proclaimed, "Thus saith the Lord." Men in those days were listening for the authentic voice of God--and in Jesus they heard it. It is true that Jesus was more than a prophet. He did not bring only the voice of God. He brought to men the very power and the very life and the very being of God. But those who saw in Jesus a prophet were at least more right than the conscience-stricken Herod and the expectant nationalists. If they had got that length in their thoughts of Jesus, it was not impossible that they might take the further step and see in him the Son of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 6:16-29

AN EVIL WOMAN'S REVENGE

Mark 6:16-29

But when Herod heard about it, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded, risen from the dead." For Herod had sent and seized John and had bound him in prison because of the affair of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife--because he had married her. For John had said to Herod, "It is not right for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias set herself against him, and wished to kill him, and she could not succeed in doing so, for Herod was afraid of John, because he well knew that he was a just and holy man, and he kept him safe. When Herod listened to John he did not know what to do, and yet he found a certain pleasure in listening to him. But a day of opportunity came, when, on his birthday, Herod was giving a banquet to his courtiers and to his captains and to the leading men of Galilee. Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced before them, and she pleased Herod and those who were reclining at table with him.

The king said to the maiden, "Ask me for anything you like and I will give it to you." He swore to her, "Whatever you ask me for, I will give you, even up to half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What am I to ask for myself?" She said, "John the Baptizer's head." At once she hurried into the king and made her request. "I wish," she said, "that here and now you will give me the head of John the Baptizer on a plate." The king was grief-stricken, but, because of the oath he had taken, and because he had taken it in front of his guests, he did not wish to break his word to her. So immediately the king despatched an executioner with orders to bring his head. The executioner went away and beheaded him in prison, and brought his head on a plate, and gave it to the maiden, and the maiden gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.

This story has all the simplicity of tremendous drama.

First, let us look at the scene. The scene was the castle of Machaerus. Machaerus stood on a lonely ridge, surrounded by terrible ravines, overlooking the east side of the Dead Sea. It was one of the loneliest and grimmest and most unassailable fortresses in the world. To this day the dungeons are there, and the traveller can still see the staples and the iron hooks in the wall to which John must have been bound. It was in that bleak and desolate fortress that the last act of John's life was played out.

Second, let us look at the characters. The marriage tangles of the Herod family are quite incredible, and their inter-relations are so complicated that they become almost impossible to work out. When Jesus was born Herod the Great was king. He was the king who was responsible for the massacre of the children in Bethlehem (Matt.2:16-18). Herod the Great was married many times. Towards the end of his life he became almost insanely suspicious, and murdered member after member of his own family, until it became a Jewish saying, "It is safer to be Herod's pig than Herod's son."

First, he married Doris, by whom he had a son, Antipater, whom he murdered. Then he married Mariamne, the Hasmonean, by whom he had two sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, whom he also murdered. Herodias, the villainess of the present passage, was the daughter of this Aristobulus.

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Mark 6:16-29

Herod the Great then married another Mariamne, called the Boethusian. By her he had a son called Herod Philip. Herod Philip married Herodias, who was the daughter of his half-brother, Aristobulus, and who was therefore his own niece. By Herodias, Herod Philip had a daughter called Salome, who is the girl who danced before Herod of Galilee in our passage. Herod the Great then married Malthake, by whom he had two sons--Archelaus and Herod Antipas who is the Herod of our passage and the ruler of Galilee. The Herod Philip who married Herodias originally, and who was the father of Salome, inherited none of Herod the Great's dominions. He lived as a wealthy private citizen in Rome. Herod Antipas visited him in Rome.

There he seduced Herodias and persuaded her to leave her husband and marry him.

Note who Herodias was: (a) she was the daughter of his half-brother, Aristobulus, and therefore his niece; and (b) she was the wife of his half-brother Herod Philip, and therefore his sister-in-law. Previously Herod Antipas had been married to a daughter of the king of the Nabataeans, an Arabian country. She escaped to her father who invaded Herod's territory to avenge his daughter's honour and heavily defeated Herod. To complete this astounding picture Herod the Great finally married Cleopatra of Jerusalem, by whom he had a son called Philip the Tetrarch. This Philip married Salome who was at one and the same time (a) the daughter of Herod Philip, his half brother, and (b) the daughter of Herodias, who herself was the daughter of Aristobulus, another of his half brothers. Salome was therefore at one and the same time his niece and his grand-niece.

By putting this in the form of a table it is easier to see:

- . HEROD THE GREAT (married 5 women)
- .
 - . 1. Doris
 - . 1. Antipater, murdered by his father
 - .
 - . 2. Mariamne the Hasmonean
 - . 1. Alexander, murdered by his father
 - . 2. Aristobulus, murdered by his father
 - . a. Herodias
 - .
 - . 3. Mariamne the Boethusian
 - . 1. Herod Philip, who married Herodias
 - . a. Salome
 - .
 - . 4. Malthake
 - . 1. Herod Antipas, who married Herodias
 - . 2. Archelaus
 - .
 - . 5. Cleopatra of Jerusalem
 - . 1. Philip the Tetrach, who married Salome

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Mark 6:16-29

Seldom in history can there have been such a series of matrimonial entanglements as existed in the Herod family. By marrying Herodias, his brother's wife, Herod had broken the Jewish law (Lev.18:16; Lev.20:21) and had outraged the laws of decency and of morality.

Because of this adulterous marriage and because of Herod's deliberate seduction of his brother's wife, John had publicly rebuked him. It took courage to rebuke in public an oriental despot who had the power of life and death, and John's courage in rebuking evil wherever he saw it is commemorated in the Prayer-book collect for St. John the Baptist's Day.

"Almighty God, by whose providence thy servant, John the Baptist, was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake."

In spite of John's rebuke Herod still feared and respected him, for John was so obviously a man of sincerity and of goodness; but with Herodias it was different. She was implacably hostile to John and determined to eliminate him. She got her chance at Herod's birthday feast which he was celebrating with his courtiers and his captains. Into that feast her daughter Salome came to dance. Solo dances in those days in such society were disgusting and licentious pantomimes. That a princess of the royal blood should so expose and demean herself is beyond belief because such dances were the art of professional prostitutes. The very fact that she did this is a grim commentary on the character of Salome, and of the mother who allowed and encouraged her to do so. But Herod was pleased; and Herod offered her any reward; and thus Herodias got the chance she had plotted for so long; and John, to gratify her spleen, was executed.

There is something to learn from every character in this story.

(i) Herod stands revealed before us.

(a) He was an odd mixture. At one and the same time he feared John and respected him. At one and the same time he dreaded John's tongue and yet found pleasure in listening to him. There is nothing in this world so queer a mixture as a human being. It is man's characteristic that he is a mixture. Boswell, in his London Diary, tells us how he sat in church enjoying the worship of God and yet at the same time was planning how to pick up a prostitute in the streets of London that same night.

The strange fact about man is that he is haunted both by sin and by goodness. Robert Louis Stevenson speaks about people "clutching the remnants of virtue in the brothel or on the scaffold." Sir Norman Birkett, the great Q.C. and judge, speaks of the criminals he had defended and tried. "They may seek to escape but they cannot; they are condemned to some nobility; afl their lives long the desire for good is at their heels, the implacable hunter." Herod could fear John and love him,

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Mark 6:16-29

could hate his message and yet not be able to free himself from its insistent fascination. Herod was simply a human being. Are we so very different?

(b) Herod was a man who acted on impulse. He made his reckless promise to Salome without thinking. It may well be that he made it when he was more than a little drunk and floundering with wine. Let a man have a care. Let a man think before he speaks. Let him never by self-indulgence get into a state when he loses his powers of judgment and is liable to do things for which afterwards he will be very sorry.

(c) Herod feared what men might say. He kept his promise to Salome because he had made it in front of his cronies and was unwilling to break it. He feared their jeers, their laughter; he feared that they would think him weak. Many a man has done things he afterwards bitterly regretted because he had not the moral courage to do the right. Many a man has made himself far worse than he is because he feared the laughter of his so-called friends.

(ii) Salome and Herodias stand revealed before us. There is a certain greatness about Herodias. Years after this her Herod sought the title of King. He went to Rome to plead for it; instead of giving him the title the Emperor banished him to Gaul for having the insolence and the insubordination to ask for such a title. Herodias was told that she need not share this exile, that she might go free, and she proudly answered that where her husband went she went too.

Herodias shows us what an embittered woman can do. There is nothing in this world as good as a good woman, and nothing as bad as a bad woman. The Jewish Rabbis had a quaint saying. They said that a good woman might marry a bad man, for by so doing she would end by making him as good as herself. But they said that a good man might never marry a bad woman, for she would inevitably drag him down to her own level. The trouble with Herodias was that she wished to eliminate the one man who had the courage to confront her with her sin. She wished to do as she liked with no one to remind her of the moral law. She murdered John that she might sin in peace. She forgot that while she need no longer meet John, she still had to meet God.

(iii) John the Baptizer stands revealed before us. He stands as the man of courage. He was a child of the desert and of the wide open spaces, and to imprison him in the dark dungeons of Machaerus must have been the last refinement of torture. But John preferred death to falsehood. He lived for the truth and he died for it. The man who brings to men the voice of God acts as a conscience. Many a man would silence his conscience if he could, and therefore the man who speaks for God must always take his life and his fortune in his hands.

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Mark 6:30-34

THE PATHOS OF THE CROWD

Mark 6:30-34

The apostles came together again to Jesus, and they told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come you by yourselves into a lonely place, and rest for a while." For there were many coming and going and they could not find time even to eat. So they went away in the boat to a lonely place all by themselves. Now many saw them going away and recognized them; and they ran together there on foot from all the towns and went on ahead of them. When Jesus disembarked he saw a great crowd, and he was moved to the depths of his being with pity for them, because they were like sheep who had no shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

When the disciples came back from their mission they reported to Jesus all that they had done. The demanding crowds were so insistent that they had no time even to eat; so Jesus told them to come with him to a lonely place on the other side of the lake that they might have peace and rest for a little time.

Here we see what might be called the rhythm of the Christian life. The Christian life is a continuous going into the presence of God from the presence of men and coming out into the presence of men from the presence of God. It is like the rhythm of sleep and work. We cannot work unless we have our time of rest; and sleep will not come unless we have worked until we are tired.

There are two dangers in life. First, there is the danger of a too constant activity. No man can work without rest; and no man can live the Christian life unless he gives himself times with God. It may well be that the whole trouble in our lives is that we give God no opportunity to speak to us, because we do not know how to be still and to listen; we give God no time to recharge us with spiritual energy and strength, because there is no time when we wait upon him. How can we shoulder life's burdens if we have no contact with him who is the Lord of all good life? How can we do God's work unless in God's strength? And how can we receive that strength unless we seek in quietness and in loneliness the presence of God?

Second, there is the danger of too much withdrawal. Devotion that does not issue in action is not real devotion. Prayer that does not issue in work is not real prayer. We must never seek the fellowship of God in order to avoid the fellowship of men but in order to fit ourselves better for it. The rhythm of the Christian life is the alternate meeting with God in the secret place and serving men in the market place.

But the rest which Jesus sought for himself and for his disciples was not to be. The crowds saw Jesus and his men going away. At this particular place it was four miles across the lake by boat and ten miles round the top of the lake on foot. On a windless day, or with a contrary wind, a boat might take some time to make the passage, and an energetic person could walk round the top of the lake and be there before the boat arrived. That is exactly what happened; and when Jesus and his men stepped out of the boat the very crowd from which they had sought some little peace was there waiting for them.

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Mark 6:30-34

Any ordinary man would have been intensely annoyed. The rest Jesus so much desired and which he had so well earned was denied to him. His privacy was invaded. Any ordinary man would have resented it all, but Jesus was moved with pity at the pathos of the crowd. He looked at them; they were so desperately in earnest; they wanted so much what he alone could give them; to him they were like sheep who had no shepherd. What did he mean?

(i) A sheep without the shepherd cannot find the way. Left to ourselves we get lost in life. Principal Cairns spoke of people who feel like "lost children out in the rain." Dante has a line where he says, "I woke up in the middle of the wood, and it was dark, and there was no clear way before me." Life can be so bewildering. We can stand at some cross-roads and not know what way to take. It is only when Jesus leads and we follow that we can find the way.

(ii) A sheep without the shepherd cannot find its pasture and its food. In this life we are bound to seek for sustenance. We need the strength which can keep us going; we need the inspiration which can lift us out of ourselves and above ourselves. When we seek it elsewhere our minds are still unsatisfied, our hearts still restless, our souls still unfed. We can gain strength for life only from him who is the living bread.

(iii) A sheep without the shepherd has no defence against the dangers which threaten it. It can defend itself neither from the robbers nor the wild beasts. If life has taught us one thing it must be that we cannot live it alone. No man can defend himself from the temptations which assail him and from the evil of the world which attacks him. Only in the company of Jesus can we walk in the world and keep our garments unspotted from it. Without him we are defenceless; with him we are safe.

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Mark 6:35-44

LITTLE IS MUCH IN THE HANDS OF JESUS

Mark 6:35-44

When it was now late the disciples came to Jesus. "The place," they said, "is lonely, and it is now late. Send them away that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." He answered, "You give them something to eat." "Are we," they said to him, "to go away and buy ten pounds worth of loaves and so give them something to eat?" "How many loaves have you?" he said to them. "Go and see!" When they had found out, they said, "Five and two fishes." He ordered them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in sections of hundreds and of fifties. He took the five loaves and the two fishes, and he looked up into the heaven and blessed them and broke the loaves. He gave them to the disciples to serve the people with them. and he divided up the two fishes among them all. And they all ate until they were completely satisfied; and they gathered up the broken pieces of bread and what was left of the fishes--twelve basketsful.

And those who ate the loaves amounted to five thousand men.

It is a notable fact that no miracle seems to have made such an impression on the disciples as this, because this is the only miracle of Jesus which is related in all four gospels. We have already seen how Mark's gospel really embodies the preaching material of Peter. To read this story, so simply and yet so dramatically told, is to read something that reads exactly like an eye-witness account. Let us note some of the vivid and realistic details.

They sat down on the green grass. It is as if Peter was seeing the whole thing in his mind's eye again. It so happens that this little descriptive phrase provides us with quite a lot of information. The only time when the grass would be green would be in the late springtime, in mid-April. So it is then that this miracle must have taken place. At that time the sun set at 6 p.m., so this must have happened some time in the late afternoon.

Mark tells us that they sat down in sections of a hundred and of fifty. The word used for sections (prasiai, GSN4237) is a very pictorial word. It is the normal Greek word for the rows of vegetables in a vegetable garden. When you looked at the little groups, as they sat there in their orderly rows, they looked for all the world like the rows of vegetables in a series of garden plots.

At the end they took up twelve basketsful of fragments. No orthodox Jew travelled without his basket (kophinos, GSN2894). The Romans made a jest of the Jew and his basket. There were two reasons for the basket which was a wicker-work affair shaped like a narrow-necked pitcher, broadening out as it went down. First, the very orthodox Jew carried his own food supplies in his basket, so that he would be certain of eating food that was ceremonially clean and pure. Second, many a Jew was an accomplished beggar, and into his basket went the proceeds of his begging. The reason that there were twelve baskets is simply that there were twelve disciples. It was into their own baskets that they frugally gathered up the fragments so that nothing would be lost.

The wonderful thing about this story is that all through it runs an implicit contrast between the attitude of Jesus and the attitude of the disciples.

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Mark 6:35-44

(i) It shows us two reactions to human need. When the disciples saw how late it was, and how tired and hungry the crowd were, they said, "Send them away so that they can find something to eat." In effect they said, "These people are tired and hungry. Get rid of them and let someone else worry about them." Jesus said, "You give them something to eat." In effect Jesus said, "These people are tired and hungry. We must do something about it." There are always the people who are quite aware that others are in difficulty and trouble, but who wish to push the responsibility for doing something about it on to someone else; and there are always the people who when they see someone up against it feel compelled to do something about it themselves. There are those who say, "Let others worry." And there are those who say, "I must worry about my brother's need."

(ii) It shows us two reactions to human resources. When the disciples were asked to give the people something to eat, they insisted that ten pounds, or what the King James Version calls two hundred "pence" was not enough to buy bread for them. The word the King James Version translates penny is denarius. This was a Roman silver coin worth about 3p. It was the standard day's wage of a working man. In effect the disciples were saying, "We could not earn enough in more than six months' work to give this crowd a meal." They really meant "Anything we have got is no use at all."

Jesus said, "What have you got?" They had five loaves. These were not like English loaves: they were more like rolls. John (Jn.6:9) tells us they were barley loaves; and barley loaves were the food of the poorest of the poor. Barley bread was the cheapest and the coarsest of all bread. They had two fishes, which would be about the size of sardines. Tarichaea--which means the salt-fish town--was a well known place on the lake from which salt-fish went out to all over the world. The little salt-fishes were eaten as relish with the dry rolls.

It did not seem much. But Jesus took it and worked wonders with it. In the hands of Jesus little is always much. We may think that we have little of talent or substance to give to Jesus. That is no reason for a hopeless pessimism such as the disciples had. The one fatal thing to say is, "For all I could do, it is not worth my while trying to do anything." If we put ourselves into the hands of Jesus Christ, there is no telling what he can do with us and through us.

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Mark 6:45-52

THE CONQUEST OF THE STORM

Mark 6:45-52

Immediately he made the disciples embark on the boat and go across ahead to Bethsaida while he sent the crowd away. When he had taken leave of them, he went away into a mountain to pray. When it was late the boat was half way across the lake and Jesus was alone upon the land. He saw that they were sore beset as they rowed, for the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he came to them walking on the sea, and it looked as if he meant to pass them by. When they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and they cried out in terror, for they all saw him and they were distracted with fear. At once he spoke with them. "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid." And he came into the boat with them, and the wind sank to rest. And they were exceedingly astonished within themselves, because they did not understand about the loaves because their minds were obtuse.

After the hunger of the crowd had been satisfied, Jesus immediately sent his disciples away before he dismissed the crowd. Why should he do that? Mark does not tell us but most probably we have the explanation in John's account. John tells us that after the crowd had been fed there was a move to take Jesus and to make him king. That was the last thing Jesus desired. It was that very way of power that once, finally and for all, he had rejected at the time of his temptations. He could see it coming. He did not want his disciples to be infected and caught up in this nationalistic outburst. Galilee was the hotbed of revolution. If this movement was not checked, there might well emerge amongst the excitable people a rebellion which would wreck everything and lead to disaster for all concerned. So Jesus sent away his disciples lest they too should become inflamed by this movement, and then he calmed the crowd and bade them farewell.

When he was alone, he went up into a mountain to pray. Thick and fast the problems were descending upon him. There was the hostility of the orthodox people; there was the frightened suspicion of Herod Antipas; there were the political hotheads who would make him a nationalistic Messiah against his will. At this particular time there was many a problem on Jesus' mind and many a burden on his heart.

For some hours he was alone amidst the hills with God. As we have seen, this must have happened about mid-April, and mid-April was the Passover time. Now the Passover was deliberately fixed for the full moon, as Easter still is. The Jewish night ran from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. and it was divided into four watches--6 p.m. to 9 p.m., 9 p.m. to 12 midnight, 12 midnight to 3 a.m., and 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. About three o'clock in the morning Jesus looked from the mountainside out across the lake. The lake was only four miles across at that point, and in the light of the moon it lay stretched out before him. The wind was up and he saw the boat, with his men in it, having a hard struggle to reach the other side.

See what happened. Immediately Jesus saw his friends in trouble his own problems were set aside; the moment for prayer was past; the time for action had come; he forgot himself and went to the help of his friends. That is of the very essence of Jesus. The cry of human need to him surpassed all other claims. His friends needed him; he must go.

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Mark 6:45-52

What happened we do not know, and will never know. The story is cloaked in mystery which defies explanation. What we do know is that he came to them and their storm became a calm. With him beside them nothing mattered any more.

When Augustine was writing about this incident he said, "He came treading the waves; and so he puts all the swelling tumults of life under his feet. Christians--why afraid?" It is the simple fact of life, a fact which has been proved by countless thousands of men and women in every generation, that when Christ is there the storm becomes a calm, the tumult becomes a peace, what cannot be done is done, the unbearable becomes bearable, and men pass the breaking point and do not break. To walk with Christ will be for us also the conquest of the storm.

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Mark 6:53-56

THE DEMANDING CROWDS

Mark 6:53-56

When they had crossed over and reached land they came to Gennesareth, and moored the boat there. When they had disembarked from the boat the people immediately recognized him; and they ran all over that countryside, and, wherever they knew he was, they began to carry to him on pallets those who were ill. And whenever he came into villages or towns or country places, they laid the sick in the open spaces, and they kept begging him to be allowed to touch even the tassel of his robe; and all who touched it were restored to health.

No sooner had Jesus landed on the other side of the lake than once again he was surrounded by crowds. Just sometimes he must have looked on the crowds with a certain wistfulness, because there was hardly a person in them who had not come to get something out of him. They came to get. They came with their insistent demands. They came--to put it bluntly--to use him. What a difference it would have made if, among these crowds, there had been some few who came to give and not to get. In a way it is natural that we should come to Jesus to get things from him, for there are so many things that he alone can give: but it is always shameful to take everything and to give nothing, and yet it is very characteristic of human nature.

(i) There are those who simply make use of their homes. It is specially so with young people. They regard their homes as being there to cater for their comfort and their convenience. It is there they eat and sleep and get things done for them; but surely home is a place to which we ought to contribute, from which we ought not only to be taking all the time.

(ii) There are those who simply make use of their friends. There are some people from whom we never receive a letter unless they want something from us. There are those who regard other people as existing to help them when they need their help, and to be forgotten when they cannot be made of use.

(iii) There are those who simply make use of the church. They desire the church to baptize their children, marry their young people and bury their dead. They are seldom to be seen there unless they wish some service. It is their unconscious attitude that the church exists to serve them, but that they have no duty whatever towards it.

(iv) There are those who seek simply to make use of God. They never remember him unless they need him. Their only prayers are requests, or even demands, made of God. Someone has put it this way. In American hotels there is a boy called the "bell-hop." The hotel guest rings the bell and the bell-hop appears; he will fetch anything the guest wishes on demand. Some people regard God as a kind of universal bell-hop, only to be summoned when something is needed.

If we examine ourselves, we are all, to some extent, guilty of these things. It would rejoice the heart of Jesus if more often we came to him to offer our love, our service, our devotion, and less often to demand from him the help we need.

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Mark 7:1-4

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN

Mark 7:1-4

There gathered together to Jesus the Pharisees, and some of the experts in the law who had come down from Jerusalem. They saw that some of his disciples ate their bread with hands which were ceremonially unclean, that is to say hands which had not undergone the prescribed washings; for the Pharisees, and all the Jews, who hold to the traditions of the elders, do not eat unless they wash their hands, using the fist as the law prescribes; and when they come in from the market-place they do not eat unless they immerse their whole bodies; and there are many other traditions which they observe which relate to the prescribed washings of cups and pitchers and vessels of bronze.

The difference and the argument between Jesus and the Pharisees and the experts in the law, which this chapter relates, are of tremendous importance, for they show us the very essence and core of the divergence between Jesus and the orthodox Jew of his time.

The question asked was, Why do Jesus and his disciples not observe the tradition of the elders? What was this tradition, and what was its moving spirit?

Originally, for the Jew, the Law meant two things; it meant, first and foremost, the Ten Commandments, and, second, the first five books of the Old Testament, or, as they are called, the Pentateuch. Now it is true that the Pentateuch contains a certain number of detailed regulations and instructions; but, in the matter of moral questions, what is laid down is a series of great moral principles which a man must interpret and apply for himself. For long the Jews were content with that. But in the fourth and fifth centuries before Christ there came into being a class of legal experts whom we know as the Scribes. They were not content with great moral principles; they had what can only be called a passion for definition. They wanted these great principles amplified, expanded, broken down until they issued in thousands and thousands of little rules and regulations governing every possible action and every possible situation in life.

These rules and regulations were not written down until long after the time of Jesus. They are what is called the Oral Law; it is they which are the tradition of the elders.

The word elders does not mean, in this phrase, the officials of the synagogue; rather it means the ancients, the great legal experts of the old days, like Hillel and Shammai. Much later, in the third century after Christ, a summary of all these rules and regulations was made and written down, and that summary is known as the Mishnah.

There are two aspects of these scribal rules and regulations which emerge in the argument in this passage. One is about the washing of hands. The Scribes and Pharisees accused the disciples of Jesus of eating with unclean hands. The Greek word is *koinos* (GSN2839). Ordinarily, *koinos* (GSN2839) means common; then it comes to describe something which is ordinary in the sense that it is not sacred, something that is profane as opposed to sacred things; and finally it describes something, as it does here, which is ceremonially unclean and unfit for the service and worship of God.

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Mark 7:1-4

There were definite and rigid rules for the washing of hands. Note that this hand-washing was not in the interests of hygienic purity; it was ceremonial cleanness which was at stake. Before every meal, and between each of the courses, the hands had to be washed, and they had to be washed in a certain way. The hands, to begin with, had to be free of any coating of sand or mortar or gravel or any such substance. The water for washing had to be kept in special large stone jars, so that it itself was clean in the ceremonial sense and so that it might be certain that it had been used for no other purpose, and that nothing had fallen into it or had been mixed with it. First, the hands were held with finger tips pointing upwards; water was poured over them and had to run at least down to the wrist; the minimum amount of water was one quarter of a log, which is equal to one and a half egg-shells full of water. While the hands were still wet each hand had to be cleansed with the fist of the other.

That is what the phrase about using the fist means; the fist of one hand was rubbed into the palm and against the surface of the other. This meant that at this stage the hands were wet with water; but that water was now unclean because it had touched unclean hands. So, next, the hands had to be held with finger tips pointing downwards and water had to be poured over them in such a way that it began at the wrists and ran off at the finger tips. After all that had been done the hands were clean.

To fail to do this was in Jewish eyes, not to be guilty of bad manners, not to be dirty in the health sense, but to be unclean in the sight of God. The man who ate with unclean hands was subject to the attacks of a demon called Shibta. To omit so to wash the hands was to become liable to poverty and destruction. Bread eaten with unclean hands was not better than excrement. A Rabbi who once omitted the ceremony was buried in excommunication. Another Rabbi, imprisoned by the Romans, used the water given to him for handwashing rather than for drinking and in the end nearly perished of thirst, because he was determined to observe the rules of cleanliness rather than satisfy his thirst.

That to the Pharisaic and Scribal Jew was religion. It was ritual, ceremonial, and regulations like that which they considered to be essence of the service of God. Ethical religion was buried under a mass of taboos and rules.

The last verses of the passage deal further with this conception of uncleanness. A thing might in the ordinary sense be completely clean and yet in the legal sense be unclean. There is something about this conception of uncleanness in Lev. 11-15, and in Num. 19. Nowadays we would talk rather of things being tabu than of being unclean. Certain animals were unclean (Lev. 11). A woman after child-birth was unclean; a leper was unclean; anyone who touched a dead body was unclean. And anyone who had so become unclean made unclean anything he in turn touched. A Gentile was unclean; food touched by a Gentile was unclean; any vessel touched by a Gentile was unclean. So, then, when a strict Jew returned from the market place he immersed his whole body in clean water to take away the taint he might have acquired.

Obviously vessels could easily become unclean; they might be touched by an unclean person or by unclean food. This is what our passage means by the washings of cups and pitchers and vessels of bronze. In the Mishnah there are no fewer than twelve treatises on this kind of uncleanness. If we take some actual examples we will see how far this went. A hollow vessel made of pottery could contract uncleanness inside but not outside; that is to say, it did not matter who or what touched it

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outside, but it did matter what touched it inside. If it became unclean it must be broken; and no unbroken piece must remain which was big enough to hold enough oil to anoint the little toe. A flat plate without a rim could not become unclean at all; but a plate with a rim could. If vessels made with leather, bone or glass were flat they could not contract uncleanness at all; if they were hollow they could become unclean outside and inside.

If they were unclean they must be broken; and the break must be a hole at least big enough for a medium-sized pomegranate to pass through. To cure uncleanness earthen vessels must be broken; other vessels must be immersed, boiled, purged with fire--in the case of metal vessels--and polished. A three-legged table could contract uncleanness; if it lost one or two legs it could not; if it lost three legs it could, for then it could be used as a board and a board could become unclean. Things made of metal could become unclean, except a door, a bolt, a lock, a hinge, a knocker and a gutter. Wood used in metal utensils could become unclean; but metal used in wood utensils could not. Thus a wooden key with metal teeth could become unclean; but a metal key with wooden teeth could not.

We have taken some time over these scribal laws, this tradition of the elders, because that is what Jesus was up against. To the scribes and Pharisees these rules and regulations were the essence of religion. To observe them was to please God; to break them was to sin. This was their idea of goodness and of the service of God. In the religious sense Jesus and these people spoke different languages. It was precisely because he had no use for all these regulations that they considered him a bad man. There is a fundamental cleavage here--the cleavage between the man who sees religion as ritual, ceremonial, rules and regulations, and the man who sees in religion loving God and loving his fellow-men.

The next passage will develop this; but it is clear that Jesus' idea of religion and that of the scribes and Pharisees had nothing in common at all.

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Mark 7:5-8

GOD'S LAWS AND MEN'S RULES

Mark 7:5-8

So the Pharisees and the experts in the law asked him, "Why do your disciples not conduct themselves as the tradition of the elders prescribes, but eat bread with hands that are unclean?" He said to them, "Isaiah did well when he prophesied about you hypocrites, as it stands written, 'This people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. This so-called reverence of men is an empty thing, for they teach as doctrine human rules and regulations.' While you hold fast the tradition of men you abandon the command of God."

The scribes and Pharisees saw that the disciples of Jesus did not observe the niceties of the tradition and the code of the oral law in regard to the washing of hands before and during meals, and they asked why. Jesus began by quoting to them a passage from Isa.29:13. There Isaiah accused the people of his day of honouring God with their lips while their hearts were really far away. In principle Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of two things.

(i) He accused them of hypocrisy. The word *hypokrites* (GSN5273) has an interesting and revealing history. It begins by meaning simply one who answers; it goes on to mean one who answers in a set dialogue or a set conversation, that is to say an actor; and finally it means, not simply an actor on the stage, but one whose whole life is a piece of acting without any sincerity behind it at all. Anyone to whom religion is a legal thing, anyone to whom religion means carrying out certain external rules and regulations, anyone to whom religion is entirely connected with the observation of a certain ritual and the keeping of a certain number of tabus is in the end bound to be, in this sense, a hypocrite. The reason is this--he believes that he is a good man if he carries out the correct acts and practices, no matter what his heart and his thoughts are like.

To take the case of the legalistic Jew in the time of Jesus, he might hate his fellow man with all his heart, he might be full of envy and jealousy and concealed bitterness and pride; that did not matter so long as he carried out the correct handwashings and observed the correct laws about cleanness and uncleanness. Legalism takes account of a man's outward actions; but it takes no account at all of his inward feelings. He may well be meticulously serving God in outward things, and bluntly disobeying God in inward things--and that is hypocrisy.

The devout Mohammedan must pray to God a certain number of times each day. To do so he carries his prayer mat; wherever he is, he will unroll the mat, fall upon his knees, say his prayers and then go on. There is a story of a Mohammedan who was pursuing a man with upraised knife to murder him. Just then the call to prayer rang out. Immediately he stopped, spread out his prayer mat, knelt, said his prayer as fast as he could; then rose and continued his murderous pursuit. The prayer was simply a form and a ritual, an outward observance, merely the correct interlude in the career of murder.

There is no greater religious peril than that of identifying religion with outward observance. There is no commoner religious mistake than to identify goodness with certain so-called religious acts. Church-going, bible-reading, careful financial giving, even time-tabled prayer do not make a

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Mark 7:5-8

man a good man. The fundamental question is, how is a man's heart towards God and towards his fellow-men? And if in his heart there are enmity, bitterness, grudges, pride, not all the outward religious observances in the world will make him anything other than a hypocrite.

(ii) The second accusation that Jesus implicitly levelled against these legalists was that they substituted the efforts of human ingenuity for the laws of God. For their guidance for life they did not depend on listening to God; they depended on listening to the clever arguments and debates, the fine-spun niceties, the ingenious interpretations of the legal experts. Cleverness never can be the basis of true religion. True religion can never be the product of man's mind. It must always come, not from a man's ingenious discoveries, but from the simple listening to and accepting the voice of God.

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Mark 7:9-13

AN INIQUITOUS REGULATION

Mark 7:9-13

He said to them, "You make an excellent job of completely nullifying the command of God in order to observe your own tradition. For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother.' And, 'He who speaks evil of his father or mother shall certainly die.' But you say, that, if a man says to his father or mother, 'That by which you might have been helped by me is Korban,'--that is to say, God-dedicated--you no longer allow him to do anything for his father and mother, and you thereby render invalid the word of God by your tradition which you hand on. You do many things like that."

The exact meaning of this passage is very difficult to discover. It hinges on the word Korban (GSN2878) which seems to have undergone two stages of meaning in Jewish usage.

(i) The word meant a gift. It was used to describe something which was specially dedicated to God. A thing which was Korban (GSN2878) was as if it had already been laid upon the altar. That is to say, it was completely set apart from all ordinary purposes and usages and became the property of God. If a man wished to dedicate some of his money or his property to God, he declared it Korban (GSN2878), and thereafter it might never again be used for any ordinary or secular purpose.

It does seem that, even at this stage, the word was capable of very shrewd usage. For instance, a creditor might have a debtor who refused or was unwilling to pay. The creditor might then say, "The debt you owe me is Korban (GSN2878)," that is to say, "The debt you owe me is dedicated to God." From then on the debtor ceased to be in debt to a fellow-man and began to be in debt to God, which was far more serious. It may well be that the creditor could discharge his part of the matter by making a quite small symbolic payment to the Temple, and then keeping the rest for himself. In any event, to introduce the idea of Korban (GSN2878) into this kind of debt was a kind of religious blackmail transforming a debt owed to man into a debt owed to God.

It does seem that the idea of Korban (GSN2878) was already capable of misuse. If that be the idea behind this, the passage speaks of a man declaring his property Korban (GSN2878), sacred to God, and then when his father or mother in dire need comes to him for help, saying, "I am sorry that I cannot give you any help because nothing that I have is available for you because it is dedicated to God." The vow was made an excuse to avoid helping a parent in need. The vow which the scribal legalist insisted upon involved breaking one of the ten commandments which are the very law of God.

(ii) There came a time when Korban (GSN2878) became a much more generalized oath. When a person declared anything Korban (GSN2878) he entirely alienated it from the person to whom he was talking. A man might say, "Korban (GSN2878) that by which I might be profited by you," and, in so doing, he bound himself never to touch, taste, have or handle anything possessed by the person so addressed. Or, he might say, "Korban (GSN2878) that by which you might be profited by me," and, in so saying, he bound himself never to help or to benefit the person so addressed by anything that belonged to himself. If that be the use here, the passage means that, at some time,

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perhaps in a fit of anger or rebellion, a man had said to his parents, "Korban (GSN2878) anything by which you may ever be helped by me," and that afterwards, even if he repented from his rash vow, the scribal legalists declared that it was unbreakable and that he might never again render his parents any assistance.

Whichever be the case--and it is not possible to be certain--this much is sure, that there were cases in which the strict performance of the scribal law made it impossible for a man to carry out the law of the ten commandments.

Jesus was attacking a system which put rules and regulations before the claim of human need. The commandment of God was that the claim of human love should come first; the commandment of the scribes was that the claim of legal rules and regulations should come first. Jesus was quite sure that any regulation which prevented a man from giving help where help was needed was nothing less than a contradiction of the law of God.

We must have a care that we never allow rules to paralyse the claims of love. Nothing that prevents us helping a fellowman can ever be a rule approved by God.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 7:14-23

THE REAL DEFILEMENT

Mark 7:14-23

He called the crowd to him again and said, "Listen to me, all of you and understand. There is nothing which goes into a man from outside which can render him unclean; but it is the things which come out of a man which render the man unclean." When he came into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about this hard saying. He said to them, "So, then, are you too unable to grasp things? Do you not understand that everything that goes into a man from outside cannot render him unclean, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and it is then evacuated from him by natural bodily processes?" (The effect of this saying is to render all foods clean.) But he went on to say, "What comes out of a man, that is what renders the man unclean. it is from within, from the heart, that there come evil designs, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetous deeds, evil deeds, guile, wanton wickedness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they render a man unclean."

Although it may not seem so now, this passage, when it was first spoken, was well-nigh the most revolutionary passage in the New Testament. Jesus has been arguing with the legal experts about different aspects of the traditional law. He has shown the irrelevance of the elaborate handwashings. He has shown how rigid adherence to the traditional law can actually mean disobedience to the law of God. But here he says something more startling yet. He declares that nothing that goes into a man can possibly defile him, for it is received only into his body which rids itself of it in the normal, physical way.

No Jew ever believed that and no orthodox Jew believes it yet. Lev.11 has a long list of animals that are unclean and may not be used for food. How very seriously this was taken can be seen from many an incident in Maccabean times. At that time the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, was determined to root out the Jewish faith. One of the things he demanded was that the Jews should eat pork, swine's flesh but they died in their hundreds rather than do so. "Howbeit many in Israel were fully resolved and confirmed in themselves not to eat any unclean thing. Wherefore they chose rather to die, that they might not be defiled with meats, and that they might not profane the holy covenant; so then they died." (1Macc.1:62-63.) Fourth Maccabees (chapter 7) tells the story of a widow and her seven sons. It was demanded that they should eat swine's flesh. They refused. The first had his tongue cut out, the ends of his limbs cut off; and he was then roasted alive in a pan; the second had his hair and the skin of his skull torn off; one by one they were tortured to death while their aged mother looked on and cheered them on; they died rather than eat meat which to them was unclean.

It is in face of this that Jesus made his revolutionary statement that nothing that goes into a man can make him unclean. He was wiping out at one stroke the laws for which Jews had suffered and died. No wonder the disciples were amazed.

In effect Jesus was saying that things cannot be either unclean or clean in any real religious sense of the term. Only persons can be really defiled; and what defiles a person is his own actions, which are the product of his own heart. This was new doctrine and shatteringly new doctrine. The Jew

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had, and still has, a whole system of things which are clean and unclean. With one sweeping pronouncement Jesus declared the whole thing irrelevant and that uncleanness has nothing to do with what a man takes into his body but everything to do with what comes out of his heart.

Let us look at the things Jesus lists as coming from the heart and making a man unclean.

He begins with evil designs (dialogismoi, GSN1261). Every outward act of sin is preceded by an inward act of choice; therefore Jesus begins with the evil thought from which the evil action comes. Next come fornications (porneiai, GSN4202); later he is to list acts of adultery (moicheiai, GSN3430); but this first word is a wide word--it means every kind of traffic in sexual vice. There follow thefts (klopai, GSN2829). In Greek there are two words for a robber--kleptes (GSN2812) and lestes (GSN3027). Lestes (GSN3027) is a brigand; Barabbas was a lestes (GSN3027) (Jn.18:40) and a brigand may be a very brave man although an outlaw. Kleptes (GSN2812) is a thief; Judas was a kleptes (GSN2812) when he pilfered from the box (Jn.12:6). A kleptes (GSN2812) is a mean, deceitful, dishonourable pilferer, without even the redeeming quality of a certain audacious gallantry that a brigand must have. Murders (phonoi, GSN5408) and adulteries come next in the list and their meaning is clear.

Then comes covetous deeds (pleonexiai, GSN4124). Pleonexia comes from two Greek words meaning to have more. It has been defined as the accursed love of having. It has been defined as "the spirit which snatches at that which it is not right to take," "the baneful appetite for that which belongs to others." It is the spirit which snatches at things, not to hoard them like a miser, but to spend them in lust and luxury. Cowley defined it as, "Rapacious appetite for gain, not for its own sake, but for the pleasure of refunding it immediately through all the channels of pride and luxury." It is not the desire for money and things; it includes the desire for power, the insatiable lust of the flesh. Plato said, "The desire of man is like a sieve or pierced vessel which he ever tries to, and can never fill." Pleonexia (GSN4124) is that lust for having which is in the heart of the man who sees happiness in things instead of in God.

There follows evil deeds. In Greek there are two words for evil--kakos (GSN2560), which describes a thing which in itself is evil, and poneros (GSN4190), which describes a person or a thing which is actively evil. Poneriai (GSN4189) is the word used here. The man who is poneros (GSN4190) is the man in whose heart there is the desire to harm. He is, as Bengel said, "trained in every crime and completely equipped to inflict evil on any man." Jeremy Taylor defined this poneria (GSN4189) as "aptness to do shrewd turns, to delight in mischiefs and tragedies; loving to trouble our neighbour, and to do him ill offices; crossness, perverseness and peevishness of action in our intercourse." Poneria (GSN4189) not only corrupts the man who has it; it corrupts others too. Poneros (GSN4190)--the Evil One--is the title of Satan. The worst of men, the man who is doing Satan's work, is the man who, being bad himself, makes others as bad as himself.

Next comes dolos (GSN1388); translated guile. It comes from a word which means bait; it is used for trickery and deceit. It is used for instance of a mousetrap. When the Greeks were besieging Troy and could not gain entry, they sent the Trojans the present of a great wooden horse, as if it was a token of good will. The Trojans opened their gates and took it in. But the horse was filled

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with Greeks who in the night broke out and dealt death and devastation to Troy. That exactly is dolos (GSN1388). It is crafty, cunning, deceitful, clever treachery.

Next on the list is wanton wickedness (aselgeia, GSN0766). The Greeks defined aselgeia (GSN0766) as "a disposition of soul that resents all discipline," as "a spirit that acknowledges no restraints, dares whatsoever its caprice and wanton insolence may suggest." The great characteristic of the man who is guilty of aselgeia (GSN0766) is that he is lost to decency and to shame. An evil man may hide his sin, but the man who has aselgeia (GSN0766) sins without a qualm and never hesitates to shock his fellow-men. Jezebel was the classic instance of aselgeia (GSN0766) when she build a heathen shrine in Jerusalem the Holy City.

Envy is literally the evil eye, the eye that looks on the success and happiness of another in such a way that it would cast an evil spell upon it if it could. The next word is blasphemia (GSN0988). When this is used of words against man, it means slander; when it is used of words against God, it means blasphemy. It means insulting man or God.

There follows pride (huperephania, GSN5243). The Greek word literally means "showing oneself above." It describes the attitude of the man "who has a certain contempt for everyone except himself." The interesting thing about this word, as the Greeks used it, is that it describes an attitude that may never become public. It may be that in his heart of hearts a man is always secretly comparing himself with others. He might even ape humility and yet in his heart be proud. Sometimes, of course, the pride is evident. The Greeks had a legend of this pride. They said that the Giants, the sons of Tartarus and GE, in their pride sought to storm heaven and were cast down by Hercules. That is huperephania (GSN5243). It is setting oneself up against God; it is "invading God's prerogatives." That is why it has been called "the peak of all the vices," and why "God opposes the proud." (Jas.4:6.)

Lastly comes folly (aphrosune, GSN0877). This does not mean the foolishness that is due to weakness of intellect and lack of brains; it means moral folly. It describes, not the man who is a brainless fool, but the man who chooses to play the fool.

It is a truly terrible list which Jesus cites of the things that come from the human heart. When we examine it a shudder surely passes over us. Nonetheless it is a summons, not to a fastidious shrinking from such things, but to an honest self-examination of our own hearts.

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Mark 7:24-30

THE FORECAST OF A WORLD FOR CHRIST

Mark 7:24-30

He left there and went away into the regions of Tyre and Sidon. He went into a house and he did not wish anyone to know about it, but he could not be there without people knowing about it. When a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him, she immediately came and threw herself at his feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth. She asked him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "First of all you must let the children eat their fill; it is not right to take the bread that belongs to the children and to throw it to the dogs." "True, sir," she answered, "but even the dogs below the table eat some of the bits of bread that the children throw away." He said to her, "Because of this word, go your way! The demon has come out of your daughter!" She went away and found the child thrown upon her bed and the demon gone.

When this incident is seen against its background, it becomes one of the most moving and extraordinary in the life of Jesus.

First, let us look at the geography of the incident. Tyre and Sidon were cities of Phoenicia, which was a part of Syria. Phoenicia stretched north from Carmel, right along the coastal plain. It lay between Galilee and the sea coast. Phoenicia indeed, as Josephus puts it, "encompassed Galilee."

Tyre lay 40 miles north-west of Capernaum. Its name means The Rock. It was so called because off the shore lay two great rocks joined by a three-thousand-feet-long ridge. This formed a natural breakwater and Tyre was one of the great natural harbours of the world from the earliest times. Not only did the rocks form a breakwater, they also formed a defence; and Tyre was not only a famous harbour, she was also a famous fortress. It was from Tyre and Sidon that there came the first sailors who steered by the stars. Until men learned to find their way by the stars, ships had to hug the coast and to lay up by night; but the Phoenician sailors circumnavigated the Mediterranean and found their way through the Pillars of Hercules until they came to Britain and the tin mines of Cornwall. It may well be that in their adventuring they had even circumnavigated Africa.

Sidon was 26 miles north-east of Tyre and 60 miles north of Capernaum. Like Tyre it had a natural breakwater, and its origin as a harbour and a city was so ancient that no man knew who had founded it.

Although the Phoenician cities were part of Syria, they were all independent, and they were all rivals. They had their own kings, their own gods and their own coinage. Within a radius of 15 or 20 miles they were supreme. Outwardly they looked to the sea; inland they looked to Damascus; and the ships of the sea and the caravans of many lands flowed into them. In the end Sidon lost her trade and her greatness to Tyre and sank into a demoralised degeneracy. But the Phoenician sailors will always be famous as the men who first found their way by following the stars.

(i) So, then, the first tremendous thing which meets us is that Jesus is in Gentile territory. Is it any accident that this incident comes here? The previous incident shows Jesus wiping out the distinction between clean and unclean foods. Can it be that here, in symbol, we have him wiping

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out the difference between clean and unclean people? Just as the Jew would never soil his lips with forbidden foods, so he would never soil his life by contact with the unclean Gentile. It may well be that here Jesus is saying by implication that the Gentiles are not unclean but that they, too, have their place within the Kingdom.

Jesus must have come north to this region for temporary escape. In his own country he was under attack from every side. Long ago the scribes and Pharisees had branded him as a sinner because he broke through their rules and regulations. Herod regarded him as a menace. The people of Nazareth treated him with scandalized dislike. The hour would come when he would face his enemies with blazing defiance, but that was not yet. Before it came, he would seek the peace and quiet of seclusion, and in that withdrawal from the enmity of the Jews the foundation of the Kingdom of the Gentiles was laid. It is the forecast of the whole history of Christianity. The rejection of the Jews had become the opportunity of the Gentiles.

(ii) But there is more to it than that. Ideally these Phoenician cities were part of the realm of Israel. When, under Joshua, the land was being partitioned out, the tribe of Asher was allocated the land "as far as Sidon the Great...and to the fortified city of Tyre" (Josh.19:28-29). They had never been able to subdue their territory and they had never entered into it. Again is it not symbolic? Where the might of arms was helpless, the conquering love of Jesus Christ was victorious. The earthly Israel had failed to gather in the people of Phoenicia; now the true Israel had come upon them. It was not a strange land into which Jesus came; it was a land which long ago God had given him for his own. He was not so much coming amongst strangers as entering into his inheritance.

(iii) The story itself must be read with insight. The woman came asking Jesus' help for her daughter. His answer was that it was not right to take the children's bread and give it to dogs. At first it is an almost shocking saying.

The dog was not the well-loved guardian that it is to-day; more commonly it was a symbol of dishonour. To the Greek, the word dog meant a shameless and audacious woman; it was used exactly with the connotation that we use the word bitch to-day. To the Jew it was equally a term of contempt. "Do not give dogs what is holy." (Matt.7:6; compare Php.3:2; Rev.22:15.)

The word dog was in fact sometimes a Jewish term of contempt for the Gentiles. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi had a parable. He saw the blessings of God which the Gentiles enjoy; he asked, "If the Gentiles without the law enjoy blessings like that, how many more blessings will Israel, the people of God, enjoy?" "It is like a king who made a feast and brought in the guests and placed them at the door of his palace. They saw the dogs come out, with pheasants, and heads of fatted birds, and calves in their mouths. Then the guests began to say, 'If it be thus with the dogs, how much more luxurious will the meal itself be.' And the nations of the world are compared to dogs, as it is said (Isa.56:11), 'The dogs have a mighty appetite'."

No matter how you look at it, the term dog is an insult. How, then, are we to explain Jesus' use of it here?

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(a) He did not use the usual word; he used a diminutive word which described, not the wild dogs of the streets, but the little pet lap-dogs of the house. In Greek, diminutives are characteristically affectionate. Jesus took the sting out of the word.

(b) Without a doubt his tone of voice made all the difference. The same word can be a deadly insult and an affectionate address, according to the tone of voice. We can call a man "an old rascal" in a voice of contempt or a voice of affection. Jesus' tone took all the poison out of the word.

(c) In any event Jesus did not shut the door. First, he said, the children must be fed; but only first; there is meat left for the household pets. True, Israel had the first offer of the gospel, but only the first; there were others still to come. The woman was a Greek, and the Greeks had a gift of repartee; and she saw at once that Jesus was speaking with a smile. She knew that the door was swinging on its hinges. In those days people did not have either knives or forks or table-napkins. They ate with their hands; they wiped the soiled hands on chunks of bread and then flung the bread away and the house-dogs ate it. So the woman said, "I know the children are fed first, but can't I even get the scraps the children throw away?" And Jesus loved it. Here was a sunny faith that would not take no for an answer, here was a woman with the tragedy of an ill daughter at home, and there was still light enough in her heart to reply with a smile.

Her faith was tested and her faith was real, and her prayer was answered. Symbolically she stands for the Gentile world which so eagerly seized on the bread of heaven which the Jews rejected and threw away.

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Mark 7:31-37

DOING ALL THINGS WELL

Mark 7:31-37

He went away again from the regions of Tyre and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the regions of the Decapolis. They brought to him a man who was deaf and who had an impediment in his speech, and they asked him to lay his hands on him. He took him aside from the crowd all by himself. He thrust his fingers into his ears, and spat, and touched his tongue. Then he looked up into heaven, and sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" which means, "Be opened!" And his ears were opened, and the bond which held his tongue was loosed, and he spoke correctly. He enjoined them to tell no one; but the more he enjoined them the more exceedingly they proclaimed the story of what he had done. They were all amazed beyond measure. "He has done all things well," they said. And he made the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.

This story begins by describing what is on the face of it an amazing journey. Jesus was going from Tyre to the territory around the Sea of Galilee. He was going from Tyre in the north to Galilee in the south; and he started by going to Sidon. That is to say, he started going due south by going due north! As one scholar has put it, it would be like going from London to Cornwall via Manchester; or like going from Glasgow to Edinburgh via Perth.

Because of that difficulty some have thought that the text is wrong and that Sidon should not enter into it at all. But almost certainly the text is correct as it stands. Another thinks that this journey took no less than eight months, and that, indeed, is far more likely.

It may well be that this long journey is the peace before the storm; a long communion with the disciples before the final tempest breaks. In the very next chapter Peter makes the great discovery that Jesus is the Christ (Mk.8:27-29), and it may well be that it was in this long, lonely time together that this impression became a certainty in Peter's heart. Jesus needed this long time with his men before the strain and tension of the approaching end.

When Jesus did arrive back in the regions of Galilee, he came into the district of the Decapolis, and there they brought to him a man who was deaf and who had an impediment in his speech. As Tyndale vividly translates it the man was "deffe and stambled in his speech." No doubt the two things went together; it was the man's inability to hear which made his speech so imperfect. There is no miracle which so beautifully shows Jesus' way of treating people.

(i) He took the man aside from the crowd, all by himself. Here is the most tender considerateness. Deaf folk are always a little embarrassed. In some ways it is more embarrassing to be deaf than it is to be blind. A deaf person knows he cannot hear; and when someone in a crowd shouts at him and tries to make him hear, in his excitement he becomes all the more helpless. Jesus showed the most tender consideration for the feelings of a man for whom life was very difficult.

(ii) Throughout the whole miracle Jesus acted what he was going to do in dumb-show. He put his hands in the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. In those days people believed that spittle had a curative quality. Suetonius, the Roman historian, tells of an incident in the life of

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Vespasian, the Emperor. "It fortuned that a certain mean commoner stark-blind, another likewise with a feeble and lame leg, came together unto him as he sat upon his tribunal, craving that help and remedy for their infirmities which had been shown unto them by Serapis in their dreams; that he should restore the one to his sight, if he did but spit into his eyes, and strengthen the other's leg, if he vouchsafed only to touch it with his heel.

Now when as he could hardly believe that the thing any way would find success and speed accordingly, and therefore durst not so much as put it to the venture, at the last, through the persuasion of his friends, openly before the assembly he assayed both means, neither missed he of the effect." (Suetonius, Life of Vespasian 7. Holland's translation.) Jesus looked up to heaven to show that it was from God that help was to come. Then he spoke the word and the man was healed.

The whole story shows us most vividly that Jesus did not consider the man merely a case; he considered him as an individual the man had a special need and a special problem, and with the most tender considerateness Jesus dealt with him in a way that spared his feelings and in a way that he could understand.

When it was completed the people declared that he had done all things well. That is none other than the verdict of God upon his own creation in the very beginning (Gen.1:31). When Jesus came, bringing healing to men's bodies and salvation to their souls, he had begun the work of creation all over again. In the beginning everything had been good; man's sin had spoiled it all; and now Jesus was bringing back the beauty of God to the world which man's sin had rendered ugly.

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Mark 8:1-10

COMPASSION AND CHALLENGE

Mark 8:1-10

In those days, when there was again a great crowd, and when they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have stayed with me now for three days, and they have nothing to eat. If I send them away to their homes still fasting, they will faint on the road; and some of them have come from a long distance." His disciples answered him, "Where could anyone get bread to satisfy them in a desert place like this?" He asked them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven." He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. He took the seven loaves and gave thanks for them and broke them, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people. So they set them before the crowd, and they had a few small fishes. So he blessed them and told them to set them before them too. So they ate until they were completely satisfied. They gathered up what remained over of the broken pieces--seven baskets. There were about four thousand people there.

So he sent them away, and immediately he embarked on the boat with his disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.

There are two things closely intertwined in this incident.

(i) There is the compassion of Jesus. Over and over again we see Jesus moved with compassion for men. The most amazing thing about him is his sheer considerateness. Now considerateness is a virtue which never forgets the details of life. Jesus looked at the crowd; they had been with him for three days; and he remembered that they had a long walk home. He whose task it was to bring the splendour and the majesty of the truth and love of God to men might have had a mind above thinking of what was going to happen to his congregation on their walk home. But Jesus was not like that. Confront Jesus with a lost soul or a tired body and his first instinct was to help.

It is all too true that the first instinct of too many people is not to help. I met a man once at a conference and was discussing with him the dangers of a certain stretch of road on the way to the town where we were. "Yes," he said. "It's a right bad bit of road. I saw a crash on it as I drove here today." "Did you stop and help?" I asked. "Not me," he said, "I wasn't going to be held up by getting mixed up in a thing like that." It is human to want to avoid the trouble of giving help; it is divine to be moved with such compassion and pity that we are compelled to help.

(ii) There is the challenge of Jesus. When Jesus had pity on the crowd and wished to give them something to eat, the disciples immediately pointed out the practical difficulty that they were in a desert place and that there was nowhere within miles where any food could be got. At once Jesus flashed the question back at them, "What have you got wherewith you may help?" Compassion became a challenge. In effect Jesus was saying, "Don't try to push the responsibility for helping on to someone else. Don't say that you would help if you had only something to give. Don't say that in these circumstances to help is impossible. Take what you have and give it and see what happens."

One of the most joyous of all Jewish feasts is the Feast of Purim. It falls on the 14th March and commemorates the deliverance of which the Book of Esther tells. Above all it is a time of giving

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gifts; and one of its regulations is that, no matter how poor a man is, he must seek out someone poorer than himself and give him a gift. Jesus has no time for the spirit which waits until all the circumstances are perfect before it thinks of helping. Jesus says, "If you see someone in trouble, help him with what you have. You never know what you may do." There are two interesting things in the background of this story.

The first is this. This incident happened on the far side of the Sea of Galilee in the district called the Decapolis. Why did this tremendous 4,000 crowd assemble? There is no doubt that the healing of the deaf man with the impediment in his speech would help to arouse interest and to collect the crowd.

But one commentator has made a most interesting suggestion. In Mk.5:1-20, we have already read how Jesus cured the Gerasene demoniac. That incident also happened in the Decapolis. Its result was that they urged Jesus to go away. But the cured demoniac wished to follow Jesus, and Jesus sent him back to his own people to tell them what great things the Lord had done for him. Is it just possible that part of this great crowd was due to the missionary activity of the healed demoniac? Have we got here a glimpse of what the witness of one man can do for Christ? Were there people in the crowd that day who came to Christ and found their souls because a man had told them what Christ had done for him? John Bunyan tells how he owed his conversion to the fact that he heard three or four old women talking, as they sat in the sun, "about a new birth, the work of God in their hearts." They were talking of what God had done for them.

It may well be that there were many that day in that crowd in Decapolis who were there because they had heard a man telling what Jesus Christ had done for him.

The second thing is this. It is odd that the word for basket is different in this story from the word used in the similar story in Mk.6. In Mk.6:44, the word for basket is *kophinos* (GSN2894), which describes the basket in which the Jew carried his food, a basket narrow at the top and wider at the foot, and rather like a water pot. The word used here is *sphuris* (GSN4711), which describes a basket like a hamper, a frail is the technical term; it was in that kind of basket that Paul was let down over the wall of Damascus (Ac.9:25); and it describes the basket which the Gentiles used. This incident happened in the Decapolis, which was on the far side of the lake and had a large Gentile population.

Is it possible that we are to see in the feeding of the multitude in Mk.6 the coming of the bread of God to the Jews, and in this incident the coming of the bread of God to the Gentiles? When we put these two stories together, is there somewhere at the back of them the suggestion and the forecast and the symbol that Jesus came to satisfy the hunger of Jew and Gentile alike, that in him, in truth, was the God who opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing?

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:11-13

THE BLINDNESS WHICH DESIRES A SIGN

Mark 8:11-13

The Pharisees came out and began to ask him questions. They were looking for a sign from heaven, and they were trying to test him. He sighed in his spirit and said to them, "Why does this generation look for a sign? This is the truth I tell you--no sign will be given to this generation." He sent them away and he again embarked on the boat, and went away to the other side.

The whole tendency of the age in which Jesus lived was to look for God in the abnormal. It was believed that when the Messiah came the most startling things would happen. Before we reach the end of this chapter we shall examine more closely, and in detail, the kind of signs which were expected. We may note just now that when false Messiahs arose, as they frequently did, they lured the people to follow them by promising astonishing signs. They would promise, for instance, to cleave the waters of the Jordan in two and leave a pathway through it, or they would promise, with a word, to make the city walls fall down.

It was a sign like that that the Pharisees were demanding. They wished to see some shattering event blazing across the horizon, defying the laws of nature and astonishing men. To Jesus such a demand was not due to the desire to see the hand of God; it was due to the fact that they were blind to his hand. To Jesus the whole world was full of signs; the corn in the field, the leaven in the loaf, the scarlet anemones on the hillside all spoke to him of God. He did not think that God had to break in from outside the world; he knew that God was already in the world for anyone who had eyes to see. The sign of the truly religious man is not that he comes to Church to find God but that he finds God everywhere, not that he makes a great deal of sacred places but that he sanctifies common places.

That is what the poets knew and felt, and that is why they were poets. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote:

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries."

Thomas Edward Brown wrote:

"A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Fern's grot--
The veriest school
Of peace; and yet the fool
Contented that God is not--
Not God! In gardens! when the eve is cool?"

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:11-13

Nay, but I have a sign;
'Tis very sure God walks in mine."

And still another poet wrote:

"One asked a sign from God; and day by day
The sun arose in pearl; in scarlet set;
Each night the stars appeared in bright array;
Each morn the thirsty grass with dew was wet;
The corn failed not its harvest, nor the vine
And yet he saw no sign!"

From him who has eyes to see and a heart to understand, the daily miracle of night and day and the daily splendour of all common things are sign enough from God.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:14-21

THE FAILURE TO LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE

Mark 8:14-21

They had forgotten to bring loaves, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Jesus enjoined them, "Look to it! Beware of the evil influence of the Pharisees and of the evil influence of Herod!" They kept discussing the situation among themselves, and saying, "We have no loaves." Jesus knew what they were saying. "Why," he said, "do you keep talking about the fact that you have no loaves? Do you not yet see and understand? Is your mind completely obtuse? Do you not see although you have eyes? Do you not hear although you have ears? Do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves and gave them to the five thousand how many basketsful of broken pieces did you take up?" "Twelve," they said to him. "When I broke the seven loaves among the four thousand how many basketsful of broken pieces did you take up?" "Seven," they said to him. So he said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

This passage sheds a very vivid light on the minds of the disciples. They were crossing over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and they had forgotten to bring bread with them. We will best get the meaning of this passage if we connect it closely with what goes before. Jesus was thinking of the demand of Pharisees for a sign and also thinking of Herod's terrified reaction to himself. "Beware," he said, to translate it literally, "of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." To the Jew leaven was the symbol of evil. Leaven was a piece of dough kept over from a previous baking and fermented. To the Jew fermentation was identified with putrefaction and therefore leaven stood for evil.

Sometimes the Jew used the word leaven much as we would use the term original sin, or the natural evil of human nature. Rabbi Alexander said, "It is revealed before thee that our will is to do thy will. And what hinders? The leaven that is in the dough and slavery to the kingdoms of the world. May it be thy win to deliver us from their hand." it was, so to speak, the taint of human nature, original sin, the corrupting leaven which kept man from doing the will of God. So when Jesus said this, he was saying, "Be on your guard against the evil influence of the Pharisees and of Herod. Don't you go the same way that the Pharisees and Herod have already gone."

What is the point? What possible connection is there between the Pharisees and Herod? The Pharisees had just asked for a sign. For a Jew--we shall see this more fully shortly--nothing was easier than to think of the Messiah in terms of wonders and conquests and miraculous happenings and nationalistic triumphs and political supremacy. Herod had tried to build up happiness through the gaining of power and wealth and influence and prestige. In one sense, for both the Pharisees and Herod the Kingdom of God was an earthly Kingdom; it was based on earthly power and greatness, and on the victories that force could win. It was as if Jesus by this detached hint was already preparing the disciples for something very soon to come. It was as if he was saying, "Maybe soon it will dawn on you that I am God's Anointed One, the Messiah. When that thought does come don't think in terms of earthly power and glory as the Pharisees and Herod do." Of the true meaning at the moment he said nothing.

That grim revelation was still to come.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:14-21

In point of fact this hint of Jesus passed clean over the disciples' heads. They could think of nothing but the fact that they had forgotten to bring loaves, and that, unless something happened, they would go hungry. Jesus saw their preoccupation with bread. It may well be that he asked his questions, not with anger, but with a smile, like one who tries to lead a slow child to see a self-evident truth. He reminded them that twice he had satisfied the hunger of huge crowds with food enough and to spare. It is as if he said, "Why all the worry? Don't you remember what happened before? Hasn't experience taught you that you don't need to worry about things like that if you are with me?"

The odd fact is that we learn only half the lessons of experience. Too often experience fills us with pessimism, teaches us what we cannot do, teaches us to view life with a kind of resigned hopelessness. But there are other experiences. Sorrow came--and we came through it still erect. Temptation came--and somehow we did not fall. Illness took us--and somehow we recovered. A problem seemed insoluble--and somehow it was solved. We were at our wits' end--and somehow we went on. We reached the breaking point--and somehow we did not break. We, too, are blind. If we would only read the lessons of experience aright, it would teach us not the pessimism of the things that cannot be, but the hope which stands amazed that God has brought us thus far in safety and in certainty and the confidence that God can bring us through anything that may happen.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:22-26

A BLIND MAN LEARNS TO SEE

Mark 8:22-26

They came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to him and asked him to touch him. He took the blind man's hand and took him outside the village. He spat into his eyes and laid his hands on him, and asked him, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see men, but I see them walking looking like trees." Again he laid his hands on his eyes. He gazed intently, and his sight was restored and he saw everything clearly. He sent him away to his home. "Do not," he said, "even enter into the village."

Blindness was, and still is, one of the great curses of the East. It was caused partly by ophthalmia and partly by the pitiless glare of the sun. It was greatly aggravated by the fact that people knew nothing of hygiene and of cleanliness. It was common to see a person with matter-encrusted eyes on which the flies persistently settled. Naturally this carried the infection far and wide, and blindness was a scourge.

Only Mark tells us this story, and yet there are certain extremely interesting things in it.

(i) Again we see the unique considerateness of Jesus. He took the blind man out of the crowd and out of the village that he might be alone with him. Why? Think about it. This man was blind and apparently had been born blind. If he had been suddenly given back his sight amidst a crowd, there would have flashed upon his newly-seeing eyes hundreds of people and things, and dazzling colours, so that he would have been completely bewildered. Jesus knew it would be far better if he could be taken to a place where the thrill of seeing would break less suddenly upon him.

Every great doctor and every great teacher has one outstanding characteristic. The great doctor is able to enter into the very mind and heart of his patient; he understands his fears and his hopes; he literally sympathises--suffers--with him. The great teacher enters into the very mind of his scholar. He sees his problems, his difficulties, his stumbling-blocks. That is why Jesus was so supremely great. He could enter into the mind and heart of the people whom he sought to help. He had the gift of considerateness, because he could think with their thoughts and feel with their feelings. God grant to us this Christlike gift.

(ii) Jesus used methods that the man could understand. The ancient world believed in the healing power of spittle. The belief is not so strange when we remember that it is a first instinct to put a cut or burned finger into our mouth to ease the pain. Of course the blind man knew of this and Jesus used a method of curing him which he could understand. Jesus was wise. He did not begin with words and methods which were far above the heads of simple folk. He spoke to them and acted on them in a way that simple minds could grasp and understand. There have been times when unintelligibility has been accounted a virtue and a sign of greatness. Jesus had the still greater greatness--the greatness which a simple mind could grasp.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:22-26

(iii) In one thing this miracle is unique--it is the only miracle which can be said to have happened gradually. Usually Jesus' miracles happened suddenly and completely. In this miracle the blind man's sight came back in stages.

There is symbolic truth here. No man sees all God's truth all at once. One of the dangers of a certain type of evangelism is that it encourages the idea that when a man has taken his decision for Christ he is a full-grown Christian. One of the dangers of Church membership is that it can be presented in such a way as to imply that when a person becomes a pledged member of the Church he has come to the end of the road. So far from that being the case the decision and the pledge of membership are the beginning of the road. They are the discovery of the riches of Christ which are inexhaustible, and if a man lived a hundred, or a thousand, or a million years, he would still have to go on growing in grace, and learning more and more about the infinite wonder and beauty of Jesus Christ. F. W. H. Myers, in his poem Saint Paul, makes Paul say:

"Let no man think that sudden in a minute
All is accomplished and the work is done--
Though with thine earliest dawn thou shouldst begin it
Scarce were it ended in thy setting sun."

It is gloriously true that sudden conversion is a gracious possibility, but it is equally true that every day a man should be re-converted. With all God's grace and glory before him he can go on learning for a life time and still need eternity to know as he is known.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:27-30

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

Mark 8:27-30

Jesus and his disciples went away to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the road he asked his disciples a question. "Who," he said to them, "do men say that I am?" They said to him, "Some say, John the Baptizer; others say, Elijah; others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "You--who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are God's Anointed One." And he insisted that they should tell no man about him.

Caesarea Philippi was outside Galilee altogether. It was not in the territory of Herod, but in the territory of Philip. It was a town with an amazing history. In the oldest days it was called Balinas, for it had once been a great centre of the worship of Baal. To this day it is called Banias, which is a form of Panias. It is so called because up on the hillside there was a cavern which was said to be the birthplace of the Greek God, Pan, the god of nature. From a cave in the hillside gushed forth a stream which was held to be the source of the River Jordan. Farther up on the hillside rose a gleaming temple of white marble which Philip had built to the godhead of Caesar, the Roman Emperor, the ruler of the world, who was regarded as a god.

It is an amazing thing that it was here of all places that Peter saw in a homeless Galilean carpenter the Son of God. The ancient religion of Palestine was in the air, and the memories of Baal clustered around. The gods of classical Greece brooded over the place, and no doubt men heard the pipes of Pan and caught a glimpse of the woodland nymphs. The Jordan would bring back to memory episode after episode in the history of Israel and the conquest of the land. And clear in the eastern sun gleamed and glinted the marble of the holy place which reminded all men that Caesar was a god. There, of all places, as it were against the background of all religions and all history, Peter discovered that a wandering teacher from Nazareth, who was heading for a cross, was the Son of God. There is hardly anything in all the gospel story which shows the sheer force of the personality of Jesus as does this incident. It comes in the very middle of Mark's gospel and it does so designedly.

for it comes at the gospel's peak moment. In one way at least this moment was the crisis of Jesus' life. Whatever his disciples might be thinking, he knew for certain that ahead lay an inescapable cross. Things could not go on much longer. The opposition was gathering itself to strike. The problem confronting Jesus was this--had he had any effect at all? Had he achieved anything? Or, to put it another way, had anyone discovered who he really was? If he had lived and taught and moved amongst men and no one had glimpsed God in him, then all his work had gone for nothing. There was only one way he could leave a message with men and that was to write it on some man's heart.

So, in this moment, Jesus put all things to the test. He asked his disciples what men were saying about him, and he heard from them the popular rumours and reports. Then came a breathless silence and he put the question which meant so much, "Who do you say that I am?" And suddenly Peter realized what he had always known deep down in his heart. This was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God. And with that answer Jesus knew that he had not failed.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:27-30

Now we come to a question which has been half-put and half-answered more than once before, but which now must be answered in detail or the whole gospel story is not fully intelligible. No sooner had Peter made this discovery than Jesus told him he must tell no man of it. Why? Because, first and foremost, Jesus had to teach Peter and the others what Messiahship really meant. To understand the task that Jesus had in hand and to understand the real meaning of this necessity, we have to enquire at some length what the Messianic ideas of the time of Jesus really were.

THE JEWISH IDEAS OF THE MESSIAH

Throughout all their existence the Jews never forgot that they were in a very special sense God's chosen people. Because of that, they naturally looked to a very special place in the world. In the early days they looked forward to achieving that position by what we might call natural means. They always regarded the greatest days in their history as the days of David; and they dreamed of a day when there would arise another king of David's line, a king who would make them great in righteousness and in power. (Isa.9:7; Isa.11:1; Jer.22:4; Jer.23:5; Jer.30:9.)

But as time went on it came to be pitilessly clear that this dreamed-of greatness would never be achieved by natural means. The ten tribes were carried off to Assyria and lost forever. The Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and carried the Jews away captive. Then came the Persians as their masters; then the Greeks; then the Romans. So far from knowing anything like dominion, for centuries the Jews never even knew what it was to be completely free and independent.

So another line of thought grew up. It is true that the idea of a great king of David's line never entirely vanished and was always intertwined in some way with their thought; but more and more they began to dream of a day when God would intervene in history and achieve by supernatural means that which natural means could never achieve. They looked for divine power to do what human power was helpless to do.

In between the Testaments were written a whole flood of books which were dreams and forecasts of this new age and the intervention of God. As a class they are called Apocalypses. The word literally means unveilings. These books were meant to be unveilings of the future. It is to them that we must turn to find out what the Jews believed in the time of Jesus about the Messiah and the work of the Messiah and the new age. It is against their dreams that we must set the dream of Jesus.

In these books certain basic ideas occur. We follow here the classification of these ideas given by Schurer, who wrote *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*.

(i) Before the Messiah came there would be a time of terrible tribulation. There would be a Messianic travail. It would be the birth-pangs of a new age. Every conceivable terror would burst upon the world; every standard of honour and decency would be torn down; the world would become a physical and moral chaos.

"And honour shall be turned into shame,
And strength humiliated into contempt,
And probity destroyed,

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:27-30

And beauty shall become ugliness...
And envy shall rise in those who had not thought
aught of themselves,
And passion shall seize him that is peaceful,
And many shall be stirred up in anger to injure many,
And they shall rouse up armies in order to shed blood,
And in the end they shall perish together with them."
(2 Baruch 27.)

There would be, "quakings of places, tumult of peoples, schemings of nations, confusion of leaders, disquietude of princes." (4 Ezra 9: 3.)

"From heaven shall fall fiery words down to the earth. Lights shall come, bright and great, flashing into the midst of men; and earth, the universal mother, shall shake in these days at the hand of the Eternal. And the fishes of the sea and the beasts of the earth and the countless tribes of flying things and all the souls of men and every sea shall shudder at the presence of the Eternal and there shall be panic. And the towering mountain peaks and the hiEs of the giants he shall rend, and the murky abyss shall be visible to all. And the high ravines in the lofty mountains shall be full of dead bodies and rocks shall flow with blood and each torrent shall flood the plain.... And God shall judge all with war and sword, and there shall be brimstone from heaven, yea stones and rain and hail incessant and grievous. And death shall be upon the four-footed beasts.... Yea the land itself shall drink of the blood of the perishing and beasts shall eat their fill of flesh." (The Sibylline Oracles 3: 363 ff.)

The Mishnah enumerates as signs that the coming of the Messiah is near,

"That arrogance increases, ambition shoots up, that the vine yields fruit yet wine is dear. The government turns to heresy. There is no instruction. the synagogue is devoted to lewdness. Galilee is destroyed, Gablan laid waste. The inhabitants of a district go from city to city without finding compassion. The wisdom of the learned is hated, the godly despised, truth is absent. Boys insult old men, old men stand in the presence of children. The son depreciates the father, the daughter rebels against the mother, the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law. A man's enemies are his house-fellows."

The time which preceded the coming of the Messiah was to be a time when the world was torn in pieces and every bond relaxed. The physical and the moral order would collapse.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:27-30

(ii) Into this chaos there would come Elijah as the forerunner and herald of the Messiah. He was to heal the breaches and bring order into the chaos to prepare the way for the Messiah. In particular he was to mend disputes. In fact the Jewish oral law laid it down that money and property whose ownership was disputed, or anything found whose owner was unknown, must wait "till Elijah comes." When Elijah came the Messiah would not be far behind.

(iii) Then there would enter the Messiah. The word Messiah and the word Christ mean the same thing. Messiah is the Hebrew and Christ is the Greek for the Anointed One. A king was made king by anointing and the Messiah was God's Anointed King. It is important to remember that Christ is not a name; it is a title. Sometimes the Messiah was thought of as a king of David's line, but more often he was thought of as a great, super-human figure crashing into history to remake the world and in the end to vindicate God's people.

(iv) The nations would ally themselves and gather themselves together against the champion of God.

"The kings of the nations shall throw themselves against this land bringing retribution on themselves. They shall seek to ravage the shrine of the mighty God and of the noblest men whosoever they come to the land. In a ring round the city the accursed kings shall place each one his throne with his infidel people by him. And then with a mighty voice God shall speak unto all the undisciplined, empty-minded people and judgment shall come upon them from the mighty God, and all shall perish at the hand of the Eternal." (Sibylline Oracles 3: 363-372.)

"It shall be that when all the nations hear his (the Messiah's) voice, every man shall leave his own land and the warfare they have one against the other, and an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together desiring to fight against him." (4 Ezra 13: 33-35.)

(v) The result would be the total destruction of these hostile powers. Philo said that the Messiah would "take the field and make war and destroy great and populous nations."

"He shall reprove them for their ungodliness,
Rebuke them for their unrighteousness,
Reproach them to their faces with their treacheries--
And when he has rebuked them he shall destroy them."
(4 Ezra 12: 32-33.)

"And it shall come to pass in those days that none shall be saved,
Either by gold or by silver,
And none shall be able to escape.
And there shall be no iron for war,
Nor shall one clothe oneself with a breastplate.

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Mark 8:27-30

Bronze shall be of no service,
And tin shall not be esteemed,
And lead shall not be desired.
And all things shall be destroyed from the surface of the earth."
(Enoch 5 2: 7-9.)

The Messiah will be the most destructive conqueror in history, smashing his enemies into utter extinction.

(vi) There would follow the renovation of Jerusalem. Sometimes this was thought of as the purification of the existing city. More often it was thought of as the coming down of the new Jerusalem from heaven. The old house was to be folded up and carried away, and in the new one, "All the pillars were new and the ornaments larger than those of the first." (Enoch 90: 28-29.)

(vii) The Jews who were dispersed all over the world would be gathered into the city of the new Jerusalem. To this day the Jewish daily prayer includes the petition, "Lift up a banner to gather our dispersed and assemble us from the four end?, of the earth." The eleventh of the Psalms of Solomon has a noble picture of that return.

"Blow ye in Zion on the trumpet to summon the saints,
Cause ye to be heard in Jerusalem the voice of him that
bringeth good tidings;
For God hath had pity on Israel in visiting them.
Stand on the height, O Jerusalem, and behold thy children,
From the East and the West, gathered together by the Lord,
From the North they come in the gladness of their God,
From the isles afar off God hath gathered them.
High mountains hath he abased into a plain for them;
The hills fled at their entrance.
The woods gave them shelter as they passed by;
Every sweet-smelling tree God caused to spring up for them,
That Israel might pass by in the visitation of the glory of their
God.
Put on, O Jerusalem, thy glorious garments;
Make ready thy holy robe;
For God hath spoken good for Israel forever and ever,
Let the Lord do what he hath spoken concerning Israel and
Jerusalem;
Let the Lord raise up Israel by his glorious name.
The mercy of the Lord be upon Israel forever and ever."

It can easily be seen how Jewish this new world was to be. The nationalistic element is dominant all the time.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:27-30

(viii) Palestine would be the centre of the world and the rest of the world subject to it. All the nations would be subdued.

Sometimes it was thought of as a peaceful subjugation.

"And all the isles and the cities shall say, How doth the Eternal love those men! For all things work in sympathy with them and help them.... Come let us all fall upon the earth and supplicate the eternal King, the mighty, everlasting God. Let us make procession to his Temple, for he is the sole Potentate." (Sibylline Oracles 3: 690 ff.)

More often the fate of the Gentiles was utter destruction at which Israel would exult and rejoice.

"And he will appear to punish the Gentiles,
And he will destroy all their idols.
Then, thou, O Israel, shalt be happy.
And thou shalt mount upon the necks and the wings of the eagle
(i.e., Rome, the eagle, is to be destroyed)
And they shall be ended and God will exalt thee.

"And thou shalt look from on high
And see thine enemies in Gehenna,
And thou shalt recognize them and rejoice."
(Assumption of Moses 10: 8-10.)

It was a grim picture. Israel would rejoice to see her enemies broken and in hell. Even the dead Israelites were to be raised up to share in the new world.

(ix) Finally, there would come the new age of peace and goodness which would last forever.

These are the Messianic ideas which were in the minds of men when Jesus came. They were violent, nationalistic, destructive, vengeful. True, they ended in the perfect reign of God, but they came to it through a bath of blood and a career of conquest. Think of Jesus set against a background like that. No wonder he had to re-educate his disciples in the meaning of Messiahship; and no wonder they crucified him in the end as a heretic. There was no room for a cross and there was little room for suffering love in a picture like that.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:31-33

THE TEMPTER SPEAKS IN THE VOICE OF A FRIEND

Mark 8:31-33

He began to teach them that it was necessary that the Son of Man should suffer many things, and should be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and rise again after three days. He kept telling them this plainly. And Peter caught him and began to rebuke him. He turned round; he looked at his disciples; and he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan," he said. "These are not God's thoughts but men's."

It is against the background of what we have just seen of the common conception of the Messiah that we must read this. When Jesus connected Messiahship with suffering and death, he was making statements that were to the disciples both incredible and incomprehensible. All their lives they had thought of the Messiah in terms of irresistible conquest, and they were now being presented with an idea which staggered them. That is why Peter so violently protested. To him the whole thing was impossible.

Why did Jesus so sternly rebuke Peter? Because he was putting into words the very temptations which were assailing Jesus. Jesus did not want to die. He knew that he had powers which he could use for conquest. At this moment he was refighting the battle of temptations in the wilderness. This was the devil tempting him again to fall down and worship him, to take his way instead of God's way.

It is a strange thing, and sometimes a terrible thing, that the tempter sometimes speaks to us in the voice of a well-meaning friend. We may have decided on a course which is the right course but which will inevitably bring trouble, loss, unpopularity, sacrifice. And some well-meaning friend tries with the best intentions in the world, to stop us. I knew a man who decided to take a course which would almost inevitably land him in trouble. A friend came to him and tried to dissuade him. "Remember," said the friend, "that you have a wife and a family. You can't do this." It is quite possible for someone to love us so much that he wants us to avoid trouble and to play safe.

In Gareth and Lynette Tennyson tells the story of the youngest son of Lot and Bellicent. He has seen the vision and he wishes to become one of Arthur's knights. Bellicent, his mother, does not wish to let him go.

"Hast thou no pity on my loneliness?" she asks. His father, Lot, is old and "lies like a log and all but smouldered out." Both his brothers are already at Arthur's court. "Stay, my best son," she says, "ye are yet more boy than man." If he stays she will arrange the hunt to keep him happy in the chase and find some princess to be his bride. The boy has had the vision, and, one by one the mother, who loves him dearly, produces reasons, excellent reasons, why he should stay at home. Someone who loves him speaks with the tempter's voice, all unaware that she is doing it. But Gareth answers,

"O Mother,
How can ye keep me tethered to you--Shame.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:31-33

Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? Follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King--
Else, wherefore born?"

So Gareth went when the vision called.

The tempter can make no more terrible attack than in the voice of those who love us and who think they seek only our good. That is what happened to Jesus that day; that is why he answered so sternly. Not even the pleading voice of love must silence for us the imperious voice of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:34-35

THE WAY OF THE DISCIPLE

Mark 8:34-35

He called the crowd to him, together with his disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow me."

This part of Mark's gospel is so near the heart and centre of the Christian faith that we must take it almost sentence by sentence. If each day a man could go out with only one of these sentences locked in his heart and dominating his life, it would be far more than enough to be going on with.

Two things stand out here even at first sight.

(i) There is the almost startling honesty of Jesus. No one could ever say that he was induced to follow Jesus by false pretences. Jesus never tried to bribe men by the offer of an easy way. He did not offer men peace; he offered them glory. To tell a man he must be ready to take up a cross was to tell him he must be ready to be regarded as a criminal and to die.

The honesty of great leaders has always been one of their characteristics. In the days of the Second World War, when Sir Winston Churchill took over the leadership of the country, all that he offered men was "blood, toil, tears and sweat." Garibaldi, the great Italian patriot, appealed for recruits in these terms: "I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions; I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country in his heart, and not with his lips only, follow me." "Soldiers, all our efforts against superior forces have been unavailing. I have nothing to offer you but hunger and thirst, hardship and death; but I call on all who love their country to join with me."

Jesus never sought to lure men to him by the offer of an easy way; he sought to challenge them, to waken the sleeping chivalry in their souls, by the offer of a way than which none could be higher and harder. He came not to make life easy but to make men great.

(ii) There is the fact that Jesus never called on men to do or face anything which he was not prepared to do and face himself. That indeed is the characteristic of the leader whom men will follow.

When Alexander the Great set out in pursuit of Darius, he made one of the wonder marches of history. In eleven days he marched his men thirty-three hundred furlongs. They were very nearly giving up, mainly because of thirst, for there was no water. Plutarch relates the story. "While they were in this distress, it happened that some Macedonians who had fetched water in skins upon their mules from a river they had found out came about noon to the place where Alexander was, and seeing him almost choked with thirst, presently fined an helmet and offered it to him. He asked them to whom they were carrying the water; they told him to their children, adding, that if his life were but saved, it was no matter for them, they should be well enough able to repair that loss, though they all perished.

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Mark 8:34-35

Then he took the helmet into his hands, and looking round about, when he saw all those who were near him stretching their heads out and looking earnestly after the drink, he returned it again with thanks without tasting a drop of it. 'For,' he said, 'if I alone should drink, the rest would be out of heart.' The soldiers no sooner took notice of his temperance and magnanimity upon this occasion, but they, one and all, cried out to him to lead them forward boldly, and began whipping on their horses. For while they had such a king they said they defied both weariness and thirst, and looked upon themselves to be little less than immortal." It was easy to follow a leader who never demanded from his men what he would not endure himself.

There was a famous Roman general, Quintus Fabius Cunctator. He was discussing with his staff how to take a difficult position. Someone suggested a certain course of action. "It will only cost the lives of a few men," this counsellor said. Fabius looked at him. "Are you," he said, "willing to be one of the few?"

Jesus was not the kind of leader who sat remote and played with the lives of men like expendable pawns. What he demanded that they should face, he, too, was ready to face. Jesus had a right to call on us to take up a cross, for he himself first bore one.

(iii) Jesus said of the man who would be his disciple, "Let him deny himself." We will understand the meaning of this demand best if we take it very simply and literally. "Let him say no to himself." If a man will follow Jesus Christ he must ever say no to himself and yes to Christ. He must say no to his own natural love of ease and comfort. He must say no to every course of action based on self-seeking and self-will. He must say no to the instincts and the desires which prompt him to touch and taste and handle the forbidden things. He must unhesitatingly say yes to the voice and the command of Jesus Christ. He must be able to say with Paul that it is no longer he who lives but Christ who lives in him. He lives no longer to follow his own will, but to follow the will of Christ, and in that service he finds his perfect freedom.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:36

FINDING LIFE BY LOSING LIFE

Mark 8:36

Whoever seeks to save his life shall lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel shall save it.

There are certain things which are lost by being kept and saved by being used. Any talent that a man possesses is like that. If he uses it, it will develop into something still greater. If he refuses to use it he will in the end lose it. Supremely so, life is like that.

History is full of examples of men, who by throwing away their lives, gained life eternal. Late in the fourth century, there was in the East a monk called Telemachus. He had determined to leave the world and to live all alone in prayer and meditation and fasting, and so to save his soul. In his lonely life he sought nothing but contact with God. But somehow he felt there was something wrong. One day as he rose from his knees, it suddenly dawned upon him that his life was based, not on a self-less, but on a selfish love of God. It came to him that if he was to serve God he must serve men, that the desert was no place for a Christian to live, that the cities were full of sin and therefore full of need.

He determined to bid farewell to the desert and set out to the greatest city in the world, Rome, at the other side of the world. He begged his way across lands and seas. By this time Rome was officially Christian. He arrived at a time when Stilicho, the Roman general, had gained a mighty victory over the Goths. To Stilicho was granted a Roman triumph. There was this difference from the old days--now it was to the Christian churches the crowds poured and not to the heathen temples. There were the processions and the celebrations and Stilicho rode in triumph through the streets, with the young Emperor Honorius by his side.

But one thing had lingered on into Christian Rome. There was still the arena; there were still the gladiatorial games. Nowadays Christians were no longer thrown to the lions; but still those captured in war had to fight and kill each other to make a Roman holiday for the populace. Still men roared with blood lust as the gladiators fought.

Telemachus found his way to the arena. There were eighty-thousand people there. The chariot races were ending; and there was a tenseness in the crowd as the gladiators prepared to fight. Into the arena they came with their greeting. "Hail, Caesar! We who are about to die salute you!" The fight was on and Telemachus was appalled. Men for whom Christ had died were killing each other to amuse an allegedly Christian populace. He leapt the barrier. He was in between the gladiators, and for a moment they stopped. "Let the games go on," roared the crowd. They pushed the old man aside; he was still in his hermit's robes. Again he came between them. The crowd began to hurl stones at him; they urged the gladiators to kill him and get him out of the way. The commander of the games gave an order; a gladiator's sword rose and flashed; and Telemachus lay dead.

Suddenly the crowd were silent. They were suddenly shocked that a holy man should have been killed in such a way. Suddenly there was a mass realization of what this killing really was. The

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Mark 8:36

games ended abruptly that day--and they never began again. Telemachus, by dying, had ended them. As Gibbon said of him, "His death was more useful to mankind than his life." By losing his life he had done more than ever he could have done by husbanding it out in lonely devotion in the desert.

God gave us life to spend and not to keep. If we live carefully, always thinking first of our own profit, ease, comfort, security, if our sole aim is to make life as long and as trouble-free as possible, if we will make no effort except for ourselves, we are losing life all the time. But if we spend life for others, if we forget health and time and wealth and comfort in our desire to do something for Jesus and for the men for whom Jesus died, we are winning life all the time.

What would have happened to the world if doctors and scientists and inventors had not been prepared to risk experiments often on their own bodies? What would have happened to life if everyone had wished for nothing but to remain comfortably at home, and there had been no such person as an explorer or a pioneer? What would happen if every mother refused to take the risk of bearing a child? What would happen if all men spent all they had upon themselves?

The very essence of life is in risking life and spending life, not in saving it and hoarding it. True, it is the way of weariness, of exhaustion, of giving to the uttermost--but it is better any day to burn out than to rust out, for that is the way to happiness and the way to God.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:37

THE SUPREME VALUE IN LIFE

Mark 8:37

What profit is it for a man to gain the whole world and to forfeit his life? For what is a man to give in exchange for his life?

It is quite possible for a man in one sense to make a huge success of life and in another sense to be living a life that is not worth living. The real question Jesus asks is, "Where do you put your values in life?" It is possible for a man to put his values on the wrong things and to discover it too late.

(i) A man may sacrifice honour for profit. He may desire material things and not be over-particular how he gets them. The world is full of temptations towards profitable dishonesty. George Macdonald tells in one of his books about a draper who always used his thumb to make the measure just a little short. "He took from his soul," he said, "and put it in his siller-bag." The real question, the question which sooner or later will have to be answered is, "How does life's balance sheet look in the sight of God?" God is the auditor whom, in the end, all men must face.

(ii) A man may sacrifice principle for popularity. It may happen that the easy-going, agreeable, pliable man will save himself a lot of trouble. It may happen that the man inflexibly devoted to principle will find himself disliked. Shakespeare paints the picture of Wolsey, the great Cardinal, who served Henry the Eighth with all the ingenuity and wit he possessed.

"Had I but serv'd my God with half the zeal
I serv'd my king, he would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies."

The real question, the question every man in the end will have to face, is not, "What did men think of this?" but, "What does God think of it?" It is not the verdict of public opinion but the verdict of God that settles destiny.

(iii) A man may sacrifice the lasting things for the cheap things. It is always easier to have a cheap success. An author may sacrifice that which would be really great for the cheap success of a moment. A musician may produce ephemeral trifles when he might be producing something real and lasting. A man may choose a job which will bring him more money and more comfort, and turn his back on one where he could render more service to his fellow-men. A man may spend his life in little things and let the big things go. A woman may prefer a life of pleasure and of so-called freedom to the service of her home and the upbringing of a family.

But life has a way of revealing the true values and condemning the false as the years pass on. A cheap thing never lasts.

(iv) We may sum it all up by saying that a man may sacrifice eternity for the moment. We would be saved from all kinds of mistakes if we always looked at things in the light of eternity. Many a

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Mark 8:37

thing is pleasant for the moment but ruinous in the long run. The test of eternity, the test of seeking to see the thing as God sees it, is the realest test of all.

The man who sees things as God sees them will never spend his life on the things that lose his soul.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 8:38-9:1

WHEN THE KING COMES INTO HIS OWN

Mark 8:38-9:1

"Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And he used to say to them, "This is the truth I tell you--there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste of death until they shall see the Kingdom of God coming with power."

One thing leaps out from this passage--the confidence of Jesus. He has just been speaking of his death; he has no doubt that the Cross stands ahead of him; but nonetheless he is absolutely sure that in the end there will be triumph.

The first part of the passage states a simple truth. When the King comes into his Kingdom he will be loyal to those who have been loyal to him. No man can expect to dodge all the trouble of some great undertaking and then reap all the benefit of it. No man can expect to refuse service in some campaign and then share in the decorations when it is brought to a successful conclusion. Jesus is saying, "In a difficult and hostile world Christianity is up against it these days. If a man is ashamed under such conditions to show that he is a Christian, if he is afraid to show what side he is on, he cannot expect to gain a place of honour when the Kingdom comes."

The last part of this passage has caused much serious thought. Jesus says that many who are standing there will not die until they see the Kingdom coming with power. What worries some people is that they take this as a reference to the Second Coming; but if it is, Jesus was mistaken, because he did not return in power and glory in the lifetime of those who were there.

But this is not a reference to the Second Coming at all. Consider the situation. At the moment Jesus had only once been outside Palestine, and on that occasion he was just over the border in Tyre and Sidon. Only a very few men in a very small country had ever heard of him. Palestine was only about 120 miles from north to south and about 40 miles from east to west; her total population was 4,000,000 or thereby. To speak in terms of world conquest when he had scarcely ever been outside such a small country was strange. To make matters worse, even in that small country, he had so provoked the enmity of the orthodox leaders and of those in whose hands lay power, that it was quite certain that he could hope for nothing other than death as a heretic and an outlaw. In face of a situation like that there must have been many who felt despairingly that Christianity had no possible future, that in a short time it would be wiped out completely and eliminated from the world.

Humanly speaking, these pessimists were right.

Now consider what did happen. Scarcely more than thirty years later, Christianity had swept through Asia Minor; Antioch had become a great Christian church. It had penetrated to Egypt; the Christians were strong in Alexandria. It had crossed the sea and come to Rome and swept through Greece. Christianity had spread like an unstoppable tide throughout the world. It was astonishingly true that in the lifetime of many there, against all expectations, Christianity had come with power. So far from being mistaken, Jesus was absolutely right.

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Mark 8:38-9:1

The amazing thing is that Jesus never knew despair. In face of the dullness of the minds of men, in face of the opposition, in face of crucifixion and of death, he never doubted his final triumph--because he never doubted God. He was always certain that what is impossible with man is completely possible with him.

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Mark 9:2-8

THE GLORY OF THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Mark 9:2-8

Six days after, Jesus took Peter and James and John along with him and brought them up into a high mountain, all by themselves, alone. And he was transfigured in their presence. His clothes became radiant, exceedingly white, such that no fuller on earth could have made them so white. And Elijah and Moses appeared to them, and they were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus. "Teacher, it is good for us to be here. So let us make three booths, one for you, and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He said this because he did not know what he was saying, for they were awe-struck. And there came a cloud overshadowing them. And there came a voice from the cloud, "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!" And immediately, when they had looked round, they saw no one any more except Jesus alone with them.

We are face to face with an incident in the life of Jesus that is cloaked in mystery. We can only try to understand. Mark says that this happened six days after the incidents near Caesarea Philippi. Luke says that it happened eight days afterwards. There is no discrepancy here. They both mean what we might express by saying, "About a week afterwards." Both the Eastern and the Western Churches hold their remembrance of the transfiguration on 6th August. It does not matter whether or not that is the actual date, but it is a time we do well to remember.

Tradition says that the transfiguration took place on the top of Mount Tabor. The Eastern Church actually calls the Festival of the Transfiguration the Taborion. It may be that the choice is based on the mention of Mount Tabor in Ps.89:12, but it is unfortunate. Tabor is in the south of Galilee and Caesarea Philippi is away to the north. Tabor is no more than 1,000 feet high, and, in the time of Jesus, there was a fortress on the top. It is much more likely that this event took place amidst the eternal snows of Mount Hermon which is 9,200 feet high and much nearer Caesarea Philippi and where the solitude would be much more complete.

What happened we cannot tell. We can only bow in reverence as we try to understand. Mark tells us that the garments of Jesus became radiant. The word he uses (stilbein, GSN4744) is the word used for the glistening gleam of burnished brass or gold or of polished steel or of the golden glare of the sunlight. When the incident came to an end a cloud overshadowed them.

In Jewish thought the presence of God is regularly connected with the cloud. It was in the cloud that Moses met God. It was in the cloud that God came to the Tabernacle. It was the cloud which rifled the Temple when it was dedicated after Solomon had built it. And it was the dream of the Jews that when the Messiah came the cloud of God's presence would return to the Temple. (Exo.16:10, Exo.19:9, Exo.33:9, 1Kgs.8:10, 2Macc.2:8.) The descent of the cloud is a way of saying that the Messiah had come, and any Jew would understand it like that.

The transfiguration has a double significance.

(i) It did something very precious for Jesus. Jesus had to take his own decisions. He had taken the decision to go to Jerusalem and that was the decision to face and accept the Cross. Obviously he

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Mark 9:2-8

had to be absolutely sure that was right before he could go on. On the mountain top he received a double approval of his decision.

(a) Moses and Elijah met with him. Now Moses was the supreme law-giver of Israel. To him the nation owed the laws of God. Elijah was the first and the greatest of the prophets. Always men looked back to him as the prophet who brought to men the very voice of God. When these two great figures met with Jesus it meant that the greatest of the law-givers and the greatest of the prophets said to him, "Go on!" It meant that they saw in Jesus the consummation of all that they had dreamed of in the past. It meant that they saw in him all that history had longed for and hoped for and looked forward to. It is as if at that moment Jesus was assured that he was on the right way because all history had been leading up to the Cross.

(b) God spoke with Jesus. As always, Jesus did not consult his own wishes. He went to God and said, "What wilt thou have me to do?" He put all his plans and intentions before God. And God said to him, "You are acting as my own beloved Son should act and must act. Go on!" On the mountain of the transfiguration Jesus was assured that he had not chosen the wrong way. He saw, not only the inevitability, but the essential rightness of the Cross.

(ii) It did something very precious for the disciples.

(a) They had been shattered by Jesus' statement that he was going to Jerusalem to die. That seemed to them the complete negation of all that they understood of the Messiah. They were still bewildered and uncomprehending. Things were happening which not only baffled their minds but were also breaking their hearts. What they saw on the mountain of the transfiguration would give them something to hold on to, even when they could not understand. Cross or no Cross, they had heard God's voice acknowledge Jesus as his Son.

(b) It made them in a special sense witnesses of the glory of Christ. A witness has been defined as a man who first sees and then shows. This time on the mountain had shown them the glory of Christ, and now they had the story of this glory to hide in their hearts and to tell to men, not at the moment, but when the time came.

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Mark 9:9-13

THE FATE OF THE FORERUNNER

Mark 9:9-13

As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus enjoined them that they must not relate to anyone what they had seen, except when the Son of Man should have risen from the dead. They clung to this word, asking among themselves, what this phrase about rising from the dead could mean. They asked Jesus, "Do the experts in the Law not say that Elijah must come first?" "It is true," he said to them, "Elijah comes first and sets all things in order. And yet how does it stand written about the Son of Man that he must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But, I say to you, Elijah, too, has come, and they treated him as they wished, even as it stands written about him."

Naturally the three disciples were thinking hard as they came down the mountain-side.

First, Jesus began with an injunction. They must tell no one of what they had seen. Jesus knew quite well that their minds were still haunted by the conception of a Messiah of might and power. If they were to tell of what had happened on the mountain top, of how the glory of God had appeared, of how Moses and Elijah had appeared, how that could be made to chime in with popular expectations! How it could be made to seem a prelude to the burst of God's avenging power on the nations of the world! The disciples still had to learn what Messiahship meant. There was only one thing that could teach them that--the Cross and the Resurrection to follow. When the Cross had taught them what Messiahship meant and when the Resurrection had convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah, then, and then only, they might tell of the glory of the mountain top for then, and then only, would they see it as it ought to be seen--as the prelude, not to the unleashing of God's force, but to the crucifying of God's love.

Still their minds worked on. They could not understand what Jesus' words about resurrection meant. Their whole attitude shows that in fact they never understood them. Their whole outlook when the Cross came was that of men to whom the end had come. We must not blame the disciples. It was simply that they had been so schooled in a completely different idea of Messiahship that they could not take in what Jesus had said.

Then they asked something that was puzzling them. The Jew believed that before the Messiah came Elijah would come to be his herald and forerunner. (Mal.4:5-6.) They had a rabbinic tradition that Elijah would come three days before the Messiah. On the first day he would stand on the mountains of Israel, lamenting the desolation of the land. And then in a voice that would be heard from one end of the world to the other, he would cry, "Peace cometh to the world. Peace cometh to the world." On the second day he would cry, "Good cometh to the world. Good cometh to the world." And on the third day he would cry "Jeshuah (see Yeshuw`ah - HSN3444) (salvation) cometh to the world. Jeshuah cometh to the world." He would restore all things. He would mend the family breaches of the grim last days. He would settle all doubtful points of ritual and ceremonial. He would cleanse the nation by bringing back those wrongfully excluded and driving out those wrongfully included.

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Mark 9:9-13

Elijah had an amazing place in the thought of Israel. He was conceived of as being continuously active in heaven and on earth in their interest, and being the herald of the final consummation.

Inevitably the disciples were wondering "If Jesus is the Messiah what has happened to Elijah?" Jesus' answer was in terms that any Jew would understand. "Elijah," he said, "has come and men treated him as they willed. They took him and they arbitrarily applied their will to him and forgot God's will." He was referring to the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod. Then, by implication, he drove them back to that thought they would not face and that he was determined they must face. By implication he demanded, "If they have done that to the forerunner, what will they do to the Messiah?"

Jesus was overturning all the preconceived notions and ideas of his disciples. They looked for the emergence of Elijah, the coming of the Messiah, the irruption of God into time and the shattering victory of heaven, which they identified with the triumph of Israel. He was trying to compel them to see that in fact the herald had been cruelly killed and the Messiah must end on a Cross. They still did not understand, and their failure to understand was due to the cause which always makes men fail to understand--they clung to their way and refused to see God's way. They wished things as they desired them and not as God had ordered them. the error of their thoughts had blinded them to the revelation of God's truth.

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Mark 9:14-18

COMING DOWN FROM THE MOUNT

Mark 9:14-18

When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd gathered around them, and the experts in the law engaged in discussion with them. And as soon as they saw him the whole crowd were amazed and ran to him and greeted him. He asked them, "What are you discussing among yourselves?" And one of the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you because he has a spirit which makes him dumb. And whenever the spirit seizes him, it convulses him, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth, and he is wasting away. And I asked your disciples to cast it out and they could not."

This is the kind of thing that Peter had wanted to avoid. On the mountain top, in the presence of the glory, Peter had said, "This is a good place for us to be." Then he had wanted to build three booths for Jesus and Moses and Elijah, and to stay there. Life was so much better, so much nearer God, there on the mountain top. Why ever come down again? But it is of the very essence of life that we must come down from the mountain top. It has been said that in religion there must be solitude, but not solitariness. The solitude is necessary, for a man must keep his contact with God; but if a man, in his search for the essential solitude, shuts himself off from his fellow-men, shuts his ears to their appeal for help, shuts his heart to the cry of their tears, that is not religion. The solitude is not meant to make us solitary. It is meant to make us better able to meet and cope with the demands of everyday life.

Jesus came down to a delicate situation. A father had brought his boy to the disciples, and the boy was an epileptic. All the symptoms were there. The disciples had been quite unable to deal with his case, and that had given the scribes their chance. The helplessness of the disciples was a first-rate opportunity to belittle not only them but their Master. That is what made the situation so delicate, and that is what makes every human situation so delicate for the Christian. His conduct, his words, his ability or inability to cope with the demands of life, are used as a yard-stick, not only to judge him, but to judge Jesus Christ.

A. Victor Murray, in his book on Christian Education, writes, "There are those into whose eyes comes a far-away look when they talk about the church. It is a supernatural society, the body of Christ, his spotless bride, the custodian of the oracles of God, the blessed company of the redeemed, and a few more romantic titles, none of which seem to tally with what the outsider can see for himself in 'St. Agatha's Parish Church,' or 'High Street Methodists.'" It does not matter how high-sounding a man's professions may be, it is by his actions that people judge him, and, in judging him, judge his Master. That was the situation here.

Then Jesus arrived. When the people saw him, they were astonished. We are not for one moment to think that the radiance of the transfiguration still lingered on him. That would have been to undo his own instructions that it be kept as yet a secret. The crowd had thought him away up in the lonely slopes of Hermon. They had been so engrossed in their argument that they had not seen him come, and now, just when the moment was right, here he was in the midst of them. It was at his sudden, unexpected but opportune arrival, that they were surprised.

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Mark 9:14-18

Here we learn two things about Jesus.

(i) He was ready to face the Cross and he was ready to face the common problem just as either came. It is characteristic of human nature that we can face the great crisis-moments of life with honour and dignity, but allow the routine demands of everyday to irritate and annoy us. We can face the shattering blows of life with a certain heroism, but allow the petty pinpricks to upset us. Many a man can face a great disaster or a great loss with calm serenity and yet loses his temper if a meal is badly cooked or a train late. The amazing thing about Jesus was that he could serenely face the Cross, and just as calmly deal with the day-to-day emergencies of life. The reason was that he did not keep God only for the crisis as so many of us do. He walked the daily paths of life with him.

(ii) He had come into the world to save the world, and yet he could give himself in his entirety to the helping of one single person. It is much easier to preach the gospel of love for mankind than it is to love individual not-very-lovable sinners. It is easy to be filled with a sentimental affection for the human race, and just as easy to find it too much bother to go out of our way to help an individual member of it. Jesus had the gift, which is the gift of a regal nature, of giving himself entirely to every person with whom he happened to be.

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Mark 9:19-24

THE CRY OF FAITH

Mark 9:19-24

"O faithless generation!" Jesus answered. "How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear you? Bring him to me!" They brought him to Jesus. When he saw Jesus, the spirit immediately sent the boy into a convulsion, and he fell upon the ground, and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked his father, "How long is it since this happened to him?" He said, "He has been like this since he was a child. Often it throws him into the fire and into waters for it is out to destroy him. But, if you can, let your heart be moved with pity, and help us." Jesus said to him, "You say, 'If you can.' All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the boy cried out, "I do believe. Help my unbelief."

This passage begins with a cry wrung from the heart of Jesus. He had been on the mountain top and had faced the tremendous task that lay ahead of him. He had decided to stake his life on the redemption of the world. And now he had come back down to find his nearest followers, his own chosen men, beaten and baffled and helpless and ineffective. The thing, for the moment, must have daunted even Jesus. He must have had a sudden realization of what anyone else would have called the hopelessness of his task. He must at that moment have almost despaired of the attempt to change human nature and to make men of the world into men of God.

How did he meet the moment of despair? "Bring the boy to me," he said. When we cannot deal with the ultimate situation, the thing to do is to deal with the situation which at the moment confronts us. It was as if Jesus said, "I do not know how I am ever to change these disciples of mine, but I can at this moment help this boy. Let me get on with the present task, and not despair of the future."

Again and again that is the way to avoid despair. If we sit and think about the state of the world, we may well become very depressed; then let us get to action in our small corner of the world. We may sometimes despair of the church; then let us get to action in our own small part of the church. Jesus did not sit appalled and paralysed at the slowness of men's minds; he dealt with the immediate situation. As Kingsley had it,

"Do the work that's nearest,
Though it's dull at whiles,
Helping when we meet them
Lame dogs over stiles."

The surest way to avoid pessimism and despair is to take what immediate action we can--and there is always something to be done.

To the father of the boy Jesus stated the conditions of a miracle. "To him who believes," said Jesus, "all things are possible." It was as if Jesus said, "The cure of your boy depends, not on me, but on you." This is not a specially theological truth; it is universal. To approach anything in the spirit of hopelessness is to make it hopeless; to approach anything in the spirit of faith is to make it

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Mark 9:19-24

a possibility. Cavour once said that what a statesman needed above all was "a sense of the possible." Most of us are cursed with a sense of the impossible, and that is precisely why miracles do not happen.

The whole attitude of the father of the boy is most illuminating. Originally he had come seeking for Jesus himself. Since Jesus was on the mountain top he had had to deal with the disciples and his experience of them was discouraging. His faith was badly shaken, so badly shaken that when he came to Jesus all he could say at first was, "Help me, if you can." then, face to face with Jesus, suddenly his faith blazed up again. "I believe," he cried. "If there is still some discouragement in me, still some doubts, take them away and fill me with an unquestioning faith."

It sometimes happens that people get less than they hoped for from some church or from some servant of the church. When that happens they ought to press beyond the church to the Master of the church, beyond the servant of Christ to Christ himself. The church may at times disappoint us, and God's servants on earth may disappoint us. But when we battle our way face to face with Jesus Christ, he never disappoints us.

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Mark 9:25-29

THE CAUSE OF FAILURE

Mark 9:25-29

When Jesus saw that the crowd was running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit. "Spirit of dumbness and deafness," he said, "I order you, come out of him, and don't go into him again." When it had cried and violently convulsed him it came out, and he became like a dead man, so that many said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand, and raised him up, and he stood up. When he had gone into the house, and when they were by themselves, his disciples asked him, "Why were we not able to cast it out?" "This kind," he said to them, "cannot come out except by prayer."

Jesus must have taken father and son aside. But the crowd, hearing their cries, came running up, and Jesus acted. There was one last struggle, a struggle to complete exhaustion, and the boy was cured.

When they were by themselves the disciples asked the cause of their failure. They were no doubt remembering that Jesus had sent them out to preach and heal and cast out devils (Mk.3:14-15). Why, then, had they this time so signally failed? Jesus answered quite simply that this kind of cure demanded prayer.

In effect he said to them, "You don't live close enough to God." They had been equipped with power, but it needed prayer to maintain it.

There is a deep lesson here. God may have given us a gift, but unless we maintain close contact with him it may wither and die. That is true of any gift. God may give a man great natural gifts as a preacher, but unless he maintains contact with God, he may in the end become only a man of words and not a man of power. God may give a man a gift of music or of song, but unless he maintains contact with God, he may become a mere professional, who uses the gift only for gain, which is a dreary thing. That is not to say a man should not use a gift for gain. He has a right to capitalize any talent. But it does mean that, even when he is so using it, he should be finding joy in it because he is also using it for God. It is told of Jenny Lind, the famous Swedish soprano, that before every performance she would stand alone in her dressing-room and pray, "God, help me to sing true to-night."

Unless we maintain this contact with God we lose two things however great our gift may be.

(i) We lose vitality. We lose that living power, that something plus which makes for greatness. The thing becomes a performance instead of an offering to God. What should be a vital, living body becomes a beautiful corpse.

(ii) We lose humility. What should be used for God's glory we begin to use for our own, and the virtue goes out of it. What should have been used to set God before men is used to set ourselves before them, and the breath of loveliness is gone.

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Mark 9:25-29

Here is a warning thought. The disciples had been equipped with power direct from Jesus, but they had not nurtured power with prayer, and power had vanished. Whatever gifts God has given us, we lose them when we use them for ourselves. We keep them when we enrich them by continual contact with the God who gave them.

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Mark 9:30-31

FACING THE END

Mark 9:30-31

When they left there, they made their way through Galilee, and Jesus did not wish anyone to know where he was, for he kept teaching the disciples and saying to them, "The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and, when he has been killed, after three days he will rise again." But they did not understand what he said, and they were afraid to ask him what it meant.

This passage marks a mile-stone. Jesus had now left the north country where he was safe and was taking the first step towards Jerusalem and to the Cross which awaited him there. For once he did not watt the crowds around him. He knew quite clearly that unless he could write his message on the hearts of his chosen men, he had failed. Any teacher can leave behind him a series of propositions, but Jesus knew that that was not enough. He had to leave behind him a band of persons on whom these propositions were written. He had to make sure, before he left this world in the body, that there were some who understood, however dimly, what he had come to say.

This time the tragedy of his warning is even more poignant. If we compare it with the previous passage in which he foretold his death (Mk.8:31), we see that one phrase is added, "The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men." There was a traitor in the little band, and Jesus knew it. He could see the way in which the mind of Judas was working. Maybe he could see it better than Judas could himself. And when he said, "The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men." he was not only announcing a fact and giving a warning, he was also making a last appeal to the man in whose heart was forming the purpose of betrayal.

Even yet the disciples did not understand. The thing they did not understand was the bit about rising again. By this time they were aware of the atmosphere of tragedy, but to the end of the day they never grasped the certainty of the Resurrection. That was a wonder that was too great for them, a wonder that they grasped only when it became an accomplished fact.

When they did not understand, they were afraid to ask any further questions. They were like men who knew so much that they were afraid to know more. A man might receive a verdict from his doctor. He might think the general purport of the verdict bad, but not understand all the details, and he might be afraid to ask questions, for the simple reason that he is afraid to know any more. The disciples were like that.

Sometimes we are amazed that they did not grasp what was so plainly spoken. The human mind has an amazing faculty for rejecting what it does not wish to see. Are we so very different? Over and over again we have heard the Christian message. We know the glory of accepting it and the tragedy of rejecting it, but many of us are just as far off as ever we were from giving it our full allegiance and moulding our lives to fit it. Men still accept the parts of the Christian message which they like and which suit them, and refuse to understand the rest.

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Mark 9:32-35

THE TRUE AMBITION

Mark 9:32-35

So they came to Capernaum. When Jesus was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" They remained silent. for on the road they had been arguing with each other who was to be greatest. So Jesus sat down, and called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he must be the last of all, and the servant of all."

Nothing so well shows how far the disciples were from realizing the real meaning of Jesus' Messiahship as this does. Repeatedly he had told them what awaited him in Jerusalem, and yet they were still thinking of his Kingdom in earthly terms and of themselves as his chief ministers of state. There is something heart-breaking in the thought of Jesus going towards a Cross and his disciples arguing about who would be greatest.

Yet in their heart of hearts they knew they were wrong. When he asked them what they had been arguing about they had nothing to say. It was the silence of shame. They had no defence. It is strange how a thing takes its proper place and acquires its true character when it is set in the eyes of Jesus. So long as they thought that Jesus was not listening and that Jesus had not seen, the argument about who should be greatest seemed fair enough, but when that argument had to be stated in the presence of Jesus it was seen in all its unworthiness.

If we took everything and set it in the sight of Jesus it would make all the difference in the world. If of everything we did, we asked, "Could I go on doing this if Jesus was watching me?"; if of everything we said, we asked, "Could I go on talking like this if Jesus was listening to me?" there would be many things which we would be saved from doing and saying. And the fact of Christian belief is that there is no "if" about it. All deeds are done, all words are spoken in his presence. God keep us from the words and deeds which we would be ashamed that he should hear and see.

Jesus dealt with this very seriously. It says that he sat down and called the Twelve to him. When a Rabbi was teaching as a Rabbi, as a master teaches his scholars and disciples, when he was really making a pronouncement, he sat to teach. Jesus deliberately took up the position of a Rabbi teaching his pupils before he spoke. And then he told them that if they sought for greatness in his Kingdom they must find it, not by being first but by being last, not by being masters but by being servants of all. It was not that Jesus abolished ambition. Rather he recreated and sublimated ambition. For the ambition to rule he substituted the ambition to serve. For the ambition to have things done for us he substituted the ambition to do things for others.

So far from being an impossibly idealistic view, this is a view of the soundest common-sense. The really great men, the men who are remembered as having made a real contribution to life, are the men who said to themselves, not, "How can I use the state and society to further my own prestige and my own personal ambitions?" but, "How can I use my personal gifts and talents to serve the state?"

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Mark 9:32-35

Stanley Baldwin paid a noble tribute to Lord Curzon when he died. In it he said, "I want, before I sit down, to say one or two things that no one but I can say. A Prime Minister sees human nature bared to the bone, and it was my chance to see him twice when he suffered great disappointment--the time when I was preferred to him as Prime Minister, and the time when I had to tell him that he could render greater service to the country as chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence than in the Foreign Office. Each of these occasions was a profound and bitter disappointment to him, but never for one moment did he show by word, look, or innuendo, or by any reference to the subject afterwards, that he was dissatisfied.

He bore no grudge, and he pursued no other course than the one I expected of him, of doing his duty where it was decided he could best render service." Here was a man whose greatness lay not in the fact that he reached the highest offices of state, but in the fact that he was ready to serve his country anywhere.

True selflessness is rare, and when it is found it is remembered. The Greeks had a story of a Spartan called Paedaretos. Three hundred men were to be chosen to govern Sparta and Paedaretos was a candidate. When the list of the successful was announced his name was not on it. "I am sorry," said one of his friends, "that you were not elected. The people ought to have known what a wise officer of state you would have made." "I am glad," said Paedaretos, "that in Sparta there are three hundred men better than I am." Here was a man who became a legend because he was prepared to give to others the first place and to bear no ill will.

Every economic problem would be solved if men lived for what they could do for others and not for what they could get for themselves. Every political problem would be solved if the ambition of men was only to serve the state and not to enhance their own prestige. The divisions and disputes which tear the church asunder would for the most part never occur if the only desire of its office-bearers and its members was to serve it without caring what position they occupied. When Jesus spoke of the supreme greatness and value of the man whose ambition was to be a servant, he laid down one of the greatest practical truths in the world.

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Mark 9:36-37

HELPING THE HELPLESS IS HELPING CHRIST

Mark 9:36-37

Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And he took him up in the crook of his arm and said to them, "Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me, but him who sent me."

Jesus is here still dealing with the worthy and the unworthy ambition.

He took a child and set him in the midst. Now a child has no influence at all; a child cannot advance a man's career nor enhance his prestige; a child cannot give us things. It is the other way round. A child needs things; a child must have things done for him. So Jesus says, "If a man welcomes the poor, ordinary people, the people who have no influence and no wealth and no power, the people who need things done for them, he is welcoming me. More than that, he is welcoming God." The child is typical of the person who needs things, and it is the society of the person who needs things that we must seek.

There is a warning here. It is easy to cultivate the friendship of the person who can do things for us, and whose influence can be useful to us. And it is equally easy to avoid the society of the person who inconveniently needs our help. It is easy to curry favour with the influential and the great, and to neglect the simple, humble, ordinary folk. It is easy at some function to seek the society and the notice of some distinguished person, and to avoid the poor relation. In effect Jesus here says that we ought to seek out not those who can do things for us, but those for whom we can do things, for in this way we are seeking the society of himself. This is another way of saying, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt.25:40).

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Mark 9:38-40

A LESSON IN TOLERANCE

Mark 9:38-40

John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons by the use of your name, and we tried to stop him because he is not one of our company." "Don't stop him," said Jesus. "There is no one who can do a work of power in the strength of my name and lightly speak evil of me. He who is not against us is for us."

As we have seen over and over again, in the time of Jesus everyone believed in demons. Everyone believed that both mental and physical illness was caused by the malign influence of these evil spirits. Now there was one very common way to exorcise them. If one could get to know the name of a still more powerful spirit and command the evil demon in that name to come out of a person, the demon was supposed to be powerless to resist. It could not stand against the might of the more powerful name. This is the kind of picture we have here. John had seen a man using the all-powerful name of Jesus to defeat the demons and he had tried to stop him, because he was not one of the intimate band of the disciples. But Jesus declared that no man could do a mighty work in his name and be altogether his enemy. Then Jesus laid down the great principle that "he who is not against us is for us."

Here is a lesson in tolerance, and it is a lesson that nearly everyone needs to learn.

(i) Every man has a right to his own thoughts. Every man has a right to think things out and to think them through until he comes to his own conclusions and his own beliefs. And that is a right we should respect. We are often too apt to condemn what we do not understand. William Penn once said, "Neither despise nor oppose what thou dost not understand." Kingsley Williams in *The New Testament in Plain English*, translates a phrase in Jd.10 like this--"Those who speak abusively of everything they do not understand."

There are two things we must remember.

(a) There is far more than one way to God. "God," as Tennyson has it, "fulfils himself in many ways." Cervantes once said, "Many are the roads by which God carries his own to heaven." The world is round, and two people can get to precisely the same destination by starting out in precisely opposite directions. All roads, if we pursue them long enough and far enough, lead to God. It is a fearful thing for any man or any church to think that he or it has a monopoly of salvation.

(b) It is necessary to remember that truth is always bigger than any man's grasp of it. No man can possibly grasp all truth. The basis of tolerance is not a lazy acceptance of anything. It is not the feeling that there cannot be assurance anywhere. The basis of tolerance is simply the realization of the magnitude of the orb of truth. John Morley wrote, "Toleration means reverence for all the possibilities of truth, it means acknowledgment that she dwells in divers mansions, and wears vesture of many colours, and speaks in strange tongues. It means frank respect for freedom of indwelling conscience against mechanical forms, official conventions, social force. It means the

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charity that is greater than faith or hope." Intolerance is a sign both of arrogance and ignorance, for it is a sign that a man believes that there is no truth beyond the truth he sees.

(ii) Not only must we concede to every man the right to do his own thinking, we must also concede the right to a man to do his own speaking. Of all democratic rights the dearest is that of liberty of speech. There are, of course, limits. If a man is inculcating doctrines calculated to destroy morality and to remove the foundations from all civilized and Christian society, he must be combatted. But the way to combat him is certainly not to eliminate him by force but to prove him wrong. Once Voltaire laid down the conception of freedom of speech in a vivid sentence. "I hate what you say," he said, "but I would die for your right to say it."

(iii) We must remember that any doctrine or belief must finally be judged by the kind of people it produces. Dr. Chalmers once put the matter in a nutshell. "Who cares," he demanded, "about any Church but as an instrument of Christian good?" The question must always ultimately be, not, "How is a Church governed?" but, "What kind of people does a Church produce?"

There is an old eastern fable. A man possessed a ring set with a wonderful opal. Whoever wore the ring became so sweet and true in character that all men loved him. The ring was a charm. Always it was passed down from father to son, and always it did its work. As time went on, it came to a father who had three sons whom he loved with an equal love. What was he to do when the time came to pass on the ring? The father got other two rings made precisely the same so that none could tell the difference. On his death-bed he called each of his sons in, spoke some words of love and to each, without telling the others, gave a ring. When the three sons discovered that each had a ring, a great dispute arose as to which was the true ring that could do so much for its owner. The case was taken to a wise judge. He examined the rings and then he spoke. "I cannot tell which is the magic ring," he said, "but you yourselves can prove it." "We?" asked the sons in astonishment. "Yes," said the judge, "for if the true ring gives sweetness to the character of the man who wears it, then I and all the other people in the city will know the man who possesses the true ring by the goodness of his life. So, go your ways, and be kind, be truthful, be brave, be just in your dealings, and he who does these things will be the owner of the true ring."

The matter was to be proved by life. No man can entirely condemn beliefs which make a man good. If we remember that, we may be less intolerant.

(iv) We may hate a man's beliefs, but we must never hate the man. We may wish to eliminate what he teaches, but we must never wish to eliminate him.

"He drew a circle that shut me out--
Rebel, heretic, thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win--
We drew a circle that took him in."

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Mark 9:41-42

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

Mark 9:41-42

Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink on the ground that you belong to Christ, I tell you truly he will not lose his reward. And whoever puts a stumbling-block in the path of one of these little ones who believe in me, it is better for him that a great millstone hang about his neck and he be cast into the sea.

The teaching of this passage is simple, unmistakable and salutary.

(i) It declares that any kindness shown, any help given, to the people of Christ will not lose its reward. The reason for helping is that the person in need belongs to Jesus. Every man in need has a claim upon us because he is dear to Christ. Had Jesus still been here in the flesh he would have helped that man in the most practical way and the duty of help has devolved on us. It is to be noted how simple the help is. The gift is a cup of cold water. We are not asked to do great things for others, things beyond our power. We are asked to give the simple things that any man can give.

A missionary tells a lovely story. She had been telling a class of African primary children about giving a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus. She was sitting on the verandah of her house. Into the village square came a company of native bearers. They had heavy packs. They were tired and thirsty, and they sat down to rest. Now they were men of another tribe, and had they asked the ordinary non-Christian native for water they would have been told to go and find it for themselves, because of the barrier between the tribes. But as the men sat wearily there, and as the missionary watched, from the school emerged a little line of tiny African girls. On their heads they had pitchers of water. Shyly and fearfully they approached the tired bearers, knelt and offered their pitchers of water. In surprise the bearers took them and drank and handed them back, and the girls took to their heels and ran to the missionary.

"We have given a thirsty man a drink," they said, "in the name of Jesus." The little children took the story and the duty literally.

Would that more would do so! It is the simple kindnesses that are needed. As Mahomet said long ago, "Putting a lost man on the right road, giving a thirsty man a drink of water, smiling in your brother's face--that, too, is charity."

(ii) But the converse is also true. To help is to win the eternal reward. To cause a weaker brother to stumble is to win the eternal punishment. The passage is deliberately stern. The mill-stone that is mentioned is a great millstone. There were two kinds of mills in Palestine. There was the hand-mill that the women used in the house. And there was the mill whose stone was so great that it took an ass to turn it.

The mill-stone here is literally an ass' mill-stone. To be cast into the sea with that attached was certainly to have no hope of return. This was in fact a punishment and a means of execution both in Rome and in Palestine. Josephus tells us that when certain Galilaeans had made a successful revolt "they took those of Herod's party and drowned them in the lake." Suetonius, the Roman historian,

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Mark 9:41-42

tells us of Augustus that, "Because the tutor and attendants of his son Gaius took advantage of their master's illness to commit acts of arrogance and greed to his province, he had them thrown into a river with heavy weights about their necks."

To sin is terrible but to teach another to sin is infinitely worse. O. Henry has a story in which he tells of a little girl whose mother was dead. Her father used to come home from work and sit down and take off his jacket and open his paper and light his pipe and put his feet on the mantelpiece. The little girl would come in and ask him to play with her for a little for she was lonely. He told her he was tired, to let him be at peace. He told her to go out to the street and play. She played on the streets. The inevitable happened--she took to the streets. The years passed on and she died. Her soul arrived in heaven. Peter saw her and said to Jesus, "Master, here's a girl who was a bad lot. I suppose we send her straight to hell?" "No," said Jesus gently, "let her in. Let her in." And then his eyes grew stern, "But look for a man who refused to play with his little girl and sent her out to the streets--and send him to hell." God is not hard on the sinner, but he will be stern to the person who makes it easier for another to sin, and whose conduct, either thoughtless or deliberate, puts a stumbling-block in the path of a weaker brother.

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Mark 9:43-48

THE GOAL WHICH IS WORTH ANY SACRIFICE

Mark 9:43-48

If your hand proves a stumbling-block to you, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than to go away to Gehenna with two hands, to the fire that can never be quenched. And if your foot is a stumbling-block to you, cut it off. For it is better for you to enter life lame than to be cast into Gehenna with two feet. And if your eye proves a stumbling-block to you, cast it away. For it is better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than to be cast into Gehenna with two eyes, where their worm does not die and the fire is never quenched.

This passage lays down in vivid eastern language the basic truth that there is one goal in life worth any sacrifice. In physical matters it may be that a man may have to part with a limb or with some part of the body to preserve the life of the whole body. The amputation of some limb or the excision of some part of the body by surgical means is sometimes the only way to preserve the life of the whole body. In the spiritual life the same kind of thing can happen.

The Jewish Rabbis had sayings based on the way in which some parts of the body can lend themselves to sin. "The eye and the heart are the two brokers of sin." "The eye and the heart are the two handmaids of sin." "Passions lodge only in him who sees." "Woe to him who goes after his eyes for the eyes are adulterous." There are certain instincts in man, and certain parts of man's physical constitution, which minister to sin. This saying of Jesus is not to be taken literally, but is a vivid eastern way of saying that there is a goal in life worth any sacrifice to attain it.

There are in this passage repeated references to Gehenna. Gehenna is spoken of in the New Testament in Matt.5:22,29,30; Matt.10:28; Matt.18:9; Matt.23:15; Matt.23:33; Lk.12:5; Jas.3:6. The word is regularly translated Hell. It is a word with a history. It is a form of the word Hinnom. The valley of Hinnom was a ravine outside Jerusalem. It had an evil past.

It was the valley in which Ahaz, in the old days, had instituted fire worship and the sacrifice of little children in the fire. "He burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his sons as an offering." (2Chr.28:3). That terrible heathen worship was also followed by Manasseh (2Chr.33:6). The valley of Hinnom, Gehenna, therefore, was the scene of one of Israel's most terrible lapses into heathen customs. In his reformation Josiah declared it an unclean place. "He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the sons of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech." (2Kgs.23:10).

When the valley had been so declared unclean and had been so desecrated it was set apart as the place where the refuse of Jerusalem was burned. The consequence was that it was a foul, unclean place, where loathsome worms bred on the refuse, and which smoked and smouldered at all times like some vast incinerator. The actual phrase about the worm which does not die, and the fire which is not quenched, comes from a description of the fate of Israel's evil enemies in Isa.66:24.

Because of all this Gehenna had become a kind of type or symbol of Hell, the place where the souls of the wicked would be tortured and destroyed. It is so used in the Talmud. "The sinner who

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desists from the words of the Law will in the end inherit Gehenna." So then Gehenna stands as the place of punishment, and the word roused in the mind of every Israelite the grimmest and most terrible pictures.

But what was the goal for which everything must be sacrificed? It is described in two ways. Twice it is called life, and once it is called the Kingdom of God. How may we define the Kingdom of God? We may take our definition from the Lord's Prayer. In that prayer two petitions are set beside each other. "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." There is no literary device so characteristic of Jewish style as parallelism. In parallelism two phrases are set side by side, the one of which either restates the other, or amplifies, explains and develops it. Any verse of the Psalms will show this device in action. So, then, we may take it that in the Lord's Prayer the one petition is an explanation and amplification of the other. When we set the two together we get the definition that, "The Kingdom of Heaven is a society upon earth in which God's will is as perfectly done in earth as it is in heaven."

We may then go on to say quite simply that perfectly to do God's will is to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. And if we take that and apply it to the passage we are now studying it will mean that it is worth any sacrifice and any discipline and any self-denial to do the will of God and only in doing that will is there real life and ultimate and completely satisfying peace.

Origen takes this symbolically. He says that it may be necessary to excise some heretic or some evil person from the fellowship of the Church in order to keep the body of the Church pure. But this saying is meant to be taken very personally. It means that it may be necessary to excise some habit, to abandon some pleasure, to give up some friendship, to cut out some thing which has become very dear to us, in order to be fully obedient to the will of God. This is not a matter with which anyone can deal for anyone else. It is solely a matter of a man's individual conscience, and it means that, if there is anything in our lives which is coming between us and a perfect obedience to the will of God, however much habit and custom may have made it part of our lives, it must be rooted out. The rooting out may be as painful as a surgical operation, it may seem like cutting out part of our own body, but if we are to know real life, real happiness and real peace it must go. This may sound bleak and stern, but in reality it is only facing the facts of life.

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Mark 9:49-50

THE SALT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Mark 9:49-50

Everyone must be salted with fire, Salt is good, but, if the salt has become saltless, with what will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and so live at peace with each other.

These three verses are amongst the most difficult in the New Testament. The commentators produce scores of different interpretations. The interpretation will become easier if we remember something we have already had cause to note. Often Jesus dropped pithy sayings which stuck in men's minds because they could not possibly forget them. But often, although men remembered the saying, they did not remember the occasion on which it was said. The result is that we often get a series of quite disconnected sayings of Jesus set together because they stuck in the writer's mind in that order.

Here is an instance of this. We will not make sense of these two verses at all unless we recognize that here we have three quite separate sayings of Jesus which have nothing to do with each other. They came together in the compiler's mind and stuck there together in this order because they all contain the word salt. They are a little collection of sayings of Jesus in which he used salt in various ways as metaphor or illustration. AD this is to say that we must not try to find some remote connection between these sayings. We must take them individually and interpret each as it comes.

(i) Everyone must be salted by fire. According to the Jewish Law every sacrifice must be salted with salt before it was offered to God on the altar (Lev.2:13). That sacrificial salt was called the salt of the covenant (Num.18:19; 2Chr.13:5). It was the addition of that salt which made the sacrifice acceptable to God, and which his covenant law laid down as necessary. This saying of Jesus will then mean, "Before a Christian life becomes acceptable to God it must be treated with fire just as every sacrifice is treated with salt." The fire is the salt which makes the life acceptable to God.

What does that mean? In ordinary New Testament language, fire has two connections.

(a) It is connected with purification. It is the fire which purifies the base metal; the alloy is separated and the metal left pure. Fire then will mean everything which purifies life, the discipline by which a man conquers his sin, the experiences of life which purify and strengthen the sinews of the soul. In that case this will mean, "The life which is acceptable to God is the life which has been cleansed and purified by the discipline of Christian obedience and Christian acceptance of the guiding hand of God."

(b) Fire is connected with destruction. In that case this saying will have to do with persecution. It will mean that the life which has undergone the trials and hardships and perils of persecution is the life which is acceptable to God. The man who has voluntarily faced the danger of the destruction of his goods and the destruction of his own life because of his loyalty to Jesus Christ is the man who is dear to God.

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Mark 9:49-50

We may take this first saying of Jesus to mean that the life which is purified by discipline and has faced the danger of persecution because of its loyalty is the sacrifice which is precious to God.

(ii) Salt is good, but if the salt has become saltless, with what will you season it? This is an even harder saying to interpret. We would not say that there are no other possible interpretations, but we would suggest that it may be understood on the following lines. Salt has two characteristic virtues. First, it lends flavour to things. An egg without salt is an insipid thing. Anyone knows how unpleasant many a dish is when the salt which should have been included is accidentally omitted in the preparation. Second, salt was the earliest of all preservatives. To keep a thing from going rotten salt was used. The Greeks used to say that salt acted like a soul in a dead body. Dead meat left to itself went bad, but, pickled in salt, it retained its freshness. The salt seemed to put a kind of life into it. Salt defended against corruption.

Now the Christian was sent into a heathen society to do something for it. Heathen society had two characteristics. First, it was bored and world-weary. The very luxuries and excesses of that ancient world were a proof that in its bored weariness it was looking for some thrill in a life from which all thrill had gone. As Matthew Arnold wrote,

"On that hard pagan world, disgust
And secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.
In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay;
He drove abroad in furious guise
Along the Appian Way;
He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his hair with flowers--
No easier nor no quicker passed
The impracticable hours."

Into that bored and weary world Christianity came, and it was the task of the Christian to impart to society a new flavour and a new thrill as salt does to the dish with which it is used.

Second, that ancient world was corrupt. No one knew that better than the ancients themselves. Juvenal likened Rome to a filthy sewer. Purity was gone and chastity was unknown. Into that corrupt world Christianity came, and it was the task of the Christian to bring an antiseptic to the poison of life, to bring a cleansing influence into that corruption. Just as salt defeated the corruption which inevitably attacked dead meat, so Christianity was to attack the corruption of the world.

So then in this saying Jesus was challenging the Christian. "The world," he said, "needs the flavour and the purity that only the Christian can bring. And if the Christian himself has lost the thrill and the purity of the Christian life, where will the world ever get these things?" Unless the Christian, in the power of Christ, defeats world-weariness and world corruption, these things must flourish unchecked.

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(iii) Have salt in yourselves and live at peace with each other. Here we must take salt in the sense of purity. The ancients declared that there was nothing in the world purer than salt because it came from the two purest things, the sun and the sea. The very glistening whiteness of salt was a picture of purity. So this will mean, "Have within yourselves the purifying influence of the Spirit of Christ. Be purified from selfishness and self-seeking, from bitterness and anger and grudge-bearing. Be cleansed from irritation and moodiness and self-centredness, and then, and then only, you will be able to live in peace with your fellow men." In other words, Jesus is saying that it is only the life that is cleansed of self and filled with Christ which can live in real fellowship with men.

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Mark 10:1-12

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

Mark 10:1-12

Leaving there, Jesus came into the hill-country of Judaea and to the district across the Jordan, and once again crowds came together to him. As his custom was, he again continued to teach them. Some Pharisees came to him and asked him if it was lawful for a man to put away his wife. They asked this question to test him. He asked them, "What commandment did Moses lay down for you?" They answered, "Moses allowed a man to write a bill of divorcement and then to put her away." Jesus said to them, "It was to meet the hardness of your heart that he wrote this commandment for you. From the beginning of creation male and female he created them. For this cause a man will leave his father and his mother and will cleave to his wife. And the two will become one flesh, so that they are no longer two but one flesh. So then what God has joined together let not man separate." In the house his disciples again asked him about this.

He said to them, "Whoever puts away his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

Jesus was pursuing his way south. He had left Galilee and had come into Judaea. He had not yet entered Jerusalem, but step by step and stage by stage he was approaching the final scene.

Certain Pharisees came with a question about divorce, by which they hoped to test him. There may have been more than one motive behind their question. Divorce was a burning question, a crux of rabbinic discussion, and it may well be that they honestly wished for Jesus' opinion on it. They may have wished to test his orthodoxy. It may well be that Jesus had already had something to say on this matter. Matt.5:31-32, shows us Jesus speaking about marriage and re-marriage, and it may be that these Pharisees had the hope that he might contradict himself and entangle himself in his own words. It may be that they knew what he would answer and wished to involve him in enmity with Herod who had in fact divorced his wife and married another. It may well be that they wished to hear Jesus contradict the law of Moses, as indeed he did, and thereby to formulate a charge of heresy against him. One thing is certain--the question they asked Jesus was no academic one of interest only to the rabbinic schools.

It was a question which dealt with one of the acutest issues of the time.

In theory nothing could be higher than the Jewish ideal of marriage. Chastity was held to be the greatest of all the virtues. "We find that God is long-suffering to every sin except the sin of unchastity." "Unchastity causes the glory of God to depart." "Every Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder or adultery." "The very altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth." The ideal was there but practice fell very far short.

The basic fact that vitiated the whole situation was that in Jewish law a woman was regarded as a thing. She had no legal rights whatever but was at the complete disposal of the male head of the family. The result was that a man could divorce his wife on almost any grounds, while there were very few on which a woman could seek divorce. At best she could only ask her husband to divorce her. "A woman may be divorced with or without her will, but a man only with his will." The only

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Mark 10:1-12

grounds on which a woman could claim a divorce were if her husband became a leper, if he engaged in a disgusting trade such as that of a tanner, if he ravished a virgin, or if he falsely accused her of pre-nuptial sin.

The law of Jewish divorce goes back to Deut.24:1. That passage was the foundation of the whole matter. It runs thus: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house."

At first the bill of divorcement was very simple. It read like this: "Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt." In later days the bill became more elaborate: "On the day, of the week, of the month, year of the world, according to the calculation in use in the town of situated by the river 11, A.B., son of C.D., and by whatsoever name I am called here, present this day native of the town of I acting of my free-will, and without any coercion, do repudiate, send back, and put away thee E.F., daughter of G.H., and by whatsoever name thou art called, and until this present time my wife. I send thee away now E.F., daughter of G.H., so that thou art free and thou canst at thy pleasure marry whom thou wilt and no one will hinder thee.

This is thy letter of divorce, act of repudiation, certificate of separation, according to the law of Moses and of Israel." In New Testament times this document took a skilled Rabbi to draw it up. It was afterwards proved by a court of three rabbis, and then lodged with the Sanhedrin. But the process of divorce remained on the whole exceedingly easy, and at the entire discretion of the man.

But the real crux of the problem was the interpretation of the law as it is in Deut.24:1. There it is laid down that a man can divorce his wife if he finds in her some indecency. How was that phrase to be interpreted? There were in this matter two schools of thought.

There was the school of Shammai. They interpreted the matter with utter strictness. A matter of indecency was adultery and adultery alone. Let a woman be as bad as Jezebel, unless she was guilty of adultery there could be no divorce.

The other school was the school of Hillel. They interpreted that crucial phrase as widely as possible. They said that it could mean if the wife spoiled a dish of food, if she spun in the streets, if she talked to a strange man, if she spoke disrespectfully of her husband's relations in his hearing, if she was a brawling woman, (who was defined as a woman whose voice could be heard in the next house). Rabbi Akiba even went the length of saying that it meant if a man found a woman who was fairer in his eyes than his wife was.

Human nature being as it is, it was the laxer view which prevailed. The result was that divorce for the most trivial reasons, or for no reason at all, was tragically common. To such a pass had things come that, in the time of Jesus, women hesitated to marry at all because marriage was so insecure. When Jesus spoke as he did he was speaking on a subject which was a burning issue, and he was striking a blow for women by seeking to restore marriage to the position it ought to have.

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Certain things are to be noted. Jesus quoted the Mosaic regulation, and then he said that Moses laid that down only "to meet the hardness of your hearts." That may mean one of two things. It may mean that Moses laid it down because it was the best that could be expected from people such as those for whom he was legislating. Or, it may mean that Moses laid it down in order to try to control a situation which even then was degenerating, that in fact it was not so much a permission to divorce as it was in the beginning an attempt to control divorce, to reduce it to some kind of law, and to make it more difficult.

In any event Jesus made it quite clear that he regarded Deut.24:1, as being laid down for a definite situation and being in no sense permanently binding. The authorities which he quoted went much further back. For his authorities he went right back to the Creation story and quoted Gen.1:27 and Gen.2:24. It was his view that in the very nature of things marriage was a permanency which indissolubly united two people in such a way that the bond could never be broken by any human laws and regulations. It was his belief that in the very constitution of the universe marriage is meant to be an absolute permanency and unity, and no Mosaic regulation dealing with a temporary situation could alter that.

The difficulty is that in the parallel account in Matthew there is a difference. In Mark, Jesus' prohibition of divorce and remarriage is absolute. In Matt.19:3-9, he is shown as absolutely forbidding remarriage, but as permitting divorce on one ground--adultery. Almost certainly the Matthew version is correct, and it is indeed implied in Mark. It was Jewish law that adultery did in fact compulsorily dissolve any marriage. And the truth is that infidelity does in fact dissolve the bond of marriage. Once adultery has been committed the unity is in any case destroyed and divorce merely attests the fact.

The real essence of the passage is that Jesus insisted that the loose sexual morality of his day must be mended. Those who sought marriage only for pleasure must be reminded that marriage is also for responsibility. Those who regarded marriage simply as a means of gratifying their physical passions must be reminded that it was also a spiritual unity. Jesus was building a rampart round the home.

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Mark 10:13-16

OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Mark 10:13-16

They brought little children to Jesus that he might touch them. But the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw what they were doing he was vexed and said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and don't try to stop them for of such is the Kingdom of God. This is the truth I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will not enter into it." And he took them up in the crook of his arm and blessed them and laid his hands upon them.

It was natural that Jewish mothers should wish their children to be blessed by a great and distinguished Rabbi. Especially they brought their children to such a person on their first birthday. It was in this way that they brought the children to Jesus on this day.

We will fully understand the almost poignant beauty of this passage only if we remember when it happened. Jesus was on the way to the Cross--and he knew it. Its cruel shadow can never have been far from his mind. It was at such a time that he had time for the children. Even with such a tension in his mind as that he had time to take them in his arms and he had the heart to smile into their faces and maybe to play with them awhile.

The disciples were not boorish and ungracious men. They simply wanted to protect Jesus. They did not quite know what was going on, but they knew quite clearly that tragedy lay ahead and they could see the tension under which Jesus laboured. They did not want him to be bothered. They could not conceive that he could want the children about him at such a time as that. But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me."

Incidentally, this tells us a great deal about Jesus. It tells us that he was the kind of person who cared for children and for whom children cared. He could not have been a stern and gloomy and joyless person. There must have been a kindly sunshine on him. He must have smiled easily and laughed joyously. Somewhere George Macdonald says that he does not believe in a man's Christianity if the children are never to be found playing around his door. This little, precious incident throws a flood of light on the human kind of person Jesus was.

"Of such," said Jesus "is the Kingdom of God." What is it about the child that Jesus liked and valued so much?

(i) There is the child's humility,. There is the child who is an exhibitionist, but such a child is rare and almost always the product of misguided adult treatment. Ordinarily the child is embarrassed by prominence and publicity. He has not yet learned to think in terms of place and pride and prestige. He has not yet learned to discover the importance of himself.

(ii) There is the child's obedience. True, a child is often disobedient, but, paradox though it may seem, his natural instinct is to obey. He has not yet learned the pride and the false independence which separate a man from his fellow-men and from God.

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Mark 10:13-16

(iii) There is the child's trust. That is seen in two things.

(a) It is seen in the child's acceptance of authority. There is a time when he thinks his father knows everything and that his father is always right. To our shame, he soon grows out of that. But instinctively the child realizes his own ignorance and his own helplessness and trusts the one who, as he thinks, knows.

(b) It is seen in the child's confidence in other people. He does not expect any person to be bad. He will make friends with a perfect stranger. A great man once said that the greatest compliment ever paid him was when a little boy came up to him, a complete stranger, and asked him to tie his shoelace. The child has not yet learned to suspect the world. He still believes the best about others. Sometimes that very trust leads him into danger for there are those who are totally unworthy of it and who abuse it, but that trust is a lovely thing.

(iv) The child has a short memory. He has not yet learned to bear grudges and nourish bitterness. Even when he is unjustly treated--and who among us is not sometimes unjust to his children?--he forgets, and forgets so completely that he does not even need to forgive.

Indeed, of such is the Kingdom of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 10:17-22

HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT GOODNESS?

Mark 10:17-22

As Jesus was going along the road, a man came running to him and threw himself at his feet and asked him, "Good teacher, what am I to do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? There is no one who is good, except one--God. You know the commandments. You must not kill, you must not commit adultery, you must not steal, you must not bear false witness, you must not defraud anyone, you must honour your father and mother." He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth." When Jesus looked at him he loved him, and he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Go, sell all that you have, and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. And come! Follow me!" But he was grieved at this saying, and he went away in sadness, for he had many possessions.

Here is one of the most vivid stories in the gospels.

(i) We must note how the man came and how Jesus met him. He came running. He flung himself at Jesus' feet. There is something amazing in the sight of this rich, young aristocrat falling at the feet of the penniless prophet from Nazareth, who was on the way to being an outlaw. "Good teacher!" he began. And straight away Jesus answered back, "No flattery! Don't call me good! Keep that word for God!" It looks almost as if Jesus was trying to freeze him and to pour cold water on that young enthusiasm.

There is a lesson here. It is clear that this man came to Jesus in a moment of overflowing emotion. It is also clear that Jesus exercised a personal fascination over him. Jesus did two things that every evangelist and every preacher and every teacher ought to remember and to copy.

First, he said in effect, "Stop and think! You are all wrought up and palpitating with emotion! I don't want you swept to me by a moment of emotion. Think calmly what you are doing." Jesus was not freezing the man. He was telling him even at the very outset to count the cost.

Second, he said in effect, "You cannot become a Christian by a sentimental passion for me. you must look at God." Preaching and teaching always mean the conveying of truth through personality, and thereby lies the greatest danger of the greatest teachers. The danger is that the pupil, the scholar, the young person may form a personal attachment to the teacher or the preacher and think that it is an attachment to God. The teacher and preacher must never point to himself. He must always point to God. There is in all true teaching a certain self-obliteration. True, we cannot keep personality and warm personal loyalty out of it altogether, and we would not if we could. But the matter must not stop there. The teacher and the preacher are in the last analysis only finger-posts to God.

(ii) Never did any story so lay down the essential Christian truth that respectability is not enough. Jesus quoted the commandments which were the basis of the decent life. Without hesitation the man said he had kept them all. Note one thing--with one exception they were all negative commandments, and that one exception operated only in the family circle. In effect the man was

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Mark 10:17-22

saying, "I never in my life did anyone any harm." That was perfectly true. But the real question is, "What good have you done?" And the question to this man was even more pointed, "With all your possessions, with your wealth, with all that you could give away, what positive good have you done to others? How much have you gone out of your way to help and comfort and strengthen others as you might have done?" Respectability, on the whole, consists in not doing things; Christianity consists in doing things. That was precisely where this man--like so many of us--fell down.

(iii) So Jesus confronted him with a challenge. In effect he said, "Get out of this moral respectability. Stop looking at goodness as consisting in not doing things. Take yourself and all that you have, and spend everything on others. Then you will find true happiness in time and in eternity." The man could not do it. He had great possessions, which it had never entered his head to give away and when it was suggested to him he could not. True, he had never stolen, and he had never defrauded anyone--but neither had he ever been, nor could he compel himself to be, positively and sacrificially generous.

It may be respectable never to take away from anyone. It is Christian to give to someone. In reality Jesus was confronting this man with a basic and essential question--"How much do you want real Christianity? Do you want it enough to give your possessions away?" And the man had to answer in effect, "I want it--but I don't want it as much as all that."

Robert Louis Stevenson in *The Master of Ballantrae* draws a picture of the master leaving the ancestral home of Durrisdere for the last time. Even he is sad. He is talking to the faithful family steward. "Ah! M'Kellar," he said, "Do you think I have never a regret." "I do not think," said M'Kellar, "that you could be so bad a man unless you had all the machinery for being a good one." "Not all," said the master, "not all. It is there you are in error. The malady of not wanting."

It was the malady of not wanting enough which meant tragedy for the man who came running to Jesus. It is the malady from which most of us suffer. We all want goodness, but so few of us want it enough to pay the price.

Jesus, looking at him, loved him. There were many things in that look of Jesus.

(a) There was the appeal of love. Jesus was not angry with him. He loved him too much for that. It was not the look of anger but the appeal of love.

(b) There was the challenge to chivalry. It was a look which sought to pull the man out of his comfortable, respectable, settled life into the adventure of being a real Christian.

(c) It was the look of grief. And that grief was the sorest grief of all--the grief of seeing a man deliberately choose not to be what he might have been and had it in him to be.

Jesus looks at us with the appeal of love and with the challenge to the knightliness of the Christian way. God grant that he may never have to look at us with sorrow for a loved one who refuses to be what he might have been and could have been.

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Mark 10:23-27

THE PERIL OF RICHES

Mk 10:23-27

Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, "With what difficulty will those who have money enter into the Kingdom of God!" His disciples were amazed at his words. Jesus repeated, "Children, how difficult it is for those who trust in money to enter into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished. "Who then," they said to him, "can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God."

The ruler who had refused the challenge of Jesus had walked sorrowfully away, and, no doubt the eyes of Jesus and the company of the apostles followed him until his figure receded into the distance. Then Jesus turned and looked round his own men. "How very difficult it is," he said, "for a man who has money to enter into the Kingdom of God." The word used for money is *chremata* (GSN5536), which is defined by Aristotle as, "All those things of which the value is measured by coinage."

We may perhaps wonder why this saying so astonished the disciples. Twice their amazement is stressed. The reason for their amazement was that Jesus was turning accepted Jewish standards completely upside down. Popular Jewish morality was simple. It believed that prosperity was the sign of a good man. If a man was rich, God must have honoured and blessed him. Wealth was proof of excellence of character and of favour with God. The Psalmist sums it up, "I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging bread." (Ps.37:25.)

No wonder the disciples were surprised! They would have argued that the more prosperous a man was the more certain he was of entry into the Kingdom. So Jesus repeated his saying in a slightly different way to make clearer what he meant. "How difficult it is," he said, "for those who have put their trust in riches to enter the Kingdom."

No one ever saw the dangers of prosperity and of material things more clearly than Jesus did. What are these dangers?

(i) Material possessions tend to fix a man's heart to this world. He has so large a stake in it, he has so great an interest in it, that it is difficult for him to think beyond it, and it is specially difficult for him to contemplate leaving it. Dr. Johnson was once shown round a famous castle and its lovely grounds. After he had seen it all, he turned to his friends and said, "These are the things that make it difficult to die." The danger of possessions is that they fix a man's thoughts and interests to this world.

(ii) If a man's main interest is in material possessions it tends to make him think of everything in terms of price. A hill shepherd's wife wrote a most interesting letter to a newspaper. Her children had been brought up in the loneliness of the hills. They were simple and unsophisticated. Then her husband got a position in a town and the children were introduced to the town. They changed very considerably--and they changed for the worse. The last paragraph of her letter read--"Which is

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preferable for a child's upbringing--a lack of worldliness, but with better manners and sincere and simple thoughts, or worldliness and its present-day habit of knowing the price of everything and the true value of nothing?"

If a man's main interest is in material things, he will think in terms, of price and not in terms of value. He will think in terms of what money can get. And he may well forget that there are values in this world far beyond money, that there are things which have no price, and that there are precious things that money cannot buy. It is fatal when a man begins to think that everything worth having has a money price.

(iii) Jesus would have said that the possession of material things is two things.

(a) It is an acid test of a man. For a hundred men who can stand adversity only one can stand prosperity. Prosperity can so very easily make a man arrogant, proud, self-satisfied, worldly. It takes a really big and good man to bear it worthily.

(b) It is a responsibility. A man will always be judged by two standards how he got his possessions and how he uses them. The more he has, the greater the responsibility that rests upon him. Will he use what he has selfishly or generously? Will he use it as if he had undisputed possession of it, or remembering that he holds it in stewardship from God.

The reaction of the disciples was that, if what Jesus was saying was true, to be saved at all was well-nigh impossible. Then Jesus stated the whole doctrine of salvation in a nutshell. "If," he said, "salvation depended on a man's own efforts it would be impossible for anyone. But salvation is the gift of God and all things are possible to him." The man who trusts in himself and in his possessions can never be saved. The man who trusts in the saving power and the redeeming love of God can enter freely into salvation. This is the thought that Jesus stated. This is the thought that Paul wrote in letter after letter. And this is the thought which is still for us the very foundation of the Christian faith.

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Mark 10:28-31

CHRIST IS NO MAN'S DEBTOR

Mark 10:28-31

Peter began to say to him, "Look now! We have left everything and have become your followers." Jesus said, "This is the truth I tell you--there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the good news who will not get it back a hundred times over in this present time--homes and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands--with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Peter's mind had been working, and, characteristically, his tongue could not stay still. He had just seen a man deliberately refuse Jesus' "Follow me!" He had just heard Jesus say in effect that that man by his action had shut himself out from the Kingdom of God. Peter could not help drawing the contrast between that man and himself and his friends. Just as the man had refused Jesus' "Follow me!" he and his friends had accepted it, and Peter with that almost crude honesty of his wanted to know what he and his friends were to get out of it. Jesus' answer falls into three sections.

(i) He said that no man ever gave up anything for the sake of himself and of his good news without getting it back a hundredfold. It so happened that in the early Church that was literally true. A man's Christianity might involve the loss of home and friends and loved ones, but his entry into the Christian Church brought him into a far greater and wider family than ever he had left, a family who were all spiritually kin to him.

We see the thing actually happening in the life of Paul. No doubt, when Paul became a Christian the door of his home slammed in his face and his family disowned him. But equally without doubt there was city upon city, town upon town, village upon village in Europe and in Asia Minor where he could find a home waiting for him and a family in Christ to welcome him. It is strange how he uses the very family terms. In Rom.16:13, he tells how the mother of Rufus was as good as a mother to him. In Phm.10, he speaks of Onesimus as the son whom he had begotten in his bonds.

It would be so of every Christian in the early days. When his own family rejected him he entered into the wider family of Christ.

When Egerton Young first preached the gospel to the Red Indians in Saskatchewan the idea of the fatherhood of God fascinated men who had hitherto seen God only in the thunder and the lightning and the storm blast. An old chief said to Egerton Young, "Did I hear you say to God 'Our Father'?" "I did," said Egerton Young. "God is your Father?" asked the chief. "Yes," said Egerton Young. "And," went on the chief, "He is also my Father?" "He certainly is," said Egerton Young. Suddenly the chief's face lit up with a new radiance. His hand went out. "Then," he said like a man making a dazzling discovery, "you and I are brothers."

A man may have to sacrifice ties that are very dear in order to become a Christian, but when he does he becomes a member of a family and a brotherhood as wide as earth and heaven.

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Mark 10:28-31

(ii) Jesus added two things. First, he added the simple words and persecutions. Straightaway these words remove the whole matter from the world of quid pro quo. They take away the idea of a material reward for a material sacrifice. They tell us of two things. They speak of the utter honesty of Jesus. He never offered an easy way. He told men straight that to be a Christian is a costly thing. Second, they tell us that Jesus never used a bribe to make men follow him. He used a challenge. It is as if he said, "Certainly you will get your reward, but you will have to show yourself a big enough man and a gallant enough adventurer to get it." The second thing that Jesus added was the idea of the world to come. He never promised that within this world of space and time there would be a kind of squaring up of the balance sheet and settlement of accounts. He did not call men to win the rewards of time. He called men to earn the blessings of eternity. God has not only this world in which to repay.

(iii) Then Jesus added one warning epigram--"Many who are first shall be last, and the last first." This was in reality a warning to Peter. It may well be that by this time Peter was estimating his own worth and his own reward and assessing them high. What Jesus was saying was, "The final standard of judgment is with God. Many a man may stand well in the judgment of the world, but the judgment of God may upset the world's judgment. Still more many a man may stand well in his own judgment, and find that God's evaluation of him is very different." It is a warning against all pride. It is a warning that the ultimate judgments belong to God who alone knows the motives of men's hearts. It is a warning that the judgments of heaven may well upset the reputations of earth.

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Mark 10:32-34

THE APPROACHING END

Mark 10:32-34

They were on the road, on their way up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. They were in a state of astonished bewilderment, and, as they followed him, they were afraid. Once again he took the Twelve to him, and began to tell them what was going to happen to him. "Look you!" He said, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and experts in the law, and they will condemn him to death, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles, and they will make a jest of him, and they will spit on him, and they will scourge him and they will kill him. And after three days he will rise again."

Here is a vivid picture, all the more vivid because of the stark economy of words with which it is painted. Jesus and his men were entering upon the last scene. Jesus had set his course definitely and irrevocably to Jerusalem and the Cross. Mark marks the stages very definitely. There had been the withdrawal to the north, to the territory round Caesarea Philippi. there had been the journey south, and the brief halt in Galilee. There had been the way to Judaea and the time in the hill-country and beyond Jordan. And now there is the final stage, the road to Jerusalem.

This picture tells us something about Jesus.

(i) It tells us of the loneliness of Jesus. They were going along the road and he was out ahead of them--alone. And they were so amazed and bewildered, so conscious of the sense of impending tragedy, that they were afraid to go up to him. There are certain decisions which a man must take alone. Had Jesus tried to share this decision with the Twelve their only contribution would have been to try to stop him. There are certain things which a man must face alone. Matthew Arnold, in his poem *Isolation*, speaks of,

"This truth--to prove and make thine own:
'Thou hast been, shalt be, art alone'."

There are certain decisions which must be taken and certain roads that must be walked in the awful loneliness of a man's own soul. And yet, in the deepest sense of all, even in these times a man is not alone, for never is God nearer to him. Whittier writes of such a time,

"Nothing before, nothing behind.
The steps of faith
Fall on the seeming void, and find
The rock beneath."

Here we see the essential loneliness of Jesus, a loneliness that was comforted by God.

(ii) It tells us of the courage of Jesus. Three times Jesus foretold the things that were to happen to him in Jerusalem, and as Mark tells of these warnings, each time they grow grimmer and some further detail of horror is included. At first (Mk.8:31) it is the bare announcement. At the second

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Mark 10:32-34

time the hint of betrayal is there (Mk.9:31). And now at the third time the jesting, the mocking and the scourging appear. It would seem as if the picture became ever clearer in the mind of Jesus as he became more and more aware of the cost of redemption.

There are two kinds of courage. There is the courage which is a kind of instinctive reaction, almost a reflex action, the courage of the man confronted out of the blue with a crisis to which he instinctively reacts with gallantry, scarcely having time to think. Many a man has become a hero in the heat of the moment. There is also the courage of the man who sees the grim thing approaching far ahead, who has plenty of time to turn back, who could, if he chose, evade the issue, and who yet goes on. There is no doubt which is the higher courage--this known deliberate facing of the future. That is the courage Jesus showed. If no higher verdict was possible, it would still be true to say of Jesus that he ranks with the heroes of the world.

(iii) It tells us of the personal magnetism of Jesus. It is quite clear that by this time the disciples did not know what was going on. They were sure that Jesus was the Messiah. They were equally sure that he was going to die. To them these two facts did not make sense when put together. They were completely bewildered, and yet they followed. To them everything was dark except one thing--they loved Jesus, and, however much they wished to, they could not leave him. They had learned something which is of the very essence of life and faith--they loved so much that they were compelled to accept what they could not understand.

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Mark 10:35-40

THE REQUEST OF AMBITION

Mark 10:35-40

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask you." "What do you want me to do for you?" he said to them. They said to him, "Grant to us that, in your glory, we may sit one on your right hand and one on your left." "You do not know what you ask," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup which I am drinking? Or, can you go through the experience through which I am going?" "We can," they said to him. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup which I am drinking. You will go through the experience through which I am going. But to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give you. That place belongs to those for whom it has been prepared."

This is a very revealing story.

(i) It tells us something about Mark. Matthew retells this story (Matt.20:20-23), but in his version the request for the first places is made not by James and John, but by their mother Salome. Matthew must have felt that such a request was unworthy of an apostle, and, to save the reputation of James and John, he attributed it to the natural ambition of their mother. This story shows us the honesty of Mark. It is told that a court painter painted the portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was afflicted with warts on the face. Thinking to please him, the painter omitted the warts in the painting. When Cromwell saw it, he said, "Take it away! and paint me warts and all!" Mark's aim is to show us the disciples, warts and all. And Mark was right, because the Twelve were not a company of saints. They were ordinary men. It was with people like ourselves Jesus set out to change the world--and did it.

(ii) It tells us something about James and John.

(a) It tells us that they were ambitious. When the victory was won and the triumph was complete, they aimed at being Jesus' chief ministers of state. Maybe their ambition was kindled because more than once Jesus had made them part of his inner circle, the chosen three. Maybe they were a little better off than the others. Their father was well enough off to employ hired servants (Mk.1:20), and it may be that they rather snobbishly thought that their social superiority entitled them to the first place. In any event they show themselves as men in whose hearts there was ambition for the first place in an earthly kingdom.

(b) It tells us that they had completely failed to understand Jesus. The amazing thing is not the fact that this incident happened, but the time at which it happened. It is the juxtaposition of Jesus' most definite and detailed forecast of his death and this request that is staggering. It shows, as nothing else could, how little they understood what Jesus was saying to them. Words were powerless to rid them of the idea of a Messiah of earthly power and glory. Only the Cross could do that.

(c) But when we have said all that is to be said against James and John, this story tells us one shining thing about them--bewildered as they might be, they still believed in Jesus. It is amazing

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that they could still connect glory with a Galilean carpenter who had incurred the enmity and the bitter opposition of the orthodox religious leaders and who was apparently heading for a cross. There is amazing confidence and amazing loyalty there. Misguided James and John might be but their hearts were in the right place. They never doubted Jesus' ultimate triumph.

(iii) It tells us something of Jesus' standard of greatness. The Revised Standard Version gives a literally accurate reading of what Jesus said--"Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Jesus uses two Jewish metaphors here.

It was the custom at a royal banquet for the king to hand the cup to his guests. The cup therefore became a metaphor for the life and experience that God handed out to men. "My cup overflows," said the Psalmist (Ps.23:5), when he spoke of a life and experience of happiness given to him by God. "In the hand of the Lord there is a cup," said the Psalmist (Ps.75:8), when he was thinking of the fate in store for the wicked and the disobedient. Isaiah, thinking of the disasters which had come upon the people of Israel, describes them as having drunk "at the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath." (Isa.51:17.) The cup speaks of the experience allotted to men by God.

The other phrase which Jesus uses is actually misleading in the literal English version. He speaks of the baptism with which he was baptized. The Greek verb baptizein (GSN0907) means to dip. Its past participle (bebaptismenos, GSN0907) means submerged, and it is regularly used of being submerged in any experience. For instance, a spendthrift is said to be submerged in debt. A drunk man is said to be submerged in drink. A grief-stricken person is said to be submerged in sorrow. A lad before a cross-examining teacher is said to be submerged in questions. The word is regularly used for a ship that has been wrecked and submerged beneath the waves. The metaphor is very closely related to a metaphor which the Psalmist often uses. In Ps.42:7 we read, "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me." In Ps.124:4 we read, "Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us." The expression, as Jesus used it here, had nothing to do with technical baptism.

What he is saying is, "Can you bear to go through the terrible experience which I have to go through? Can you face being submerged in hatred and pain and death, as I have to be?" He was telling these two disciples that without a cross there can never be a crown. The standard of greatness in the Kingdom is the standard of the Cross. It was true that in the days to come they did go through the experience of their Master, for James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa (Ac.12:2), and, though John was probably not martyred, he suffered much for Christ. They accepted the challenge of their Master--even if they did so blindly.

(iv) Jesus told them that the ultimate issue of things belonged to God. The final assignment of destiny was his prerogative. Jesus never usurped the place of God. His own whole life was one long act of submission to his will and he knew that in the end that will was supreme.

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Mark 10:41-45

THE PRICE OF MAN'S SALVATION

Mark 10:41-45

When the ten heard about this, they began to be vexed about the action of James and John. Jesus called them to him. "You are well aware," he said, "that those who are esteemed good enough to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It is not so amongst you, but, amongst you, whoever wishes to be great will be your servant, and amongst you, whoever wishes to be first will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Inevitably the action of James and John aroused deep resentment amongst the other ten. It seemed to them that they had tried to steal a march and to take an unfair advantage. Immediately the old controversy about who was to be greatest began to rage again.

This was a serious situation. The fellowship of the apostolic band might well have been wrecked, had Jesus not taken immediate action. He called them to him, and made quite clear the different standards of greatness in his Kingdom and in the kingdoms of the world. In the kingdoms of the world the standard of greatness was power. The test was: How many people does a man control? How great an army of servants has he at his beck and call? On how many people can he impose his will? Not very much later than this, Galba was to sum up the heathen idea of kingship and greatness when he said that now he was emperor he could do what he liked and do it to anyone. In the Kingdom of Jesus the standard was that of service. Greatness consisted, not in reducing other men to one's service, but in reducing oneself to their service. The test was not, What service can I extract?, but, What service can I give?

We tend to think this is an ideal state of affairs, but, in point of fact, it is the soundest common sense. It is in fact the first principle of ordinary everyday business life. Bruce Barton points out that the basis on which a motor company will claim the patronage of prospective customers is that they will crawl under your car oftener and get themselves dirtier than any of their competitors. They are in other words prepared to give more service. He points out that although the ordinary clerk may go home at 5.30 p.m., the light will be seen burning in the office of the chief executive long into the night. It is his willingness to give the extra service that makes him head of the firm.

The basic trouble in the human situation is that men wish to do as little as possible and to get as much as possible. It is only when they are filled with the desire to put into life more than they take out, that life for themselves and for others will be happy and prosperous. Kipling has a poem called Mary's Son which is advice on the spirit in which a man must work:

"If you stop to find out what your wages win be
And how they will clothe and feed you,
Willie, my son, don't you go to the Sea,
For the Sea will never need you.

"If you ask for the reason of every command,

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And argue with people about you,
Willie, my son, don't you go on the Land,
For the Land will do better without you.

If you stop to consider the work that you've done
And to boast what your labour is worth, dear,
Angels may come for you, Willie, my son,
But you'll never be wanted on earth dear!"

The world needs people whose ideal is service--that is to say it needs people who have realized what sound sense Jesus spoke.

To clinch his words Jesus pointed to his own example. With such powers as he had, he could have arranged life entirely to suit himself, but he had spent himself and all his powers in the service of others. He had come, he said, to give his life a ransom for many. This is one of the great phrases of the gospel, and yet it has been sadly mishandled and maltreated. People have tried to erect a theory of the atonement on what is a saying of love.

It was not long until people were asking to whom this ransom of the life of Christ had been paid? Origen asked the question. "To whom did he give his life a ransom for many? It was not to God. Was it not then to the Evil One? For the devil was holding us fast until the ransom should be given to him, even the life of Jesus, for he was deceived with the idea that he could have dominion over it and did not see that he could not bear the torture involved in retaining it." It is an odd conception that the life of Jesus was paid as a ransom to the devil so that he should release men from the bondage in which he held them, but that the devil found that in demanding and accepting that ransom, he had, so to speak, bitten off more than he could chew.

Gregory of Nyssa saw the flaw in that theory, namely that it really puts the devil on an equality with God. It allows him to make a bargain with God on equal terms. So Gregory of Nyssa conceived of the extraordinary idea of a trick played by God. The devil was tricked by the seeming weakness of the incarnation. He mistook Jesus for a mere man. He tried to exert his authority over him and, by trying to do so, lost it. Again it is an odd idea--that God should conquer the devil by a trick.

Another two hundred years passed and Gregory the Great took up the idea. He used a fantastic metaphor. The incarnation was a divine stratagem to catch the great leviathan. The deity of Christ was the hook, his flesh was the bait. When the bait was dangled before Leviathan, the devil, he swallowed it, and tried to swallow the hook, too, and so was overcome forever.

Finally Peter the Lombard brings this idea to its most grotesque and repulsive. "The Cross," he said, "was a mouse-trap to catch the devil, baited with the blood of Christ." All this simply shows what happens when men take a lovely and precious picture and try to make a cold theology out of it.

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Mark 10:41-45

Suppose we say, "Sorrow is the price of love," we mean that love cannot exist without the possibility of sorrow, but we never even think of trying to explain to whom that price is paid. Suppose we say that freedom can be obtained only at the price of blood, toil, tears and sweat, we never think of investigating to whom that price is paid. This saying of Jesus is a simple and pictorial way of saying that it cost the life of Jesus to bring men back from their sin into the love of God. It means that the cost of our salvation was the Cross of Christ. Beyond that we cannot go, and beyond that we do not need to go. We know only that something happened on the Cross which opened for us the way to God.

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Mark 10:46-52

A MIRACLE BY THE WAYSIDE

Mark 10:46-52

They went to Jericho. As Jesus was passing through Jericho, on his way out of the city--his disciples and a great crowd were with him--Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there he began to shout. "Son of David!" he cried, "Jesus! Have pity on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more, "Son of David! Have pity on me!" Jesus came to a stop. "Call him here!" he said. They called the blind man. "Courage!" they said to him. "Get up! He is calling you!" He threw off his cloak and leapt up and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "Master teacher! My prayer is that I might see again." Jesus said to him, "Go! Your faith has cured you." Immediately he saw again, and he followed him upon the road.

For Jesus the end of the road was not far away. Jericho was only about 15 miles from Jerusalem. We must try to visualize the scene. The main road ran right through Jericho. Jesus was on his way to the Passover. When a distinguished Rabbi or teacher was on such a journey it was the custom that he was surrounded by a crowd of people, disciples and learners, who listened to him as he discoursed while he walked. That was one of the commonest ways of teaching.

It was the law that every male Jew over twelve years of age who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem must attend the Passover. It was clearly impossible that such a law should be fulfilled and that everyone should go. Those who were unable to go were in the habit of lining the streets of towns and villages through which groups of Passover pilgrims must pass to bid them godspeed on their way. So then the streets of Jericho would be lined with people, and there would be even more than usual, for there would be many eager and curious to catch a glimpse of this audacious young Galilean who had pitted himself against the assembled might of orthodoxy.

Jericho had one special characteristic. There were attached to the Temple over 20,000 priests and as many levites. Obviously they could not all serve at the one time. They were therefore divided into twenty-six courses which served in rotation. Very many of these priests and levites resided in Jericho when they were not on actual temple duty. There must have been many of them in the crowd that day. At the Passover all were on duty for all were needed. It was one of the rare occasions when all did serve. But many would not have started yet. They would be doubly eager to see this rebel who was about to invade Jerusalem. There would be many cold and bleak and hostile eyes in the crowd that day, because it was clear that if Jesus was right, the whole Temple worship was one vast irrelevancy.

At the northern gate sat a beggar, Bartimaeus by name. He heard the tramp of feet. He asked what was happening and who was passing. He was told that it was Jesus. There and then he set up an uproar to attract Jesus' attention to him. To those listening to Jesus' teaching as he walked the uproar was an offence. They tried to silence Bartimaeus, but no one was going to take from him his chance to escape from his world of darkness, and he cried with such violence and importunity that the procession stopped, and he was brought to Jesus.

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This is a most illuminating story. In it we can see many of the things which we might call the conditions of miracle.

(i) There is the sheer persistence of Bartimaeus. Nothing would stop his clamour to come face to face with Jesus. He was utterly determined to meet the one person whom he longed to confront with his trouble. In the mind of Bartimaeus there was not just a nebulous, wistful, sentimental wish to see Jesus. It was a desperate desire, and it is that desperate desire that gets things done.

(ii) His response to the call of Jesus was immediate and eager, so eager that he cast off his hindering cloak to run to Jesus the more quickly. Many a man hears the call of Jesus, but says in effect, "Wait until I have done this," or "Wait until I have finished that." Bartimaeus came like a shot when Jesus called. Certain chances happen only once. Bartimaeus instinctively knew that. Sometimes we have a wave of longing to abandon some habit, to purify life of some wrong thing, to give ourselves more completely to Jesus. So very often we do not act on it on the moment--and the chance is gone, perhaps never to come back.

(iii) He knew precisely what he wanted--his sight. Too often our admiration for Jesus is a vague attraction. When we go to the doctor we want him to deal with some definite situation. When we go to the dentist we do not ask him to extract any tooth, but the one that is diseased. It should be so with us and Jesus. And that involves the one thing that so few people wish to face--self-examination. When we go to Jesus, if we are as desperately definite as Bartimaeus, things will happen.

(iv) Bartimaeus had a quite inadequate conception of Jesus. Son of David he insisted on calling him. Now that was a Messianic title, but it has in it all the thought of a conquering Messiah, a king of David's line who would lead Israel to national greatness. That was a very inadequate idea of Jesus. But, in spite of that, Bartimaeus had faith, and faith made up a hundredfold for the inadequacy of his theology. The demand is not that we should fully understand Jesus. That, in any event, we can never do. The demand is for faith. A wise writer has said, "We must ask people to think, but we should not expect them to become theologians before they are Christians." Christianity begins with a personal reaction to Jesus, a reaction of love, feeling that here is the one person who can meet our need. Even if we are never able to think things out theologically, that response of the human heart is enough.

(v) In the end there is a precious touch. Bartimaeus may have been a beggar by the wayside but he was a man of gratitude. Having received his sight, he followed Jesus. He did not selfishly go on his way when his need was met. He began with need, went on to gratitude, and finished with loyalty--and that is a perfect summary of the stages of discipleship.

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Mark 11:1-6

THE COMING OF THE KING

Mark 11:1-6

When they were coming near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and to Bethany, Jesus despatched two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and as soon as you come into it, you will find tethered there a colt, on which no man has ever yet sat. Loose it and bring it to me. And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it,' and immediately he will send it." And they went away and they found the colt tethered, outside a door, on the open street, and they loosed it. And some of those who were standing by said to them, "What are you doing loosing this colt?" They said to them what Jesus had told them to say, and they let them go.

We have come to the last stage of the journey. There had been the time of withdrawal around Caesarea Philippi in the far north. There had been the time in Galilee. There had been the stay in the hill-country of Judaea and in the regions beyond Jordan. There had been the road through Jericho. Now comes Jerusalem.

We have to note something without which the story is almost unintelligible. When we read the first three gospels we get the idea that this was actually Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem. They are concerned to tell the story of Jesus' work in Galilee. We must remember that the gospels are very short. Into their short compass is crammed the work of three years, and the writers were bound to select the things in which they were interested and of which they had special knowledge. And when we read the fourth gospel we find Jesus frequently in Jerusalem. (Jn.2:13, Jn.5:1, Jn.7:10.) We find in fact that he regularly went up to Jerusalem for the great feasts.

There is no real contradiction here. The first three gospels are specially interested in the Galilean ministry, and the fourth in the Judaeian. In fact, moreover, even the first three have indications that Jesus was not infrequently in Jerusalem. There is his close friendship with Martha and Mary and Lazarus at Bethany, a friendship which speaks of many visits. There is the fact that Joseph of Arimathea was his secret friend. And above all there is Jesus' saying in Matt.23:37 that often he would have gathered together the people of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings but they were unwilling. Jesus could not have said that unless there had previously been more than one appeal which had met with a cold response.

This explains the incident of the colt. Jesus did not leave things until the last moment. He knew what he was going to do and long ago he had made arrangements with a friend. When he sent forward his disciples, he sent them with a pass-word that had been pre-arranged--"The Lord needs it now." This was not a sudden, reckless decision of Jesus. It was something to which all his life had been budding up.

Bethphage and Bethany were villages near Jerusalem. Very probably Bethphage means house of figs and Bethany means house of dates. They must have been very close because we know from the Jewish law that Bethphage was one of the circle of villages which marked the limit of a Sabbath day's journey, that is, less than a mile, while Bethany was one of the recognized lodging--places for pilgrims to the Passover when Jerusalem was full.

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Mark 11:1-6

The prophets of Israel had always had a very distinctive method of getting their message across. When words failed to move people they did something dramatic, as if to say, "If you will not hear, you must be compelled to see." (compare specially 1Kgs.11:30-32.) These dramatic actions were what we might call acted warnings or dramatic sermons. That method was what Jesus was employing here. His action was a deliberate dramatic claim to be Messiah.

But we must be careful to note just what he was doing. There was a saying of the prophet Zechariah (Zech.9:9), "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem. Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, and riding on an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass." The whole impact is that the King was coming in peace. In Palestine the ass was not a despised beast, but a noble one. When a king went to war he rode on a horse, when he came in peace he rode on an ass.

G. K. Chesterton has a poem in which he makes the modern donkey speak:

"When fishes flew ind forests walk'd
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

"With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
Of all four-footed things.

"The tatter'd outlaw of the earth
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me, I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

"Fools! For I also had my hour,
One far fierce hour and sweet;
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet."

It is a wonderful poem. Nowadays the ass is a beast of amused contempt, but in the time of Jesus it was the beast of kings. But we must note what kind of a king Jesus was claiming to be. He came meek and lowly. He came in peace and for peace. They greeted him as the Son of David, but they did not understand.

It was just at this time that the Hebrew poems, The Psalms of Solomon, were written. They represent the kind of Son of David whom people expected. Here is their description of him:

"Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of

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Mark 11:1-6

David,

At the time, in the which thou seest, O God, that he may
reign over Israel, thy servant.

And gird him with strength that he may shatter unrighteous rulers,
And that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample
her down to destruction.

Wisely, righteously he shall thrust out sinners from the inheritance,
He shall destroy the pride of sinners as a potter's vessel.

With a rod of iron he shall break in pieces all their substance.

He shall destroy the godless nations with the word of his
mouth.

At his rebuke nations shall flee before him,

And he shall reprove sinners for the thoughts of their hearts.

"All nations shall be in fear before him,

For he will smite the earth with the word of his mouth forever."

(Wis.17:21-25,39.)

That was the kind of poem on which the people nourished their hearts. They were looking for a king who would shatter and smash and break. Jesus knew it--and he came meek and lowly, riding upon an ass.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day, he claimed to be king, but he claimed to be King of peace. His action was a contradiction of all that men hoped for and expected.

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Mark 11:7-10

HE THAT COMETH

Mark 11:7-10

They brought the colt to Jesus, and they put their garments on it, and mounted him on it. Many of them spread their garments on the road. Others cut branches from the fields and spread them on the road. And those who were going before and those who were following kept shouting, "Save now! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Send thy salvation from the heights of heaven!"

The colt they brought had never been ridden upon. That was fitting, for a beast to be used for a sacred purpose must never have been used for any other purpose. It was so with the red heifer whose ashes cleansed from pollution (Num.19:2, Deut.21:3).

The whole picture is of a populace who misunderstood. It shows us a crowd of people thinking of kingship in the terms of conquest in which they had thought of it for so long. It is oddly reminiscent of how Simon Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem a hundred and fifty years before, after he had blasted Israel's enemies in battle. "And he entered into it the three and twentieth day of the seventh month, in the hundred, seventy and first year, with thanksgiving and branches of palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and viols, and hymns and songs, because there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel." (1Macc.13:51.) It was a conqueror's welcome they sought to give to Jesus, but they never dreamed of the kind of conqueror he wished to be.

The very shouts which the crowd raised to Jesus showed how their thoughts were running. When they spread their garments on the ground before him, they did exactly what the crowd did when that man of blood Jehu was anointed king. (2Kgs.9:13.) They shouted, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" That is a quotation from Ps.118:26, and should really read a little differently, "Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes!"

There are three things to note about that shout.

(i) It was the regular greeting with which pilgrims were addressed when they reached the Temple on the occasion of the great feasts.

(ii) "He who comes" was another name for the Messiah. When the Jews spoke about the Messiah, they talked of him as the One who is Coming.

(iii) But it is the whole origin of the Psalm from which the words come that makes them supremely suggestive. In 167 B.C. there had arisen an extraordinary king in Syria called Antiocheus. He had conceived it his duty to be a missionary of Hellenism and to introduce Greek ways of life, Greek thought and Greek religion wherever he could, even, if necessary, by force. He tried to do so in Palestine.

For a time he conquered Palestine. To possess a copy of the law or to circumcise a child were crimes punishable by death. He desecrated the Temple courts. He actually instituted the worship of

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Zeus where Jehovah had been worshipped. With deliberate insult he offered swine's flesh on the great altar of the burnt-offering. He made the chambers round the Temple courts into brothels. He did everything he could to wipe out the Jewish faith.

It was then that Judas Maccabaeus arose, and after an amazing career of conquest, in 163 B.C. he drove Antiocheius out and re-purified and re-consecrated the temple, an event which the Feast of the Dedication, or the Feast of Hanukah, still commemorates. And in all probability Ps.118 was written to commemorate that great day of purification and the battle which Judas Maccabaeus won. It is a conqueror's psalm.

Again and again we see the same thing happening in this incident. Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah, but in such a way as to try to show that the popular ideas of the Messiah were misguided. But the people did not see it. Their welcome was one which befitted, not the King of love, but the conqueror who would shatter the enemies of Israel.

In Mk.11:9-10 there is the word Hosanna. The word is consistently misunderstood. It is quoted and used as if it meant Praise; but it is a simple transliteration of the Hebrew for Save now! it occurs in exactly the same form in 2Sam.14:4 and 2Kgs.6:26, where it is used by people seeking for help and protection at the hands of the king. When the people shouted Hosanna it was not a cry of praise to Jesus, which it often sounds like when we quote it. It was a cry to God to break in and save his people now that the Messiah had come.

No incident so shows the sheer courage of Jesus as this does. In the circumstances one might have expected him to enter Jerusalem secretly and to keep hidden from the authorities who were out to destroy him. Instead he entered in such a way that the attention of every eye was focussed upon him. One of the most dangerous things a man can do is to go to people and tell them that all their accepted ideas are wrong. Any man who tries to tear up by the roots a people's nationalistic dreams is in for trouble. But that is what Jesus deliberately was doing. Here we see Jesus making the last appeal of love and making it with a courage that is heroic.

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Mark 11:11

THE QUIET BEFORE THE STORM

Mark 11:11

And he came into Jerusalem into the Temple. After he had looked round everything, when it was now late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

This simple verse shows us two things about Jesus which were typical of him.

(i) It shows us Jesus deliberately summing up his task. The whole atmosphere of the last days was one of deliberation. Jesus was not recklessly plunging into unknown dangers. He was doing everything with his eyes wide open. When he looked round everything, he was like a commander summing up the strength of the opposition and his own resources preparatory to the decisive battle.

(ii) It shows us where Jesus got his strength. He went back to the peace of Bethany. Before he joined battle with men he sought the presence of God. It was only because each day he faced God that he could face men with such courage.

This brief passage also shows us something about the Twelve. They were still with him. By this time it must have been quite plain to them that Jesus was committing suicide, as it seemed to them. Sometimes we criticize them for their lack of loyalty in the last days, but it says something for them, that, little as they understood what was happening, they still stood by him.

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Mark 11:12-14, 20-21

THE FRUITLESS FIG-TREE

Mark 11:12-14; Mark 11:20-21

When, on the next day, they were coming out from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. From a distance he saw a fig-tree in leaf, and he went to it to see if he would find anything on it. When he came to it he found nothing except leaves, for it was not yet the season of figs. He said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you for ever." And the disciples heard him say it.... When they were going along the road early in the morning, they saw the fig-tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered what Jesus had said the day before and said, "Teacher! Look! The fig-tree which you cursed has withered away!"

Although the story of the fig-tree is in Mark's gospel divided into two we take it as one. The first part of the story happened on the morning of one day, and the second part on the morning of the next day, and, chronologically, the cleansing of the Temple came in between. But, when we are trying to see the meaning of the story, we are better to take it as one.

There can be no doubt that this, without exception, is the most difficult story in the gospel narrative. To take it as literal history presents difficulties which are well-nigh insuperable.

(i) The story does not ring true. To be frank, the whole incident does not seem worthy of Jesus. There seems a certain petulance in it. It is just the kind of story that is told of other wonder-workers but never of Jesus. Further, we have this basic difficulty. Jesus had always refused to use his miraculous powers for his own sake. He would not turn the stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger. He would not use his miraculous powers to escape from his enemies. He never used his power for his own sake. And yet here he uses his power to blast a tree which had disappointed him when he was hungry.

(ii) Worse, the whole action was unreasonable. This was the Passover Season, that is, the middle of April. The fig-tree in a sheltered spot may bear leaves as early as March, but never did a fig-tree bear figs until late May or June. Mark says that it was not the season for figs. Why blast the tree for failing to do what it was not possible for it to do? It was both unreasonable and unjust. Some commentators, to save the situation, say that what Jesus was looking for was green figs, half-ripe figs in their early stages, but such unripe fruit was unpleasant and was never eaten.

The whole story does not seem to fit Jesus at all. What are we to say about it?

If we are to take this as the story of something which actually happened, we must take it as an enacted parable. We must in fact take it as one of those prophetic, symbolic, dramatic actions. If we take it that way, it may be interpreted as the condemnation of two things.

(i) It is the condemnation of promise without fulfillment. The leaves on the tree might be taken as the promise of fruit, but there was no fruit there. It is the condemnation especially of the people of Israel. All their history was a preparation for the coming of God's Chosen One. The whole promise

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Mark 11:12-14, 20-21

of their national record was that when the Chosen One came they would be eager to receive him. But when he did come, that promise was tragically unfulfilled.

Charles Lamb tells of a certain man called Samuel le Grice. In his life there were three stages. When he was young, people said of him, "He will do something." As he grew older and did nothing, they said of him, "He could do something if he tried." Towards the end they said of him, "He might have done something if he had tried." His life was the tale of a promise that was never fulfilled. If this incident is an enacted parable it is the condemnation of unfulfilled promise.

(ii) It is the condemnation of profession without practice. It might be taken that the tree with its leaves professed to offer something and did not. The whole cry of the New Testament is that a man can be known only by the fruits of his life. "You will know them by their fruits." (Matt.7:16.) "Bear fruits that befit repentance." (Lk.3:8.) It is not the man who piously says, "Lord, Lord," who will enter into the Kingdom but the man who does God's will. (Matt.7:21.) Unless a man's religion makes him a better and more useful man, makes his home happier, makes life better and easier for those with whom he is brought into contact, it is not religion at all. No man can claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and remain entirely unlike the Master whom he professes to love.

If this incident is to be taken literally and is an enacted parable, that must be the meaning. But, relevant as these lessons may be, it seems difficult to extract them from the incident, because it was quite unreasonable to expect the fig-tree to bear figs when the time for figs was still six weeks away.

What then are we to say? Luke does not relate this incident at all, but he has the parable of the fruitless fig-tree (Lk.13:6-9). Now that parable ends indecisively. The master of the vineyard wished to root up the tree. The gardener pled for another chance. The last chance was given; and it was agreed that if the tree bore fruit it should be spared, and if not it should be destroyed. May it not be that this incident is a kind of continuation of that parable? The people of Israel had had their chance. They had failed to bear fruit. And now was the time for their destruction. It has been suggested--and it is quite possible--that on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem there was a lonely blasted fig-tree.

It may well be that Jesus said to his disciples, "You remember the parable I told you about the fruitless fig-tree? Israel is still fruitless and will be blasted as that tree." It may well be that that lonely tree became associated in men's minds with a saying of Jesus about the fate of fruitlessness, and so the story arose.

Let the reader take it as he will. To us there seem insuperable difficulties in taking it literally. It seems to us to be in some way connected with the parable of the fruitless tree. But in any event the whole lesson of the incident is that uselessness invites disaster.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 11:15-19

THE WRATH OF JESUS

Mark 11:15-19

They came into Jerusalem, and when Jesus had come into the sacred precincts, he began to cast out those who sold and bought in the sacred place, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves, and he would not allow that anyone should carry their gear through the sacred precincts. The burden of his teaching and speaking was, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a brigands' cave?" The chief priests and the experts in the law heard him, and they sought a way to destroy him, for they were afraid of him, for the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching.

And when evening came he went out of the city.

We will visualize this far better if we have in our mind's eye a picture of the lay-out of the Temple precincts. There are two closely connected words used in the New Testament. The first is hieron (GSN2411), which means the sacred place. This included the whole temple area. The temple area covered the top of Mount Zion and was about thirty acres in extent. It was surrounded by great walls which varied on each side, 1,300 to 1,000 feet in length. There was a wide outer space called the Court of the Gentiles. Into it anyone, Jew or Gentile, might come. At the inner edge of the Court of the Gentiles was a low wall with tablets set into it which said that if a Gentile passed that point the penalty was death. The next court was called the Court of the Women. It was so called because unless women had come actually to offer sacrifice they might not proceed farther. Next was the Court of the Israelites.

In it the congregation gathered on great occasions, and from it the offerings were handed by the worshippers to the priests. The inmost court was the Court of the Priests.

The other important word is naos (GSN3485), which means the Temple proper, and it was in the Court of the Priests that the Temple stood. The whole area, including all the different Courts, was the sacred precincts (hieron, GSN2411). The special building within the Court of the Priests was the Temple (naos, GSN3485).

This incident took place in the Court of the Gentiles. Bit by bit the Court of the Gentiles had become almost entirely secularised. It had been meant to be a place of prayer and preparation, but there was in the time of Jesus a commercialised atmosphere of buying and selling which made prayer and meditation impossible. What made it worse was that the business which went on there was sheer exploitation of the pilgrims.

Every Jew had to pay a temple tax of one half shekel a year. That was a sum of 6p. It does not seem much but it has to be evaluated against the fact that the standard day's wage for a working man was 3p. That tax had to be paid in one particular kind of coinage. For ordinary purposes Greek, Roman, Syrian, Egyptian, Phoenician, Tyrian coinages were an equally valid. But this tax had to be paid in shekels of the sanctuary. It was paid at the Passover time. Jews came from all over the world to the Passover and with all kinds of currencies. When they went to have their money changed they had to pay a fee of 1p., and should their coin exceed the tax, they had to pay another

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lp. before they got their change. Most pilgrims had to pay this extra 2p. before they could pay their tax. We must remember that that was half a day's wage, which for most men was a great deal of money.

As for the sellers of doves--doves entered largely into the sacrificial system (Lev.12:8, Lev.14:22, Lev.15:14). A sacrificial victim had to be without blemish. Doves could be bought cheaply enough outside, but the temple inspectors would be sure to find something wrong with them, and worshippers were advised to buy them at the temple stalls. Outside doves cost as little as 3p a pair, inside they cost as much as 75p. Again it was sheer imposition, and what made matters worse was that this business of buying and selling belonged to the family of Annas who had been High Priest.

The Jews themselves were well aware of this abuse. The Talmud tells us that Rabbi Simon ben Gamaliel, on hearing that a pair of doves inside the temple cost a gold piece, insisted that the price be reduced to a silver piece. It was the fact that poor, humble pilgrims were being swindled which moved Jesus to wrath. Lagrange, the great scholar, who knew the East so well, tells us that precisely the same situation still obtains in Mecca. The pilgrim, seeking the divine presence, finds himself in the middle of a noisy uproar, where the one aim of the sellers is to exact as high a price as possible and where the pilgrims argue and defend themselves with equal fierceness.

Jesus used a vivid metaphor to describe the temple court. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious for its robbers. It was a narrow winding road, passing between rocky defiles. Amidst the rocks were caves where the brigands lay in wait, and Jesus said, "There are worse brigands in the temple courts than ever there are in the caves of the Jericho road."

Mk.11:16 has the odd statement that Jesus would not allow anyone to carry his gear through the temple court. In point of fact the temple court provided a short cut from the eastern part of the city to the Mount of Olives. The Mishnah itself lays down, "A man may not enter into the temple mount with his staff or his sandal or his wallet, or with the dust upon his feet, nor may he make of it a short by-path." Jesus was reminding the Jews of their own laws. In his time the Jews thought so little of the sanctity of the outer court of the temple that they used it as a thoroughfare on their business errands. It was to their own laws that Jesus directed their attention, and it was their own prophets that he quoted to them. (Isa.56:7 and Jer.7:11.)

What moved Jesus to such wrath?

(i) He was angry at the exploitation of the pilgrims. The Temple authorities were treating them not as worshippers, not even as human beings, but as things to be exploited for their own ends. Man's exploitation of man always provokes the wrath of God, and doubly so when it is made under the cloak of religion.

(ii) He was angry at the desecration of God's holy place. Men had lost the sense of the presence of God in the house of God. By commercialising the sacred they were violating it.

(iii) Is it possible that Jesus had an even deeper anger? He quoted Isa.56:7, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Yet in that very same house there was a wall beyond

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Mark 11:15-19

which to pass was for the Gentile death. It may well be that Jesus was moved to anger by the exclusiveness of Jewish worship and that he wished to remind them that God loved, not the Jews, but the world.

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Mark 11:22-26

THE LAWS OF PRAYER

Mark 11:22-26

Jesus answered, "Have faith in God. This is the truth I tell you--whoever will say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and be cast into the sea,' and who in his heart does not doubt, but believes that what he says is happening, it will be done for him. So then I tell you, believe that you have received everything for which you pray and ask, and it will be done for you. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive it, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

We return now to sayings which Mark attaches to the story of the blasting of the fig-tree. We have noticed more than once how certain sayings of Jesus stuck in men's minds although the occasion on which he said them had been forgotten. It is so here. The saying about the faith which can remove mountains also occurs in Matt.17:20 and in Lk.17:6, and in each of the gospels it occurs in a quite different context. The reason is that Jesus said it more than once and its real context had often been forgotten. The saying about the necessity of forgiving our fellow-men occurs in Matt.6:12,14 again in a quite different context. We must approach these sayings as not so much having to do with particular incidents, but as general rules which Jesus repeatedly laid down.

This passage gives us three rules for prayer.

(i) It must be the prayer of faith. The phrase about removing mountains was a quite common Jewish phrase. It was a regular, vivid phrase for removing difficulties. It was specially used of wise teachers. A good teacher who could remove the difficulties which the minds of his scholars encountered was called a mountain-remover. One who heard a famous Rabbi teach said that "he saw Resh Lachish as if he were plucking up mountains." So the phrase means that if we have real faith, prayer is a power which can solve any problem and make us able to deal with any difficulty. That sounds very simple, but it involves two things.

First, it involves that we should be willing to take our problems and our difficulties to God. That in itself is a very real test. Sometimes our problems are that we wish to obtain something we should not desire at all, that we wish to find a way to do something we should not even think of doing, that we wish to justify ourselves for doing something to which we should never lay our hands or apply our minds. One of the greatest tests of any problem is simply to say, "Can I take it to God and can I ask his help?"; Second, it involves that we should be ready to accept God's guidance when he gives it. It is the commonest thing in the world for a person to ask for advice when all he really wants is approval for some action that he is already determined to take. It is useless to go to God and to ask for his guidance unless we are willing to be obedient enough to accept it. But if we do take our problems to God and are humble enough and brave enough to accept his guidance, there does come the power which can conquer the difficulties of thought and of action.

(ii) It must be the prayer of expectation. It is the universal fact that anything tried in the spirit of confident expectation has a more than double chance of success. The patient who goes to a doctor and has no confidence in the prescribed remedies has far less chance of recovery than the patient

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who is confident that the doctor can cure him. When we pray, it must never be a mere formality. It must never be a ritual without hope.

James Burns quotes a scene from Leonard Merrick's book, *Conrad in Quest of His Youth*. "Do you think prayers are ever answered?" inquired Conrad. "In my life I have sent up many prayers, and always with the attempt to persuade myself that some former prayer had been fulfilled. But I knew. I knew in my heart none ever had been. Things that I wanted have come to me, but--I say it with all reverence--too late...." Mr. Irqueton's fine hand wandered across his brow. "Once," he began conversationally, "I was passing with a friend through Grosvenor Street. It was when in the spring the tenant's fancy lightly turns to coats of paint, and we came to a ladder leaning against a house that was being redecorated. In stepping to the outer side of it my friend lifted his hat to it. You may know the superstition. He was a 'Varsity man, a man of considerable attainments. I said, 'Is it possible you believe in that nonsense?' He said, 'N-no, I don't exactly believe in it, but I never throw away a chance'." On a sudden the vicar's inflexion changed, his utterance was solemn, stirring, devout, "I think, sir, that most people pray on my friend's principle--they don't believe in it, but they never throw away a chance."

There is much truth in that. For many people prayer is either a pious ritual or a forlorn hope. It should be a thing of burning expectation. Maybe our trouble is that what we want from God is our answer, and we do not recognize his answer when it comes.

(iii) It must be the prayer of charity. The prayer of a bitter man cannot penetrate the wall of his own bitterness. Why? If we are to speak with God there must be some bond between two people who have nothing in common. The principle of God is love, for he is love. If the ruling principle of a man's heart is bitterness, he has erected a barrier between himself and God. If ever the prayer of such a man is to be answered he must first ask God to cleanse his heart from the bitter spirit and put into it the spirit of love. Then he can speak to God and God can speak to him.

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Mark 11:27-33

A CUNNING QUESTION AND A PIERCING ANSWER

Mark 11:27-33

Once again they came to Jerusalem, and, when Jesus was walking in the Temple, the chief priests and the experts in the law and the elders came to him, and said to him, "By what kind of authority do you do these things? Or, who gave you authority to do these things?" Jesus said, "I will put one point to you, and, if you answer me, I will tell you by what kind of authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven? or was it from men? Answer me!" They discussed the matter among themselves. "If," they said, "we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe in it?' But, are we to say, 'From men'?"--for they were afraid of the people, for all truly held that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." So Jesus said to them, "Neither do I tell you by what kind of authority I do these things."

In the sacred precincts there were two famous cloisters, one on the east and one on the south side of the Court of the Gentiles. The one on the east was called Solomon's Porch. It was a magnificent arcade made by Corinthian columns 35 feet high. The one on the south was even more splendid. It was called the Royal Cloister. It was formed by four rows of white marble columns, each 6 feet in diameter and 30 feet high. There were 162 of them. It was common for Rabbis and teachers to stroll in these columns and to teach as they walked. Most of the great cities of ancient times had these cloisters. They gave shelter from the sun and the wind and the rain, and, in point of fact, it was in these places that most of the religious and philosophic teaching was done. One of the most famous schools of ancient thought was that of the Stoics. They received their name from the fact that Zeno, their founder, taught as he walked in the Stoa Poikile, the Painted Porch, in Athens.

The word stoa (GSN4745) means porch or arcade and the Stoics were the school of the porch. It was in these cloisters in the Temple that Jesus was walking and teaching.

To him there came a deputation of the chief priests and the experts in the law, that is the scribes, rabbis and elders. This was in reality a deputation from the Sanhedrin, of which these three groups formed the component parts. They asked a most natural question. For a private individual, all on his own, to clear the Court of the Gentiles of its accustomed and official traders was a staggering thing. So they asked Jesus, "By what kind of authority do you act like that?"

They hoped to put Jesus into a dilemma. If he said he was acting under his own authority they might well arrest him as a megalomaniac before he did any further damage. If he said that he was acting on the authority of God they might well arrest him on an obvious charge of blasphemy, on the grounds that God would never give any man authority to create a disturbance in the courts of his own house. Jesus saw quite clearly the dilemma in which they sought to involve him, and his reply put them into a dilemma which was still worse. He said that he would answer on condition that they would answer one question for him, "Was John the Baptist's work, in your opinion, human or divine?"

This impaled them on the horns of a dilemma. If they said it was divine, they knew that Jesus would ask why they had stood out against it. Worse than that--if they said it was divine, Jesus could reply that John had in fact pointed all men to him, and that therefore he was divinely attested and

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needed no further authority. If these members of the Sanhedrin agreed that John's work was divine, they would be compelled to accept Jesus as the Messiah. On the other hand, if they said that John's work was merely human, now that John had the added distinction of being a martyr, they knew quite well that the listening people would cause a riot. So they were compelled to say weakly that they did not know, and thereby Jesus escaped the need to give them any answer to their question.

The whole story is a vivid example of what happens to men who will not face the truth. They have to twist and wriggle and in the end get themselves into a position in which they are so helplessly involved that they have nothing to say. The man who faces the truth may have the humiliation of saying that he was wrong, or the peril of standing by it, but at least the future for him is strong and bright. The man who will not face the truth has nothing but the prospect of deeper and deeper involvement in a situation which renders him helpless and ineffective.

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Mark 12:1-12

REJECTION AND RETRIBUTION

Mark 12:1-12

Jesus began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard. He put a hedge round about it, and dug a wine vat, and built a tower. He let it out to cultivators and went abroad. At the right time he sent a servant to the cultivators that he might receive from the cultivators his share of the fruits of the vineyard. They took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent another servant to them. They wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. He sent yet another. They killed him. So they treated many others, beating some and killing others. He had still one person left to send, his beloved son. Last of all he sent him to them. "They will respect my son," he said. But these cultivators said to each other, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What, then,

will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and he will destroy the cultivators and he will give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this passage of scripture, "The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the headstone of the corner. This came from God, and it is in our eyes an amazing thing?" They tried to find a way to get hold of Jesus, for they feared the crowd, for they were well aware that he spoke this parable against them. So they let him alone and went away.

We said that a parable must never be treated as an allegory, and that a meaning must not be sought for every detail. Originally Jesus' parables were not meant to be read but to be spoken and their meaning was that which flashed out when first they were heard. But to some extent this parable is an exception. It is a kind of hybrid, a cross between an allegory and a parable. Not all the details have an inner meaning, but more than usual have. And this is because Jesus was talking in pictures which were part and parcel of Jewish thought and imagery.

The owner of the vineyard is God; the vineyard itself is the people of Israel. This was a picture with which the Jews were perfectly familiar. In the Old Testament it is vividly used in Isa.5:1-7, a passage from which some of the details and the language of this passage are taken. This vineyard was given every equipment. There was a wall to mark out its boundaries, to keep out robbers and to defend it from the assaults of the wild boars. There was a wine vat. In a vineyard there was a wine press in which the grapes were trodden down with the feet. Beneath the wine press was a wine vat into which the pressed-out juice flowed. There was a tower. In this the wine was stored, the cultivators had their lodging, and from this watch was kept for robbers at harvest time. The cultivators stand for the rulers of Israel throughout the history of the nation. The servants whom the owner sent stand for the prophets. Servant or slave of God is a regular title. So Moses was called (Josh.14:7).

So David was called (2Sam.3:18). And the title occurs regularly in the books of the prophets (Am.3:7, Jer.7:25, Zech.1:6). The son is Jesus himself. Even on the spur of the moment the hearers could have made these identifications because the thoughts and the pictures were all so familiar to them.

The story itself is of what might well happen in Palestine in the time of Jesus. The country had much labour unrest and many absentee landlords. The owner of such a vineyard might be a Jew

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Mark 12:1-12

who had sought a more comfortable land than Palestine, or he might be a Roman who regarded the vineyard as an investment for his money. If the owner followed the law, the first time for collecting the rental would be five years after the planting of the vineyard (Lev.19:23-25). In such a case the rental was paid in kind. It might be a fixed and agreed percentage of the crop, or it might be a stated amount, irrespective of what the crop came to. The story is by no means improbable and tells of the kind of thing which did actually happen.

The parable is so full of truths that we can note them only in the briefest way.

It tells us certain things about God.

(i) It tells us of the generosity of God. The vineyard was equipped with everything that was necessary to make the work of the cultivators easy and profitable. God is generous in the life and in the world that he gives to men.

(ii) It tells us of the trust of God. The owner went away and left the cultivators to run the vineyard themselves. God trusts us enough to give us freedom to run life as we choose. As someone has said, "The lovely thing about God is that he allows us to do so much for ourselves."

(iii) It tells us of the patience of God. Not once or twice but many times the master gave the cultivators the chance to pay the debt they owed. He treated them with a patience they little deserved.

(iv) It tells us of the ultimate triumph of the justice of God. Men might take advantage of the patience of God, but in the end comes judgment and justice. God may bear long with disobedience and rebellion but in the end he acts.

This parable tells us something about Jesus.

(i) It tells us that Jesus regarded himself not as a servant but as a son. He deliberately removes himself from the succession of the prophets. They were servants. He was son. In him God's last and final word was being spoken. This parable was a deliberate challenge to the Jewish authorities because it contains the unmistakable claim of Jesus to be Messiah.

(ii) It tells us that Jesus knew that he was to die. The Cross did not come to him as a surprise. He knew that the way he had chosen could have no other ending. It is the greatness of his courage that he knew that and still went on.

(iii) It tells us that Jesus was sure of his ultimate triumph. He also knew that he would be maltreated and killed, but he also knew that would not be the end, that after the rejection would come the glory.

This parable tells us something about man.

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Mark 12:1-12

(i) There could be only one reason why the cultivators thought they could kill the son and then enter into possession of the vineyard. They must have thought that the owner was too far away to act, or that he was dead and out of the reckoning. Men still think they can act against God and get away with it. But God is very much alive. Men seek to trade on their own freedom and his patience, but the day of reckoning comes.

(ii) If a man refuses his privileges and his responsibilities, they pass on to someone else. The parable has in it the whole germ of what was to come--the rejection of the Jews and the passing of their privileges and responsibilities to the Gentiles.

The parable closes with an Old Testament quotation which became very dear to the Church. The quotation about the stone that was rejected is from Ps.118:22-23. The rejected stone had become the stone that bound the corners of the building together, the keystone of the arch, the most important stone of all. This passage fascinated the early Christian writers. It is quoted or referred to in Ac.4:11, 1Pet.2:4,7, Rom.9:32-33, Eph.2:20. Originally, in the Psalm, the reference was to the people of Israel. The great nations which had thought of themselves as architects of the structure of the world had regarded the people of Israel as unimportant and unhonoured. But, as the Psalmist saw it, the nation which had been regarded as of no importance would, some day, in God's economy, become the greatest nation in the world. The Christian writers saw in the Psalmist's dream something which was perfectly fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

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Mark 12:13-17

CAESAR AND GOD

Mark 12:13-17

They sent to Jesus some of the Pharisees and Herodians to try to trap him in his speech. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are genuine, and that you do not allow yourself to be influenced by anyone, for you are no respecter of persons, and you teach the way of God in truth. Is it right to pay tax to Caesar? Or not? Are we to pay? Or, are we not to pay?" Jesus knew well that they were acting a part. "Why are you trying to test me?" he said, "Bring me a denarius and let me see it." So they brought him one. He said to them, "Whose portrait is this, and whose inscription is on it?" "Caesar's," they said to him. Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things which belong to Caesar, and to God the things that belong to God." And they were completely astonished at him.

There is history behind this shrewd question, and bitter history too. Herod the Great had ruled all Palestine as a Roman tributary king. He had been loyal to the Romans and they had respected him and given him a great deal of freedom. When he died in 4 B.C. he divided his kingdom into three. To Herod Antipas he gave Galilee and Peraea. To Herod Philip he gave the wild district up in the north-east round Trachonitis and Ituraea and Abilene. To Archelaus he gave the south country including Judaea and Samaria.

Antipas and Philip soon settled in and on the whole ruled wisely and well. But Archelaus was a complete failure. The result was that in A.D. 6 the Romans had to step in and introduce direct rule. Things were so unsatisfactory that southern Palestine could no longer be left as a semi-independent tributary kingdom. It had to become a province governed by a procurator.

Roman provinces fell into two classes. Those which were peaceful and required no troops were governed by the senate and ruled by proconsuls. Those which were trouble-centres and required troops were the direct sphere of the Emperor and were governed by procurators. Southern Palestine fell naturally into the second category and tribute was in fact paid direct to the Emperor.

The first act of the governor, Cyrenius, was to take a census of the country, in order that he might make proper provision for fair taxation and general administration. The calmer section of the people accepted this as an inevitable necessity. But one Judas the Gaulonite raised violent opposition. He thundered that "taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery." He called on the people to rise, and said that God would favour them only if they resorted to all the violence they could muster. He took the high ground that for the Jews God was the only ruler. The Romans dealt with Judas with their customary efficiency, but his battle-cry never died out. "No tribute to the Romans," became a rallying cry of the more fanatical Jewish patriots.

The actual taxes imposed were three.

(i) A ground tax, which consisted of one-tenth of all the grain and one-fifth of the wine and fruit produced. This was paid partly in kind and partly in money.

(ii) An income tax which amounted to one per cent of a man's income.

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(iii) A poll tax, which was levied on all men from fourteen to sixty-five and on all women from twelve to sixty-five. This poll tax was one denarius, roughly 31 pence per head. It was the tax which everyone had to pay simply for the privilege of existing.

The approach of the Pharisees and Herodians was very subtle. They began with flattery. That flattery was designed to do two things. It was designed to disarm the suspicions that Jesus might have had; and to make it impossible for him to avoid giving an answer without losing his reputation completely.

In view of all the circumstances the question which the Pharisees and Herodians put to Jesus was a masterpiece of cunning. They must have thought that they had him impaled on the horns of a completely inescapable dilemma. If he said that it was lawful to pay tribute, his influence with the populace would be gone forever, and he would be regarded as a traitor and a coward. If he said that it was not lawful to pay tribute, they could report him to the Romans and have him arrested as a revolutionary. They must have been sure that they had Jesus in a trap from which there was no escape.

Jesus said, "Show me a denarius." We may note in the passing that he himself did not possess even one coin of his own. He asked whose image was on it. The image would be that of Tiberius, the reigning emperor. All the emperors were called Caesar. Round the coin there would be the title which declared that this was the coin "of Tiberius Caesar, the divine Augustus, son of Augustus," and on the reverse would be the title "pontifex maximus," "the high priest of the Roman nation."

We must understand the ancient view of coinage if this incident is to be intelligible. In regard to coinage the ancient peoples held three consistent principles.

(i) Coinage is the sign of power. When anyone conquered a nation or was a successful rebel, the first thing he did was to issue his own coinage. That and that alone was the final guarantee of kingship and power.

(ii) Where the coin was valid the king's power, held good. A king's sway was measurable by the area in which his coins were valid currency.

(iii) Because a coin had the king's head and inscription on it, it was held, at least in some sense, to be his personal property. Jesus' answer therefore was, "By using the coinage of Tiberius you in any event recognize his political power in Palestine. Apart altogether from that, the coinage is his own because it has his name on it. By giving it to him you give him what is in any event his own. Give it to him but remember that there is a sphere in life which belongs to God and not to Caesar."

Never did any man lay down a more influential principle. It conserved at one and the same time the civil and the religious power. Rawlinson reminds us that Lord Acton, the great historian, said of this, "Those words...gave to the civil power, under the protection of conscience, a sacredness it had never enjoyed and bounds it had never acknowledged, and they were the repudiation of absolutism

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and the inauguration of freedom." At one and the same time these words asserted the rights of the state and the liberty of conscience.

On the whole the New Testament lays down three great principles with regard to the individual Christian and the state.

(i) The state is ordained by God. Without the laws of the state life would be chaos. Men cannot live together unless they agree to obey the laws of living together. Without the state there is many a valuable service no man could enjoy. No individual man could have his own water supply, his own sewage system, his own transport system, his own social security organization. The state is the origin of many of the things which make life livable.

(ii) No man can accept all the benefits which the state gives him and then opt out of all the responsibilities. It is beyond question that the Roman government brought to the ancient world a sense of security it never had before. For the most part, except in certain notorious areas, the seas were cleared of pirates and the roads of brigands, civil wars were changed for peace and capricious tyranny for Roman impartial justice. As E. J. Goodspeed wrote, "It was the glory of the Roman Empire that it brought peace to a troubled world. Under its sway the regions of Asia Minor and the East enjoyed tranquillity and security to an extent and for a length of time unknown before and probably since. This was the pax Romana.

The provincial, under Roman sway, found himself in a position to conduct his business, provide for his family, send his letters, and make his journeys in security, thanks to the strong hand of Rome." It is still true that no man can honourably receive all the benefits which living in a state confers upon him and then opt out of all the responsibilities of citizenship.

(iii) But there is a limit. E. A. Abbott has a suggestive thought. The coin had Caesar's image upon it, and therefore belonged to Caesar. Man has God's image upon him--God created man in his own image (Gen.1:26-27)--and therefore belongs to God. The inevitable conclusion is that, if the state remains within its proper boundaries and makes its proper demands, the individual must give it his loyalty and his service; but in the last analysis both state and man belong to God, and therefore, should their claims conflict, loyalty to God comes first. But it remains true, that, in all ordinary circumstances, a man's Christianity should make him a better citizen than any other man.

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Mark 12:18-27

THE WRONG IDEA OF THE LIFE TO COME

Mark 12:18-27

There came to Jesus Sadducees, who are a party who say that the resurrection of the dead does not exist. They put the following problem to him. "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote the law for us, that, if a man's brother dies and leaves behind him a wife, and does not leave a family, the law is that the brother should take his wife, and should raise up a family to his brother. There were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died, and left no family. The second took her, and he died, and left behind no family. The third did the same. The seven left no family. Last of all, the woman died. At the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife." Jesus said to them, "Are you not in error and for this reason--because you do not know the scriptures, nor do you know the power of God? When people rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are they given in marriage, but they are like the angels in heaven.

With regard to the dead, and the fact that they do rise, have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are far wrong."

This is the only time in Mark's gospel that the Sadducees appear, and their appearance is entirely characteristic of them. The Sadducees were not a large Jewish party. They were aristocratic and wealthy. They included most of the priests; the office of high priest was regularly held by a Sadducee. Being the wealthy and aristocratic party, they were not unnaturally collaborationist, for they wished to retain their comforts and their privileges. It was from them came those who were prepared to collaborate with the Romans in the government of the country.

They differed very widely from the Pharisees in certain matters. First, they accepted only the written scriptures and attached more importance to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, than to all the rest. They did not accept the mass of oral law and tradition, the rules and regulations which were so dear to the Pharisees. It was on the written Mosaic Law that they took their stand. Second, they did not believe in immortality, nor in spirits and angels. They said that in the early books of the Bible there was no evidence for immortality, and they did not accept it.

So the Sadducees came to Jesus with a test question designed to make the belief in individual resurrection look ridiculous. The Jewish Law had an institution called levirate marriage. Its regulations are laid down in Deut.25:5-10. If a group of brothers lived together--that is a point that is omitted in the Sadducees' quotation of the law--and if one of them died and left no issue, it was the duty of the next to take his brother's widow as wife and to raise up issue to his brother. Theoretically this would go on so long as there were brothers left and so long as no child was born. When a child was born, the child was held to be the offspring of the original husband.

It is clear that the whole point of this law was to ensure two things--first, that the family name continued, and second, that the property remained within the family. As a matter of fact, strange as the matter seems to us, there were certain not dissimilar regulations in Greek law. If a Greek father had a considerable estate and had only a daughter, she, being a woman, could not inherit direct.

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Either her husband or her son would be the direct heir. But if the daughter was unmarried the father could leave his property and his daughter to anyone he chose. Such a person, in order to inherit the property, had to marry the heiress, even if he had to divorce an already existing wife to do so. And, if in such circumstances, a father died without making a will, the nearest relation could claim the heiress daughter as his wife. It is the same principle again. The whole thing is designed to maintain the family and to retain the property within the family.

The question that the Sadducees asked, therefore, may have presented an exaggerated case, with the story of the seven brothers, but it was a question founded on a well-known Jewish law.

The question of the Sadducees was simply this--if, in accordance with the regulations governing levirate marriage, one woman has been married in turn to seven brothers, if there is a resurrection of the dead, whose wife is she when that resurrection comes? They thought that by asking that question they rendered the idea of resurrection completely ridiculous.

Jesus' answer really falls into two parts.

First, he deals with what we might call the manner of the resurrection. He lays it down that when a person rises again, the old laws of physical life no longer obtain. The risen are like the angels and physical things like marrying and being married no longer enter into the case. Jesus was saying nothing new. In Enoch the promise is, "Ye shall have great joy as the angels of heaven." In the Apocalypse of Baruch it is said that the righteous shall be made "like unto the angels." And the rabbinic writings themselves said that in the life to come "there is no eating and drinking, no begetting of children, no bargaining, jealousy, hatred and strife, but that the righteous sit with crowns on their heads, and are satisfied with the glory of God." It is Jesus' point that the life to come cannot be thought of in terms of this life at all.

Second, he deals with the fact of the resurrection. Here he meets the Sadducees on their own ground. They insisted that in the Pentateuch, by which they set so much store, there was no evidence for immortality. From the Pentateuch Jesus draws his proof. In Exo.3:6, God call himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. If God is the God of these patriarchs even yet, it means that they must still be alive, for the living God must be the God of living people, and not of those who are dead. And if the patriarchs are alive then the resurrection is proved. On their own grounds, and with an argument to which they could find no answer, Jesus defeated the Sadducees.

This passage may seem to deal with a matter which is recondite and remote. It is an argument on terms which are out of the orbit of our experience. In spite of that two eternally valid truths emerge.

(i) The Sadducees made the mistake of creating heaven in the image of earth. Men have always done so. The Red Indians, who were by nature hunters, conceived of a heaven which was a happy hunting ground. The Vikings, who were by nature warriors, thought of a Valhalla where they would fight all day, where at night the dead would be raised and the wounded made whole again, and they would spend the evening in banquets, drinking wine from cups made from the skulls of their conquered foes. The Mohammedans were a desert people living in circumstances where luxury was

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unknown. They conceived of heaven as a place where men would live a life replete with every sensual and bodily pleasure. The Jews hated the sea and thought of heaven as a place where there would be no more sea. All men shrank from sorrow and from pain, and heaven would be a place where the tears were wiped from every eye and there would be no more pain.

Always men have tended to create in thought a heaven to suit themselves. Sometimes that idea can be poignantly beautiful. During the 1914-18 war The Westminster Gazette printed a lovely little poem about those who had died for their country:

"They left the fury of the fight,
And they were tired.
The gates of heaven were open quite,
Unguarded and unwired.
There was no sound of any gun,
The land was still and green,
Wide hills lay silent in the sun,
Blue valleys slept between.
They saw far off a little wood
Stand up against the sky.
Knee deep in grass a great tree stood,
Some lazy cows went by.
There were some rooks sailed overhead,
And once a church bell pealed.
'God, but it's England!' someone said,
'And there's a cricket field'."

There is wistful beauty there and real truth. But we do well to remember that Paul was right (1Cor.2:9) when he took the words of the prophet (Isa.64:4) and made them his own, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." The life of the heavenly places will be greater than any conception this life can supply.

(ii) In the end Jesus based his conviction of the resurrection on the fact that the relationship between God and a good man is one that nothing can break. God was the friend of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when they lived. That friendship could not cease with death. "God," as Loisy said, "cannot cease to be the God of those who served him and loved him." As the Psalmist said, "I am continually with thee. Thou dost hold my right hand. Thou dost guide me with thy counsel and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory." (Ps.73:23-24.) He cannot conceive of his relationship with God ever being broken.

In a word, there is only one immortal thing--and that is love.

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Mark 12:28-34

LOVE FOR GOD AND LOVE FOR MEN

Mark 12:28-34

One of the experts in the law, who had listened to the discussion, and who realized that Jesus had answered them well, approached him and asked him, "What is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered, "The Lord thy God is one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your whole soul, and your whole mind, and your whole strength.' This is the second, 'You must love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment which is greater than these." The expert in the law said to him, "Teacher, you have in truth spoken well, because God is one, and there is no other except him, and to love him with your whole heart, and your whole understanding, and your whole strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is better than all burnt-offerings of whole victims and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And no one any longer dared to ask him any questions.

No love was lost between the expert in the law and the Sadducees. The profession of the scribes was to interpret the law in all its many rules and regulations. Their trade was to know and to apply the oral law, while, as we have seen, the Sadducee did not accept the oral law at all. The expert in the law would no doubt be well satisfied with the discomfiture of the Sadducees.

This scribe came to Jesus with a question which was often a matter of debate in the rabbinic schools. In Judaism there was a kind of double tendency. There was the tendency to expand the law limitlessly into hundreds and thousands of rules and regulations. But there was also the tendency to try to gather up the law into one sentence, one general statement which would be a compendium of its whole message. Hillel was once asked by a proselyte to instruct him in the whole law while he stood on one leg. Hillel's answer was, "What thou hatest for thyself, do not to thy neighbour. This is the whole law, the rest is commentary. Go and learn." Akiba had already said, "'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'--this is the greatest, general principle in the law." Simon the Righteous had said, "On three things stands the world--on the law, on the worship, and on works of love."

Sammlai had taught that Moses received 613 precepts on Mount Sinai, 365 according to the days of the sun year, and 248 according to the generations of men. David reduced the 613 to 11 in Ps.15.

Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent? who shall dwell on thy holy hill?

1. He who walks blamelessly.
2. And does what is right.
3. And speaks truth from his heart.
4. Who does not slander with his tongue.
5. And does no evil to his friend.
6. Nor takes up a reproach against his neighbour.
7. In whose eyes a reprobate is despised.
8. But who honours those who fear the Lord.

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9. Who swears to his own heart and does not change.
10. Who does not put out his money at interest.
11. And does not take a bribe against the innocent.

Isaiah reduced them to 6. (Isa.33:15.)

1. He who walks righteously.
 2. And speaks uprightly.
 3. Who despises the gain of oppressions.
 4. Who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe.
 5. Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed.
 6. And shuts his eyes from looking upon evil.
- He shall dwell on high.

Micah reduced the 6 to 3. (Mic.6:8.)

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee?

1. To do justice.
2. To love kindness.
3. To walk humbly with your God.

Once again Isaiah brought the 3 down to 2. (Isa.56:1.)

1. Keep justice.
2. Do righteousness.

Finally Habakkuk reduced them all to one. (Hab.2:4.)

The righteous shall live by his faith.

It can be seen that rabbinic ingenuity did try to contract as well as to expand the law. There were really two schools of thought. There were those who believed that there were lighter and weightier matters of the law, that there were great principles which were all-important to grasp. As Augustine later said, "Love God--and do what you like." But there were others who were much against this, who held that every smallest principle was equally binding and that to try to distinguish between their relative importance was highly dangerous. The expert who asked Jesus this question was asking about something which was a living issue in Jewish thought and discussion.

For answer Jesus took two great commandments and put them together.

(i) "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." That single sentence is the real creed of Judaism (Deut.6:4). It had three uses. It is called the Shema. Shema is the imperative of the Hebrew verb to hear (compare HSN8085), and it is so called from the first word in the sentence.

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(a) It was the sentence with which the service of the synagogue always began and still begins. The full Shema is Deut.6:4-9, Deut.11:13-21, Num.15:37-41. It is the declaration that God is the only God, the foundation of Jewish monotheism.

(b) The three passages of the Shema were contained in the phylacteries (Matt.23:5), little leather boxes which the devout Jew wore on his forehead and on his wrist when he was at prayer. As he prayed he reminded himself of his creed. His warrant for wearing phylacteries he found in Deut.6:8.

(c) The Shema was contained in a little cylindrical box called the Mezuzah (compare HSN4201) which was and still is affixed to the door of every Jewish house and the door of every room within it, to remind the Jew of God in his going out and his coming in.

When Jesus quoted this sentence as the first commandment, every devout Jew would agree with him.

(ii) "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." That is a quotation from Lev.19:18. Jesus did one thing with it. In its original context it has to do with a man's fellow Jew. It would not have included the Gentile, whom it was quite permissible to hate. But Jesus quoted it without qualification and without limiting boundaries. He took an old law and fined it with a new meaning.

The new thing that Jesus did was to put these two commandments together. No rabbi had ever done that before. There is only one suggestion of connection previously. Round about 100 B.C. there was composed a series of tractates called The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, in which an unknown writer put into the mouths of the patriarchs some very fine teaching. In The Testament of Issachar (5: 2) we read:

"Love the Lord and love your neighbour,
Have compassion on the poor and weak."

In the same testament (7: 6) we read:

"I loved the Lord,
Likewise also every man with my whole heart."

In The Testament of Dan (5: 3) we read:

"Love the Lord through all your life,
And one another with a true heart"

But no one until Jesus put the two commandments together and made them one. Religion to him was loving God and loving men. He would have said that the only way in which a man can prove that he loves God is by showing that he loves men.

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Mark 12:28-34

The scribe willingly accepted this, and went on to say that such a love was better than all sacrifices. In that he was in line with the highest thought of his people. Long, long ago Samuel had said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." (1Sam.15:22.) Hosea had heard God say, "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice." (Hos.6:6.)

But it is always easy to let ritual take the place of love. It is always easy to let worship become a matter of the Church building instead of a matter of the whole life. The priest and the levite could pass by the wounded traveller because they were eager to get on with the ritual of the temple. This scribe had risen beyond his contemporaries and that is why he found himself in sympathy with Jesus.

There must have been a look of love in Jesus' eyes, and a look of appeal as he said to him, "You have gone so far. Will you not come further and accept my way of things? Then you will be a true citizen of the Kingdom."

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Mark 12:35-37a

THE SON OF DAVID

Mark 12:35-37a

While Jesus was teaching in the sacred precincts, he said, "How can the experts in the law say that God's Anointed One is the Son of David? David himself, moved by the Holy Spirit, said, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' David himself calls him Lord. And how then can he be his son?"

For us this is a difficult passage to understand, because it uses thoughts and methods of argument which are strange to us. But it would not be at all difficult for the crowd who heard it in the Temple precincts in Jerusalem, for they were well accustomed to just such ways of arguing and of using scripture.

We may begin by noting one thing which helps to make the passage clearer. The Revised Standard Version translates Mk.12:35, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David." In the early parts of the New Testament Christ is never a proper name, as nowadays it has come to be. It has in fact in this passage the definite article before it and so is translated the Christ. Christos (GSN5547) and Messiah (HSN4899, compare GSN3323) are the Greek and the Hebrew for the same word, and both mean the Anointed One. The reason for the use of the title is that in ancient times a man was made king by being anointed with oil--still a part of our own coronation ceremony. Christos (GSN5547) and Messiah (HSN4899) then both mean God's Anointed King, the great one who is to come from God to save his people. So when Jesus asks, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?" he is not directly referring to himself. He is really saying, "How can the scribes say that God's Anointed King who is to come is the Son of David?"

The argument which Jesus puts forward in support is this. He quotes Ps.110:1--"The Lord says to my Lord sit at my right hand." The Jews at this time assumed that all the Psalms came from the hand of David. They also held that this Psalm referred to the coming Messiah. In this verse David refers to this coming one as his Lord. How, asks Jesus, if he be his son can David address him by the title of Lord?

What is Jesus seeking to teach here? Of all titles for the Messiah the commonest was Son of David. At all times the Jews looked forward to a God-sent deliverer who would be of David's line. (Isa.9:2-7, Isa.11:1-9, Jer.23:5ff, Jer.33:14-18, Eze.34:23ff, Eze.37:24, Ps.89:20ff.) It was by that title that Jesus himself was often addressed, especially by the crowds (Mk.10:47ff, Matt.9:27, Matt.12:23, Matt.15:22, Matt.21:9,15). All through the New Testament the conviction that Jesus was in fact the son of David in his physical descent occurs (Rom.1:3, 2Tim.2:8, Matt.1:1-17, Lk.3:23-38). The genealogies of Jesus given in the passages from Matthew and Luke which we have cited are to show that Jesus was in fact of the lineage of David. What Jesus is doing is this--he is not denying that the Messiah is the Son of David, nor is he saying that he himself is not the Son of David. What he is saying is that he is the Son of David--and far more, not only David's son but David's Lord.

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Mark 12:35-37a

The trouble was that the title Son of David had got itself inextricably entangled with the idea of a conquering Messiah. It had got involved in political and nationalistic hopes and dreams, aims and ambitions. Jesus was saying that the title Son of David, as it was popularly used, is a quite inadequate description of himself. He was Lord. This word Lord (the Greek kurios, GSN2962) is the regular translation of Yahweh (HSN3068; HSN3069) (=Jehovah) in the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures. Always its use would turn men's thoughts to God. What Jesus was saying was that he came not to found any earthly kingdom but to bring men God.

Jesus is doing here what he so constantly tried to do. He is trying to take from men's minds their idea of a conquering warrior Messiah who would found an earthly empire, and seeking to put into them the idea of a Messiah who would be the servant of God and bring to men the love of God.

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Mark 12:37b-40

THE WRONG KIND OF RELIGION

Mark 12:37b-40

The mass of the people listened to him with pleasure. And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the experts in the law, who like to walk about in flowing robes, and who like greetings in the market-places, and the front seats in the synagogue, and the places of highest honour at meals, men who devour widows' houses, and who, in pretence, pray at great length. These will receive a more abundant condemnation."

The first sentence of this passage most probably goes with this section and not, as in the Revised Standard Version, with the passage which goes before. The verse divisions of the New Testament were first inserted by Stephanus in the sixteenth century. It was said that he put them in while riding from his house to his printing factory. They are by no means always the most suitable divisions, and this seems to be one requiring change. It is far more likely that the mass of the people listened with pleasure to a denunciation of the scribes than they did to a theological argument. There are certain minds to which invective is always attractive.

In this passage Jesus makes a series of charges against the scribes. They liked to walk about in flowing robes. A long robe which swept the ground was the sign of a notable. It was the kind of robe in which no one could either hurry or work, and was the sign of the leisured man of honour. It may be that the phrase has another meaning. In obedience to Num.15:38 the Jews wore tassels at the edge of their outer robe. These tassels were to remind them that they were the people of God. Quite possibly these legal experts wore outsize tassels for special prominence (compare Matt.23:5). At all events they liked to dress in such a way that it drew attention to themselves and to the honour they enjoyed.

They liked greetings in the market-place. The scribes loved to be greeted with honour and with respect. The very title Rabbi means "My great one." To be so addressed was agreeable to their vanity.

They liked the front seats in the synagogue. In the synagogue, in front of the ark where the sacred volumes were kept and facing the congregation, there was a bench where the specially distinguished sat. It had the advantage that no one who sat there could possibly be missed, being in full view of the admiring congregation.

They liked the highest places at feasts. At feasts precedence was strictly fixed. The first place was that on the right of the host, the second that on the left of the host, and so on, alternating right and left, round the table. It was easy to tell the honour in which a man was held by the place at which he sat.

They devoured widows' houses. This is a savage charge. Josephus, who was himself a Pharisee, says of certain times of intrigue in Jewish history, that "the Pharisees valued themselves highly upon their exact skill in the law of their fathers, and made men believe that they (the Pharisees) were highly favoured by God," and that "they inveigled" certain women into their schemes and

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Mark 12:37b-40

plottings. The idea behind this seems to be this. An expert in the law could take no pay for his teaching. He was supposed to have a trade by which he earned his daily bread. But these legal experts had managed to convey to people that there was no higher duty and privilege than to support a rabbi in comfort, that, in fact such support would undoubtedly entitle him or her who gave it to a high place in the heavenly academy. It is a sad fact that women have always been imposed upon by religious charlatans, and it would seem that these scribes and Pharisees imposed on simple people who could ill afford to support them.

The long prayers of the scribes and Pharisees were notorious. It has been said that the prayers were not so much offered to God as offered to men. They were offered in such a place and in such a way that no one could fail to see how pious they were who offered them.

This passage, as stern as Jesus ever spoke, warns against three things.

(i) It warns against the desire for prominence. It is still true that many a man accepts office in the church because he thinks he has earned it, rather than because he desires to render selfless service to the house and the people of God. Men may still regard office in the church as a privilege rather than a responsibility.

(ii) It warns against the desire for deference. Almost everyone likes to be treated with respect. And yet a basic fact of Christianity is that it ought to make a man wish to obliterate self rather than to exalt it. There is a story of a monk in the old days, a very holy man, who was sent to take up office as abbot in a monastery. He looked so humble a person that, when he arrived, he was sent to work in the kitchen as a scullion, because no one recognized him. Without a word of protest and with no attempt to take his position, he went and washed the dishes and did the most menial tasks. It was only when the bishop arrived a considerable time later that the mistake was discovered and the humble monk took up his true position. The man who enters upon office for the respect which will be given to him has begun in the wrong way, and cannot, unless he changes, ever be in any sense the servant of Christ and of his fellow-men.

(iii) It warns against the attempt to make a traffic of religion. It is still possible to use religious connections for self-gain and self-advancement. But this is a warning to all who are in the church for what they can get out of it and not for what they can put into it.

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THE GREATEST GIFT

Mark 12:41-44

When Jesus had sat down opposite the treasury, he was watching how the crowd threw their money into the treasury, and many rich people threw in large sums. A poor widow woman came and threw in two mites which make up half a farthing. He called his disciples and said to them, "This is the truth I tell you--this poor widow woman has thrown in more than all the people who threw money into the treasury, for all of them threw their contributions in out of their abundance, but she out of her lack has thrown in everything that she had, all she had to live on."

Between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women there was the Gate Beautiful. It may well be that Jesus had gone to sit quietly there after the argument and the tension of the Court of the Gentiles and the discussions in the cloisters. In the Court of the Women there were thirteen collecting boxes called "The Trumpets," because they were so shaped. Each of them was for a special purpose, for instance to buy corn or wine or oil for the sacrifices. They were for contributions for the daily sacrifices and expenses of the Temple. Many people threw in quite considerable contributions. Then came a widow. She flung in two mites. The coin so called was a lepton (GSN3016), which literally means a thin one. It was the smallest of all coins and was worth one fortieth of one pence. And yet Jesus said that her tiny contribution was greater than all the others, for the others had thrown in what they could spare easily enough and still have plenty left, while the widow had flung in everything she had.

Here is a lesson in giving:

(i) Real giving must be sacrificial. The amount of the gift never matters so much as its cost to the giver, not the size of the gift, but the sacrifice. Real generosity gives until it hurts. For many of us it is a real question if ever our giving to God's work is any sacrifice at all. Few people will do without their pleasures to give a little more to the work of God. It may well be a sign of the decadence of the church and the failure of our Christianity that gifts have to be coaxed out of church people, and that often they will not give at all unless they get something back in the way of entertainment or of goods. There can be few of us who read this story without shame.

(ii) Real giving has a certain recklessness in it. The woman might have kept one coin. It would not have been much but it would have been something, yet she gave everything she had. There is a great symbolic truth here. It is our tragedy that there is so often some part of our lives, some part of our activities, some part of ourselves which we do not give to Christ. Somehow there is nearly always something we hold back. We rarely make the final sacrifice and the final surrender.

(iii) It is a strange and lovely thing that the person whom the New Testament and Jesus hand down to history as a pattern of generosity was a person who gave a gift of half a farthing. We may feel that we have not much in the way of material gifts or personal gifts to give to Christ, but, if we put all that we have and are at his disposal, he can do things with it and with us that are beyond our imaginings.

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THE THINGS TO COME

Mk.13 is one of the most difficult chapters in the New Testament for a modern reader to understand. That is because it is one of the most Jewish chapters in the Bible. From beginning to end it is thinking in terms of Jewish history and Jewish ideas. All through it Jesus is using categories and pictures which were very familiar to the Jews of his day, but which are very strange, and indeed, unknown, to many modern readers. Even so, it is not possible to disregard this chapter because it is the source of many ideas about the second coming of Jesus. The difficulty about the doctrine of the second coming is that nowadays people are apt either completely to disregard it or to be so completely unbalanced about it that it becomes for them practically the only doctrine of the Christian faith. It may be that if we study this chapter with some care we shall come to a sane and correct view about this doctrine.

We will first of all glance at the Jewish background against which this chapter must be read. We will then try to make an analysis of the various elements which go to make it up. We will then study it section by section in the usual way. Finally, we will try to extract from it the great truths which are permanently valid.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

This whole chapter must be read with one thing in mind. Again and again we have to return to this matter because there is so much of the New Testament which is not intelligible without it. The Jews never doubted that they were the chosen people, and they never doubted that one day they would occupy the place in the world which the chosen people, as they saw it, deserved and were bound to have in the end. They had long since abandoned the idea that they could ever win that place by human means and they were confident that in the end God would directly intervene in history and win it for them. The day of God's intervention was the day of the Lord. Before that day of the Lord there would be a time of terror and trouble when the world would be shaken to its foundations and judgment would come. But it would be followed by the new world and the new age and the new glory.

In one sense this idea is the product of unconquerable optimism. The Jew was quite certain that God would break in. In another sense it was the product of bleak pessimism, because it was based on the idea that this world was so utterly bad that only its complete destruction and the emergence

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of a new world would suffice. They did not look for reformation. They looked for a re-creating of the entire scheme of things.

Let us look at some of the Old Testament passages about the day of the Lord. Amos writes (Am.5:16-20):

"In all the squares there shall be wailing; and in all the streets they shall say, 'Alas! Alas!'. They shall call the farmers to mourning and to wailing those who are skilled in lamentations, and in all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord. Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light ... gloom with no brightness in it."

Isaiah (Isa.13:6-16) has a terrible passage about the day of the Lord:

"Wail! for the day of the Lord is near. As destruction from the Almighty it will come.... Behold the day of the Lord comes, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light. The sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light.... Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, in the day of his fierce anger. . . ."

Jl.2-3 is full of terrible descriptions of the day of the Lord:

"The day of the Lord is coming ... a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.... I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire, and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes."

Again and again such passages of terror meet us in the Old Testament. The day of the Lord will be sudden, shattering, terrifying. The world will reel with destruction. The very course of nature will be uprooted, and God, the judge, will come.

Between the Old and the New Testaments there was a time when the Jews knew no freedom. It was therefore only natural that their hopes and dreams of the day of the Lord would become even more vivid. In that time a kind of popular religious literature grew up. Jesus would know it. All the Jews would be familiar with its picture. The writings of which this literature consisted were called Apocalypses. Apokalupsis (GSN0602) means an unveiling. These books were dreams and visions of what would happen when the day of the Lord came and in the terrible time immediately before it. They continued to use the Old Testament imagery, and to supplement it with new details. But, it

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must be noted, all these books were dreams and visions. They were attempts to paint the unpaintable and to speak the unspeakable. They were poetry, not prose. They were visions, not science. They were dreams, not history. They were never meant to be taken prosaically as maps of the future and timetables of events to come.

We will see that every single detail in this chapter can be paralleled in the visions of the Old Testament and of the literature between the Testaments. Jesus was taking the language, the imagery, the apparatus of apocalyptic literature, and using it to try to make people understand. He was working with the only ideas that people knew. But he knew, as they knew, that these things were only pictures, for no man could really tell what would happen when God broke in.

THE DIFFERENT STRANDS

Further, in this chapter there are various strands of thought. The gospel writers had a way of collecting Jesus' sayings on any subject. It was a wise way to write and excellent for teaching purposes. Here Mark, as it were, collects Jesus' sayings about the future. Now even a cursory reading, with no special knowledge, shows that, though all these sayings were about the future, they were not all about the same things. There are in fact in this chapter five different strands.

(i) There are prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem. We get them in Mk.13:1-2, Mk.13:14-20. Jesus foresaw the end of the holy city. As we shall see, Jesus was right. Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70. The Temple was destroyed and the most terrible things happened.

(ii) There is warning of persecution to come. We get that in Mk.13:9-13. Jesus foresaw that his followers would have to go through the most heart-breaking and soul-searing experiences, and he warned them in advance.

(iii) There are warnings of the dangers of the last days. We get them in Mk.13:3-6 and Mk.13:21-22. Jesus saw quite clearly that men would come who would twist and adulterate the Christian faith. It was bound to be so, for men are always inclined to listen to their own proud minds rather than to the voice of God. He wished to defend his people in advance from the heresies and lies which would invade the Church.

(iv) There are warnings of the Second Coming. Now, these warnings of the Second Coming are dressed in the language which has to do with the day of the Lord. We get them in Mk.13:7-8 and Mk.13:24-27. The imagery of the day of the Lord and of the Second Coming are inextricably mixed up. It had to be so, because no man could possibly know what would happen in either case. It is with visions and dreams that we have to deal. The only pictures Jesus could use about his Second Coming were those which prophets and apocalyptists had already used about the day of the Lord. They are not meant to be taken literally. They are meant as impressionistic pictures, as seer's visions, designed to impress upon men the greatness of that event when it should come.

(v) There are warnings of the necessity to be on the watch. We get them in Mk.13:28-37. If men live in the shadow of eternity, if they live with the constant possibility of the intervention of God, if

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they live with the prospect of the consummation of the coming of Christ ever before them, if the times and the seasons are known only to God, there is the necessity ever to be ready.

This chapter will make far more sense if we remember these various strands in it and remember that every strand is unfolded in language and imagery which go back to the Old Testament and apocalyptic pictures of the day of the Lord.

Because that is so, we will study the chapter not in consecutive verses, but in the various passages of which the various strands consist.

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Mark 13:1-2

A CITY'S DOOM

Mark 13:1-2

As they were going out of the sacred precincts, one of his disciples said to Jesus, "Teacher, see! What stones and what buildings!" Jesus said to him, "You see this great budding? Not one stone will be left on another which will not be thrown down!"

We begin with the prophecies of Jesus which foretold the doom of Jerusalem. The Temple which Herod built was one of the wonders of the world. It was begun in 20-19 B.C. and in the time of Jesus was not yet completely finished. It was built on the top of Mount Moriah. Instead of levelling off the summit of the mountain a kind of vast platform was formed by raising up walls of massive masonry and enclosing the whole area. On these walls a platform was laid, strengthened by piers which distributed the weight of the superstructure. Josephus tells us that some of these stones were forty feet long by twelve feet high by eighteen feet wide. It would be some of these vast stones that moved the Galilaean disciples to such wondering amazement.

The most magnificent entrance to the Temple was at the south-west angle. Here between the city and the Temple hill there stretched the Tyropoeon Valley. A marvellous bridge spanned the valley. Each arch was forty-one and a half feet and there were stones used in the building of it which measured twenty-four feet long. The Tyropoeon valley was no less than two hundred and twenty-five feet below. The breadth of the cleft that the bridge spanned was three hundred and fifty-four feet, and the bridge itself was fifty feet in breadth. The bridge led straight into the Royal Porch. The porch consisted of a double row of Corinthian pillars all thirty-seven and a half feet high and each one cut out of one solid block of marble.

Of the actual Temple building itself, the holy place, Josephus writes, "Now the outward face of the Temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendour, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for, as to those parts of it which were not gilt, they were exceeding white.... Of its stones, some of them were forty-five cubits in length, five in height and six in breadth." (A cubit was eighteen inches.)

It was all this splendour that so impressed the disciples. The Temple seemed the summit of human art and achievement, and seemed so vast and solid that it would stand for ever. But Jesus made the astonishing statement that the day was coming when not one of these stones would stand upon another. In less than fifty years his prophecy came tragically true.

"Pride of man and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray his trust;
What with care and toil he buildeth,
Tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,

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Mark 13:1-2

Hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower."

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Mark 13:3-6, 21-23

THE DANGERS OF THE LAST DAYS

Mark 13:3-6 and Mark 13:21-23

As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, opposite the sacred precincts of the Temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew privately asked Jesus, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are going to be completed?" Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one misleads you. Many will come in my name, and say, 'I am he' and they will lead many astray."

"And if some one then says to you, 'See! Here is the Messiah!' or, 'See! There he is!' do not believe them. For false Messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will produce signs and wonders to lead the elect astray, if it is possible. But do you look to yourselves! See! I have told you beforehand all that will happen."

Jesus was well aware that, before the end, heretics would arise; and, indeed it was not long before the church had its heretics. Heresy arises from five main causes.

(i) It arises from constructing doctrine to suit oneself. The human mind has an infinite capacity for wishful thinking. In a famous sentence, the Psalmist said, "The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The fool about whom the Psalmist was speaking was not a fool in the sense that he had no intelligence. He was a moral fool. His statement that there was no God was made because he did not wish God to be. If God existed so much the worse for him; therefore he eliminated him from his doctrine and from his universe.

One particular heresy has always been with us, that is antinomianism. The antinomian begins with the principle that law has been abolished--and in a sense he is right. He goes on to say that there is nothing but grace--and again in a sense he is right. He then goes on to argue--as Paul shows us in Rom.6--on lines like these. "You say that God's grace is wide enough to cover every sin?" "Yes." "You say that God's grace can forgive any sin?" "Yes." "You say that God's grace is the greatest and the most wonderful thing in the universe?" "Yes." "Then," the antinomian concludes, "let us go on sinning to our hearts' content, for the more we sin, the more chances we give to God's amazing grace to operate. Sin is a good thing for sin gives grace a chance to work. Therefore, let us do whatever we like." The grace of God has been twisted to suit the man who wants to sin.

The same kind of argument is used by the man who declares that the only important thing in life is the soul and that a man's body does not matter. If that is so, the argument runs, then a man can do what he likes with his body. If he is so inclined he can sate its desires.

One of the commonest ways to arrive in heresy is to mould Christian truth to suit ourselves. Can it be that the doctrine of hell and the doctrine of the Second Coming have dropped out of much religious thought because they are both uncomfortable doctrines? No one would wish to bring either back in its crude form, but can it be that they have dropped too far out of Christian thought because it does not suit us to believe in them?

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Mark 13:3-6, 21-23

(ii) Heresy arises from overstressing one part of the truth. It is, for instance, always wrong to overstress one attribute of God. If we think only of God's holiness, we can never attain to any intimacy with him, but rather tend to a deism in which he is entirely remote from the world. If we think only of God's justice, we can never be free of the fear of God. We become haunted and not helped by our religion. If we think only of God's love, religion can become a very easy-going sentimental thing. There is more in the New Testament than Lk.15.

Always there is paradox in Christianity. God is love, yet God is justice. Man is free, yet God is in control. Man is a creature of time, yet also a creature of eternity. G. K. Chesterton said that orthodoxy was like a man walking along a knife-edge ridge with a yawning chasm on either side. One step too much to right or left and disaster follows. We must, as the Greeks insisted, see life steady and see it whole.

(iii) Heresy arises from trying to produce a religion which will suit people, one which will be popular and attractive. To do that it has to be watered down. The sting, the condemnation, the humiliation, the moral demand, have to be taken out of it. It is not our job to alter Christianity to suit people, but to alter people to suit Christianity.

(iv) Heresy arises from divorcing oneself from the Christian fellowship. When a man thinks alone he runs a grave danger of thinking astray. There is such a thing as the tradition of the church. There is such a conception as the church being the guardian of truth. If a man finds that his thinking separates himself from the fellowship of men, the chances are that there is something wrong with his thinking. It is the Roman Catholic principle that a man cannot have God for his Father unless he has the church for his mother--and there is truth there.

(v) Heresy arises from the attempt to be completely intelligible. Here is one of the great paradoxes. We are under the bounden duty of trying to understand our faith. But because we are finite and God is infinite we can never fully understand. For that very reason a faith that can be neatly stated in a series of propositions and neatly proved in a series of logical steps like a geometrical theorem is a contradiction in terms. As G. K. Chesterton said, "It is only the fool who tries to get the heavens inside his head, and not unnaturally his head bursts. The wise man is content to get his head inside the heavens." Even at our most intellectual we must remember that there is a place for the ultimate mystery before which we can only worship, wonder and adore.

"How could I praise,
If such as I could understand?"

"I believe," as Tertullian said, "because it is impossible."

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Mark 13:7-8, 24-27

HIS COMING AGAIN

Mark 13:7-8 and Mark 13:24-27

Jesus said, "When you hear of wars and reports of wars, do not be disturbed. These things must happen. But the end is not yet. Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. In certain places there will be earthquakes. There will be famines. These things are the beginning of the birth-pangs of the new age."

"And in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with much power and glory. And then he will send his angels and they will gather the chosen ones from the four winds, from the edge of the earth to the edge of the heaven."

Here Jesus unmistakably speaks of his coming again. But--and this is important--he clothes the idea in three pictures which are part and parcel of the apparatus connected with the day of the Lord.

(i) The day of the Lord was to be preceded by a time of wars. 4 Ezra declares that before the day of the Lord there will be,

"Quakings of places
Tumult of peoples,
Scheming of nations,
Confusion of leaders,
Disquietude of princes." (9: 3).

The same book says,

"And there shall come astonishment of mind upon the dwellers on earth. And they shall plan to war one against another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom." (13: 31).

The Sibylline Oracles foresee that,

"King captures king and takes his land, and nations ravage nations and potentates people, and rulers all flee to another land, and the land is changed in men and a barbarian empire ravages Hellas and drains the rich land of its wealth, and men come face to face in strife." (3: 633-647).

Second Baruch has the same ideas. In 27: 5-13 this book singles out twelve things which will precede the new age.

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Mark 13:7-8, 24-27

"In the first part there will be the beginning of commotions. In the second part there shall be the slayings of great ones. In the third part the fall of many by death. In the fourth part the sending of the sword. In the fifth part famine and withholding of rain. In the sixth part earthquakes and terrors...(there is a blank in the manuscript here).... In the eighth part a multitude of spectres and attacks of the evil spirits. In the ninth part the fall of fire. In the tenth part rapine and much oppression. In the eleventh part wickedness and unchastity. In the twelfth part confusion from the mingling together of all those things aforesaid."

"All the inhabitants of the earth shall be moved against one another." (48: 32.)

"And they shall hate one another,
And provoke one another to fight.

And it shall come to pass that whosoever comes safe out of the war shall die in the earthquake,
And whosoever gets safe out of the earthquake shall be burned by the fire,
And whosoever gets safe out of the fire shall be destroyed by famine."

It is abundantly clear that when Jesus spoke of wars and rumours of wars he was using pictures which were part and parcel of Jewish dreams of the future.

(ii) The day of the Lord was to be preceded by the darkening of sun and moon. The Old Testament itself is full of that (Am.8:9, Jl.2:10, Jl.3:15, Eze.32:7-8, Isa.13:10, Isa.34:4); again the popular literature of Jesus' day is full of it, too.

"Then shall the sun suddenly shine forth by night,
And the moon by day.

The outgoings of the stars shall change."
(4 Ezra 5: 4-7.)

2 Baruch 32: 1 speaks of "the time in which the mighty one is to shake the whole creation." The Sibylline Oracles (3: 796-806) talk of a time when "swords in the star-lit heaven appear by night towards dusk and towards dawn...and all the brightness of the sun fails at midday from the heaven, and the moon's rays shine forth and come back to earth, and a sign comes from the rocks with dripping streams of blood." The Assumption of Moses foresees a time when:

"The horns of the sun shall be broken and he shall be turned into

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Mark 13:7-8, 24-27

darkness,
And the moon shall not give her light, and be turned wholly into
blood,
And the circle of the stars shall be disturbed." (10: 5.)

Once again it is clear that Jesus is using the popular language which everyone knew.

(iii) It was a regular part of the imagery that the Jews were to be gathered back to Palestine from the four corners of the earth. The Old Testament itself is full of that idea (Isa.27:13; Isa.35:8-10; Mic.7:12; Zech.10:6-11); once more the popular literature loves the idea:

"Blow ye in Zion on the trumpet to summon the saints,
Cause ye to be heard in Jerusalem the voice of him that
bringeth good tidings,
For God hath had pity on Israel in visiting them.
Stand on the height, O Jerusalem, and behold thy children,
From the East and the West gathered together by the Lord."
(Wis.11:1-3.)

"The Lord will gather you together in faith through His tender
mercy, and for the sake of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob."
(The Testament of Asher 7: 5-7.)

When we read the pictorial words of Jesus about the Second Coming we must remember that he is giving us neither a map of eternity nor a timetable to the future, but that he is simply using the language and the pictures that many a Jew knew and used for centuries before him.

But it is extremely interesting to note that the things Jesus prophesied were in fact happening. He prophesied wars and the dreaded Parthians were in fact pressing in on the Roman frontiers. He prophesied earthquakes and within forty years the Roman world was aghast at the earthquake which devastated Laodicaea and by the eruption of Vesuvius which buried Pompeii in lava. He prophesied famines, and there was famine in Rome in the days of Claudius. It was in fact such a time of terror in the near future that when Tacitus began his histories he said that everything happening seemed to prove that the gods were seeking, not salvation, but vengeance on the Roman Empire.

In this passage the one thing that we must retain is the fact that Jesus did foretell that he would come again. The imagery we can disregard.

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Mark 13:9-13

THE HARD WAY

Mark 13:9-13

Take heed to yourselves, for they will hand you over to councils, and they will scourge you in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, and it will be your opportunity to bear your witness to them. The gospel must first be preached to all nations. And when they hand you over and bring you before authorities, do not worry beforehand about what you will say, but speak whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit. Brother shall hand over brother to death, and father child. All children will rise up against parents, and will kill them. And you will be hated of all for the sake of my name. But the man who has endured to the end, he will be saved;

Now we come to the warnings of persecution to come. Jesus never left his followers in any doubt that they had chosen a hard way. No man could say that he had not known the conditions of Christ's service in advance.

The handing over to councils and the scourging in synagogues refer to Jewish persecution. In Jerusalem there was the great Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews, but every town and village had its local Sanhedrin. Before such local Sanhedrins the self-confessed heretics would be tried, and in the synagogues they would be publicly scourged. The governors and kings refer to trials before the Roman courts, such as Paul faced before Felix and Festus and Agrippa.

It was a fact that the Christians were wonderfully strengthened in their trials. When we read of the trials of the martyrs, even though they were often ignorant and unlettered men, the impression often is that it was the judges and not the Christians who were on trial. Their Christian faith enabled the simplest folk to fear God so much that they never feared the face of any man.

It was true that even those of a man's own family sometimes betrayed him. In the early Roman Empire one of the curses was the informer (delator). There were those who, in their attempts to curry favour with the authorities, would not hesitate to betray their own kith and kin. That must have been the sorest blow of all.

In Hitler's Germany a man was arrested because he stood for freedom. He endured imprisonment and torture with stoic and uncomplaining fortitude. Finally, with spirit still unbroken, he was released. Some short time afterwards he committed suicide. Many wondered why. Those who knew him well knew the reason--he had discovered that his own son was the person who had informed against him. The treachery of his own broke him in a way that the cruelty of his enemies was unable to achieve.

This family and domestic hostility was one of the regular items in the catalogue of terror of the last and terrible days, "Friends shall attack one another suddenly" (4 Esdras 5: 9). "And they shall hate one another and provoke one another to fight" (2 Baruch 70: 3). "And they shall strive with one another, the young with the old, and the old with the young, the poor with the rich, the lowly with the great, the beggar with the prince" (Jubilees 23: 19). "Children shall shame the elders, and

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Mark 13:9-13

the elders shall rise up before the children" (The Mishnah, Sotah 9: 15). "For the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are the men of his own house" (Micah 7:6).

Life becomes a hell upon earth when personal loyalties are destroyed and when there is no love which a man may trust.

It was true that the Christians were hated. Tacitus talked of Christianity as an accursed superstition; Suetonius called it a new and evil superstition. The main reason for the hatred was the way in which Christianity cut across family ties. The fact was that a man had to love Christ more than father or mother, or son or daughter. And the matter was complicated by the way that the Christians were much slandered. It is beyond doubt that the Jews did much to encourage these slanders. The most serious was the charge that the Christians were cannibals, a charge supported by the words of the sacrament which speak of eating Christ's body and drinking his blood.

In this, as in all other things, it is the man who endures to the end who is saved. Life is not a short, sharp sprint; it is a marathon race. Life is not a single battle; it is a long campaign. Dr. G.J. Jeffrey tells of a famous man who refused to have his biography written when he was still alive. "I have seen too many men fall out on the last lap of the race," he said. Life is never safe until it reaches journey's end. It was Bunyan who, in his dream, saw that from the very gates of heaven there was a way to hell. It is the man who endures to the end who will be saved.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 13:14-20

A CITY'S AGONY

Mark 13:14-20

When you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not (let him who reads understand), then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the house-top not come down, nor let him go in to take anything out of his house. And let him who is working in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. Woe to women who are with child and to those whose babes are at their breasts in these days! Pray that it may not happen in the stormy weather. These days will be a tribulation such as has never happened from the beginning of the creation which God has created until now, and such as will never happen again. Unless the Lord had shortened the days no living creature could have survived. But, for the sake of the chosen ones whom he chose, he shortened the days.

Jesus forecasts some of the awful terror of the siege and the final fall of Jerusalem. It is his warning that when the first signs of it came people ought to flee, not even waiting to pick up their clothes or to try to save their goods. In fact the people did precisely the opposite. They crowded into Jerusalem, and death came in ways that are almost too terrible to think about.

The phrase the abomination of desolation has its origin in the book of Daniel (Dn.9:27; Dn.11:31; Dn.12:11). The Hebrew expression literally means the profanation that appals. The origin of the phrase was in connection with Antiocheius. We have already seen that he tried to stamp out the Jewish religion and introduce Greek thought and Greek ways. He desecrated the Temple by offering swine's flesh on the great altar and by setting up public brothels in the sacred courts. Before the very Holy Place itself he set up a great statue of Olympian Zeus and ordered the Jews to worship it.

In connection with that the writer of First Maccabees says (1Macc.1:54) "Now the fifteenth day of the month Casleu, in the hundred and forty-fifth year, they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar and builded idol altars throughout the cities of Juda on every side." The phrase the abomination of desolation, the profanation that appals, originally described the heathen image and all that accompanied it with which Antiocheius desecrated the Temple. Jesus prophesies that the same kind of thing is going to happen again. It very nearly happened in the year A.D. 40. Caligula was then Roman Emperor. He was an epileptic and mad. But he insisted that he was a god. He heard of the imageless worship of the Temple of Jerusalem and planned to set up his own statue in the Holy Place. His advisers besought him not to do so, for they knew that, if he did, a bloody civil war would result. He was obstinate, but fortunately he died in A.D. 41 before he could carry out his plan of desecration.

What does Jesus mean when he speaks about the abomination of desolation? Men expected not only a Messiah, but also the emergence of a power who would be the very incarnation of evil and who would gather up into himself everything that was against God. Paul called that power the Man of Lawlessness (2Th.2:3). John of the Revelation identified that power with Rome (Rev.17). Jesus is saying "Some day, quite soon, you will see the very incarnate power of evil rise up in a deliberate attempt to destroy the people and the Holy Place of God." He takes the old phrase and uses it to describe the terrible things that are about to happen.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 13:14-20

It was in A.D. 70 that Jerusalem finally fell to the besieging army of Titus, who was to be Emperor of Rome. The horrors of that siege form one of the grimmest pages in history. The people crowded into Jerusalem from the countryside. Titus had no alternative but to starve the city into subjection. The matter was complicated by the fact that even at that terrible time there were sects and factions inside the city itself. Jerusalem was torn without and within.

Josephus tells the story of that terrible siege in the fifth book of *The Wars of the Jews*. He tells us that 97,000 were taken captive and 1,100,000 perished by slow starvation and the sword. He tells us, "Then did the famine widen its progress and devoured the people by whole houses and families. The upper rooms were full of women and children dying of starvation. The lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged. The children and the young men wandered about the market places like shadows, all swelled with famine, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery seized them. As for burying them, those that were sick themselves were not able to do it. And those that were hearty and well were deterred by the great multitude of the dead, and the uncertainty when they would die themselves, for many died as they were burying others, and many went to their own coffins before the fatal hour. There was no lamentation made under these calamities...the famine confounded all natural passions....

A deep silence and a kind of deadly night had seized upon the city."

To make it still grimmer there were the inevitable ghouls who plundered the dead bodies. Josephus tells grimly how when not even any herbs were available "some persons were driven to such terrible distress as to search the common sewers and old dung-hills of cattle, and to eat the dung which they got there, and what they could not endure so much as to see, they now used for food." He paints a grim picture of men gnawing the leather of straps and shoes, and tells a terrible story of a woman who killed and roasted her child, and offered a share of that terrible meal to those who came seeking food.

The prophecy that Jesus made of terrible days ahead for Jerusalem came most abundantly true. Those who crowded into the city for safety died by the hundred thousand, and only those who took his advice and fled to the hills were saved.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 13:28-37

BE ON THE WATCH

Mark 13:28-37

Jesus said, "Learn the lesson the fig-tree offers you. As soon as its branches become tender, and it puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So must you too know, when you see these things happening, that the end is near at the doors. This is the truth I tell you--this generation will not pass away until these things happen. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away. But no man knows about that day and that hour, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son, no one except the Father. Be watchful, be wakeful, be praying, for you do not know when the time is. It is like when a man goes abroad, and leaves his home, and puts his servants in charge, and orders the door-keeper to be on the watch. So then be watchful! For you do not know when the master of the house comes, late in the evening, at midnight, at cockcrow, or in the early day. Watch! in case he comes suddenly and finds you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all--be on the watch!"

There are three special things to note in this passage.

(i) It is sometimes held that when Jesus said that these things were to happen within this generation he was in error. But Jesus was right, for this sentence does not refer to the Second Coming. It could not when the next sentence says he does not know when that day will be. It refers to Jesus' prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple and they were abundantly fulfilled.

(ii) Jesus says that he does not know the day or the hour when he will come again. There were things which even he left without questioning in the hand of God. There can be no greater warning and rebuke to those who work out dates and timetables as to when he will come again. Surely it is nothing less than blasphemy for us to enquire into that of which our Lord consented to be ignorant.

(iii) Jesus draws a practical conclusion. We are like men who know that their master will come, but who do not know when. We live in the shadow of eternity. That is no reason for fearful and hysterical expectation. But it means that day by day our work must be completed. It means that we must so live that it does not matter when he comes. It gives us the great task of making every day fit for him to see and being at any moment ready to meet him face to face. AH life becomes a preparation to meet the King.

We began by saying that this was a very difficult chapter, but that in the end it had permanent truth to tell us.

(i) It tells us that only the man of God can see into the secrets of history. Jesus saw the fate of Jerusalem although others were blind to it. A real statesman must be a man of God. To guide his country a man must be himself God-guided. Only the man who knows God can enter into something of the plan of God.

(ii) It tells us two things about the doctrine of the Second Coming.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 13:28-37

(a) It tells us that it contains a fact we forget or disregard at our peril.

(b) It tells us that the imagery in which it is clothed is the imagery of Jesus' own time, and that to speculate on it is useless, when Jesus himself was content not to know. The one thing of which we can be sure is that history is going somewhere; there is a consummation to come.

(iii) It tells us that of all things to forget God and to become immersed in earth is most foolish. The wise man is he who never forgets that he must be ready when the summons comes. If he lives in that memory, for him the end will not be terror, but eternal joy.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 14:1-2

THE LAST ACT BEGINS

Mark 14:1-2

The Feast of the Passover and of Unleavened Bread was due in two days' time. And the chief priests and experts in the law were trying to find some way to seize Jesus by some stratagem and to kill him, for they said, "This must not be done at the Feast itself in case there should be a disturbance of the people."

The last crowded act of Jesus' life was now about to open. The Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were really two different things. The Feast of the Passover fell on 14th Nisan, that is, about 14th April. The Feast of Unleavened Bread consisted of the seven days following the Passover. The Passover itself was a major feast and was kept like a sabbath. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was called a minor festival, and, although no new work could be begun during it, such work as was "necessary for public interest or to provide against private loss" was allowable. The really great day was Passover Day.

The Passover was one of the three compulsory feasts. The others were the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. To these feasts every male adult Jew who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem was bound to come.

The Passover had a double significance.

(a) It had an historical significance (Exo.12). It commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. God had sent plague after plague on Egypt, and, as each plague came, Pharaoh promised to let the people go. But, when each plague abated, he hardened his heart and went back on his word. Finally there came a terrible night when the angel of death was to walk through the land of Egypt and slay every first-born son in every home. The Israelites were to slay a lamb. Using a bunch of hyssop they were to smear the lintel of the door-post with the blood of the lamb, and when the angel of death saw the door-post so marked, he would pass over that house and its occupants would be safe. Before they went upon their way the Israelites were to eat a meal of a roasted lamb and unleavened bread. It was that "passover," that deliverance and that meal that the Feast of the Passover commemorated.

(b) It had an agricultural significance. It marked the ingathering of the barley harvest. On that day a sheaf of barley had to be waved before the Lord (Lev.23:10-11). Not till after that had been done could the barley of the new crop be sold in the shops or bread made with the new flour be eaten.

Every possible preparation was made for the Passover. For a month beforehand its meaning was expounded in the synagogue, and its lesson was taught daily in the schools. The aim was that no one should come ignorant and unprepared to the feast. The roads were all put in order, the bridges repaired. One special thing was done. It was very common to bury people beside the road. Now if any pilgrim had touched one of these wayside tombs he would technically have been in contact with a dead body and so rendered unclean and unable to take part in the feast. So, before the Passover, all the wayside tombs were white-washed so that they would stand out and the pilgrims

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Mark 14:1-2

could avoid them. Ps.120-134 are entitled Psalms of Degree, and it may well be that these were the psalms which the pilgrims sang on their way to the feast, as they sought to lighten the road with their music. It is said that Ps.122 was the one which they actually sang as they climbed the hill to the Temple on the last lap of their journey.

As we have already seen, it was compulsory for every adult male Jew who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem to come to the Passover, but far more than these came. It was the one ambition of every Jew to eat at least one Passover in Jerusalem before he died. Therefore from every country in the world pilgrims came flocking to the Passover Feast. During the Passover all lodging was free. Jerusalem could not hold the crowds, and Bethany and Bethphage were two of the outlying villages where pilgrims lodged.

A passage in Josephus gives us an idea of how many pilgrims actually came. He tells that Cestius, governor of Palestine round about A.D. 65, had some difficulty in persuading Nero of the great importance of the Jewish religion. To impress him, he asked the then High Priest to take a census of the lambs slain at the Passover in one year. The number, according to Josephus, was 256,500. The law was that there must be a minimum party of ten people to one lamb, so that there must have been close on 3,000,000 pilgrims in Jerusalem.

It was just there that the problem of the Jewish authorities lay. During the Passover, feeling ran very high. The remembrance of the old deliverance from Egypt made the people long for a new deliverance from Rome. At no time was nationalist feeling so intense. Jerusalem was not the Roman headquarters in Judaea. The governor had his residence and the soldiers were stationed in Caesarea. During the Passover time special detachments of troops were drafted into Jerusalem and quartered in the Tower of Antonia which overlooked the Temple. The Romans knew that at Passover anything might happen and they were taking no chances. The Jewish authorities knew that in an inflammable atmosphere like that, the arrest of Jesus might well provoke a riot. That is why they sought some secret stratagem to arrest him and have him in their power before the populace knew anything about it.

The last act of Jesus' life was to be played out in a city crammed with Jews who had come from the ends of the earth. They had come to commemorate the event whereby their nation was delivered from slavery in Egypt long ago. It was at that very time that God's deliverer of mankind was crucified upon his Cross.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 14:3-9

LOVE'S EXTRAVAGANCE

Mark 14:3-9

While Jesus was in Bethany, while he was reclining at a table in the house of Simon the leper, there came a woman who had a phial of ointment of pure nard. She broke the phial and poured it over his head. Some of them said indignantly to each other, "To what purpose is the waste of this ointment? This ointment could have been sold for more than ten pounds, and the money could have been given to the poor." And they were angry at her. Jesus said, "Let her be! Why do you trouble her? It is a lovely thing that she has done to me. You have always got the poor with you, and you can do something for them any time you like, but you have not got me always. She has done what she could. She has taken my body and anointed it beforehand against my burial. This is the truth I tell you--wherever the good news shall be proclaimed throughout the whole world, the story of what she has done will be told, so that she will always be remembered."

The poignancy of this story lies in the fact that it tells us of almost the last kindness that Jesus had done to him.

He was in the house of a man called Simon the leper, in the village of Bethany. People did not sit to eat; they reclined on low couches. They lay on the couch resting on the left elbow and using the right hand to take their food. Anyone coming up to someone lying like this would stand well above him. To Jesus there came a woman with an alabaster phial of ointment. It was the custom to pour a few drops of perfume on a guest when he arrived at a house or when he sat down to a meal. This phial held nard which was a very precious ointment made from a rare plant that came from far-off India. But it was not a few drops that this woman poured on the head of Jesus. She broke the flask and anointed him with the whole contents.

There may be more than one reason why she broke the flask. Maybe she broke it as a sign that all was to be used. There was a custom in the East that if a glass was used by a distinguished guest, it was broken so that it would never again be touched by the hand of any lesser person. Maybe there was something of that in the woman's mind. But there was one thing not in her mind which Jesus saw. It was the custom in the East, first to bathe, then to anoint the bodies of the dead. After the body had been anointed, the flask in which the perfume had been contained was broken and the fragments were laid with the dead body in the tomb. Although she did not mean it so, that was the very thing this woman was doing.

Her action provoked the grudging criticism of some of the bystanders. The flask was worth more than 300 denarii. A denarius was a Roman coin worth about 3 p which was a working man's daily wage. It would have cost an ordinary man almost a year's pay to buy the flask of ointment. To some it seemed a shameful waste; the money might have been given to the poor. But Jesus understood. He quoted their own scriptures to them. "The poor will never cease out of the land." (Deut.15:11.) "You can help the poor any time," Jesus said, "but you have not long to do anything for me now." "This," he said, "is like anointing my body beforehand for its burial."

This story shows the action of love.

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Mark 14:3-9

(i) Jesus said that it was a lovely thing the woman had done. In Greek there are two words for good. There is *agathos* (GSN0018) which describes a thing which is morally good; and there is *kalos* (GSN2570) which describes a thing which is not only good but lovely. A thing might be *agathos* (GSN0018), and yet be hard, stern, austere, unattractive. But a thing which is *kalos* (GSN2570) is winsome and lovely, with a certain bloom of charm upon it. Struthers of Greenock used to say that it would do the church more good than anything else if Christians would sometimes "do a bonnie thing." That is exactly what *kalos* (GSN2570) means; and that is exactly what this woman did. Love does not do only good things. Love does lovely things.

(ii) If love is true, there must always be a certain extravagance in it. It does not nicely calculate the less or more. It is not concerned to see how little it can decently give. If it gave all it had, the gift would still be too little. There is a recklessness in love which refuses to count the cost.

(iii) Love can see that there are things, the chance to do which comes only once. It is one of the tragedies of life that often we are moved to do something fine and do not do it. It may be that we are too shy and feel awkward about it. It may be that second thoughts suggest a more prudent course. It occurs in the simplest things--the impulse to send a letter of thanks, the impulse to tell someone of our love or gratitude, the impulse to give some special gift or speak some special word. The tragedy is that the impulse is so often strangled at birth. This world would be so much lovelier if there were more people like this woman, who acted on her impulse of love because she knew in her heart of hearts that if she did not do it then she would never do it at all. How that last extravagant, impulsive kindness must have uplifted Jesus' heart.

(iv) Once again we see the invincible confidence of Jesus. The Cross loomed close ahead now but he never believed that it would be the end. He believed that the good news would go all round the world. And with the good news would go the story of this lovely thing, done with reckless extravagance, done on the impulse of the moment, done out of a heart of love.

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Mark 14:10-11

THE TRAITOR

Mark 14:10-11

Judas Iscariot, the man who was one of the Twelve, went away to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. When they had listened to his offer, they were delighted, and they promised to give him money. So he began to search for a convenient method of betraying him.

It is with consummate artistry that Mark sets side by side the anointing at Bethany and the betrayal by Judas--the act of generous love and the act of terrible treachery.

There is always a shudder of the heart as we think of Judas. Dante sets him in the lowest of all hells, a hell of cold and ice, a hell designed for those who were not hot sinners swept away by angry passions, but cold, calculating, deliberate offenders against the love of God.

Mark tells the story with such economy of words that he leaves us no material for speculation. But at the back of Judas' action we can distinguish certain things.

(i) There was covetousness. Matt.26:15 actually tells us that Judas went to the authorities and asked what price they were prepared to pay and drove a bargain with them for thirty pieces of silver. Jn.11:57 drops a hint. That verse tells us that the authorities had asked for information as to where Jesus could be found so as to arrest him. It may well be that by this time Jesus was to all intents and purposes an outlaw with a price upon his head, and that Judas knew it and wished to acquire the offered reward. John is quite definite. He tells us that Judas was the treasurer of the apostolic band and used his position to pilfer from the common purse (Jn.12:6).

It may be so. The desire for money can be a terrible thing. It can make a man blind to decency and honesty and honour. It can make him have no care how he gets so long as he gets. Judas discovered too late that some things cost too much.

(ii) There was jealousy. Klopstock, the German poet, thought that Judas, when he joined the Twelve, had every gift and every virtue which might have made him great, but that bit by bit he became consumed with jealousy of John, the beloved disciple, and that this jealousy drove him to his terrible act. It is easy to see that there were tensions in the Twelve. The rest were able to overcome them, but it may well be that Judas had an unconquerable and uncontrollable demon of jealousy within his heart. Few things can wreck life for ourselves and for others as jealousy can.

(iii) There was ambition. Again and again we see how the Twelve thought of the Kingdom in earthly terms and dreamed of high position in it. Judas must have been like that. It may well be that, while the others still clung to them, he came to see how far wrong these dreams were and how little chance they ever had of any earthly fulfilment. And it may well be that in his disillusionment the love he once bore to Jesus turned to hate. In Henry the Eighth Shakespeare makes Wolsey say to Thomas Cromwell:

"Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition;

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Mark 14:10-11

By that sin fed the angels; how can man then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by it?
Love thyself last."

There is an ambition which will trample on love and honour and all lovely things to gain the end it has set its heart upon.

(iv) Minds have been fascinated by the idea that it may be that Judas did not want Jesus to die at all. It is almost certain that Judas was a fanatical nationalist and that he had seen in Jesus the one person who could make his dreams of national power and glory come true. But now he saw Jesus drifting to death on a cross. So it may be that in one last attempt to make his dream come true, he betrayed Jesus in order to force his hand. He delivered him to the authorities with the idea that now Jesus would be compelled to act in order to save himself, and that action would be the beginning of the victorious campaign he dreamed of. It may be that this theory is supported by the fact that when Judas saw what he had done he flung the accursed money at the feet of the Jewish authorities and went out and hanged himself. (Matt.27:3-5). If that is so, the tragedy of Judas is the greatest in history.

(v) Both Luke and John say quite simply that the devil entered into Judas (Lk.22:3, Jn.13:27). In the last analysis that is what happened. Judas wanted Jesus to be what he wanted him to be and not what Jesus wanted to be. In reality Judas attached himself to Jesus, not so much to become a follower as to use Jesus to work out the plans and desires of his own ambitious heart. So far from surrendering to Jesus, he wanted Jesus to surrender to him; and when Jesus took his own way, the way of the Cross, Judas was so incensed that he betrayed him. The essence of sin is pride; the core of sin is independence; the heart of sin is the desire to do what we like and not what God likes. That is what the devil, satan, the evil one stands for. He stands for everything which is against God and will not bow to him. That is the spirit which was incarnate in Judas.

We shudder at Judas. But let us think again--covetousness, jealousy, ambition, the dominant desire to have our own way of things. Are we so very different? These are the things which made Judas betray Jesus, and these are the things which still make men betray him.

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Mark 14:12-16

PREPARING FOR THE FEAST

Mark 14:12-16

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they were sacrificing the Passover Lamb, Jesus' disciples said to him, "Where do you wish us to go and make the necessary preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He despatched two of his disciples, and said to them. "Go into the city, and there will meet you a man carrying an earthen pitcher of water. Follow him, and wherever he enters in, say to the householder, 'The teacher says, "Where is my room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" He will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared. There get things ready for us." So the disciples went away, and they came into the city, and found everything just as he had told them. And they got everything ready for the Passover Feast.

It may seem an unusual word to use in connection with Jesus, but, as we read the narrative of the last week of his life, we cannot help being struck with his efficiency of arrangement. Again and again we see that he did not leave things until the last moment. Long before, he had arranged that the colt should be ready for his ride into Jerusalem; and here again we see that all his arrangements had been made long beforehand.

His disciples wished to know where they would eat the Passover. Jesus sent them into Jerusalem with instructions to look for a man carrying an earthen pitcher of water. That was a prearranged signal. To carry a water-pot was a woman's duty. It was a thing that no man ever did. A man with a water-pot on his shoulder would stand out in any crowd as much as, say, a man on a wet day with a lady's umbrella. Jesus did not leave things until the last minute. Long ago he had arranged a last meeting-place for himself and for his disciples, and had arranged just how it was to be found.

The larger Jewish houses had upper rooms. Such houses looked exactly like a smaller box placed on top of a bigger box. The smaller box was the upper room, and it was approached by an outside stair, making it unnecessary to go through the main room. The upper room had many uses. It was a storeroom, it was a place for quiet and meditation, it was a guest-room for visitors. But in particular it was the place where a Rabbi taught his chosen band of intimate disciples. Jesus was following the custom that any Jewish Rabbi might follow.

We must remember the Jewish way of reckoning days. The new day began at 6 p.m. in the evening. Up until 6 p.m. it was 13th Nisan, the day of the preparation for the Passover. But 14th Nisan, the Passover day itself, began at 6 p.m. To put it in English terms, Friday the 14th began at 6 p.m. on Thursday the 13th.

What were the preparations that a Jew made for The Passover?

First was the ceremonial search for leaven. Before the Passover every particle, of leaven must be banished from the house. That was because the first Passover in Egypt (Exo.12) had been eaten with unleavened bread. (Unleavened bread is not like bread at all. It is like a water-biscuit.) It had been used in Egypt because it can be baked much more quickly than a loaf baked with leaven, and the first Passover, the Passover of escape from Egypt, had been eaten in haste, with everyone ready

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for the road. In addition leaven was the symbol of corruption. Leaven is fermented dough, and the Jew identified fermentation with putrefaction, and so leaven stood for rottenness. The day before the Passover the master of the house took a lighted candle and ceremonially searched the house for leaven. Before the search he prayed,

"Blessed art thou, Jehovah, our God, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us by thy commandments, and commanded us to remove the leaven."

At the end of the search the householder said,

"All the leaven that is in my possession, that which I have seen and that which I have not seen, be it null, be it accounted as the dust of the earth."

Next, on the afternoon before the Passover evening, came the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb. All the people came to the Temple. The worshipper must slay his own lamb, thereby, as it were, making his own sacrifice. But in Jewish eyes all blood was sacred to God, because the Jew equated the blood and the life. It was quite natural to do so because, if a person or an animal is wounded, as the blood flows away, so does life. So in the Temple the worshipper slew his own lamb. Between the worshippers and the altar were two long lines of priests, each with a gold or silver bowl. As the lamb's throat was slit the blood was caught in one of these bowls, and passed up the line, until the priest at the end of the line dashed it upon the altar. The carcass was then flayed, the entrails and the fat extracted, because they were part of the necessary sacrifice, and the carcass handed back to the worshipper.

If the figures of Josephus are anywhere nearly correct, and there were more than a quarter of a million lambs slain, the scene in the Temple courts and the blood-stained condition of the altar can hardly be imagined. The lamb was carried home to be roasted. It must not be boiled. Nothing must touch it, not even the sides of a pot. It had to be roasted over an open fire on a spit made of pomegranate wood. The spit went right through the lamb from mouth to vent, and the lamb had to be roasted entire with head and legs and tail still attached to the body.

The table itself was shaped like a square with one side open. It was low and the guests reclined on couches, resting on their left arms with their right arms free for eating.

Certain things were necessary and these were the things the disciples would have to get ready.

(i) There was the lamb, to remind them of how their houses had been protected by the badge of blood when the angel of death passed through Egypt.

(ii) There was the unleavened bread to remind them of the bread they had eaten in haste when they escaped from slavery.

(iii) There was a bowl of salt water, to remind them of the tears they had shed in Egypt and of the waters of the Red Sea through which they had miraculously passed to safety.

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Mark 14:12-16

(iv) There was a collection of bitter herbs--horse radish, chicory, endive, lettuce, horehound--to remind them of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt.

(v) There was a paste called Charosheth, a mixture of apples, dates, pomegranates and nuts, to remind them of the clay of which they had made bricks in Egypt. Through it there were sticks of cinnamon to remind them of the straw with which the bricks had been made.

(vi) There were four cups of wine. The cups contained a little more than half a pint of wine, but three parts of wine were mixed with two of water. The four cups, which were drunk at different stages of the meal, were to remind them of the four promises in Exo.6:6-7,

"I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

I will rid you of their bondage.

I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.

I will take you to me for a people, and I will be your God."

Such were the preparations which had to be made for the Passover. Every detail spoke of that great day of deliverance when God liberated his people from their bondage in Egypt. It was at that feast that he who liberated the world from sin was to sit at his last meal with his disciples.

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Mark 14:17-21

LOVE'S LAST APPEAL

Mark 14:17-21

When it was evening, Jesus came with the Twelve. As they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "This is the truth I tell you--one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me," They began to be grieved, and to say to him, one by one, "Surely it cannot be I?" He said to them, "One of the Twelve, one who dips his hand with me into the dish. The Son of Man goes as it stands written about him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It had been good for him, if that man had not been born."

The new day began at 6 p.m., and when the Passover evening had come, Jesus sat down with the Twelve. There was only one change in the old ritual which had been observed so many centuries ago in Egypt. At the first Passover Feast in Egypt, the meal had been eaten standing (Exo.12:11). But that had been a sign of haste, a sign that they were slaves escaping from slavery. In the time of Jesus the regulation was that the meal should be eaten reclining, for that was the sign of a free man, with a home and a country of his own.

This is a poignant passage. All the time there was a text running in Jesus' head. "Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me." (Ps.41:9.) These words were in his mind all the time. We can see certain great things here.

(i) Jesus knew what was going to happen. That is his supreme courage, especially in the last days. It would have been easy for him to escape, and yet undeterred he went on. Homer relates how the great warrior Achilles was told that if he went out to his last battle he would surely be killed. His answer was, "Nevertheless I am for going on." With a full knowledge of what lay ahead, Jesus was for going on.

(ii) Jesus could see into the heart of Judas. The curious thing is that the other disciples seem to have had no suspicions. If they had known what Judas was engaged on, it is certain that they would have stopped him even by violence. Here is something to remember. There may be things we succeed in hiding from our fellow-men. But we cannot hide them from Jesus Christ. He is the searcher of the hearts of men. He knows what is in man.

"Our thoughts lie open to thy sight;
And naked to thy glance.
Our secret sins are in the light
Of thy pure countenance."

Blessed indeed are the pure in heart.

(iii) In this passage we see Jesus offering two things to Judas.

(a) He is making love's last appeal. It is as if he is saying to Judas, "I know what you are going to do. Will you not stop even yet?"

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Mark 14:17-21

(b) He is offering Judas a last warning. He is telling him in advance of the consequences of the thing that it is in his heart to do. But we must note this, for it is of the essence of the way in which God deals with us--there is no compulsion. Without a doubt Jesus could have stopped Judas. All he had to do was tell the other eleven what Judas was planning, and Judas would never have left that room alive.

Here is the whole human situation. God has given us wills that are free. His love appeals to us. His truth warns us. But there is no compulsion. It is the awful responsibility of man that he can spurn the appeal of God's love and disregard the warning of his voice. In the end there is no one but ourselves responsible for our sins.

In Greek legend two famous travellers passed the rocks where the Sirens sang. The Sirens sat on these rocks and sang with such sweetness that they lured mariners irresistibly to their doom. Ulysses sailed past these rocks. His method was to stop the sailors' ears so that they could not hear and order them to bind himself to the mast with ropes so that, however much he struggled, he would not be able to answer to that seductive sweetness. He resisted by compulsion. The other traveller was Orpheus, the sweetest musician of all. His method was to play and sing with such surpassing sweetness as his ship passed the rocks where the Sirens were, that the attraction of the song of the Sirens was never even felt because of the attraction of the song he sang. His method was to answer the appeal of seduction with a still greater appeal.

God's is the second way. He does not stop us whether we like it or not, from sin. He seeks to make us love him so much that his voice is more sweetly insistent to us than all the voices which call us away from him.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 14:22-26

THE SYMBOL OF SALVATION

Mark 14:22-26

As they were eating, Jesus took a loaf and gave thanks for it, and broke it and gave it to them and said, "Take this. This is my body." And, after he had given thanks, he took a cup and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And he said to them, "This is the blood of the new covenant which is being shed for many. Truly I tell you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God." And, after they had sung the Psalm, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

We must first set out the various steps of the Passover Feast, so that in our mind's eye we can follow what Jesus and his disciples were doing. The steps came in this order.

(i) The cup of the Kiddush. Kiddush means sanctification or separation. This was the act which, as it were, separated this meal from all other common meals. The head of the family took the cup and prayed over it, and then all drank of it.

(ii) The first hand washing. This was carried out only by the person who was to celebrate the feast. Three times he had to wash his hands in the prescribed way which we have already described when studying Mk.7.

(iii) A piece of parsley or lettuce was then taken and dipped in the bowl of salt water and eaten. This was an appetizer to the meal, but the parsley stood for the hyssop with which the lintel had been smeared with blood, and the salt stood for the tears of Egypt and for the waters of the Red Sea through which Israel had been brought in safety.

(iv) The breaking of bread. Two blessings were used at the breaking of bread. "Blessed be thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who bringest forth from the earth." Or, "Blessed art thou, our Father in heaven, who givest us to-day the bread necessary for us." On the table lay three circles of unleavened bread. The middle one was taken and broken. At this point only a little was eaten. It was to remind the Jews of the bread of affliction that they ate in Egypt and it was broken to remind them that slaves had never a whole loaf, but only broken crusts to eat. As it was broken, the head of the family said, "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt. Whosoever is hungry let him come and eat. Whosoever is in need let him come and keep the Passover with us." (In the modern celebration in strange lands, here is added the famous prayer, "This year we keep it here, next year in the land of Israel. This year as slaves, next year as free.")

(v) Next came the relating of the story of deliverance. The youngest person present had to ask what made this day different from all other days and why all this was being done. And the head of the house had thereupon to tell the whole story of the history of Israel down to the great deliverance which the Passover commemorated. The Passover could never become a ritual. It was always a commemoration of the power and the mercy of God.

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Mark 14:22-26

(vi) Ps.113-114 were sung. Ps.113-118 are known as the Hallel (HSN1984), which means the praise of God. All these psalms are praising psalms. They were part of the very earliest material which a Jewish boy had to commit to memory.

(vii) The second cup was drunk. It was called the cup of Haggadah (compare HSN5046), which means the cup of explaining or proclaiming.

(viii) All those present now washed their hands in preparation for the meal.

(ix) A grace was said. "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, who bringest forth fruit from the earth. Blessed art thou, O God, who has sanctified us with thy commandment and enjoined us to eat unleavened cakes." Thereafter small pieces of the unleavened bread were distributed.

(x) Some of the bitter herbs were placed between two pieces of unleavened bread, dipped in the Charosheth and eaten. This was called the sop. It was the reminder of slavery and of the bricks that once they had been compelled to make.

(xi) Then followed the meal proper. The whole lamb must be eaten. Anything left over must be destroyed and not used for any common meal.

(xii) The hands were cleansed again.

(xiii) The remainder of the unleavened bread was eaten.

(xiv) There was a prayer of thanksgiving, containing a petition for the coming of Elijah to herald the Messiah. Then the third cup was drunk, called the cup of thanksgiving. The blessing over the cup was, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who hast created the fruit of the vine."

(xv) The second part of The Hallel (HSN1984)--Ps.115-118--was sung.

(xvi) The fourth cup was drunk, and Ps.136, known as the great Hallel (HSN1984), was sung.

(xvii) Two short prayers were said:

"All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord, our God. And thy saints, the righteous, who do thy good pleasure, and all thy people, the house of Israel, with joyous song, let them praise and bless and magnify and glorify and exalt and reverence and sanctify and scribe the Kingdom to thy name, O God, our King. For it is good to praise thee, and pleasure to sing praises to thy name, for from everlasting unto everlasting thou art God."

"The breath of all that lives shall praise thy name, O Lord, our God. And the spirit of all flesh shall continually glorify and exalt

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Mark 14:22-26

thy memorial, O God, our King. For from everlasting unto everlasting thou art God, and beside thee we have no king, redeemer or saviour."

Thus ended the Passover Feast. If the feast that Jesus and his disciples sat at was the Passover it must have been items (xiii) and (xiv) that Jesus made his own, and (xvi) must have been the hymn they sang before they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Now let us see what Jesus was doing, and what he was seeking to impress upon his men. More than once we have seen that the prophets of Israel resorted to symbolic, dramatic actions when they felt that words were not enough. That is what Ahijah did when he rent the robe into twelve pieces and gave ten to Jeroboam in token that ten of the tribes would make him king (1Kgs.11:29-32). That is what Jeremiah did when he made bonds and yokes and wore them in token of the coming servitude (Jer.27). That is what the prophet Hananiah did when he broke the yokes that Jeremiah wore (Jer.28:10-11). That is the kind of thing that Ezekiel was continually doing (Eze.4:1-8, Eze.5:1-4). It was as if words were easily forgotten, but a dramatic action would print itself on the memory.

That is what Jesus did, and he allied this dramatic action with the ancient feast of his people so that it would be the more imprinted on the minds of his men. He said, "Look! Just as this bread is broken my body is broken for you! Just as this cup of red wine is poured out my blood is shed for you."

What did he mean when he said that the cup stood for a new covenant? The word covenant is a common word in the Jewish religion. The basis of that religion was that God had entered into a covenant with Israel. The word means something like an arrangement, a bargain, a relationship. The acceptance of the old covenant is set out in Exo.24:3-8; and from that passage we see that the covenant was entirely dependent on Israel keeping the law. If the law was broken, the covenant was broken and the relationship between God and the nation shattered. It was a relationship entirely dependent on law and on obedience to law. God was judge. And since no man can keep the law the people were ever in default. But Jesus says, "I am introducing and ratifying a new covenant, a new kind of relationship between God and man. And it is not dependent on law, it is dependent on the blood that I will shed." That is to say, it is dependent solely on love.

The new covenant was a relationship between man and God not dependent on law but on love. In other words Jesus says, "I am doing what I am doing to show you how much God loves you." Men are no longer simply under the law of God. Because of what Jesus did, they are forever within the love of God. That is the essence of what the sacrament says to us.

We note one thing more. In the last sentence we see again the two things we have so often seen. Jesus was sure of two things. He knew he was to die, and he knew his Kingdom would come. He was certain of the Cross, but just as certain of the glory. And the reason was that he was just as certain of the love of God as he was of the sin of man; and he knew that in the end that love would conquer that sin.

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Mark 14:27-31

THE FAILURE OF FRIENDS

Mark 14:27-31

Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away from me, for it stands written, 'I will smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I have been raised to life again, I will go before you into Galilee." Peter said to him, "All the others may fail away from you, but I will not." Jesus said to him, "This is the truth I tell you--today, this night, before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times." Peter began to insist vehemently, "If I must die with you I will not deny you." So, too, they all said.

It is a tremendous thing about Jesus that there was nothing for which he was not prepared. The opposition, the misunderstanding, the enmity of the orthodox religious people, the betrayal by one of his own inner circle, the pain and the agony of the Cross--he was prepared for them all. But perhaps what hurt him most was the failure of his friends. It is when a man is up against it that he needs his friends most, and that was exactly when Jesus' friends left him all alone and let him down. There was nothing in the whole gamut of physical pain and mental torture that Jesus did not pass through.

Sir Hugh Walpole wrote a great novel called *Fortitude*. It is the story of one called Peter, whose creed was, "It isn't life that matters, but the courage you bring to it." Life did everything that it possibly could to him. At the end, on his own mountain top, he heard a voice, "Blessed be pain and torment and every torture of the body. Blessed be all loss and the failure of friends and the sacrifice of love. Blessed be all failure and the ruin of every earthly hope. Blessed be all sorrow and torment, hardships, and endurances that demand courage. Blessed be these things--for of these things cometh the making of a man." Peter fell to praying, "Make of me a man...to be afraid of nothing, to be ready for everything. Love, friendship, success...to take it if it comes, to care nothing if these things are not for me. Make me brave. Make me brave."

Jesus had supremely, more than anyone who ever lived, this quality of fortitude, this ability to remain erect no matter with what blows life assaulted him, this serenity when there was nothing but heartbreak behind and torture in front. Inevitably every now and then we find ourselves catching our breath at his sheer heroism.

When Jesus foretold this tragic failure of loyalty, Peter could not believe that it would happen. In the days of the Stewart troubles they captured the Cock of the North, the Marquis of Huntly. They pointed at the block and the axe and told him that unless he abandoned his loyalty he would be executed then and there. His answer was, "You can take my head from my shoulders but you will never take my heart from my king." That is what Peter said that night.

There is a lesson in the word that Jesus used for "fall away." The Greek verb is *skandalizein* (GSN4624), from *skandalon* (GSN4625) or *skandalethron* which meant the bait in a trap, the stick on to which the animal was lured and which snapped the trap when the animal stepped on it. So the word *skandalizein* (GSN4624) came to mean to entrap, or to trip up by some trick or guile. Peter was too sure. He had forgotten the traps that life can lay for the best of men. He had forgotten that

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Mark 14:27-31

the best of men can step on a slippery place and fall. He had forgotten his own human weakness and the strength of the devil's temptations. But there is one thing to be remembered about Peter--his heart was in the right place. Better a Peter with a flaming heart of love, even if that love did for a moment fail most shamefully, than a Judas with a cold heart of hate. Let that man condemn Peter who never broke a promise, who never was disloyal in thought or action to a pledge. Peter loved Jesus, and even if his love failed, it rose again.

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Mark 14:32-42

THY WILL BE DONE

Mark 14:32-42

They came to a place the name of which is Gethsemane. Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter and James and John with him, and began to be in great distress and trouble of mind. He said to them, "My soul is sore grieved even to death. Stay here and watch." He went on a little farther and fell on the ground and prayed that, if it was possible, this hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, everything is possible to you. Take this cup from me--but not what I wish, but what you wish." He came and found them sleeping and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not stay awake for one hour? Watch and pray lest you enter into some testing time. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed in the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were weighed down with sleep. And they did not know how to answer him. And he came the third time and said to them, "Sleep on now. Take your rest. It is enough.

The hour has come. See! The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us be going! He who betrays me has come!"

This is a passage we almost fear to read, for it seems to intrude into the private agony of Jesus.

To have stayed in the upper room would have been dangerous. With the authorities on the watch for him, and with Judas bent on treachery, the upper room might have been raided at any time. But Jesus had another place to which to go. The fact that Judas knew to look for him in Gethsemane shows that Jesus was in the habit of going there. In Jerusalem itself there were no gardens. The city was too crowded, and there was a strange law that the city's sacred soil might not be polluted with manure for the gardens. But some of the rich people possessed private gardens out on the Mount of Olives where they took their rest. Jesus must have had some wealthy friend who gave him the privilege of using his garden at night.

When Jesus went to Gethsemane there were two things he sorely desired. He wanted human fellowship and he wanted God's fellowship. "It is not good that the man should be alone," God said in the beginning. (Gen.2:18.) In time of trouble we want someone with us. We do not necessarily want him to do anything. We do not necessarily even want to talk to him or have him talk to us. We only want him there. Jesus was like that. It was strange that men who so short a time before had been protesting that they would die for him, could not stay awake for him one single hour. But none can blame them, for the excitement and the tension had drained their strength and their resistance.

Certain things are clear about Jesus in this passage.

(i) He did not want to die. He was thirty-three and no one wants to die with life just opening on to the best of the years. He had done so little and there was a world waiting to be saved. He knew what crucifixion was like and he shuddered away from it. He had to compel himself to go on--just as we have so often to do.

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Mark 14:32-42

(ii) He did not fully understand why this had to be. He only knew beyond a doubt that this was the will of God and that he must go on. Jesus, too, had to make the great venture of faith, he had to accept--as we so often have to do--what he could not understand.

(iii) He submitted to the will of God. Abba (GSN0005) is the Aramaic for my father. It is that one word which made all the difference. Jesus was not submitting to a God who made a cynical sport of men. Hardy finishes his novel *Tess*, after telling of her tragic life, with the terrible sentence, "The President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess." But Jesus was not submitting to a God who was an iron fate.

"But helpless pieces of the game he plays,
Upon this chequer board of nights and days,
Hither and thither moves and checks and slays--
And one by one back in the closet lays."

God was not like that. Even in this terrible hour, when he was making this terrible demand, God was father. When Richard Cameron, the covenanter, was killed, his head and hands were cut off by one Murray and taken to Edinburgh. "His father being in prison for the same cause, the enemy carried them to him, to add grief unto his former sorrow, and inquired if he knew them. Taking his son's head and hands, which were very fair (being a man of a fair complexion like himself) he kissed them and said, 'I know them--I know them. They are my son's--my own dear son's. It is the Lord. Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me nor mine, but hath made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days.'" If we can call God father everything becomes bearable. Time and again we will not understand, but always we will be certain that "The Father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear." That is what Jesus knew. That is why he could go on--and it can be so with us.

We must note how the passage ends. The traitor and his gang had arrived. What was Jesus' reaction? Not to run away, although even yet, in the night, it would have been easy to escape. His reaction was to face them. To the end he would neither turn aside nor turn back.

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Mark 14:43-50

THE ARREST

Mark 14:43-50

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve arrived, and with him a crowd with swords and cudgels from the chief priests, and the experts in the law, and the elders. The betrayer had given them this sign. "Whom I shall kiss," he said, "that is he. Seize him and take him away securely." So when he had come, immediately he stepped forward. "Rabbi!" he said--and kissed him as a lover would. They laid hands on him and seized him. One of those standing by drew his sword and struck the High Priest's servant and cut off his ear. Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and cudgels to arrest me as you would come against a brigand? Daily I was with you teaching in the Temple precincts, and you did not seize me--but, let it be, that the scriptures may be fulfilled." And they all left him and fled.

Here is sheer drama and, even in Mark's economy of words, the characters stand out before us.

(i) There is Judas, the traitor. He was aware that the people knew Jesus well enough by sight. But he felt that in the dim light of the garden, with the darkness of the trees lit in pools of light by the flare of the torches, they needed a definite indication of who they were to arrest. And so he chose that most terrible of signs--a kiss. It was customary to greet a Rabbi with a kiss. It was a sign of respect and affection for a well-loved teacher. But there is a dreadful thing here. When Judas says, "Whom I shall kiss, that is he," he uses the word *philein* (GSN5368) which is the ordinary word. But when it is said that he came forward and kissed Jesus the word is *kataphilein* (GSN2705). The *kata-* (GSN2596) is intensive and *kataphilein* (GSN2705) means to kiss as a lover kisses his beloved. The sign of the betrayal was not a mere formal kiss of respectful greeting. It was a lover's kiss. That is the grimmest and most awful thing in all the gospel story.

(ii) There is the arresting mob. They came from the chief priests, the scribes and the elders. These were the three sections of the Sanhedrin and Mark means that they came from the Sanhedrin. Even under Roman jurisdiction the Sanhedrin had certain police rights and duties in Jerusalem and had its own police force. No doubt an assorted rabble had attached itself to them on the way. Somehow Mark manages to convey the wrought-up excitement of those who came to make the arrest. Maybe they had come prepared for bloodshed with nerves taut and tense. It is they who emanate terror--not Jesus.

(iii) There is the man of the forlorn hope who drew his sword and struck one blow. John (Jn.18:10) tells us that it was Peter. It sounds like Peter, and Mark very likely omitted the name because it was not yet safe to write it down. In the scuffle no one saw who struck the blow; it was better that no one should know. But when John wrote forty years later it was then quite safe to write it down. It may be wrong to draw a sword and hack at a man, but somehow we are glad that there was one man there who, at least on the impulse of the moment, was prepared to strike a blow for Jesus.

(iv) There are the disciples. Their nerve cracked. They could not face it. They were afraid that they too would share the fate of Jesus; and so they fled.

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Mark 14:43-50

(v) There is Jesus himself. The strange thing is that in all this disordered scene Jesus was the one oasis of serenity. As we read the story it reads as if he, not the Sanhedrin police, was directing affairs. For him the struggle in the garden was over, and now there was the peace of the man who knows that he is following the will of God.

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Mark 14:51-52

A CERTAIN YOUNG MAN

Mark 14:51-52

And a certain young man was following him, clothed in a linen sheet over his naked body. And they tried to seize him, but he left the linen sheet and escaped naked.

These are two strange and fascinating verses. At first sight they seem completely irrelevant. They seem to add nothing to the narrative and yet there must be some reason for them being there.

We saw in the introduction that Matthew and Luke used Mark as the basis of their work and that they include in their gospels practically everything that is in Mark. But they do not include these two verses. That would seem to show that this incident was interesting to Mark and not really interesting to anyone else. Why then was this incident so interesting to Mark that he felt he must include it? The most probable answer is that the young man was Mark himself, and that this is his way of saying, "I was there," without mentioning his own name at all.

When we read Acts we find that the meeting place and head-quarters of the Jerusalem church was apparently in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (Ac.12:12). If that be so, it is at least probable that the upper room in which the Last Supper was eaten was in that same house. There could be no more natural place than that to be the centre of the church. If we can assume that there are two possibilities.

(i) It may be that Mark was actually present at the Last Supper. He was young, just a boy, and maybe no one really noticed him. But he was fascinated with Jesus and when the company went out into the dark, he slipped out after them when he ought to have been in bed, with only the linen sheet over his naked body. It may be that all the time Mark was there in the shadows listening and watching. That would explain where the Gethsemane narrative came from. If the disciples were all asleep how did anyone know about the struggle of soul that Jesus had there? It may be that the one witness was Mark as he stood silent in the shadows, watching with a boy's reverence the greatest hero he had ever known.

(ii) From John's narrative we know that Judas left the company before the meal was fully ended (Jn.13:30). It may be that it was to the upper room that Judas meant to lead the Temple police so that they might secretly arrest Jesus. But when Judas came back with the police, Jesus and his disciples were gone. Naturally there was recrimination and argument. The uproar awakened Mark. He heard Judas propose that they should try the garden of Gethsemane. Quickly Mark wrapped his bed-sheet about him and sped through the night to the garden to warn Jesus. But he arrived too late, and in the scuffle that followed was very nearly arrested himself.

Whatever may be true, we may take it as fairly certain that Mark put in these two verses because they were about himself. He could never forget that night. He was too humble to put his own name in but in this way he wrote his signature, and said, to him who could read between the lines, "I, too, when I was a boy, was there."

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Mark 14:53, 55-65

THE TRIAL

Mark 14:53, Mark 14:55-65

They took Jesus away to the High Priest, and all the chief priests and experts in the law and elders assembled with him.... The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were trying to find some evidence against Jesus, in order to put him to death, and they could not find any, for there were many who bore false witness against him, but their evidence did not agree. Some stood up and bore false witness against him. "We heard him saying," they said, "I will destroy this Temple made with hands and in three days' time I will build another not made with hands'." But not even so did their evidence agree. So the High Priest stood up in the midst and questioned Jesus. "Do you give no answer?" he said. "What is the evidence that these men are alleging against you?" Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the High Priest questioned him, and said to him, "Are you God's Anointed One, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated on the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." The High Priest rent his garments. "What need," he said, "have we of witnesses? You have listened to blasphemy. How does it seem to you?" And they all adjudged him to be liable to death. And some began to spit upon him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say to him, "Prophecy!" And the servants received him with blows.

Things were moving quickly to their inevitable end.

At this time the powers of the Sanhedrin were limited because the Romans were the rulers of the country. The Sanhedrin had full power over religious matters. It seems also to have had a certain amount of police court power. But it had no power to inflict the death penalty. If what Mark describes was a meeting of the Sanhedrin it must be compared to a Grand Jury. Its function was not to condemn, but to prepare a charge on which the criminal could be tried before the Roman governor.

There is no doubt that in the trial of Jesus the Sanhedrin broke all its own laws. The regulations for the procedure of the Sanhedrin are in one of the tractates of the Mishnah. Naturally enough some of these regulations are rather ideals than actual practices but, even allowing for that, the whole procedure of this night was a series of flagrant injustices.

The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews and was composed of seventy-one members. Within its membership there were Sadducees--the priestly classes were all Sadducees--Pharisees and Scribes, who were experts in the law, and respected men who were elders. It appears that any vacancies in the court were filled by co-option. The High Priest presided over the court. The court sat in a semi-circle in such a way that any member could see any other member. Facing it sat the students of the Rabbis. They were allowed to speak on behalf of the person on trial but not against him. The official meeting place of the Sanhedrin was the Hall of Hewn Stone which was within the Temple precincts, and the decisions of the Sanhedrin were not valid unless reached at a meeting held in that place. The court could not meet at night, nor could it meet at any of the great feasts. When evidence was taken, witnesses were examined separately and their evidence to be valid must agree in every detail.

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Mark 14:53, 55-65

Each individual member of the Sanhedrin must give his verdict separately, beginning from the youngest and going on to the eldest. If the verdict was a verdict of death, a night must elapse before it was carried out, so that the court might have a chance to change its mind and its decision towards mercy.

It can be seen that on point after point the Sanhedrin broke its own rules. It was not meeting in its own building. It was meeting at night. There is no word of individually given verdicts. A night was not allowed to elapse before the penalty of death was inflicted. In their eagerness to eliminate Jesus, the Jewish authorities did not hesitate to break their own laws.

At first the court could not get even false witnesses to agree. The false witnesses accused Jesus of having said that he would destroy the Temple. It may well be that someone had overheard him speaking as he did in Mk.13:2, and had maliciously twisted the saying into a threat to destroy the Temple. There is an old legend which tells how the Sanhedrin could get plenty of the kind of evidence they did not want, for man after man came forward saying, "I was a leper and he cleansed me. I was blind and he made me able to see. I was deaf and he made me able to hear. I was lame and he made me able to walk. I was paralysed and he gave me back my strength."

At last the High Priest took the matter into his own hands. When he did, he asked the very kind of question that the law completely forbade. He asked a leading question. It was forbidden to ask questions by answering which the person on trial might incriminate himself. No man could be asked to condemn himself, but that was the very question the High Priest asked. Bluntly he asked Jesus if he was the Messiah. Clearly Jesus felt that it was time that the whole wretched business was ended. Without hesitation he answered that he was. Here was a charge of blasphemy, insult against God. The Sanhedrin had what it wanted, a charge which merited the death penalty, and they were savagely content.

Once again we see the two great characteristics of Jesus emerge.

(i) We see his courage. He knew that to make that answer was to die, and yet unhesitatingly he made it. Had he denied the charges they would have been powerless to touch him.

(ii) We see his confidence. Even with the Cross now a certainty, he still continued to speak with complete confidence of his ultimate triumph.

Surely it is the most terrible of tragedies to see him who came to offer men love denied even bare justice, and humiliated by the crude and cruel horse-play of the Sanhedrin servants and guards.

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Mark 14:54, 66-72

COURAGE AND COWARDICE

Mark 14:54, Mark 14:66-72

And Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the High Priest's house, and he was sitting there with the servants, warming himself at the fire.... When Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maidservants of the High Priest came up, and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You, too," she said, "were with the Nazarene, with Jesus." He denied it. "I do not know," he said, "or understand what you are saying." He went out into the porch, and the cock crew. The maidservant saw him and again began to say to the bystanders, "This man was one of them." But he again denied it. Soon afterwards the bystanders said to Peter, "In truth you are one of them, for you are a Galilaean." He began to curse and to swear, "I do not know the man you are talking about." And immediately cockcrow sounded. And Peter remembered the word, how Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crow twice you will deny me three times." And he flung his cloak about his head and wept.

Sometimes we tell this story in such a way as to do Peter far less than justice. The thing we so often fail to recognize is that up to the very last Peter's career this night had been one of fantastically reckless courage. He had begun by drawing his sword in the garden with the reckless courage of a man prepared to take on a whole mob by himself. In that scuffle he had wounded the servant of the High Priest. Common prudence would have urged that Peter should lie very low. The last place anyone would have dreamed that he would go to would be the courtyard of the High Priest's house--yet that is precisely where he did go. That in itself was sheer audacity. It may be that the others had fled, but Peter was keeping his word. Even if the others had gone he would stick to Jesus.

Then the queer mixture of human nature emerged. he was sitting by the fire, for the night was cold. No doubt he was huddled in his cloak. Maybe someone poked the fire or flung a fresh log upon it, and it flared up with a fitful flame and Peter was recognized. Straightway he denied all connection with Jesus. But--and here is the forgotten point--any prudent man would then have left that courtyard as fast as his legs could carry him--but not Peter. The same thing happened again. Again Peter denied Jesus and again he would not go. It happened once more. Again Peter denied Jesus, Peter did not curse Jesus' name. What he did was to swear he did not know Jesus and to call down curses on himself if he was not telling the truth. Still it seems he did not mean to move. But something else happened.

Very probably it was this. The Roman night was divided into four watches from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. At the end of the third watch, at three o'clock in the morning, the guard was changed. When the guard was changed there was a bugle call which was called the gallicinium, which is the Latin for the cockcrow. Most likely what happened was that as Peter spoke his third denial, the clear note of the bugle call rang out over the silent city and smote on Peter's ear. He remembered and his heart broke.

Make no mistake--Peter fell to a temptation which would have come only to a man of fantastic courage. It ill becomes prudent and safety-seeking men to criticize Peter for falling to a temptation

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Mark 14:54, 66-72

which would never, in the same circumstances, have come to them at all. Every man has his breaking-point. Peter reached his here, but nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of every thousand would have reached theirs long before. We would do well to be amazed at Peter's courage rather than to be shocked at his fall.

But there is another thing. There is only one source from which this story could have come--and that is Peter himself. We saw in the introduction that Mark's gospel is the preaching material of Peter. That is to say, over and over again Peter must have told the story of his own denial. "That is what I did," he must have said, "and this amazing Jesus never stopped loving me."

There was an evangelist called Brownlow North. He was a man of God, but in his youth he had lived a wild life. One Sunday he was to preach in Aberdeen. Before he entered the pulpit a letter was handed to him. The writer recounted a shameful incident in Brownlow North's life before he became a Christian and stated that if he dared to preach he would rise in the church and publicly proclaim what once he had done. Brownlow North took the letter into the pulpit with him. He read it to the congregation. He told them that it was perfectly true. Then he told them how through Christ he had been forgiven, how he had been enabled to overcome himself and put the past behind him, how through Christ he was a new creature. He used his own shame as a magnet to draw men to Christ. That is what Peter did. He told men, "I hurt him and I let him down like that, and still he loved and forgave me--and he can do the same for you."

When we read this passage with understanding, the story of Peter's cowardice becomes an epic of courage and the story of his shame becomes a tale of glory,

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Mark 15:1-5

Mark 15:1-5

Immediately, early in the morning, the chief priests, together with the elders and the experts in the law--that is to say, the whole Sanhedrin--held a consultation. They bound Jesus and took him away and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "It is you who say so." The chief priests made many accusations against him. Pilate again questioned him, "Have you no answer to make?" he said. "See how many accusations they have made against you." Jesus answered nothing further, and Pilate was amazed.

As soon as it was light, the Sanhedrin met to confirm the conclusions they had arrived at during their meeting in the night. They themselves had no power to carry out the death penalty. That had to be imposed by the Roman governor and carried out by the Roman authorities.

It is from Luke that we learn how deep and determined the bitter malice of the Jews was. As we have seen, the charge at which they had arrived was one of blasphemy, of insulting God. But that was not the charge on which they brought Jesus before Pilate. They knew well that Pilate would have had nothing to do with what he would have considered a Jewish religious argument. When they brought Jesus to him they charged him with perverting the people, forbidding them to give tribute to Caesar and calling himself a king (Lk.23:1-2). They had to evolve a political charge or Pilate would not have listened. They knew the charge was a lie--and so did Pilate.

Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus gave him a strange answer. he said, "It is you who say so." Jesus did not say yes or no. What he did say was, "I may have claimed to be the King of the Jews, but you know very well that the interpretation that my accusers are putting on that claim is not my interpretation. I am no political revolutionary. My kingdom is a kingdom of love." Pilate knew that perfectly well. Pilate went on to question Jesus more, and the Jewish authorities went on to multiply their charges--and Jesus remained completely silent.

There is a time when silence is more eloquent than words, for silence can say things that words can never say.

(i) There is the silence of wondering admiration. [t is a compliment for any performance or oration to be greeted with thunderous applause, but it is a still greater compliment for it to be greeted with a hushed silence which knows that applause would be out of place. It is a compliment to be praised or thanked in words, but it is a still greater compliment to receive a look of the eyes which plainly says there are no words to be found.

(ii) There is the silence of contempt. It is possible to greet someone's statements or arguments or excuses with a silence which shows they are not worth answering. Instead of answering someone's protestations the listener may turn on his heel and contemptuously leave them be.

(iii) There is the silence of fear. A man may remain silent for no other reason than that he is afraid to speak. The cowardice of his soul may stop him saying the things he knows he ought to say. Fear may gag him into a shameful silence.

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Mark 15:1-5

(iv) There is the silence of the heart that is hurt. When a person has been really wounded he does not break into protests and recriminations and angry words. The deepest sorrow is a dumb sorrow, which is past anger and past rebuke and past anything that speech can say, and which can only silently look its grief.

(v) There is the silence of tragedy, and that is silent because there is nothing to be said. That was why Jesus was silent. He knew there could be no bridge between himself and the Jewish leaders. He knew that there was nothing in Pilate to which he could ultimately appeal. He knew that the lines of communication were broken. The hatred of the Jews was an iron curtain which no words could penetrate. The cowardice of Pilate in face of the mob was a barrier no words could pierce. It is a terrible thing when a man's heart is such that even Jesus knows it is hopeless to speak. God save us from that!

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 15:6-15

THE CHOICE OF THE MOB

Mark 15:6-15

At the time of the Feast, it was the custom for the governor to release to the people a prisoner, whom they were accustomed to choose. There was a man called Barabbas, confined with the revolutionaries, who had committed murder during the insurrection. The crowd approached Pilate's judgment seat and began to request that he should carry out the customary procedure for them. Pilate answered, "Do you wish me to release to you the King of the Jews?" For he knew that the chief priests had handed him over to him through sheer malice. The chief priests stirred up the mob to demand the release of Barabbas all the more. Pilate again asked them, "What shall I do to the man you call the King of the Jews?" Again they shrieked, "Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "What harm has he done?" They shrieked the more vehemently, "Crucify him!" Pilate wished to please the mob, and he released Barabbas for them, and, when he had scourged Jesus, he handed him over to them to be crucified.

Of Barabbas we know nothing other than what we read in the gospel story. He was not a thief, he was a brigand. He was no petty pilferer but a bandit, and there must have been a rough audacity about him that appealed to the crowd. Perhaps we may guess what he was. Palestine was filled with insurrections. It was an inflammable land. In particular there was one group of Jews called the Sicarii (GSN4607), which means the dagger-bearers, who were violent, fanatical nationalists. They were pledged to murder and assassination. They carried their daggers beneath their cloaks and used them as they could. It is very likely that Barabbas was a man like that, and, thug though he was, he was a brave man, a patriot according to his lights, and it is understandable that he was popular with the mob.

People have always felt it a mystery that less than a week after the crowd were shouting a welcome when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, they were now shrieking for his crucifixion. There is no real mystery. The reason is quite simply that this was a different crowd. Think of the arrest. It was deliberately secret. True, the disciples fled and must have spread the news, but they could not have known that the Sanhedrin was going to violate its own laws and carry out a travesty of a trial by night. There can have been very few of Jesus' supporters in that crowd.

Who then were there? Think again. The crowd knew that there was this custom whereby a prisoner was released at the Passover time. It may well be that this was a crowd which had assembled with the deliberate intention of demanding the release of Barabbas. They were in fact a mob of Barabbas' supporters. When they saw the possibility that Jesus might be released and not Barabbas they went mad. To the chief priests this was a heaven-sent opportunity. Circumstances had played into their hands. They fanned the popular clamour for Barabbas and found it easy, for it was the release of Barabbas that that crowd had come to claim. It was not that the crowd was fickle. It was that it was a different crowd.

Nonetheless, they had a choice to make. Confronted with Jesus and Barabbas, they chose Barabbas.

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Mark 15:6-15

(i) They chose lawlessness instead of law. They chose the law-breaker instead of Jesus. One of the New Testament words for sin is anomia (GSN0458), which means lawlessness. In the human heart there is a streak which resents law, which desires to do as it likes, which wants to smash the confining barriers and kick over the traces and refuse all discipline. There is something of that in every man. Kipling makes the old soldier say in Mandalay:

"Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a
thirst."

There are times when most of us wish there were no Ten Commandments. The mob was the representative of men when it chose lawlessness instead of law.

(ii) They chose war instead of peace. they chose the man of blood instead of the Prince of Peace. In almost three thousand years of history there have been less than one hundred and thirty years where there has not been a war raging somewhere. Men in their incredible folly have persisted in trying to settle things by war which settles nothing. The mob were doing what men have so often done when they chose the warrior and rejected the man of peace.

(iii) They chose hatred and violence instead of love. Barabbas and Jesus stood for two different ways. Barabbas stood for the heart of hate, the stab of the dagger, the violence of bitterness. Jesus stood for the way of love. As so often has happened, hate reigned supreme in the hearts of men, and love was rejected. Men insisted on taking their own way to conquest, and refused to see that the only true conquest was the conquest of love.

There can be hidden tragedy in a word. "When he had scourged him" is one word in the Greek. The Roman scourge was a terrible thing. The criminal was bent and bound in such a way that his back was exposed. The scourge was a long leathern thong, studded here and there with sharpened pieces of lead and bits of bone. It literally tore a man's back to ribbons. Sometimes it tore a man's eye out. Some men died under it. Some men emerged from the ordeal raving mad. Few retained consciousness through it. That is what they inflicted on Jesus.

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Mark 15:16-20

THE SOLDIERS' MOCKERY

Mark 15:16-20

The soldiers led Jesus away into the hall, which is the Praetorium, and they called together the whole company. They clad him in a purple robe, and they plaited a crown of thorns and put it on him, and they began to salute him, "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they struck his head with a reed, and they spat on him, and they knelt down before him and worshipped him. And after they had made sport of him, they took off the purple robe, and clad him in his own clothes. And they led him away to crucify him.

The Roman ritual of condemnation was fixed. The judge said *Illum duci ad crucem placet*), "The sentence is that this man should be taken to a cross." Then he turned to the guard and said, *I, miles, expedi crucem*, "Go, soldier, and prepare the cross." It was when the cross was being prepared that Jesus was in the hands of the soldiers. The Praetorium was the residence of the governor, his headquarters, and the soldiers involved would be the headquarters cohort of the guard. We would do well to remember that Jesus had already undergone the agony of scourging before this horse-play of the soldiers began.

It may well be that of all that happened to him this hurt Jesus least. The actions of the Jews had been venomous with hatred. The consent of Pilate had been a cowardly evasion of responsibility. There was cruelty in the action of the soldiers but no malice. To them Jesus was only another man for a cross, and they carried out their barrack-room pantomime of royalty and worship, not with any malice, but as a coarse jest.

It was the beginning of much mockery to come. Always the Christian was liable to be regarded as a jest. Scribbled on the walls of Pompeii, whose walls are still chalked with coarse jests to-day, there is a picture of a Christian kneeling before an ass and below it is scrawled the words, "Anaximenes worships his God." If ever people make a jest of our Christianity, it will help to remember that they did it to Jesus in a way that is worse than anything likely to happen to us.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 15:21-28

THE CROSS

Mark 15:21-28

And they impressed into service a man called Simon of Cyrene, who was passing by, on his way in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, and they made him carry his Cross. So they brought him to the place Golgotha, which means the place of a skull. They offered him wine mingled with myrrh, but he would not take it. They crucified him. And they divided out his garments, throwing dice for them to decide who should take what. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him was written on the Cross--"The King of the Jews." With him they crucified two brigands, one on his right hand and one on his left.

The routine of crucifixion did not alter. When the cross was prepared the criminal had himself to carry it to the place of execution. He was placed in the middle of a hollow square of four soldiers. In front marched a soldier carrying a board stating the crime of which the prisoner was guilty. The board was afterwards affixed to the cross. They took not the shortest but the longest way to the place of execution. They followed every possible street and lane so that as many as possible should see and take warning. When they reached the place of crucifixion, the cross was laid flat on the ground. The prisoner was stretched upon it and his hands nailed to it. The feet were not nailed but only loosely bound. Between the prisoner's legs projected a ledge of wood called the saddle, to take his weight when the cross was raised upright--otherwise the nails would have torn through the flesh of the hands. The cross was then lifted upright and set in its socket--and the criminal was left to die. The cross was not tall.

It was shaped like the letter T, and had no top piece at all. Sometimes prisoners hung for as long as a week, slowly dying of hunger and of thirst, suffering sometimes to the point of actual madness.

This must have been a grim day for Simon of Cyrene. Palestine was an occupied country and any man might be impressed into the Roman service for any task. The sign of impressment was a tap on the shoulder with the flat of a Roman spear. Simon was from Cyrene in Africa. No doubt he had come from that far off land for the Passover. No doubt he had scraped and saved for many years in order to come. No doubt he was gratifying the ambition of a lifetime to eat one Passover in Jerusalem. Then this happened to him.

At the moment Simon must have bitterly resented it. He must have hated the Romans, and hated this criminal whose cross he was being forced to carry. But we may legitimately speculate what happened to Simon. It may be that it was his intention when he got to Golgotha to fling the cross down on the ground and hasten as quickly as he could from the scene. But perhaps it did not turn out that way. Perhaps he lingered on because something about Jesus fascinated him.

He is described as the father of Alexander and Rufus. The people for whom the gospel was written must have been meant to recognize him by this description. It is most likely that Mark's gospel was first written for the Church at Rome. Now let us turn to Paul's letter to Rome and read Rom.16:13. "Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine." Rufus was so choice a

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Mark 15:21-28

Christian that he was eminent in the Lord. The mother of Rufus was so dear to Paul that he could call her his own mother. Things must have happened to Simon on Golgotha.

Now turn to Ac.13:1. There is a list of the men of Antioch who sent Paul and Barnabas out on that epoch-making first mission to the Gentiles. The name of one is Simeon that was called Niger. Simeon is another form of Simon. Niger was the regular name for a man of swarthy skin who came from Africa, and Cyrene is in Africa. Here it may well be that we are meeting Simon again. Maybe Simon's experience on the way to Golgotha bound his heart forever to Jesus. Maybe it made him a Christian. Maybe in the after days he was a leader in Antioch and instrumental in the first mission to the Gentiles. Maybe it was because Simon was compelled to carry the Cross of Jesus that the first mission to the Gentiles took place. That would mean that we are Christians because one day a Passover pilgrim from Cyrene, to his bitter resentment at the moment, was impressed by a nameless Roman officer to carry his cross for Jesus.

They offered Jesus drugged wine and he would not drink it. A company of pious and merciful women in Jerusalem came to every crucifixion and gave the criminals a drink of drugged wine to ease the terrible pain. They offered this to Jesus--and he refused it. When Dr. Johnson was ill with his last illness he asked his doctor to tell him honestly if he could recover. The doctor said he could not without a miracle. "Then," said Johnson, "I will take no more physic, not even opiates, for I have prayed that I may render up my soul to God unclouded." Jesus was resolved to taste death at its bitterest and to go to God with open eyes.

The soldiers dined for his clothes. We have seen how the prisoner was marched to the place of crucifixion amid the four soldiers. These soldiers had as their perquisite the clothes of the criminal. Now a Jew wore five articles of clothing--the inner robe, the outer robe, the sandals, the girdle and the turban. When the four lesser things had been assigned, that left the great outer robe. It would have been useless to cut it up, and so the soldiers gambled for it in the shadow of the Cross.

Jesus was crucified between two thieves. It was a symbol of his whole life that even at the end he accompanied with sinners.

Barclay's Commentary

Mark 15:29-32

THE LIMITLESS LOVE

Mark 15:29-32

Those who were passing by hurled their insults at him, wagging their heads at him. "Aha!" they said, "you who are going to pull down the Temple and build it in three days, come down from the Cross and save yourself!" Even so the chief priests jested with each other, with the experts in the law. "He saved others," they said, "He cannot save himself. Let this Anointed One of God, this King of Israel, come down from the Cross, so that we may see it and believe." And those who were crucified with him flung their taunts at him.

The Jewish leaders flung one last challenge at Jesus. "Come down from the Cross," they said, "and we will believe in you." It was precisely the wrong challenge. As General Booth said long ago, "It is because Jesus did not come down from the Cross that we believe in him." The death of Jesus was absolutely necessary and the reason was this. Jesus came to tell men of the love of God; more, he was himself the incarnate love of God. If he had refused the Cross or if in the end he had come down from the Cross, it would have meant that there was a limit to God's love, that there was something which that love was not prepared to suffer for men, that there was a line beyond which it would not go. But, Jesus went the whole way and died on the Cross and this means that there is literally no limit to God's love, that there is nothing in all the universe which that love is not prepared to suffer for men, that there is nothing, not even death on a cross, which it will refuse to bear for men.

When we look at the Cross, Jesus is saying to us, "God loves you like that, with a love that is limitless, a love that will bear every suffering earth has to offer."

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Mark 15:33-41

TRAGEDY AND TRIUMPH

Mark 15:33-41

When it was twelve o'clock midday, there came a darkness over the whole earth, and it lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon. And at three o'clock Jesus cried with a great voice, "Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?" When certain of the bystanders heard it, they said, "See! He is calling for Elijah!" Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and gave him a drink. "Let be!" he said, "till we see if Elijah is going to come and take him down." Jesus uttered a great shout--and died. And the veil of the Temple was rent in two from top to bottom. When the centurion who was standing opposite him saw that he died like this, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God." There were some women watching from a distance, amongst whom were Mary of Magdala, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome. They had accompanied him in Galilee and had attended to his needs. And there were many others who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Here comes the last scene of all, a scene so terrible that the sky was unnaturally darkened and it seemed that even nature could not bear to look upon what was happening. Let us look at the various people in this scene.

(i) There was Jesus. Two things Jesus said.

(a) He uttered the terrible cry, "My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?" There is a mystery behind that cry which we cannot penetrate. Maybe it was like this. Jesus had taken this life of ours upon him. He had done our work and faced our temptations and borne our trials. He had suffered all that life could bring. He had known the failure of friends, the hatred of foes, the malice of enemies. He had known the most searing pain that life could offer. Up to this moment Jesus had gone through every experience of life except one--he had never known the consequence of sin. Now if there is one thing sin does, it separates us from God. It puts between us and God a barrier like an unscalable wall. That was the one human experience through which Jesus had never passed, because he was without sin.

It may be that at this moment that experience came upon him--not because he had sinned, but because in order to be identified completely with our humanity he had to go through it. In this terrible, grim, bleak moment Jesus really and truly identified himself with the sin of man. Here we have the divine paradox--Jesus knew what it was to be a sinner. And this experience must have been doubly agonizing for Jesus, because he had never known what it was to be separated by this barrier from God.

That is why he can understand our situation so well. That is why we need never fear to go to him when sin cuts us off from God. Because he has gone through it, he can help others who are going through it. There is no depth of human experience which Christ has not plumbed.

(b) There was the great shout. Both Matthew (Matt.27:50) and Luke (Lk.23:46) tell of it. John does not mention the shout but he tells us that Jesus died having said, "It is finished." (Jn.19:30.) In

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Mark 15:33-41

the original that would be one word; and that one word was the great shout. "Finished!" Jesus died with the cry of triumph on his lips, his task accomplished, his work completed, his victory won. After the terrible dark there came the light again, and he went home to God a victor triumphant.

(ii) There was the bystander who wished to see if Elijah would come. He had a kind of morbid curiosity in the face of the Cross. The whole terrible scene did not move him to awe or reverence or even pity. He wanted to experiment while Jesus died.

(iii) There was the centurion. A hard-bitten Roman soldier, he was the equivalent of a regimental sergeant-major. He had fought in many a campaign and he had seen many a man die. But he had never seen a man die like this and he was sure that Jesus was the Son of God. If Jesus had lived on and taught and healed he might have attracted many, but it is the Cross which speaks straight to the hearts of men.

(iv) There were the women in the distance. They were bewildered, heart-broken, drenched in sorrow--but they were there. They loved so much that they could not leave him. Love clings to Christ even when the intellect cannot understand. It is only love which can give us a hold on Christ that even the most bewildering experiences can not break.

There is one other thing to note. "The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom." This was the curtain which shut off the Holy of Holies, into which no man might go. Symbolically that tells us two things.

(a) The way to God was now wide open. Into the Holy of Holies only the High Priest could go, and he only once a year on the day of Atonement. But now, the curtain was torn and the way to God was wide open to every man.

(b) Within the Holy of Holies dwelt the very essence of God. Now with the death of Jesus the curtain which hid God was torn and men could see him face to face. No longer was God hidden. No longer need men guess and grope. Men could look at Jesus and say, "That is what God is like. God loves me like that."

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Mark 15:42-47

THE MAN WHO GAVE JESUS A TOMB

Mark 15:42-47

When it was now evening, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea, a respected member of the council, and a man who was himself waiting for the Kingdom of God, ventured to go to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was amazed that he was already dead. He summoned the centurion, and asked if he had been long dead. And when he had learned the facts from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. And Joseph bought fine linen, and he took him down from the Cross and wrapped him in the linen, and put him in a tomb which had been hewn out of rock, and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he had been laid.

Jesus died at three o'clock on the Friday afternoon and the next day was the Sabbath. We have already seen that the new day started at 6 p.m. Therefore when Jesus died, it was already the time of preparation for the Sabbath, and there was very little time to waste, for after 6 p.m. the Sabbath law would operate and no work could be done.

Joseph of Arimathaea acted quickly. It frequently happened that the bodies of criminals were never buried at all, but were simply taken down and left for the vultures and the scavenging wild dogs to deal with. In fact it has been suggested that Golgotha may have been called the place of a skull because it was littered with skulls from previous crucifixions. Joseph went to Pilate. It often happened that criminals hung for days on their crosses before they died, and Pilate was amazed that Jesus was dead only six hours after he had been crucified. But when he had checked the facts with the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.

Joseph is a curious study.

(i) It may well be that it is from Joseph that all the information came about the trial before the Sanhedrin. Certainly none of the disciples was there. The information must have come from some member of the Sanhedrin, and it is probable that Joseph was the one. If that is so he had a very real share in the writing of the gospel story.

(ii) There is a certain tragedy about Joseph. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and yet we have no hint that he spoke one word in Jesus' favour or intervened in any way on his behalf. Joseph is the man who gave Jesus a tomb when he was dead but was silent when he was alive. It is one of the commonest tragedies of life that we keep our wreaths for people's graves and our praises until they are dead. It would be infinitely better to give them some of these flowers and some of these words of gratitude when they are still alive.

(iii) But we cannot blame Joseph overmuch, for he was another of those people for whom the Cross did what not even the life of Jesus could do. When he had seen Jesus alive, he had felt his attraction but had gone no further. But when he saw Jesus die--and he must have been present at the crucifixion--his heart was broken in love. First the centurion, then Joseph--it is an amazing thing

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Mark 15:42-47

how soon Jesus' words came true that when he was lifted up from the earth he would draw all men to himself. (Jn.12:32.)

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Mark 16:1-8

TELL PETER

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath had passed, Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices to go and anoint his body. Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, when the sun was rising, they went to the tomb. They kept saying to each other, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" They looked up and they saw that the stone had been rolled away, for it was very large. And they went into the tomb, and they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long, white robe. They were utterly amazed. He said to them, "Do not be amazed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is risen. He is not here. See! There is the place where they laid him. But go! Tell his disciples and Peter, 'He goes before you into Galilee. There you will see him as he told you'." And they went out and fled from the tomb, for fear and astonishment gripped them. And they told no one anything for they were afraid.

There had not been time to render the last services to the body of Jesus. The Sabbath had intervened and the women who wished to anoint the body had not been able to do so. As early as possible after the Sabbath had passed, they set out to perform this sad task.

They were worried about one thing. Tombs had no doors. When the word door is mentioned it really means opening. In front of the opening was a groove, and in the groove ran a circular stone as big as a cart-wheel; and the women knew that it was quite beyond their strength to move a stone like that. But when they reached the tomb, the stone was rolled away, and inside was a messenger who gave them the unbelievable news that Jesus had risen from the dead.

One thing is certain--if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would never have heard of him. The attitude of the women was that they had come to pay the last tribute to a dead body. The attitude of the disciples was that everything had finished in tragedy. By far the best proof of the Resurrection is the existence of the Christian church. Nothing else could have changed sad and despairing men and women into people radiant with joy and flaming with courage. The Resurrection is the central fact of the whole Christian faith. Because we believe in the Resurrection certain things follow.

(i) Jesus is not a figure in a book but a living presence. It is not enough to study the story of Jesus like the life of any other great historical figure. We may begin that way but we must end by meeting him.

(ii) Jesus is not a memory but a presence. The dearest memory fades. The Greeks had a word to describe time meaning time which wipes all things out. Long since, time would have wiped out the memory of Jesus unless he had been a living presence forever with us.

"And warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is he;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee."

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Mark 16:1-8

Jesus is not someone to discuss so much as someone to meet.

(iii) The Christian life is not the life of a man who knows about Jesus, but the life of a man who knows Jesus. There is all the difference in the world between knowing about a person and knowing a person. Most people know about Queen Elizabeth or the President of the United States but not so many know them. The greatest scholar in the world who knows everything about Jesus is less than the humblest Christian who knows him.

(iv) There is an endless quality about the Christian faith. It should never stand still. Because our Lord is a living Lord there are new wonders and new truths waiting to be discovered all the time.

But the most precious thing in this passage is in two words which are in no other gospel. "Go," said the messenger. "Tell his disciples and Peter." How that message must have cheered Peter's heart when he received it! He must have been tortured with the memory of his disloyalty, and suddenly there came a special message for him. It was characteristic of Jesus that he thought, not of the wrong Peter had done him but of the remorse he was undergoing. Jesus was far more eager to comfort the penitent sinner than to punish the sin. Someone has said, "The most precious thing about Jesus is the way in which he trusts us on the field of our defeat."

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Mark 16:9-20

THE COMMISSION OF THE CHURCH

Mark 16:9-20

When he had risen early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary of Magdala, out of whom he had cast seven devils. She went and told the news to those who had been with him, who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.

After that he appeared in another form to two of them as they walked, as they were on their way to the country. And they went away and told the news to the rest, but they did not believe it.

Later he appeared to the eleven as they were sitting at meat and rebuked them for their disbelief and the obtuseness of their minds, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. He said to them, "Go into the whole world and preach the goodness. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe. By my name they will cast out devils. They will speak with new tongues. They will lift serpents, and even if they drink any deadly thing it will not hurt them. They will place their hands on the infirm and they will be well."

So the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

They went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed their message by the signs that accompanied it.

As we saw in the introduction, Mark's gospel really stops at Mk.16:8. We have only to read this passage to see how different it is from the rest of the gospel and it appears in none of the great manuscripts of the gospel. It is a later summary which replaces the ending which either Mark did not live to write or which at some time went astray.

Its great interest is the picture of the duty of the church that it gives to us. The man who wrote this concluding section obviously believed that the church had certain tasks committed to it by Jesus.

(i) The church has a preaching task. It is the duty of the church, and that means that it is the duty of every Christian, to tell the story of the good news of Jesus to those who have never heard it. The Christian duty is to be the herald of Jesus.

(ii) The church has a healing task. Here is a fact we have seen again and again. Christianity is concerned with men's bodies as well as men's minds. Jesus wished to bring health to the body and health to the soul.

(iii) The church has a source of power. We need not take everything literally. We need not think that the Christian is literally to have the power to lift venomous snakes and drink poisonous liquids

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Mark 16:9-20

and take no harm. But at the back of this picturesque language is the conviction that the Christian is filled with a power to cope with life that others do not possess.

(iv) The church is never left alone to do its work. Always Christ works with it and in it and through it. The Lord of the church is still in the church and is still the Lord of power.

And so the gospel finishes with the message that the Christian life is lived in the presence and the power of him who was crucified and rose again.

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Introduction to Luke

A LOVELY BOOK AND ITS AUTHOR

The gospel according to St. Luke has been called the loveliest book in the world. When once an American asked him if he could recommend a good life of Christ, Denney answered, "Have you tried the one that Luke wrote?" There is a legend that Luke was a skilled painter; there is even a painting of Mary in a Spanish cathedral to this day which purports to be by him. Certainly he had an eye for vivid things. It would not be far wrong to say that the third gospel is the best life of Christ ever written. Tradition has always believed that Luke was the author and we need have no qualms in accepting that tradition. In the ancient world it was the regular thing to attach books to famous names; no one thought it wrong. But Luke was never one of the famous figures of the early Church. If he had not written the gospel no one would have attached it to his name.

Luke was a gentile; and he has the unique distinction of being the only New Testament writer who was not a Jew. He was a doctor by profession (Col.4:14) and maybe that very fact gave him the wide sympathy he possessed. It has been said that a minister sees men at their best; a lawyer sees men at their worst; and a doctor sees men as they are. Luke saw men and loved them all.

The book was written to a man called Theophilus. He is called most excellent Theophilus and the title given him is the normal title for a high official in the Roman government. No doubt Luke wrote it to tell an earnest inquirer more about Jesus; and he succeeded in giving Theophilus a picture which must have thrilled his heart closer to the Jesus of whom he had heard.

THE SYMBOLS OF THE GOSPELS

Every one of the four gospels was written from a certain point of view. Very often on stained glass windows the writers of the gospels are pictured; and usually to each there is attached a symbol. The symbols vary but one of the commonest allocations is this.

The emblem of Mark is a man. Mark is the simplest and most straightforward of the gospels. It has been well said that its characteristic is realism. It is the nearest to being a report of Jesus' life.

The emblem of Matthew is a lion. Matthew was a Jew writing for Jews and he saw in Jesus the Messiah, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the one whom all the prophets had predicted.

The emblem of John is the eagle. The eagle can fly higher than any other bird. It is said that of all creatures only the eagle can look straight into the sun. John is the theological gospel; its flights of thought are higher than those of any of the others. It is the gospel where the philosopher can find themes to think about for a lifetime and to solve only in eternity.

The symbol of Luke is the calf. The calf is the animal for sacrifice; and Luke saw in Jesus the sacrifice for all the world. In Luke above all, the barriers are broken down and Jesus is for Jew and gentile, saint and sinner alike. He is the saviour of the world. Keeping that in mind, let us now set down the characteristics of this gospel.

AN HISTORIAN'S CARE

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Introduction to Luke

First and foremost, Luke's gospel is an exceedingly careful bit of work. His Greek is notably good. The first four verses are well-nigh the best Greek in the New Testament. In them he claims that his work is the product of the most careful research. His opportunities were ample and his sources must have been good. As the trusted companion of Paul he must have known all the great figures of the church, and we may be sure that he had them tell their stories to him. For two years he was Paul's companion in imprisonment in Caesarea. In those long days he had every opportunity for study and research and he must have used them well.

An example of Luke's care is the way in which he dates the emergence of John the Baptist. He does so by no fewer than six contemporary datings. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (1), Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea (2), Herod being tetrarch of Galilee (3), and his brother Philip being tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis (4), and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene (5) in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (6), the word of God came to John" (Lk.3:1-2). Here is a man who is writing with care and who will be as accurate as it is possible for him to be.

THE GOSPEL FOR THE GENTILES

It is clear that Luke wrote mainly for gentiles. Theophilus was a gentile, as was Luke himself, and there is nothing in the gospel that a gentile could not grasp and understand. (a) As we have seen, Luke begins his dating from the reigning Roman emperor and the current Roman governor. The Roman date comes first. (b) Unlike Matthew, he is not greatly interested in the life of Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy. (c) He very seldom quotes the Old Testament at all. (d) He has a habit of giving Hebrew words in their Greek equivalent so that a Greek would understand. Simon the Cananaean becomes Simon the Zealot. (compare Lk.6:15 and Matt.10:4). Calvary is called not by its Hebrew name, Golgotha (compare HSN1538 and HSN1556), but by its Greek name, Kranion (GSN2898). Both mean the place of a skull. He never uses the Jewish term Rabbi (HSN7227) of Jesus but always a Greek word meaning Master.

When he is tracing the descent of Jesus, he traces it not to Abraham, the founder of the Jewish race, as Matthew does, but to Adam, the founder of the human race. (compare Matt.1:2 and Lk.3:38).

Because of this Luke is the easiest of all the gospels to read. He was writing, not for Jews, but for people very like ourselves.

THE GOSPEL OF PRAYER

Luke's gospel is specially the gospel of prayer. At all the great moments of his life, Luke shows us Jesus at prayer. He prayed at his baptism (Lk.3:21); before his first collision with the Pharisees (Lk.5:16); before he chose the Twelve (Lk.6:12); before he questioned his disciples as to who they thought he was; before his first prediction of his own death (Lk.9:18); at the Transfiguration (Lk.9:29); and upon the Cross (Lk.23:46). Only Luke tells us that Jesus prayed for Peter in his hour of testing (Lk.22:32). Only he tells us the prayer parables of the Friend at Midnight (Lk.11:5-13) and the Unjust Judge (Lk.18:1-8). To Luke the unclosed door of prayer was one of the most precious in all the world.

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Introduction to Luke

THE GOSPEL OF WOMEN

In Palestine the place of women was low. In the Jewish morning prayer a man thanks God that he has not made him "a gentile, a slave or a woman." But Luke gives a very special place to women. The birth narrative is told from Mary's point of view. It is in Luke that we read of Elizabeth, of Anna, of the widow at Nain, of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. It is Luke who makes vivid the pictures of Martha and Mary and of Mary Magdalene. It is very likely that Luke was a native of Macedonia where women held a more emancipated position than anywhere else; and that may have something to do with it.

THE GOSPEL OF PRAISE

In Luke the phrase "praising God" occurs oftener than in all the rest of the New Testament put together. This praise reaches its peak in the three great hymns that the church has sung throughout all her generations--the Magnificat (Lk.1:46-55); the Benediculus (Lk.1:68-79); and the Nunc Dimittis (Lk.2:29-32). There is a radiance in Luke's gospel which is a lovely thing, as if the sheen of heaven had touched the things of earth.

THE UNIVERSAL GOSPEL

But the outstanding characteristic of Luke is that it is the universal gospel. All the barriers are down; Jesus Christ is for all men without distinction.

(a) The kingdom of heaven is not shut to the Samaritans (Lk.9:51-56). Luke alone tells the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk.10:30-37). The one grateful leper is a Samaritan (Lk.17:11-19). John can record a saying that the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans (Jn.4:9). But Luke refuses to shut the door on any man.

(b) Luke shows Jesus speaking with approval of gentiles whom the orthodox Jew would have considered unclean. He shows us Jesus citing the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian as shining examples (Lk.4:25-27). The Roman centurion is praised for the greatness of his faith (Lk.7:9). Luke tells us of that great word of Jesus, "Men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God" (Lk.13:29).

(c) Luke is supremely interested in the poor. When Mary brings the offering for her purification it is the offering of the poor (Lk.2:24). When Jesus is, as it were, setting out his credentials to the emissaries of John, the climax is, "The poor have good news preached to them" (Lk.7:22). He alone tells the parable of the Rich Man and the Poor Man (Lk.16:19-31). In Luke's account of the Beatitudes the saying of Jesus runs, not, as in Matthew (Matt.5:3), "Blessed are the poor in spirit," but simply, "Blessed are you poor" (Lk.6:20). Luke's gospel has been called "the gospel of the underdog." His heart runs out to everyone for whom life is an unequal struggle.

(d) Above all Luke shows Jesus as the friend of outcasts and sinners. He alone tells of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet and bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair in the house

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of Simon the Pharisee (Lk.7:36-50); of Zacchaeus, the quisling tax-gatherer (Lk.19:1-10); of the Penitent Thief (Lk.23:43); and he alone has the immortal story of the prodigal son and the loving father (Lk.15:11-32). When Matthew tells how Jesus sent his disciples out to preach, he says that Jesus told them not to go to the Samaritans or the gentiles (Matt.10:5); but Luke omits that altogether. All four gospel writers quote from Isa.40 when they give the message of John the Baptist, "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God"; but only Luke continues the quotation to its triumphant conclusion, "And all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Isa.40:3-5; Matt.3:3; Mk.1:3; Jn.1:23; Lk.3:4,6). Luke of all the gospel writers sees no limits to the love of God.

THE BOOK BEAUTIFUL

As we study this book we must look for these characteristics. Somehow of all the gospel writers one would have liked to meet Luke best of all, for this gentile doctor with the tremendous vision of the infinite sweep of the love of God must have been a lovely soul. Faber wrote the lines,

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice,
Which is more than liberty.
For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

Luke's gospel is the demonstration that this is true.

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Luke 1:1-4

AN HISTORIAN'S INTRODUCTION

Luke 1:1-4

Since many have set their hands to the task of drawing up an account of the events which were completed amongst us, telling the story just as those who were the original eye-witnesses and who became the servants of the word handed it down to us, I too made up my mind to carry out a careful investigation of all things from the beginning, and to write to you, Theophilus, your excellency, an orderly account of them, so that you might have in your mind a full and reliable account of the things in which you have been instructed.

Luke's introduction is unique in the first three gospels because it is the only place where the author steps out upon the stage and uses the pronoun "I." There are three things to note in this passage.

(i) It is the best bit of Greek in the New Testament. Luke uses here the very form of introduction which the great Greek historians all used. Herodotus begins, "These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus." A much later historian, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, tells us at the beginning of his history, "Before beginning to write I gathered information, partly from the lips of the most learned men with whom I came into contact, and partly from histories written by Romans of whom they spoke with praise." So Luke, as he began his story in the most sonorous Greek, followed the highest models he could find.

It is as if Luke said to himself, "I am writing the greatest story in the world and nothing but the best is good enough for it." Some of the ancient manuscripts are very beautiful productions, written in silver ink on purple vellum; and often the scribe, when he came to the name of God or of Jesus, wrote it in gold. Dr. Boreham tells of an old workman who, every Friday night, took the newest and shiniest coins out of his pay packet for Sunday's offering in church. The historian, the scribe and the workman were all filled with the same idea--only the best is good enough for Jesus. They always gave their utmost for the highest.

(ii) It is most significant that Luke was not satisfied with anyone else's story of Christ. He must have his own. Real religion is never a second-hand thing. It is a personal discovery. Professor Arthur Gossip of Trinity College, Glasgow used to say that the four gospels were important, but beyond them all came the gospel of personal experience. Luke had to rediscover Jesus Christ for himself.

(iii) There is no passage of the Bible which sheds such a floodlight on the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture. No one would deny that the gospel of Luke is an inspired document; and yet Luke begins by affirming that it is the product of the most careful historical research. God's inspiration does not come to the man who sits with folded hands and lazy mind and only waits, but to the man who thinks and seeks and searches. True inspiration comes when the seeking mind of man joins with the revealing Spirit of God. The word of God is given, but it is given to the man who is seeking for it. "Seek and you shall find" (Matt.7:7).

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Luke 1:5-25

A SON IS PROMISED

Luke 1:5-25

In the time of Herod, the king of Judaea, there was a priest called Zacharias, who belonged to the section of Abia. His wife was also a direct descendant of Aaron and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were good people before God, for they walked blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. They had no child because Elizabeth was barren and both of them were far advanced in years. When he was acting as priest before God, when his section was on duty, in accordance with the custom of priestly duty, it fell to him by lot to go into the Temple of the Lord to burn the incense. The whole congregation of the people was praying outside at the hour when incense was offered. The angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zacharias saw him he was deeply moved and awe fell upon him.

The angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, because your request has been heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you must call him by the name of John. You will have joy and exultation and many will rejoice at his birth. He will be great in God's sight; he must not drink wine or strong drink and, even from the time he is in his mother's womb, he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many sons of Israel to the Lord their God; and he himself will go before his face in the spirit and the power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to get ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know that this is going to happen? For I am an old man and my wife is far advanced in years." "I am Gabriel," the angel answered, "who stands before God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

And--look you--you will be silent and unable to speak until the day these things happen, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." The people were waiting for Zacharias and they were surprised that he was lingering so long in the Temple. When he came out he was not able to speak to them and they realized that he had seen a vision in the Temple. He kept making signs to them but he remained unable to speak. When the days of his time of service were completed he went away to his own home. After these days Elizabeth his wife conceived; and she hid herself for five months. "This is God's doing for me," she said, "when he looked upon me to take away my shame among men.

Zacharias, the central character in this scene, was a priest. He belonged to the section of Abia. Every direct descendant of Aaron was automatically a priest. That meant that for all ordinary purposes there were far too many priests. They were therefore divided into twenty-four sections. Only at the Passover, at Pentecost and at the Feast of Tabernacles did all the priests serve. For the rest of the year each course served two periods of one week each. Priests who loved their work looked forward to that week of service above all things; it was the highlight of their lives.

A priest might marry only a woman of absolutely pure Jewish lineage. It was specially meritorious to marry a woman who was also a descendant of Aaron, as was Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias.

There was as many as twenty thousand priests altogether and so there were not far short of a thousand in each section. Within the sections all the duties were allocated by lot. Every morning

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Luke 1:5-25

and evening sacrifice was made for the whole nation. A burnt offering of a male lamb, one year old, without spot or blemish was offered, together with a meat offering of flour and oil and a drink offering of wine. Before the morning sacrifice and after the evening sacrifice incense was burned on the altar of incense so that, as it were, the sacrifices might go up to God wrapped in an envelope of sweet-smelling incense. It was quite possible that many a priest would never have the privilege of burning incense all his life; but if the lot did fall on any priest that day was the greatest day in all his life, the day he longed for and dreamed of. On this day the lot fell on Zacharias and he would be thrilled to the core of his being.

But in Zacharias's life there was tragedy. He and Elizabeth were childless. The Jewish Rabbis said that seven people were excommunicated from God and the list began, "A Jew who has no wife, or a Jew who has a wife and who has no child." Childlessness was a valid ground for divorce. Not unnaturally Zacharias, even on his great day, was thinking of his personal and domestic tragedy and was praying about it. Then the wondrous vision came and the glad message that, even when hope was dead, a son would be born to him.

The incense was burned and the offering made in the inmost court of the Temple, the Court of the Priests. While the sacrifice was being made, the congregation thronged the next court, the Court of the Israelites. It was the privilege of the priest at the evening sacrifice to come to the rail between the two courts after the incense had been burned in order to bless the people. The people marvelled that Zacharias was so long delayed. When he came he could not speak and the people knew that he had seen a vision. So in a wordless daze of joy Zacharias finished his week's duty and went home; and then the message of God came true and Elizabeth knew she was going to have a child.

One thing stands out here. It was in God's house that God's message came to Zacharias. We may often wish that a message from God would come to us. In Shaw's play, Saint Joan, Joan hears voices from God. The Dauphin is annoyed. "Oh, your voices, your voices," he said, "Why don't the voices come to me? I am king not you." "They do come to you," said Joan, "but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the field in the evening listening for them. When the angelus rings you cross yourself and have done with it; but if you prayed from your heart, and listened to the thrilling of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the voices as well as I do." Joan gave herself the chance to hear God's voice. Zacharias was in the Temple waiting on God. God's voice comes to those who listen for it--as Zacharias did--in God's house.

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Luke 1:26-38

GOD'S MESSAGE TO MARY

Lk 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a maiden who was betrothed to a man called Joseph, who belonged to the house of David. The maiden's name was Mary. He came in to her and said, "Greetings, most favoured one. The Lord is with you." She was deeply moved at this word and wondered what a greeting like that could mean. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour in God's sight. Look you--you will conceive and you will bear a son and you must call him by the name of Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father; and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be since I do not know a man?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the Spirit of the Most High will overshadow you, and so the child who will be born will be called holy, the Son of God, and--look you--Elizabeth, too, your kinswoman has also conceived in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who is called barren, because there is nothing which is impossible with God." Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Whatever he says, I accept." And the angel went away from her.

Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Betrothal lasted for a year and was quite as binding as marriage. It could be dissolved only by divorce. Should the man to whom a girl was betrothed die, in the eyes of the law she was a widow. In the law there occurs the strange-sounding phrase, "a virgin who is a widow."

In this passage we are face to face with one of the great controversial doctrines of the Christian faith--the Virgin Birth. The church does not insist that we believe in this doctrine. Let us look at the reasons for and against believing in it, and then we may make our own decision.

There are two great reasons for accepting it.

(i) The literal meaning of this passage, and still more of Matt.1:18-25, clearly is that Jesus was to be born of Mary without a human father.

(ii) It is natural to argue that if Jesus was, as we believe, a very special person, he would have a special entry into the world.

Now let us look at the things which may make us wonder if the story of the virgin birth is to be taken as literally as all that.

(i) The genealogies of Jesus both in Luke and in Matthew (Lk.3:23-38; Matt.1:1-17) trace the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, which is strange if Joseph was not his real father.

(ii) When Mary was looking for Jesus on the occasion that he lingered behind in the Temple, she said, "Your father and I have been looking for you anxiously" (Lk.2:48). The name father is definitely given by Mary to Joseph.

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Luke 1:26-38

(iii) Repeatedly Jesus is referred to as Joseph's son (Matt.13:55; Jn.6:42).

(iv) The rest of the New Testament knows nothing of the virgin birth. True, in Gal.4:4 Paul speaks of Jesus as "born of woman." But this is the natural phrase for any mortal man. (compare Jb.14:1; Jb.15:14; Jb.25:4).

But let us ask, "If we do not take the story of the virgin birth literally, how did it arise?" The Jews had a saying that in the birth of every child there are three partners--the father, the mother and the Spirit of God. They believed that no child could ever be born without the Spirit. And it may well be that the New Testament stories of the birth of Jesus are lovely, poetical ways of saying that, even if he had a human father, the Holy Spirit of God was operative in his birth in a unique way.

In this matter we may make our own decision. It may be that we will desire to cling to the literal doctrine of the virgin birth; it may be that we will prefer to think of it as a beautiful way of stressing the presence of the Spirit of God in family life.

Mary's submission is a very lovely thing. "Whatever God says, I accept." Mary had learned to forget the world's commonest prayer--"Thy will be changed"--and to pray the world's greatest prayer--"Thy will be done."

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 1:39-45

THE PARADOX OF BLESSEDNESS

Luke 1:39-45

In those days Mary arose and went eagerly to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and went into the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the babe leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she lifted up her voice with a great cry and said, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why has this been granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For--look you--when the voice of your greeting came to my ears the babe in my womb leaped with exultation. Blessed is she who believed that the things spoken to her from the Lord would find their fulfilment."

This is a kind of lyrical song on the blessedness of Mary. Nowhere can we better see the paradox of blessedness than in her life. To Mary was granted the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God. Well might her heart be filled with a wondering, tremulous joy at so great a privilege. Yet that very blessedness was to be a sword to pierce her heart. It meant that some day she would see her son hanging on a cross.

To be chosen by God so often means at one and the same time a crown of joy and cross of sorrow. The piercing truth is that God does not choose a person for ease and comfort and selfish joy but for a task that will take all that head and heart and hand can bring to it. God chooses a man in order to use him. When Joan of Arc knew that her time was short she prayed, "I shall only last a year; use me as you can." When that is realized, the sorrows and hardships that serving God may bring are not matters for lamentation; they are our glory, for all is suffered for God.

When Richard Cameron, the Covenanter, was caught by the dragoons they killed him. He had very beautiful hands and they cut them off and sent them to his father with a message asking if he recognized them. "They are my son's," he said, "my own dear son's. Good is the will of the Lord who can never wrong me or mine." The shadows of life were lit by the sense that they, too, were in the plan of God. A great Spanish saint prayed for his people, "May God deny you peace and give you glory." A great modern preacher said, "Jesus Christ came not to make life easy but to make men great."

It is the paradox of blessedness that it confers on a person at one and the same time the greatest joy and the greatest task in all the world.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 1:46-56

A WONDROUS HYMN

Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God, my Saviour, because he looked graciously on the humble estate of his servant. For--look you--from now on all generations shall call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me and his name is holy. His mercy is from generation to generation to those who fear him. He demonstrates his power with his arm. He scatters the proud in the plans of their hearts. He casts down the mighty from their seats of power. He exalts the humble. He fills those who are hungry with good things and he sends away empty those who are rich. He has helped Israel, his son, in that he has remembered his mercy--as he said to our fathers that he would--to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Here we have a passage which has become one of the great hymns of the church--the Magnificat. It is saturated in the Old Testament; and is specially kin to Hannah's song of praise in 1Sam.2:1-10. It has been said that religion is the opiate of the people; but, as Stanley Jones said, "the Magnificat is the most revolutionary document in the world."

It speaks of three of the revolutions of God.

(i) He scatters the proud in the plans of their hearts. That is a moral revolution. Christianity is the death of pride. Why? Because if a man sets his life beside that of Christ it tears the last vestiges of pride from him.

Sometimes something happens to a man which with a vivid, revealing light shames him. O. Henry has a short story about a lad who was brought up in a village. In school he used to sit beside a girl and they were fond of each other. He went to the city and fell into evil ways. He became a pickpocket and a petty thief. One day he snatched an old lady's purse. It was clever work and he was pleased. And then he saw coming down the street the girl whom he used to know, still sweet with the radiance of innocence. Suddenly he saw himself for the cheap, vile thing he really was. Burning with shame, he leaned his head against the cool iron of a lamp standard. "God," he said, "I wish I could die." He saw himself.

Christ enables a man to see himself. It is the deathblow to pride. The moral revolution has begun.

(ii) He casts down the mighty--he exalts the humble. That is a social revolution. Christianity puts an end to the world's labels and prestige.

Muretus was a wandering scholar of the middle ages. He was poor. In an Italian town he took ill and was taken to a hospital for waifs and strays. The doctors were discussing his case in Latin, never dreaming he could understand. They suggested that since he was such a worthless wanderer they might use him for medical experiments. He looked up and answered them in their own learned tongue, "Call no man worthless for whom Christ died!"

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 1:46-56

When we have realized what Christ did for all men, it is no longer possible to speak about a common man. The social grades are gone.

(iii) He has filled those who are hungry ... those who are rich he has sent empty away. That is an economic revolution. A non-Christian society is an acquisitive society where each man is out to amass as much as he can get. A Christian society is a society where no man dares to have too much while others have too little, where every man must get only to give away.

There is loveliness in the Magnificat but in that loveliness there is dynamite. Christianity begets a revolution in each man and revolution in the world.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 1:57-66

HIS NAME IS JOHN

Luke 1:57-66

When Elizabeth's time to bear the child was completed she brought forth a son. When her neighbours and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they went to circumcise the child and it was their intention to call him Zacharias after his father. But his mother said, "No; he must be called John." They said to her, "There is no one in your connection who is called by this name." They asked his father by signs by what name he wished him to be called. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "John is his name." Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue was loosed and he kept on praising God. And great awe fell upon all the neighbours, and all these events were talked about in all the hill country of Judaea; and all those who heard them kept them in their hearts and said, "What will this child turn out to be, for the hand of the Lord is with him?"

In Palestine the birth of a boy was an occasion of great joy. When the time of the birth was near at hand, friends and local musicians gathered near the house. When the birth was announced and it was a boy, the musicians broke into music and song, and there was universal congratulation and rejoicing. If it was a girl the musicians went silently and regretfully away! There was a saying, "The birth of a male child causes universal joy, but the birth of a female child causes universal sorrow." So in Elizabeth's house there was double joy. At last she had a child and that child was a son.

On the eighth day the boy was circumcised and received his name. Girls could be named any time within thirty days of their birth. In Palestine names were descriptive. They sometimes described a circumstance attending the birth as Esau and Jacob do (Gen.25:25-26). They sometimes described the child. Laban, for instance, means white or blonde. Sometimes the child received the parental name. Often the name described the parents' joy. Saul and Samuel, for instance, both mean "asked for." Sometimes the name was a declaration of the parents' faith. Elijah for instance, means "Jehovah is my God." Thus, in a time of Baal-worship, Elijah's parents asserted their faith in the true God.

Elizabeth, to the neighbours' surprise, said that her son must be called John and Zacharias indicated that that was also his desire. John is a shorter form of the name Jehohanan, which means "Jehovah's gift" or "God is gracious." It was the name which God had ordered to be given to the child and it described the parents' gratitude for an unexpected joy.

It was the question of the neighbours and of all who had heard the amazing story, "What will this child turn out to be?" Every child is a bundle of possibilities. There was an old Latin schoolmaster who always bowed gravely to his class before he taught them. When he was asked why, he answered, "Because you never know what one of these lads will turn out to be." The entry of a child into a family is two things. First, it is the greatest privilege which life can offer a man and wife. It is something for which to thank God. Second, it is one of life's supreme responsibilities, for that child is a bundle of possibilities, and on parents and teachers depends how these possibilities will or will not be realized.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 1:67-80

A FATHER'S JOY

Luke 1:67-80

His father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied like this: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has graciously visited his people and wrought deliverance for them. He has raised the horn of salvation for us in the house of David, his servant--as long ago he said he would through the mouth of his holy prophets--even deliverance from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, in that he has shown mercy to us as he did to our fathers and has remembered his holy covenant, the pledge which he gave to Abraham our father, to grant to us that we, being delivered from the hands of our enemies, should fearlessly serve him, in holiness and righteousness before him, all our days.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will walk before the Lord to prepare his ways, in order to give the knowledge of salvation to his people together with forgiveness of their sins, through the mercy of our God, in which the dawn from on high has graciously visited us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to direct our feet in the way of peace."

And the child grew and was strengthened by the Spirit; and he lived in the desert places until the day when he was displayed to Israel.

Zacharias had a great vision for his son. He thought of him as the prophet and the forerunner who would prepare the way of the Lord. All devout Jews hoped and longed for the day when the Messiah, God's anointed king, would come. Most of them believed that, before he came, a forerunner would announce his coming and prepare his way. The usual belief was that Elijah would return to do so (Mal.4:5). Zacharias saw in his son the one who would prepare the way for the coming of God's king.

Lk.1:75-77 give a great picture of the steps of the Christian way.

(i) There is preparation. All life is a preparation to lead us to Christ. When Sir Walter Scott was young his aim was to be a soldier. An accident made him slightly lame and that dream had to be abandoned. He took to reading the old Scottish histories and romances and so became the master novelist. An old man said of him, "He was makin' himself a' the time; but he didna ken maybe what he was about till years had passed." In life God is working all things together to bring us to Christ.

(ii) There is knowledge. It is the simple fact that men did not know what God was like until Jesus came. The Greeks thought of a passionless God, beyond all joy and sorrow, looking on men in calm unmoved detachment--no help there. The Jews thought of a demanding God, whose name was law and whose function was that of judge--nothing but terror there. Jesus came to tell that God was love, and in staggered amazement men could only say, "We never knew that God was like that." One of the great functions of the incarnation was to bring to men the knowledge of God.

(iii) There is forgiveness. We must be clear about one thing regarding forgiveness. It is not so much the remission of penalty as the restoration of a relationship. Nothing can deliver us from

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Luke 1:67-80

certain consequences of our sins; the clock cannot be put back; but estrangement from God is turned to friendship. The distant God has become near and the God we feared has become the lover of the souls of men.

(iv) There is walking in the ways of peace. Peace in Hebrew does not mean merely freedom from trouble; it means all that makes for a man's highest good; and through Christ a man is enabled to walk in the ways that lead to everything that means life, and no longer to all that means death.

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Luke 2:1-7

JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

Luke 2:1-7

In these days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken of all the world. The census first took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria; and everyone went to enroll himself, each man to his own town. So Joseph went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judaea, to David's town, which is called Bethlehem, because he belonged to the house and the line of David, to enrol himself with Mary who was betrothed to him and she was with child. When they arrived there her time to bear the child was completed; and she bore her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the place where they had meant to lodge.

In the Roman Empire periodical censuses were taken with the double object of assessing taxation and of discovering those who were liable for compulsory military service. The Jews were exempt from military service, and, therefore, in Palestine a census would be predominantly for taxation purposes. Regarding these censuses, we have definite information as to what happened in Egypt; and almost certainly what happened in Egypt happened in Syria, too, and Judaea was part of the province of Syria. The information we have comes from actual census documents written on papyrus and then discovered in the dust-heaps of Egyptian towns and villages and in the sands of the desert.

Such censuses were taken every fourteen years. And from A.D. 20 until about A.D. 270 we possess actual documents from every census taken. If the fourteen-year cycle held good in Syria this census must have been in 8 B.C. and that was the year in which Jesus was born. It may be that Luke has made one slight mistake. Quirinius did not actually become governor of Syria until A.D. 6; but he held an official post previously in those regions from 10 B.C. until 7 B.C. and it was during that first period that this census must have been taken.

Critics used to question the fact that every man had to go to his own city to be enrolled; but here is an actual government edict from Egypt:

"Gaius Vibius Maximus, Prefect of Egypt orders: 'Seeing that the time has come for the house-to-house census, it is necessary to compel all those who for any cause whatsoever are residing outside their districts to return to their own homes, that they may both carry out the regular order of the census, and may also diligently attend to the cultivation of their allotments.'"

If that was the case in Egypt, it may well be that in Judaea, where the old tribal ancestries still held good, men had to go to the headquarters of their tribe. Here is an instance where further knowledge has shown the accuracy of the New Testament.

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Luke 2:1-7

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was 80 miles. The accommodation for travellers was most primitive. The eastern khan was like a series of stalls opening off a common courtyard. Travellers brought their own food; all that the innkeeper provided was fodder for the animals and a fire to cook. The town was crowded and there was no room for Joseph and Mary. So it was in the common courtyard that Mary's child was born. Swaddling clothes consisted of a square of cloth with a long bandage-like strip coming diagonally off from one corner. The child was first wrapped in the square of cloth and then the long strip was wound round and round about him. The word translated "manger" means a place where animals feed; and therefore it can be either the stable or the manger which is meant.

That there was no room in the inn was symbolic of what was to happen to Jesus. The only place where there was room for him was on a cross. He sought an entry to the over-crowded hearts of men; he could not find it; and still his search--and his rejection--go on.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 2:8-20

SHEPHERDS AND ANGELS

Luke 2:8-20

In this country there were shepherds who were in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were much afraid. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for--look you--I am bringing you good news of great joy, which will be to every people, for today a Saviour has been born for you, in David's town, who is Christ the Lord. You will recognize him by this sign. You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger." And suddenly with the angel there was a crowd of heaven's host, praising God and saying, "In the highest heights glory to God; and on earth peace to the men whose welfare he ever seeks." When the angels had left them and gone away to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Come! Let us go across, to Bethlehem and let us see this thing which has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they hurried on and they discovered Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. When they had seen him they told everyone about the word which had been spoken to them about this child; and all who heard were amazed at what was told them by the shepherds. But Mary stored up these things in her memory and in her heart kept wondering what they meant. So the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen, just as it had been told to them.

It is a wonderful thing that the story should tell that the first announcement of God came to some shepherds. Shepherds were despised by the orthodox good people of the day. They were quite unable to keep the details of the ceremonial law; they could not observe all the meticulous hand-washings and rules and regulations. Their flocks made far too constant demands on them; and so the orthodox looked down on them. It was to simple men of the fields that God's message first came.

But these were in all likelihood very special shepherds. We have already seen how in the Temple, morning and evening, an unblemished lamb was offered as a sacrifice to God. To see that the supply of perfect offerings was always available the Temple authorities had their own private sheep flocks; and we know that these flocks were pastured near Bethlehem. It is most likely that these shepherds were in charge of the flocks from which the Temple offerings were chosen. It is a lovely thought that the shepherds who looked after the Temple lambs were the first to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

We have already seen that when a boy was born, the local musicians congregated at the house to greet him with simple music. Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem and therefore that ceremony could not be carried out. It is a lovely thought that the minstrelsy of heaven took the place of the minstrelsy of earth, and angels sang the songs for Jesus that the earthly singers could not sing.

All through these readings we must have been thinking of the rough simplicity of the birth of the Son of God. We might have expected that, if he had to be born into this world at all, it would be in a palace or a mansion. There was a European monarch who worried his court by often disappearing and walking incognito amongst his people. When he was asked not to do so for security's sake, he answered, "I cannot rule my people unless I know how they live." It is the great thought of the

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Luke 2:8-20

Christian faith that we have a God who knows the life we live because he too lived it and claimed no special advantage over common men.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 2:21-24

THE ANCIENT CEREMONIES ARE OBSERVED

Luke 2:21-24

When the eight days necessarily prior to circumcision had elapsed, he was called by the name of Jesus, the name by which he had been called by the angel before he had been conceived in the womb. When the time which, according to the law of Moses, must precede the ceremony of purification had elapsed, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (in accordance with the regulation in the Lord's law, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to make the sacrifice which the regulation in the Lord's law lays down, that is, a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

In this passage we see Jesus undergoing three ancient ceremonies which every Jewish boy had to undergo.

(i) Circumcision. Every Jewish boy was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. So sacred was that ceremony that it could be carried out even on a Sabbath when the law forbade almost every other act which was not absolutely essential; and on that day a boy received his name.

(ii) The Redemption of the First-born. According to the law (Exo.13:2) every firstborn male, both of human beings and of cattle, was sacred to God. That law may have been a recognition of the gracious power of God in giving human life, or it may even have been a relic of the day when children were sacrificed to the gods. Clearly if it had been carried out literally life would have been disrupted. There was therefore a ceremony called the Redemption of the Firstborn (Num.18:16). It is laid down that for the sum of five shekels--approximately 75 pence--parents could, as it were, buy back their son from God. The sum had to be paid to the priests. It could not be paid sooner than thirty-one days after the birth of the child and it might not be long delayed after that.

(iii) The Purification after Childbirth. When a woman had borne a child, if it was a boy, she was unclean for forty days, if it was a girl, for eighty days. She could go about her household and her daily business but she could not enter the Temple or share in any religious ceremony (Lev.12). At the end of that time she had to bring to the Temple a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon for a sin offering. That was a somewhat expensive sacrifice, and so the law laid it down (Lev.12:8) that if she could not afford the lamb she might bring another pigeon. The offering of the two pigeons instead of the lamb and the pigeon was technically called The Offering of the Poor. It was the offering of the poor which Mary brought. Again we see that it was into an ordinary home that Jesus was born, a home where there were no luxuries, a home where every penny had to be looked at twice, a home where the members of the family knew all about the difficulties of making a living and the haunting insecurity of life.

When life is worrying for us we must remember that Jesus knew what the difficulties of making ends meet can be.

These three ceremonies are strange old ceremonies; but all three have at the back of them the conviction that a child is a gift of God. The Stoics used to say that a child was not given to a parent

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 2:21-24

but only lent. Of all God's gifts there is none for which we shall be so answerable as the gift of a child.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 2:25-35

A DREAM REALIZED

Luke 2:25-35

Now--look you--there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon. This man was good and pious. He was waiting for the comforting of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. He had received a message from the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Anointed One. So he came in the Spirit to the Temple precincts. When his parents brought in the child Jesus, to do regarding him the customary ceremonies laid down by the law, he took him into his arms and blessed God and said, "Now O Lord, as you said, let your servant depart in peace, because my eyes have seen your instrument of salvation, which you have prepared before all the people, a light to bring your revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." His father and mother were amazed at what was said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Look you, this child is appointed to be the cause whereby many in Israel will fall and many rise and for a sign which will meet with much opposition.

As for you--a sword will pierce your soul--and all this will happen that the inner thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

There was no Jew who did not regard his own nation as the chosen people. But the Jews saw quite clearly that by human means their nation could never attain to the supreme world greatness which they believed their destiny involved. By far the greater number of them believed that because the Jews were the chosen people they were bound some day to become masters of the world and lords of all the nations. To bring in that day some believed that some great, celestial champion would descend upon the earth; some believed that there would arise another king of David's line and that all the old glories would revive; some believed that God himself would break directly into history by supernatural means. But in contrast to all that there were some few people who were known as the Quiet in the Land. They had no dreams of violence and of power and of armies with banners; they believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God should come. All their lives they waited quietly and patiently upon God.

Simeon was like that; in prayer, in worship, in humble and faithful expectation he was waiting for the day when God would comfort his people. God had promised him through the Holy Spirit that his life would not end before he had seen God's own Anointed King. In the baby Jesus he recognized that King and was glad. Now he was ready to depart in peace and his words have become the Nunc Dimittis, another of the great and precious hymns of the Church.

In Lk.2:34 Simeon gives a kind of summary of the work and fate of Jesus.

(i) He will be the cause whereby many will fall. This is a strange and a hard saying but it is true. It is not so much God who judges a man; a man judges himself; and his judgment is his reaction to Jesus Christ. If, when he is confronted with that goodness and that loveliness, his heart runs out in answering love, he is within the Kingdom. If, when so confronted, he remains coldly unmoved or actively hostile, he is condemned. There is a great refusal just as there is a great acceptance.

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Luke 2:25-35

(ii) He will be the cause whereby many will rise. Long ago Seneca said that what men needed above all was a hand let down to lift them up. It is the hand of Jesus which lifts a man out of the old life and into the new, out of the sin into the goodness, out of the shame into the glory.

(iii) He will meet with much opposition. Towards Jesus Christ there can be no neutrality. We either surrender to him or are at war with him. And it is the tragedy of life that our pride often keeps us from making that surrender which leads to victory.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 2:36-40

A LOVELY OLD AGE

Luke 2:36-40

There was a prophetess called Anna. She was the daughter of Phanuel and she belonged to the tribe of Asher. She was far advanced in years. She had lived with her husband ever since seven years after she came to womanhood; and now she was a widow of eighty-four years of age. She never left the Temple and day and night she worshipped with fastings and with prayers. At that very time she came up and she began to give thanks to God and she kept speaking about him to all those who were waiting expectantly for the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had completed everything which the Lord's law lays down they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew bigger and stronger and he was filled with wisdom, and God's grace was on him.

Anna, too, was one of the Quiet in the Land. We know nothing about her except what these verses tell but even in this brief compass Luke has drawn us a complete character sketch.

(i) Anna was a widow. She had known sorrow and she had not grown bitter. Sorrow can do one of two things to us. It can make us hard, bitter, resentful, rebellious against God. Or it can make us kinder, softer, more sympathetic. It can despoil us of our faith; or it can root faith ever deeper. It all depends how we think of God. If we think of him as a tyrant we will resent him. If we think of him as Father we too will be sure that

A Father's hand will never cause
His child a needless tear.

(ii) She was eighty-four years of age. She was old and she had never ceased to hope. Age can take away the bloom and the strength of our bodies; but age can do worse--the years can take away the life of our hearts until the hopes that once we cherished die and we become dully content and grimly resigned to things as they are. Again it all depends on how we think of God. If we think of him as distant and detached we may well despair; but if we think of him as intimately connected with life, as having his hand on the helm, we too will be sure that the best is yet to be and the years will never kill our hope.

How then was Anna such as she was?

(i) She never ceased to worship. She spent her life in God's house with God's people. God gave us his church to be our mother in the faith. We rob ourselves of a priceless treasure when we neglect to be one with his worshipping people.

(ii) She never ceased to pray. Public worship is great; but private worship is also great. As someone has truly said, "They pray best together who first pray alone." The years had left Anna without bitterness and in unshakable hope because day by day she kept her contact with him who is the source of strength and in whose strength our weakness is made perfect.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 2:41-52

THE DAWNING REALIZATION

Luke 2:41-52

Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years of age, they went up according to the custom of the feast, and when they had completed the days of the feast and returned home, the child Jesus stayed on in Jerusalem. His parents were not aware of this. They thought he was in the caravan and when they had gone a day's journey they looked for him amongst their kinsfolk and acquaintances. When they did not find him they turned back to Jerusalem, looking for him all the time. After three days they found him in the Temple precincts, sitting in the middle of the rabbis, listening to them and asking them questions. All who were listening were astonished at his understanding and at his answers. When they saw him they were amazed.

His mother said to him, "Child, why did you do this to us? Look you, your father and I have been looking for you and we have been very worried." He said to them, "Why were You looking for me? Did you not know that I was bound to be in my Father's house?" They did not understand the meaning of what he said to them. So he came home with them and went to Nazareth and he was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew wise and grew bigger and increased in favour with God and man.

This is a supremely important passage in the gospel story. it was laid down by law that every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem must attend the Passover. In point of fact it was the aim of every Jew in all the world at least once in a lifetime to attend that feast.

A Jewish boy became a man when he was twelve years of age. Then he became a son of the law and had to take the obligations of the law upon him. So at twelve Jesus for the first time went to the Passover. We may well imagine how the holy city and the Temple and the sacred ritual fascinated him.

When his parents returned he lingered behind. It was not through carelessness that they did not miss him. Usually the women in a caravan started out much earlier than the men for they travelled more slowly. The men started later and travelled faster and the two sections would not meet until the evening encampment was reached. It was Jesus' first Passover. No doubt Joseph thought he was with Mary, Mary thought that he was with Joseph and not till the evening camp did they miss him.

They returned to Jerusalem to search for him. For the Passover season it was the custom for the Sanhedrin to meet in public in the Temple court to discuss, in the presence of all who would listen, religious and theological questions. It was there they found Jesus. We must not think of it as a scene where a precocious boy was dominating a crowd of his seniors. Hearing and asking questions is the regular Jewish phrase for a student learning from his teachers. Jesus was listening to the discussions and eagerly searching for knowledge like an avid student.

And now comes one of the key passages in the life of Jesus. "Your father and I," said Mary, "have been looking for you anxiously." "Did you not know," said Jesus, "that I must be in my Father's house"? See how very gently but very definitely Jesus takes the name "father" from Joseph

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Luke 2:41-52

and gives it to God. At some time Jesus must have discovered his own unique relationship to God. He cannot have known it when he was a child in the manger and a baby at his mother's breast or he would be a monstrosity. As the years went on he must have had thoughts; and then at this first Passover, with manhood dawning, there came in a sudden blaze of realization the consciousness that he was in a unique sense the Son of God.

Here we have the story of the day when Jesus discovered who he was. And mark this--the discovery did not make him proud. It did not make him look down on his humble parents, the gentle Mary and the hard-working Joseph. He went home and he was obedient to them. The fact that he was God's Son made him the perfect son of his human parents. The real man of God does not despise earthly ties; just because he is God's man he discharges human duties with supreme fidelity.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 3:1-6

THE COURIER OF THE KING

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, and when Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and the district of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, when he was in the desert. So he came into the territory around Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance whereby sins might be forgiven--as it stands written in the book of the words of Isaiah, the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Get ready the road of the Lord, make his paths straight; every ravine shall be filled up; every mountain and hill will be made low; the twisted places will be made into straight roads and the rough places into smooth; and all flesh shall see God's instrument of salvation.'"

To Luke the emergence of John the Baptist was one of the hinges on which history turned. So much so is that the case that he dates it in no fewer than six different ways.

(i) Tiberius was the successor of Augustus and therefore the second of the Roman emperors. As early as A.D. 11 or 12 Augustus had made him his colleague in the imperial power but he did not become sole emperor until A.D. 14. The fifteenth year of his reign would therefore be A.D. 28-29. Luke begins by setting the emergence of John against a world background, the background of the Roman Empire.

(ii) The next three dates Luke gives are connected with the political organization of Palestine. The title tetrarch (see GSN5075 and GSN5076) literally means governor of a fourth part. In such provinces as Thessaly and Galatia, which were divided into four sections or areas, the governor of each part was known as a tetrarch; but later the word widened its meaning and came to mean the governor of any part. Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. after the reign of about forty years. He divided his kingdom between three of his sons and in the first instance the Romans approved the decision.

(a) To Herod Antipas were left Galilee and Peraea. He reigned from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39 and therefore Jesus' life was lived in Herod's reign and very largely in Herod's dominions in Galilee.

(b) To Herod Philip were left Ituraea and Trachonitis. He reigned from 4 B.C. to A.D. 33. Caesarea Philippi was called after him and was actually built by him.

(c) To Archelaus were left Judaea, Samaria and Edom. He was a thoroughly bad king. The Jews in the end actually petitioned Rome for his removal; and Rome, impatient of the continual troubles in Judaea, installed a procurator or governor. That is how the Romans came directly to rule Judaea. At this time Pilate, who was in power from A.D. 25 until A.D. 37, was the Roman governor. So in this one sentence Luke gives us a panoramic view of the division of the kingdom which had once belonged to Herod the Great.

(iii) Of Lysanias we know practically nothing.

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Luke 3:1-6

(iv) Having dealt with the world situation and the Palestinian political situation, Luke turns to the religious situation and dates John's emergence as being in the priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. There never at any time were two high-priests at the one time. What then does Luke mean by giving these two names? The high-priest was at one and the same time the civil and the religious head of the community. In the old days the office of high-priest had been hereditary and for life. But with the coming of the Romans the office was the object of all kinds of intrigue. The result was that between 37 B.C. and A.D. 26 there were no fewer than twenty-eight different high-priests. Now Annas was actually high-priest from A.D. 7 until A.D. 14. He was therefore at this time out of office; but he was succeeded by no fewer than four of his sons and Caiaphas was his son-in-law. Therefore, although Caiaphas was the reigning high-priest, Annas was the power behind the throne. That is in fact why Jesus was brought first to him after his arrest (Jn.18:13) although at that time he was not in office. Luke associates his name with Caiaphas because, although Caiaphas was the actual high-priest, Annas was still the most influential priestly figure in the land.

Lk.3:4-6 are a quotation from Isa.40:3-5. When a king proposed to tour a part of his dominions in the east, he sent a courier before him to tell the people to prepare the roads. So John is regarded as the courier of the king. But the preparation on which he insisted was a preparation of heart and of life. "The king is coming," he said. "Mend, not your roads, but your lives." There is laid on everyone of us the duty to make life fit for the King to see.

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Luke 3:7-18

JOHN'S SUMMONS TO REPENTANCE

Luke 3:7-18

To the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, John used to say, "You spawn of vipers, who put it into your heads to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruits to match repentance. Do not begin to say among yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." The crowds asked him, "What are we to do?" He answered them, "Let him who has two robes give one to one who has none and let him who has food do likewise." The tax-collectors came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what are we to do?" He said to them, "Exact no more beyond what your instructions lay down." The soldiers, too, asked him, "What are we to do?" He said to them, "Treat no man with violence and do not play the false informer and be content with your pay."

When the people were in a state of expectancy and when they were all wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he could be the Anointed One, John answered them all, "I baptize you with water, but the One who is stronger than I is coming, the latchet of whose sandals I am not worthy to unloose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand to cleanse his threshing floor and he will gather the corn into his store but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Here we have the message of John to the people. Nowhere does the difference between John and Jesus stand out so clearly because, whatever the message of John was, it was not a gospel. It was not good news; it was news of terror.

John had lived in the desert. The face of the desert was covered with stubble and brushwood, as dry as tinder. Sometimes a spark set the face of the desert alight and out from their crannies came the vipers, scurrying in terror from the menacing flames. It was to them John likened the people who came to be baptized.

The Jews had not the slightest doubt that in God's economy there was a favoured nation clause. They held that God would judge other nations with one standard but the Jews with another. They, in fact, held that a man was safe from judgment simply in virtue of the fact that he was a Jew. A son of Abraham was exempt from judgment. John told them that racial privilege meant nothing; that life, not lineage, was God's standard of judgment.

There are three outstanding things about John's message.

(i) It began by demanding that men should share with one another. It was a social gospel which laid it down that God will never absolve the man who is content to have too much while others have too little.

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Luke 3:7-18

(ii) It ordered a man, not to leave his job, but to work out his own salvation by doing that job as it should be done. Let the tax-collector be a good tax-collector; let the soldier be a good soldier. It was a man's duty to serve God where God had set him.

A negro spiritual says:

There's a king and captain high,
And he's coming by and by,
And he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes,
You can hear his legions charging in the regions of the sky,
And he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.
There's a man they thrust aside,
Who was tortured till he died,
And he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.

He was hated and rejected,
He was scorned and crucified,
And he'll find me hoeing cotton when he comes.
When he comes! when he comes!
He'll be crowned by saints and angels when he comes,
They'll be shouting out Hosanna! to the man that men denied,
And I'll kneel among my cotton when he comes.

It was John's conviction that nowhere can a man serve God better than in his day's work.

(iii) John was quite sure that he himself was only the forerunner. The King was still to come and with him would come judgment. The winnowing fan was a great flat wooden shovel; with it the grain was tossed into the air; the heavy grain fell to the ground and the chaff was blown away. And just as the chaff was separated from the grain so the King would separate the good and bad.

So John painted a picture of judgment, but it was a judgment which a man could meet with confidence if he had discharged his duty to his neighbour and if he had faithfully done his day's work.

John was one of the world's supremely effective preachers. Once Chalmers was congratulated on a sermon. "Yes," he said, "but what did it do?" It is clear that John preached for action and produced it. He did not deal in theological subtleties but in life.

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Luke 3:19-20

THE ARREST OF JOHN

Luke 3:19-20

So then, urging the people with many other pleas, John preached the gospel to them. But, when Herod the tetrarch was rebuked by him concerning the matter of Herodias, his brother's wife, and concerning all the other wicked things he had done, he added this also to them all--he shut up John in prison.

John was so plain and blunt a preacher of righteousness that he was bound to run into trouble. In the end Herod arrested him. Josephus says that the reason for the arrest was that Herod "feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it in his power and inclination to raise a rebellion; for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise." That is no doubt true but the New Testament writers give a much more personal and immediate cause. Herod Antipas had married Herodias and John rebuked him for it.

The relationships involved in this marriage are extremely complicated. Herod the Great was a much-married man. Herod Antipas, who married Herodias and who arrested John, was the son of Herod the Great by a woman called Malthake. Herodias herself was the daughter of Aristobulus, who was the son of Herod the Great by Mariamne, commonly called the Hasmonean. As we have seen, Herod had divided up his realm between Archelaus, Herod Antipas and Herod Philip. He had another son, also called Herod, who was his son by another Mariamne, the daughter of a high priest. This Herod had no share in his father's realms and lived as a private citizen in Rome; he married Herodias. He was in fact her half-uncle, because her father (Aristobulus) and he were both sons of Herod by different wives. Herod Antipas, on a visit to Rome, seduced her from his half-brother and married her.

She was at one and the same time his sister-in-law, because she was married to his half-brother, and his niece because she was the daughter of Aristobulus, another half-brother.

The whole proceeding was utterly revolting to Jewish opinion and quite contrary to Jewish law, and indeed improper by any standard. It was a dangerous thing to rebuke an eastern tyrant, but John did so. The result was that he was arrested and imprisoned in the dungeon castle of Machaerus on the shores of the Dead Sea. There could be no greater cruelty than to take this child of the desert and shut him up in a dungeon cell. Ultimately he was beheaded to gratify the resentment of Herodias (Matt.14:5-12; Mk.6:17-29).

It is always dangerous to speak the truth; and yet although the man who allies himself with the truth may end in jail or on the scaffold, in the final count he is the victor. Once the Earl of Morton, who was regent of Scotland, threatened Andrew Melville, the reformer. "There will never," he slid menacingly. "be quietness in this country till half a dozen of you be hanged or banished." Melville answered him, "Tush! sir. Threaten not your courtiers in that fashion. It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or in the ground ... God be glorified, it will not lie in your power to hang nor exile his truth." Plato once said that the wise man will always choose to suffer wrong rather than to do wrong. We need only ask ourselves whether in the last analysis and at the final assize we would prefer to be Herod Antipas or John the Baptist.

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Luke 3:21-22

THE HOUR STRIKES FOR JESUS

Luke 3:21-22

When all the people had been baptized and when Jesus too had been baptized, as he was praying, the heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit in bodily form like a dove came down upon him and there was a voice from heaven. "You are my beloved son; in you I am well pleased."

The thinkers of the church have always sought an answer to the problem, "Why did Jesus go to John to be baptized?" The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance and it is our conviction that Jesus was without sin. Why then did he offer himself for this baptism? In the early church it was sometimes suggested, with a homely touch, that he did it to please Mary, his mother, and in answer to her entreaties; but we need a better reason than that.

In the life of every man there are certain definite stages, certain hinges on which his whole life turns. It was so with Jesus and every now and again we must stop and try to see his life as a whole. The first great hinge was the visit to the Temple when he was twelve, when he discovered his unique relationship to God. By the time of the emergence of John, Jesus was about thirty (Lk.3:23). That is to say at least eighteen years had passed. All through these years he must have been realizing more and more his own uniqueness. But still he remained the village carpenter of Nazareth. He must have known that a day must come when he must say good-bye to Nazareth and go out upon his larger task. He must have waited for some sign.

When John emerged the people flocked out to hear him and to be baptized. Throughout the whole country there was an unprecedented movement towards God. And Jesus knew that his hour had struck. It was not that he was conscious of sin and of the need of repentance. It was that he knew that he too must identify himself with this movement towards God. For Jesus the emergence of John was God's call to action; and his first step was to identify himself with the people in their search for God.

But in Jesus' baptism something happened. Before he could take this tremendous step he had to be sure that he was right; and in the moment of baptism God spoke to him. Make no mistake, what happened in the baptism was an experience personal to Jesus. The voice of God came to him and told him that he had taken the right decision. But more--far more--that very same voice mapped out all his course for him.

God said to him, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." That saying is composed of two texts. You are my beloved Son--that is from Ps.2:7 and was always accepted as a description of the Messianic King. In whom I am well pleased--that is part of Isa.42:1 and is from a description of the servant of the Lord whose portrait culminates in the sufferings of Isa.53. Therefore in his baptism Jesus realized, first, that he was the Messiah, God's Anointed King; and, second, that this involved not power and glory, but suffering and a cross. The cross did not come on Jesus unawares; from the first moment of realization he saw it ahead. The baptism shows us Jesus asking for God's approval and receiving the destiny of the cross.

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Luke 3:23-38

THE LINEAGE OF JESUS

Luke 3:23-38

When Jesus began his ministry he was about thirty years of age. He was the son (as it was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Jesus, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Symeon, the son of Judas, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nashon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Ami, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Pelag, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

This passage begins with the most suggestive statement. It tells us that when Jesus began his ministry he was no less than about thirty years of age. Why did he spend thirty years in Nazareth when he had come to be the saviour of the world? It is commonly said that Joseph died fairly young and that Jesus had to take upon himself the support of Mary and of his younger brothers and sisters, and that not until they were old enough to take the business on their own shoulders, did he feel free to leave Nazareth and go into the wider world. Whether that be so or not, three things are true.

(i) It was essential that Jesus should carry out with the utmost fidelity the more limited tasks of family duty before he could take up the universal task of saving the world. It was by his conscientiousness in the performance of the narrow duties of home that Jesus fitted himself for the great task he had to do. When he told the parable of the talents, the word to the faithful servants was, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much" (Matt.25:21,23). Beyond a doubt he was putting his own experience into words when he said that. When Sir James Barrie's mother died, he said, "I can look back and I cannot see the smallest thing undone." It was because Jesus faithfully performed the smallest duties that the greatest task in all the world was given him.

(ii) It gave him the opportunity to live out his own teaching. Had he always been a homeless, wandering teacher with no human ties or obligations, men might have said to him, "What right have you to talk about human duties and human relationships, you, who never fulfilled them?" But Jesus was able to say, not, "Do as I say," but, "Do as I have done." Tolstoy was the man who always talked about living the way of love; but his wife wrote poignantly of him, "There is so little genuine warmth about him; his kindness does not come from the heart, but merely from his principles. His biographies will tell of how he helped the labourers to carry buckets of water, but no one will ever

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Luke 3:23-38

know that he never gave his wife a rest and never--in all these thirty-two years--gave his child a drink of water or spent five minutes by his bedside to give me a chance to rest a little from all my labours." No one could ever speak like that of Jesus. He lived at home what he preached abroad.

(iii) If Jesus was to help men he had to know how men lived. And because he spent these thirty years in Nazareth, he knew the problems of making a living, the haunting insecurity of the life of the working man, the ill-natured customer, the man who would not pay his debts. It is the glory of the incarnation that we face no problem of life and living which Jesus did not also face.

Here we have Luke's genealogy of Jesus. The Jews were interested in genealogies. Genealogies, especially of the priests, who had to prove unbroken descent from Aaron, were kept amongst the public records. In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah we read of priests who lost their office because they could not produce their genealogy (Ezr.2:61-63; Neh.7:63-65).

But the problem of this genealogy is its relationship with that in Matt.1:1-17. The facts are these--only Luke gives the section from Adam to Abraham; the section from Abraham to David is the same in both; but the section from David to Joseph is almost completely different. Ever since men studied the New Testament they have tried to explain the differences.

(i) It is said that both genealogies are symbolic and that Matthew gives the royal descent of Jesus and Luke the priestly descent.

(ii) One of the earliest suggestions was that Matthew in fact gives the genealogy of Joseph and Luke of Mary.

(iii) The most ingenious explanation is as follows. In Matt.1:16 Joseph's father is Jacob; in Lk.3:23 it is Heli. According to the Jewish law of levirate marriage (Deut.25:5 f) if a man died childless his brother must, if free to do so, marry the widow and ensure the continuance of the line. When that happened a son of such a marriage could be called the son either of the first or of the second husband. It is suggested that Joseph's mother married twice. Joseph was in actual fact the son of Heli, the second husband, but he was in the eyes of the law the son of Jacob, the first husband who had died. It is then suggested that while Heli and Jacob had the same mother they had different fathers and that Jacob's father was descended from David through Solomon and Heli's father was descended from David through Nathan. This ingenious theory would mean that both genealogies are correct. In fact, all we can say is that we do not know.

Two things, however, are to be noted about the genealogy of Jesus which Luke gives.

(i) It stresses the real humanity of Jesus. It stresses the fact that he was a man amongst men. He was no phantom or demigod. To save men he became in the most real sense a man.

(ii) Matthew stops at Abraham; Luke goes right back to Adam. To Matthew, Jesus was the possession of the Jews; to Luke, he was the possession of all mankind, because his line is traced back not to the founder of the Jewish nation but to the founder of the human race. Luke removes the national and racial boundaries even from the ancestry of Jesus.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 4:1-13

THE BATTLE WITH TEMPTATION

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus came back from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and for forty days he was tempted by the devil; and in those days he ate nothing, and when they were completed he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you really are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It stands written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" He took him up and showed him in an instant of time all the kingdoms of the inhabited world. The devil said to him, "I will give you all this power and the glory of them, because it has been handed over to me, and I can give it to whomsoever I wish. If then you worship me all of it will be yours." Jesus answered him, "It stands written, 'You must worship the Lord God and him only must you serve.'" He brought him to Jerusalem and set him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and said to him, "If you really are the Son of God throw yourself down from here, for it stands written, 'He has given his angels instructions concerning you, to take care of you, and they will bear you up in their hands lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It has been said, 'You must not try to test the Lord your God.'" So when he had gone through the whole gamut of temptation, the devil left him for a time.

We have already seen how there were certain great milestones in the life of Jesus and here is one of the greatest. In the Temple when he was twelve there had come the realization that God was his Father in a unique way. In the emergence of John, the hour had struck and in his baptism God's approval had come. At this time Jesus was just about to begin his campaign. Before a man begins a campaign he must choose his methods. The temptation story shows us Jesus choosing once and for all the method by which he proposed to win men to God. It shows him rejecting the way of power and glory and accepting the way of suffering and the cross.

Before we go on to think of this story in detail there are two general points we must note.

(i) This is the most sacred of stories, for it can have come from no other source than his own lips. At some time he must have himself told his disciples about this most intimate experience of his soul.

(ii) Even at this time Jesus must have been conscious of quite exceptional powers. The whole point of the temptations is that they could have come only to a man who could do astonishing things. It is no temptation to us to turn stones into bread or leap from a Temple pinnacle, for the simple reason that it is impossible for us to do such things. These are temptations which could have come only to a man whose powers were unique and who had to decide how to use them.

First of all let us think of the scene, namely, the wilderness. The inhabited part of Judaea stood on the central plateau which was the backbone of Southern Palestine. Between it and the Dead Sea stretched a terrible wilderness, thirty-five by fifteen miles. It was called Jeshimmon, which means "The Devastation." The hills were like dust heaps; the limestone looked blistered and peeling; the rocks were bare and jagged; the ground sounded hollow to the horses' hooves; it glowed with heat

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Luke 4:1-13

like a vast furnace and ran out to the precipices, 1,200 feet high, which swooped down to the Dead Sea. It was in that awesome devastation that Jesus was tempted.

We must not think that the three temptations came and went like scenes in a play. We must rather think of Jesus deliberately retiring to this lonely place and for forty days wrestling with the problem of how he could win men. It was a long battle which never ceased until the cross and the story ends by saying that the tempter left Jesus--for a season.

(i) The first temptation was to turn stones into bread. This wilderness was not a wilderness of sand. It was covered by little bits of limestone exactly like loaves. The tempter said to Jesus, "If you want people to follow you, use your wonderful powers to give them material things." He was suggesting that Jesus should bribe people into following him. Back came Jesus' answer in a quotation of Deut.8:3. "A man," he said, "will never find life in material things."

The task of Christianity is not to produce new conditions, although the weight and voice of the church must be behind all efforts to make life better for men. Its real task is to produce new men; and given the new men, the new conditions will follow.

(ii) In the second temptation Jesus in imagination stood upon a mountain from which the whole civilized world could be seen. The tempter said, "Worship me, and all will be yours." This is the temptation to compromise. The devil said, "I have got people in my grip. Don't set your standards so high. Strike a bargain with me. Just compromise a little with evil and men will follow you." Back came Jesus' answer, "God is God, right is right and wrong is wrong. There can be no compromise in the war on evil." Once again Jesus quotes scripture (Deut.6:13; Deut.10; Deut.20).

It is a constant temptation to seek to win men by compromising with the standards of the world. G. K. Chesterton said that the tendency of the world is to see things in terms of an indeterminate grey; but the duty of the Christian is to see things in terms of black and white. As Carlyle said, "The Christian must be consumed by the conviction of the infinite beauty of holiness and the infinite damnability of sin."

(iii) In the third temptation Jesus in imagination saw himself on the pinnacle of the Temple where Solomon's Porch and the Royal Porch met. There was a sheer drop of 450 feet down into the Kedron Valley below. This was the temptation to give the people sensations. "No," said Jesus, "you must not make senseless experiments with the power of God" (Deut.6:16). Jesus saw quite clearly that if he produced sensations he could be a nine days' wonder: but he also saw that sensationalism would never last.

The hard way of service and of suffering leads to the cross, but after the cross to the crown.

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Luke 4:14-15

THE GALILAEAN SPRINGTIME

Luke 4:14-15

So Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee; and the story of him spread throughout the whole countryside. He kept on teaching in their synagogues; and he was held in high reputation by all.

No sooner had Jesus left the wilderness than he was faced with another decision. He knew that for him the hour had struck; he had settled once and for all the method he was going to take. Now he had to decide where he would start.

(i) He began in Galilee. Galilee was an area in the north of Palestine about fifty miles from north to south and twenty-five miles from east to west. The name itself means a circle and comes from the Hebrew word galiyl (HSN1551). It was so called because it was encircled by non-Jewish nations. Because of that, new influences had always played upon Galilee and it was the most forward-looking and least conservative part of Palestine. It was extraordinarily densely populated. Josephus, who was himself at one time governor of the area, says that it had 204 villages or towns, none with a population less than 15,000. It seems incredible that there could be some 3,000,000 people congregated in Galilee.

It was a land of extraordinary fertility. There was a proverb which said that, "It is easier to raise a legion of olive trees in Galilee than to bring up one child in Judaea." The wonderful climate and the superb water supply made it the garden of Palestine. The very list of trees which grew there shows how amazingly fertile it was--the vine, the olive, the fig, the oak, the walnut, the terebinth, the palm, the cedar, the cypress, the balsam, the fir-tree, the pine, the sycamore, the bay-tree, the myrtle, the almond, the pomegranate, the citron and the oleander.

The Galilaeans themselves were the Highlanders of Palestine. Josephus says of them, "They were ever fond of innovations and by nature disposed to changes, and delighted in seditions. They were ever ready to follow a leader who would begin an insurrection. They were quick in temper and given to quarrelling." "The Galilaeans," it was said, "have never been destitute of courage." "They were ever more anxious for honour than for gain."

That is the land in which Jesus began. It was his own land; and it would give him, at least at the beginning, an audience who would listen and kindle at his message.

(ii) He began in the synagogue. The synagogue was the real centre of religious life in Palestine. There was only one Temple; but the law said that wherever there were ten Jewish families there must be a synagogue; and so in every town and village it was in the synagogue that the people met to worship. There were no sacrifices in the synagogue. The Temple was designed for sacrifice; the synagogue for teaching. But how could Jesus gain an entry into the synagogue and how could he, a layman, the carpenter from Nazareth, deliver his message there?

In the synagogue service there were three parts.

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Luke 4:14-15

(a) The worship part in which prayer was offered.

(b) The reading of the scriptures. Seven people from the congregation read. As they read, the ancient Hebrew, which was no longer widely understood, was translated by the Targumist into Aramaic or Greek, in the case of the Law, one verse at a time, in the case of the prophets, three verses at a time.

(c) The teaching part. In the synagogue there was no professional ministry nor any one person to give the address; the president would invite any distinguished person present to speak and discussion and talk would follow. That is how Jesus got his chance. The synagogue and its platform were open to him at this stage.

(iii) The passage ends by saying that he was held in high reputation by all. This period of Jesus' ministry has been called the Galilaean springtime. He had come like a breath of the very wind of God. The opposition had not yet crystallized. Men's hearts were hungry for the word of life, and they had not yet realized what a blow he was to strike at the orthodoxy of his time. A man with a message will always command an audience.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 4:16-30

WITHOUT HONOUR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

Luke 4:16-30

So Jesus came to Nazareth where he had been brought up; and, as was his habit, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read the lesson. The roll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He opened the roll and found the passage where it is written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring the Good News to the poor. He has sent me to announce release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who have been bruised, to proclaim that the year which everyone is waiting for has come." And he folded up the roll and handed it back to the officer and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed intently on him. He began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears." And all witnessed to him and were amazed at the words of grace that came from his mouth.

And they said, "Is this not the son of Joseph?" He said to them, "You are bound to quote the proverb to me, 'Physician, heal yourself; we have heard about all that happened in Capernaum; do the same kind of things in your own home country.'" He said, "This is the truth that I tell you. No prophet is accepted in his own home country. In truth I tell you there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months and when there was a great famine all over the earth. And to none of them was Elijah sent but he was sent to Zarephath, to a widow of Sidon. There were many lepers in Israel in the times of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was healed; but Naaman the Syrian was." And the people in the synagogue were filled with anger as they listened to these things; and they rose up and hustled him out of the town.

They took him to the brow of the hill on which their town is built, to throw him down; but he passed through the midst of them and went upon his way.

One of Jesus' very early visits was to Nazareth, his home town. Nazareth was not a village. It is called a polis (GSN4172) which means a town or city; and it may well have had as many as 20,000 inhabitants. It stood in a little hollow in the hills on the lower slopes of Galilee near the Plain of Jezreel. But a boy had only to climb to the hilltop above the town and he could see an amazing panorama for miles around.

Sir George Adam Smith described the scene from the hilltop. The history of Israel stretched out before the watcher's eye. There was the plain of Esdraelon where Deborah and Barak had fought; where Gideon had won his victories; where Saul had crashed to disaster and Josiah had been killed in battle; there was Naboth's vineyard and the place where Jehu slaughtered Jezebel; there was Shunem where Elisha had lived; there was Carmel where Elijah had fought his epic battle with the prophets of Baal; and, blue in the distance, there was the Mediterranean and the isles of the sea.

Not only the history of Israel was there; the world unfolded itself from the hilltop above Nazareth. Three great roads skirted it. There was the road from the south carrying pilgrims to Jerusalem. There was the great Way of the Sea which led from Egypt to Damascus with laden caravans moving along it. There was the great road to the east bearing caravans from Arabia and Roman legions marching out to the eastern frontiers of the Empire. It is wrong to think of Jesus as

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Luke 4:16-30

being brought up in a backwater; he was brought up in a town in sight of history and with the traffic of the world almost at its doors.

We have already described the synagogue service and this passage gives us a vivid picture of it in action. It was not a book which Jesus took, for at this time everything was written on rolls. It was from Isa.61 that he read. In Lk.4:20 the King James Version speaks misleadingly of the minister. The official in question was the Chazzan. He had many duties. He had to take out and put back the sacred rolls of scripture; he had to keep the synagogue clean; he had to announce the coming of the Sabbath with three blasts of the silver trumpet from the synagogue roof; and he was also the teacher in the village school. Lk.4:20 says that Jesus sat down. That gives us the impression that he was finished. In point of fact it means that he was about to start, because the speaker gave the address seated and Rabbis taught sitting down. (compare our own phrase, a professor's chair).

What angered the people was the apparent compliment that Jesus paid to gentiles. The Jews were so sure that they were God's people that they utterly despised all others. They believed that "God had created the gentiles to be fuel for the fires of hell." And here was this young Jesus, whom they all knew, preaching as if the gentiles were specially favoured by God. It was beginning to dawn upon them that there were things in this new message the like of which they had never dreamed.

We must note two other things.

(i) It was Jesus' habit to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. There must have been many things with which he radically disagreed and which grated on him--yet he went. The worship of the synagogue might be far from perfect; yet Jesus never omitted to join himself to God's worshipping people on God's day.

(ii) We have only to read the passage of Isaiah that Jesus read to see the difference between Jesus and John the Baptist. John was the preacher of doom and at his message men must have shuddered with terror. It was a gospel--Good News--which Jesus brought. Jesus, too, knew the wrath of God but it was always the wrath of love.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 4:31-37

THE SPIRIT OF AN UNCLEAN DEVIL

Luke 4:31-37

Jesus came down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and he was teaching them on the Sabbath day; and they were astonished at his teaching because his speech was with authority. There was in the synagogue a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon and he cried out with a loud voice, "What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God." So Jesus rebuked it. "Be muzzled," he said, "and come out of him." And after the demon had thrown him into the midst of them, it came out of him and it did him no harm. Astonishment fell on them all and they kept saying to each other, "What word is this? because he gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and with power and they come out." And the story of him went out to every place in the surrounding district.

We would have liked to know as much about Capernaum as we do about Nazareth, but the strange fact is that there is even doubt as to the site of this lake-side town where so much of Jesus' mighty work was done.

This passage is specially interesting because it is the first in Luke where we encounter demon possession. The ancient world believed that the air was thickly populated with evil spirits which sought entry into men. Often they did enter a man through food or drink. All illness was caused by them. The Egyptians believed there were thirty-six different parts of the human body and any of them could be entered and controlled by one of these evil spirits. There were spirits of deafness, of dumbness, of fever; spirits which took a man's sanity and wits away; spirits of lying and of deceit and of uncleanness. It was such a spirit that Jesus exorcised here.

To many people this is a problem. On the whole, modern thought regards belief in spirits as something primitive and superstitious which men have outgrown. Yet Jesus seemed to believe in them. There are three possibilities.

(i) Jesus actually did believe in them. If that is so, as far as scientific knowledge went he was not in advance of his own age but under all the limitations of contemporary medical thought. There is no need to refuse such a conclusion for, if Jesus was really a man, in scientific things he must have had the knowledge then open to men.

(ii) Jesus did not believe in them. But the sufferer did believe intensely and Jesus could cure people only by assuming their beliefs about themselves to be true. If a person is ill and someone says to him, "There's nothing wrong with you," that is no help. The reality of the pain has to be admitted before a cure can follow. The people believed they were possessed of devils and Jesus, like a wise doctor, knew he could not heal them unless he assumed that their view of their trouble was real.

(iii) Modern thought has been swinging round to the admission that perhaps there is something in demons after all. There are certain troubles which have no bodily cause as far as can be discovered.

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Luke 4:31-37

There is no reason why the man is ill, but he is ill. Since there is no physical explanation some now think there must be a spiritual one and that demons may not be so unreal after all.

The people were astonished at Jesus' power--and no wonder. The east was full of people who could exorcise demons. But their methods were weird and wonderful. An exorcist would put a ring under the afflicted person's nose; he would recite a long spell; and then all of a sudden there would be a splash in a basin of water which he had put near to hand--and the demon was out! A magical root called Baaras was specially effective. When a man approached it, it shrank into the ground unless gripped, and to grip it was certain death. So the ground round it was dug away; a dog was tied to it; the struggles of the dog tore up the root; and when the root was torn up the dog died, as a substitute for a man. What a difference between all this hysterical paraphernalia and the calm single word of command of Jesus! It was his sheer authority which staggered them.

Jesus' authority was something quite new. When the Rabbis taught they supported every statement with quotations. They always said, "There is a saying that . . ." "Rabbi so and so said that . . ." They always appealed to authority. When the prophets spoke, they said, "Thus saith the Lord." Theirs was a delegated authority. When Jesus spoke, he said, "I say to you." He needed no authorities to buttress him; his was not a delegated authority; he was authority incarnate. Here was a man who spoke as one who knew.

In every sphere of life the expert bears an air of authority. A musician tells how when Toscanini mounted the rostrum authority flowed from him and the orchestra felt it. When we need technical advice we call in the expert. Jesus is the expert in life. He speaks and men know that this is beyond human argument--this is God.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 4:38-39

A MIRACLE IN A COTTAGE

Luke 4:38-39

Jesus left the synagogue and came into Simon's house; and Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a major fever. They asked him to do something for her. He stood over her and rebuked the fever and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.

Here Luke the doctor writes. In the grip of a major fever--every word is a medical term. In the grip of is the medical Greek for someone definitely laid up with an illness. The Greek medical writers divided fevers into two classes--major and minor. Luke knew just how to describe this illness.

There are three great truths in this short incident.

(i) Jesus was always ready to serve. He had just left the synagogue. Every preacher knows what it is like after a service. Virtue is gone out of him; he has need of rest. The last thing he wants is a crowd of people and a fresh call upon him. But no sooner had Jesus left the synagogue and entered Peter's house than the insistent cry of human need was at him. He did not claim that he was tired and must rest; he answered it without complaint.

The Salvation Army people tell of a Mrs. Berwick in the days of the London blitzes. She had been in charge of the Salvation Army's social work in Liverpool and had retired to London. People had strange ideas during the blitzes and they had the idea that somehow Mrs Berwick's house was safe; and so they gathered there. Though she had retired, the instinct to help was still with her. She got together a simple first-aid box and then put a notice in her window, "If you need help, knock here." Always Jesus was ready to help; his followers must be the same.

(ii) Jesus did not need a crowd to work a miracle. Many a man will put out an effort in a crowd that he will not make among his own private circle. Many a man is at his best in society and at his worst at home. All too commonly we are gracious, courteous, obliging to strangers and the very opposite when there is no one but our own folk to see. But Jesus was prepared to put out all his power in a village cottage in Capernaum when the crowds were gone.

(iii) When Peter's mother-in-law was cured immediately she began to serve them. She realized that she had been given back her health to spend it in the service of others. She wanted no fussing and no petting; she wanted to get on with cooking and serving her own folk and Jesus. Mothers are always like that. We would do well to remember that if God gave us the priceless gift of health and strength, he gave it that we might use it always in the service of others.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 4:40-44

THE INSISTENT CROWDS

Luke 4:40-44

When the sun was setting all who had friends who were ill with all kinds of sicknesses brought them to Jesus; and he laid his hands upon each one of them and cured them. Out of many there came demons, shouting out and saying, "You are the Son of God." And he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Anointed One. When day came, he went out and went to a desert place; and the crowds kept looking for him and they tried to restrain him so that he would not go away from them; but he said to them, "I must tell the Good News of the Kingdom of God to other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do."

(i) Early in the morning Jesus went out to be alone. He was able to meet the insistent needs of men only because he first companied with God. Once, in the 1914-18 war, a staff conference was due to begin. All were present except Marshal Foch, the commander-in-chief. An officer who knew him well said, "I think I know where we may find him." He led them round to a ruined chapel close beside General Headquarters and there, before the shattered altar, the great soldier was kneeling in prayer. Before he met men he must first meet God.

(ii) There is no word of complaint or resentment when Jesus' privacy was invaded by the crowds. Prayer is great but in the last analysis human need is greater. Florence Allshorn, the great missionary teacher, used to run a training college for missionaries. She knew human nature and she had little time for people who suddenly discovered that their quiet hour was due just when the dishes were to be washed! Pray we must; but prayer must never be an escape from reality. Prayer cannot preserve a man from the insistent cry of human need. It must prepare him for it; and sometimes he will need to rise from his knees too soon and get to work--even when he does not want to.

(iii) Jesus would not let the demons speak. Over and over again we get on Jesus' lips this injunction to silence. Why? For this very good reason--the Jews had their own popular ideas of the Messiah. To them the Messiah was to be a conquering king who would set his foot upon the eagle's neck and sweep the Romans from Palestine. Palestine was in an inflammable condition. Rebellion was always just below the surface and often broke out. Jesus knew that if the report went out that he was the Messiah the revolutionaries would be ready to flare up. Before men could call him Messiah, he had to teach them that Messiah meant not a conquering king but a suffering servant. His injunctions to silence were given because people did not yet know what Messiahship meant, and if they started out with the wrong ideas death and destruction would surely follow.

(iv) Here is the first mention of the kingdom of God in Luke's gospel. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God (Mk. 1:15). That was the essence of his message. What did he mean by the kingdom of God? For Jesus the kingdom was three things at the same time.

(a) It was past. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were in the kingdom and they had lived centuries ago (Lk. 13:28).

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Luke 4:40-44

(b) It was present. "The kingdom," he said, "is within you, or among you" (Lk.17:21).

(c) It was future. It was something which God was still to give and for which men must ever pray.

How can the kingdom be all these things at the same time? Turn to the Lord's Prayer. There are two petitions in it side by side. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in Heaven (Matt.6:10). Now the Hebrews, as any verse of the psalms will show, had a way of saying things twice; and always the second way explained, or developed, or amplified the first way. Put these two phrases together--Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. The second explains the first; therefore, the kingdom of God is a society upon earth where Gods will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. If any man in the past has perfectly done God's will, he is in the kingdom; if any man does it now, he is in the kingdom; but the day when all men will do that will is still far distant, therefore the consummation is still to come; and so the kingdom is past and present and future all at the same time.

Other men do that will spasmodically, sometimes obeying, sometimes disobeying. Only Jesus always did it perfectly. That is why he is the foundation and the incarnation of the kingdom. He came to enable all men to do the same. To do God's will is to be a citizen of the kingdom of God. We may well pray-- "Lord, bring in thy kingdom, beginning with me."

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:1-11

THE CONDITIONS OF A MIRACLE

Luke 5:1-11

Jesus was standing on the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret while the crowds pressed in upon him to listen to the word of God. He saw two boats riding close to the shore. the fishermen had disembarked from them and were washing their nets. He embarked on one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to push out a little from the land. He sat down and continued to teach the crowds from the boat. When he stopped speaking, he said to Simon, "Push out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have toiled all night long and we caught nothing; but, if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so they enclosed a great crowd of fishes; their nets were torn with the numbers; so they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and they rifled both the boats so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this he fell at Jesus' knees.

"Leave me, Lord," he said, "because I am a sinful man." Wonder gripped him and afl who were with him at the number of fishes they had caught. It was the same with James and John, Zebedee's sons, who were partners with Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "From now on you will be catching men." So they brought the boats to land and they left everything and followed him.

The famous sheet of water in Galilee is called by three names--the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret. It is thirteen miles long by eight miles wide. It lies in a dip in the earth's surface and is 680 feet below sea level. That fact gives it an almost tropical climate. Nowadays it is not very populous but in the days of Jesus it had nine townships clustered round its shores, none of fewer than 15,000 people.

Gennesaret is really the name of the lovely plain on the west side of the lake, a most fertile piece of land. The Jews loved to play with derivations, and they had three derivations for Gennesaret all of which show how beautiful it was.

(i) From kinnowr (HSN3658), which means a harp, either because "its fruit is as sweet as the sound of a harp" or because "the voice of its waves is pleasant as the voice of the harp,"

(ii) From gan (HSN1588), a garden, and sar (HSN8269), a prince--hence "the prince of gardens."

(iii) From gan (HSN1588), a garden, and `osher (HSN6239), riches--hence "the garden of riches."

We are here confronted with a turning point in the career of Jesus. Last time we heard him preach he was in the synagogue; now he is at the lakeside. True, he will be back in the synagogue again; but the time is coming when the door of the synagogue will be shut to him and his church will be the lakeside and the open road, and his pulpit a boat. He would go anywhere where men would listen to him.

"Our societies," said John Wesley, "were formed from those who were wandering upon the dark mountains, that belonged to no Christian church; but were awakened by the preaching of the Methodists, who had pursued them through the wilderness of this world to the High-ways and the Hedges--to the Markets and the Fairs--to the Hills and the Dales--who set up the Standard of the

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Luke 5:1-11

Cross in the Streets and Lanes of the Cities, in the Villages, in the Barns, and Farmers' Kitchens, etc.--and all this done in such a way, and to such an extent, as never had been done before since the Apostolic age." "I love a commodious room," said Wesley, "a soft cushion and a handsome pulpit, but field preaching saves souls." When the synagogue was shut Jesus took to the open road.

There is in this story what we might call a list of the conditions of a miracle.

(i) There is the eye that sees. There is no need to think that Jesus created a shoal of fishes for the occasion. In the Sea of Galilee there were phenomenal shoals which covered the sea as if it was solid for as much as an acre. Most likely Jesus' keen eye saw just such a shoal and his keen sight made it look like a miracle. We need the eye that really sees. Many people saw steam raise the lid of a kettle; only James Watt went on to think of a steam engine. Many people saw an apple fall; only Isaac Newton went on to think out the law of gravity. The earth is full of miracles for the eye that sees.

(ii) There is the spirit that will make an effort. If Jesus said it, tired as he was Peter was prepared to try again. For most people the disaster of life is that they give up just one effort too soon.

(iii) There is the spirit which will attempt what seems hopeless. The night was past and that was the time for fishing. All the circumstances were unfavourable, but Peter said, "Let circumstances be what they may, if you say so, we will try again." Too often we wait because the time is not opportune. If we wait for a perfect set of circumstances, we will never begin at all. If we want a miracle, we must take Jesus at his word when he bids us attempt the impossible.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:12-15

TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE

Luke 5:12-15

While Jesus was in one of the towns--look you--a man who was a severe case of leprosy saw him. He fell before him and besought him, "Lord, if you are willing to do so you are able to cleanse me." Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him. Jesus enjoined him to tell no one. "But," he said, "go and show yourself to the priest, and bring the offering for cleansing, as Moses's law laid it down, to prove to them that you are cured." Talk about him spread all the more; and many crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their illnesses.

In Palestine there were two kinds of leprosy. There was one which was rather like a very bad skin disease, and it was the less serious of the two. There was one in which the disease, starting from a small spot, ate away the flesh until the wretched sufferer was left with only the stump of a hand or a leg. It was literally a living death.

The regulations concerning leprosy are in Lev.13-14. The most terrible thing about it was the isolation it brought. The leper was to cry "Unclean! Unclean!" wherever he went; he was to dwell alone; "in a habitation outside the camp" (Lev.13:45-46). He was banished from the society of men and exiled from home. The result was, and still is, that the psychological consequences of leprosy were as serious as the physical.

Dr. A. B. MacDonald, in an article on the leper colony in Itu, of which he was in charge, wrote, "The leper is sick in mind as well as body. For some reason there is an attitude to leprosy different from the attitude to any other disfiguring disease. It is associated with shame and horror, and carries, in some mysterious way, a sense of guilt, although innocently acquired like most contagious troubles. Shunned and despised, frequently do lepers consider taking their own lives and some do."

The leper was hated by others until he came to hate himself. That is the kind of man who came to Jesus; he was unclean; and Jesus touched him.

(i) Jesus touched the untouchable. His hand went out to the man from whom everyone else would have shrunk away. Two things emerge. First, when we despise ourselves, when our hearts are filled with bitter shame, let us remember, that, in spite of all, Christ's hand is still stretched out. Mark Rutherford wished to add a new beatitude, "Blessed are those who heal us of our self-despisings." That is what Jesus did and does. Second, it is of the very essence of Christianity to touch the untouchable, to love the unlovable, to forgive the unforgivable. Jesus did--and so must we.

(ii) Jesus sent the man to carry out the normal, prescribed routine for cleansing. The regulations are described in Lev.14. That is to say a miracle did not dispense with what medical science of the time could do. It did not absolve the man from carrying out the prescribed rules. We will never get miracles by neglecting the gifts and the wisdom God has given us. It is when man's skill combines with God's grace that wonder happens.

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Luke 5:12-15

(iii) Lk.5:15 tells us of the popularity Jesus enjoyed. But it was only because people wanted something out of him. Many desire the gifts of God but repudiate the demands of God--and, there could be nothing more dishonourable.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:16-17

THE OPPOSITION INTENSIFIES

Luke 5:16-17

Jesus withdrew into the desert places and he continued in prayer. On a certain day he was teaching and, sitting listening, there were Pharisees and experts in the law who had come from every village in Galilee and from Judaea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was there to enable him to heal.

There are only two verses here; but as we read them we must pause, for this indeed is a milestone. The scribes and the Pharisees had arrived on the scene. The opposition which would never be satisfied until it had killed Jesus had emerged into the open.

If we are to understand what happened to Jesus we must understand something about the Law, and the relationship of the scribes and the Pharisees to it. When the Jews returned from Babylon about 440 B.C. they knew well that, humanly speaking, their hopes of national greatness were gone. They therefore deliberately decided that they would find their greatness in being a people of the law. They would bend all their energies to knowing and keeping God's law.

The basis of the law was the Ten Commandments. These commandments are principles for life. They are not rules and regulations; they do not legislate for each event and for every circumstance. For a certain section of the Jews that was not enough. They desired not great principles but a rule to cover every conceivable situation. From the Ten Commandments they proceeded to develop and elaborate these rules.

Let us take an example. The commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy"; and then goes on to lay it down that on the Sabbath no work must be done (Exo.20:8-11). But the Jews asked, "What is work?" and went on to define it under thirty-nine different heads which they called "Fathers of Work." Even that was not enough. Each of these heads was greatly sub-divided. Thousands of rules and regulations began to emerge. These were called the Oral Law, and they began to be set even above the Ten Commandments.

Again, let us take an actual example. One of the works forbidden on the Sabbath was carrying a burden. Jer.17:21-24 says, "Take heed for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day." But, the legalists insisted, a burden must be defined. So definition was given. A burden is "food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye-salve, paper enough to write a custom-house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters, reed enough to make a pen" . . . and so on endlessly. So for a tailor to leave a pin or needle in his robe on the Sabbath was to break the law and to sin; to pick up a stone big enough to fling at a bird on the Sabbath was to sin. Goodness became identified with these endless rules and regulations.

Let us take another example. To heal on the Sabbath was to work. It was laid down that only if life was in actual danger could healing be done; and then steps could be taken only to keep the sufferer from getting worse, not to improve his condition. A plain bandage could be put on a

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Luke 5:16-17

wound, but not any ointment; plain wadding could be put into a sore ear, but not medicated. It is easy to see that there was no limit to this.

The scribes were the experts in the law who knew all these rules and regulations, and who deduced them from the law. The name Pharisee means "The Separated One"; and the Pharisees were those who had separated themselves from ordinary people and ordinary life in order to keep these rules and regulations. Note two things. First, for the scribes and Pharisees these rules were a matter of life and death; to break one of them was deadly sin. Second, only people desperately in earnest would ever have tried to keep them, for they must have made life supremely uncomfortable. It was only the best people who would even make the attempt.

Jesus had no use for rules and regulations like that. For him, the cry of human need superseded all such things. But to the scribes and Pharisees he was a law-breaker, a bad man who broke the law and taught others to do the same. That is why they hated him and in the end killed him. The tragedy of the life of Jesus was that those who were most in earnest about their religion drove him to the Cross. It was the irony of things that the best people of the day ultimately crucified him.

From this time on there was to be no rest for him. Always he was to be under the scrutiny of hostile and critical eyes. The opposition had crystallized and there was but one end.

Jesus knew this and before he met the opposition he withdrew to pray. The love in the eyes of God compensated him for the hate in the eyes of men. The approval of God nerved him to meet the criticism of men. He drew strength for the battle of life from the peace of God--and it is enough for the disciple that he should be as his Lord.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:18-26

FORGIVEN AND HEALED

Luke 5:18-26

Now--look you--there came men bearing on a bed a man who was paralysed, and they were trying to carry him in and to lay him before Jesus. When they could find no way to carry him in because of the crowd they climbed up on to the roof and they let him down, bed and all, through the tiles right into the middle of them in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." The scribes and Pharisees began to raise questions. "Who," they said, "is this who insults God? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus was well aware of what they were thinking.

He answered, "What are you thinking about in your hearts? Which is easier--to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (he said to the paralysed man), I tell you rise, take up your bed, and go to your own house." And immediately he stood up in front of them and lifted up the bedding on which he was lying and went away to his house, glorifying God. Astonishment gripped them all and they glorified God and were filled with awe. "To-day," they said, "we have seen amazing things."

Here we have a vivid story. Jesus was in a house teaching. The Palestinian house was flat-roofed. The roof had only the slightest tilt, sufficient to make the rain water run off. It was composed of beams laid from wall to wall and quite a short distance apart. The space between the beams was filled with close packed twigs, compacted together with mortar and then marled over. It was the easiest thing in the world to take out the packing between two beams. In fact coffins were very often taken in and out of a house via the roof.

What does the passage about forgiving sins mean? We must remember that sin and suffering were in Palestine inextricably connected. It was implicitly believed that if a man was suffering he had sinned. And therefore the sufferer very often had an even morbid sense of sin. That is why Jesus began by telling the man that his sins were forgiven. Without that the man would never believe that he could be cured. This shows how in debate the scribes and Pharisees were completely routed. They objected to Jesus claiming to extend forgiveness to the man. But on their own arguments and assumptions the man was ill because he had sinned; and if he was cured that was proof that his sins were forgiven. The complaint of the Pharisees recoiled on them and left them speechless.

The wonderful thing is that here is a man who was saved by the faith of his friends. When Jesus saw their faith--the eager faith of those who stopped at nothing to bring their friend to Jesus won his cure. It still happens.

(i) There are those who are saved by the faith of their parents. Carlyle used to say that still across the years there came his mother's voice to him, "Trust in God and do the right." When Augustine was living a reckless and immoral life his devout mother came to ask the help of a Christian bishop. "It is impossible," he said, "that the child of such prayers and tears should perish." Many of us would gladly witness that we owe all that we are and ever will be to the faith of godly parents.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:18-26

(ii) There are those who are daily saved by the faith of those who love them. When H. G. Wells was newly married and success was bringing new temptations to him, he said, "It was as well for me that behind the folding doors at 12 Mornington Road there slept one so sweet and clean that it was unthinkable that I should appear before her squalid or drunken or base." Many of us would do the shameful thing but for the fact that we could not meet the pain and sorrow in someone's eyes.

In the very structure of life and love--blessed be God--there are precious influences which save men's souls.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:27-32

THE GUEST OF AN OUTCAST

Luke 5:27-32

After that Jesus went out, and he saw a tax-collector, called Levi, sitting at his tax-collector's table. He said to him, "Follow me!" He left everything and rose and followed him. And Levi made a great feast for him in his house; and a great crowd of tax-collectors and others who were their friends sat down at table with them. The Pharisees and scribes complained at this, and said to the disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered, "Those who are healthy have no need of a doctor but those who are ill have. I did not come to invite the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Here we have the call of Matthew (compare Matt.9:9-13). Of all people in Palestine the tax-collectors were the most hated. Palestine was a country subject to the Romans; tax-collectors had taken service under the Roman government; therefore they were regarded as renegades and traitors.

The taxation system lent itself to abuse. The Roman custom had been to farm out the taxes. They assessed a district at a certain figure and then sold the right to collect that figure to the highest bidder. So long as the buyer handed over the assessed figure at the end of the year he was entitled to retain whatever else he could extract from the people; and since there were no newspapers, radio or television, and no ways of making public announcements that would reach everyone, the common people had no real idea of what they had to pay.

This particular system had led to such gross abuses that by New Testament times it had been discontinued. There were, however, still taxes to be paid, still quisling tax-collectors working for the Romans, and still abuses and exploitation.

There were two types of taxes. First, there were stated taxes. There was a poll tax which all men from 14 to 65, and all women from 12 to 65, had to pay simply for the privilege of existing. There was a ground tax which consisted of one-tenth of all grain grown, and one-fifth of wine and oil. This could be paid in kind or commuted into money. There was income tax, which was one per cent. of a man's income. In these taxes there was not a great deal of room for extortion.

Second, there were all kinds of duties. A tax was payable for using the main roads, the harbours, the markets. A tax was payable on a cart, on each wheel of it, and on the animal which drew it. There was purchase tax on certain articles, and there were import and export duties. A tax-collector could bid a man stop on the road and unpack his bundles and charge him well nigh what he liked. If a man could not pay, sometimes the tax-collector would offer to lend him money at an exorbitant rate of interest and so get him further into his clutches.

Robbers, murderers and tax-collectors were classed together. A tax-collector was barred from the synagogue. A Roman writer tells us that he once saw a monument to an honest tax-collector. An honest specimen of this renegade profession was so rare that he received a monument.

Yet Jesus chose Matthew the tax-collector to be an apostle.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:27-32

(i) The first thing Matthew did was to invite Jesus to a feast--he could well afford it--and to invite his fellow tax-collectors and their outcast friends to meet him. Matthew's first instinct was to share the wonder he had found. John Wesley once said, "No man ever went to Heaven alone; he must either find friends or make them." It is a Christian duty to share the blessedness that we have found.

(ii) The scribes and Pharisees objected. The Pharisees--the separated ones--would not even let the skirt of their robe touch the like of Matthew. Jesus made the perfect answer. Once Epictetus called his teaching "the medicine of salvation." Jesus pointed out that it is only sick people who need doctors; and people like Matthew and his friends were the very people who needed him most. It would be well if we were to regard the sinner not as a criminal but as a sick man; and if we were to look on the man who has made a mistake not as someone deserving contempt and condemnation but as someone needing love and help to find the right way.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:33-35

THE HAPPY COMPANY

Luke 5:33-35

They said to him, "John's disciples fast frequently and pray. So do the disciples of the Pharisees; but your disciples eat and drink." Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them. But the days will come--and when the bridegroom is taken away from them in those days they will fast."

What amazed and shocked the scribes and the Pharisees was the normality of the followers of Jesus. Collie Knox tells how once a well-loved chaplain said to him, "Young Knox, don't make an agony of your religion." It was said of Burns that he was haunted rather than helped by his religion. The orthodox Jews had an idea--not yet altogether dead--that a man was not being religious unless he was being uncomfortable.

They had systematised their religious observances. They fasted on Mondays and Thursdays; and often they whitened their faces so that no one could fail to see that they were fasting. True, fasting was not so very serious because it lasted only from sunrise to sunset and after that ordinary food could be taken. The idea was to call God's attention to the faster. Sometimes they even thought of it in terms of sacrifice. By fasting a man was in essence offering nothing less than his own flesh to God. Even prayer was systematised. Prayer was to be offered at 12 midday, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Jesus was opposed radically to religion by rule. He used a vivid picture. When two young people married in Palestine they did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home, and for a week kept open house. They dressed in their best; sometimes they even wore crowns; for that week they were king and queen and their word was law. They would never have a week like that again in their hard-wrought lives. And the favoured guests who shared this festive week were called the children of the bride-chamber.

(i) It is extremely significant that more than once Jesus likened the Christian life to a wedding feast. Joy is a primary Christian characteristic. It was said of a famous American teacher by one of her students, "She made me feel as if I was bathed in sunshine." Far too many people think of Christianity as something which compels them to do all the things they do not want to do and hinders them from doing all the things they do want to do. Laughter has become a sin, instead of--as a famous philosopher called it--"a sudden glory." Robert Louis Stevenson was right, when he wrote in *The Celestial Surgeon*:

If I have faltered more or less
In my great task of happiness;
If I have moved among my race
And shown no glorious morning face;
If beams from happy human eyes
Have moved me not; if morning skies,
Books, and my food, and summer rain
Knocked on my sullen heart in vain:

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:33-35

Lord, thy most pointed pleasure take
And stab my spirit broad awake;
Or, Lord, if too obdurate I,
Choose thou, before that spirit die,
A piercing pain, a killing sin,
And to my dead heart run them in!

(ii) At the same time Jesus knew there would come a day when the bridegroom would be taken away. He was not caught unawares by death. Ahead he saw the cross; but even on the way to the cross he knew the joy that no man can take away, because it is the joy of the presence of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:36-39

THE NEW IDEA

Luke 5:36-39

He spoke a parable to them like this: "Nobody puts a patch from a new garment on an old garment. If he does the new will tear it and the patch from the new will not match the old. No one puts new wine into old skins. If he does the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new skins, and no one who drinks old wine wishes for new for he says, 'The old is good.'"

There is in religious people a kind of passion for the old. Nothing moves more slowly than a church. The trouble with the Pharisees was that the whole religious outlook of Jesus was so startlingly new they simply could not adjust to it.

The mind soon loses the quality of elasticity and will not accept new ideas. Jesus used two illustrations. "You cannot put a new patch on an old garment," he said, "The strong new cloth will only rip the rent in the old cloth wider." Bottles in Palestine were made of skin. When new wine was put into them it fermented and gave off gas. If the bottle was new, there was a certain elasticity in the skin and it gave with the pressure; but if it was old, the skin was dry and hard and it would burst. "Don't," says Jesus, "let your mind become like an old wineskin. People say of wine, 'The old is better.' It may be at the moment, but they forget that it is a mistake to despise the new wine, for the day will come when it has matured and it will be best of all."

The whole passage is Jesus' condemnation of the shut mind and a plea that men should not reject new ideas.

(i) We should never be afraid of adventurous thought. If there is such a person as the Holy Spirit, God must ever be leading us into new truth. Fosdick somewhere asks, "How would medicine fare if doctors were restricted to drugs and methods and techniques three hundred years old?" And yet our standards of orthodoxy are far older than that. The man with something new has always to fight. Galileo was branded a heretic when he held that the earth moved round the sun. Lister had to fight for antiseptic technique in surgical operations. Simpson had to battle against opposition in the merciful use of chloroform. Let us have a care that when we resent new ideas we are not simply demonstrating that our minds are grown old and inelastic; and let us never shirk the adventure of thought.

(ii) We should never be afraid of new methods. That a thing has always been done may very well be the best reason for stopping doing it. That a thing has never been done may very well be the best reason for trying it. No business could exist on outworn methods--and yet the church tries to. Any business which had lost as many customers as the church has would have tried new ways long ago--but the church tends to resent all that is new.

Once on a world tour Rudyard Kipling saw General Booth come aboard the ship. He came aboard to the beating of tambourines which Kipling's orthodox soul resented. Kipling got to know the General and told him how he disliked tambourines and all their kindred. Booth looked at him.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 5:36-39

"Young man," he said, "if I thought I could win one more soul for Christ by standing on my head and beating a tambourine with my feet I would learn how to do it."

There is a wise and an unwise conservatism. Let us have a care that in thought and in action we are not hidebound reactionaries when we ought, as Christians, to be gallant adventurers.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:1-5

THE INCREASING OPPOSITION

Luke 6:1-5

One Sabbath day, Jesus happened to be going through the corn fields, and his disciples were plucking the ears of corn and rubbing them in their hands and eating them. Some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is illegal to do on the Sabbath?" Jesus answered, "Have you not read what David did when he and his comrades were hungry?--how he went into the house of God and took the loaves of the presence and ate them and gave them to his comrades, although it is not legal for any but the priests to eat them. The Son of Man," he said to them, "is the Lord of the Sabbath."

This is the first of two incidents which show the opposition to Jesus rapidly coming out into the open and which make it clear that the immediate charge against him was that he was a breaker of the Sabbath law. He and his disciples were passing Along one of the paths which intersected the corn fields. The fact that the disciples plucked the ears of corn was in itself no crime. One of the merciful laws of the Old Testament laid it down that anyone passing through a corn field was free to pluck the corn so long as he did not put a sickle into it (Deut.23:25). On any other day there would have been no complaint; but this was the Sabbath. Four of the forbidden kinds of work were reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing food; and technically the disciples had broken every one of them. By plucking the corn they were guilty of reaping; by rubbing it in their hands of threshing; by flinging away the husks of winnowing; and the very fact that they ate it showed that they had prepared food on the Sabbath.

To us the whole thing seems fantastic; but we must remember that to a strict Pharisee this was deadly sin; rules and regulations had been broken; this was a matter of life and death.

They made their accusation and Jesus quoted the Old Testament to them. He quoted the incident in 1Sam.21:1-6 when David and his comrades, when they were very hungry, ate the shewbread of the Tabernacle. A better name for it is the Bread of the Presence. Every Sabbath morning there were laid before God twelve wheaten loaves baked of flour sieved no fewer than eleven times. There was one loaf for every tribe. In the time of Jesus these loaves were laid on a table of solid gold, three feet long, one and a half feet broad, and nine inches high. The table stood lengthwise along the northern side of the Holy Place. The bread stood for the very presence of God and none but the priests might eat of it (Lev.24:5-9). But David's need had taken precedence over rules and regulations.

The Rabbis themselves said, "The Sabbath is made for you and not you for the Sabbath." That is to say at their highest and their best the Rabbis admitted that human need abrogated ritual law. If that be so, how much more is the Son of Man, with his heart of love and mercy, Lord of the Sabbath? How much more can he use it for his purposes of love? But the Pharisees had forgotten the claims of mercy because they were immersed in their rules and regulations. It is most significant that they were watching Jesus and his disciples as they passed through the corn fields. Clearly they were spying; from now on every act of Jesus' life was to be scrutinised by those bleak and critical and hostile eyes.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:1-5

This passage contains a great general truth. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Have you not read what David did?" The answer of course was, "Yes"--but they had never seen what it meant. It is possible to read scripture meticulously, to know the Bible inside out from cover to cover, to be able to quote it verbatim and to pass any examination on it--and yet completely miss its real meaning. Why did the Pharisees miss the meaning--and why do we so often miss it?

(i) They did not bring to scripture an open mind. They came to scripture not to learn God's will but to find proof texts to buttress up their own ideas. Far too often men have taken their theology to the Bible instead of finding their theology in the Bible. When we read scripture we must say, not, "Listen, Lord, for thy servant is speaking," but, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant is listening."

(ii) They did not bring a needy heart. The man who comes with no sense of need always misses the deepest meaning of scripture. When need awakens, the Bible is a new book. When Bishop Butler was dying he was troubled. "Have you forgotten, my lord," said his chaplain, "that Jesus Christ is a saviour?" "But," said the dying bishop, "how can I know that he is a saviour for me?" "It is written," said the chaplain, "him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." And Butler answered, "I have read these words a thousand times and I never saw their meaning until now. Now I die in peace." The sense of need unlocked for him the treasury of scripture.

When we read God's book we must bring to it the open mind and the needy heart--and then to us also it will be the greatest book in the world.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:6-11

THE DEFIANCE OF JESUS

Luke 6:6-11

On another Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and was teaching, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The Scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see if he would heal on the Sabbath day in order to find a charge against him. He knew well what they were thinking. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Rise, and stand in the midst." He rose and stood. Jesus said to them, "Here is a question for you--is it legal to do good on the Sabbath day or to do evil? To save a life or to destroy it?" He looked round on them and said to him, "Stretch out your hand." He did so and his hand was restored. They were filled with insane anger, and they discussed with each other what they could do to Jesus.

By this time the opposition to Jesus was quite open. He was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day and the scribes and Pharisees were there with the set purpose of watching him so that, if he healed, they could charge him with breaking the Sabbath. There is this interesting touch. If we compare the story in Matt. 12:10-13 and Mk. 3:1-6 with Luke's version, we find that only Luke tells us that it was the man's right hand which was withered. There speaks the doctor, interested in the details of the case.

In this incident Jesus openly broke the law. To heal was to work and work was prohibited on the Sabbath day. True, if there was any danger to life, steps might be taken to help a sufferer. For instance, it was always legal to treat diseases of the eye or throat. But this man was in no danger of his life; he might have waited until the next day without peril. But Jesus laid down the great principle that, whatever the rules and regulations may say, it is always right to do a good thing on the Sabbath day. He asked the piercing questions, "Is it legal to save life or to destroy it on the Sabbath?" That must have struck home, for while he was seeking to help the life of the man, they were doing all they could to destroy him. It was he who was seeking to save and they who were seeking to destroy.

In this story there are three characters.

(i) There is the man with the withered hand. We can tell two things about him.

(a) One of the apocryphal gospels, that is, one which never gained admission into the New Testament, tells us that he was a stone mason and he came to Jesus, begging his help and saying, "I was a stone mason earning my living with my hand; I beseech you, Jesus, give me back my health that I may not have to beg my bread with shame." He was a man who wanted to work. God always looks with approval on the man who wants to do an honest day's work.

(b) He was a man who was prepared to attempt the impossible. He did not argue when Jesus told him to stretch out his useless hand; he tried and, in the strength Jesus gave him, he succeeded. Impossible is a word which should be banished from the vocabulary of the Christian. As a famous scientist said, "The difference between the difficult and the impossible is only that the impossible takes a little longer to do."

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:6-11

(ii) There is Jesus. There is in this story a glorious atmosphere of defiance. Jesus knew that he was being watched but without hesitation he healed. He bade the man stand out in the midst. This thing was not going to be done in a corner. There is a story of one of Wesley's preachers who proposed to preach in a hostile town. He hired the town-crier to announce the meeting and the town-crier announced it in a terrified whisper. The preacher took the bell from him and rang it and thundered out. "Mr. So and So will preach in such and such a place and at such and such a time to-night--and I am the man." The real Christian displays with pride the banner of his faith and bids the opposition do its worst.

(iii) There are the Pharisees. Here were men who took the quite extraordinary course of hating a man who had just cured a sufferer. They are the outstanding example of men who loved their rules and regulations more than they loved God. We see this happen in churches over and over again. Disputes are not about the great matters of the faith but about matters of church government and the like. Leighton once said, "The mode of church government is unconstrained; but peace and concord, kindness and goodwill are indispensable." There is an ever present danger of setting loyalty to a system above loyalty to God.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:12-19

JESUS CHOOSES HIS MEN

Luke 6:12-19

In these days Jesus went away into a mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came he called his disciples. From them he chose twelve, whom he also called apostles--Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. He came down with them and took his stand with them on a place in the plain; and there was a great crowd of his disciples there, and a great crowd of people from all Judaea and Jerusalem and from the coastal district of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to listen to him and to be healed from their diseases; and those who were distressed by unclean spirits were healed and the whole crowd sought to touch him because power went out from him, and he healed all.

Here we see Jesus choosing his men. It is interesting and salutary to see why he chose them, because it is for the same reasons that he still wants and needs men.

(i) Mk.3:14 tells us that he chose them that they might be with him. That means two things.

(a) He chose them to be his friends. It is amazing that Jesus needed human friendship. It is of the very essence of the Christian faith that we can say in all reverence and humility that God cannot be happy without men. Just because God is Father there is a blank in his heart until the last man comes home.

(b) Jesus knew that the end was coming. Had he lived in a later age he might have written a book which would have carried his teaching all over the world. But, living when he did, Jesus chose these men that he might write his message upon them. They were to be his living books. They were to company with him that they might some day take his message to all men.

(ii) Jesus chose them from his disciples. The word disciple means a learner. They were to be those who were always learning more and more about him. A Christian is a man whose whole life is spent learning about that Lord whom he will some day meet face to face and will then know even as he is known.

(iii) Jesus chose them to be his apostles. The Greek word apostolos (GSN0652) means someone who is sent out. It can be used for an envoy or an ambassador. They were to be his ambassadors to men. A little girl received in the Sunday School a lesson on the disciples. She did not get the word quite right because she was very young; and she came home and told her parents that she had been learning about Jesus' samples. The ambassador is the man who in a foreign land represents his country. He is supremely the sample of his country. The Christian is ever sent to be an ambassador for Christ, not only by his words but by his life and deeds.

About the Twelve themselves we may note two things.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:12-19

(i) They were very ordinary men. There was not a wealthy, nor a famous, nor an influential man amongst them; they had no special education; they were men of the common folk. It is as if Jesus said, "Give me twelve ordinary men and I will change the world." The work of Jesus is not in the hands of men whom the world calls great, but in the hands of ordinary people like ourselves.

(ii) They were a strange mixture. To take but two of them--Matthew was a tax-collector, and, therefore, a traitor and a renegade. Simon was a Zealot, and the Zealots were fanatical nationalists, who were sworn to assassinate every traitor and every Roman they could. It is one of the miracles of the power of Christ that Matthew the tax-collector and Simon the Zealot could live at peace in the close company of the apostolic band. When men are really Christian the most diverse and divergent types can live at peace together. It was said of Gilbert Chesterton and his brother Cecil, "They always argued, they never quarrelled." It is only in Christ that we can solve the problem of living together; because even the most opposite people may be united in their love for him. If we really love him, we will also love each other.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:20-26

THE END OF THE WORLD'S VALUES

Luke 6:20-26

Jesus lifted up his eyes upon his disciples and said, "Happy are you poor, because yours is the Kingdom of God. Happy are you who are hungry now because you will be filled. Happy are you who weep now because you will laugh. Happy are you when men will hate you and shut you off from their company and insult you and cast out your name as an evil name, for the sake of the Son of Man; for--look you--your reward in heaven will be great. Their fathers used to treat the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich because you have all the comfort you are going to get. Woe to you who are filled because you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now because you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is what your fathers used to do to the false prophets."

Luke's Sermon on the Plain and Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5-7) closely correspond. Both start with a series of beatitudes. There are differences between the versions of Matthew and Luke, but this one thing is clear--they are a series of bombshells. It may well be that we have read them so often that we have forgotten how revolutionary they are. They are quite unlike the laws which a philosopher or a typical wise man might lay down. Each one is a challenge.

As Deissmann said, "They are spoken in an electric atmosphere. They are not quiet stars but flashes of lightning followed by a thunder of surprise and amazement." They take the accepted standards and turn them upside down. The people whom Jesus called happy the world would call wretched; and the people Jesus called wretched the world would call happy. Just imagine anyone saying, "Happy are the poor, and, Woe to the rich!" To talk like that is to put an end to the world's values altogether.

Where then is the key to this? It comes in Lk.6:24. There Jesus says, "Woe to you who are rich because you have all the comfort you are going to get." The word Jesus uses for have is the word used for receiving payment in full of an account. What Jesus is saying is this, "If you set your heart and bend your whole energies to obtain the things which the world values, you will get them--but that is all you will ever get." In the expressive modern phrase, literally, you have had it! But if on the other hand you set your heart and bend all your energies to be utterly loyal to God and true to Christ, you will run into all kinds of trouble, you may by the world's standards look unhappy, but much of your payment is still to come; and it will be joy eternal.

We are here face to face with an eternal choice which begins in childhood and never ends till life ends. Will you take the easy way which yields immediate pleasure and profit? or, Will you take the hard way which yields immediate toil and sometimes suffering? Will you seize on the pleasure and the profit of the moment? or, Are you willing to look ahead and sacrifice them for the greater good? Will you concentrate on the world's rewards? or, Will you concentrate on Christ? If you take the world's way, you must abandon the values of Christ. If you take Christ's way, you must abandon the values of the world.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:20-26

Jesus had no doubt which way in the end brought happiness. F. R. Maltby said, "Jesus promised his disciples three things--that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble." G. K. Chesterton, whose principles constantly got him into trouble, once said, "I like getting into hot water. It keeps you clean!" It is Jesus' teaching that the joy of heaven will amply compensate for the trouble of earth. As Paul said, "This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2Cor.4:17). The challenge of the beatitudes is, "Will you be happy in the world's way, or in Christ's way?"

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 6:27-38

THE GOLDEN RULE

Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said, "But to you who are listening I say, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-use you. To him who strikes you on one cheek offer the other cheek also. If anyone takes away your cloak, do not stop him taking your tunic, too. Give to everyone who asks you; if anyone takes away your belongings, do not demand them back again. As you would like men to act towards you, so do you act towards them. If you love those who love you, what special grace is there in that? Even sinners love those who love them. If you are kind to those who are kind to you, what special grace is there in that? Even sinners love those who love them. If you are kind to those who are kind to you, what special grace is there in that? Even sinners do that. If you lend to those from whom you wish to get, what special grace is in that? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to get as much back again.

But you must love your enemies; and do good to them; and lend with no hope of getting anything in return. Your reward will be great and you will be the sons of the Most High, because he is kind both to the thankless and to the wicked. Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful; do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. People will give into your bosom, good measure pressed together, shaken down, running over; for with what measure you measure it will be measured to you back again."

There is no commandment of Jesus which has caused so much discussion and debate as the commandment to love our enemies. Before we can obey it we must discover what it means. In Greek there are three words for to love. There is *eran* (compare GSN2037), which describes passionate love, the love of a man for a maid. There is *philein* (GSN5368), which describes our love for our nearest and dearest, the warm affection of the heart. Neither of these two words is used here; the word used here is *agapan* (GSN0025), which needs a whole paragraph to translate it.

Agapan (GSN0025) describes an active feeling of benevolence towards the other person; it means that no matter what that person does to us we will never allow ourselves to desire anything but his highest good; and we will deliberately and of set purpose go out of our way to be good and kind to him. This is most suggestive. We cannot love our enemies as we love our nearest and dearest. To do so would be unnatural, impossible and even wrong. But we can see to it that, no matter what a man does to us, even if he insults, ill-treats and injures us, we will seek nothing but his highest good.

One thing emerges from this. The love we bear to our dear ones is something we cannot help. We speak of falling in love; it is something which happens to us. But this love towards our enemies is not only something of the heart; it is something of the will. It is something which by the grace of Christ we may will ourselves to do.

This passage has in it two great facts about the Christian ethic.

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Luke 6:27-38

(i) The Christian ethic is positive. It does not consist in not doing things but in doing them. Jesus gave us the Golden Rule which bids us do to others as we would have them do to us. That rule exists in many writers of many creeds in its negative form. Hillel, one of the great Jewish Rabbis, was asked by a man to teach him the whole law while he stood on one leg. He answered, "What is hateful to thee, do not to another. That is the whole law and all else is explanation." Philo, the great Jew of Alexandria, said, "What you hate to suffer, do not do to anyone else." Isocrates, the Greek orator, said.

"What things make you angry when you suffer them at the hands of others, do not you do to other people." The Stoics had as one of their basic rules, "What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not you do to any other." When Confucius was asked, "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?" he answered, "Is not Reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

Every one of these forms is negative. It is not unduly difficult to keep yourself from such action; but it is a very different thing to go out of your way to do to others what you would want them to do to you. The very essence of Christian conduct is that it consists, not in refraining from bad things, but in actively doing good things.

(ii) The Christian ethic is based on the extra thing. Jesus described the common ways of sensible conduct and then dismissed them with the question, "What special grace is in that?" So often people claim to be just as good as their neighbours. Very likely they are. But the question of Jesus is, "How much better are you than the ordinary person?" It is not our neighbour with whom we must compare ourselves; we may well stand that comparison very adequately; it is God with whom we must compare ourselves; and in that comparison we are all in default.

(iii) What is the reason for this Christian conduct? The reason is that it makes us like God, for that is the way he acts. God sends his rain on the just and the unjust. He is kind to the man who brings him joy and equally kind to the man who grieves his heart. God's love embraces saint and sinner alike. It is that love we must copy; if we, too, seek even our enemy's highest good we will in truth be the children of God.

Lk.6:38 has the strange phrase, "People will give into your bosom." The Jew wore a long loose robe down to the feet, and round the waist a girdle. The robe could be pulled up so that the bosom of the robe above the girdle formed a kind of outsize pocket in which things could be carried. So the modern equivalent of the phrase would be, "People will fill your pocket."

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Luke 6:39-46

RULES FOR LIFE AND LIVING

Luke 6:39-46

Jesus spoke a parable to them: "Surely a blind man cannot lead a blind man? If he tries to do so will not both fall into the ditch? The disciple cannot advance beyond his teacher, but every disciple will be equipped as his teacher is. Why do you look at the speck of dust that is in your brother's eye and never notice the plank that is in your own eye? Or, how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck of dust that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not notice the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite! First put the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to put out the speck of dust that is in your brother's eye. There is no good tree which produces rotten fruit; nor again, is there a rotten tree which produces good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not gather figs from thistles nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. The good man produces good from the treasure of his heart. The evil man produces evil from the evil.

The mouth speaks out of whatever abounds in the heart."

This reads like a disconnected series of separate sayings. Two things are possible. It may well be that Luke is collecting together here sayings of Jesus which were spoken on different occasions and so giving us a kind of compendium of rules for life and living. Or, this may be an instance of the Jewish method of preaching. The Jews called preaching "charaz" (HSN2737), which means stringing beads. The Rabbis held that the preacher must never linger more than a few moments on any topic but, in order to maintain interest, must move quickly from one topic to another. Jewish preaching, therefore, often gives us the impression of being disconnected.

The passage falls into four sections.

(i) Lk.6:39-40. Jesus warned that no teacher can lead his scholars beyond the stage which he himself has reached. That is a double warning to us. In our learning we must seek only the best teacher for only he can lead us farthest on; in our teaching we must remember that we cannot teach what we do not know.

(ii) Lk.6:41-42. Here is an example of the humour of Jesus. It must have been with a smile that Jesus drew the picture of a man with a plank in his own eye trying to extract a speck of dust from someone else's eye. He taught that we have no right to criticize unless we ourselves are free of faults. That simply means that we have no right to criticise at all, because "there is so much bad in the best of us and so much good in the worst of us that it ill becomes any of us to find fault with the rest of us."

(iii) Lk.6:43-44 remind us that a man cannot be judged in any other way than by his deeds. It was said to a teacher, "I cannot hear what you say for listening to what you are." Teaching and preaching are both "truth through personality." Fine words will never take the place of fine deeds. That is very relevant to-day. We fear the menace of communism and of other secular movements. We will never defeat them by writing books and pamphlets and holding discussion groups. The

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only way to prove the superiority of Christianity is to show by our lives that it produces better men and women.

(iv) Lk.6:45. In this verse Jesus reminded men that the words of their lips are in the last analysis the product of their hearts. No man can speak of God with his mouth unless God's Spirit be in his heart. Nothing shows the state of a man's heart so well as the words he speaks when he is not carefully considering his words, when he is talking freely and saying, as we put it, the first thing which comes into his head. If you ask directions to a certain place, one person may tell you it is near such and such a church; another, that it is near such and such a cinema; another, that it is near such and such a football ground; another, that it is near such and such a public house. The very words of the answer to a chance question often show where a man's thoughts most naturally turn and where the interests of his heart lie. Always our speech betrays us.

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Luke 6:47-49

THE ONLY SURE FOUNDATION

Luke 6:47-49

Jesus said, "Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not what I say? I will show you what everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and does them is like. He is like a man building a house, who dug deep down into the earth and laid the foundation on a rock. When the flood rose the river dashed against that house but it could not shake it because it was well founded. But he who has listened to me and has not done what I say is like a man who built his house on the top of earth without any foundation. The river dashed against it and immediately it collapsed, and great was the fall of it."

To get the real picture behind this parable we have to read Matthew's version of it as well. (Matt. 7:24-27.) In Luke's version the river does not seem to make sense; that is because Luke was not a native of Palestine and had not a clear picture of the circumstances in his own mind; whereas Matthew did belong to Palestine and knew just what the picture was. In summer many of the rivers dried up altogether and left a sandy bed empty of water. But in winter, after the September rains had come, the empty river bed became a raging torrent. Many a man, looking for a site for a house, found an inviting stretch of sand and built there, only to discover when the winter came, that he had built his house in the middle of a raging river which swept it away. The wise man searched for rock, where it was much more difficult to build and where it was hard labour to cut out the foundations. When the wild winter weather came, his toil was amply repaid, for his house stood strong and firm and secure.

In either form the parable teaches the importance of laying the right foundation for life; the only true foundation is obedience to the teaching of Jesus.

What made the foolish builder choose so unwisely?

(i) He wanted to avoid toil. He could not be bothered to dig into the rock. The sand was much more attractive and much less trouble. It may be easier to take our way than it is to take Jesus' way but the end is ruin; Jesus' way is the way to security here and hereafter.

(ii) He was short-sighted. He never troubled to think what his chosen site would be like six months afterwards. In every decision in life there is a short view and a long view. Happy is the man who never barter future good for present pleasure. Happy is the man who sees things, not in the light of the moment, but in the light of eternity.

When we learn that the hard way is often the best way, and that the long view is always the right view, we will found our lives upon the teaching of Jesus and no storms will ever shake them.

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Luke 7:1-10

A SOLDIER'S FAITH

Luke 7:1-10

When Jesus had completed all his words in the hearing of the people, he went into Capernaum. The servant of a certain centurion was so ill that he was going to die, and he was very dear to him. When he heard about Jesus he sent some Jewish elders to him and asked him to come and save his servant's life. They came to Jesus and strenuously urged him to come. "He is," they said, "a man who deserves that you should do this for him, for he loves our nation and has himself built us our synagogue." So Jesus went with them. When he was now quite near the house the centurion sent friends to him. "Sir," he said, "do not trouble yourself. I am not worthy that you should come under my roof; nor do I count myself fit to come to you; but just speak a word and my servant will be cured. For I myself am a man under orders, and I have soldiers under me, and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him.

He turned to the crowd who were following him and said, "I tell you I have not found such great faith not even in Israel." And those who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant completely cured.

The central character is a Roman centurion; and he was no ordinary man.

(i) The mere fact that he was a centurion meant he was no ordinary man. A centurion was the equivalent of a regimental sergeant-major; and the centurions were the backbone of the Roman army. Wherever they are spoken of in the New Testament they are spoken of well (compare Lk.23; Lk.47; Ac.10:22; Ac.22:26; Ac.23:17,23,24; Ac.24:23; Ac.27:43). Polybius, the historian, describes their qualifications. They must be not so much "seekers after danger as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over anxious to rush into the fight; but when hard pressed they must be ready to hold their ground and die at their posts." The centurion must have been a man amongst men or he would never have held the post which was his.

(ii) He had a completely unusual attitude to his slave. He loved this slave and would go to any trouble to save him. In Roman law a slave was defined as a living tool; he had no rights; a master could ill-treat him and even kill him if he chose. A Roman writer on estate management recommends the farmer to examine his implements every year and to throw out those which are old and broken, and to do the same with his slaves. Normally when a slave was past his work he was thrown out to die. The attitude of this centurion to his slave was quite unusual.

(iii) He was clearly a deeply religious man. A man needs to be more than superficially interested before he will go the length of building a synagogue. It is true that the Romans encouraged religion from the cynical motive that it kept people in order. They regarded it as the opiate of the people. Augustus recommended the building of synagogues for that very reason. As Gibbon said in a famous sentence, "The various modes of religion which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful." But this centurion was no administrative cynic; he was a sincerely religious man.

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(iv) He had an extremely unusual attitude to the Jews. If the Jews despised the gentiles, the gentiles hated the Jews. Anti-semitism is not a new thing. The Romans called the Jews a filthy race; they spoke of Judaism as a barbarous superstition; they spoke of the Jewish hatred of mankind; they accused the Jews of worshipping an ass's head and annually sacrificing a gentile stranger to their God. True, many of the gentiles, weary of the many gods and loose morals of paganism, had accepted the Jewish doctrine of the one God and the austere Jewish ethic. But the whole atmosphere of this story implies a close bond of friendship between this centurion and the Jews.

(v) He was a humble man. He knew quite well that a strict Jew was forbidden by the law to enter the house of a gentile (Ac.10:28); just as he was forbidden to allow a gentile into his house or have any communication with him. He would not even come to Jesus himself. He persuaded his Jewish friends to approach him. This man who was accustomed to command had an amazing humility in the presence of true greatness.

(vi) He was a man of faith. His faith is based on the soundest argument. He argued from the here and now to the there and then. He argued from his own experience to God. If his authority produced the results it did, how much more must that of Jesus? He came with that perfect confidence which looks up and says, "Lord, I know you can do this." If only we had a faith like that, for us too the miracle would happen and life become new.

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Luke 7:11-17

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST

Luke 7:11-17

Next, after that, Jesus was on his way to a town called Nain; and his disciples and a great crowd accompanied him on the journey. When he came near the gate of the town--look you--a man who had died was being carried out to burial. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. There was a great crowd of towns-people with her. When the Lord saw her he was moved to the depths of his heart for her and said to her, "Don't go on weeping!" He went up and touched the bier. Those who were carrying it stood still. "Young man," he said, "I tell you, rise!" And the dead man sat up and began to speak. And he gave him back to his mother. And awe gripped them all. They glorified God saying, "A great prophet has been raised up amongst us," and, "God has graciously visited his people." This story about him went out in all Judaea and all the surrounding countryside.

In this passage, as in the one immediately preceding, once again Luke the doctor speaks. In Lk.7:10 the word we translated completely cured is the technical medical term for sound in wind and limb. In Lk.7:15 the word used for sitting up is the technical term for a patient sitting up in bed.

Nain was a day's journey from Capernaum and lay between Endor and Shunem, where Elisha, as the old story runs, raised another mother's son (2Kgs.4:18-37). To this day, ten minutes' walk from Nain on the road to Endor there is a cemetery of rock tombs in which the dead are laid.

In many ways this is the loveliest story in all the gospels.

(i) It tells of the pathos and the poignancy of human life. The funeral procession would be headed by the band of professional mourners with their flutes and their cymbals, uttering in a kind of frenzy their shrill cries of grief. There is all the ageless sorrow of the world in the austere and simple sentence, "He was his mother's only son and she was a widow."

"Never morning wore to evening
But some heart did break."

In Shelley's Adonais, his lament for Keats, he writes,

"As long as skies are blue, and fields are green,
Evening must usher night, night urge the morrow,
Month follow month with woe, and year wake year to sorrow."

Virgil, the Roman poet, in an immortal phrase spoke about "The tears of things"--sunt lacrimae rerum. In the nature of things we live in a world of broken hearts.

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Luke 7:11-17

(ii) To the pathos of human life, Luke adds the compassion of Christ. Jesus was moved to the depths of his heart. There is no stronger word in the Greek language for sympathy and again and again in the gospel story it is used of Jesus (Matt.14:14; Matt.15:32; Matt.20:34; Mk.1:41; Mk.8:2).

To the ancient world this must have been a staggering thing. The noblest faith in antiquity was Stoicism. The Stoics believed that the primary characteristic of God was apathy, incapability of feeling. This was their argument. If someone can make another sad or sorry, glad or joyful, it means that, at least for the moment, he can influence that other person. If he can influence him that means that, at least for the moment, he is greater than he. Now, no one can be greater than God; therefore, no one can influence God; therefore, in the nature of things, God must be incapable of feeling.

Here men were presented with the amazing conception of one who was the Son of God being moved to the depths of his being.

"In ev'ry pang that rends the heart.
The Man of sorrows has a part."

For many that is the most precious thing about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(iii) To the compassion of Jesus, Luke adds the power of Jesus. He went up and touched the bier. It was not a coffin, for coffins were not used in the east. Very often long wicker-work baskets were used for carrying the body to the grave. It was a dramatic moment. As one great commentator says, "Jesus claimed as his own what death had seized as his prey."

It may well be that here we have a miracle of diagnosis; that Jesus with those keen eyes of his saw that the lad was in a cataleptic trance and saved him from being buried alive, as so many were in Palestine. It does not matter; the fact remains that Jesus claimed for life a lad who had been marked for death. Jesus is not only the Lord of life; he is the Lord of death who himself triumphed over the grave and who has promised that, because he lives, we shall live also (Jn.14:19).

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Luke 7:18-29

THE FINAL PROOF

Luke 7:18-29

John's disciples told him about all these things; so John called two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord saying, "Are you he who is to come, or, are we to look for another?" When they arrived, the men said to him, "John, the Baptizer, has sent us to you. Are you the One who is to come," he asks, "or are we to look for another?" At that time he cured many of their diseases and afflictions and of evil spirits, and to many blind people he gave the gift of sight. "Go," he answered them, "and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind recover their sight; the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear; the dead are raised up; the poor have the Good News told to them; and blessed is he who does not find a stumbling-block in me."

When John's messengers had gone away, Jesus began to say to the crowds concerning John, "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothes? Look you--those who wear expensive clothes and live in luxury are in royal palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and something more than a prophet. This is he of whom it stands written-- 'Look you, I send my messenger before you to prepare your way before you.' I tell you there is no one greater amongst those born of women than John. But he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." When the people and the tax-collectors heard this they called God righteous for they had been baptized with John's baptism.

John sent emissaries to Jesus to ask if he really was the Messiah or if they must look for someone else.

(i) This incident has worried many because they have been surprised at the apparent doubt in the mind of John. Various explanations have been advanced.

(a) It is suggested that John took this step, not for his own sake, but for the sake of his disciples. He was sure enough; but they had their qualms and he desired that they should be confronted with proof unanswerable.

(b) It is suggested that John wished to hurry Jesus on because he thought it was time Jesus moved towards decisive action.

(c) The simplest explanation is the best. Think what was happening to John. John, the child of the desert and of the wide-open spaces, was confined in a dungeon cell in the castle of Machaerus. Once, one of the Macdonalds, a highland chieftain, was confined in a little cell in Carlisle Castle. In his cell was one little window. To this day you may see in the sandstone the marks of the feet and hands of the highlander as he lifted himself up and clung to the window ledge day by day to gaze with infinite longing upon the border hills and valleys he would never walk again. Shut in his cell, choked by the narrow walls, John asked his question because his cruel captivity had put tremors in his heart.

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Luke 7:18-29

(ii) Note the proof that Jesus offered. He pointed at the facts. The sick and the suffering and the humble poor were experiencing the power and hearing the word of the Good News. Here is a point which is seldom realized--this is not the answer John expected. If Jesus was God's anointed one, John would have expected him to say, "My armies are massing. Caesarea, the headquarters of the Roman government, is about to fall. The sinners are being obliterated. And judgment has begun." He would have expected Jesus to say, "The wrath of God is on the march." but Jesus said, "The mercy of God is here." Let us remember that where pain is soothed and sorrow turned to joy, where suffering and death are vanquished, there is the kingdom of God. Jesus' answer was, "Go back and tell John that the love of God is here."

(iii) After John's emissaries had gone, Jesus paid his own tribute to him. People had crowded out into the desert to see and hear John and they had not gone to see a reed shaken by the wind. That may mean one of two things.

(a) Nothing was commoner by Jordan's banks than a reed shaken by the wind. It was in fact a proverbial phrase for the commonest of sights. It may then mean that the crowds went out to see no ordinary sight.

(b) It may stand for fickleness. It was no vacillating, swaying character men went out to see like a swaying reed, but a man immovable as a mighty tree.

They had not gone out to see some soft effeminate soul, like the silk-clad courtiers of the royal palace.

What then had they gone to see?

(a) First, Jesus pays John a great tribute. All men expected that before God's anointed king arrived upon the earth, Elijah would return to prepare the way and act as his herald (Mal.4:5). John was the herald of the Highest.

(b) Second, Jesus states quite clearly the limitations of John. The least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. Why? Some have said that it was because John had wavered, if but for a moment, in his faith. It was not that. It was because John marked a dividing line in history. Since John's proclamation had been made, Jesus had come; eternity had invaded time; heaven had invaded earth; God had arrived in Jesus; life could never be the same again. We date all time as before Christ and after Christ--B.C. and A.D. Jesus is the dividing line. Therefore, all who come after him and who receive him are of necessity granted a greater blessing than all who went before. The entry of Jesus into the world divided all time into two; and it divided all life in two. If any man be in Christ he is a new creation (2Cor.5:17).

As Bilney, the martyr said, "When I read that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, it was as if day suddenly broke on a dark night."

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 7:30-35

THE PERVERSITY OF MEN

Luke 7:30-35

But the Pharisees and the scribes frustrated God's purpose for themselves because they were not baptized by him. "To whom," asked Jesus, "will I compare the men of this generation? And to whom are they like? They are like children seated in the market place who call to one another, 'We have piped to you, and you did not dance. We have sung you a dirge and you did not weep.' John the Baptizer came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you say, 'Look! a gluttonous man and a wine-drinker, the friend of tax-collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is justified by her children."

This passage has two great warnings in it.

(i) It tells of the perils of free-will. The scribes and the Pharisees had succeeded in frustrating God's purpose for themselves. The tremendous truth of Christianity is that the coercion of God is not of force but of love. It is precisely there that we can glimpse the sorrow of God. It is always love's greatest tragedy to look upon some loved one who has taken the wrong way and to see what might have been, what could have been and what was meant to have been. That is life's greatest heartbreak.

Sir William Watson has a poem called *Lux Perdita*, the "Lost Light."

"These were the weak, slight hands
That might have taken this strong soul, and bent
Its stubborn substance to thy soft intent,
And bound it unresisting with such bands
As not the arm of envious heaven had rent.

These were the calming eyes
That round my pinnacle could have stilled the sea,
And drawn thy voyager home, and bid him be
Pure with their pureness, with their wisdom wise,
Merged in their light, and greatly lost in thee.

But thou--thou passedst on,
With whiteness clothed of dedicated days,
Cold, like a star; and me in alien ways
Thou leftest, following life's chance lure, where shone
The wandering gleam that beckons and betrays."

It is true that,

"Of all sad words of tongue and pen
The saddest are those, 'It might have been.'"

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Luke 7:30-35

God's tragedy, too, is the might have been of life. As G. K. Chesterton said, "God had written not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage managers, who had since made a great mess of it." God save us from making shipwreck of life and bringing heartbreak to himself by using our freewill to frustrate his purposes.

(ii) It tells of the perversity of men. John had come, living with a hermit's austerity, and the scribes and Pharisees had said that he was a mad eccentric and that some demon had taken his wits away. Jesus had come, living the life of men and entering into all their activities, and they had taunted him with loving earth's pleasures far too much. We all know the days when a child will grin at anything and the moods when nothing will please us. The human heart can be lost in a perversity in which any appeal God may make will be met with wilful and childish discontent.

(iii) But there are the few who answer; and God's wisdom is in the end justified by those who are his children. Men may misuse their freewill to frustrate God's purposes; men in their perversity may be blind and deaf to all his appeal. Had God used the force of coercion and laid on man the iron bonds of a will that could not be denied, there would have been a world of automata and a world without trouble. But God chose the dangerous way of love, and love in the end will triumph.

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Luke 7:36-50

A SINNER'S LOVE

Luke 7:36-50

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table; and--look you--there was a woman in the town, a bad woman. She knew that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, so she took an alabaster phial of perfume and stood behind him, beside his feet, weeping. She began to wash his feet with tears, and she wiped them with the hairs of her head; and she kept kissing his feet and anointing them with the perfume. When the Pharisee, who had invited him, saw this, he said to himself, "If this fellow was a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of a person this woman is who keeps touching him, for she is a bad woman." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." He said, "Master, say it." Jesus said, "There were two men who were in debt to a certain lender. The one owed him 20 pounds, the other 2 pounds. Since they were unable to pay he cancelled the debt to both. Who then will love him the more?" Simon answered, "I presume, he to whom the greater favour was shown." He said to him, "Your judgment is correct." He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house--you gave me no water for my feet. She has washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. You did not give me any kiss. But she, from the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil. She has anointed my feet with perfume. Wherefore, I tell you, her sins--her many sins--are forgiven for she loved much. He to whom little is forgiven loves little." He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Those who were at table with him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who forgives even sins?" He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

This story is so vivid that it makes one believe that Luke may well have been an artist.

(i) The scene is the courtyard of the house of Simon the Pharisee. The houses of well-to-do people were built round an open courtyard in the form of a hollow square. Often in the courtyard there would be a garden and a fountain; and there in the warm weather meals were eaten. It was the custom that when a Rabbi was at a meal in such a house, all kinds of people came in--they were quite free to do so--to listen to the pearls of wisdom which fell from his lips. That explains the presence of the woman.

When a guest entered such a house three things were always done. The host placed his hand on the guest's shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace. That was a mark of respect which was never omitted in the case of a distinguished Rabbi. The roads were only dust tracks, and shoes were merely soles held in place by straps across the foot. So always cool water was poured over the guest's feet to cleanse and comfort them. Either a pinch of sweet-smelling incense was burned or a drop of attar of roses was placed on the guest's head. These things good manners demanded, and in this case not one of them was done.

In the east the guests did not sit, but reclined, at table. They lay on low couches, resting on the left elbow, leaving the right arm free, with the feet stretched out behind; and during the meal the sandals were taken off. That explains how the woman was standing beside Jesus' feet.

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Luke 7:36-50

(ii) Simon was a Pharisee, one of the separated ones. Why should such a man invite Jesus to his house at all? There are three possible reasons.

(a) It is just possible that he was an admirer and a sympathizer, for not all the Pharisees were Jesus' enemies (compare Lk.13:31). But the whole atmosphere of discourtesy makes that unlikely.

(b) It could be that Simon had invited Jesus with the deliberate intention of enticing him into some word or action which might have been made the basis of a charge against him. Simon may have been an agent provocateur. Again it is not likely, because in Lk.7:40 Simon gives Jesus the title, Rabbi.

(c) Most likely, Simon was a collector of celebrities; and with a half-patronising contempt he had invited this startling young Galilean to have a meal with him. That would best explain the strange combination of a certain respect with the omission of the usual courtesies. Simon was a man who tried to patronize Jesus.

(iii) The woman was a bad woman, and a notoriously bad woman, a prostitute. No doubt she had listened to Jesus speak from the edge of the crowd and had glimpsed in him the hand which could lift her from the mire of her ways. Round her neck she wore, like all Jewish women, a little phial of concentrated perfume; they were called alabasters; and they were very costly. She wished to pour it on his feet, for it was all she had to offer. But as she saw him the tears came and fell upon his feet. For a Jewish woman to appear with hair unbound was an act of the gravest immodesty. On her wedding day a girl bound up her hair and never would she appear with it unbound again. The fact that this woman loosed her long hair in public showed how she had forgotten everyone except Jesus.

The story demonstrates a contrast between two attitudes of mind and heart.

(i) Simon was conscious of no need and therefore felt no love, and so received no forgiveness. Simon's impression of himself was that he was a good man in the sight of men and of God.

(ii) The woman was conscious of nothing else than a clamant need, and therefore was overwhelmed with love for him who could supply it, and so received forgiveness.

The one thing which shuts a man off from God is self-sufficiency. And the strange thing is that the better a man is the more he feels his sin. Paul could speak of sinners "of whom I am foremost" (1Tim.1:15). Francis of Assisi could say, "There is nowhere a more wretched and a more miserable sinner than I." It is true to say that the greatest of sins is to be conscious of no sin; but a sense of need will open the door to the forgiveness of God, because God is love, and love's greatest glory is to be needed.

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Luke 8:1-3

ON THE ROAD

Luke 8:1-3

After that, Jesus travelled through the country, town by town, and village by village, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, as were certain women, who had been cured from evil spirits and from illnesses. There was Mary, who is called Mary Magdalene, out of whom there went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, who was Herod's agent, and Susanna and many others. It was their habit to minister to their needs out of their resources.

The time we saw coming had now come. Jesus was on the road. The synagogues were not now open to him, as once they had been. He had begun, as it were, in the church, where any man with a message from God might expect to find a responsive and receptive audience. Instead of a welcome he had found opposition; instead of eager listeners he had found the scribes and Pharisees bleakly waiting to catch him out; so now he took to the open road and the hillside and the lake shore.

(i) Once more we are confronted with a fact which we have already noted. This passage lists a little group of women who served him out of their resources. It was always considered to be a pious act to support a Rabbi, and the fact that the devoted followers of Jesus helped him in this way was in direct line with ordinary practice. But, as with the disciples, so with these women, we cannot fail to see how mixed a company they were. There was Mary Magdalene, that is Mary from the town of Magdala, out of whom he had cast seven devils. Clearly she had a past that was a dark and terrible thing. There was Joanna. She was the wife of Chuza, Herod's epitropos (GSN2012). A king had many perquisites and much private property; his epitropos (GSN2012) was the official who looked after the king's financial interests. In the Roman Empire, even in provinces which were governed by proconsuls appointed by the senate, the Emperor still had his epitropos (GSN2012) to safeguard his interests.

There could be no more trusted and important official. It is an amazing thing to find Mary Magdalene, with the dark past, and Joanna, the lady of the court, in the one company.

It is one of the supreme achievements of Jesus that he can enable the most diverse people to live together without in the least losing their own personalities or qualities. G. K. Chesterton writes about the text which says that the lion will lie down with the lamb. "But remember that this text is too lightly interpreted. It is constantly assumed ... that when the lion lies down with the lamb the lion becomes lamb-like. But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion instead of the lion eating the lamb. The real problem is--Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity? That is the problem the Church attempted; that is the miracle she achieved." There is nothing which the church needs more than to learn how to yoke in common harness the diverse temperaments and qualities of different people. If we are failing it is our own fault, for, in Christ, it can be done--and has been done.

(ii) In this list of women we have a group whose help was practical. Being women, they would not be allowed to preach; but they gave the gifts they had. There was an old shoemaker who once had wished to become a minister but the way had never opened up. He was the friend of a young divinity student; and when the lad one day was called to his first charge the old man asked him for

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Luke 8:1-3

a favour. He asked to be allowed always to make his shoes so that he might feel the preacher was wearing his shoes in that pulpit into which he could never go himself.

It is not always the person in the foreground who is doing the greatest work. Many a man who occupies a public position could not sustain it for one week without the help of the home behind him! There is no gift which cannot be used in the service of Christ. Many of his greatest servants are in the background, unseen but essential to his cause.

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Luke 8:4-15

THE SOWER AND THE SEED

Luke 8:4-15

When a great crowd had gathered, and when they came to him from every city, Jesus spoke to them by means of a parable. The sower went out to sow his seed. As he sowed some seed fell by the wayside. It was trampled upon and the birds of the heaven devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it grew up and withered because there was no moisture. Other seed fell in the middle of thorns and the thorns grew up along with it and choked the life out of it. Other seed fell into good ground and it produced a crop a hundredfold. As he told the story he said, "He that has an ear to hear let him hear."

The disciples asked him what the parable meant. He said, "It is given to you to know the secrets of the kingdom of God. To the others it is presented in parables, so that they may see, and yet not see, and so that they may hear and yet not understand."

The meaning of the parable is this. The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside stand for those who have heard, and then the devil comes and takes the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground stand for those, who, whenever they hear the word, gladly receive it; but they have no root; they believe for a time; but when a time of trial comes they fall away. The seed that falls among thorns stands for those, who, when they have heard, go their way and are suffocated by the cares, the wealth and the pleasures of this life, and so never complete their crop. The seed that is in the good ground stands for those who have heard the word and keep hold of it in a heart that is fine and good, and bear fruit with fortitude.

In this parable Jesus used a picture that all his hearers would recognize. It is in fact quite likely that he was looking at some sower sowing his seed as he spoke.

The parable speaks of four kinds of ground.

(i) The common ground in Palestine was split into long narrow strips; between the strips there were paths which were rights of way; when the seed fell on these paths, which were beaten as hard as the road, it had no chance of getting in.

(ii) There was the rocky ground. This does not mean ground that was full of stones but ground which was only a thin skin of earth over a shelf of limestone rock. In such ground there was no moisture or nourishment, and the growing plant was bound to wither and die.

(iii) The ground which was full of thorns was ground which at the moment looked clean enough. It is possible to make any bit of ground look clean simply by turning it over. But the seeds of the weeds and the fibrous roots of the wild grasses had been left in it. The good seed and the weeds grew together, but the weeds grew more strongly; and so the life was choked out of the good seed.

(iv) The good ground was ground that was deep and clean and well-prepared.

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Luke 8:4-15

Lk.8:9-10 have always been puzzling. It sounds as if Jesus is saying that he spoke in parables so that people would not be able to understand; but we cannot believe he would deliberately cloak his meaning from his listeners. Various explanations have been suggested.

(i) Matt.13:13, puts it slightly differently. He says that Jesus spoke in parables because people could not rightly see and understand. Matthew seems to say that it was not to hinder people from seeing and understanding but to help them that Jesus so spoke.

(ii) Matthew quotes immediately after this a saying of Isa.6:9-10, which in effect says, "I have spoken to them the word of God and the only result is that they have not understood a word of it." So then the saying of Jesus may indicate not the object of his teaching in parables but the result of it.

(iii) What Jesus really meant is this--people can become so dull and heavy and blunted in mind that when God's truth comes to them they cannot see it. It is not God's fault. They have become so mentally lazy, so blinded by prejudice, so unwilling to see anything they do not want to see, that they have become incapable of assimilating God's truth.

There are two interpretations of this parable.

(i) It is suggested that it means that the fate of the word of God depends on the heart into which it is sown.

(a) The hard path represents the shut mind, the mind which refuses to take it in.

(b) The shallow ground represents those who accept the word but who never think it out and never realize its consequences and who therefore collapse when the strain comes.

(c) The thorny ground stands for those whose lives are so busy that the things of God get crowded out. We must ever remember that the things which crowd out the highest need not necessarily be bad. The worst enemy of the best is the second best.

(d) The good ground stands for the good heart. The good hearer does three things. First, he listens attentively. Second, he keeps what he hears in his mind and heart and thinks over it until he discovers its meaning for himself. Third, he acts upon it. He translates what he has heard into action.

(ii) It is suggested that the parable is really a counsel against despair. Think of the situation. Jesus has been banished from the synagogues. The scribes and the Pharisees and the religious leaders are up against him. Inevitably the disciples would be disheartened. It is to them Jesus speaks this parable and in it he is saying, "Every farmer knows that some of his seed will be lost; it cannot all grow. But that does not discourage him or make him stop sowing because he knows that in spite of all the harvest is sure. I know we have our setbacks and our discouragements; I know we have our enemies and our opponents; but, never despair, in the end the harvest is sure."

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Luke 8:4-15

This parable can be both a warning as to how we hear and receive the word of God and an encouragement to banish all despair in the certainty that not all the setbacks can defeat the ultimate harvest of God.

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Luke 8:16-18

LAWS FOR LIFE

Luke 8:16-18

No one lights a lamp and then hides it under a vessel or puts it under a bed. No! he puts it on a lamp-stand so that those who come in may see the light. There is nothing hidden which will not be made manifest; there is nothing secret which will not be known and brought into the open. Take care, then, how you listen; for to him who has it will be given; and from him who has not there shall be taken away even what he thinks he has.

Here we have three sayings, each with its own warning for life.

(i) Lk.8:16 stresses the essential conspicuousness of the Christian life. Christianity is in its very nature something which must be seen. It is easy to find prudential reasons why we should not flaunt our Christianity in the world's face. In almost every person there is an instinctive fear of being different; and the world is always likely to persecute those who do not conform to pattern.

A writer tells how he kept hens. In the hen-run all the hens were precisely the same in marking except one. The one different hen was pecked to death by the other occupants of the hen-run. Even in the animal world, being different is a crime.

Hard as it may be, the duty is laid upon us of never being ashamed to show whose we are and whom we serve; and if we regard the matter in the right way it will be, not a duty, but a privilege.

A short time before the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II most houses and shops were displaying flags. I was out on a country road at that time; and in a little copse by the roadside I came upon a tinker's camp. It consisted of only one little tent, and beside the tent there fluttered on a pole a Union Jack nearly as big as the tent itself. It was as if that vagrant tinker said, "I haven't got much in this world; but I am going to attach my colours to what I have."

The Christian, however humble his position and his sphere, must never be ashamed to show his colours.

(ii) Lk.8:17 stresses the impossibility of secrecy. There are three people from whom we try to hide things.

(a) Sometimes we try to hide things from ourselves. We shut our eyes to the consequences of certain actions and habits, consequences of which we are well aware. It is like a man deliberately shutting his eyes to symptoms of an illness which he knows he has. We have only to state that to see its incredible folly.

(b) Sometimes we try to hide things from our fellow men. Things have a way of coming out. The man with a secret is an unhappy man. The happy man is the man with nothing to hide. It is told that once an architect offered to build for Plato a house in which every room would be hidden from the

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Luke 8:16-18

public eye. "I will give you twice the money," said Plato, "if you build me a house into every room of which all men's eyes can see." Happy is the man who can speak like that.

(c) Sometimes we try to hide things from God. No man ever attempted a more impossible task. We would do well to have before our eyes forever the text which says, "Thou art a God of seeing." (Gen.16:13.)

(iii) Lk.8:18 lays down the universal law that the man who has will get more; and that the man who has not will lose what he has. If a man is physically fit and keeps himself so, his body will be ready for ever greater efforts; if he lets himself go flabby, he will lose even the abilities he has. The more a student learns, the more he can learn; but if he refuses to go on learning, he will lose the knowledge he has. This is just another way of saying that there is no standing still in life. All the time we are either going forward or going back. The seeker will always find; but the man who stops seeking will lose even what he has.

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Luke 8:19-21

TRUE KINSHIP

Luke 8:19-21

Jesus' mother and brothers came to him, and they could not get at him because of the crowd. He was given a message. "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they want to see you." "My mother and my brothers," he answered them, "are those who hear the word of God and do it."

It is not difficult to see that, at least during his lifetime, Jesus' family were not in sympathy with him. Mk.3:21 tells us how his kinsmen came and tried to restrain him because they believed him to be mad. In Matt.10:36 Jesus warns his followers that a man's foes may well be those of his own household--and he was speaking out of hard and bitter experience.

There is in this passage a great and practical truth. It may very well be that a man finds himself closer to people who are not related to him than he does to his own kith and kin. The deepest relationship of life is not merely a blood relationship; it is the relationship of mind to mind and heart to heart. It is when people have common aims, common principles, common interests, a common goal that they become really and truly kin.

Let us remember that definition of the kingdom which we already worked out. The kingdom of God is a society upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. It was Jesus' supreme quality that he alone succeeded in fully achieving the identity of his will and the will of God. Therefore, all whose one aim in life is to make God's will their will are the true kindred of Jesus. We speak of all men being the sons of God; and in a very real and precious sense that is true, because God loves saint and sinner; but the deepest kind of sonship is ethically conditioned. It is when a man puts his will in line with God's will by the help of the Holy Spirit, that real kinship begins.

The Stoics declared that that was the only way to happiness in this life. They had the conviction that everything that happens--joy and sorrow, triumph and disaster, gain and loss, sunshine and shadow--was the will of God. When a man refused to accept it he battered his head against the walls of the universe and could bring himself nothing but pain and trouble of heart.

When a man looks up to God and says, "Do with me as you wish," he has found the way to joy.

Two things emerge:

(i) There is a loyalty which surpasses all earthly loyalties; there is something which takes precedence of the dearest things on earth. In that sense Jesus Christ is a demanding master, for he will share a man's heart with nothing and with no one. Love is necessarily exclusive. We can love only one person at a time and serve only one master at a time.

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Luke 8:19-21

(ii) That is hard; but there is this great wonder--that when a man gives himself absolutely to Christ he becomes one of a family whose boundaries are the earth. Whatever loss he may experience is counterbalanced by his gain. As John Oxenham wrote:

"In Christ there is no East or West,
In him no South or North,
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.

In him shall true hearts everywhere
Their high communion find,
His service is the golden cord
Close-binding all mankind.

Join hands, then, brother of the faith,
Whate'er your race may be!
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East and West,
In him meet South and North,
All Christly souls are one in him,
Throughout the whole wide earth."

The man who, through Jesus Christ, seeks the will of God has entered into a family which includes all the saints in earth and in heaven.

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Luke 8:22-25

CALM AMIDST THE STORM

Luke 8:22-25

One day Jesus and his disciples embarked upon a ship. "Let us go over," he said to them, "to the other side of the lake." So they set sail. As they sailed he fell asleep. A violent squall of wind came down upon the lake; and the boat began to fill with water; and they were in peril. They came to him and woke him. "Master, Master," they said, "we are perishing." When he awoke, he rebuked the wind and the surf of the water. They ceased their raging, and there was a calm. "Where is your faith?" he said to them. But they were awe-stricken and amazed. "Who can this be," they said to each other, "because he gives his orders even to the winds and the water, and they obey him?"

Luke tells this story with an extraordinary economy of words, and yet with extraordinary vividness. It was no doubt for much needed rest and quiet that Jesus decided to cross the lake. As they sailed, he fell asleep.

It is a lovely thing to think of the sleeping Jesus. He was tired, just as we become tired. He, too, could reach the point of exhaustion when the claim of sleep is imperative. He trusted his men; they were the fishermen of the lake and he was content to leave things to their skill and seamanship, and to relax. He trusted God; he knew that he was as near to God by sea as ever he was by land.

Then the storm came down. The Sea of Galilee is famous for its sudden squalls. A traveller says, "The sun had scarcely set when the wind began to rush down towards the lake, and it continued all night long with increasing violence, so that when we reached the shore next morning the face of the lake was like a huge boiling caldron." The reason is this. The Sea of Galilee is more than six hundred feet below sea level. It is surrounded by table lands beyond which the great mountains rise. The rivers have cut deep ravines through the table lands down into the sea. These ravines act like great funnels to draw down the cold winds from the mountains; and thus the storms arise. The same traveller tells how they tried to pitch their tents in such a gale. "We had to double-pin all the tent-ropes, and frequently were obliged to hang on with our whole weight upon them to keep the quivering tabernacle from being carried up bodily into the air."

It was just such a sudden storm that struck the boat that day, and Jesus and his disciples were in peril of their lives. The disciples woke Jesus and with a word he calmed the storm.

Everything that Jesus did had more than a merely temporal significance. And the real meaning of this incident is that, wherever Jesus is, the storm becomes a calm.

(i) Jesus comes, calms the storms of temptation. Sometimes temptation comes with almost overmastering force. As Stevenson once said, "You know the Caledonian Railway Station in Edinburgh? One cold bleak morning I met Satan there." It comes to us all to meet Satan. If we meet the tempest of temptation alone we will perish; but Christ brings the calm in which temptations lose their power.

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(ii) Jesus calms the storms of passion. Life is doubly difficult for the man with the hot heart and the blazing temper. A friend met such a man. "I see," he said, "that you have succeeded in conquering your temper." "No," said the man, "I didn't conquer it. Jesus conquered it for me."

"When deep within our swelling hearts
The thoughts of pride and anger rise,
When bitter words are on our tongues
And tears of passion in our eyes,
Then we may stay the angry blow,
Then we may check the hasty word,
Give gentle answers back again,
And fight a battle for our Lord."

It is a losing battle unless Jesus gives us the calm of victory.

(iii) Jesus calms the storms of sorrow. Into every life some day the tempest of sorrow must come, for sorrow is ever the penalty of love and if a man loves he will sorrow. When Pusey's wife died, he said, "It was as if there was a hand beneath my chin to hold me up." In that day, in the presence of Jesus, the tears are wiped away and the wounded heart is soothed.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 8:26-39

THE DEFEAT OF THE DEMONS

Luke 8:26-39

They came in their voyage to the district of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus had disembarked on the land there met him a man from the town who had demons. For a long time he had gone unclothed, and he did not stay in a house and fell down before him and shouted, "What have you and I to do with each other, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God? I beseech you--don't torture me!"--for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For many a time it had snatched at him, and he was kept bound with chains and fetters, but when he was driven into the deserted places by the demons, he would burst the fetters. Jesus answered, "What is your name?" He said, "A regiment"--because many demons had entered into him, and they begged him not to order them to depart to the abyss. There was a herd of many pigs there, feeding on the mountainside. The demons asked him to allow them to go into them. He did so. So the demons came out of the man and into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the precipice into the lake and were drowned. When those who were in charge of them saw what had happened, they fled and brought the story to the town and to the countryside round about. They came out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out sitting there at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his senses--and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened told them how the demon-possessed man had been cured; and the whole crowd from the Gerasene countryside asked him to go away from them, because they were in the grip of a great fear. So he embarked on the ship and went away. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to be allowed to go with him; but he sent him away. "Go back," he said, "to your home and tell the story of all that God did for you." So he went away and proclaimed throughout the whole town all that God had done for him.

We will never even begin to understand this story unless we realize that, whatever we think about the demons, they were intensely real to the people of Gerasa and to the man whose mind was deranged. This man was a case of violent insanity. He was too dangerous to live amongst men and he lived amidst the tombs, which were believed to be the home and the haunt of demons. We may well note the sheer courage of Jesus in dealing with him. The man had a maniacal strength which enabled him to snap his fetters. His fellow-men were so terrified of him that they would never try to do anything for him; but Jesus faced him calm and unafraid.

When Jesus asked the man his name, he answered, "Legion." A Roman legion was a regiment of 6,000 soldiers. Doubtless this man had seen a Roman legion on the march, and his poor, afflicted mind felt that there was not one demon but a whole regiment inside him. It may well be that the word haunted him because he had seen atrocities carried out by a Roman legion when he was a child. It is possible that it was the sight of such atrocities which left a scar upon his mind and ultimately sent him mad.

Far too much difficulty has been made out of the pigs. Jesus has been condemned for sending the demons into the innocent swine. That has been characterised as a cruel and immoral action. Again we must remember the intensity of the belief in demons. The man, thinking the demons were speaking through him, pleaded with Jesus not to send them into the abyss of hell to which they

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would be consigned in the final judgment. He would never have believed that he was cured unless he had visible demonstration. Nothing less than the visible departure of the demons would have convinced him.

Surely what happened was this. The herd of swine was feeding there on the mountain side. Jesus was exerting his power to cure what was a very stubborn case. Suddenly the man's wild shouts and screams disturbed the swine and they went dashing down the steep place into the sea in blind terror. "Look!" said Jesus, "Look! Your demons are gone!" Jesus had to find a way to get into the mind of this poor man; and in that way he found it.

In any event, can we compare the value of a herd of swine with the value of a man's immortal soul? If it cost the lives of these swine to save that soul, are we to complain? Is it not perverse fastidiousness which complains that swine were killed in order to heal a man? Surely we ought to preserve a sense of proportion. If the only way to convince this man of his cure was that the swine should perish, it seems quite extraordinarily blind to object that they did.

We must look at the reaction of two sets of people.

(i) There were the Gerasenes. They asked Jesus to go away.

(a) They hated having the routine of life disturbed. Life went peacefully on till there arrived this disturbing Jesus; and they hated him. More people hate Jesus because he disturbs them than for any other reason. If he says to a man, "You must give up this habit, you must change your life"; if he says to an employer, "You can't be a Christian and make people work under conditions like that"; if he says to a landlord, "You can't take money for slums like that"--one and all are liable to say to him, "Go away and let me be in peace."

(b) They loved their swine more than they valued the soul of a man. One of life's supreme dangers is to value things more than persons. That is what created slums and vicious working conditions. Nearer home, that is what makes us selfishly demand our ease and comfort even if it means that someone who is tired has to slave for us. No thing in this world can ever be as important as a person.

(ii) There was the man who was cured. Very naturally he wanted to come with Jesus but Jesus sent him home. Christian witness, like Christian charity, begins at home. It would be so much easier to live and speak for Christ among people who do not know us. But it is our duty, where Christ has set us, there to witness for him. And if it should happen that we are the only Christian in the shop, the office, the school, the factory, the circle in which we live or work, that is not matter for lamentation. It is a challenge in which God says, "Go and tell the people you meet every day what I have done for you."

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Luke 8:40-42, 49-56

AN ONLY CHILD IS HEALED

Luke 8:40-42,49-56

When Jesus came back the crowd welcomed him for they were all waiting for him. A man called Jairus came to him. He was the president of the synagogue. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and asked him to come to his house, because he had an only daughter who was about twelve years of age and she was dying. As he went the crowd pressed round him ... While he was still speaking someone came from the president's house. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the Master any more." Jesus heard this. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Just have faith and she will be cured." When he had come to the house he allowed no one to come in with him, except Peter and John and James, and the girl's father and mother. They were all weeping and wailing for her. "Stop weeping," he said, "for she is not dead but sleeping." They laughed him down because they were sure she was dead. He took hold of her hand and said to her, "Child, rise!" Her breath came back to her and immediately she rose.

He told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were out of themselves with amazement; but he enjoined them to tell no one what had happened.

Here is the pathos of life suddenly turned to gladness. Very keenly Luke felt the tragedy of this girl's death. There were three things which made it so poignant.

(a) She was an only child. Only Luke tells us that. The light of her parents' life had gone out.

(b) She was about twelve years of age. That is to say she was just at the dawn of womanhood because children in the East develop much more quickly than in the West. She could even have been contemplating marriage at that age. What should have been the morning of life had become the night.

(c) Jairus was the president of the synagogue. That is to say, he was the man who was responsible for the administration of the synagogue and the ordering of public worship. He had reached the highest post that life could give him in the respect of his fellow-men. No doubt he was well to do; no doubt he had climbed the ladder of earthly ambition and prestige. It seemed as if life--as it sometimes does--had given lavishly of many things but was about to take the most precious thing away. All the pathos of life is in the background of this story.

The wailing women had already come. To us it sounds almost repulsively artificial. But to hire these wailing women was a token of respect to the dead that was never omitted. They were sure she was dead, but Jesus said she was asleep. It is perfectly possible that Jesus meant this literally. It may well be that here we have a real miracle of diagnosis; that Jesus saw the girl was in a deep trance and that she was on the point of being buried alive. From the evidence of the tombs in Palestine it is clear that many were buried alive. It could happen the more easily because climatic conditions in Palestine made burial within a matter of hours a sheer necessity. However that may be, Jesus gave her back her life.

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Luke 8:40-42, 49-56

We must note one very practical touch. Jesus ordered that the girl should be given something to eat. Is it possible that he was thinking just as much of the mother as of the girl? The mother, with the pain of grief and the sudden shock of joy, must have been almost on the point of collapse. At such a time to do some practical thing with one's hands is a life-saver. And it may well be that Jesus, in his kindly wisdom which knew human nature so well, was giving the overwrought mother a job to do to calm her nerves.

But by far the most interesting character in this story is Jairus.

(i) He was clearly a man who could pocket his pride. He was the president of the synagogue. By this time the synagogue doors were rapidly closing on Jesus, if indeed they had not already closed. He could have had no love for Jesus and he must have regarded Jesus as a breaker of the law. But in his hour of need, he pocketed his pride and asked for help.

There is a famous story of Roland, the paladin of Charlemagne. He was in charge of the rearguard of the army and he was suddenly caught by the Saracens at Roncesvalles. The battle raged fiercely against terrible odds. Now Roland had a horn called Olivant which he had taken from the giant Jatmund and its blast could be heard thirty miles away. So mighty was it that, so they said, the birds fell dead when its blast tore through the air. Oliver, his friend, besought him to blow the horn so that Charlemagne would hear and come back to help. But Roland was too proud to ask for help. One by one his men fell fighting till only he was left. Then at last with his dying breath he blew the horn, and Charlemagne came hasting back. But it was too late, for Roland was dead--because he was too proud to ask for help.

It is easy to think that we can handle life ourselves. But the way to find the miracles of the grace of God is to pocket our pride and humbly to confess our need and ask. Ask, and you will receive--but there is no receiving without asking.

(ii) Jairus was clearly a man of a stubborn faith. Whatever he felt, he did not wholly accept the verdict of the wailing women; for with his wife he went into the room where the girl lay. He hoped against hope. No doubt in his heart there was the feeling, "You never know what this Jesus can do." And none of us knows all that Jesus can do. In the darkest day we can still hope in the unsearchable riches and the all-sufficient grace and the unconquerable power of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 8:43-48

NOT LOST IN THE CROWD

Luke 8:43-48

There was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years. She had spent all her living on doctors and she could not be cured by any of them. She came up behind Jesus and she touched the tassel of his robe; and immediately her flow of blood was stayed. Jesus said, "Who touched me?" When they were all denying that they had done so, Peter and his companions said, "Master, the crowds are all round you and press in upon you." Jesus said, "Someone has touched me, for I know that power has gone out of me." The woman saw that she could not hide. She came all trembling; she threw herself at his feet; and in front of everyone she had told him why she had touched him, and that she had been cured there and then. "Daughter," he said to her, "your faith has cured you. Go in peace."

This story laid hold on the heart and the imagination of the early church. It was believed that the woman was a gentile from Caesarea Philippi. Eusebius, the great church historian (A.D. 300), relates how it was said that the woman had at her own cost erected a statue commemorating her cure in her native city. It was said that that statue remained there until Julian, the Roman Emperor who tried to bring back the pagan gods, destroyed it, and erected his own in place of it, only to see his own statue blasted by a thunderbolt from God.

The shame of the woman was that ceremonially she was unclean (Lev.15:19-33). Her issue of blood had cut her off from life. That was why she did not come openly to Jesus but crept up in the crowd; and that was why at first she was so embarrassed when Jesus asked who touched him.

All devout Jews wore robes with fringes on them (Num.15:37-41; Deut.22:12). The fringes ended in four tassels of white thread with a blue thread woven through them. They were to remind the Jew every time he dressed that he was a man of God and committed to the keeping of God's laws. Later, when it was dangerous to be a Jew, these tassels were worn on the undergarments. Nowadays they still exist on the talith or shawl that the Jew wears round his head and shoulders when he is at prayer. But in the time of Jesus they were worn on the outer garment, and it was one of these the woman touched.

Luke the doctor is here in evidence again. Mark says of the woman that she had spent her all on the doctors and was no better but rather grew worse (Mk.5:26). Luke misses out the final phrase, because he did not like this gibe against the doctors!

The lovely thing about this story is that from the moment Jesus was face to face with the woman, there seemed to be nobody there but he and she. It happened in the middle of a crowd; but the crowd was forgotten and Jesus spoke to that woman as if she was the only person in the world. She was a poor, unimportant sufferer, with a trouble that made her unclean, and yet to that one unimportant person Jesus gave all of himself.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 8:43-48

We are very apt to attach labels to people and to treat them according to their relative importance. To Jesus a person had none of these man-made labels. He or she was simply a human soul in need. Love never thinks of people in terms of human importances.

A distinguished visitor once came to call on Thomas Carlyle. He was working and could not be disturbed, but Jane, his wife, agreed to take this visitor up and open the door just a chink that he might at least see the sage. She did so, and as they looked in at Carlyle, immersed in his work and oblivious of all else, penning the books that made him famous, she said, "That's Tammas Carlyle about whom all the world is talking--and he's my man." It was not in terms of the world's labels Jane thought, but in terms of love.

A traveller tells how she was travelling in Georgia in the days before the Second World War. She was taken to see a very humble old woman in a little cottage. The old peasant woman asked her if she was going to Moscow. The traveller said she was. "Then," asked the woman, "would you mind delivering a parcel of home-made toffee to my son? He can not get anything like it in Moscow." Her son's name was Josef Stalin. We do not normally think of the man who was once dictator of all the Russias as a man who liked toffee--but his mother did! For her the man-made labels did not matter.

Almost everybody would have regarded the woman in the crowd as totally unimportant. For Jesus she was someone in need, and therefore he, as it were, withdrew from the crowd and gave himself to her. "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love."

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Luke 9:1-9

EMISSARIES OF THE KING

Luke 9:1-9

Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to cure those who were ill. He said to them, "Take nothing for the road, neither a staff nor a wallet, nor bread nor money, nor two tunics. Whatever house you go into, stay there, and leave from there. As for whoever do not receive you--when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as evidence against them." So they went out, and they went through the villages, preaching and healing everywhere.

Herod, the tetrarch, heard about the things which were going on. He did not know what to make of them, because it was said by some, "John is risen from the dead"; and by some, "Elijah has appeared"; and by others, "One of the prophets of the ancient days has risen again." But Herod said, "John I myself beheaded. Who is this about whom I hear such reports?" And he tried to see him.

In the ancient days there was in effect only one way of spreading a message abroad and that was by word of mouth. Newspapers did not exist; books had to be hand-written, and a book the size of Luke--Acts would have cost over 40 British pounds per copy to produce! Radio and television had not even been dreamed of. That is why Jesus sent out the Twelve on this mission. He was under the limitations of time and space; his helpers had to be mouths to speak for him.

They were to travel light. That was simply because the man who travels light travels far and fast. The more a man is cluttered up with material things the more he is shackled to one place. God needs a settled ministry; but he also needs those who will abandon earthly things to adventure for him.

If they were not received they were to shake off the dust from their feet when they left the town. When Rabbis entered Palestine after some journey in a gentile land, they shook off the last particle of heathen dust from their feet. A village or town which would not receive them was to be treated as a strict Jew would treat a heathen country. It had refused its opportunity and had condemned itself.

That this ministry was mightily effective is plain from Herod's reaction. Things were happening. Perhaps Elijah, the forerunner, had at last come. Perhaps even the great promised prophet had arrived (Deut.18:15). But "Conscience doth make cowards of us all," and there was a lingering fear in Herod's mind that John the Baptiser, whom he thought he had eliminated, had come back to haunt him.

One thing which stands out about the ministry which Jesus laid upon the Twelve is this--sever and over again in this short passage it joins preaching and healing. It joins concern for men's bodies and men's souls. It was something which was not to deal only in words, however comforting; but also in deeds. It was a message which was not confined to news of eternity; it proposed to change

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Luke 9:1-9

conditions on earth. It was the reverse of a religion of "pie in the sky." It insisted that health to men's bodies was as integral a part of God's purpose as health to their souls.

Nothing has done the church more harm than the repeated statement that the things of this world do not matter. In the middle thirties of this century unemployment invaded many respectable and decent homes. The father's skill was rusting in idleness; the mother was trying to make a shilling do what a pound ought to do; children could not understand what was going on except that they were hungry. Men grew bitter or broken. To go and tell such people that material things make no difference was unforgivable, especially if the teller was in reasonable comfort himself. General Booth was once blamed for offering food and meals to poor people instead of the simple gospel. The old warrior flashed back, "It is impossible to comfort men's hearts with the love of God when their feet are perishing with cold."

Of course, it is possible to overstress material things. But it is equally possible to neglect them. The church will forget only at her peril that Jesus first sent out his men to preach the kingdom and to heal, to save men in body and in soul.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 9:10-17

FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY

Luke 9:10-17

When the apostles returned they told Jesus all that they had done. So he took them and withdrew privately to a place called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out where he was they followed him; and he welcomed them, and talked to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing. The day began to draw to a close. The Twelve came to him. "Send the crowd away," they said, "that they may go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find some place to stay and get food because here we are in a desert place." He said to them, "Do you give them food to eat." They said, "All we have is five loaves and two fishes--unless we go and buy food for all this people." For there were about five thousand men. He said to his disciples. "Make them sit down in companies of fifty." They did so, and they got them all seated. He took the five loaves and the two fishes and looked up into heaven and blessed them and broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the crowd.

And all of them ate and were satisfied; and what they had left over was taken up and there were twelve baskets of the fragments.

This is the only miracle of Jesus related in all the four gospels (compare Matt.14:13; Mk.6:30; Jn.6:1). It begins with a lovely thing. The Twelve had come back from their tour. Never was a time when Jesus needed more to be alone with them, so he took them to the neighbourhood of Bethsaida, a village on the far side of the Jordan to the north of the Sea of Galilee. When the people discovered where he had gone they followed him in hordes--and he welcomed them.

There is all the divine compassion here. Most people would have resented the invasion of their hard-won privacy. How would we feel if we had sought out some lonely place to be with our most intimate friends and suddenly a clamorous mob of people turned up with their insistent demands? Sometimes we are too busy to be disturbed, but to Jesus human need took precedence over everything.

The evening came; home was far away; and the people were tired and hungry. Jesus, astonishingly, ordered his disciples to give them a meal. There are two ways in which a man can quite honestly look at this miracle. First, he can see in it simply a miracle in which Jesus created food for this vast multitude. Second, some people think that this is what happened. The people were hungry--and they were utterly selfish. They all had something with them, but they would not even produce it for themselves in case they had to share it with others. The Twelve laid before the multitude their little store and thereupon others were moved to produce theirs; and in the end there was more than enough for everyone. So it may be regarded as a miracle which turned selfish, suspicious folk into generous people, a miracle of Christ's changing determined self interest into a willingness to share.

Before Jesus distributed the food he blessed it; he said grace. There was a Jewish saying that "he who enjoys anything without thanksgiving is as though he robbed God." The blessing said in every home in Palestine before every meal ran, "Blessed art thou, Jehovah, our God, King of the world,

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Luke 9:10-17

who causest bread to come forth from the earth." Jesus would not eat without giving thanks to the giver of an good gifts.

This is a story which tells us many things.

(i) Jesus was concerned that men were hungry. It would be most interesting to work out how much time Jesus spent, not talking, but easing men's pain and satisfying their hunger. He still needs the service of men's hands. The mother who has spent a lifetime cooking meals for a hungry family; the nurse, the doctor, the friend, relation or parent, who has sacrificed life and time to ease another's pain; the social reformer who has burned himself out to seek better conditions for men and women--they have all preached far more effective sermons than the eloquent orator.

(ii) Jesus' help was generous. There was enough, and more than enough. In love there is no nice calculation of the less and more. God is like that. When we sow a packet of seeds we usually have to thin the plants out and throw away far more than we can keep. God has created a world where there is more than enough for all if men will share it.

(iii) As always there is permanent truth in an action in time. In Jesus all men's needs are supplied. There is a hunger of the soul; there is in every man, sometimes at least, a longing to find something in which he may invest his life. Our hearts are restless until they rest in him. "My God will supply every need of yours," said Paul (Php.4:19)--even in the desert places of this life.

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Luke 9:18-22

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

Luke 9:18-22

It happened that when Jesus was praying alone his disciples were with him. He asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They answered, "Some say that you are John the Baptist; others that you are Elijah; others that one of the prophets of the ancient days has risen again." He said to them, "But you--who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The anointed one of God." Jesus warned and enjoined them to tell this to no one. "The Son of Man," he said, "must suffer many things, and must be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and must be killed, and must be raised again on the third day."

This is one of the most crucial moments in the life of Jesus. He asked this question when he was already turning his face to go to Jerusalem (Lk.9:51). He well knew what awaited him there, and the answer to his question was of supreme importance. He knew that he was going to a Cross to die; he wanted to know before he went, if there was anyone who had really discovered who he was. The right answer would make all the difference. If instead there was dull incomprehension, all his work would have gone for nothing. If there was any realization, however incomplete, it meant that he had lit such a torch in the hearts of men as time would never put out. How Jesus' heart must have lifted when Peter's sudden discovery rushed to his lips--"You are the anointed one of God!" When Jesus heard that, he knew he had not failed.

Not only had the Twelve to discover the fact; they had also to discover what the fact meant. They had grown up against a background of thought which expected from God a conquering king who would lead them to world dominion. Peter's eyes would blaze with excitement when he said this. But Jesus had to teach them that God's anointed one had come to die upon a Cross. He had to take their ideas of God and of God's purposes and turn them upside down; and from this time that is what he set himself to do. They had discovered who he was; now they had to learn what that discovery meant.

There are two great general truths in this passage.

(i) Jesus began by asking what men were saying about him; and then, suddenly, he flashes the question at the Twelve, "Who do you say that I am?" It is never enough to know what other people have said about Jesus. A man might be able to pass any examination on what has been said and thought about Jesus; he might have read every book about Christology written in every language upon earth and still not be a Christian. Jesus must always be our own personal discovery. Our religion can never be a carried tale. To every man Jesus comes asking, not, "Can you tell me what others have said and written about me?" but, "Who do you say that I am?" Paul did not say, "I know what I have believed"; he said, "I know whom I have believed" (2Tim.1:12). Christianity does not mean reciting a creed; it means knowing a person.

(ii) Jesus said, "I must go to Jerusalem and die." It is of the greatest interest to look at the times in Luke's gospel when Jesus said must. "I must be in my Father's house," (Lk.2:49). "I must preach the kingdom," (Lk.4:43). "I must go on my way today and tomorrow," (Lk.13:33). Over and over again

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Luke 9:18-22

he told his disciples he must go to his Cross (Lk.9:22; Lk.17:25; Lk.24:7). Jesus knew he had a destiny to fulfil. God's will was his will. He had no other object but to do upon earth what God had sent him to do. The Christian, like his Lord, is a man under orders.

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Luke 9:23-27

THE CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

Luke 9:23-27

Jesus said to them all, "If any man wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and day by day let him take up his cross and follow me. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses himself or has himself confiscated? Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he shall come in his own glory, and in the glory of his Father and of the holy angels. I tell you truly that there are some of these who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

Here Jesus lays down the conditions of service for those who would follow him.

(i) A man must deny himself. What does that mean? A great scholar comes at the meaning in this way. Peter once denied his Lord. That is to say, he said of Jesus, "I do not know the man." To deny ourselves is to say, "I do not know myself." It is to ignore the very existence of oneself. It is to treat the self as if it did not exist. Usually we treat ourselves as if our self was far and away the most important thing in the world. If we are to follow Jesus, we must forget that self exists.

(ii) A man must take up his cross. Jesus well knew what crucifixion meant. When he was a lad of about eleven years of age, Judas the Galilaean had led a rebellion against Rome. He had raided the royal armoury at Sepphoris, which was only four miles from Nazareth. The Roman vengeance was swift and sudden. Sepphoris was burned to the ground; its inhabitants were sold into slavery; and two thousand of the rebels were crucified on crosses which were set in lines along the roadside that they might be a dreadful warning to others tempted to rebel. To take up our cross means to be prepared to face things like that for loyalty to Jesus; it means to be ready to endure the worst that man can do to us for the sake of being true to him.

(iii) A man must spend his life, not hoard it. The whole gamut of the world's standards must be changed. The questions are not, "How much can I get?" but, "How much can I give?" Not, "What is the safe thing to do?" but, "What is the right thing to do?" Not, "What is the minimum permissible in the way of work?" but, "What is the maximum possible?" The Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep for himself but to spend for others; not to husband its flame but to burn it out for Christ and for men.

(iv) Loyalty to Jesus will have its reward, and disloyalty its punishment. If we are true to him in time, he will be true to us in eternity. If we seek to follow him in this world, in the next he will point to us as one of his people. But if by our lives we disown him, even though with our lips we confess him, the day must come when he cannot do other than disown us.

(v) In the last verse of this passage Jesus says that some standing there will see the kingdom of God before they die. Some people maintain that Jesus was looking forward to his return in glory, that he was declaring that this would happen within the lifetime of some of those present; and that therefore he was completely mistaken. That is not so.

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Luke 9:23-27

What Jesus was saying is this, "Before this generation has passed away you will see signs that the kingdom of God is on the way." Beyond a doubt that came to pass. Something came into the world which, like leaven in dough, began to change it. It would be well if, sometimes, we turned from our pessimism and thought rather of the light that has been slowly breaking on the world.

As A. H. Clough wrote,

"Say not the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke conceal'd,
Your comrades chase e'en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light.
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward, look, the land is bright!"

Be of good cheer--the kingdom is on the way--and we do well to thank God for every sign of its dawning.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 9:28-36

THE MOUNTAIN TOP OF GLORY

Luke 9:28-36

About eight days after these words, Jesus took Peter and John and James and went up into a mountain to pray. While he was praying the appearance of his face became different and his clothing became white as the lightning's flash. And--look you--two men were talking with him, who were Moses and Elijah. They appeared in glory, and they talked about the departure which he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his friends were heavy with sleep. When they were fully awake they saw his glory, and the two men standing with him. And when they were going to leave him, Peter said, "Master, it is good for us to be here. So let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah," for he did not know what he was saying. As he was saying this a cloud came and overshadowed them and they feared as they entered into the cloud. A voice came from the cloud saying, "This is my beloved Son, my chosen one! Hear him!" And when the voice had passed, Jesus was found alone.

They kept silent in those days and did not tell anyone anything about what they had seen.

Here we have another of the great hinges in Jesus' life upon earth. We must remember that he was just about to set out to Jerusalem and to the cross. We have already looked at one great moment when he asked his disciples who they believed him to be, in order that he might discover if anyone had realized who he was. But there was one thing Jesus would never do--he would never take any step without the approval of God. In this scene that is what we see him seeking and receiving.

What happened on the Mount of Transfiguration we can never know, but we do know that something tremendous did happen. Jesus had gone there to seek the approval of God for the decisive step he was about to take. There Moses and Elijah appeared to him. Moses was the great law-giver of the people of Israel; Elijah was the greatest of the prophets. It was as if the princes of Israel's life and thought and religion told Jesus to go on.

Jesus could set out to Jerusalem now, certain that at least one little group of men knew who he was, certain that what he was doing was the consummation of all the life and thought and work of his nation, and certain that God approved of the step that he was taking.

There is a vivid sentence here. It says of the three apostles, "When they were fully awake they saw his glory."

(i) In life we miss so much because our minds are asleep. There are certain things which are liable to keep our minds asleep.

(a) There is prejudice. We may be so set in our ideas that our minds are shut. A new idea knocks at the door but we are like sleepers who will not awake.

(b) There is mental lethargy. There are so many who refuse the strenuous struggle of thought. "The unexamined life," said Plato, "is the life not worth living. "How many of us have really thought things out and thought them through? It was said of someone that he had skirted the

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Luke 9:28-36

howling deserts of infidelity and a wiser man said that he would have been better to have fought his way through them. Sometimes we are so lethargic that we will not even face our questions and our doubts.

(c) There is the love of ease. There is a kind of defence mechanism in us that makes us automatically shut the door against any disturbing thought.

A man can drug himself mentally until his mind is sound asleep.

(ii) But life is full of things designed to waken us.

(a) There is sorrow. Once Elgar said of a young singer, who was technically perfect, but quite without feeling and expression, "She will be great when something breaks her heart." Often sorrow can rudely awaken a man, but in that moment, through the tears, he will see the glory.

(b) There is love. Somewhere Browning tells of two people who fell in love. She looked at him; he looked at her--"and suddenly life awoke." Real love is an awakening to horizons we never dreamed were there.

(c) There is the sense of need. For long enough a man may live the routine of life half asleep; then all of a sudden there comes some completely insoluble problem, some quite unanswerable question, some overmastering temptation, some summons to an effort which he feels is beyond his strength. In that day there is nothing left to do but to "cry, clinging heaven by the hems." And that sense of need awakens him to God.

We would do well to pray, "Lord, keep me always awake to you."

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 9:37-45

COMING DOWN FROM THE MOUNT

Luke 9:37-45

On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd of people met him. And--look you--a man shouted from the crowd, "Teacher, I beg you to look with pity upon my son, because he is my only child. And--look you--a spirit seizes him and he suddenly shouts out; he convulses him until he foams at the mouth; he shatters him and will hardly leave him. I begged your disciples to cast out the spirit but they could not do it." Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation! How long will I be with you? How long will I bear you? Bring your son here." While he was coming the demon dashed him down and convulsed him. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father; and everyone was astonished at the majesty of God.

While they were all wondering at the things which he kept doing, he said to his disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears--the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." They did not know what this word meant; and its meaning was concealed from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask him about this word.

No sooner had Jesus descended from the mountain top than the demands and disappointments of life were upon him. A man had come to the disciples seeking their help, for his only son was an epileptic. Of course his epilepsy was attributed to the malign activity of a demon. The word used in Lk.9:42 is very vivid. As he was coming to Jesus, the demon dashed him down. It is the word used of a boxer dealing a knock-out blow to his opponent or of a wrestler throwing someone. It must have been a pitiful sight to see the lad convulsed; and the disciples were quite helpless to cure him. But when Jesus came he dealt with the situation with calm mastery and gave the boy back to his father cured.

Two things stand out.

(i) The moment on the mount was absolutely necessary, but it could not be prolonged beyond its own time. Peter, not really knowing what he was saying, would have liked to linger on the mountain top. He wished to build three tabernacles so that they might stay there in all the glory; but they had to descend again. Often there come to us moments that we would like to prolong indefinitely. But after the time on the mountain top we must come back to the battle and the routine of life; that time is meant to give us strength for life's everyday.

After the great struggle at Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal, Elijah, in reaction, ran away. Out into the desert he went and there, as he lay under a juniper tree asleep, an angel twice prepared a meal for him. Then comes the sentence, "And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights" (1Kgs.19:1-8). To the mountain top of the presence of God we must go, not to remain there but to go in the strength of that time for many days. It was said of Captain Scott, the great explorer, that he was "a strange mixture of the dreamy and the practical, and never more practical than immediately after he had been dreamy." We cannot live forever in the moment on the mountain but we cannot live at all without it.

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Luke 9:37-45

(ii) In no incident is the sheer competence of Jesus so clearly shown. When he came down from the mountain the situation was out of hand. The whole impression is that of people running about not knowing what to do. The disciples were helplessly baffled; the boy's father was bitterly disappointed and upset. Into this scene of disorder came Jesus. He gripped the situation in a flash and in his mastery the disorder became a calm. So often we feel that life is out of control; that we have lost our grip on things. Only the Master of life can deal with life with the calm competence that brings everything under control.

(iii) Once again the incident finished with Jesus pointing at the cross. Here was triumph; here Jesus had mastered the demons and astonished the people. And in that very moment when they were ready to acclaim him, Jesus told them he was on the way to die. It would have been so easy to take the way of popular success; it was Jesus' greatness that he rejected it and chose the cross. He would not himself shirk that cross to which he called others.

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Luke 9:46-48

TRUE GREATNESS

Luke 9:46-48

There arose an argument amongst them as to which of them should be the greatest. But when Jesus knew the thoughts of their hearts he took a child and set him beside him. "Whoever," he said to them, "receives this child in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives him that sent me. He who is least among you, he it is who is the greatest."

So long as the Twelve thought of Jesus' kingdom as an earthly kingdom it was inevitable that they should be in competition for the highest places in it. Long ago the Venerable Bede suggested that this particular quaff el arose because Jesus had taken Peter, John and James up into the mountain top with him and the others were jealous.

Jesus knew what was going on in their hearts. He took a child and placed him beside himself; that would be the seat of highest honour. He went on to say that whoever received a little child, received him; and whoever received him, received God. What did he mean? The Twelve were the chosen lieutenants of Jesus; but this child occupied no place of honour and held no official position. Jesus was saying, "If you are prepared to spend your lives serving, helping, loving people who, in the eyes of the world, do not matter at all, you are serving me and serving God. If you are prepared to spend your life doing these apparently unimportant things and never trying to be what the world calls great, you will be great in the eyes of God."

There are so many wrong motives for service.

(i) There is the desire for prestige. A. J. Cronin tells of a district nurse he knew when he was in practice as a doctor. For twenty years, single-handed, she had served a ten-mile district. "I marvelled," he says, "at her patience, her fortitude and her cheerfulness. She was never too tired at night to rise for an urgent call. Her salary was most inadequate, and late one night, after a particularly strenuous day, I ventured to protest to her, 'Nurse, why don't you make them pay you more? God knows you are worth it.' 'If God knows I'm worth it,' she answered, 'that's all that matters to me.'" She was working, not for men, but for God. And when we work for God, prestige will be the last thing that enters into our mind, for we will know that even our best is not good enough for him.

(ii) There is the desire for place. If a man is given a task or a position or an office in the church, he should regard it not as an honour but as a responsibility. There are those who serve within the church, not thinking really of those they serve, but thinking of themselves. A certain English Prime Minister was offered congratulations on attaining to that office. "I do not want your congratulations," he said, "but I do want your prayers." To be chosen for office is to be set apart for service, not elevated to honour.

(iii) There is the desire for prominence. Many a person will serve or give so long as his service and his generosity are known and he is thanked and praised. It is Jesus' own instruction that we

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Luke 9:46-48

should not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. If we give only to gain something out of the giving for ourselves, we have undone much of its good.

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Luke 9:49-56

TWO LESSONS IN TOLERANCE

Luke 9:49-56

John said to Jesus, "Master, we saw a man casting out demons in your name; and we stopped him because he does not follow with us." Jesus said to him, "Don't try to stop him, for he who is not against us is for us."

When the days that he should be received up were on their way to being completed he fixed his face firmly to go to Jerusalem. He sent messengers on ahead. When they had gone on they went into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; and they refused to receive them because his face was set in the direction of Jerusalem. When his disciples, James and John, learned of this they said, "Lord, would you like us to order fire to come down from heaven and destroy them?" He turned to them and rebuked them; and they went on to another village.

Here we have two lessons in tolerance.

There were many exorcists in Palestine, all claiming to be able to cast out demons; and no doubt John regarded this man as a competitor and wished to eliminate him. But Jesus would not permit him.

The direct way from Galilee to Jerusalem led through Samaria; but most Jews avoided it. There was a centuries' old quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans (Jn.4:9). The Samaritans in fact did everything they could to hinder and even to injure any bands of pilgrims who attempted to pass through their territory. For Jesus to take that way to Jerusalem was unusual; and to attempt to find hospitality in a Samaritan village was still more unusual. When he did this he was extending a hand of friendship to a people who were enemies. In this case not only was hospitality refused but the offer of friendship was spurned. No doubt, therefore, James and John believed they were doing a praiseworthy thing when they offered to call in divine aid to blot out the village. But Jesus would not permit them.

There is no passage in which Jesus so directly teaches the duty of tolerance as in this. In many ways tolerance is a lost virtue, and often, where it does exist, it exists from the wrong cause. Of all the greatest religious leaders none was such a pattern of tolerance as John Wesley. "I have no more right," he said, "to object to a man for holding a different opinion from mine than I have to differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair; but if he takes his wig off and shakes the powder in my face, I shall consider it my duty to get quit of him as soon as possible. . . . The thing which I resolved to use every possible method of preventing was a narrowness of spirit, a party zeal, a being straitened in our own bowels--that miserable bigotry which makes many so unready to believe that there is any work of God but among themselves. . . . We think and let think." When his nephew, Samuel, the son of his brother Charles, entered the Roman Catholic Church, he wrote to him, "Whether in this Church or that I care not. You may be saved in either or damned in either; but I fear you are not born again." The Methodist invitation to the sacrament is simply, "Let all who love the Lord come here."

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Luke 9:49-56

The conviction that our beliefs and our methods alone are correct has been the cause of more tragedy and distress in the church than almost any other thing. Oliver Cromwell wrote once to the intransigent Scots, "I beseech you by the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken." T. R. Glover somewhere quotes a saying, "Remember that whatever your hand finds to do, someone thinks differently!"

There are many ways to God. He has his own secret stairway into every heart. He fulfils himself in many ways; and no man or church has a monopoly of his truth.

But--and this is intensely important--our tolerance must be based not on indifference but on love. We ought to be tolerant not because we could not care less; but because we look at the other person with eyes of love. When Abraham Lincoln was criticized for being too courteous to his enemies and reminded that it was his duty to destroy them, he gave the great answer, "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" Even if a man be utterly mistaken, we must never regard him as an enemy to be destroyed but as a strayed friend to be recovered by love.

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Luke 9:57-62

THE HONESTY OF JESUS

Luke 9:57-62

As they were journeying along the road, a man said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus said to him, "The foxes have dens; the birds of the air have places to roost; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

He said to another man, "Follow Me! Lord," he said, "let me go first and bury my father." He said to him, "Let the dead bury their dead; but do you go and tell abroad the news of the kingdom of God."

Another man said to him, "Lord, I will follow you; but let me first say good-bye to the folk at home." Jesus said to him, "No man who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is the right kind of man for the kingdom of God."

Here we have the words of Jesus to three would-be followers.

(i) To the first man, his advice was, "Before you follow me, count the cost." No one can ever say that he was induced to follow Jesus under false pretenses. Jesus paid men the compliment of pitching his demands so high that they cannot be higher. It may well be that we have done great hurt to the church by letting people think that church membership need not make so very much difference. We ought to tell them that it should make all the difference in the world. We might have fewer people; but those we had would be really pledged to Christ.

(ii) Jesus' words to the second man sound harsh, but they need not be so. In all probability the man's father was not dead, and not even nearly dead. His saying most likely meant, "I will follow you after my father has died." An English official in the East tells of a very brilliant young Arab who was offered a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge. His answer was, "I will take it after I have buried my father." At the time his father was not much more than forty years of age.

The point Jesus was making is that in everything there is a crucial moment; if that moment is missed the thing most likely will never be done at all. The man in the story had stirrings in his heart to get out of his spiritually dead surroundings; if he missed that moment he would never get out.

The psychologists tell us that every time we have a fine feeling, and do not act on it, the less likely we are to act on it at all. The emotion becomes a substitute for the action. Take one example—sometimes we feel that we would like to write a letter, perhaps of sympathy, perhaps of thanks, perhaps of congratulations. If we put it off until to-morrow, it will in all likelihood never be written. Jesus urges us to act at once when our hearts are stirred.

(iii) His words to the third man state a truth which no one can deny. No ploughman ever ploughed a straight furrow looking back over his shoulder. There are some whose hearts are in the past. They walk forever looking backwards and thinking wistfully of the good old days. Watkinson, the great preacher, tells how once at the seaside, when he was with his little grandson, he met an old

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minister. The old man was very disgruntled and, to add to all his troubles, he had a slight touch of sunstroke. The little boy had been listening but had not picked it up quite correctly; and when they left the grumbling complaints of the old man, he turned to Watkinson and said, "Granddad, I hope you never suffer from a sunset!"

The Christian marches on, not to the sunset, but to the dawn. The watchword of the kingdom is not, "Backwards!" but, "Forwards!" To this man Jesus did not say either, "Follow!" or, "Return!" he said, "I accept no lukewarm service," and left the man to make his own decision.

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Luke 10:1-16

LABOURERS FOR THE HARVEST

Luke 10:1-16

After these things the Lord appointed other seventy men and sent them out in twos ahead of him into every town and place where he intended to go. "The harvest is great," he said to them, "but the workers are few. Pray then the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for the harvest. Go! Look you--I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Do not take a purse or a wallet or sandals. Greet no one on the road. Into whatever house you go, say first of all, 'Peace to this house!' If it is a son of peace who lives there your peace will remain upon it; but if not it will return to you. Remain in the same house eating and drinking whatever they give you; for the workman deserves his pay. Do not go from house to house. If you go into any town and they receive you, eat what is put before you.

Heal those in it who are ill, and keep saying to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near you!' If you go into any town and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'The very dust which clings to our feet from this town, we wipe off against you. But realize this--the kingdom of God has come near you!' I tell you, things will be easier for Sodom in that day than for that town. Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have sat in dust and ashes and repented. But at the judgment things will be easier for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you Capernaum--will you be exalted to heaven? You will be cast down to hell. He who listens to you, listens to me; and he who sets no value on you, sets no value on me; and he who sets no value on me, sets no value on him that sent me."

This passage describes a wider mission than the first mission of the Twelve.

The number seventy was to the Jews symbolic.

(a) It was the number of the elders who were chosen to help Moses with the task of leading and directing the people in the wilderness (Num. 11:16-17, 24, 25).

(b) It was the number of the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of the Jews. If we relate the Seventy to either of these bodies they will be the helpers of Jesus.

(c) It was held to be the number of nations in the world. Luke was the man with the universalist view and it may well be that he was thinking of the day when every nation in the world would know and love his Lord.

There is an interesting sidelight here. One of the towns on which woe is pronounced is Chorazin. It is implied that Jesus did many mighty works there. In the gospel history as we have it Chorazin is never even mentioned, and we do not know one thing that Jesus did or one word that he spoke there. Nothing could show so vividly how much we do not know about the life of Jesus. The gospels are not biographies; they are only sketches of his life (compare Jn. 21:25).

This passage tells us certain supremely important things about both the preacher and the hearer.

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Luke 10:1-16

(i) The preacher is not to be cluttered up with material things; he is to travel light. It is easy to get entangled in the things of this life. Once Dr. Johnson, after seeing through a great castle and its policies, remarked grimly, "These are the things which make it difficult to die." Earth must never blot out heaven.

(ii) The preacher is to concentrate on his task; he is to greet no man on the way. This goes back to Elisha's instruction to Gehazi in 2Kgs.4:29. It is not an instruction to discourtesy; but means that the man of God must not turn aside or linger on the lesser things while the great things call him.

(iii) The preacher must not be in the work for what he can get out of it; he is to eat what is put before him and must not move from house to house seeking better and more comfortable quarters. It was not long before the church had its spongers. There is a work called The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. It was written about A.D. 100, and is the church's first book of order. In those days there were prophets who wandered from town to town. It is laid down that if a prophet wishes to stay in a place for more than three days without working he is a false prophet; and if a prophet in the Spirit asks for money or a meal he is a false prophet! The labourer is worthy of his hire, but the servant of a crucified Master cannot be a seeker for luxury.

(iv) To have heard God's word is a great responsibility. A man will be judged according to what he has had the chance to know. We allow things in a child we condemn in an adult; we forgive things in a savage we punish in a civilized man. Responsibility is the other side of privilege.

(v) It is a terrible thing to reject God's invitation. There is a sense in which every promise of God that a man has ever heard can become his condemnation. If he receives these promises they are his greatest glory, but each one that he has rejected will some day be a witness against him.

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Luke 10:17-20

A MAN'S TRUE GLORY

Luke 10:17-20

The Seventy returned with joy. "Lord," they said, "at your name the demons are subject to us." He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven. Look you--I have given you authority to walk upon snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the Enemy. Nothing will hurt you. But do not rejoice in this--that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

When the Seventy returned they were radiant with the triumphs which they had wrought in the name of Jesus. Jesus said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven." That is a difficult phrase to understand. It can have two meanings.

(i) It may mean, "I saw the forces of darkness and evil defeated; the citadel of Satan is stormed and the kingdom of God is on the way." It may mean that Jesus knew that the deathblow to Satan and all his powers had been struck, however long his final conquest might be delayed.

(ii) Equally well it may be a warning against pride. The legend was that it was for a pride which rebelled against God that Satan was cast out of heaven where once he had been the chief of the angels. It may be that Jesus was saying to the Seventy, "You have had your triumphs; keep yourselves from pride, for once the chief of all the angels fell to pride and was cast from heaven."

Certainly Jesus went on to warn his disciples against pride and over-confidence. It was true that they were given all power, but their greatest glory was that their names were written in heaven.

It will always remain true that a man's greatest glory is not what he has done but what God has done for him. It might well be claimed that the discovery of the use of chloroform saved the world more pain than any other single medical discovery. Once someone asked Sir James Simpson, who pioneered its use, "What do you regard as your greatest discovery?" expecting the answer, "Chloroform." But Simpson answered, "My greatest discovery was that Jesus Christ is my Saviour."

Even the greatest man can say in the presence of God only,

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy Cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

Pride bars from heaven; humility is the passport to the presence of God.

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Luke 10:21-24

THE UNSURPASSABLE CLAIM

Luke 10:21-24

At that time Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. "I thank you, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth," he said, "that you have hidden these things from the wise and clever and that you have revealed them to babes. Yes, O Father, for so it was your good pleasure in your sight. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father; and no one knows who the Father is except the Son, and he to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." He turned to his disciples when they were in private and said, "Happy are the eyes which see the things which you are seeing for I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see the things that you are seeing and did not see them, and to hear the things that you are hearing and did not hear them."

There are three great thoughts in this passage.

(i) Lk.10:21 tells us of the wisdom of simplicity. The simple mind could receive truths that learned minds could not take in. Once Arnold Bennett said, "The only way to write a great book is to write it with the eyes of a child who sees things for the first time." It is possible to be too clever. It is possible to be so learned that in the end we cannot see the wood for the trees. Someone has said that the test of a really great scholar is how much he is able to forget. After all, Christianity does not mean knowing all the theories about the New Testament; still less does it mean knowing all the theologies and the Christologies. Christianity does not mean knowing about Christ, it means knowing Christ; and to do that requires not earthly wisdom but heavenly grace.

(ii) Lk.10:22 tells of the unique relationship between Jesus and God. This is what the Fourth Gospel means when it says, "The Word became flesh" (Jn.1:14), or when it makes Jesus say, "I and the Father are one," or, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn.10:30; Jn.14:9). To the Greeks God was unknowable. There was a great gulf fixed between matter and spirit, man and God. "It is very difficult," they said, "to know God, and when you do know him it is impossible to tell anyone else about him." But when Jesus came he said, "If you want to know what God is like, look at me." Jesus did not so much tell men about God as show them God, because in himself were God's mind and heart.

(iii) Lk.10:23-24 tell us that Jesus is the consummation of all history. In these verses Jesus said, "I am the One to whom all the prophets and the saints and the kings looked forward and for whom they longed." This is what Matthew means when over and over again in his gospel he wrote, "This was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying . . ." (compare Matt.2:15,17,23). Jesus was the peak to which history had been climbing, the goal to which it had been marching, the dream which had ever haunted men of God. If we desire to express this in terms of modern thought we might dare to put it this way. We believe in evolution, the slow climb upwards of man from the level of the beasts. Jesus is the end and climax of the evolutionary process because in him man meets God; and he is at once the perfection of manhood and the fulness of godhead.

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Luke 10:25-37

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR

Luke 10:25-37

Look you--an expert in the law stood up and asked Jesus a test question. "Teacher," he said, "What is it I am to do to become the possessor of eternal life?" He said to him, "What stands written in the law? How do you read?" He answered, "You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole mind, and your neighbour as yourself." "Your answer is correct," said Jesus. But he, wishing to put himself in the right, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus answered, "There was a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He fell amongst brigands who stripped him and laid blows upon him, and went away and left him half-dead. Now, by chance, a priest came down by that road. He looked at him and passed by on the other side. In the same way when a Levite came to the place he looked at him and passed by on the other side. A Samaritan who was on the road came to where he was. He looked at him and was moved to the depths of his being with pity.

So he came up to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in wine and oil; and he put him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and cared for him. On the next day he put down 10p and gave it to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and whatever more you are out of pocket, when I come back this way, I'll square up with you in full.' Which of these three, do you think, was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of brigands?" He said, "He who showed mercy on him." "Go," said Jesus to him, "and do likewise."

First, let us look at the scene of this story. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a notoriously dangerous road. Jerusalem is 2,300 feet above sea-level; the Dead Sea, near which Jericho stood, is 1,300 feet below sea-level. So then, in somewhat less than 20 miles, this road dropped 3,600 feet. It was a road of narrow, rocky defiles, and of sudden turnings which made it the happy hunting-ground of brigands. In the fifth century Jerome tells us that it was still called "The Red, or Bloody Way." In the 19th century it was still necessary to pay safety money to the local Sheiks before one could travel on it. As late as the early 1930's, H. V. Morton tells us that he was warned to get home before dark, if he intended to use the road, because a certain Abu Jildah was an adept at holding up cars and robbing travellers and tourists, and escaping to the hills before the police could arrive. When Jesus told this story, he was telling about the kind of thing that was constantly happening on the Jerusalem to Jericho road.

Second, let us look at the characters.

(a) There was the traveller. He was obviously a reckless and foolhardy character. People seldom attempted the Jerusalem to Jericho road alone if they were carrying goods or valuables. Seeking safety in numbers, they travelled in convoys or caravans. This man had no one but himself to blame for the plight in which he found himself.

(b) There was the priest. He hastened past. No doubt he was remembering that he who touched a dead man was unclean for seven days (Num.19:11). He could not be sure but he feared that the man was dead; to touch him would mean losing his turn of duty in the Temple; and he refused to risk

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Luke 10:25-37

that. He set the claims of ceremonial above those of charity. The Temple and its liturgy meant more to him than the pain of man.

(c) There was the Levite. He seems to have gone nearer to the man before he passed on. The bandits were in the habit of using deceptions. One of their number would act the part of a wounded man; and when some unsuspecting traveller stopped over him, the others would rush upon him and overpower him. The Levite was a man whose motto was, "Safety first." He would take no risks to help anyone else.

(d) There was the Samaritan. The listeners would obviously expect that with his arrival the villain had arrived. He may not have been racially a Samaritan at all. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans and yet this man seems to have been a kind of commercial traveller who was a regular visitor to the inn. In Jn.8:48 the Jews call Jesus a Samaritan. The name was sometimes used to describe a man who was a heretic and a breaker of the ceremonial law. Perhaps this man was a Samaritan in the sense of being one whom all orthodox good people despised.

We note two things about him.

(i) His credit was good! Clearly the innkeeper was prepared to trust him. He may have been theologically unsound, but he was an honest man.

(ii) He alone was prepared to help. A heretic he may have been, but the love of God was in his heart. It is no new experience to find the orthodox more interested in dogmas than in help and to find the man the orthodox despise to be the one who loves his fellow-men. In the end we will be judged not by the creed we hold but by the life we live.

Third, let us look at the teaching of the parable. The scribe who asked this question was in earnest. Jesus asked him what was written in the law, and then said, "How do you read?" Strict orthodox Jews wore round their wrists little leather boxes called phylacteries, which contained certain passages of scripture--Exo.13:1-10; Exo.13:11-16; Deut.6:4-9; Deut.11:13-20. "You will love the Lord your God" is from Deut.6:4 and Deut.11:13. So Jesus said to the scribe, "Look at the phylactery on your own wrist and it will answer your question." To that the scribe added Lev.19:18, which bids a man love his neighbour as himself; but with their passion for definition the Rabbis sought to define who a man's neighbour was; and at their worst and their narrowest they confined the word neighbour to their fellow Jews. For instance, some of them said that it was illegal to help a gentile woman in her sorest time, the time of childbirth, for that would only have been to bring another gentile into the world. So then the scribe's question, "Who is my neighbour?" was genuine.

Jesus' answer involves three things.

(i) We must help a man even when he has brought his trouble on himself, as the traveller had done.

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Luke 10:25-37

(ii) Any man of any nation who is in need is our neighbour. Our help must be as wide as the love of God.

(iii) The help must be practical and not consist merely in feeling sorry. No doubt the priest and the Levite felt a pang of pity for the wounded man, but they did nothing. Compassion, to be real, must issue in deeds.

What Jesus said to the scribe, he says to us--"Go you and do the same."

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Luke 10:38-42

THE CLASH OF TEMPERAMENTS

Luke 10:38-42

As they journeyed, Jesus entered into a village. A woman called Martha received him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, and she sat at Jesus' feet and kept listening to his word. Martha was worried about much serving. She stood over them and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me alone to do the serving? Tell her to give me a hand." "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered her, "you are worried and troubled about many things. Only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part, and it is not going to be taken away from her."

It would be hard to find more vivid character drawing in greater economy of words than we find in these verses.

(i) They show us the clash of temperaments. We have never allowed enough for the place of temperament in religion. Some people are naturally dynamos of activity; others are naturally quiet. It is hard for the active person to understand the person who sits and contemplates. And the person who is devoted to quiet times and meditation is apt to look down on the person who would rather be active.

There is no right or wrong in this. God did not make everyone alike. One person may pray,

"Lord of all pots and pans and things,
Since I've no time to be
A saint by doing lovely things,
Or watching late with thee,

Or dreaming in the dawnlight,
Or storming heaven's gates,
Make me a saint by getting meals
And washing up the plates."

Another may sit with folded hands and mind intense to think and pray. Both are serving God. God needs his Marys and his Marthas, too.

(ii) These verses show us something more--they show us the wrong type of kindness. Think where Jesus was going when this happened. He was on his way to Jerusalem--to die. His whole being was taken up with the intensity of the inner battle to bend his will to the will of God. When Jesus came to that home in Bethany it was a great day; and Martha was eager to celebrate it by laying on the best the house could give. So she rushed and fussed and cooked; and that was precisely what Jesus did not want. All he wanted was quiet. With the cross before him and with the inner tension in his heart, he had turned aside to Bethany to find an oasis of calm away from the demanding crowds if only for an hour or two; and that is what Mary gave him and what Martha, in her kindness, did her best to destroy. "One thing is necessary"--quite possibly this means, "I don't

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Luke 10:38-42

want a big spread; one course, the simplest meal is all I want." It was simply that Mary understood and that Martha did not.

Here is one of the great difficulties in life. So often we want to be kind to people--but we want to be kind to them in our way; and should it happen that our way is not the necessary way, we sometimes take offence and think that we are not appreciated. If we are trying to be kind the first necessity is to try to see into the heart of the person we desire to help--and then to forget all our own plans and to think only of what he or she needs. Jesus loved Martha and Martha loved him, but when Martha set out to be kind, it had to be her way of being kind which was really being unkind to him whose heart cried out for quiet. Jesus loved Mary and Mary loved him, and Mary understood.

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Luke 11:1-4

TEACH US TO PRAY

Luke 11:1-4

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he stopped, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say,

O Father, let your name be held in reverence. Let your kingdom come. Give to us each day our bread for the day. And forgive us our sins as we too forgive everyone who is in debt to us. And lead us not into temptation."

It was the regular custom for a Rabbi to teach his disciples a simple prayer which they might habitually use. John had done that for his disciples, and now Jesus' disciples came asking him to do the same for them. This is Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer. It is shorter than Matthew's, but it will teach us all we need to know about how to pray and what to pray for.

(i) It begins by calling God Father. That was the characteristic Christian address to God. (compare Gal.4:6; Rom.8:15; 1Pet.1:17). The very first word tells us that in prayer we are not coming to someone out of whom gifts have to be unwillingly extracted, but to a Father who delights to supply his children's needs.

(ii) In Hebrew the name means much more than merely the name by which a person is called. The name means the whole character of the person as it is revealed and known to us. Ps.9:10 says, "Those who know thy name put their trust in thee." That means far more than knowing that God's name is Jehovah. It means that those who know the whole character and mind and heart of God will gladly put their trust in him.

(iii) We must note particularly the order of the Lord's Prayer. Before anything is asked for ourselves, God and his glory, and the reverence due to him, come first. Only when we give God his place will other things take their proper place.

(iv) The prayer covers all life.

(a) it covers present need. It tells us to pray for our daily bread; but it is bread for the day for which we pray. This goes back to the old story of the manna in the wilderness (Exo.16:11-21). Only enough for the needs of the day might be gathered. We are not to worry about the unknown future, but to live a day at a time.

"I do not ask to see
The distant scene--one step enough for me."

(b) It covers past sin. When we pray we cannot do other than pray for forgiveness, for the best of us is a sinful man coming before the purity of God.

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Luke 11:1-4

(c) It covers future trials. Temptation means any testing situation. It includes far more than the mere seduction to sin; it covers every situation which is a challenge to and a test of a person's manhood and integrity and fidelity. We cannot escape it, but we can meet it with God.

Someone has said that the Lord's Prayer has two great uses in our private prayers. If we use it at the beginning of our devotions it awakens all kinds of holy desires which lead us on into the right pathways of prayer. If we use it at the end of our devotions it sums up all we ought to pray for in the presence of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 11:5-13

ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE

Luke 11:5-13

Jesus said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him towards midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves because a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to set before him'; and suppose his friend answers from within, 'Don't bother me; the door has already been shut and my children are in bed with me; I can't get up and supply you'--I tell you, if he will not rise and supply him because he is his friend, he will rise and give him as much as he needs because of his shameless persistence. For I say to you, 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it will be opened.

If a son asks any father among you for bread, will he give him a stone? Or, if he asks a fish, will he, instead of a fish, give him a serpent? Or if he asks an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

Travellers often journeyed late in the evening to avoid the heat of the midday sun. In Jesus' story just such a traveller had arrived towards midnight at this friend's house. In the east hospitality is a sacred duty; it was not enough to set before a man a bare sufficiency; the guest had to be confronted with an ample abundance. In the villages bread was baked at home. Only enough for the day's needs was baked because, if it was kept and became stale, no one would wish to eat it.

The late arrival of the traveller confronted the householder with an embarrassing situation, because his larder was empty and he could not fulfil the sacred obligations of hospitality. Late as it was, he went out to borrow from a friend. The friend's door was shut. In the east no one would knock on a shut door unless the need was imperative. In the morning the door was opened and remained open all day, for there was little privacy; but if the door was shut, that was a definite sign that the householder did not wish to be disturbed. But the seeking householder was not deterred. He knocked, and kept on knocking.

The poorer Palestinian house consisted of one room with only one little window. The floor was simply of beaten earth covered with dried reeds and rushes. The room was divided into two parts, not by a partition but by a low platform. Two-thirds of it were on ground level. The other third was slightly raised. On the raised part the charcoal stove burned all night, and round it the whole family slept, not on raised beds but on sleeping mats. Families were large and they slept close together for warmth. For one to rise was inevitably to disturb the whole family. Further, in the villages it was the custom to bring the livestock, the hens and the cocks and the goats, into the house at night.

Is there any wonder that the man who was in bed did not want to rise? But the determined borrower knocked on with shameless persistence--that is what the Greek word means--until at last the householder, knowing that by this time the whole family was disturbed anyway, arose and gave him what he needed.

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Luke 11:5-13

"That story," said Jesus, "will tell you about prayer." The lesson of this parable is not that we must persist in prayer; it is not that we must batter at God's door until we finally compel him for very weariness to give us what we want, until we coerce an unwilling God to answer.

A parable literally means something laid alongside. If we lay something beside another thing to teach a lesson, that lesson may be drawn from the fact that the things are like each other or from the fact that the things are a contrast to each other. The point here is based, not on likeness, but on contrast. What Jesus says is, "If a churlish and unwilling householder can in the end be coerced by a friend's shameless persistence into giving him what he needs, how much more will God who is a loving Father supply all his children's needs?" "If you," he says, "who are evil, know that you are bound to supply your children's needs, how much more will God?"

This does not absolve us from intensity in prayer. After all, we can guarantee the reality and sincerity of our desire only by the passion with which we pray. But it does mean this, that we are not wringing gifts from an unwilling God, but going to one who knows our needs better than we know them ourselves and whose heart towards us is the heart of generous love. If we do not receive what we pray for, it is not because God grudgingly refuses to give it but because he has some better thing for us. There is no such thing as unanswered prayer. The answer given may not be the answer we desired or expected; but even when it is a refusal it is the answer of the love and the wisdom of God.

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Luke 11:14-23

A MALICIOUS SLANDER

Luke 11:14-23

Jesus was casting out a dumb demon. When the demon came out the dumb man spoke and the crowds were amazed. Some of them said, "He casts out demons by the help of Beelzebul, who is the prince of demons." Others, trying to put him to the test, sought a sign from heaven from him. He knew what they were thinking. "Every kingdom," he said, "that is divided against itself is devastated; and every house that is divided against itself falls; so if Satan is divided against himself how win his kingdom stand? You must answer that question because you say that I cast out demons by the help of Beelzebul. If I cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul, by whose power do your sons cast them out? You have become your own judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man in full panoply guards his own homestead, his goods are in peace.

But when a stronger man than he comes and conquers him, he will take away the armour in which he trusted, and will divide his spoil. He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters."

When Jesus' enemies were helpless to oppose him by fair means they resorted to slander. They declared that his power over the demons was due to the fact that he was in league with the prince of demons. They attributed his power not to God but to the devil. Jesus gave them a double and a crushing answer.

First, he struck them a shrewd blow. There were many exorcists in Jesus' time in Palestine. Josephus, traces this power back to Solomon. Part of Solomon's wisdom was that he was skilful with herbs and had invented incantations which--drove out demons in such a way that they never came back; and Josephus states that he had seen Solomon's methods used with success even in his own day. (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 8: 5: 2) So Jesus delivers a home-thrust. "If I," he said, "cast out devils because I am in league with the prince of devils, what of your own people who do the same thing? If you condemn me, you are only condemning yourselves."

Second, he used a really unanswerable argument. No kingdom in which there is a civil war can survive. If the prince of devils is lending his power to defeat his own emissaries he is finished. There is only one way for a strong man to be defeated and that is for a still stronger man to master him. "Therefore," said Jesus, "if I cast out devils, so far from that proving that I am in league with the prince of devils, it proves that the devil's citadel is breached, the strong man of evil is mastered, and the kingdom of God is here."

Out of this passage emerge certain permanent truths.

(i) It is by no means uncommon for people to resort to slander when honest opposition is helpless. Gladstone was interested in the reformation of the fallen women of the streets of London. His enemies suggested that he was interested in them for very different and very inferior reasons. There is nothing so cruel as slander, for it is apt to stick because the human mind always tends to think the worst and very often the human ear prefers to hear the derogatory rather than the complimentary

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tale. We need not think that we are free of that particular sin. How often do we tend to think the worst of other people? How often do we deliberately impute low motives to someone whom we dislike? How often do we repeat the slanderous and the malicious tale and murder reputations over the tea-cups? To think of this will not cause complacency but call for self-examination.

(ii) Once again we must note that Jesus' proof that the kingdom had come was the fact that sufferers were healed and health walked where disease had been. Jesus' aim was not only soul salvation; it was also whole salvation.

(iii) Luke finishes this section with the saying of Jesus that he who was not with him was against him and that he who did not help to gather the flock helped to scatter it abroad. There is no place for neutrality in the Christian life. The man who stands aloof from the good cause automatically helps the evil one. A man is either on the way or in the way.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 11:24-28

THE PERIL OF THE EMPTY SOUL

Luke 11:24-28

When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it goes through waterless places seeking for rest. And when it does not find it, it says, "I will go back to my house from which I came out." So it comes and finds the house swept and in order. Then it goes and gets in addition seven spirits worse than itself, and they enter in and settle there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

When he was speaking a woman lifted up her voice from the crowd and said, "Happy is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you sucked." "But," he said, "rather, happy are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

Here is a grim and terrible story. There was a man from whom an unclean spirit was expelled. It wandered seeking rest and found none. It determined to return to the man. It found his soul swept and garnished--but empty. So the spirit went and collected seven spirits worse than itself and came back and entered in; and the man's last state was worse than his first.

(i) Here is the fundamental truth that you cannot leave a man's soul empty. It is not enough to banish the evil thoughts and the evil habits and the old ways and leave the soul empty. An empty soul is a soul in peril. Adam C. Welch liked to preach on the text, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph.5:18). When he did so his opening sentence was, "You've got to fill a man with something." It is not enough to drive out evil; good must come in.

(ii) That means we can never erect a real religion on negatives. Take a very clear example--the problem of Sunday observance is still not solved in the church today. Too often it is approached with a tirade against the things which people allow themselves to do on Sunday and a catalogue of forbidden things. But the man to whom we speak has a perfect right to ask, "Well, what may I do?" And unless we tell him, his last state is worse than his first, for we have simply condemned him to idleness, and Satan is adept at finding mischief for idle hands to do. It is always the peril of religion that it may present itself in a series of negatives. Cleansing is necessary; but after the rooting out of evil, there must come the filling with good.

(iii) The best way to avoid evil is to do good. The loveliest garden I ever saw was so full of flowers that there was scarcely room for a weed to grow. In no garden is it enough to uproot weeds; flowers must be sown and planted until the space is filled. Nowhere is this truer than in the world of thoughts. Often we may be troubled with wrong thoughts. If we go no further than to say to ourselves, "I will not think about that," all we do is fix our thoughts upon it more and more. The cure is to think of something else, to banish the evil thought by thinking a good thought. We never become good by not doing things, but by filling life with lovely things.

Lk.11:27-28 show Jesus speaking sternly but truly. The woman who spoke was carried away by a moment of emotion. Jesus pulled her back to reality. The moment of emotion is a fine thing; but the

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Luke 11:24-28

greatest thing is a life of obedience in the routine things of everyday. No amount of fine feeling can take the place of faithful doing.

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Luke 11:29-32

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PRIVILEGE

Luke 11:29-32

When the crowds were thronging upon him, he began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah; for just as Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh so the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the south will rise up in judgment with the men of this generation and will condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and--look you--something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and--look you--something greater than Jonah is here."

The Jews wanted Jesus to do something sensational to prove that he really was the anointed one of God. Later than this, about the year A.D. 45, a man called Theudas arose claiming to be the Messiah. He persuaded the people to follow him out to the Jordan with the promise that he would cleave the river in two and give them a pathway through it to the other side. Needless to say he failed, and the Romans dealt summarily with his rising; but that is the kind of thing the people wanted Jesus to do to prove his claims. They could not see that the greatest sign that God could ever send was Jesus himself.

Just as once long ago Jonah had been God's sign to Nineveh, so now Jesus was God's sign to them---and they failed to recognize him. When Solomon was king the Queen of Sheba recognized his wisdom and came from far to benefit from it; when Jonah preached the men of Nineveh recognized the authentic voice of God and responded to it. In the day of judgment these people would rise up and condemn the Jews of Jesus' time, because these Jews had had an opportunity and a privilege far beyond anything they had ever had and had refused to accept it. The condemnation of the Jews would be all the more complete because their privileges were so great.

Privilege and responsibility go ever hand in hand. Think of two of our greatest privileges and how we use them.

(i) Available to everyone is the Bible, the word of God. It did not cost nothing. There was a time when it was death to teach the English Bible. When Wycliff wrote to a certain scholar, about the year A.D. 1350, asking him to teach the common people the gospel stories in the English tongue, he answered, "I know well that I am holden by Christ's law to perform thy asking, but, natheless, we are now so far fallen away from Christ's law, that if I would answer to thy askings I must in case undergo the death; and thou wettest well that a man is beholden to keep his life as long as he may." Later on, Foxe was to tell us that in those days men sat up all night to read and hear the word of God in English. "Some gave five marks (equal to 40 British pounds), some more, some less for a book; some gave a load of hay for a few chapters of St. James or St. Paul in English." It was Tyndale who gave England its first printed Bible.

To do so, as he said himself, he suffered, "poverty, exile, bitter absence from friends, hunger and thirst and cold, great dangers and innumerable other hard and sharp fightings." In 1536 he was

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Luke 11:29-32

martyred. When, some years before, the authorities had burned the book, he said, "They did none other thing than I looked for; no more shall they do if they burn me also."

There is no book which cost so much as the Bible. To-day it is in serious danger of deserving the cynical definition of a classic--a book of which everyone has heard and which no one reads. We have the privilege of possessing the Bible and that privilege is a responsibility for which we shall answer.

(ii) We have freedom to worship as we think right; and that, too, is a privilege which cost the lives of men. The tragedy is that so many people have used that freedom in order not to worship at all. That privilege, too, is a responsibility for which we shall answer.

If a man possesses Christ, and Christ's book, and Christ's church, he is the heir of all the privileges of God; and if he neglects them or refuses them he, like the Jews in the time of Jesus, is a man under condemnation.

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Luke 11:33-36

THE DARKENED HEART

Luke 11:33-36

No one lights a lamp and puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but upon a lamp-stand, so that those who come in may see the light. The lamp of the body is your eye. When your eye is sound your whole body is full of light; but if the eye is diseased the whole body is full of darkness. Take care, then, lest the light that is in you is darkness. If, then, your whole body is full of light, without any part of darkness, it will be altogether bright as when the lamp with its ray gives you light.

The meaning is not easy to grasp, but probably it is this. The light of the body depends on the eye; if the eye is healthy the body receives all the light it needs; if the eye is diseased the light turns to darkness. Just so, the light of life depends on the heart; if the heart is right the whole life is irradiated with light; if the heart is wrong all life is darkened. Jesus urges us to see that the inner lamp is always burning.

What is it that darkens the inner light? What is it that can go wrong with our hearts?

(i) Our hearts may become hard. Sometimes, if we have to do something unaccustomed with our hands, the skin is irritated and we have pain; but if we repeat the action often enough the skin becomes hardened and we can do what once hurt us without any trouble. It is so with our hearts. The first time we do a wrong thing we do it with a tremor and sometimes with a sore heart. Each time we repeat it the tremor grows less, until in the end we can do it without a qualm. There is a terrible hardening power in sin. No man ever took the first step to sin without the warnings sounding in his heart; but if he sins often enough the time comes when he ceases to care. What we were once afraid and reluctant to do becomes a habit. We have nobody but ourselves to blame if we allow ourselves to reach that stage.

(ii) Our hearts may become dull. It is tragically easy to accept things. In the beginning our hearts may be sore at the sight of the world's suffering and pain; but in the end most people become so used to it that they accept it and feel nothing at all.

It is all too true that for most people the feelings of youth are far more intense than those of age. That is specially true of the cross of Jesus Christ. Florence Barclay tells how when she was a little girl she was taken to church for the first time. It was Good Friday, and the long story of the crucifixion was read and beautifully read. She heard Peter deny and Judas betray; she heard Pilate's bullying cross-examination; she saw the crown of thorns, the buffeting of the soldiers; she heard of Jesus being delivered to be crucified, and then there came the words with their terrible finality, "and there they crucified him." No one in the church seemed to care; but suddenly the little girl's face was buried in her mother's coat, and she was sobbing her heart out, and her little voice rang through the silent church, "Why did they do it? Why did they do it?"

That is how we all ought to feel about the cross, but we have heard the story so often that we can listen to it with no reaction at all. God keep us from the heart which has lost the power to feel the agony of the cross--borne for us.

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Luke 11:33-36

(iii) Our hearts may be actively rebellious. It is quite possible for a man to know the right way and deliberately to take the wrong way. A man may actually feel God's hand upon his shoulder and twitch that shoulder away. With open eyes a man may take his way to the far country when God is calling him home.

God save us from the darkened heart.

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Luke 11:37-44

THE WORSHIP OF DETAILS AND THE NEGLECT OF THE THINGS THAT MATTER

Luke 11:37-44

After Jesus had spoken a Pharisee asked him to dine with him. He came in and reclined at the table. The Pharisee was surprised when he saw that he did not dip his hands in water before he ate. The Lord said to him, "You Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full of grasping and wickedness. Fools! Did he who made the outside not make the inside also? But cleanse the things that are within--and look you--all things will be pure for you.

But woe to you Pharisees! because you give tithes of mint and rue and every herb and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without omitting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! because you love the chief seats in the synagogues and greetings in the market places. Woe to you! because you are like tombs which are not seen, and the men who walk over them do not know that they are doing it."

The Pharisee was surprised that Jesus did not wash his hands before eating. This was not a matter of cleanliness but of the ceremonial law. The law laid it down that before a man ate he must wash his hands in a certain way and that he must also wash them between the courses. As usual every littlest detail was worked out. Large stone vessels of water were specially kept for the purpose because ordinary water might be unclean; the amount of water used must be at least a quarter of a log, that is, enough to fill one and a half egg-shells. First the water must be poured over the hands beginning at the tips of the fingers and running right up to the wrist. Then the palm of each hand must be cleansed by rubbing the fist of the other into it. Finally, water must again be poured over the hand, this time beginning at the wrist and running down to the fingertips. To the Pharisee, to omit the slightest detail of this was to sin.

Jesus' comment was that, if they were as particular about cleansing their hearts as they were about washing their hands, they would be better men.

There were certain dues which the meticulously orthodox would never omit to pay.

(a) The first fruits of the soil. The first fruits of the seven kinds--wheat, barley, vines, fig-trees, pomegranates, olives and honey--were offered in the Temple.

(b) There was the Terumah (HSN8641). The first fruits were given to God, but the Terumah was a contribution to the upkeep of the priests. It was the presentation of the first fruits of every growing thing. The amount to be given was one-fiftieth of the total yield.

(c) There was the tithe. The tithe was paid directly to the Levites, who, in turn, paid a tithe of what they received to the priests. It was one-tenth of "everything that can be used as food and is cultivated and grows out of the earth." The meticulousness of the Pharisees in tithing is shown by the fact that even the law said it was not necessary to tithe rue. No matter what their inner hearts and feelings were like, however much they neglected justice and forgot love, they never omitted the tithe.

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Luke 11:37-44

The chief seats at the synagogue were the seats out in front facing the audience. In the congregation itself the best seats were at the front and they decreased in honour the further back they got. The advantage of these seats was that they could be seen by all!

The more exaggerated the respect of the greetings the Pharisees received in the streets the better they were pleased.

The point of Lk.11:44 is this. Num.19:16 lays it down that "whoever in the open field touches a grave shall be unclean seven days." To be unclean was to be debarred from all religious worship. Now, it might be that a man might touch a grave without knowing that he was doing it. That did not matter; its touch made him unclean. Jesus said that the Pharisees were exactly like that. Although men might not know it their influence could do nothing but harm. All unawares, the man who came in contact with them was being touched for evil. Men might not suspect the corruption but it was there; all the time they were being infected with wrong ideas of God and of his demands.

Two things stand out about the Pharisees and for these two things Jesus condemned them.

(i) They concentrated on externals. So long as the externals of religion were carried out that was all that mattered. Their hearts might be as black as hell; they might be utterly lacking in charity and even in justice; but so long as they went through the correct motions at the correct time they considered themselves good in the eyes of God.

A man may be regular in his church attendance; he may be a diligent student of his Bible; he may be a generous giver to the church; but if in his heart there are thoughts of pride and of contempt, if he has no charity in his dealings with his fellow men in the life of the everyday, if he is unjust to his subordinates or dishonest to his employer, he is not a Christian man. No man is a Christian when he meticulously observes the conventions of religion and forgets the realities.

(ii) They concentrated on details. Compared with love and kindness, justice and generosity, the washing of hands and the giving of tithes with mathematical accuracy were unimportant details. Once a man came to Dr Johnson with a tale of woe. He worked in a paper factory; he had taken for his own purposes a very little piece of paper and a very little bit of string, and he had convinced himself that he had committed a deadly sin and would not stop talking about it. At last Johnson broke out, "Sir, stop bothering about paper and packthread when we are all living together in a world that is bursting with sin and sorrow." How often church courts and church people get lost in totally unimportant details of church government and administration, and even argue and fight about them, and forget the great realities of the Christian life!

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Luke 11:45-54

THE SINS OF THE LEGALISTS

Luke 11:45-54

A scribe answered, "Teacher, when you talk like that you are insulting us." Jesus said, "Woe to you scribes too! because you bind burdens upon men that are hard to bear and you yourselves do not lay a finger on the burdens. Woe to you! because you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed! So you are witnesses that you agree with the deeds of your fathers, because they killed them and you build them tombs. Because of this God in his wisdom said, 'I will send prophets and apostles to them, some of whom they will slay and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, will be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias who perished between the altar and the Temple.' Yes, I tell you, it will be required from this generation. Woe to you scribes! You did not enter in yourselves and you hindered those who were trying to enter."

As Jesus went away from them, the scribes and Pharisees began to watch him intensely, and to try to provoke him to discuss on many subjects, for they were laying traps for him, to hunt for something out of his mouth which they could use as a charge against him.

Three charges are levelled against the scribes.

(i) They were experts in the law; they laid upon men the thousand and one burdens of the ceremonial law; but they did not keep them themselves, because they were experts in evasion. Here are some of their evasions.

The limit of a Sabbath day's journey was 2,000 cubits (1,000 yards) from a man's residence. But if a rope was tied across the end of the street, the end of the street became his residence and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that; if on the Friday evening he left at any given point enough food for two meals that point technically became his residence and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that!

One of the forbidden works on the Sabbath was the tying of knots, sailors' or camel drivers' knots and knots in ropes. But a woman might tie the knot in her girdle. Therefore, if a bucket of water had to be raised from a well a rope could not be knotted to it, but a woman's girdle could, and it could be raised with that!

To carry a burden was forbidden, but the codified written law laid it down, "he who carries anything, whether it be in his right hand, or in his left hand, or in his bosom, or on his shoulder is guilty; but he who carries anything on the back of his hand, with his foot, or with his mouth, or with his elbow, or with his ear, or with his hair, or with his money bag turned upside down, or between his money bag and his shirt, or in the fold of his shirt or in his shoe, or in his sandal is guiltless, because he does not carry it in the usual way of carrying it out."

It is incredible that men should ever have thought that God could have laid down laws like that, and that the working out of such details was a religious service and the keeping of them a matter of

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Luke 11:45-54

life and death. But that was scribal religion. Little wonder that Jesus turned on the scribes, and that the scribes regarded him as an irreligious heretic.

(ii) The attitude of the scribes to the prophets was paradoxical. They professed a deep admiration for the prophets. But the only prophets they admired were dead; when they met a living one they tried to kill him. They honoured the dead prophets with tombs and memorials, but they dishonoured the living ones with persecution and death.

"Your new moons," said Isaiah, "and your appointed feasts my soul hates." "He has showed you, O man, what is good," said Micah; "and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" That was the essence of the prophetic message; and it was the very antithesis of scribal teaching. No wonder the scribes, with their external details, hated the prophets, and Jesus walked in the prophetic line. The murder of Zacharias is described in 2Chr.24:20-21.

(iii) The scribes shut the people off from scripture. Their interpretation of scripture was so fantastic that it was impossible for the ordinary man to understand it. In their hands scripture became a book of riddles. In their mistaken ingenuity they refused to see its plain meaning themselves, and they would not let anyone else see it either. The scriptures had become the perquisite of the expert and a dark mystery to the common man.

None of this is so very out of date. There are still those who demand from others standards which they themselves refuse to satisfy. There are still those whose religion is nothing other than legalism. There are still those who make the word of God so difficult that the seeking mind of the common man is bewildered and does not know what to believe or to whom to listen.

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Luke 12:1-12

THE CREED OF COURAGE AND OF TRUST

Luke 12:1-12

In the meantime, when the people had been gathered together in their thousands, so that they trampled on each other, Jesus began to say first of all to his disciples, "Be on your guard against the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing covered up which will not be unveiled, and there is nothing secret which shall not be known. All, therefore, that you have spoken in the dark shall be heard in the light; and what you have spoken into someone's ear in the inner room will be proclaimed on the housetops. I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and who after that are not able to do anything further. I will warn you whom you are to fear--fear him who after he has killed you has authority to cast you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for 1/2 pence? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God. But as for you--even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows.

I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, him will the Son of Man acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. If anyone speaks a word against the Son of Man it will be forgiven him; but he who speaks irreverently of the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they bring you before synagogues and rulers and those set in authority, do not worry how you will defend yourself or about what defence you will make, or about what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that same hour what you ought to say."

When we read this passage we are reminded again of the Jewish definition of preaching--charaz (HSN2737), which means stringing pearls. This passage, too, is a collection of pearls strung together without the close connection which modern preaching demands. But in it there are certain dominant ideas.

(i) It tells us of the forbidden sin, which is hypocrisy. The word hypocrite began by meaning someone who answers; and hypocrisy originally meant answering. First the words were used of the ordinary flow of question and answer in any talk or in any dialogue; then they began to be connected with question and answer in a play. From that they went on to be connected with acting apart. The hypocrite is never genuine; he is always play-acting. The basis of hypocrisy is insincerity. God would rather have a blunt, honest sinner, than someone who puts on an act of goodness.

(ii) It tells of the correct attitude to life, which is an attitude of fearlessness. There are two reasons for fearlessness.

(a) Man's power over man is strictly limited to this life. A man can destroy another man's life but not his soul. In the 1914-18 war Punch had a famous cartoon in which it showed the German Emperor saying to King Albert of Belgium, "So now you have lost everything"; and back came Albert's answer, "But not my soul!" On the other hand, God's power is such that it can blot out a man's very soul. It is, therefore, only reasonable to fear God rather than to fear men. It was said of

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Luke 12:1-12

John Knox, as his body was being lowered into the grave, "Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of man."

(b) God's care is the most detailed of all. To God we are never lost in the crowd. Matthew says, "Are not two sparrows sold for 1/4 pence?" (Matt.10:29.) Here Luke says, "Are not five sparrows sold for 1/2 pence?" If you were prepared to spend 1/2 pence you got not four, but five sparrows. One was flung into the bargain as having no value at all. Not even the sparrow on which men set not a 1/4 pence value is forgotten before God. The very hairs of our head are numbered. It has been computed that a blonde person has about 145,000 hairs; a dark-haired person, 120,000; and a person with red hair, 90,000! The Jews were so impressed with the individual care of God that they said that every blade of grass had its guardian angel. None of us needs to fear for each can say, "God cares for me."

(iii) It tells us of the unforgivable sin, which is the sin against the Holy Spirit. Both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus spoke about this sin immediately after the scribes and Pharisees had attributed his cures to the prince of devils instead of to God (Matt.12:31-32; Mk.3:28-29). These men could look at the very grace and power of God and call it the work of the devil. To understand this we must remember that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit as the Jews understood that conception, not in the full Christian sense, about which his audience at that time obviously knew nothing.

To a Jew, God's Spirit had two great functions. Through the Spirit he told his truth to men, and it was by the action of the Spirit in a man's mind and heart that he could recognize and grasp God's truth. Now, if a man for long enough refuses to use a faculty he will lose it. If we refuse to use any part of the body long enough it atrophies. Darwin tells how when he was a young man he loved poetry and music; but he so devoted himself to biology that he completely neglected them. The consequence was that in later life poetry meant nothing to him and music was only a noise, and he said that if he had his life to live over again he would see to it that he would read poetry and listen to music so that he would not lose the faculty of enjoying them.

Just so we can lose the faculty of recognizing God. By repeatedly refusing God's word, by repeatedly taking our own way, by repeatedly shutting our eyes to God and closing our ears to him, we can come to a stage when we do not recognize him when we see him, when to us evil becomes good and good becomes evil. That is what happened to the scribes and Pharisees. They had so blinded and deafened themselves to God that when he came they called him the devil.

Why is that the unforgivable sin? Because in such a state repentance is impossible. If a man does not even realize that he is sinning, if goodness no longer makes any appeal to him, he cannot repent. God has not shut him out; by his repeated refusals he has shut himself out. That means that the one man who can never have committed the unforgivable sin is the man who fears that he has, for once a man has committed it, he is so dead to God that he is conscious of no sin at all.

(iv) It tells us of the rewarded loyalty. The reward of loyalty is no material thing. It is that in heaven Jesus will say of us, "This was my man. Well done!"

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Luke 12:1-12

(v) It tells us of the help of the Holy Spirit. In the fourth Gospel the favourite title of the Holy Spirit is the Paraclete. Parakletos (GSN3875) means someone who stands by to help. It can be used of a witness, or an advocate to plead our cause. In the day of trouble there need be no fear, for no less a person than the Holy Spirit of God stands by to help.

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Luke 12:13-34

THE PLACE OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS IN LIFE

Luke 12:13-34

One of the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." He said to him, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" He said to them, "Watch and guard yourself against the spirit which is always wanting more; for even if a man has an abundance his life does not come from his possessions." He spoke a parable to them. "The land," he said, "of a rich man bore good crops. He kept thinking what he would do. 'What will I do,' he said, 'because I have no room to gather in my crops?' So he said, 'This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns and I will build bigger ones, and I will gather there all my corn and all my good things; and I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many good things laid up for many years. Take your rest, eat, drink and enjoy yourself.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is demanded from you; and, the things you prepared--who will get them all?' So is he who heaps up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God."

Jesus said to his disciples, "I therefore tell you, do not worry about your life--about what you are to eat; nor about your body--about what you are to wear. For your life is something more than food, and your body than clothing. Look at the ravens. See how they do not sow or reap; they have no storehouse or barn; but God feeds them. How much more valuable are you than the birds? Which of you, by worrying about it, can add a few days to his span of life? If, then, you cannot do the littlest thing why worry about the other things? Look at the lilies. See how they grow. They do not work; they do not spin; but, I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these. If God so clothe the grass in the field, which is there to-day and which to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith? Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink; do not be tossed about in a storm of anxiety. The peoples of the world seek for all these things.

Your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom and all these things will be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, because it is your Father's will to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Make yourselves purses which never grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where a thief does not come near and a moth does not destroy. For where your treasure is there your heart will also be."

It was not uncommon for people in Palestine to take their unsettled disputes to respected Rabbis; but Jesus refused to be mixed up in anyone's disputes about money. But out of that request there came to Jesus an opportunity to lay down what his followers' attitude to material things should be. He had something to say both to those who had an abundant supply of material possessions and to those who had not.

(i) To those who had an abundant supply of possessions Jesus spoke this parable of the Rich Fool. Two things stand out about this man.

(a) He never saw beyond himself. There is no parable which is so full of the words, I, me, my and mine. A schoolboy was once asked what parts of speech my and mine are. He answered, "Aggressive pronouns." The rich fool was aggressively self-centred. It was said of a self-centred

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young lady, "Edith lived in a little world, bounded on the north, south, east and west by Edith." The famous criticism was made of a self-centred person, "There is too much ego in his cosmos." When this man had a superfluity of goods the one thing that never entered his head was to give any away. His whole attitude was the very reverse of Christianity. Instead of denying himself he aggressively affirmed himself; instead of finding his happiness in giving he tried to conserve it by keeping.

John Wesley's rule of life was to save all he could and give all he could. When he was at Oxford he had an income of 30 British pounds a year. He lived on 28 pounds and gave 2 pounds away. When his income increased to 60 pounds, 90 pounds and 120 pounds per year, he still lived on 28 pounds and gave the balance away. The Accountant-General for Household Plate demanded a return from him. His reply was, "I have two silver tea spoons at London and two at Bristol. This is all the plate which I have at present; and I shall not buy any more, while so many around me want bread."

The Romans had a proverb which said that money was like sea-water; the more a man drank the thirstier he became. And so long as a man's attitude is that of the rich fool his desire will always be to get more--and that is the reverse of the Christian way.

(b) He never saw beyond this world. All his plans were made on the basis of life here. There is a story of a conversation between a young and ambitious lad and an older man who knew life. Said the young man, "I will learn my trade." "And then?" said the older man. "I will set up in business." "And then?" "I will make my fortune." "And then?" "I suppose that I shall grow old and retire and live on my money." "And then?" "Well, I suppose that some day I will die." "And then?" came the last stabbing question.

The man who never remembers that there is another world is destined some day for the grimmest of grim shocks.

(ii) But Jesus had something to say to those who had few possessions. In all this passage the thought which Jesus forbids is anxious thought or worry. Jesus never ordered any man to live in a shiftless, thriftless, reckless way. What he did tell a man was to do his best and then leave the rest to God. The lilies Jesus spoke of were the scarlet anemones. After one of the infrequent showers of summer rain, the mountain side would be scarlet with them; they bloomed one day and died. Wood was scarce in Palestine, and it was the dried grasses and wild flowers that were used to feed the oven fire. "If," said Jesus, "God looks after the birds and the flowers, how much more will he care for you?"

Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God." We saw that God's kingdom was a state on earth in which his will was as perfectly done as it is in heaven. So Jesus is saying, "Bend all your life to obeying God's will and rest content with that. So many people give all their effort to heap up things which in their very nature cannot last. Work for the things which last forever, things which you need not leave behind when you leave this earth, but which you can take with you."

In Palestine wealth was often in the form of costly raiment; the moths could get at the fine clothes and leave them ruined. But if a man clothes his soul with the garments of honour and purity and

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Luke 12:13-34

goodness, nothing on earth can injure them. If a man seeks the treasures of heaven, his heart will be fixed on heaven; but if he seeks the treasures of earth, his heart will be thirled to earth--and some day he must say good-bye to them, for, as the grim Spanish proverb has it, "There are no pockets in a shroud."

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Luke 12:35-48

BE PREPARED

Luke 12:35-48

"Let your loins be girt and your lamps burning. Be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that, when he comes and knocks, they will open to him immediately. Happy are those servants whom the master will come and find awake. This is the truth that I tell you--he will gird himself; he will make them recline at table; and he will come and serve them. Happy are they if he finds them so, even if he comes in the second or third watch. Know this--that if the householder knew at what time the thief would come he would have been awake and he would not have allowed his home to be broken into. So you must show yourselves ready, for the Son of Man comes at an hour you do not expect."

Peter said, "Lord are you speaking this parable to us or to everyone?" The Lord said, "Who, then, is the faithful and wise steward, whom the master will set over the administration of his house to give them their ration of food at the right time? Happy is that servant whom the master will come and find acting like this. I tell you truly that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and if he begins to beat the men servants and the maid servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will arrive on a day on which he is not expecting him and at an hour which he does not know, and he will cut him in pieces and he will place his part with the unfaithful. That servant who knew the will of his master, and who failed to have things ready, and to act in accordance with that will, will be beaten with many stripes.

But he who did not know, even if he did things that deserved stripes, will be beaten with few stripes. To whom much is given, from him much will be required; and men will demand much from him to whom much was entrusted."

This passage has two senses. In its narrower sense it refers to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ; in its wider sense it refers to the time when God's summons enters a man's life, a call to prepare to meet our God.

There is praise for the servant who is ready. The long flowing robes of the east were a hindrance to work; and when a man prepared to work he gathered up his robes under his girdle to leave himself free for activity. The eastern lamp was like a cotton wick floating in a sauce-boat of oil. Always the wick had to be kept trimmed and the lamp replenished or the light would go out.

No man can tell the day or the hour when eternity will invade time and summons will come. How, then, would we like God to find us?

(i) We would like him to find us with our work completed. Life for so many of us is filled with loose ends. There are things undone and things half done; things put off and things not even attempted. Great men have always the sense of a task that must be finished. Keats wrote,

"When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain."

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Luke 12:35-48

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote,

"The morning drum-call on my eager ear
Thrills unforgotten yet; the morning dew
Lies yet undried along my field of noon.

But now I pause at whiles in what I do,
And count the bell, and tremble lest I hear
(My work untrimmed) the sunset gun too soon."

Jesus himself said, "I have accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do" (Jn.17:4). No man should ever lightly leave undone a task he ought to have finished, before night falls.

(ii) We would like God to find us at peace with our fellowmen. It would be a haunting thing to pass from this world at bitterness with a fellow. No man should let the sun go down on his anger (Eph.4:26), least of all the last sun of all and he never knows which sun that will be.

(iii) We should like God to find us at peace with himself. It will make all the difference at the last whether we feel that we are going out to a stranger or an enemy, or going to fall asleep in the arms of God.

In the second section of this passage Jesus draws a picture of the wise and the unwise steward. In the east the steward had almost unlimited power. He was himself a slave, yet he had control of all the other slaves. A trusted steward ran his master's house for him and administered his estate. The unwise steward made two mistakes.

(i) He said, I will do what I like while my master is away; he forgot that the day of reckoning must come. We have a habit of dividing life into compartments. There is a part in which we remember that God is present; and there is a part in which we never think of him at all. We tend to draw a line between sacred and secular; but if we really know what Christianity means we will know that there is no part of life when the master is away. We are working and living forever in our great task-master's eye.

(ii) He said, I have plenty of time to put things right before the master comes; there is nothing so fatal as to feel that we have plenty of time. Jesus said, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night comes when no one can work" (Jn.9:4). Denis Mackail tells how, when Sir James Barrie was old, he would never make arrangements or give invitations for a distant date. "Short notice now!" he would say. One of the most dangerous days in a man's life is when he discovers the word "tomorrow."

The passage finishes with the warning that knowledge and privilege always bring responsibility. Sin is doubly sinful to the man who knew better; failure is doubly blameworthy in the man who had every chance to do well.

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Luke 12:49-53

THE COMING OF THE SWORD

Luke 12:49-53

Jesus said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth. And what do I wish? Would that it were already kindled! There is an experience through which I must pass; and now I am under tension until it is accomplished! Do you think I came to give peace in the earth? Not that, I tell you, but division! From now on in one house there will be five people divided--three against two, and two against three. They will be divided, father against son, and son against father, mother against daughter, and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

To those who were learning to regard Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed one of God, these words would come as a bleak shock. They regarded the Messiah as conqueror and king, and the Messianic age as a golden time.

(i) In Jewish thought fire is almost always the symbol of judgment. So, then, Jesus regarded the coming of his kingdom as a time of judgment. The Jews firmly believed that God would judge other nations by one standard and themselves by another; that the very fact that a man was a Jew would be enough to absolve him. However much we may wish to eliminate the element of judgment from the message of Jesus it remains stubbornly and unalterably there.

(ii) The King James Version and the Revised Standard translate Lk.12:50. "I have a baptism to be baptised with." The Greek verb baptizein (GSN0907) means to dip. In the passive it means to be submerged. Often it is used metaphorically. For instance, it is used of a ship sunk beneath the waves. It can be used of a man submerged in drink and therefore dead-drunk. It can be used of a scholar submerged (or sunk, as we say) by an examiner's questions. Above all it is used of a man submerged in some grim and terrible experience--someone who can say, "All the waves and billows are gone over me."

That is the way in which Jesus uses it here. "I have," he said, "a terrible experience through which I must pass; and life is full of tension until I pass through it and emerge triumphantly from it." The cross was ever before his eyes. How different from the Jewish idea of God's King! Jesus came, not with avenging armies and flying banners, but to give his life a ransom for many.

There was a Knight of Bethlehem,
Whose wealth was tears and sorrows,
His men-at-arms were little lambs,
His trumpeters were sparrows.
His castle was a wooden Cross
On which he hung so high;
His helmet was a crown of thorns,
Whose crest did touch the sky.

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Luke 12:49-53

(iii) His coming would inevitably mean division; in point of fact it did. That was one of the great reasons why the Romans hated Christianity--it tore families in two. Over and over again a man had to decide whether he loved better his kith and kin or Christ. The essence of Christianity is that loyalty to Christ has to take precedence over the dearest loyalties of this earth. A man must be prepared to count all things but loss for the excellence of Jesus Christ.

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Luke 12:54-59

WHILE YET THERE IS TIME

Luke 12:54-59

Jesus said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'Rain is coming.' And so it happens. When you feel the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat.' And so it happens. Hypocrites! you can read the signs of the face of the earth and the sky. How can you not read the signs of this time? Why do you not for yourselves judge what is right? When you are going with your adversary to the magistrate, make an effort to come to an agreement with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the officer, and the officer will throw you into prison. I tell you, you will not come out from there until you have paid the last farthing."

The Jew's of Palestine were weatherwise. When they saw the clouds forming in the west, over the Mediterranean Sea, they knew rain was on the way. When the south wind blew from the desert they knew the sirocco-like wind was coming. But those who were so wise to read the signs of the sky could not, or would not, read the signs of the times. If they had, they would have seen that the kingdom of God was on the way.

Jesus used a very vivid illustration. He said, "When you are threatened with a law-suit, come to an agreement with your adversary before the matter comes to court, for if you do not you will have imprisonment to endure and a fine to pay." The assumption is that the defendant has a bad case which will inevitably go against him. "Every man," Jesus implied, "has a bad case in the presence of God; and if he is wise, he will make his peace with God while yet there is time."

Jesus and all his great servants have always been obsessed with the urgency of time. Andrew Marvell spoke of ever hearing "time's winged chariot hurrying near." There are some things a man cannot afford to put off; above all, making his peace with God.

We read in the last verse of paying to the last farthing. We have already come across several references to money; and it will be useful if we collect the information about Jewish coinage in the time of Jesus. In order of value the principal coins were as follows:

The Lepton; lepton (GSN3016) means the thin one; it was the smallest coin, and was worth about one thirty-second of 1 pence. It was the widow's mite (Mk.12:42) and is the coin mentioned here.

The Quadrans (GSN2835) was worth two lepta and therefore worth about one-sixteenth of 1 pence. It is mentioned in Matt.5:26.

The Assarion (GSN0787) was worth a little less than 1/2 pence. It is mentioned in Matt.10:29 and Lk.12:6.

The Denarius (GSN1220) was worth about 3 pence. It was a day's pay for a working man (Matt.20:2); and was the coin that the Good Samaritan left with the innkeeper (Lk.10:25).

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The Drachma (GSN1406) was a silver coin worth about 4 pence. It was the coin which the woman lost and searched for (Lk.15:8).

The Didrachma (GSN1323) or Half-shekel was worth about 7 pence. It was the amount of the Temple Tax which everyone had to pay. It was for thirty didrachmae--about 2 British pounds--that Judas betrayed Jesus.

The Shekel (GSN4715) was worth about 15 pence, and was the coin found in the fish's mouth (Matt.17:27).

The Mina (GSN3414) is the coin mentioned in the parable of the Pounds (Lk.19:11-27). It was equal to 100 drachmae; and was, therefore, worth about 4 British pounds.

The Talent (GSN5007) was not so much a coin but a weight of silver worth 240 British pounds. It is mentioned in Matt.18:24 and in the parable of the Talents (Matt.25:14-30).

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Luke 13:1-5

SUFFERING AND SIN

Luke 13:1-5

At this time some men came and told Jesus about the Galilaeans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. "Do you think," he answered, "that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans because this happened to them? I tell you, No! But unless you repent you will all perish in like manner. Or, as for the eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell--do you think they were debtors to God beyond all those who dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, No! But unless you repent you will perish in the same way."

We have here references to two disasters about which we have no definite information and can only speculate.

First, there is the reference to the Galilaeans whom Pilate murdered in the middle of their sacrifices. As we have seen, Galilaeans were always liable to get involved in political trouble because they were a highly inflammable people. Just about this time Pilate had been involved in serious trouble. He had decided rightly that Jerusalem needed a new and improved water supply. He proposed to build it and, to finance it with certain Temple monies. It was a laudable object and a more than justifiable expenditure. But at the very idea of spending Temple monies like that, the Jews were up in arms. When the mobs gathered, Pilate instructed his soldiers to mingle with them, wearing cloaks over their battle dress for disguise. They were instructed to carry cudgels rather than swords. At a given signal they were to fall on the mob and disperse them. This was done, but the soldiers dealt with the mob with a violence far beyond their instructions and a considerable number of people lost their lives.

Almost certainly Galilaeans would be involved in that. We know that Pilate and Herod were at enmity, and only became reconciled after Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod for trial (Lk.23:6-12). It may well be that it was this very incident which provoked that enmity.

As for the eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell, they are still more obscure. The King James Version uses the word sinners of them also; but, as the margin shows, it should be not sinners but debtors. Maybe we have a clue here. It has been suggested that they had actually taken work on Pilate's hated aqueducts. If so, any money they earned was due to God and should have been voluntarily handed over, because it had already been stolen from him; and it may well be that popular talk had declared that the tower had fallen on them because of the work they had consented to do.

But there is far more than an historical problem in this passage. The Jews rigidly connected sin and suffering. Eliphaz had long ago said to Job, "Who that was innocent ever perished?" (Jb.4:7). This was a cruel and a heartbreaking doctrine, as Job knew well. And Jesus utterly denied it in the case of the individual. As we all know very well, it is often the greatest saints who have to suffer most.

But Jesus went on to say that if his hearers did not repent they too would perish. What did he mean? One thing is clear--he foresaw and foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in

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Luke 13:1-5

A.D. 70 (compare Lk.21:21-24). He knew well that if the Jews went on with their intrigues, their rebellions, their plottings, their political ambitions, they were simply going to commit national suicide; he knew that in the end Rome would step in and obliterate the nation; and that is precisely what happened. So what Jesus meant was that if the Jewish nation kept on seeking an earthly kingdom and rejecting the kingdom of God they could come to only one end.

To put the matter like that leaves, at first sight, a paradoxical situation. It means that we cannot say that individual suffering and sin are inevitably connected but we can say that national sin and suffering are so connected. The nation which chooses the wrong ways will in the end suffer for it. But the individual is in very different case. He is not an isolated unit. He is bound up in the bundle of life. Often he may object, and object violently, to the course his nation is taking; but when the consequence of that course comes, he cannot escape being involved in it. The individual is often caught up in a situation which he did not make; his suffering is often not his fault; but the nation is a unit and chooses its own policy and reaps the fruit of it. It is always dangerous to attribute human suffering to human sin; but always safe to say that the nation which rebels against God is on the way to disaster.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 13:6-9

THE GOSPEL OF THE OTHER CHANCE AND THE THREAT OF THE LAST CHANCE

Luke 13:6-9

Jesus spoke this parable, "A man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and did not find it. He said to the keeper of the vineyard, 'Look you--for the last three years I have been coming and looking for fruit on this fig-tree, and I still am not finding any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the ground' 'Lord,' he answered him, 'let it be this year too, until I dig round about it and manure it, and if it bears fruit in the coming year, well and good; but if not, you will cut it down.'"

Here is a parable at one and the same time lit by grace and close packed with warnings.

(i) The fig-tree occupied a specially favoured position. It was not unusual to see fig-trees, thorn-trees and apple-trees in vineyards. The soil was so shallow and poor that trees were grown wherever there was soil to grow them; but the fig-tree had a more than average chance; and it had not proved worthy of it. Repeatedly, directly and by implication, Jesus reminded men that they would be judged according to the opportunities they had. C. E. M. Joad once said, "We have the powers of gods and we use them like irresponsible schoolboys." Never was a generation entrusted with so much as ours and, therefore, never was a generation so answerable to God.

(ii) The parable teaches that uselessness invites disaster. It has been claimed that the whole process of evolution in this world is to produce useful things, and that what is useful will go on from strength to strength, while what is useless will be eliminated. The most searching question we can be asked is, "Of what use were you in this world?"

(iii) Further, the parable teaches that nothing which only takes out can survive. The fig-tree was drawing strength and sustenance from the soil; and in return was producing nothing. That was precisely its sin. In the last analysis, there are two kinds of people in this world--those who take out more than they put in, and those who put in more than they take out.

In one sense we are all in debt to life. We came into it at the peril of someone else's life; and we would never have survived without the care of those who loved us. We have inherited a Christian civilization and a freedom which we did not create. There is laid on us the duty of handing things on better than we found them.

"Die when I may," said Abraham Lincoln, "I want it said of me that I plucked a weed and planted a flower wherever I thought a flower would grow." Once a student was being shown bacteria under the microscope. He could actually see one generation of these microscopic living things being born and dying and another being born to take its place. He saw, as he had never seen before, how one generation succeeds another. "After what I have seen," he said, "I pledge myself never to be a weak link."

If we take that pledge we will fulfil the obligation of putting into life at least as much as we take out.

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Luke 13:6-9

(iv) The parable tells us of the gospel of the second chance. A fig-tree normally takes three years to reach maturity. If it is not fruiting by that time it is not likely to fruit at all. But this fig-tree was given another chance.

It is always Jesus' way to give a man chance after chance. Peter and Mark and Paul would all gladly have witnessed to that. God is infinitely kind to the man who falls and rises again.

(v) But the parable also makes it quite clear that there is a final chance. If we refuse chance after chance, if God's appeal and challenge come again and again in vain, the day finally comes, not when God has shut us out, but when we by deliberate choice have shut ourselves out. God save us from that!

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 13:10-17

MERCY MORE THAN LAW

Luke 13:10-17

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath; and--look you--there was a woman there who had a spirit of weakness for eighteen years. She was bent together and could not straighten up properly. When Jesus saw her he called her to him. "Woman," he said, "you are set free from your weakness"; and he laid his hands upon her; and immediately she was straightened. The president of the synagogue was vexed that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. "Are there not six days," he said to the crowd, "in which work ought to be done? Come and be healed on them and not on the Sabbath day." "Hypocrites!" the Lord answered.

"Does each one of you not loose his ox or his ass from the manger on the Sabbath, and lead him out and give him drink? And as for this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom--look you--Satan bound for eighteen years, should she not have been loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" And, as he said this, his opponents were put to shame, and all the crowd rejoiced at the glorious things that were done by him.

This is the last time we ever hear of Jesus being in a synagogue. It is clear that by this time the authorities were watching his every action and waiting to pounce upon him whenever they got the chance. Jesus healed a woman who for eighteen years had not been able to straighten her bent body; and then the president of the synagogue intervened. He had not even the courage to speak directly to Jesus. He addressed his protest to the waiting people, although it was meant for Jesus. Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; technically healing was work; and, therefore he had broken the Sabbath. But he answered his opponents out of their own law. The Rabbis abhorred cruelty to dumb animals and, even on the Sabbath, it was perfectly legal to loose beasts from their stalls and water them. Jesus demanded, "If you can loose a beast from a stall and water him on the Sabbath day, surely it is right in the sight of God to loose this poor woman from her infirmity."

(i) The president of the synagogue and those like him were people who loved systems more than people. They were more concerned that their own petty little laws should be observed than that a woman should be helped.

One of the great problems of a developed civilization is the relationship of the individual to the system. In times of war the individual vanishes. A man ceases to be a person and becomes a member of such and such an age group or the like. A number of men are lumped together, not as individuals, but as living ammunition that is, in that terrible word, expendable. A man becomes no more than an item in a statistical list. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, afterwards Lord and Lady Passfield, were two great economists and statistical experts; but H. G. Wells said of Beatrice Webb that her trouble was that "she saw men as specimens walking."

In Christianity the individual comes before the system. It is true to say that without Christianity there can be no such thing as democracy, because Christianity alone guarantees and defends the value of the ordinary, individual man. If ever Christian principles are banished from political and economic life there is nothing left to keep at bay the totalitarian state where the individual is lost in the system, and exists, not for his own sake, but only for the sake of the system.

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Luke 13:10-17

Strangely enough, this worship of systems commonly invades the Church. There are many church people--it would be a mistake to call them Christian people--who are more concerned with the method of church government than they are with the worship of God and the service of men. It is all too tragically true that more trouble and strife arise in Churches over legalistic details of procedure than over any other thing.

In the world and in the church we are constantly in peril of loving systems more than we love God and more than we love men.

(ii) Jesus' action in this matter makes it clear that it is not God's will that any human being should suffer one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. The Jewish law was that it was perfectly legal to help someone on the Sabbath who was in actual danger of his life. If Jesus had postponed the healing of this woman until the morrow no one could have criticized him; but he insisted that suffering must not be allowed to continue until tomorrow if it could be helped today. Over and over again in life some good and kindly scheme is held up until this or that regulation is satisfied, or this or that technical detail worked out. He gives twice who gives quickly, as the Latin proverb has it. No helpful deed that we can do today should be postponed until tomorrow.

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Luke 13:18-19

THE EMPIRE OF CHRIST

Luke 13:18-19

So Jesus said to them, "To what is the kingdom of God like, and to what will I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and cast into his garden; and it grew until it became a tree, and the birds of the air found a lodging in its branches."

This is an illustration which Jesus used more than once, and for different purposes. In the east mustard is not a garden herb but a field plant. It does literally grow to be a tree. A height of seven or eight feet is common, and a traveller tells how once he came across a mustard plant which was twelve feet high, and which overtopped a horse and its rider. It is common to see a cloud of birds around such trees, for they love the little black mustard seeds.

Matthew (Matt.13:31-32) also relates this parable but with a different emphasis. His version is,

Jesus put another parable before them, saying. "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but, when it has grown, it is the greatest of shrubs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

The point of the parable in Matthew and in Luke is quite different. Matthew stresses the smallness of the seed which Luke never even mentions; and Matthew's point is that the greatest things can start from the smallest beginnings and so does the kingdom of heaven. Luke's version leads up to the birds making nests in the branches. In the east the regular symbol of a great empire was a mighty tree; and the subject nations who found shelter and protection within it were typified by birds in the branches (compare Eze.31:6; Eze.17:23). As we have seen more than once, Luke is the universalist who dreamed of a world for Christ; and his point is that the kingdom of God will grow into a vast empire in which all kinds of men and nations will come together and will find the shelter and the protection of God. There is much in Luke's conception that we would do well to learn.

(i) There is room in the kingdom for a wide variety of beliefs. No man and no church has a monopoly of all truth. To think ourselves right and everyone else wrong can lead to nothing but trouble and bitterness and strife. So long as all men's beliefs are stemmed in Christ they are all facets of God's truth.

(ii) There is room in the kingdom for a wide variety of experiences. We do infinite harm when we try to standardize Christian experience and insist that all men must come to Christ in the same way. One man may have a sudden shattering experience and be able to point to the day and the hour, even the very minute, when God invaded his life. Another man's heart may open to Christ naturally and without crisis, as the petal of the lint-bell opens to the sun. Both experiences come from God and both men belong to God.

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Luke 13:18-19

(iii) There is room in the kingdom for a wide variety of ways of worship. One man finds touch with God in an elaborate ritual and a splendid liturgy; another finds him in the bare simplicities. There is no right or wrong here. It is the glory of the church that within its fellowship somewhere a man will find the worship that brings him to God. Let him find it, but let him not think his way the only way and criticize another's.

(iv) There is room in the kingdom for all kinds of people. The world has its labels and its distinctions and its barriers. But in the kingdom there is no distinction between rich and poor, small and great, famous and unknown. The church is the only place in the world where distinctions have no legitimate place.

(v) There is room in the kingdom for all nations. In the world today are many national barriers; but none of them has any standing with God. In Rev.21:16 we are given the dimensions of the Holy City. It is a square each of whose sides is 12,000 furlongs. 12,000 furlongs is 1,500 miles; and the area of a square whose sides are 1,500 miles is 2,250,000 square miles! There is room in the city of God for all the world and more.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 13:20-21

THE LEAVEN OF THE KINGDOM

Luke 13:20-21

Again Jesus said, "To what will I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened."

This is an illustration which Jesus took from his own home. In those days bread was baked at home. Leaven was a little piece of dough which had been kept over from the last baking and had fermented in the keeping. Leaven is regularly used in Jewish thought for influence, usually for bad influence, because the Jews identified fermentation with putrefaction. Jesus had seen Mary put a little bit of leaven in the dough and had seen the whole character of the dough changed because of it. "That," he said, "is how my kingdom comes."

There are two interpretations of this parable. From the first the following points emerge.

(i) The kingdom of heaven starts from the smallest beginnings. The leaven was very small but it changed the whole character of the dough. We well know how in any court, or committee, or board, one person can be a focus of trouble or a centre of peace. The kingdom of heaven starts from the dedicated lives of individual men and women. In the place where we work or live we may be the only professing Christians; if that be so, it is our task to be the leaven of the kingdom there.

(ii) The kingdom of heaven works unseen. We do not see the leaven working but all the time it is fulfilling its function. The kingdom is on the way. Anyone who knows a little history will be bound to see that. Seneca, than whom the Romans had no higher thinker, could write, "We strangle a mad dog; we slaughter a fierce ox; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown." In A.D. 60 that was the normal thing. Things like that cannot happen today because slowly, but inevitably, the kingdom is on the way.

(iii) The kingdom of heaven works from inside. As long as the leaven was outside the dough it was powerless to help; it had to get right inside. We will never change men from the outside. New houses, new conditions, better material things change only the surface. It is the task of Christianity to make new men; and once the new men are created a new world will surely follow. That is why the church is the most important institution in the world; it is the factory where men are produced.

(iv) The power of the kingdom comes from outside. The dough had no power to change itself. Neither have we. We have tried and failed. To change life we need a power outside and beyond us. We need the master of life, and he is forever waiting to give us the secret of victorious living.

The second interpretation of this parable insists that so far from working unseen the work of the leaven is manifest to all because it turns the dough into a bubbling, seething mass. On this basis, the leaven stands for the disturbing power of Christianity. In Thessalonica it was said of the Christians, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (Ac.17:6). True religion is never dope; never sends people comfortably to sleep; never makes them placidly accept the evils that should be striven against. Real Christianity is the most revolutionary thing in the world; it

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Luke 13:20-21

works revolution in the individual life and in society. "May God," said Unamuno the great Spanish mystic, "deny you peace and give you glory." The kingdom of heaven is the leaven which fills a man at one and the same time with the peace of God and with the divine discontent which will not rest until the evils of earth are swept away by the changing, revolutionizing power of God.

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Luke 13:22-30

THE RISK OF BEING SHUT OUT

Luke 13:22-30

Jesus continued to go through towns and villages, teaching and making his way to Jerusalem. "Lord," someone said to him, "are those who are to be saved few in number?" He said to them, "Keep on striving to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will seek to enter in and will not be able to. Once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and when you begin to stand outside and knock, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We have eaten and drunk in your presence and you taught in our streets.' He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me all you who are workers of iniquity.' There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there, when you will see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God and yourselves cast out. And they will come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and take their places at table in the kingdom of God. And--look you--there are those who are last who will be first, and there are those first who will be last."

When this questioner asked his question it would certainly be on the assumption that the kingdom of God was for the Jews and that gentiles would all be shut out. Jesus' answer must have come as a shock to him.

(i) He declared that entry to the kingdom can never be automatic but is the result and the reward of a struggle. "Keep on striving to enter," he said. The word for striving is the word from which the English word agony is derived. The struggle to enter in must be so intense that it can be described as an agony of soul and spirit.

We run a certain danger. It is easy to think that, once we have made a commitment of ourselves to Jesus Christ, we have reached the end of the road and can, as it were, sit back as if we had achieved our goal. There is no such finality in the Christian life. A man must ever be going forward or necessarily he goes backward.

The Christian way is like a climb up a mountain pathway towards a peak which will never be reached in this world. It was said of two gallant climbers who died on Mount Everest, "When last seen they were going strong for the top." It was inscribed on the grave of an Alpine guide who had died on the mountain-side, "He died climbing." For the Christian, life is ever an upward and an onward way.

(ii) The defence of these people was, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." There are those who think that just because they are members of a Christian civilization all is well. They differentiate between themselves and the heathen in their ignorance and blindness. But the man who lives in a Christian civilization is not necessarily a Christian. He may be enjoying all its benefits; he certainly is living on the Christian capital which others before him have built up; but that is no reason for sitting back content that all is well. Rather it challenges us, "What did you

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Luke 13:22-30

do to initiate all this? What have you done to preserve and develop it?" We cannot live on borrowed goodness.

(iii) There will be surprises in the kingdom of God. Those who are very prominent in this world may have to be very humble in the next; those whom no one notices here may be the princes of the world to come. There is a story of a woman who had been used to every luxury and to all respect. She died, and when she arrived in heaven, an angel was sent to conduct her to her house. They passed many a lovely mansion and the woman thought that each one, as they came to it, must be the one allotted to her. When they had passed through the main streets they came to the outskirts where the houses were much smaller; and on the very fringe they came to a house which was little more than a hut. "That is your house," said the conducting angel. "What," said the woman, "that! I cannot live in that." "I am sorry," said the angel, "but that is all we could build for you with the materials you sent up."

The standards of heaven are not the standards of earth. Earth's first will often be last, and its last will often be first.

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Luke 13:31-35

COURAGE AND TENDERNESS

Luke 13:31-35

At that hour some Pharisees came to Jesus. "Depart," they said to him, "and get on your way from this place, because Herod is out to kill you." "Go," he said, "and tell that fox, look you, I cast out demons and I work cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day my work is perfected. I must be on my way today, and tomorrow and the next day, because it is not possible for a prophet to perish out of Jerusalem. Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Killer of the prophets! Stoner of those who were sent to you! How often I wanted to gather together your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings--and you would not! Look you, your house is desolate. I tell you, you will not see me until you shall say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Because of the behind-the-scenes insight that it gives into the life of Jesus, this is one of the most interesting passages in Luke's gospel.

(i) It gives us the, at first sight, surprising information that not all the Pharisees were hostile to Jesus. Here we have some of them actually warning him that he was in danger, and advising him to seek safety. It is true that from the gospels we do get a one-sided picture of the Pharisees. The Jews themselves knew very well that there were good and bad Pharisees. They divided them into seven different classes.

(a) The Shoulder Pharisees. These wore their good deeds on their shoulder and performed them to be seen of men.

(b) The Wait-a-little Pharisees. They could always find a good excuse for putting off a good deed until tomorrow.

(c) The Bruised or Bleeding Pharisees. No Jewish Rabbi could be seen talking to any woman on the street, not even his wife or mother or sister. But certain of the Pharisees went further. They would not even look at a woman on the street; they even shut their eyes to avoid seeing a woman; they, therefore, knocked into walls and houses and bruised themselves; and then exhibited their bruises as special badges of extraordinary piety.

(d) The Pestle-and-Mortar or Hump-backed Pharisees. They walked bent double in a false and cringing humility; they were the Uriah Heeps of Jewish religion.

(e) The Ever-reckoning Pharisees. They were ever reckoning up their good deeds and, as it were, striking a balance-sheet of profit and loss with God.

(f) The Timid or Fearing Pharisees. They went ever in fear of the wrath of God. They were, as it was said of Burns, not helped but haunted by their religion.

(g) The God-loving Pharisees. They were copies of Abraham and lived in faith and charity.

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Luke 13:31-35

There may have been six bad Pharisees for every good one; but this passage shows that even amongst the Pharisees there were those who admired and respected Jesus.

(ii) This passage shows us Jesus talking to Herod Antipas king of Galilee, who was out to stop him. To the Jew the fox was a symbol of three things. First it was regarded as the slyest of animals. Second, it was regarded as the most destructive of animals. Third, it was the symbol of a worthless and insignificant man.

It takes a brave man to call the reigning king a fox. Latimer was once preaching in Westminster Abbey when Henry the king was one of the congregation. In the pulpit he soliloquised, "Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The king of England is here!" Then he went on, "Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The King of Kings is here."

Jesus took his orders from God, and he would not shorten his work by one day to please or to escape any earthly king.

(iii) The lament over Jerusalem is most important, because it is another of the passages which shows how little we really know of Jesus' life. It is quite clear that Jesus could never have spoken like this, unless he had more than once gone with his offer of love to Jerusalem; but in the first three gospels there is no indication of any such visits. Once again it is made plain that in the gospels we have the merest sketch of Jesus' life.

Nothing hurts so much as to go to someone and offer love and have that offer spurned. It is life's bitterest tragedy to give one's heart to someone only to have it broken. That is what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem; and still he comes to men, and still men reject him. But the fact remains that to reject God's love is in the end to be in peril of his wrath.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 14:1-6

UNDER THE SCRUTINY OF HOSTILE MEN

Luke 14:1-6

On the Sabbath day Jesus had gone into the house of one of the rulers who belonged to the Pharisees to eat bread; and they were watching him. And--look you-- there was a man before him who had dropsy. Jesus said to the Scribes and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Or, is it not?" They kept silent. So he took him and healed him and sent him away. He said to them, "Suppose one of you has an ass or an ox, and it falls into a well, will he not immediately pull it out, even if it is on the Sabbath day?" And they had no answer to these things.

In the gospel story there are seven incidents in which Jesus healed on the Sabbath day. In Luke we have already studied the story of the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (Lk.4:38); of the man with the withered hand (Lk.6:6); and of the woman who was bent for eighteen years (Lk.13:13). To these John adds the story of the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (Jn.5:9); and of the man born blind (Jn.9:14). Mark adds one more--the healing of the demon-possessed man in the synagogue at Capernaum (Mk.1:21).

Anyone would think that a record like that would have made a man beloved of all; but it is the tragic fact that every miracle of healing that Jesus wrought on the Sabbath day only made the scribes and Pharisees more certain that he was dangerous and irreligious and must at all costs be stopped. If we are to understand what happened to Jesus it is essential to remember that the orthodox Jews of his day regarded him as a law-breaker. He healed on the Sabbath; therefore he worked on the Sabbath; therefore he broke the law.

On this occasion a Pharisee invited him to a meal on the Sabbath. The law had its meticulous regulations about Sabbath meals. Of course no food could be cooked on the Sabbath; that would have been to work. All food had to be cooked on the Friday; and, if it was necessary to keep it hot, it must be kept hot in such a way that it was not cooked any more! So it is laid down that food to be kept warm for the Sabbath must not be put into "oil dregs, manure, salt, chalk or sand, whether moist or dry, nor into straw, grape-skins, flock or vegetables, if these are damp, though it may be if they are dry. It may be, however, put into clothes, amidst fruits, pigeons' feathers and flax tow." It was the observance of regulations like this that the Pharisees and scribes regarded as religion. No wonder they could not understand Jesus!

It is by no means impossible that the Pharisees "planted" the man with the dropsy in this house to see what Jesus would do. They were watching him; and the word used for watching is the word used for "interested and sinister espionage." Jesus was under scrutiny.

Without hesitation Jesus healed the man. He knew perfectly well what they were thinking; and he quoted their own law and practice to them. Open wells were quite common in Palestine, and were not infrequently the cause of accidents (compare Exo.21:33). It was perfectly allowable to rescue a beast which had fallen in. Jesus, with searing contempt, demands how, if it be right to help an animal on the Sabbath, it can be wrong to help a man.

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Luke 14:1-6

This passage tells us certain things about Jesus and his enemies.

(i) It shows us the serenity with which Jesus met life. There is nothing more trying than to be under constant and critical scrutiny. When that happens to most people they lose their nerve and, even more often, lose their temper. They become irritable; and while there may be greater sins than irritability there is none that causes more pain and heartbreak. But even in things which would have broken most men's spirit, Jesus remained serene. If we live with him, he can make us like himself

(ii) It is to be noted that Jesus never refused any man's invitation of hospitality. To the end he never abandoned hope of men. To hope to change them or even to appeal to them, might be the forlornest of forlorn hopes, but he would never let a chance go. He would not refuse even an enemy's invitation. It is as clear as daylight that we will never make our enemies our friends if we refuse to meet them and talk with them.

(iii) The most amazing thing about the scribes and Pharisees is their staggering lack of a sense of proportion. They would go to endless trouble to formulate and to obey their petty rules and regulations; and yet they counted it a sin to ease a sufferer's pain on the Sabbath day.

If a man had only one prayer to pray he might well ask to be given a sense of proportion. The things which disturb the peace of congregations are often trifles. The things which divide men from men and which destroy friendships are often little things to which no sensible man, in his saner moments, would allow any importance. The little things can bulk so large that they can fill the whole horizon. Only if we put first things first will all things take their proper place--and love comes first.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 14:7-11

THE NECESSITY OF HUMILITY

Luke 14:7-11

Jesus spoke a parable to the invited guests, for he noticed how they chose the first places at the table. "When you are bidden by someone to a marriage feast," he said. "do not take your place at table in the first seat, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited, for in that case the man who invited you will come and say to you, 'Give place to this man.' And then, with shame, you will begin to take the lowest place. But, when you have been invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that, when the man who has invited you comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, come up higher.' Then you will gain honour in front of all who sit at table with you. For he who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus chose a homely illustration to point an eternal truth. If a quite undistinguished guest arrived early at a feast and annexed the top place, and if a more distinguished person then arrived, and the man who had usurped the first place was told to step down, a most embarrassing situation resulted. If, on the other hand, a man deliberately slipped into the bottom place, and was then asked to occupy a more distinguished place, his humility gained him all the more honour.

Humility has always been one of the characteristics of great men. When Thomas Hardy was so famous that any newspaper would gladly have paid enormous sums for his work, he used sometimes to submit a poem, and always with it a stamped and addressed envelope for the return of his manuscript should it be rejected. Even in his greatness he was humble enough to think that his work might be turned down.

There are many stories and legends of the humility of Principal Cairns. He would never enter a room first. He always said, "You first, I follow." Once, as he came on to a platform, there was a great burst of applause in welcome. He stood aside and let the man after him come first and began himself to applaud. He never dreamed that the applause could possibly be for him; he thought it must be for the other man. It is only the little man who is self-important.

How can we retain our humility?

(i) We can retain it by realizing the facts. However much we know, we still know very little compared with the sum total of knowledge. However much we have achieved, we still have achieved very little in the end. However important we may believe ourselves to be, when death removes us or when we retire from our position, life and work will go on just the same.

(ii) We can retain it by comparison with the perfect. It is when we see or hear the expert that we realize how poor our own performance is. Many a man has decided to burn his clubs after a day at golf's Open Championship. Many a man has decided never to appear in public again after hearing a master musician perform. Many a preacher has been humbled almost to despair when he has heard a real saint of God speak. And if we set our lives beside the life of the Lord of all good life, if we see our unworthiness in comparison with the radiance of his stainless purity, pride will die and self-satisfaction will be shrivelled up.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 14:12-14

DISINTERESTED CHARITY

Luke 14:12-14

Jesus said to the man who had invited him, "Whenever you give a dinner or a banquet, do not call your friends, or your brothers, or your kinsfolk or your rich neighbours, in case they invite you back again in return and you receive a repayment. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. Then you will be happy, because they cannot repay you. You will receive your repayment at the resurrection of the righteous."

Here is a searching passage, because it demands that we should examine the motives behind all our generosity.

(i) A man may give from a sense of duty.

He dropped a penny in the plate
And meekly raised his eyes,
Glad the week's rent was duly paid
For mansions in the skies.

We may give to God and to man much in the same way as we pay our income tax--as the satisfaction of a grim duty which we cannot escape.

(ii) A man may give purely from motives of self-interest. Consciously or unconsciously he may regard his giving as an investment. He may regard each gift as an entry on the credit side of his account in the ledger of God. Such giving, so far from being generosity, is rationalized selfishness.

(iii) A man may give in order to feel superior. Such giving can be a cruel thing. It can hurt the recipient much more than a blunt refusal. When a man gives like that he stands on his little eminence and looks down. He may even with the gift throw in a short and smug lecture. It would be better not to give at all than to give merely to gratify one's own vanity and one's own desire for power. The Rabbis had a saying that the best kind of giving was when the giver did not know to whom he was giving, and when the receiver did not know from whom he was receiving.

(iv) A man may give because he cannot help it. That is the only real way to give. The law of the kingdom is this--that if a man gives to gain reward he will receive no reward; but if a man gives with no thought of reward his reward is certain. The only real giving is that which is the uncontrollable outflow of love. Once Dr Johnson cynically described gratitude as "a lively sense of favours to come." The same definition could equally apply to certain forms of giving. God gave because he so loved the world--and so must we.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 14:15-24

THE KING'S BANQUET AND THE KING'S GUESTS

Luke 14:15-24

When one of those who were sitting at table with Jesus heard this, he said, "Happy is the man who eats bread in the kingdom of God." Jesus said to him, "There was a man who made a great banquet, and who invited many people to it. At the time of the banquet he sent his servants to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, because everything is now ready.' With one accord they all began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out. Please have me excused.' Another said, 'I have married a wife, and, therefore, I cannot come.' So the servant came and told his master these things.

The master of the house was enraged, and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the town and bring here the poor, and the maimed, and the blind and the lame.' The servant said, 'Sir, your orders have been carried out and there is still room.' So the master said to his servant, 'Go out to the roads and to the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you that none of these men who were invited shall taste of my banquet.'"

The Jews had a series of ever-recurring conventional pictures of what would happen when God broke into history and when the golden days of the new age arrived. One of these was the picture of the Messianic banquet. On that day God would give a great feast to his own people at which Leviathan, the sea monster, would be part of the food. It is of this banquet that the man who spoke to Jesus was thinking. When he spoke of the happiness of those who would be guests at that banquet he was thinking of Jews, and of Jews only, for the average, orthodox Jew would never have dreamed that gentiles and sinners would find a place at the feast of God. That is why Jesus spoke this parable.

In Palestine, when a man made a feast, the day was announced long beforehand and the invitations were sent out and accepted; but the hour was not announced; and when the day came and all things were ready, servants were sent out to summon the already invited guests. To accept the invitation beforehand and then to refuse it when the day came was a grave insult.

In the parable the master stands for God. The originally invited guests stand for the Jews. Throughout all their history they had looked forward to the day when God would break in; and when he did, they tragically refused his invitation. The poor people from the streets and lanes stand for the tax-gatherers and sinners who welcomed Jesus in a way in which the orthodox never did. Those gathered in from the roads and the hedges stand for the gentiles for whom there was still ample room at the feast of God. As Bengel, the great commentator, put it, "both nature and grace abhor a vacuum," and when the Jews refused God's invitation and left his table empty, the invitation went out to the gentiles.

There is one sentence in this parable which has been sadly misused. "Go out," said the master, "and compel them to come in." Long ago Augustine used that text as a justification for religious persecution. It was taken as a command to coerce people into the Christian faith. It was used as a defence of the inquisition, the thumb-screw, the rack, the threat of death and imprisonment, the

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Luke 14:15-24

campaigns against the heretics, all those things which are the shame of Christianity. Beside it we should always set another text--The love of Christ controls us. (2Cor.5:14.) In the kingdom of God there is only one compulsion--the compulsion of love.

But though this parable spoke with a threat to the Jews who had refused God's invitation, and with an undreamed of glory to the sinners and the outcasts and the gentiles who had never dreamed of receiving it, there are in it truths which are forever permanent and as new as today. In the parable the invited guests made their excuses and men's excuses do not differ so very much today.

(i) The first man said that he had bought a field and was going to see it. He allowed the claims of business to usurp the claims of God. It is still possible for a man to be so immersed in this world that he has no time to worship, and even no time to pray.

(ii) The second man said that he had bought five yoke of oxen and that he was going to try them out. He let the claims of novelty usurp the claims of Christ. It often happens that when people enter into new possessions they become so taken up with them that the claims of worship and of God get crowded out. People have been known to acquire a motor car and then to say, "We used to go to church on a Sunday, but now we go off to the country for the day." It is perilously easy for a new game, a new hobby, even a new friendship, to take up even the time that should be kept for God.

(iii) The third man said, with even more finality than the others, "I have married a wife, and I cannot come." One of the wonderful merciful laws of the Old Testament laid it down, "when a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, to be happy with his wife whom he has taken" (Deut.24:5). No doubt that very law was in this man's mind. It is one of the tragedies of life when good things crowd out the claims of God. There is no lovelier thing than a home and yet a home was never meant to be used selfishly. They live best together who live with God; they serve each other best who also serve their fellow-men; the atmosphere of a home is most lovely when those who dwell within it remember that they are also members of the great family and household of God.

THE BANQUET OF THE KINGDOM

Before we leave this passage we must note that Lk.14:1-24 have all to do with feasts and banquets. It is most significant that Jesus thought of his kingdom and his service in terms of a feast. The symbol of the kingdom was the happiest thing that human life could know. Surely this is the final condemnation of the Christian who is afraid to enjoy himself.

There has always been a type of Christianity which has taken all the colour out of life. Julian spoke of those pale-faced, flat-breasted Christians for whom the sun shone and they never saw it. Swinburne slandered Christ by saying,

"Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilaean,
The world has grown gray from thy breath."

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Luke 14:15-24

Ruskin, who was brought up in a rigid and a narrow home, tells how he was given a jumping-jack as a present and a pious aunt took it away from him, saying that toys were no things for a Christian child. Even so great and sane and healthy a scholar as A. B. Bruce said that you could not conceive of the child Jesus playing games when he was a boy, or smiling when he was a man. W. M. Macgregor, in his Warrack Lectures, speaks with the scorn of which he was such a master, about one of John Wesley's few mistakes. He founded a school at Kingswood, near Bristol. He laid it down that no games were to be allowed in the school or in the grounds, because "he who plays when he is a child will play when he is a man." There were no holidays. The children rose at 4 a.m. and spent the first hour of the day in prayer and meditation, and on Friday they fasted until three in the afternoon. W. M. Macgregor characterizes the whole set up as "nature-defying foolishness."

We must always remember that Jesus thought of the kingdom in terms of a feast. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. Locke, the great philosopher, defined laughter as "a sudden glory." There is no healthy pleasure which is forbidden to a Christian man, for a Christian is like a man who is forever at a wedding feast.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 14:25-33

ON COUNTING THE COST

Luke 14:25-33

Great crowds were on the way with Jesus. He turned and said to them, "If any man comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and even his own life too, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Which of you, if he wishes to build a tower, does not first sit down and reckon up the expense, to see whether he has enough to finish it? This he does lest, when he has laid the foundation and is unable to complete the work, all who see him begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was unable to finish the job.' Or, what king when he is going to engage battle with another king, does not first sit down and take counsel, whether he is able with ten thousand men to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he finds he cannot, while he is still distant, he sends an embassy and asks for terms of peace. So, therefore, everyone of you who does not bid farewell to all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

When Jesus said this he was on the road to Jerusalem. He knew that he was on his way to the cross; the crowds who were with him thought that he was on his way to an empire. That is why he spoke to them like this. In the most vivid way possible he told them that the man who followed him was not on the way to worldly power and glory, but must be ready for a loyalty which would sacrifice the dearest things in life and for a suffering which would be like the agony of a man upon a cross.

We must not take his words with cold and unimaginative literalness. Eastern language is always as vivid as the human mind can make it. When Jesus tells us to hate our nearest and dearest, he does not mean that literally. He means that no love in life can compare with the love we must bear to him.

There are two suggestive truths within this passage.

(i) It is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp-follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one's weight. Once someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, "So and so tells me that he was one of your students." The teacher answered devastatingly, "He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students." It is one of the supreme handicaps of the church that in it there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.

(ii) It is a Christian's first duty to count the cost of following Christ. The tower which the man was going to build was probably a vineyard tower. Vineyards were often equipped with towers from which watch was kept against thieves who might steal the harvest. An unfinished building is always a humiliating thing. In Scotland, we may, for instance, think of that weird structure called "M'Caig's Folly" which stands behind Oban.

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Luke 14:25-33

In every sphere of life a man is called upon to count the cost. In the introduction to the marriage ceremony according to the forms of the Church of Scotland, the minister says, "Marriage is not to be entered upon lightly or unadvisedly, but thoughtfully, reverently, and in the fear of God." A man and woman must count the cost.

It is so with the Christian way. But if a man is daunted by the high demands of Christ let him remember that he is not left to fulfil them alone. He who called him to the steep road will walk with him every step of the way and be there at the end to meet him.

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Luke 14:34-35

THE INSIPID SALT

Luke 14:34-35

Jesus said, "Salt is a fine thing; but if salt has become insipid, by what means shall its taste be restored? It is fit neither for the land nor the dunghill. Men throw it out. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear."

Just sometimes Jesus speaks with a threat in his voice. When a person is always carping and criticizing and complaining, his irritable anger ceases to have any significance or any effect. But when someone whose accent is the accent of love suddenly speaks with a threat we are bound to listen. What Jesus is saying is this--when a thing loses its essential quality and fails to perform its essential duty, it is fit for nothing but to be thrown away.

Jesus uses salt as a symbol of the Christian life. What, then, are its essential qualities? In Palestine it had three characteristic uses.

(i) Salt was used as a preservative. It is the earliest of all preservatives. The Greeks used to say that salt could put a new soul into dead things. Without salt a thing putrefied and went bad; with it its freshness was preserved. That means that true Christianity must act as a preservative against the corruption of the world. The individual Christian must be the conscience of his fellows; and the church the conscience of the nation. The Christian must be such that in his presence no doubtful language will be used, no questionable stories told, no dishonourable action suggested. He must be like a cleansing antiseptic in the circle in which he moves. The church must fearlessly speak against all evils and support all good causes. She must never hold her peace through fear or favour of men.

(ii) Salt was used as a flavouring. Food, without salt, can be revoltingly insipid. The Christian, then, must be the man who brings flavour into life. The Christianity which acts like a shadow of gloom and a wet blanket is no true Christianity. The Christian is the man who, by his courage, his hope, his cheerfulness and his kindness brings a new flavour into life.

(iii) Salt was used on the land. It was used to make it easier for all good things to grow. The Christian must be such that he makes it easier for people to be good and harder to be bad. We all know people in whose company there are certain things we would not and could not do; and equally we all know people in whose company we might well stoop to things which by ourselves we would not do. There are fine souls in whose company it is easier to be brave and cheerful and good. The Christian must carry with him a breath of heaven in which the fine things flourish and the evil things shrivel up.

That is the function of the Christian; if he fails in his function there is no good reason why he should exist at all; and we have already seen that in the economy of God uselessness invites disaster. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 15:1-7

THE SHEPHERD'S JOY

Luke 15:1-7

The tax-collectors and sinners were all coming near to Jesus to hear him, and the Pharisees and scribes were murmuring, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

He spoke this parable to them. "What man of you," he said, "who has a hundred sheep, and who has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he finds it, rejoicing he lays it on his shoulders; and when he comes home he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my sheep which was lost.' I tell you that just so there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents more than over ninety-nine just people who have no need of repentance."

There is no chapter of the New Testament so well known and so dearly loved as the fifteenth chapter of Luke's gospel. It has been called "the gospel in the gospel," as if it contained the very distilled essence of the good news which Jesus came to tell.

These parables arose out of definite situations. It was an offence to the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus associated with men and women who, by the orthodox, were labelled as sinners. The Pharisees gave to people who did not keep the law a general classification. They called them the People of the Land; and there was a complete barrier between the Pharisees and the People of the Land. To marry a daughter to one of them was like exposing her bound and helpless to a lion. The Pharisaic regulations laid it down, "When a man is one of the People of the Land, entrust no money to him, take no testimony from him. trust him with no secret, do not appoint him guardian of an orphan, do not make him the custodian of charitable funds, do not accompany him on a journey." A Pharisee was forbidden to be the guest of any such man or to have him as his guest. He was even forbidden, so far as it was possible, to have any business dealings with him.

It was the deliberate Pharisaic aim to avoid every contact with the people who did not observe the petty details of the law. Obviously, they would be shocked to the core at the way in which Jesus companied with people who were not only rank outsiders, but sinners, contact with whom would necessarily defile. We will understand these parables more fully if we remember that the strict Jews said, not "There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents," but, "There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated before God." They looked sadistically forward not to the saving but to the destruction of the sinner.

So Jesus told them the parable of the lost sheep and the shepherd's joy. The shepherd in Judaea had a hard and dangerous task. Pasture was scarce. The narrow central plateau was only a few miles wide, and then it plunged down to the wild cliffs and the terrible devastation of the desert. There were no restraining walls and the sheep would wander. George Adam Smith wrote of the shepherd, "On some high moor across which at night the hyaenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning on his staff and looking out over his scattered sheep, everyone of them on his heart, you understand why the shepherd of Judaea sprang to the front in his people's history; why they gave his name to the king and made him the symbol of providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice."

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Luke 15:1-7

The shepherd was personally responsible for the sheep. If a sheep was lost the shepherd must at least bring home the fleece to show how it had died. These shepherds were experts at tracking and could follow the straying sheep's footprints for miles across the hills. There was not a shepherd for whom it was not all in the day's work to risk his life for his sheep.

Many of the flocks were communal flocks, belonging, not to individuals, but to villages. There would be two or three shepherds in charge. Those whose flocks were safe would arrive home on time and bring news that one shepherd was still out on the mountain side searching for a sheep which was lost. The whole village would be upon the watch, and when, in the distance, they saw the shepherd striding home with the lost sheep across his shoulders, there would rise from the whole community a shout of joy and of thanksgiving.

That is the picture Jesus drew of God; that, said Jesus, is what God is like. God is as glad when a lost sinner is found as a shepherd is when a strayed sheep is brought home. As a great saint said, "God, too, knows the joy of finding things that have gone lost."

There is a wondrous thought here. It is the truly tremendous truth that God is kinder than men. The orthodox would write off the tax-collectors and the sinners as beyond the pale and as deserving of nothing but destruction; not so God. Men may give up hope of a sinner; not so God. God loves the folk who never stray away; but in his heart there is the joy of joys when a lost one is found and comes home. It is a thousand times easier to come back to God than to come home to the bleak criticism of men.

Souls of men! why win ye scatter
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?
Foolish hearts! why will ye wander
From a love so true and deep?
Was there ever kindest shepherd
Half so gentle, half so sweet,
As the Saviour who would have us
Come and gather round his feet?
For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 15:8-10

THE COIN A WOMAN LOST AND FOUND

Luke 15:8-10

Or, what woman who has ten silver pieces, if she loses one piece, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, "Rejoice with me because I have found the silver piece which I lost." Even so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

The coin in question in this parable was a silver drachma (GSN1406) worth about 4 pence. It would not be difficult to lose a coin in a Palestinian peasant's house and it might take a long search to find it. The houses were very dark, for they were lit by one little circular window not much more than about eighteen inches across. The floor was beaten earth covered with dried reeds and rushes; and to look for a coin on a floor like that was very much like looking for a needle in a haystack. The woman swept the floor in the hope that she might see the coin glint or hear it tinkle as it moved.

There are two reasons why the woman may have been so eager to find the coin:

(i) It may have been a matter of sheer necessity. 4 p does not sound very much but it was more than a whole day's wage for a working man in Palestine. These people lived always on the edge of things and very little stood between them and real hunger. The woman may well have searched with intensity because, if she did not find, the family would not eat.

(ii) There may have been a much more romantic reason. The mark of a married woman was a head-dress made of ten silver coins linked together by a silver chain. For years maybe a girl would scrape and save to amass her ten coins, for the head-dress was almost the equivalent of her wedding ring. When she had it, it was so inalienably hers that it could not even be taken from her for debt. It may well be that it was one of these coins that the woman had lost, and so she searched for it as any woman would search if she lost her marriage ring.

In either case it is easy to think of the joy of the woman when at last she saw the glint of the elusive coin and when she held it in her hand again. God, said Jesus, is like that. The joy of God, and of all the angels, when one sinner comes home, is like the joy of a home when a coin which has stood between them and starvation has been lost and is found; it is like the joy of a woman who loses her most precious possession, with a value far beyond money, and then finds it again.

No Pharisee had ever dreamed of a God like that. A great Jewish scholar has admitted that this is the one absolutely new thing which Jesus taught men about God--that he actually searched for men. The Jew might have agreed that if a man came crawling home to God in self-abasement and prayed for pity he might find it; but he would never have conceived of a God who went out to search for sinners. We believe in the seeking love of God, because we see that love incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 15:11-32

THE STORY OF THE LOVING FATHER

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the part of the estate which falls to me.' So his father divided his living between them. Not many days after, the son realized it all and went away to a far country, and there in wanton recklessness scattered his substance. When he had spent everything a mighty famine arose throughout that country and he began to be in want. He went and attached himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs; and he had a great desire to fill himself with the husks the pigs were eating; and no one gave anything to him. When he had come to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, and I--I am perishing here with hunger. I will get up and I will go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants."' So he got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way away his father saw him, and was moved to the depths of his being and ran and flung his arms round his neck and kissed him tenderly. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger; put shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and rejoice, for this my son was dead and has come back to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to rejoice.

"Now the elder son was in the field. When he came near the house he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what these things could mean? He said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.' He was enraged and refused to come in. His father went out and urged him to come in. He answered his father, 'Look you, I have served you so many years and I never transgressed your order, and to me you never gave a kid that I might have a good time with my friends. But when this son of yours--this fellow who consumed your living with harlots--came, you killed the fatted calf for him.' 'Child,' he said to him, 'you are always with me. Everything that is mine is yours. But we had to rejoice and be glad, for your brother was dead and has come back to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

Not without reason this has been called the greatest short story in the world. Under Jewish law a father was not free to leave his property as he liked. The elder son must get two-thirds and the younger one-third. (Deut.21:17.) It was by no means unusual for a father to distribute his estate before he died, if he wished to retire from the actual management of affairs. But there is a certain heartless callousness in the request of the younger son. He said in effect, "Give me now the part of the estate I will get anyway when you are dead, and let me get out of this." The father did not argue. He knew that if the son was ever to learn he must learn the hard way; and he granted his request. Without delay the son realized his share of the property and left home.

He soon ran through the money; and he finished up feeding pigs, a task that was forbidden to a Jew because the law said, "Cursed is he who feeds swine." Then Jesus paid sinning mankind the greatest compliment it has ever been paid. "When he came to himself," he said. Jesus believed that

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Luke 15:11-32

so long as a man was away from God he was not truly himself; he was only truly himself when he was on the way home. Beyond a doubt Jesus did not believe in total depravity. He never believed that you could glorify God by blackguarding man; he believed that man was never essentially himself until he came home to God.

So the son decided to come home and plead to be taken back not as a son but in the lowest rank of slaves, the hired servants, the men who were only day labourers. The ordinary slave was in some sense a member of the family, but the hired servant could be dismissed at a day's notice. He was not one of the family at all. He came home; and, according to the best Greek text, his father never gave him the chance to ask to be a servant. He broke in before that. The robe stands for honour; the ring for authority, for if a man gave to another his signet ring it was the same as giving him the power of attorney; the shoes for a son as opposed to a slave, for children of the family were shod and slaves were not. (The slave's dream in the negro spiritual is of the time when "all God's chillun got shoes," for shoes were the sign of freedom.) And a feast was made that all might rejoice at the wanderer's return.

Let us stop there and see the truth so far in this parable.

(i) It should never have been called the parable of the Prodigal Son, for the son is not the hero. It should be called the parable of the Loving Father, for it tells us rather about a father's love than a son's sin.

(ii) It tells us much about the forgiveness of God. The father must have been waiting and watching for the son to come home, for he saw him a long way off. When he came, he forgave him with no recriminations. There is a way of forgiving, when forgiveness is conferred as a favour. It is even worse, when someone is forgiven, but always by hint and by word and by threat his sin is held over him.

Once Lincoln was asked how he was going to treat the rebellious southerners when they had finally been defeated and had returned to the Union of the United States. The questioner expected that Lincoln would take a dire vengeance, but he answered, "I will treat them as if they had never been away."

It is the wonder of the love of God that he treats us like that.

That is not the end of the story. There enters the elder brother who was actually sorry that his brother had come home. He stands for the self-righteous Pharisees who would rather see a sinner destroyed than saved. Certain things stand out about him.

(i) His attitude shows that his years of obedience to his father had been years of grim duty and not of loving service.

(ii) His attitude is one of utter lack of sympathy. He refers to the prodigal, not as any brother, but as your son. He was the kind of self-righteous character who would cheerfully have kicked a man farther into the gutter when he was already down.

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(iii) He had a peculiarly nasty mind. There is no mention of harlots until he mentions them. He, no doubt, suspected his brother of the sins he himself would have liked to commit.

Once again we have the amazing truth that it is easier to confess to God than it is to many a man; that God is more merciful in his judgments than many an orthodox man; that the love of God is far broader than the love of man; and that God can forgive when men refuse to forgive. In face of a love like that we cannot be other than lost in wonder, love and praise.

THREE LOST THINGS

We must finally note that these three parables are not simply three ways of stating the same thing. There is a difference. The sheep went lost through sheer foolishness. It did not think; and many a man would escape sin if he thought in time. The coin was lost through no fault of its own. Many a man is led astray; and God will not hold him guiltless who has taught another to sin. The son deliberately went lost, callously turning his back on his father.

The love of God can defeat the foolishness of man, the seduction of the tempting voices, and even the deliberate rebellion of the heart.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 16:1-13

A BAD MAN'S GOOD EXAMPLE

Luke 16:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples, "There was a rich man who had a steward. He received information against the steward which alleged that he was dissipating his goods. He called him, and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.' The steward said to himself, 'What am I to do? I have not the strength to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I will do, so that, when I am removed from my stewardship, they will receive me into their houses.' So he summoned each of the people who owed debts to his master.

To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'Nine hundred gallons of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your account and sit down and write quickly, four hundred and fifty.' Then he said to another 'And you--how much do you owe?' He said, 'A thousand bushels of corn.' He said to him, 'Take your accounts and write eight hundred.' And the master praised the wicked steward because he acted shrewdly; for the sons of this world are shrewder in their own generation than the sons of light. And, I tell you, make for yourselves friends by means of your material possessions, even if they have been unjustly acquired, so that when your money has gone they will receive you into a dwelling which lasts forever. He who is trustworthy in a very little is also trustworthy in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.

If you have not shown yourself trustworthy in your ordinary business dealings about material things, who will trust you with the genuine wealth? If you have not shown yourselves trustworthy in what belongs to someone else, who will give you what is your own? No household slave can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot be the slave of God and of material things."

This is a difficult parable to interpret. It is a story about as choice a set of rascals as one could meet anywhere.

The steward was a rascal. He was a slave, but he was nonetheless in charge of the running of his master's estate. In Palestine there were many absentee landlords. The master may well have been one of these, and his business may well have been entrusted to his steward's hands. The steward had followed a career of embezzlement.

The debtors were also rascals. No doubt what they owed was rent. Rent was often paid to a landlord, not in money, but in kind. It was often an agreed proportion of the produce of the part of the estate which had been rented. The steward knew that he had lost his job. He, therefore, had a brilliant idea. He falsified the entries in the books so that the debtors were debited with far less than they owed. This would have two effects. First, the debtors would be grateful to him; and second, and much more effective, he had involved the debtors in his own misdemeanours, and, if the worst came to the worst, he was now in a strong position to exercise a little judicious blackmail!

The master himself was something of a rascal, for, instead of being shocked at the whole proceeding, he appreciated the shrewd brain behind it and actually praised the steward for what he had done.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 16:1-13

The difficulty of the parable is clearly seen from the fact that Luke attaches no fewer than four different lessons to it.

(i) In Lk.16:8 the lesson is that the sons of this world are wiser in their generation than the sons of light. That means that, if only the Christian was as eager and ingenious in his attempt to attain goodness as the man of the world is in his attempt to attain money and comfort, he would be a much better man. If only men would give as much attention to the things which concern their souls as they do to the things which concern their business, they would be much better men. Over and over again a man will expend twenty times the amount of time and money and effort on his pleasure, his hobby, his garden, his sport as he does on his church. Our Christianity will begin to be real and effective only when we spend as much time and effort on it as we do on our worldly activities.

(ii) In Lk.16:9 the lesson is that material possessions should be used to cement the friendships wherein the real and permanent value of life lies. That could be done in two ways.

(a) It could be done as it affects eternity. The Rabbis had a saying, "The rich help the poor in this world, but the poor help the rich in the world to come." Ambrose, commenting on the rich fool who built bigger barns to store his goods, said, "The bosoms of the poor, the houses of widows, the mouths of children are the barns which last forever." It was a Jewish belief that charity given to poor people would stand to a man's credit in the world to come. A man's true wealth would consist not in what he kept, but in what he gave away.

(b) It could be done as it affects this world. A man can use his wealth selfishly or he can use it to make life easier, not only for himself, but for his friends and his fellow-men. How many a scholar is forever grateful to a rich man who gave or left money to found bursaries and scholarships which made a university career possible! How many a man is grateful to a better-off friend who saw him through some time of need in the most practical way! Possessions are not in themselves a sin, but they are a great responsibility, and the man who uses them to help his friends has gone far to discharge that responsibility.

(iii) In Lk.16v10-11 the lesson is that a man's way of fulfilling a small task is the best proof of his fitness or unfitness to be entrusted with a bigger task. That is clearly true of earthly things. No man will be advanced to higher office until he has given proof of his honesty and ability in a smaller position. But Jesus extends the principle to eternity. He says, "Upon earth you are in charge of things which are not really yours. You cannot take them with you when you die. They are only lent to you. You are only a steward over them. They cannot, in the nature of things, be permanently yours. On the other hand, in heaven you will get what is really and eternally yours. And what you get in heaven depends on how you use the things of earth. What you will be given as your very own will depend on how you use the things of which you are only steward."

(iv) Lk.16:13 lays down the rule that no slave can serve two masters. The master possessed the slave, and possessed him exclusively. Nowadays, a servant or a workman can quite easily do two jobs and work for two people. He can do one job in his working time and another in his spare time.

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Luke 16:1-13

He can, for instance, be a clerk by day and a musician by night. Many a man augments his income or finds his real interest in a spare-time occupation. But a slave had no spare time; every moment of his day, and every ounce of his energy, belonged to his master. He had no time which was his own. So, serving God can never be a part-time or a spare-time job. Once a man chooses to serve God every moment of his time and every atom of his energy belongs to God. God is the most exclusive of masters. We either belong to him totally or not at all.

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Luke 16:14-18

THE LAW WHICH DOES NOT CHANGE

Luke 16:14-18

When the Pharisees, who were characteristically fond of money, heard these things, they derided Jesus. So he said to them, "You are those who make yourselves look righteous before men, but God knows your hearts, because that which is exalted amongst men is an abomination before God."

"The law and the prophets were until John; from then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed; and every one forces his way into it; but it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become invalid."

"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman who has been divorced from her husband commits adultery."

This passage falls into three sections.

(i) It begins with a rebuke to the Pharisees. It says that they derided Jesus. The word literally means that they turned up their noses at him. The Jew tended to connect earthly prosperity with goodness; wealth was a sign that a man was a good man. The Pharisees put-on a parade of goodness and they regarded material prosperity as a reward of that goodness; but the more they exalted themselves before men, the more they became an abomination to God. It is bad enough for a man to think himself a good man; it is worse when he points to material prosperity as an unanswerable proof of his goodness.

(ii) Before Jesus the law and the prophets had been the final word of God; but Jesus came preaching the kingdom. When he did, the most unlikely people, the tax-collectors and the sinners, came storming their way into the kingdom even when the scribes and Pharisees would have set up barriers to keep them out. But Jesus emphasized that the kingdom was not the end of the law. True, the little details and regulations of the ceremonial law were wiped out. No man was to think that Christianity offered an easy way in which no laws remained. The great laws stood unaltered and unalterable. Certain Hebrew letters are very like each other and are distinguished only by the serif, the little line at the top or bottom. Not even a serif of the great laws would pass away.

(iii) As an illustration of law that would never pass away Jesus took the law of chastity. This very definite statement of Jesus must be read against the contemporary background of Jewish life. The Jew glorified fidelity and chastity. The Rabbis said, "All things can God overlook except unchastity." "Unchastity causes the glory of God to depart." A Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder or adultery.

But the tragedy was that at this time the marriage bond was on the way to being destroyed. In the eyes of Jewish law a woman was a thing. She could divorce her husband only if he became a leper or an apostate or if he ravished a virgin. Otherwise a woman had no rights whatever and no redress, other than that the marriage dowry must be repaid if she was divorced. The law said, "A woman may be divorced with or without her will; a man only with his will." The Mosaic law (Deut.24:1)

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Luke 16:14-18

said, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house." The bill of divorce had to be signed before two witnesses and ran, "Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt." Divorce was as simple and easy as that.

The matter turned on the interpretation of the phrase some indecency in the Mosaic regulation. There were two schools of thought. The school of Shammai said that meant adultery and adultery alone. The school of Hillel said it could mean "if she spoiled a dish of food; if she spun in the street; if she talked to a strange man; if she was guilty of speaking disrespectfully of her husband's relations in his hearing; if she was a brawling woman," which was defined as a woman whose voice could be heard in the next house. Rabbi Akiba went so far as to say that a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman who was fairer than she. Human nature being what it is, it was the school of Hillel which prevailed, so that, in the time of Jesus things were so bad that women were refusing to marry at all and family life was in danger.

Jesus here lays down the sanctity of the marriage bond. The saying is repeated in Matt.5:31-32 where adultery is made the sole exception to the universal rule. We sometimes think our own generation is bad, but Jesus lived in a generation where things were every bit as bad. If we destroy family life, we destroy the very basis of the Christian life; and Jesus here lays down a law which men relax only at their peril.

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Luke 16:19-31

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE MAN WHO NEVER NOTICED

Luke 16:19-31

There was a rich man who dressed habitually in purple and fine linen, and who feasted in luxury every day. A poor man, called Lazarus, was laid at his gate. He was full of ulcerated sores, and he desired to satisfy his hunger from the things which fell from the rich man's table; more, the dogs used to come and lick his sores. The poor man died, and he was carried by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man died and was buried. And in hell, being in torture, he lifted up his eyes, and from far away he saw Abraham, and Lazarus in his bosom. He called out, "Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus to me that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in anguish in this fire." Abraham said, "Child, remember that you received in full your good things in your life-time, just as Lazarus received evil things.

Now be is comforted, and you are in anguish; and, besides afl this, between you and us a great gulf is fixed, so that those who wish to pass from here to you cannot do so, nor can any cross from there to us." He said, "Well then, I ask you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may warn them, so that they may not also come to this place of torture." Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them." He said, "No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to them, "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead."

This is a parable constructed with such masterly skill that not one phrase is wasted. Let us look at the two characters in it.

(i) First, there is the rich man, usually called Dives, which is the Latin for rich. Every phrase adds something to the luxury in which he lived. He was clothed in purple and fine linen. That is the description of the robes of the High Priests, and such robes cost anything from L 30 to L 40, an immense sum in days when a working man's wage was about 4 p a day. He feasted in luxury every day. The word used for feasting is the word that is used for a gourmet feeding on exotic and costly dishes. He did this every day. In so doing he definitely and positively broke the fourth commandment. That commandment not only forbids work on the Sabbath; it also says six days you shall labour (Exo.20:9).

In a country where the common people were fortunate if they ate meat once in the week and where they toiled for six days of the week, Dives is a figure of indolent self-indulgence. Lazarus was waiting for the crumbs that fell from Dives's table. In that time there were no knives, forks or napkins. Food was eaten with the hands and, in very wealthy houses, the hands were cleansed by wiping them on hunks of bread, which were then thrown away. That was what Lazarus was waiting for.

(ii) Second, there is Lazarus. Strangely enough Lazarus is the only character in any of the parables who is given a name. The name is the Latinized form of Eleazar and means God is my help. He was a beggar; he was covered with ulcerated sores, and so helpless that he could not even ward off the street dogs, which pestered him.

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Luke 16:19-31

Such is the scene in this world; then abruptly it changes to the next and there Lazarus is in glory and Dives is in torment. What was the sin of Dives? He had not ordered Lazarus to be removed from his gate. He had made no objections to his receiving the bread that was flung away from his table. He did not kick him in the passing. He was not deliberately cruel to him. The sin of Dives was that he never noticed Lazarus, that he accepted him as part of the landscape and simply thought it perfectly natural and inevitable that Lazarus should lie in pain and hunger while he wallowed in luxury. As someone said, "It was not what Dives did that got him into gaol; it was what he did not do that got him into hell."

The sin of Dives was that he could look on the world's suffering and need and feel no answering sword of grief and pity pierce his heart; he looked at a fellow-man, hungry and in pain, and did nothing about it. His was the punishment of the man who never noticed.

It seems hard that his request that his brothers should be warned was refused. But it is the plain fact that if men possess the truth of God's word, and if, wherever they look, there is sorrow to be comforted, need to be supplied pain to be relieved, and it moves them to no feeling and to no action, nothing will change them.

It is a terrible warning that the sin of Dives was not that he did wrong things, but that he did nothing.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 17:1-10

LAWS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Luke 17:1-10

Jesus said to his disciples, "It is impossible that snares to sin should not arise; but woe to him through whom they do arise! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to trip up.

"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. Even if he sins against you seven times in the day, and if seven times he turns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Give us also faith!" The Lord said, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

"If any of you has a slave ploughing or watching the flock, and the slave comes in from the field, will he say to him, 'Come at once and take your place at table'; or rather, will he not say to him, 'Get ready my evening meal, and gird yourself and serve me, until I eat and drink, and after that you shall eat and drink yourself'? Does he thank a servant because he has done what he was ordered to do? Even so, you too, when you have done everything you were ordered to do, say, 'We are unworthy servants. We have done what it was our duty to do.'"

This passage falls into four definite and disconnected sections.

(i) Lk.17:1-2 condemn the man who teaches others to sin. The Revised Standard Version talks in these verses about temptations to sin. The Greek word (skandalon, GSN4625) is exactly the same word as the English scandal. It has two meanings.

(a) It originally meant the bait-stick in a trap.

(b) It then came to mean any stumbling-block placed in a man's way to trip him up. Jesus said that it was impossible to construct a world with no temptations; but woe to that man who taught another to sin or who took away another's innocence.

Every one must be given his first invitation to sin, his first push along the wrong way. Kennedy Williamson tells of an old man who was dying. Something was obviously worrying him. He told them at last what it was. "When I was a lad," he said, "I often played on a wide common. Near its centre two roads met and crossed, and, standing at the cross-roads, was an old rickety sign-post. I remember one day twisting it round in its socket, thus altering the arms and making them point in the wrong direction; and I've been wondering ever since how many travellers I sent on the wrong road."

God will not hold the man guiltless, who, on the road of life, sends a younger or a weaker brother on the wrong way.

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Luke 17:1-10

(ii) Lk.17:3-4 speak of the necessity of forgiveness in the Christian life. It tells us to forgive seven times. The Rabbis had a saying that if one forgave another three times, one was a perfect man. The Christian standard takes the Rabbinic standard, doubles it and adds one; but it is not a matter of calculation. It simply means that the Christian standard of forgiveness must immeasurably exceed the best the world can achieve.

(iii) Lk.17:5-6 tell us that faith is the greatest force in the world. We must again remember that it was the eastern custom to use language in the most vivid possible way. This saying means that even that which looks completely impossible becomes possible, if it is approached with faith. We have only to think of the number of scientific marvels, of the number of surgical operations, of the feats of endurance which today have been achieved and which less than fifty years ago would have been regarded as utterly impossible. If we approach a thing saying, "It can't be done," it will not; if we approach it saying, "It must be done," the chances are that it will. We must always remember that we approach no task alone, but that with us there is God and all his power.

(iv) Lk.17:7-10 tell us that we can never put God in our debt and can never have any claim on him. When we have done our best, we have done only our duty; and a man who has done his duty has done only what, in any event, he could be compelled to do.

Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

It may be possible to satisfy the claims of law; but every lover knows that nothing can ever satisfy the claims of love.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 17:11-19

THE RARITY OF GRATITUDE

Luke 17:11-19

When Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem, he was going along between Samaria and Galilee; and, as he entered a village, ten lepers, who stood far off, met him. They lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have pity upon us." When he saw them, he said, "Go, and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. One of them when he saw that he was cured, turned back, glorifying God with a great voice. He fell on his face at Jesus' feet and kept on thanking him. And he was a Samaritan. Jesus said, "Were the ten not cleansed? The nine--where are they? Were none found to turn back and give glory to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go! Your faith has made you well."

Jesus was on the border between Galilee and Samaria and was met by a band of ten lepers. We know that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans; yet in this band there was at least one Samaritan. Here is an example of a great law of life. A common misfortune had broken down the racial and national barriers. In the common tragedy of their leprosy they had forgotten they were Jews and Samaritans and remembered only they were men in need. If flood surges over a piece of country and the wild animals congregate for safety on some little bit of higher ground, you will find standing peacefully together animals who are natural enemies and who at any other time would do their best to kill each other. Surely one of the things which should draw all men together is their common need of God.

The lepers stood far off. (compare Lev.13:45-46; Num.5:2.) There was no specified distance at which they should stand, but we know that at least one authority laid it down that, when he was to windward of a healthy person, the leper should stand at least fifty yards away. Nothing could better show the utter isolation in which lepers lived.

No story in all the gospels so poignantly shows man's ingratitude. The lepers came to Jesus with desperate longing; he cured them; and nine never came back to give thanks. So often, once a man has got what he wants, he never comes back.

(i) Often we are ungrateful to our parents. There was a time in our lives when a week's neglect would have killed us. Of all living creatures man requires longest to become able to meet the needs essential for life. There were years when we were dependent on our parents for literally everything. Yet the day often comes when an aged parent is a nuisance; and many young people are unwilling to repay the debt they owe. As King Lear said in the day of his own tragedy.

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!"

(ii) Often we are ungrateful to our fellow-men. Few of us have not at some time owed a great deal to some fellow-man. Few of us at the moment, believed we could ever forget; but few of us in the end satisfy the debt of gratitude we owe. It often happens that a friend, a teacher, a doctor, a

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Luke 17:11-19

surgeon does something for us which it is impossible to repay; but the tragedy is that we often do not even try to repay it.

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.

(iii) Often we are ungrateful to God. In some time of bitter need we pray with desperate intensity; the time passes and we forget God. Many of us never even offer a grace before meat. God gave us his only Son and often we never give to him even a word of thanks. The best thanks we can give him is to try to deserve his goodness and his mercy a little better. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." (Ps.103:2.)

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Luke 17:20-37

THE SIGNS OF HIS COMING

Luke 17:20-37

When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, "The kingdom of God does not come with signs that you can watch for; nor will they say, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' For--look you--the kingdom of God is within you."

He said to his disciples, "Days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Look there! Look here!' Do not depart, and do not follow them. For, as the flashing lightning lights up the sky from one side to another, so shall be the Son of Man in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Even as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day on which Noah entered the ark and the flood came and wiped them all out. In the same way, so it was in the days of Lot. They were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building, but, on the day on which Lot went out of Sodom, fire and brimstone rained from heaven and wiped them all out. It will be the same on the day on which the Son of Man is revealed.

If, on that day, anyone is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them. In the same way, if anyone is in the field, let him not turn back. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will preserve it alive. This is the truth I tell you--on that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." They said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the body is, there the vultures will be gathered together."

Here are two very difficult passages.

In Lk.17:20-21 Jesus answered the question of the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God would come. He said that it would not come with signs that watch for. The word he used is the word used for a doctor watching a patient for symptoms of some disease which he suspects.

We are not quite sure what Jesus went on to say. The Greek may mean two things.

(a) It may mean, the kingdom of God is within you. That is to say, the kingdom of God works in men's hearts; it is to produce not new things, but new people. It is not a revolution in material things that we are to look for, but a revolution in the hearts of men.

(b) It may mean, the kingdom of God is among you. That would refer to Jesus himself. He was the very embodiment of the kingdom, and they did not recognize him. It was as if he said, "The whole offer and secret of God are here--and you will not accept them."

Lk.17:22-37 speak of the Second Coming of Jesus. Out of this difficult passage we can pick only the things which are certain--and in truth they are enough.

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Luke 17:20-37

(i) There will be times when the Christian will long for the coming of Christ. Like the martyred saints he will cry out, "How long?" (Rev.6:10.) But he will need to learn to light a candle of patience and wait. God takes his own time.

(ii) The coming of Christ is certain, but its time is quite unknown. Speculation is vain. People will come with false prophecies and false predictions; but we must not leave our ordinary work to follow them. The best way that Christ can come upon a man is when he is faithfully and humbly and watchfully doing his duty. As a great commentator said, "No man will foresee it, and all men will see it."

(iii) When that day comes the judgments of God will operate, and of two people, who all their lives lived side by side, one will be taken and the other left. There is a warning here. Intimacy with a good person does not necessarily guarantee our own salvation. "No man can deliver his brother." Is it not often true that a family is apt to leave the duties of church membership to one of its number? Is it not often true that a husband leaves the duties of the church to his wife? The judgment of God is an individual judgment. We cannot discharge our duty to God by proxy nor even by association. Often one will be taken and another left.

(iv) When they asked Jesus when all this would happen, he answered by quoting a well-known proverb. "Where the body is, there the vultures will be gathered together." That simply meant that a thing would happen when the necessary conditions were fulfilled. That means for us that God will bring Jesus Christ again in his good time. We cannot know that time; we dare not speculate about it. We must live so that whenever he comes, at morning, at midday or at evening, he will find us ready.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 18:1-8

UNWEARIED IN PRAYER

Luke 18:1-8

Jesus spoke a parable to them to show that it is necessary always to pray and not to lose heart. "There was a judge," he said, "in a town who neither feared God nor respected man. There was a widow in the same town who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For some time he refused. But afterwards he said to himself, 'Even though I neither fear God nor respect man, because she bothers me, I will vindicate this widow, lest by her constant coming she exhausts me.'" The Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And shall God not vindicate his own chosen ones who cry to him day and night, even though he seem to wait for long? But when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?"

This parable tells of the kind of thing which could, and often did, happen. There are two characters in it.

(i) The judge was clearly not a Jewish judge. All ordinary Jewish disputes were taken before the elders, and not into the public courts at all. If, under Jewish law, a matter was taken to arbitration, one man could not constitute a court. There were always three judges, one chosen by the plaintiff, one by the defendant, and one independently appointed.

This judge was one of the paid magistrates appointed either by Herod or by the Romans. Such judges were notorious. Unless a plaintiff had influence and money to bribe his way to a verdict he had no hope of ever getting his case settled. These judges were said to pervert justice for a dish of meat. People even punned on their title. Officially they were called Dayyaneh Gezeroth, which means judges of prohibitions or punishments. Popularly they were called Dayyaneh Gezeloth, which means robber judges.

(ii) The widow was the symbol of all who were poor and defenceless. It was obvious that she, without resource of any kind, had no hope of ever extracting justice from such a judge. But she had one weapon--persistence. It is possible that what the judge in the end feared was actual physical violence. The word translated, lest she exhausts me, can mean, lest she give me a black eye. It is possible to close a person's eye in two ways--either by sleep or by assault and battery! In either event, in the end her persistence won the day.

This parable is like the parable of the Friend at Midnight. It does not liken God to an unjust judge; it contrasts him to such a person. Jesus was saying, "If, in the end, an unjust and rapacious judge can be wearied into giving a widow woman justice, how much more will God, who is a loving Father, give his children what they need?"

That is true, but it is no reason why we should expect to get whatever we pray for. Often a father has to refuse the request of a child, because he knows that what the child asks would hurt rather than help. God is like that. We do not know what is to happen in the next hour, let alone the next week, or month, or year. Only God sees time whole, and, therefore, only God knows what is good for us in the long run. That is why Jesus said we must never be discouraged in prayer. That is why

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Luke 18:1-8

he wondered if men's faith would stand the long delays before the Son of Man should come. We will never grow weary in prayer and our faith will never falter if, after we have offered to God our prayers and requests, we add the perfect prayer, Thy will be done.

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Luke 18:9-14

THE SIN OF PRIDE

Luke 18:9-14

Jesus spoke this parable to some who were self-confidently sure that they were righteous and who despised others. "Two men went up to the Temple to pray. The one was a Pharisee, the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'O God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, thieves, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of all that I get.' The tax-collector stood afar off, and would not lift even his eyes to heaven, and kept beating his breast and said, 'O God, be merciful, to me--the sinner.' I tell you, this man went down to his house accepted with God rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The devout observed three prayer times daily--9 a.m., 12 midday and 3 p.m. Prayer was held to be specially efficacious if it was offered in the Temple and so at these hours many went up to the Temple courts to pray. Jesus told of two men who went.

(i) There was a Pharisee. He did not really go to pray to God. He prayed with himself. True prayer is always offered to God and to God alone. A certain American cynically described a preacher's prayer as "the most eloquent prayer ever offered to a Boston audience." The Pharisee was really giving himself a testimonial before God.

The Jewish law prescribed only one absolutely obligatory fast--that on the day of Atonement. But those who wished to gain special merit fasted also on Mondays and Thursdays. It is noteworthy that these were the market days when Jerusalem was full of country people. Those who fasted whitened their faces and appeared in dishevelled clothes, and those days gave their piety the biggest possible audience. The Levites were to receive a tithe of all a man's produce (Num.18:21; Deut.14:22). But this Pharisee tithed everything, even things which there was no obligation to tithe.

His whole attitude was not untypical of the worst in Pharisaism. There is a recorded prayer of a certain Rabbi which runs like this, "I thank, Thee, O Lord my God, that thou hast put my part with those who sit in the Academy, and not with those who sit at the street-corners. For I rise early, and they rise early; I rise early to the words of the law, and they to vain things. I labour, and they labour; I labour and receive a reward, and they labour and receive no reward. I run, and they run; I run to the life of the world to come, and they to the pit of destruction." It is on record that Rabbi Simeon ben Jocai once said, "If there are only two righteous men in the world, I and my son are these two; if there is only one, I am he!"

The Pharisee did not really go to pray; he went to inform God how good he was.

(ii) There was a tax-collector. He stood afar off, and would not even lift his eyes to God. The King James and Revised Standard Versions do not even do justice to his humility for he actually prayed, "O God, be merciful to me--the sinner," as if he was not merely a sinner, but the sinner par excellence. "And," said Jesus, "it was that heart-broken, self-despising prayer which won him acceptance before God."

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Luke 18:9-14

This parable unmistakably tells us certain things about prayer.

(i) No man who is proud can pray. The gate of heaven is so low that none can enter it save upon his knees. All that a man can say is,

"None other Lamb, none other Name,
None other Hope in heaven or earth or sea,
None other Hiding-place from guilt and shame,
None beside Thee."

(ii) No man who despises his fellow-men can pray. In prayer we do not lift ourselves above our fellow-men. We remember that we are one of a great army of sinning, suffering, sorrowing humanity, all kneeling before the throne of God's mercy.

(iii) True prayer comes from setting our lives beside the life of God. No doubt all that the Pharisee said was true. He did fast; he did meticulously give tithes; he was not as other men are; still less was he like that tax-collector. But the question is not, "Am I as good as my fellow-men?" The question is, "Am I as good as God?" Once I made a journey by train to England. As we passed through the Yorkshire moors I saw a little whitewashed cottage and it seemed to me to shine with an almost radiant whiteness. Some days later I made the journey back to Scotland. The snow had fallen and was lying deep all around. We came again to the little white cottage, but this time its whiteness seemed drab and soiled and almost grey in comparison with the virgin whiteness of the driven snow.

It all depends what we compare ourselves with. And when we set our lives beside the life of Jesus and beside the holiness of God, all that is left to say is, "God be merciful to me--the sinner."

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Luke 18:15-17

THE MASTER AND THE CHILDREN

Luke 18:15-17

People were bringing even their babies to Jesus that he might touch them. When the disciples saw it they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him saying, "Let the little children come to me, and don't stop them, for of such is the kingdom of God. This is the truth I tell you--whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter into it."

It was the custom for mothers to bring their children to some distinguished Rabbi on their first birthday that he might bless them. That is what the mothers wanted for their children from Jesus. We are not to think that the disciples were hard and cruel. It was kindness that made them act as they did. Remember where Jesus was going. He was on the way to Jerusalem to die upon a cross. The disciples could see upon his face the inner tension of his heart; and they did not want Jesus to be bothered. Often at home we may say to a little child, "Don't bother your Daddy; he's tired and worried tonight." That is exactly how the disciples felt about Jesus.

It is one of the loveliest things in all the gospel story that Jesus had time for the children even when he was on the way to Jerusalem to die.

When Jesus said that it was of the child-like that the kingdom of God was composed, what did he mean "What are the qualities of which he was thinking"?

(i) The child has not lost the sense of wonder. Tennyson tells of going early one morning into the bedroom of his little grandson and of seeing the child "worshipping the sunbeam playing on the bedpost." As we grow older we begin to live in a world which has grown grey and tired. The child lives in a world with a sheen on it and in which God is always near.

(ii) The child's whole life is founded on trust. When we are young, we never doubt where the next meal is to come from or where our clothes will be found. We go to school certain that home will be there when we return, and all things ready for our comfort. When we go on a journey we never doubt that the fare will be paid or that our parents know the way and will take us safely there. The child's trust in his parents is absolute, as ours should be in our Father--God.

(iii) The child is naturally obedient. True, he often disobeys and grumbles at his parents' bidding. But his instinct is to obey. He knows very well that he should obey and is not happy when he has been disobedient. In his heart of hearts his parents' word is law. So should it be with us and God.

(iv) The child has an amazing faculty of forgiveness. Almost all parents are unjust to their children. We demand from them a standard of obedience, of good manners, of refined language, of diligence which we seldom satisfy ourselves. Time and again we scold them for doing the very things we do ourselves. If others treated us in the way we treat our children in the matter of plain justice, we probably would never forgive. But the child forgives and forgets, and does not even realize it when he is very young. It would be so much lovelier a world if we would forgive as a child forgives.

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Luke 18:15-17

To keep alive the sense of wonder, to live in unquestioning trust, instinctively to obey, to forgive and to forget--that is the childlike spirit, and that is the passport to the kingdom of God.

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Luke 18:18-30

THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT PAY THE PRICE

Luke 18:18-30

A ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? There is none good except one God. You know the commandments--do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honour your father and your mother." He said, "From my youth I have kept all these." When Jesus heard that, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come! Follow me!" When he heard these things he was very sad, because he was exceedingly rich.

When Jesus saw him he said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard him said, "And who can be saved?" He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." Peter said, "Look you--we have left our private possessions and have followed you." He said to them, "This is the truth I tell you--there is no one who has left house, or wife, or brother, or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not get it all back many times over in this time, and, in the age that is coming, eternal life."

This ruler addressed Jesus in a way which, for a Jew, was without parallel. In all the religious Jewish literature there is no record of any Rabbi being addressed as, "Good teacher." The Rabbis always said "there is nothing that is good but the law." To address Jesus in such a way savoured of almost fulsome flattery. So Jesus began by driving him and his thoughts back to God. Jesus was always sure that his own power and his own message, came to him from God. When the nine lepers failed to return, his grief was, not that they had forgotten to come back to say thanks to him, but that they had not come back to glorify God (Lk.17:18).

It was indisputable that this ruler was a good man, but he felt within his heart and soul that in his life there was something lacking. Jesus' command to him was that if he wanted to find all that he was searching for in life he must sell all his possessions and distribute them to the poor and follow him. Why did Jesus make this demand specially from this man? When the man whom Jesus had cured in the country of the Gerasenes wished to follow him, he told him to stay at home (Lk.8:38-39). Why this very different advice to this ruler?

There is an apocryphal gospel called the Gospel according to the Hebrews most of which is lost; in one of the fragments which remain there is an account of this incident which gives us a clue. "The, other rich man said to Jesus, 'Master, what good thing must I do really to live?' Jesus said to him, 'Man, obey the law and the prophets.' He said, 'I have done so.' Jesus said to him, 'Go, sell all that you possess, distribute it among the poor, and come, follow me!' The rich man began to scratch his head because he did not like this command.

The Lord said to him, 'Why do you say that you have obeyed the law and the prophets? For it is written in the law, "You must love your neighbour as yourself," and look you--there are many brothers of yours, sons of Abraham, who are dying of hunger, and your house is full of many good things, and not one single thing goes out of it to them.' And he turned and said to Simon, his

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Luke 18:18-30

disciple, who was sitting beside him, 'Simon, son of Jonas, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

There we have the secret and the tragedy of this rich ruler. He was living utterly selfishly. He was rich, and yet he gave nothing away. His real God was comfort, and what he really worshipped were his own possessions and his wealth. That is why Jesus told him to give it all away. Many a man uses such wealth as he has to bring comfort and joy and good to his fellow-men; but this man used it for nobody but himself. If a man's god is that to which he gives all his time, his thought, his energy, his devotion, then wealth was his god. If he was ever to find happiness he must be done with all that and live for others with the same intensity as that with which he had so long lived for himself.

Jesus went on to say that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Quite often the rabbis talked of an elephant trying to get through the eye of a needle as a picture of something fantastically impossible. But Jesus' picture may have one of two origins.

(i) It is said that beside the great gate into Jerusalem through which traffic went, there was a little gate just wide and high enough for a man to get through. It is said that that little gate was called the needle's eye, and that the picture is of a camel trying to struggle through it.

(ii) The Greek word for a camel is kamelos (GSN2574). In this age of Greek there was a tendency for the vowel sounds to become very like each other, and there was another word which would sound almost exactly the same--the word kamilos, which means a ship's hawser. It may well be that what Jesus said was that it would be easier to thread a needle with a ship's hawser than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Why should it be so? The whole tendency of possessions is to shackle a man's thoughts to this world. He has so big a stake in it that he never wants to leave it, and never thinks of anything else. It is not a sin to have much wealth--but it is a danger to the soul and a great responsibility.

Peter pointed out that he and his fellow disciples had left all to follow Jesus; and Jesus promised that no man would ever give up anything for the kingdom of God but he would be repaid many times over. It is the experience of all Christian folk that that is true. Once someone said to David Livingstone, thinking of the trials he had endured and the sorrows he had borne, of how he had lost his wife and ruined his health in Africa, "What sacrifices you have made!" Livingstone answered, "Sacrifices? I never made a sacrifice in all my life."

For the man who walks the Christian way there may be things the world calls hard, but, beyond them all and through them all, there is a peace which the world cannot give and cannot take away, and a joy that no man takes from him.

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Luke 18:31-34

THE WAITING CROSS

Luke 18:31-34

Jesus took the Twelve and said to them, "Look you--we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that was written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the gentiles; and he will be mocked and cruelly treated; and spat upon; and they will scourge him and kin him; and on the third day he will rise again." But they did not understand these things; this word was hidden from them; and they did not grasp what was being said.

There are two kinds of courage. There is the courage of the man who, suddenly and without warning, is confronted with some emergency or some crisis, and who unhesitatingly and even recklessly flings himself into it. There is the courage of the man who sees a terrible situation looming ahead and knows that nothing short of flight can avoid it, and who yet goes steadfastly and inflexibly on. There is no question which is the higher courage. Many a man is capable of the heroic action on the spur of the moment; it takes a man of supreme courage to go on to face something which haunts him for days ahead and which, by turning back, he could escape.

In a novel a writer paints a picture of two children walking along the road playing their children's games. One said to the other, "When you're walking along the road, do you ever pretend that there is something terrible just around the next corner waiting for you; and you've got to go and face it? It makes it so exciting." With Jesus it was no game of let's pretend. It was the grim truth that there was something terrible waiting for him. He knew what crucifixion was like; he had seen it; and yet he went on. If Jesus was nothing else, he would still be one of the most heroic figures of all time.

In face of Jesus' frequent warning of what was to happen to him in Jerusalem, we sometimes wonder why, when the cross came, it was such a shock and such a shattering blow to his disciples. The truth is that they simply could not take in what he was saying to them. They were obsessed with the idea of a conquering king; they still clung to that hope that he would let loose his power in Jerusalem and blast his enemies off the face of the earth.

Here is a great warning to every listener. The human mind has a way of listening only to what it wants to hear. There are none so blind as those who refuse to see. There is a kind of wishful thinking which believes that the unpleasant truth cannot really be true, and that the thing it does not want to happen cannot happen. A man must ever struggle against the tendency to hear only what he wants to hear.

One thing more we must note. Jesus never foretold the cross without foretelling the resurrection. He knew that shame lay before him, but he was equally certain that glory lay before him, too. He knew what the malice of men could do, but he knew also what the power of God could do. It was in the certainty of ultimate victory that he faced the apparent defeat of the cross. He knew that without a cross there can never be any crown.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 18:35-43

THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT BE SILENCED

Luke 18:35-43

When Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the wayside begging. When he heard the crowd passing through he asked what it meant. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!" Those who were going on in front rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he cried all the more, "Son of David, have pity on me." Jesus stood, and ordered him to be brought to him. When he had come near he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed him glorifying God, and, when the people saw it, they all gave praise to God.

The one thing which stands out in this story is the sheer, desperate persistence of the blind man. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to the Passover. At such a time pilgrims travelled in bands together. One of the commonest ways for a Rabbi to teach was to discourse as he walked. That was what Jesus was doing, and the rest of the pilgrim band were crowding close around him, not to miss anything that he might say. As such a pilgrim band passed through a village or a town those who themselves could not go to the feast lined the wayside to see the pilgrims pass and to bid them godspeed on the way.

It was amongst the wayside crowd that the blind man was sitting. When he heard the murmur of the approaching throng he asked what was happening and was told that Jesus was passing by. Immediately he cried out to Jesus for help and healing. Thereupon everyone tried to silence him. The people round Jesus were missing what he was saying because of the clamour of this blind man.

But the man would not be silenced. He shouted again. The word used for shout in Lk.18:39 is quite different from that used in Lk.18:38. In Lk.18:38 it is an ordinary loud shout to attract attention. In Lk.18:39 it is the instinctive shout of ungovernable emotion, a scream, an almost animal cry. The word well shows the utter desperation of the man.

So Jesus stopped, and the blind man found the healing he so passionately desired.

This story tells us two things.

(i) It tells us something about the blind man. He was determined to come face to face with Jesus. Nothing would stop him. He refused to be silent and he refused to be restrained. His sense of need drove him relentlessly into the presence of Jesus. If a man wants a miracle that is the spirit he must show. A gentle, sentimental longing never really taps the power of God; but the passionate, intense desire of the very depths of the human heart will never be disappointed.

(ii) It tells us something about Jesus. At that moment he was discoursing to the crowd like any rabbi. But at the blind man's cry of need he stopped, the discourse forgotten. For Jesus it was always more important to act than to talk. Words always took second place to deeds. Here was a human soul in need. Speech must end and action begin. Someone has said that many teachers are

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Luke 18:35-43

like men throwing chatty remarks to a man drowning in a tempestuous sea. Jesus was never like that; he leaped to the rescue of the man. There is many a man who could not put two sentences together but others love him because he is kind. Men may respect an orator but they love a man with helping hands. Men admire a man with a great mind but they love a man with a big heart.

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Luke 19:1-10

THE GUEST OF THE MAN WHOM ALL MEN DESPISED

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. And--look you--there was a man called Zacchaeus by name, and he was commissioner of taxes, and he was rich. He was seeking to see who Jesus was, and he could not for the crowd, because he was short in height. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree, for he was to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus! Hurry and come down! for this very day I must stay at your house." So he hurried and came down, and welcomed him gladly; and when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look you--half of my goods, Lord, I hereby give to the poor. If I have taken anything from any man by fraud I give it back to him four times over." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

Jericho was a very wealthy and a very important town. It lay in the Jordan valley and commanded both the approach to Jerusalem and the crossings of the river which gave access to the lands east of the Jordan. It had a great palm forest and world-famous balsam groves which perfumed the air for miles around. Its gardens of roses were known far and wide. Men called it "The City of Palms." Josephus called it "a divine region," "the fattest in Palestine." The Romans carried its dates and balsam to world-wide trade and fame.

All this combined to make Jericho one of the greatest taxation centres in Palestine. We have already looked at the taxes which the tax-collectors collected and the wealth they rapaciously acquired (Lk.5:27-32). Zacchaeus was a man who had reached the top of his profession; and he was the most hated man in the district. There are three stages in his story.

(i) Zacchaeus was wealthy but he was not happy. Inevitably he was lonely, for he had chosen a way that made him an outcast. He had heard of this Jesus who welcomed tax-collectors and sinners, and he wondered if he would have any word for him. Despised and hated by men, Zacchaeus was reaching after the love of God.

(ii) Zacchaeus determined to see Jesus, and would let nothing stop him. For Zacchaeus to mingle with the crowd at all was a courageous thing to do, for many a man would take the chance to get a nudge, or kick, or push at the little tax-collector. It was an opportunity not to be missed. Zacchaeus would be black and blue with bruises that day. He could not see--the crowd took an ill delight in making sure of that. So he ran on ahead and climbed a fig-mulberry tree. A traveller describes the tree as being like "the English oak, and its shade is most pleasing. It is consequently a favourite wayside tree . . . It is very easy to climb, with its short trunk and its wide lateral branches forking out in all directions." Things were not easy for Zacchaeus but the little man had the courage of desperation.

(iii) Zacchaeus took steps to show all the community that he was a changed man. When Jesus announced that he would stay that day at his house, and when he discovered that he had found a

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Luke 19:1-10

new and wonderful friend, immediately Zacchaeus took a decision. He decided to give half of his goods to the poor; the other half he did not intend to keep to himself but to use to make restitution for the frauds of which he had been self-confessedly guilty.

In his restitution he went far beyond what was legally necessary. Only if robbery was a deliberate and violent act of destruction was a fourfold restitution necessary (Exo.22:1). If it had been ordinary robbery and the original goods were not restorable, double the value had to be repaid. (Exo.22:4,7). If voluntary confession was made and voluntary restitution offered, the value of the original goods had to be paid, plus one-fifth (Lev.6:5; Num.5:7). Zacchaeus was determined to do far more than the law demanded. He showed by his deeds that he was a changed man.

Dr. Boreham has a terrible story. There was a meeting in progress at which several women were giving their testimony. One woman kept grimly silent. She was asked to testify but refused. She was asked why and she answered, "Four of these women who have just given their testimony owe me money, and I and my family are half-starved because we cannot buy food."

A testimony is utterly worthless unless it is backed by deeds which guarantee its sincerity. It is not a mere change of words which Jesus Christ demands, but a change of life.

(iv) The story ends with the great words, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. We must always be careful how we take the meaning of this word lost. In the New Testament it does not mean damned or doomed. It simply means in the wrong place. A thing is lost when it has got out of its own place into the wrong place; and when we find such a thing, we return it to the place it ought to occupy. A man is lost when he has wandered away from God; and he is found when once again he takes his rightful place as an obedient child in the household and the family of his Father.

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 19:11-27

THE KING'S TRUST IN HIS SERVANTS

Luke 19:11-27

As they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell them a parable because he was near Jerusalem, and they were thinking that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. So he said, "There was a noble man who went into a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself and then to return. He called ten of his own servants and gave them 5 pounds each and said to them, 'Trade with these until I come.' His citizens hated him, and they despatched an embassy after him, saying, 'We do not wish this man to be king over us.' When he had received the kingdom and had returned, he ordered the servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had made by trading with it.

The first came and said, 'Sir, your 5 pounds has produced 50 pounds.' So he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have shown yourself faithful in a little thing, you shall have authority over ten cities.' And the second came and said to him also, 'Sir, your 5 pounds has made 25 pounds.' He said to him also, 'You, too, are to be promoted over five cities.' Another came to him and said, 'Sir, here is your 5 pounds, which I was keeping laid away in a towel, for I was afraid of you, because I know that you are a hard man. You take up what you did not put down and you reap what you did not sow.' He said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I judge you, wicked servant. You knew that I am a hard man, taking up what I did not put down, and reaping what I did not sow.

You ought, therefore, to have given my money to the bankers, so that when I came, I would have received it plus interest.' He said to those standing by, 'Take the 5 pounds from him and give it to him who has 50 pounds.' They said to him, 'Sir, he has 50 pounds.' I tell you, that to everyone who has it will be given; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these my enemies, who did not wish to have me as their king--bring them here and hew them to pieces in my presence."

This is unique among the parables of Jesus, because it is the only one whose story is in part based on an actual historical event. It tells about a king who went away to receive a kingdom and whose subjects did their best to stop him receiving it. When Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. he left his kingdom divided between Herod Antipas, Herod Philip and Archelaus. That division had to be ratified by the Romans, who were the overlords of Palestine, before it became effective. Archelaus, to whom Judaea had been left, went to Rome to persuade Augustus to allow him to enter into his inheritance, whereupon the Jews sent an embassy of fifty men to Rome to inform Augustus that they did not wish to have him as king. In point of fact, Augustus confirmed him in his inheritance, though without the actual title of king. Anyone in Judaea, on hearing the parable, would immediately remember the historical circumstances on which it was based.

The parable of the king and his servants illustrates certain great facts of the Christian life.

(i) It tells of the king's trust. He gave his servants the money and then went away and left them to use it as they could and as they thought best. He did not in any way interfere with them, or stand over them. He left them entirely to their own devices. That is the way in which God trusts us. Someone has said, "The nicest thing about God is that he trusts us to do so much by ourselves."

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(ii) It tells of the king's test. As always, this trust was a test, of whether or not a man was faithful and reliable in little things. Sometimes a man justifies a certain large inefficiency in the ordinary routine affairs of life by claiming that "he has a mind above trifles." God has not. It is precisely in these routine duties that God is testing men. There is no example of this like Jesus himself. Of his thirty-three years of life Jesus spent thirty in Nazareth. Had he not discharged with absolute fidelity the tasks of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth and the obligation of being the breadwinner of the family, God could never have given him the supreme task of being the Saviour of the world.

(iii) It tells us of the king's reward. The reward that the faithful servants received was not one which they could enjoy by sitting down and folding their hands and doing nothing. One was put over ten cities and the other over five. The reward of work well done was more work to do. The greatest compliment we can pay a man is to give him ever greater and harder tasks to do. The great reward of God to the man who has satisfied the test is more trust.

(iv) The parable concludes with one of the inexorable laws of life. To him who has, more will be given; from him who has not, what he has will be taken away. If a man plays a game and goes on practising at it, he will play it with ever greater efficiency; if he does not practise, he will lose much of whatever knack and ability he has. If we discipline and train our bodies, they will grow ever fitter and stronger; if we do not, they will grow flabby and lose much of the strength we have. If a schoolboy learns Latin, and goes on with his learning, the wealth of Latin literature will open wider and wider to him; if he does not go on learning, he will forget much of the Latin he knows. If we really strive after goodness and master this and that temptation, new vistas and new heights of goodness will open to us; if we give up the battle and take the easy way, much of the resistance power we once possessed will be lost and we will slip from whatever height we had attained.

There is no such thing as standing still in the Christian life. We either get more or lose what we have. We either advance to greater heights or slip back.

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Luke 19:28-40

THE ENTRY OF THE KING

Luke 19:28-40

When Jesus had said these things, he went on ahead on the way up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, which is near the mount called the Mount of Olives, he despatched two of his disciples. "Go to the village opposite," he said. "As you come into it, you will find tethered a colt upon which no man has ever sat. Loose it and bring it here. And if any one asks you, 'Why are you loosing this colt?' you will say, 'The Lord needs it.'" Those who had been despatched went off, and found everything exactly as he had told them. And as they were loosing the colt, its owners told them, "Why are you loosing the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it"; and they brought it to Jesus. They flung their garments on the colt, and mounted Jesus on it. As he went they strewed their garments on the road.

When he was now drawing near, at the descent from the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to rejoice, and to praise God with shouts for all the deeds of power they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the heights!" Some of the Pharisees who were in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." "I tell you," he answered, "if these keep silent, the stones will cry out."

From Jerusalem to Jericho was only seventeen miles, and now Jesus had almost reached his goal. Jerusalem, journey's end, lay just ahead. The prophets had a regular custom of which they made use again and again. When words were of no effect, when people refused to take in and understand the spoken message, they resorted to some dramatic action which put their message into a picture which none could fail to see. We get examples of such dramatic actions in 1Kgs.11:29-31; Jer.13:1-11; Jer.27:1-11; Eze.4:1-3; Eze.5:1-4. It was just such a dramatic action which Jesus planned now. He proposed to ride into Jerusalem in a way that would be an unmistakable claim to be the Messiah, God's Anointed King. We have to note certain things about this entry into Jerusalem.

(i) It was carefully planned. It was no sudden, impulsive action. Jesus did not leave things until the last moment. He had his arrangement with the owners of the colt. The Lord needs it was a password chosen long ago.

(ii) It was an act of glorious defiance and of superlative courage. By this time there was a price on Jesus' head. (Jn.11:57.) It would have been natural that, if he must go into Jerusalem at all, he should have slipped in unseen and hidden away in some secret place in the back streets. But he entered in such a way as to focus the whole lime-light upon himself and to occupy the centre of the stage. It is a breath-taking thing to think of a man with a price upon his head, an outlaw, deliberately riding into a city in such a way that every eye was fixed upon him. It is impossible to exaggerate the sheer courage of Jesus.

(iii) It was a deliberate claim to be king, a deliberate fulfilling of the picture in Zech.9:9. But even in this Jesus underlined the kind of kingship which he claimed. The ass in Palestine was not the lowly beast that it is in this country. It was noble. Only in war did kings ride upon a horse; when

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Luke 19:28-40

they came in peace they came upon an ass. So Jesus by this action came as a king of love and peace, and not as the conquering military hero whom the mob expected and awaited.

(iv) It was one last appeal. In this action Jesus came, as it were, with pleading hands outstretched, saying, "Even now, will you not take me as your king?" Before the hatred of men engulfed him, once again he confronted them with love's invitation.

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Luke 19:41-48

THE PITY AND THE ANGER OF JESUS

Luke 19:41-48

When Jesus had come near, and when he saw the city, he wept over it. "Would that, even today," he said, "you recognised the things which would give you peace! But as it is, they are hidden from your eyes; for days will come upon you when your enemies will cast a rampart around you, and will surround you, and will hem you in on every side, and they will dash you and your children within you to the ground, and they will not leave one stone upon another within you, because you did not recognise the day when God visited you."

And he entered into the Temple and began to cast out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a brigands' cave."

And he taught daily in the Temple. The chief priests and the scribes sought to kill him, as did the chief men of the nation; and they could not discover anything they could do to him, for all the people, as they listened to him, hung upon his words.

In this passage there are three separate incidents.

(i) There is Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. From the descent of the Mount of Olives there is a magnificent view of Jerusalem with the whole city fully displayed. As Jesus came to a turn in the road he stopped and wept over Jerusalem. He knew what was going to happen to the city. The Jews were even then embarking upon that career of political manoeuvre and intrigue which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when the city was so devastated that a plough was drawn across the midst of it. The tragedy was that if only they had abandoned their dreams of political power and taken the way of Christ it need never have happened.

The tears of Jesus are the tears of God when he sees the needless pain and suffering in which men involve themselves through foolish rebelling against his will.

(ii) There is the cleansing of the Temple. Luke's account is very summary; Matthew's is a little fuller (Matt.21:12-13). Why did Jesus, who was the very incarnation of love, act with such violence to the money changers and the sellers of animals in the Temple courts?

First, let us look at the money changers. Every male Jew had to pay a Temple tax every year of half a shekel. That was equal to about 6 pence, but, in evaluating it, it must be remembered that it was equal to nearly two days' pay for a working man. A month before the Passover, booths were set up in all the towns and villages and it could be paid there; but by far the greater part was actually paid by the pilgrims in Jerusalem when they came to the Passover Feast. In Palestine all kinds of currencies were in circulation, and, for ordinary purposes, they were all--Greek, Roman Tyrian, Syrian, Egyptian--equally valid. But this tax had to be paid either in exact half shekels of the sanctuary or in ordinary Galilaean shekels. That is where the money changers came in. To change a coin of exact value they charged one maah, which was equal to 1 pence. If a larger coin was

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Luke 19:41-48

tendered a charge of one maah was made for the requisite half shekel and of another maah for the giving of change.

It has been computed that these money changers made a profit of between 28,000 and 9,000 British pounds per annum. It was a deliberate ramp, and an imposition on poor people who could least of all afford it.

Second, let us look at the sellers of animals. Almost every visit to the Temple involved its sacrifice. Victims could be bought outside at very reasonable prices; but the Temple authorities had appointed inspectors, for a victim must be without spot or blemish. It was, therefore, far safer to buy victims from the booths officially set up in the Temple. But there were times when a pair of doves would cost as much as 75 pence inside the Temple and considerably less than 5 pence outside. Again it was a deliberately planned victimization of the poor pilgrims, nothing more or less than legalized robbery. Worse, these Temple shops were known as the Booths of Annas and were the property of the family of the High Priest. That is why Jesus was brought first before Annas when he was arrested (Jn.18:13). Annas was delighted to gloat over this man who had struck such a blow at his evil monopoly. Jesus cleansed the Temple with such violence because its traffic was being used to exploit helpless men and women.

It was not simply that the buying and selling interfered with the dignity and solemnity of worship; it was that the very worship of the house of God was being used to exploit the worshippers. It was the passion for social justice which burned in Jesus' heart when he took this drastic step.

(iii) There is something almost incredibly audacious in the action of Jesus in teaching in the Temple courts when there was a price on his head. This was sheer defiance. At the moment the authorities could not arrest him, for the people hung upon his every word. But every time he spoke he took his life in his hands and he knew well that it was only a matter of time until the end should come. The courage of the Christian should match the courage of his Lord. He left us an example that we should never be ashamed to show whose we are and whom we serve.

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Luke 20:1-8

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

Luke 20:1-8

One day, while Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple and telling them the good news, the chief priests and scribes with the elders came up and said to him, "Tell us, by what authority do you do these things? Or, who is it who gives you this authority?" He said to them, "I, too, will ask you for a statement. Tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" They discussed it with each other. "If," they said to each other, "we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe in him?' But, if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." So they answered that they did not know where it was from. Jesus said to them, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."

This chapter describes what is usually called the Day of Questions. It was a day when the Jewish authorities, in all their different sections, came to Jesus with question after question designed to trap him, and when, in his wisdom, he answered them in such a way as routed them and left them speechless.

The first question was put by the chief priests, the scribes and the elders. The chief priests were a body of men composed of ex-High Priests and of members of the families from which the High Priests were drawn. The phrase describes the religious aristocracy of the Temple. The three sets of men--chief priests, scribes and elders--were the component parts of the Sanhedrin, the supreme council and governing body of the Jews; and we may well take it that this was a question concocted by the Sanhedrin with a view to formulating a charge against Jesus.

No wonder they asked him by what authority he did these things! To ride into Jerusalem as he did and then to take the law into his own hands and cleanse the Temple, required some explanation. To the orthodox Jews of the day, Jesus' calm assumption of authority was an amazing thing. No Rabbi ever delivered a judgment or made a statement without giving his authorities. He would say, "There is a teaching that . . ." Or he would say, "This was confirmed by Rabbi So and So when he said . . ." But none would have claimed the utterly independent authority with which Jesus moved among men. What they wanted was that Jesus should say bluntly and directly that he was the Messiah and the Son of God. Then they would have a ready-made charge of blasphemy and could arrest him on the spot. But he would not give that answer, for his hour was not yet come.

The reply of Jesus is sometimes described as a clever debating answer, used simply to score a point. But it is far more than that. He asked them to answer the question, "Was the authority of John the Baptist human or divine?" The point is that their answer to Jesus' question would answer their own question. Every one knew how John had regarded Jesus and how he had considered himself only the fore-runner of the one who was the Messiah. If they agreed that John's authority was divine then they had also to agree that Jesus was the Messiah, because John had said so. If they denied it, the people would rise,, against them. Jesus' answer in fact asks the question, "Tell me--where do you yourself think I got my authority?" He did not need to answer their question if they answered his.

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Luke 20:1-8

To face the truth may confront a man with a sore and difficult situation; but to refuse to face it confronts him with a tangle out of which there is no escape. The emissaries of the Pharisees refused to face the truth, and they had to withdraw frustrated and discredited with the crowd.

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Luke 20:9-18

A PARABLE WHICH WAS A CONDEMNATION

Luke 20:9-18

Jesus began to speak this parable to the people. "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants, and went away for a long time. At the proper time he despatched a servant to the tenants so that they might give him his share of the fruit of the vineyard. The tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He went on to send another servant. They beat him, too, and maltreated him, and sent him away empty-handed. He went on to send a third. This one they wounded and threw out. The owner of the vineyard said, 'What am I to do? I will send my beloved son. It may be they will respect him.' When the tenants saw him they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.' And they flung him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and he will destroy these tenants, and will give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "God forbid!" He looked at them and said, "What, then, is this which stands written-- 'The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner? Everyone who falls against that stone will be shattered; but if it falls on anyone it will wipe him out as the wind blows the chaff away.'"

This is a parable whose meaning is crystal clear. The vineyard stands for the nation of Israel (compare Isa.5:1-7). The tenants are the rulers of Israel into whose hands the nation was entrusted. The messengers are the prophets who were disregarded, persecuted and killed. The son is Jesus himself. And the doom is that the place which Israel should have occupied is to be given to others.

The story itself is the kind of thing which could and did happen. Judaea in the time of Jesus was in the throes of economic trouble and labour unrest. There was many an absentee landlord who let out his lands in just such a way. The rent was seldom paid in money. It was either a fixed amount of produce, irrespective of the success or failure of the harvest, or it was a percentage of the crop, whatever it might be.

In its teaching this is one of the richest of the parables. It tells us certain things about man.

(i) It tells us of human privilege. The tenants did not make the vineyard. They entered into possession of it. The owner did not stand over them with a whip. He went away and left them to work in their own way.

(ii) It tells us of human sin. The sin of the tenants was that they refused to give the owner his due and wished to control what it was his sole right to control. Sin consists in the failure to give God his proper place and in usurping the power which should be his.

(iii) It tells of human responsibility. For long enough the tenants were left to their own devices; but the day of reckoning came. Soon or late a man is called upon to give account for that which was committed to his charge.

The parable tells us certain things about God.

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Luke 20:9-18

(i) It tells us of the patience of God. The owner did not strike at the first sign of rebellion on the part of the tenants. He gave them chance after chance to do the right thing. There is nothing so wonderful as the patience of God. If any man had created the world he would have taken his hand, and, in exasperated despair, he would have wiped it out long ago.

(ii) It tells us of the judgment of God. The tenants thought they could presume on the patience of the master and get away with it. But God has not abdicated. However much a man may seem to get away with it, the day of reckoning comes. As the Romans put it, "Justice holds the scales with an even and a scrupulous balance and in the end she will prevail."

The parable tells us something about Jesus.

(i) It tells us that he knew what was coming. He did not come to Jerusalem hugging a dream that even yet he might escape the cross. Open eyed and unafraid, he went on. When Achilles, the great Greek hero, was warned by the prophetess Cassandra that, if he went out to battle, he would surely die, he answered, "Nevertheless I am for going on." For Jesus there was to be no turning back.

(ii) It tells us that he never doubted God's ultimate triumph. Beyond the power of wicked men stood the undefeatable majesty of God. Wickedness may seem for a time to prevail, but it cannot in the end escape its punishment.

Careless seems the great Avenger, history's pages but record
One death grapple in the darkness, 'twixt old systems and
the Word;
Truth for ever on the scaffold, Wrong for ever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

(iii) It lays down most unmistakably his claim to be the Son of God. Deliberately he removes himself from the succession of the prophets. They were servants; he is the Son. In this parable he made a claim that none could fail to see to be God's Chosen King.

The quotation about the stone which the builders rejected comes from Ps.118:22-23. It was a favourite quotation in the early church as a description of the death and resurrection of Jesus. (compare Ac.4:11; 1Pet.2:7.)

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Luke 20:19-26

CAESAR AND GOD

Luke 20:19-26

The scribes and chief priests tried to lay hands on Jesus at that very hour; and they feared the people, for they realized that he spoke this parable to them. They watched for an opportunity, and they despatched spies, who pretended that they were genuinely concerned about the right thing to do, so that they might fasten on what he said and be able to hand him over to the power and the authority of the governor. They asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and you are no respecter of persons. Is it lawful for us to pay tribute to Caesar? Or not?" He saw their subtle deception and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription is on it?" They said, "Caesar's." "Well then," he said to them, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." There was nothing in this statement that they could fasten on to in the presence of the people. They were amazed at his answer, and had nothing to say.

Here the emissaries of the Sanhedrin returned to the attack. They suborned men to go to Jesus and ask a question as if it was really troubling their consciences. The tribute to be paid to Caesar was a poll-tax of one denarius, about 4 pence, per year. Every man from 14 to 65 and every women from 12 to 65 had to pay that simply for the privilege of existing. This tribute was a burning question in Palestine and had been the cause of more than one rebellion. It was not the merely financial question which was at stake. The tribute was not regarded as a heavy imposition and was in fact no real burden at all. The issue at stake was this--the fanatical Jews claimed that they had no king but God and held that it was wrong to pay tribute to anyone other than him. The question was a religious question, for which many were willing to die.

So, then, these emissaries of the Sanhedrin attempted to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. If he said that the tribute should not be paid, they would at once report him to Pilate and arrest would follow as surely as the night the day. If he said that it should be paid, he would alienate many of his supporters, especially the Galilaeans, whose support was so strong.

Jesus answered them on their own grounds. He asked to be shown a denarius. Now, in the ancient world the sign of kingship was the issue of currency. For instance, the Maccabees had immediately issued their own currency whenever Jerusalem was freed from the Syrians. Further, it was universally admitted that to have the right to issue currency carried with it the right to impose taxation. If a man had the right to put his image and superscription on a coin, ipso facto he had acquired the right to impose taxation. So Jesus said, "If you accept Caesar's currency and use it, you are bound to accept Caesar's right to impose taxes"; "but," he went on, "there is a domain in which Caesar's writ does not run and which belongs wholly to God."

(i) If a man lives in a state and enjoys all its privileges, he cannot divorce himself from it. The more honest a man is, the better citizen he will be. There should be no better and no more conscientious citizens of any state than its Christians; and one of the tragedies of modern life is that Christians do not sufficiently take their part in the government of the state. If they abandon their responsibilities and leave materialistic politicians to govern, Christians cannot justifiably complain about what is done or not done.

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Luke 20:19-26

(ii) Nonetheless, it remains true that in the life of the Christian God has the last word and not the state. The voice of conscience is louder than the voice of any man-made laws. The Christian is at once the servant and the conscience of the state. Just because he is the best of citizens, he will refuse to do what a Christian citizen cannot do. He will at one and the same time fear God and honour the king.

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Luke 20:27-40

THE SADDUCEES' QUESTION

Luke 20:27-40

Some of the Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection, came to Jesus and asked him, "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that, if a man's married brother dies without leaving any children, his brother must take his wife and raise up descendants for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife and died childless. The second and the third also took her; and in the same way the whole seven left no children and died. Later the wife died, too. Whose wife will she be at the resurrection, for the seven had her to wife?" Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are married. But those who are deemed worthy to obtain that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are married, for they cannot die any more, for they are like angels and they are sons of God, for they are the sons of the resurrection. That the dead are raised even Moses indicated in the passage about the bush, when he called the Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

God is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to him." Some of the scribes said, "Teacher, you have spoken well"; and they no longer dared to ask him any question.

When the emissaries of the Sanhedrin had been finally silenced, the Sadducees appeared on the scene. The whole point of their question depends on two things.

(i) It depends upon the levirate law of marriage (Deut.25:5). According to that law if a man died childless, his brother must marry the widow and beget children to carry on the line. It is far from likely that it was operative in the time of Jesus, but it was included in the Mosaic regulations and therefore the Sadducees regarded it as binding.

(ii) It depends upon the beliefs of the Sadducees. Sadducees and Pharisees are often mentioned together but in beliefs they were poles apart.

(a) The Pharisees were entirely a religious body. They had no political ambitions and were content with any government which allowed them to carry out the ceremonial law. The Sadducees were few but very wealthy. The priests and the aristocrats were nearly all Sadducees. They were the governing class; and they were largely collaborationist with Rome, being unwilling to risk losing their wealth, their comfort and their place.

(b) The Pharisees accepted the scriptures plus all the thousand detailed regulations and rules of the oral and ceremonial law, such as the Sabbath law and the laws about hand washing. The Sadducees accepted only the written law of the Old Testament; and in the Old Testament they stressed only the law of Moses and set no store on the prophetic books.

(c) The Pharisees believed in the resurrection from the dead and in angels and spirits. The Sadducees held that there was no resurrection from the dead and that there were no angels or spirits.

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(d) The Pharisees believed in fate; and that a man's life was planned and ordered by God. The Sadducees believed in unrestricted free-will.

(e) The Pharisees believed in and hoped for the coming of the Messiah; the Sadducees did not. For them the coming of the Messiah would have been a disturbance of their carefully ordered lives.

The Sadducees, then, came with this question about who would be the husband in heaven of the woman who was married to seven different men. They regarded such a question as the kind of thing that made belief in the resurrection of the body ridiculous. Jesus gave them an answer which has a permanently valid truth in it. He said that we must not think of heaven in terms of this earth. Life there will be quite different, because we will be quite different. It would save a mass of misdirected ingenuity, and not a little heartbreak, if we ceased to speculate on what heaven is like and left things to the love of God.

Jesus went further. As we have said, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body. They declared they could not believe in it because there was no information about it, still less any proof of it, in the books of the law which Moses was held to have written. So far no Rabbi had been able to meet them on that ground; but Jesus did. He pointed out that Moses himself had heard God say, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exo.3:1-6), and that it was impossible that God should be the God of the dead. Therefore Abraham and Isaac and Jacob must be still alive. Therefore there was such a thing as the resurrection of the body. No wonder the scribes declared it to be a good answer, for Jesus had met the Sadducees on their own ground and defeated them.

It may well be that we find this an arid passage. It deals with burning questions of the time by means of arguments which a Rabbi would find completely convincing but which are not convincing to the modern mind. But out of this very aridity there emerges a great truth for anyone who teaches or who wishes to commend Christianity to his fellows. Jesus used arguments that the people he was arguing with could understand. He talked to them in their own language; he met them on their own ground; and that is precisely why the common people heard him gladly.

Sometimes, when one reads religious and theological books, one feels that all this may be true but it would be quite impossible to present it to the non-theologically minded man who, after all, is in an overwhelming majority. Jesus used language and arguments which people could and did understand; he met people with their own vocabulary, on their own ground, and with their own ideas. We will be far better teachers of Christianity and far better witnesses for Christ when we learn to do the same.

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Luke 20:41-44

THE WARNINGS OF JESUS

Luke 20:41-44

Jesus said to them, "How does David say that the Christ is his son? For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, 'The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.' So David calls him Lord, and how can he be his son?"

It is worth while taking this little passage by itself for it is very difficult to understand. The most popular title of the Messiah was Son of David. That is what the blind man at Jericho called Jesus (Lk.18:38-39), and that is how the crowds addressed him at his entry into Jerusalem (Matt.21:9). Here Jesus seems to cast doubts on the validity of that title. The quotation is from Ps.110:1. In Jesus' time all the Psalms were attributed to David and this one was taken to refer to the Messiah. In it David says that he heard God speak to his Anointed One and tell him to sit at his right hand until his enemies became his footstool; and in it David calls the Messiah My Lord. How can the Messiah be at once David's son and David's Lord?

Jesus was doing here what he so often tried to do, trying to correct the popular idea of the Messiah which was that under him the golden age would come and Israel would become the greatest nation in the world. It was a dream of political power. How was that to happen? There were many ideas about it but the popular one was that some great descendant of David would come to be invincible captain and king. So then the title Son of David was inextricably mixed up with world dominion, with military prowess and with material conquest.

Really what Jesus was saying here was, "You think of the coming Messiah as Son of David; so he is; but he is far more. He is Lord." He was telling men that they must revise their ideas of what Son of David meant. They must abandon these fantastic dreams of world power and visualize the Messiah as Lord of the hearts and lives of men. He was implicitly blaming them for having too little an idea of God. It is always man's tendency to make God in his own image, and thereby to miss his full majesty.

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Luke 20:45-47

THE LOVE OF HONOUR AMONG MEN

Luke 20:45-47

While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, and who love greetings in the market places, and the chief seats in synagogues, and the top place at banquets. They devour widows' houses and pretend to offer long prayers. These will receive the greater condemnation."

The honours which the scribes and Rabbis expected to receive were quite extraordinary. They had rules of precedence all carefully drawn up. In the college the most learned Rabbi took precedence; at a banquet, the oldest. It is on record that two Rabbis came in, after walking on the street, grieved and bewildered because more than one person had greeted them with, "May your peace be great," without adding, "My masters!" They claimed to rank even above parents. They said, "Let your esteem for your friend border on your esteem for your teacher, and let your respect for your teacher border on your reverence for God." "Respect for a teacher should exceed respect for a father, for both father and son owe respect to a teacher." "If a man's father and teacher have lost anything, the teacher's loss has the precedence, for a man's father only brought him into this world; his teacher, who taught him wisdom, brought him into the life of the world to come....

If a man's father and teacher are carrying burdens, he must first help his teacher, and afterwards his father. If his father and teacher are in captivity, he must first ransom his teacher, and afterwards his father." Such claims are almost incredible; it was not good for a man to make them; it was still less good for him to have them conceded. But it was claims like that the scribes and Rabbis made.

Jesus also accused the scribes of devouring widows' houses. A Rabbi was legally bound to teach for nothing. All Rabbis were supposed to have trades and to support themselves by the work of their hands, while their teaching was given free. That sounds very noble but it was deliberately taught that to support a Rabbi was an act of the greatest piety. "Whoever," they said, "puts part of his income into the purse of the wise is counted worthy of a seat in the heavenly academy."

"Whosoever harbours a disciple of the wise in his house is counted as if he offered a daily sacrifice." "Let thy house be a place of resort to wise men." It is by no means extraordinary that impressionable women were the legitimate prey of the less scrupulous and more comfort-loving rabbis. At their worst, they did devour widows' houses.

The whole unhealthy business shocked and revolted Jesus. It was all the worse because these men knew so much better and held so responsible a place within the life of the community. God will always condemn the man who uses a position of trust to further his own ends and to pander to his own comfort.

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Luke 21:1-4

THE PRECIOUS GIFT

Luke 21:1-4

Jesus looked up and saw those who were putting their gifts into the treasury--rich people--and he saw a poor widow putting in two lepta. So he said, "I tell you truly that this poor widow has put in more than all, for all these contributed to the gifts out of their abundance, but she, out of her need, has put in everything she had to live on."

In the Court of the Women in the Temple there were thirteen collecting boxes known as the Trumpets. They were shaped like trumpets with the narrow part at the top and the wider part at the foot. Each was assigned to offerings for a different purpose--for the wood that was used to burn the sacrifice, for the incense that was burned on the altar, for the upkeep of the golden vessels, and so on. It was near the Trumpets that Jesus was sitting.

After the strenuous debates with the emissaries of the Sanhedrin and the Sadducees he was tired and his head drooped between his hands. He looked up and he saw many people flinging their offerings into the Trumpets; and then came a poor widow. All she had in the world was two lepta. A lepton (GSN3016) was the smallest of all coins; the name means "the thin one." It was worth one fortieth of a new penny; and, therefore, the offering of the widow woman was only one-twentieth of a new penny. But Jesus said that it far outvalued all the other offerings, because it was everything she had.

Two things determine the value of any gift.

(i) There is the spirit in which it is given. A gift which is unwillingly extracted, a gift which is given with a grudge, a gift that is given for the sake of prestige or of self-display loses more than half its value. The only real gift is that which is the inevitable outflow of the loving heart, that which is given because the giver cannot help it.

(ii) There is the sacrifice which it involves. That which is a mere trifle to one man may be a vast sum to another. The gifts of the rich, as they flung their offerings into the Trumpets, did not really cost them much; but the two lepta (GSN3016) of the widow woman cost her everything she had. They no doubt gave having nicely calculated how much they could afford; she gave with that utterly reckless generosity which could give no more.

Giving does not begin to be real giving until it hurts. A gift shows our love only when we have had to do without something or have had to work doubly hard in order to give it. How few people give to God like that! Someone draws a picture of a man in church, lustily singing,

Were the whole realm of Nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all,

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Luke 21:1-4

while, all the time, he is carefully feeling the coins in his pocket to make sure that it is 10 p and not 50 p that he will put into the collection which is immediately to follow.

He is an insensate man who can read the story of the widow and her two lepta without searching and humiliating self-examination.

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Luke 21:5-24

TIDINGS OF TROUBLE

Luke 21:5-24

When some were speaking about the Temple, how it was adorned with lovely stones and offerings, Jesus said, "As for these things at which you are looking--days will come in which not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be pulled down." They asked him, "Teacher, when, then, will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are going to happen?" He said, "Take care that you are not led astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. When you hear of wars and upheavals, do not be alarmed; for these things must happen first; but the end will not come at once."

Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes; in some places there will be famines and pestilences; there will be terrifying things, and great signs from heaven. Before all these things, they will lay hands upon you, and they will hand you over to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for the sake of my name. It will all be an opportunity for you to bear witness to me. So, then, make up your minds not to prepare your defence beforehand, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom against which all your opponents will be unable to stand or argue. You will be handed over even by parents, and brothers, and kinsfolk and friends; some of you will be put to death; and you will be hated by all for the sake of my name. But not one hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will win your souls."

"When you shall see Jerusalem encircled by armies, then know that the time of the desolation is at hand. At that time let those in Jerusalem flee to the mountains; let those who are in the midst of her go out of her; and let not those in the country districts enter into her, because these are days of vengeance, to fulfil all that stands written. Woe to those who, in those days, are carrying a child in the womb, or who have a babe at the breast. For great distress will be upon the earth and wrath upon all the people. They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and they will be taken away captive to all nations. Jerusalem will be trodden underfoot by the gentiles, until the times of gentiles are completed."

THE BACKGROUND OF THE CHAPTER

From Lk.21:5 onwards this becomes a very difficult chapter. Its difficulty rests in the fact that beneath it lie four different conceptions.

(i) There is the conception of the day of the Lord. The Jews regarded time as being in two ages. There was the present age, which was altogether bad and evil, incapable of being cured, and fit only for destruction. There was the age to come, which was the golden age of God and of Jewish supremacy. But in between the two there would be the day of the Lord, which would be a terrible time of cosmic upheaval and destruction, the desperate birth-pangs of the new age.

It would be a day of terror. "Behold the day of the Lord comes, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it." (Isa.13:9; compare Jl.2:1-2;

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Luke 21:5-24

Am.5:18-20; Zeph.1:14-18.) It would come suddenly. "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." (1Th.5:2; compare 2Pet.3:10.) It would be a day when the world would be shattered. "The stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light.... Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger." (Isa.13:10-13; compare Jl.2:30-31; 2Pet.3:10.)

The day of the Lord was one of the basic conceptions of religious thought in the time of Jesus; everyone knew these terrible pictures. In this passage Lk.21:9,11, Lk.21:25-26 take their imagery from that.

(ii) There is the prophesied fall of Jerusalem. Jerusalem fell to the Roman armies in A.D. 70 after a desperate siege in which the inhabitants were actually reduced to cannibalism and in which the city had to be taken literally stone by stone. Josephus says that an incredible number of 1,100,000 people perished in the siege and 97,000 were carried away into captivity. The Jewish nation was obliterated; and the Temple was fired and became a desolation. In this passage Lk.21:5-6, Lk.21:20-24 clearly refer to that event still to come.

(iii) There is the second coming of Christ. Jesus was sure that he was to come again and the early church waited for that coming. It will often help us to understand the New Testament passages about the second coming if we remember that much of the older imagery which had to do with the day of the Lord was taken and attached to it. In this passage Lk.21:27-28 clearly refer to it. Before the second coming it was expected that many false claimants to be the Christ would arise and great upheavals take place. In this passage Lk.21:7-9 refer to that.

(iv) There is the idea of persecution to come. Jesus clearly foresaw and foretold the terrible things his people would have to suffer for his sake in the days to come. In this passage Lk.21:12-19 refer to that.

This passage will become much more intelligible and valuable if we remember that beneath it there is not one consistent idea, but these four allied conceptions.

THE PASSAGE

It was a comment on the splendour of the Temple that moved Jesus to prophesy. In the Temple the pillars of the porches and of the cloisters were columns of white marble, forty feet high, each made of one single block of stone. Of the ornaments, the most famous was the great vine made of solid gold, each of whose clusters was as tall as a man. The finest description of the Temple as it stood in the time of Jesus is in Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, book 5, section 5. At one point he writes, "The outward face of the Temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendour, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays."

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Luke 21:5-24

But the Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceeding white." To the Jews it was unthinkable that the glory of the Temple should be shattered to dust.

From this passage we learn certain basic things about Jesus and about the Christian life.

(i) Jesus could read the signs of history. Others might be blind to the approaching disaster but he saw the avalanche about to descend. It is only when a man sees things through the eyes of God that he sees them clearly.

(ii) Jesus was completely honest. "This," he said to his disciples, "is what you must expect if you choose to follow me." Once in the middle of a great struggle for righteousness, an heroic leader wrote to a friend, "Heads are rolling in the sand; come and add yours." Jesus believed in men enough to offer them, not an easy way, but a way for heroes.

(iii) Jesus promised that his disciples would never meet their tribulations alone. It is the sheer evidence of history that the great Christians have written over and over again, when their bodies were in torture and when they were awaiting death, of sweet times with Christ. A prison can be like a palace, a scaffold like a throne, the storms of life like summer weather, when Christ is with us.

(iv) Jesus spoke of a safety that overpasses the threats of earth. "Not one hair of your head," he said, "will be harmed." In the days of the 1914-18 war Rupert Brooke, out of his faith and his ideal, wrote these lines:

We have found safety with all things undying,
The winds, and morning, tears of men and mirth,
The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying,
And sleep, and freedom, and the autumnal earth.
We have built a house which is not for Time's throwing,
We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's endeavour:
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

The man who walks with Christ may lose his life but he can never lose his soul.

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Luke 21:25-38

WATCH!

Luke 21:25-38

And there will be signs in sun, and moon, and stars, and on earth the nations will be in distress and will not know what to do in the roaring of the sea and of the wave, while men's hearts will swoon from fear and from foreboding of the things that are coming on the world. The power of the heavens will be shaken; and then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and much glory. When these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your hearts for your deliverance is near.

And he spoke this parable to them, "Look at the fig-tree and all the trees; whenever they put out their leaves, you see it for yourselves and you know that the harvest is near. So, whenever you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. This is the truth I tell you, that this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. The heaven and the earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Take care lest your hearts grow heavy with dissipation and drunkenness and anxieties for the things of this life, and lest that day come suddenly upon you like a trap closing, for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the earth. Be watchful at all times, and keep praying that you may have strength to escape all the things that are going to happen, and to be able to stand before the Son of Man.

During the days Jesus was teaching in the Temple, but at night he went out and stayed in the Mount called the Mount of Olives; and all the people came early in the morning to listen to him in the Temple.

There are two main conceptions here.

(i) There is the conception of the second coming of Jesus Christ. There has always been much useless argument and speculation about the second coming. When it will be and what it will be like, are not ours to know. But the one great truth it enshrines is this--that history is going somewhere. The Stoics regarded history as circular. They held that every three thousand years or so the world was consumed by a great conflagration, then it started all over again and history repeated itself. That meant that history was going nowhere and men were tramping round on a kind of eternal treadmill. The Christian conception of history is that it has a goal and at that goal Jesus Christ will be Lord of all. That is all we know, and all we need to know.

(ii) There is stressed the need to be upon the watch. The Christian must never come to think that he is living in a settled situation. He must be a man who lives in a permanent state of expectation. A novelist, in one of her books, has a character who will not stoop to certain things that others do. "I know," she said, "that some day the great thing will come into my life and I want to keep myself fit to take it." We must live forever in the shadow of eternity, in the certainty that we are men who are fitting or unfitting themselves to appear in the presence of God. There can be nothing so thrilling as the Christian life.

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Luke 21:25-38

(iii) Jesus spent the day amidst the crowds of the Temple; he spent the night beneath the stars with God. He won his strength to meet the crowds through his quiet time alone; he could face men because he came to men from God's presence.

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Luke 22:1-6

AND SATAN ENTERED INTO JUDAS

Luke 22:1-6

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near, and the chief priests and the scribes searched to find a way to destroy Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. And Satan entered into Judas, who was called Iscariot, who belonged to the number of the Twelve. So he went away and discussed with the chief priests and captains how he might betray Jesus to them. They were glad and they undertook to give him money. So he agreed, and he began to look for a suitable time to betray him, when the mob were not there.

It was at Passover time that Jesus came to Jerusalem to die. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is not, strictly speaking, the same thing as the Passover. The Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted for a week, from 15th to 21st Nisan (April), and the Passover itself was eaten on 15th Nisan. It commemorated the deliverance of the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt (Exo.12). On that night the angel of death smote the first-born son in every Egyptian family; but he passed over the homes of the Israelites, because the lintels of their doors were smeared with the blood of the lamb to distinguish them. On that night they left so quickly that, at their last meal, there was no time to bake bread with leaven. It was unleavened cakes they ate.

There were elaborate preparations for the Passover. Roads were repaired; bridges were made safe; wayside tombs were whitewashed lest the pilgrim should fail to see them, and so touch them and become unclean. For a month before, the story and meaning of the Passover was the subject of the teaching of every synagogue. Two days before the Passover there was in every house a ceremonial search for leaven. The householder took a candle and solemnly searched every nook and cranny in silence, and the last particle of leaven was thrown out.

Every male Jew, who was of age and who lived within 15 miles of the holy city, was bound by law to attend the Passover. But it was the ambition of every Jew in every part of the world (as it is still) to come to the Passover in Jerusalem at least once in his lifetime. To this day, when Jews keep the Passover in every land they pray that they may keep it next year in Jerusalem. Because of this vast numbers came to Jerusalem at the Passover time. Cestius was governor of Palestine in the time of Nero and Nero tended to belittle the importance of the Jewish faith. To convince Nero of it, Cestius took a census of the lambs slain at one particular Passover. Josephus tells us that the number was 256,500. The law laid it down that the minimum number for a Passover celebration was 10. That means that on this occasion, if these figures are correct, there must have been more than 2,700,000 pilgrims to the Passover. It was in a city crowded like that that the drama of the last days of Jesus was played out.

The atmosphere of Passover time was always inflammable. The headquarters of the Roman government was at Caesarea, and normally only a small detachment of troops was stationed at Jerusalem; but for the Passover season many more were drafted in. The problem which faced the Jewish authorities was how to arrest Jesus without provoking a riot. It was solved for them by the treachery of Judas. Satan entered into Judas. Two things stand out.

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Luke 22:1-6

(i) Just as God is ever looking for men to be his instruments, so is Satan. A man can be the instrument of good or of evil, of God or of the devil. The Zoroastrians see this whole universe as the battle ground between the god of the light and the god of the dark, and in that battle a man must choose his side. We, too, know that a man can be the servant of the light or of the dark.

(ii) But it remains true that Satan could not have entered into Judas unless Judas had opened the door. There is no handle on the outside of the door of the human heart. It must be opened from within.

To every man there openeth
A high way and a low;
And every man decideth
The way his soul shall go.

It is our own decision whether we will choose to be the instrument of Satan or a weapon in the hand of God. We can enlist in either service. God help us choose aright!

Barclay's Commentary

Luke 22:7-23

THE LAST MEAL TOGETHER

Luke 22:7-23

There came the day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover had to be sacrificed. Jesus despatched Peter and John. "Go," he said, "and make ready the Passover for us that we may eat it." They said to him, "Where do you want us to make it ready?" "Look you," he said to them, "when you have gone into the city, a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him to the house into which he enters; and you will say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room that I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" And he will show you a big upper room, ready furnished. There, get things ready." So they went away and found everything just as he had told them; and they made ready the Passover.

When the hour came he took his place at table, and so did his disciples. "I have desired with all my heart," he said to them, "to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you that I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." He received the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God has come." And he took the bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is being given for you. Do this so that you will remember me." In the same way, after the meal, he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant made at the price of my blood, which is shed for you. But--look you--the hand of him who betrays me is on the table with me, for the Son of Man goes as it has been determined. But woe to that man by whom he has been betrayed"; and they began to question one another which of them it could be who was going to do this.

Once again Jesus did not leave things until the last moment; his plans were already made. The better class houses had two rooms. The one room was on the top of the other; and the house looked exactly like a small box placed on top of a large one. The upper room was reached by an outside stair. During the Passover time all lodging in Jerusalem was free. The only pay a host might receive for letting lodgings to the pilgrims was the skin of the lamb which was eaten at the feast. A very usual use of an upper room was that it was the place where a Rabbi met with his favourite disciples to talk things over with them and to open his heart to them. Jesus had taken steps to procure such a room. He sent Peter and John into the city to look for a man bearing a jar of water. To carry water was a woman's task. A man carrying a jar of water would be as easy to pick out as, say, a man using a lady's umbrella on a wet day. This was a prearranged signal between Jesus and a friend.

So the feast went on; and Jesus used the ancient symbols and gave them a new meaning.

(i) He said of the bread, "This is my body." Herein is exactly what we mean by a sacrament. A sacrament is something, usually a very ordinary thing, which has acquired a meaning far beyond itself for him who has eyes to see and a heart to understand. There is nothing specially theological or mysterious about this.

In the house of everyone of us there is a drawer full of things which can only be called junk, and yet we will not throw them out, because when we touch and handle and look at them, they bring

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Luke 22:7-23

back this or that person, or this or that occasion. They are common things but they have a meaning far beyond themselves. That is a sacrament.

When Sir James Barries mother died and they were clearing up her belongings, they found that she had kept all the envelopes in which her famous son had posted her the cheques he so faithfully and lovingly sent. They were only old envelopes but they meant much to her. That is a sacrament.

When Nelson was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral a party of his sailors bore his coffin to the tomb. One who saw the scene writes, "With reverence and with efficiency they lowered the body of the world's greatest admiral into its tomb. Then, as though answering to a sharp order from the quarter deck, they all seized the Union Jack with which the coffin had been covered and tore it to fragments, and each took his souvenir of the illustrious dead." All their lives that little bit of coloured cloth would speak to them of the admiral they had loved. That is a sacrament.

The bread which we eat at the sacrament is common bread, but, for him who has a heart to feel and understand, it is the very body of Christ.

(ii) He said of the cup, "This cup is the new covenant made at the price of my blood." In the biblical sense, a covenant is a relationship between man and God. God graciously approached man; and man promised to obey and to keep his law. The whole matter is set out in Exo.24:1-8. The continuance of that covenant depends on man's keeping his pledge and obeying this law; Man could not and cannot do that; man's sin interrupts the relationship between man and God. All the Jewish sacrificial system was designed to restore that relationship by the offering of sacrifice to God to atone for sin. What Jesus said was this--"By my life and by my death I have made possible a new relationship between you and God. You are sinners. That is true. But because I died for you, God is no longer your enemy but your friend." It cost the life of Christ to restore the lost relationship of friendship between God and man.

(iii) Jesus said, "Do this and it will make you remember me." Jesus knew how easily the human mind forgets. The Greeks had an adjective which they used to describe time--"time," they said, "which wipes all things out," as if the mind of man were a slate and time a sponge which wiped it clean. Jesus was saying, "In the rush and press of things you will forget me. Man forgets because he must, and not because he will. Come in sometimes to the peace and stillness of my house and do this again with my people--and you will remember."

It made the tragedy all the more tragic that at that very table there was one who was a traitor. Jesus Christ has at every communion table those who betray him, for if in his house we pledge ourselves to him and then by our lives go out to deny him, we too are traitors to him.

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Luke 22:24-30

STRIFE AMONG THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

Luke 22:24-30

Strife arose amongst them about which was to be considered greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them and those who have authority over them claim the title of Benefactor. It must not be so with you; but let him who is greatest among you be as the youngest; and let him who is the leader be as him who serves. Who is the greater? He who sits at table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stayed with me in my tribulations; and I assign to you a kingdom, just as my Father has assigned one to me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

It is one of the most poignantly tragic things in the gospel story that the disciples could quarrel about precedence in the very shadow of the cross. The seating arrangements at a Jewish feast were very definite. The table was arranged like a square with one side left open. At the top side of the square, in the centre, sat the host. On his right sat the guest of first honour; on his left the second guest; second on his right, the third guest; second on his left the fourth guest; and so on round the table. The disciples had been quarrelling about where they were to sit, for they had not yet rid themselves of the idea of an earthly kingdom. Jesus told them bluntly that the standards of his kingdom were not the standards of this world. A king on earth was evaluated by the power he exercised. One of the commonest titles for a king in the east was Euergetes (GSN2110), which is the Greek for Benefactor. Jesus said, "It is not the king but the servant who obtains that title in my kingdom."

(i) What the world needs is service. The odd thing is that the business world knows this. Bruce Barton points out that you will find by the road-side, over and over again, the sign, Service Station. It was the claim of one firm, "We will crawl under your car oftener and get ourselves dirtier than any of our competitors." The strange thing is that there is more argument about precedence, and more concern about people's "places" in the church than anywhere else. The world needs and recognizes service.

(ii) It is only the man who will consent to serve more than anyone else who will really rise high. It frequently happens that the ordinary worker will go home at 5.30 p.m. to forget his or her job until next morning, while the light will be burning in the office of the chief executive long after that. Often passers-by would see the light burning in John D. Rockefeller's office when the rest of the building was in darkness. It is a law of life that service leads to greatness; and the higher a man rises the greater the servant he must be.

(iii) We can found our life either on giving or on getting; but the plain fact is that if we found it on getting we shall miss both the friendship of man and the reward of God, for no one ever loved a man who was always out for himself.

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Luke 22:24-30

(iv) Jesus finished his warning by promising his disciples that those who had stood by him through thick and thin would in the end reign with him. God will be in no man's debt. Those who have shared in the bearing of Christ's cross will some day share in the wearing of his crown.

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Luke 22:31-38, 54-62

PETER'S TRAGEDY

Luke 22:31-38,54-62

"Simon, Simon," Jesus said, "Look you, Satan has been allowed to have you that he may sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not wholly fail. And you--when you have turned again--strengthen your brothers." He said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." "Peter," he said, "I tell you, the cock will not crow today before you have three times denied that you know me."

And he said to them, "When I sent you out without purse or wallet or shoes, did you lack for anything?" They said, "For nothing." But he said to them. "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and so with a wallet; and let him who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this which stands written must be fulfilled in me--`And he was reckoned with the law-breakers'--for that which was written of me is finding its fulfilment." They said, "Lord, here are two swords." He said to them, "It is enough." . . .

So they seized Jesus and led him away, and brought him to the High Priest's house. Peter followed a long way away. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard, and were sitting there together, Peter sat in the midst of them. A maidservant saw him as he sat in the firelight. She looked intently at him. "This man, too," she said, "was with him." He denied it. "Woman," he said, "I do not know him." Soon after another man saw him and said, "You, too, were one of them." Peter said, "Man, I am not!" About an hour elapsed and another insisted, "Truly this man, too, was with him. I know it for he is a Galilaean." Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you are talking about." And immediately--while he was still speaking--a cock crew. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered what the Lord had said, that he said to him, "Before the cock crows today you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

We take the story of the tragedy of Peter all in one piece. Peter was a strange paradoxical mixture.

(i) Even in spite of his denial he was fundamentally loyal. H. G. Wells once said, "A man may be a bad musician, and yet be passionately in love with music." No matter what Peter did, however terrible his failure, he was nonetheless passionately devoted to Jesus. There is hope for the man who even when he is sinning is still haunted by goodness.

(ii) Peter was well warned. Jesus warned him both directly and indirectly. Lk.22:33-38 with their talk of swords is a strange passage. But what they mean is this--Jesus was saying, "All the time so far you have had me with you. In a very short time you are going to be cast upon your own resources. What are you going to do about it? The danger in a very short time is not that you will possess nothing; but that you will have to fight for your very existence." This was not an incitement to armed force. It was simply a vivid eastern way of telling the disciples that their very lives were at stake. No one could say that the seriousness and danger of the situation, and his own liability to collapse were not presented to Peter.

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Luke 22:31-38, 54-62

(iii) Peter was over-confident. If a man says, "That is one thing I will never do," that is often the very thing against which he must most carefully guard. Again and again castles have been captured because the attackers took the route which seemed unattackable and unscalable and at that very spot the defenders were off their guard. Satan is subtle. He attacks the point at which a man is too sure of himself, for there he is likeliest to be unprepared.

(iv) In all fairness it is to be noted that Peter was one of the two disciples (Jn.18:15) who had the courage to follow Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest's house at all. Peter fell to a temptation which could only have come to a brave man. The man of courage always runs more risks than the man who seeks a placid safety. Liability to temptation is the price that a man pays when he is adventurous in mind and in action. It may well be that it is better to fail in a gallant enterprise than to run away and not even to attempt it.

(v) Jesus did not speak to Peter in anger but looked at him in sorrow. Peter could have stood it if Jesus had turned and reviled him; but that voiceless, grief-laden look went to his heart like a sword and opened a fountain of tears.

I think I'd sooner frizzle up,
I' the flames of a burnin' 'ell,
Than stand and look into 'is face,
And 'ear 'is voice say--"Well?"

The penalty of sin is to face, not the anger of Jesus, but the heartbreak in his eyes.

(vi) Jesus said a very lovely thing to Peter. "When you have turned," he said, "strengthen your brothers." It is as if Jesus said to Peter, "You will deny me; and you will weep bitter tears; but the result will be that you will be better able to help your brothers who are going through it." We cannot really help a man until we have been in the same furnace of affliction or the same abyss of shame as he has been. It was said of Jesus, "He can help others who are going through it because he has been through it himself." (Heb.2:18.) To experience the shame of failure and disloyalty is not all loss, because it gives us a sympathy and an understanding that otherwise we would never have won.

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Luke 22:39-46

THY WILL BE DONE

Luke 22:39-46

Jesus went out, and, as his custom was, made his way to the Mount of Olives. The disciples, too, accompanied him. When he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he was withdrawn from them, about a stone's throw, and he knelt and prayed. "Father," he said, "if it is your will, take this cup from me; but not my will, but yours be done," And an angel from heaven appeared strengthening him. He was in an agony, and he prayed still more intensely, and his sweat was as drops of blood falling upon the ground. So he rose from prayer and came to his disciples, and found them sleeping from grief. "Why are you sleeping?" he said to them. "Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

The space within Jerusalem was so limited that there was no room for gardens. Many well-to-do people, therefore, had private gardens out on the Mount of Olives. Some wealthy friend had given Jesus the privilege of using such a garden, and it was there that Jesus went to fight his lonely battle. He was only thirty-three; and no one wants to die at thirty-three. He knew what crucifixion was like; he had seen it. He was in an agony; the Greek word is used of someone fighting a battle with sheer fear. There is no scene like this in all history. This was the very hinge and turning point in Jesus' life. He could have turned back even yet. He could have refused the cross. The salvation of the world hung in the balance as the Son of God literally sweated it out in Gethsemane; and he won.

A famous pianist said of Chopin's nocturne in C sharp minor, "I must tell you about it. Chopin told Liszt, and Liszt told me. In this piece all is sorrow and trouble. Oh such sorrow and trouble!--until he begins to speak to God, to pray; then it is all right." That is the way it was with Jesus. He went into Gethsemane in the dark; he came out in the light--because he had talked with God. He went into Gethsemane in an agony; he came out with the victory won and with peace in his soul--because he had talked with God.

It makes all the difference in what tone of voice a man says, "Thy will be done."

(i) He may say it in a tone of helpless submission, as one who is in the grip of a power against which it is hopeless to fight. The words may be the death-knell of hope.

(ii) He may say it as one who has been battered into submission. The words may be the admission of complete defeat.

(iii) He may say it as one who has been utterly frustrated and who sees that the dream can never come true: The words may be those of a bleak regret or even of a bitter anger which is all the more bitter because it cannot do anything about it.

(iv) He may say it with the accent of perfect trust. That is how Jesus said it. He was speaking to one who was Father; he was speaking to a God whose everlasting arms were underneath and about him even on the cross. He was submitting, but he was submitting to the love that would never let

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Luke 22:39-46

him go. Life's hardest task is to accept what we cannot understand; but we can do even that if we are sure enough of the love of God.

God, thou art love! I build my faith on that ...
I know thee, who has kept my path, and made
Light for me in the darkness, tempering sorrow
So that it reached me like a solemn joy:
It were too strange that I should doubt thy love.

Jesus spoke like that; and when we can speak like that, we can look up and say in perfect trust,
"Thy will be done."

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Luke 22:47-53

THE TRAITOR'S KISS

Luke 22:47-53

While Jesus was still speaking--look you--there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He came up to Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you would betray the Son of Man?" When those who were around him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the servant of the High Priest and cut off his ear. Jesus answered, "Let it come even to this!" Jesus said to the chief priests and the Temple captains, and to the elders who had come to him, "Have you come out with swords and cudgels as against a brigand? When I was daily with you in the Temple you did not lift your hand against me; but this is your hour, and the power of darkness is here."

Judas had found a way to betray Jesus in such a way that the authorities could come upon him when the crowd were not there. He knew that Jesus was in the habit of going at nights to the garden on the hill, and there he led the emissaries of the Sanhedrin. The captain of the Temple, or the Sagan, as he was called, was the official who was responsible for the good order of the Temple; the captains of the Temple here referred to were his lieutenants who were responsible for carrying out the actual arrest of Jesus. When a disciple met a beloved Rabbi, he laid his right hand on the Rabbi's left shoulder and his left hand on the right shoulder and kissed him. It was the kiss of a disciple to a beloved master that Judas used as a sign of betrayal.

There were four different parties involved in this arrest, and their actions and reactions are very significant.

(i) There was Judas the traitor. He was the man who had abandoned God and entered into a league with Satan. It is only when a man has put God out of his life and taken Satan in, that he can sink to selling Christ.

(ii) There were the Jews who had come to arrest Jesus. They were the men who were blind to God. When God incarnate came to this earth, all that they could think of was how to hustle him to a cross. They had so long chosen their own way and shut their ears to the voice of God and their eyes to his guidance that in the end they could not recognise him when he came. It is a terrible thing to be blind and deaf to God. As Mrs. Browning wrote,

"I too have strength--
Strength to behold him and not worship him,
Strength to fall from him and not to cry to him."

God save us from a strength like that!

(iii) There were the disciples. They were the men who for the moment had forgotten God. Their world had fallen in and they were sure the end had come. The last thing they remembered at that moment was God; the only thing they thought of was the

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terrible situation into which they had come. Two things happen to the man who forgets God and leaves him out of the situation. He becomes utterly terrified and completely disorganized. He loses the power to face life and to cope with it. In the time of trial, life is unlivable without God.

(iv) There was Jesus. And Jesus was the one person in the whole scene who remembered God. The amazing thing about him in the last days was his absolute serenity once Gethsemane was over. In those days, even at his arrest, it was he who seemed to be in control; and even at his trial, it was he who was the judge. The man who walks with God can cope with any situation and look any foe in the eyes, unbowed and unafraid. It is he, and he alone, who can ultimately say,

"In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbow'd.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul."

It is only when a man has bowed to God that he can talk and act like a conqueror.

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Luke 22:63-71

MOCKING AND SCOURGING AND TRIAL

Luke 22:63-71

The men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him. They blindfolded him and asked him, "Prophecy! Who is it who hit you?" And many another insulting word they spoke to him.

And when it was day, the assembly of the elders of the people came together, the chief priests and the scribes; and they led him away to the Sanhedrin, saying, "Tell us if you are God's anointed one." He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe me; if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." They all said, "Are you then the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am." They said, "What further evidence do we need? We ourselves have heard it from his own mouth."

During the night Jesus had been brought before the High Priest. That was a private and unofficial examination. Its purpose was for the authorities to gloat over him and, if possible, to trip him up in cross-examination so that a charge could be formulated against him. After that, he was handed over to the Temple police for safe-keeping, and they played their cruel jests upon him. When the morning came, he was taken before the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews. In particular it had complete jurisdiction over all religious and theological matters. It was composed of seventy members. Scribes, Rabbis and Pharisees, priests and Sadducees, and elders were all represented on it. It could not meet during the hours of darkness. That is why they held Jesus until the morning before they brought him before it. It could meet only in the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple court. The High Priest was its president.

We possess the rules of procedure of the Sanhedrin. Perhaps they are only the ideal which was never fully carried out; but at least they allow us to see what the Jews, at their best, conceived that the Sanhedrin should be and how far their actions fell short of their own ideals in the trial of Jesus. The court sat in a semi-circle, in which every member could see every other member. Facing the court stood the prisoner dressed in mourning dress. Behind him sat the rows of the students and disciples of the Rabbis. They might speak in defence of the prisoner but not against him. Vacancies in the court were probably filled by co-option from these students. All charges must be supported by the evidence of two witnesses independently examined. A member of the court might speak against the prisoner, and then change his mind and speak for him, but not vice-versa. When a verdict was due, each member had to give his individual judgment, beginning at the youngest and going on to the most senior.

For acquittal a majority of one was all that was necessary; for condemnation there must be a majority of at least two. Sentence of death could never be carried out on the day on which it was given; a night must elapse so that the court might sleep on it, so that, perchance, their condemnation might turn to mercy. The whole procedure was designed for mercy; and, even from Luke's summary account, it is clear that the Sanhedrin, when it tried Jesus, was far from keeping its own rules and regulations.

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Luke 22:63-71

It is to be very carefully noted that the charge the Sanhedrin finally produced against Jesus was one of blasphemy. To claim to be the Son of God was an insult to God's majesty and therefore blasphemy, and punishable by death.

It is the tragic fact that when Jesus asked for love he did not even receive simple justice. It is the glorious fact that Jesus, even when he had emerged from a night of malignant questioning, even when he had been mocked and buffeted and scourged, still had utter confidence that he would be set down at the right hand of God and that his triumph was sure. His faith defied the facts. He never for a moment believed that men in the end could defeat the purposes of God.

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Luke 23:1-12

TRIAL BEFORE PILATE AND SILENCE BEFORE HEROD

Luke 23:1-12

The whole assembly rose up and brought Jesus to Pilate. They began to accuse him. "We found this man," they said, "perverting our nation and trying to stop men paying taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is the anointed one, a king." Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." Pilate said to the chief priests and to the crowds, "I find nothing to condemn in this man." They were the more urgent. "He is setting the people in turmoil," they said, "throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee to this place." When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilaean. When he realised that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he referred him to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem in these days. When Herod saw Jesus he was very glad, because for a long time he had been wishing to see him, because he had heard about him; and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. He questioned him in many words; but he answered him nothing.

The chief priests and the scribes stood by vehemently hurling their accusations against him. Herod with his soldiers treated Jesus contemptuously, and after he had mocked him and arrayed him in a gorgeous dress, he referred him back again to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that same day, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.

The Jews in the time of Jesus had no power to carry out the death sentence. Such sentence had to be passed by the Roman governor and carried out by the Roman authorities. It was for that reason that the Jews brought Jesus before Pilate. Nothing better shows their conscienceless malignity than the crime with which they charged him. In the Sanhedrin the charge had been one of blasphemy, that he had dared to call himself the Son of God. Before Pilate that charge was never even mentioned. They knew well that it would have carried no weight with him, and that he would never have proceeded on a charge which would have seemed to him a matter of Jewish religion and superstition. The charge they levelled against Jesus was entirely political, and it has all the marks of the minds and ingenuity of the Sadducees.

It was really the aristocratic, collaborationist Sadducees who achieved the crucifixion of Jesus, in their terror lest he should prove a disturbing element and produce a situation in which they would lose their wealth, their comfort and their power.

Their charge before Pilate was really threefold. They charged Jesus (a) with seditious agitation; (b) with encouraging men not to pay tribute to Caesar; (c) with assuming the title king. Every single item of the charge was a lie, and they knew it. They resorted to the most calculated and malicious lies in their well-nigh insane desire to eliminate Jesus.

Pilate was not an experienced Roman official for nothing; he saw through them; and he had no desire to gratify their wishes. But neither did he wish to offend them. They had dropped the information that Jesus came from Galilee; this they had intended as further fuel for their accusations, for Galilee was notoriously "the nurse of seditious men." But to Pilate it seemed a way out. Galilee was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, who at that very time was in Jerusalem to keep the Passover. So to Herod Pilate referred the case. Herod was one of the very few people to

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Luke 23:1-12

whom Jesus had absolutely nothing to say. Why did he believe there was nothing to be said to Herod?

(i) Herod regarded Jesus as a sight to be gazed at. To Herod, he was simply a spectacle. But Jesus was not a sight to be stared at; he was a king to be submitted to. Epictetus, the famous Greek Stoic teacher, used to complain that people came from all over the world to his lectures to stare at him, as if he had been a famous statue, but not to accept and to obey his teaching. Jesus is not a figure to be gazed at but a master to be obeyed.

(ii) Herod regarded Jesus as a joke. He jested at him; he clothed him in a king's robe as an imitation king. To put it in another way--he refused to take Jesus seriously. He would show him off to his court as an amusing curiosity but there his interest stopped. The plain fact is that the vast majority of men still refuse to take Jesus seriously. If they did, they would pay more attention than they do to his words and his claims.

(iii) There is another possible translation of Lk.23:11. "Herod with his soldiers treated Jesus contemptuously." That could be translated, "Herod, with his soldiers behind him, thought that Jesus was of no importance." Herod, secure in his position as king, strong with the power of his bodyguard behind him, believed that this Galilaean carpenter did not matter. There are still those who, consciously or unconsciously, have come to the conclusion that Jesus does not matter, that he is a factor which can well be omitted from life. They gave him no room in their hearts and no influence in their lives and believe they can easily do without him. To the Christian, so far from being of no importance, Jesus is the most important person in all the universe.

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Luke 23:13-25

THE JEWS' BLACKMAIL OF PILATE

Luke 23:13-25

Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was seducing the people from their allegiance; and--look you--I have examined him in your presence, and of the accusations with which you charge him, I have found nothing in this man to condemn; and neither has Herod; for he sent him back to us. Look you--nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore scourge him and release him." All together they shouted out, "Take this man away! And release Barabbas for us." Barabbas had been thrown into prison because a certain disorder had arisen in the city, and because of murder. Again Pilate addressed them, because he wished to release Jesus. But they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" The third time he said to them, "Why? What evil has he done? I have found nothing in him which merits sentence of death.

I will chastise him and release him." But they insisted with shouts, demanding that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for disorder and murder, the man they asked for, and Jesus he delivered to their win.

This is an amazing passage. One thing is crystal clear--Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus. He was well aware that to do so would be to betray that impartial justice which was the glory of Rome. He made no fewer than four attempts to avoid passing sentence of condemnation. He told the Jews to settle the matter themselves (Jn.19:6-7). He tried to refer the whole case to Herod. He tried to persuade the Jews to receive Jesus as the prisoner granted release at Passover time (Mk.15:6). He tried to effect a compromise, saying he would scourge Jesus and then release him. It is plain that Pilate was coerced into sentencing Jesus to death.

How could a Jewish mob coerce an experienced Roman governor into sentencing Jesus to death? It is literally true that the Jews blackmailed Pilate into sentencing Jesus to death. The basic fact is that, under impartial Roman justice, any province had the right to report a governor to Rome for misgovernment, and such a governor would be severely dealt with. Pilate had made two grave mistakes in his government of Palestine.

In Judaea the Roman headquarters were not at Jerusalem but at Caesarea. But in Jerusalem a certain number of troops were quartered. Roman troops carried standards which were topped by a little bust of the reigning emperor. The emperor was at this time officially a god. The Jewish law forbade any graven image and, in deference to Jewish principles, previous governors had always removed the imperial images before they marched their troops into Jerusalem. Pilate refused to do so; he marched his soldiers in by night with the imperial image on their standards. The Jews came in crowds to Caesarea to request Pilate to remove the images. He refused. They persisted in their entreaties for days. On the sixth day he agreed to meet them in an open space surrounded by his troops. He informed them that unless they stopped disturbing him with their continuous requests the penalty would be immediate death.

"They threw themselves on the ground, and laid their necks bare, and said they would take death very willingly rather than that the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed." Not even Pilate

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Luke 23:13-25

could slaughter men in cold blood like that, and he had to yield. Josephus tells the whole story in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, chapter 3. Pilate followed this up by bringing into the city a new water supply and financing the scheme with money taken from the Temple treasury, a story which we have already told in the commentary on Lk.13:1-4.

The one thing the Roman government could not afford to tolerate in their far-flung empire was civil disorder. Had the Jews officially reported either of these incidents there is little doubt that Pilate would have been summarily dismissed. It is John who tells us of the ominous hint the Jewish officials gave Pilate when they said, "If you release this man you are not Caesar's friend." (Jn.19:12.) They compelled Pilate to sentence Jesus to death by holding the threat of an official report to Rome over his head.

Here we have the grim truth that a man's past can rise up and confront him and paralyse him. If a man has been guilty of certain actions there are certain things which he has no longer the right to say, otherwise his past will be flung in his face. We must have a care not to allow ourselves any conduct which will some day despoil us of the right to take the stand we know we ought to take and will entitle people to say, "You of all men have no right to speak like that."

But if such a situation should arise, there is only one thing to do--to have the courage to face it and its consequences. That is precisely what Pilate did not possess. He sacrificed justice rather than lose his post; he sentenced Jesus to death in order that he might remain the governor of Palestine. Had he been a man of real courage he would have done the right and taken the consequences, but his past made him a coward.

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Luke 23:26-31

THE ROAD TO CALVARY

Luke 23:26-31

As they led Jesus away, they took Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, and on him they laid the cross to carry it behind Jesus.

There followed him a great crowd of the people and of women who bewailed and lamented him. Jesus turned to them. "Daughters of Jerusalem," he said, "do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children, because--look you--days are on the way in which they will say, 'Happy are those who are barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts which never fed a child.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' For if they do these things when the sap is in the wood, what will they do when the tree is dry?"

When a criminal was condemned to be crucified, he was taken from the judgment hall and set in the middle of a hollow square of four Roman soldiers. His own cross was then laid upon his shoulders. And he was marched to the place of crucifixion by the longest possible route, while before him marched another soldier bearing a placard with his crime inscribed upon it, so that he might be a terrible warning to anyone else who was contemplating such a crime. That is what they did with Jesus.

He began by carrying his own Cross (Jn.19:17); but under its weight his strength gave out and he could carry it no farther. Palestine was an occupied country and any citizen could be immediately impressed into the service of the Roman government. The sign of such impressment was a tap on the shoulder with the flat of the blade of a Roman spear. When Jesus sank beneath the weight of his Cross, the Roman centurion in charge looked round for someone to carry it. Out of the country into the city there came Simon from far off Cyrene, which is modern Tripoli. No doubt he was a Jew who all his life had scraped and saved so that he might be able to eat one Passover at Jerusalem. The flat of the Roman spear touched him on the shoulder and he found himself, willy-nilly, carrying a criminal's cross.

Try to imagine the feelings of Simon. He had come to Jerusalem to realise the cherished ambition of a lifetime, and he found himself walking to Calvary carrying a cross. His heart was filled with bitterness towards the Romans and towards this criminal who had involved him in his crime.

But if we can read between the lines the story does not end there. J. A. Robertson saw in it one of the hidden romances of the New Testament. Mark describes Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus. (Mk.15:21.) Now you do not identify a man by the name of his sons unless these sons are well-known people in the community to which you write. There is general agreement that Mark wrote his gospel to the Church at Rome. Turn to Paul's letter to the Church at Rome. Amongst the greetings at the end he writes, "Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine." (Rom.16:13.) So in the Roman church there was Rufus, so choice a Christian that he could be called one of God's chosen ones, with a mother so dear to Paul that he could call her his mother in the faith. It may well be that this was the same Rufus who was the son of Simon of Cyrene, and his mother was Simon's wife.

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Luke 23:26-31

It may well be that as he looked on Jesus Simon's bitterness turned to wondering amazement and finally to faith; that he became a Christian; and that his family became some of the choicest souls in the Roman church. It may well be that Simon from Tripoli thought he was going to realize a life's ambition, to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem at last; that he found himself sorely against his will carrying a criminal's cross; that, as he looked, his bitterness turned to wonder and to faith; and that in the thing that seemed to be his shame he found a Saviour.

Behind Jesus there came a band of women weeping for him. He turned and bade them weep, not for him, but for themselves. Days of terror were coming. In Judaea there was no tragedy like a childless marriage; in fact childlessness was a valid ground for divorce. But the day would come when the woman who had no child would be glad that it was so. Once again Jesus was seeing ahead the destruction of that city which had so often before, and which had now so finally, refused the invitation of God. Lk.23:31 is a proverbial phrase which could be used in many connections. Here it means, if they do this to one who is innocent, what will they some day do to those who are guilty?

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Luke 23:32-38

THERE THEY CRUCIFIED HIM

Luke 23:32-38

Two others who were criminals were brought to be put to death with Jesus. When they came to the place which is called the place of a skull, there they crucified him, and the two criminals, one on his right hand, and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And, as they divided his garments, they cast lots for them. The people stood watching, and the rulers gaped at him. "He saved others," they said. "Let him save himself if he really is the anointed one of God, the chosen one." The soldiers also mocked him, coming and offering vinegar to him, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews save yourself." There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

When a criminal reached the place of crucifixion, his cross was laid flat upon the ground. Usually it was a cross shaped like a T with no top piece against which the head could rest. It was quite low, so that the criminal's feet were only two or three feet above the ground. There was a company of pious women in Jerusalem who made it their practice always to go to crucifixions and to give the victim a drink of drugged wine which would deaden the terrible pain. That drink was offered to Jesus and he refused it. (Matt.27:34.) He was determined to face death at its worst, with a clear mind and senses unclouded. The victim's arms were stretched out upon the cross bar, and the nails were driven through his hands. The feet were not nailed, but only loosely bound to the cross. Half way up the cross there was a projecting piece of wood, called the saddle, which took the weight of the criminal, for otherwise the nails would have torn through his hands. Then the cross was lifted and set upright in its socket.

The terror of crucifixion was this--the pain of that process was terrible but it was not enough to kill, and the victim was left to die of hunger and thirst beneath the blazing noontide sun and the frosts of the night. Many a criminal was known to have hung for a week upon his cross until he died raving mad.

The clothes of the criminal were the perquisites of the four soldiers among whom he marched to the cross. Every Jew wore five articles of apparel--the inner tunic, the outer robe, the girdle, the sandals and the turban. Four were divided among the four soldiers. There remained the great outer robe. It was woven in one piece without a seam. (Jn.19:23-24.) To have cut it up and divided it would have ruined it; and so the soldiers gambled for it in the shadow of the cross. It was nothing to them that another criminal was slowly dying in agony.

The inscription set upon the cross was the same placard as was carried before a man as he marched through the streets to the place of crucifixion.

Jesus said many wonderful things, but rarely anything more wonderful than, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Christian forgiveness is an amazing thing. When Stephen was being stoned to death he too prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (Ac.7:60.) There is nothing so lovely and nothing so rare as Christian forgiveness. When the unforgiving spirit is threatening to turn our hearts to bitterness, let us hear again our Lord asking forgiveness for those

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Luke 23:32-38

who crucified him and his servant Paul saying to his friends, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Eph.4:32.)

The idea that this terrible thing was done in ignorance runs through the New Testament. Peter said to the people in after days, "I know that you acted in ignorance." (Ac.3:17.) Paul said that they crucified Jesus because they did not know him. (Ac.13:27.) Marcus Aurelius, the great Roman Emperor and Stoic saint, used to say to himself every morning, "Today you will meet all kinds of unpleasant people; they will hurt you, and injure you, and insult you; but you cannot live like that; you know better, for you are a man in whom the spirit of God dwells." Others may have in their hearts the unforgiving spirit, others may sin in ignorance; but we know better. We are Christ's men and women; and we must forgive as he forgave.

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Luke 23:39-43

THE PROMISE OF PARADISE

Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who were hanged kept hurling insults at Jesus. "Are you not the anointed one?" he said. "Save yourself and us." The other rebuked him. "Do you not even fear God?" he said. "For we too are under the same sentence and justly so, for we have done things which deserve the reward that we are reaping; but this man has done nothing unseemly." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He said to him, "This is the truth--I tell you--today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was of set and deliberate purpose that the authorities crucified Jesus between two known criminals. It was deliberately so staged to humiliate Jesus in front of the crowd and to rank him with robbers.

Legend has been busy with the penitent thief. He is called variously Dismas, Demas and Dumachus. One legend makes him a Judaeen Robin Hood who robbed the rich to give to the poor. The loveliest legend tells how the holy family were attacked by robbers when they fled with the child Jesus from Bethlehem to Egypt. Jesus was saved by the son of the captain of the robber band. The baby was so lovely that the young brigand could not bear to lay hands on him but set him free, saying, "O most blessed of children, if ever there come a time for having mercy on me, then remember me and forget not this hour." That robber youth who had saved Jesus as a baby met him again on Calvary; and this time Jesus saved him.

The word Paradise is a Persian word meaning a walled garden. When a Persian king wished to do one of his subjects a very special honour he made him a companion of the garden which meant he was chosen to walk in the garden with the king. It was more than immortality that Jesus promised the penitent thief. He promised him the honoured place of a companion of the garden in the courts of heaven.

Surely this story tells us above all that it is never too late to turn to Christ. There are other things of which we must say, "The time for that is past. I am grown too old now." But we can never say that of turning to Jesus Christ. So long as a man's heart beats, the invitation of Christ still stands. As the poet wrote of the man who was killed as he was thrown from his galloping horse,

"Betwixt the stirrup and the ground,
Mercy I asked, mercy I found."

It is literally true that while there is life there is hope.

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Luke 23:44-49

THE LONG DAY CLOSES

Luke 23:44-49

By this time it was about midday, and there was darkness over the whole land until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and the light of the sun failed. And the veil of the Temple was rent in the midst. When Jesus had cried with a great voice, he said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." When he had said this he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God. "Truly," he said, "this was a good man." All the crowds, who had come together to see the spectacle, when they saw the things that had happened, went home beating their breasts. And afl his acquaintances, and the women who had accompanied him from Galilee, stood far off and saw these things.

Every sentence of this passage is rich in meaning.

(i) There was a great darkness as Jesus died. It was as if the sun itself could not bear to look upon the deed men's hands had done. The world is ever dark in the day when men seek to banish Christ.

(ii) The Temple veil was rent in two. This was the veil which hid the Holy of Holies, the place where dwelt the very presence of God, the place where no man might ever enter except the High Priest, and he only once a year, on the great day of Atonement. It was as if the way to God's presence, hitherto barred to man, was thrown open to all. It was as if the heart of God, hitherto hidden, was laid bare. The birth, life and death of Jesus tore apart the veil which had concealed God from man. "He who has seen me," said Jesus, "has seen the Father." (Jn.14:9.) On the cross, as never before and never again, men saw the love of God.

(iii) Jesus cried with a great voice. Three of the gospels tell us of this great cry. (compare Matt.27:50; Mk.15:37.) John, on the other hand, does not mention the great cry but tells us that Jesus died saying, "It is finished." (Jn.19:30.) In Greek and Aramaic "It is finished" is one word. It is finished and the great cry are, in fact, one and the same thing. Jesus died with a shout of triumph on his lips. He did not whisper, "It is finished," as one who is battered to his knees and forced to admit defeat. He shouted it like a victor who has won his last engagement with the enemy and brought a tremendous task to triumphant conclusion. "Finished!" was the cry of the Christ, crucified yet victorious.

(iv) Jesus died with a prayer on his lips. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." That is Ps.31:5 with one word added--Father. That verse was the prayer every Jewish mother taught her child to say last thing at night. Just as we were taught, maybe, to say, "This night I lay me down to sleep," so the Jewish mother taught her child to say, before the threatening dark came down, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit." Jesus made it even more lovely for he began it with the word Father. Even on a cross Jesus died like a child falling asleep in his father's arms.

(v) The centurion and the crowd were deeply moved as Jesus died. His death did what even his life could not do; it broke the hard hearts of men. Already Jesus' saying was coming true--"I, when

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Luke 23:44-49

I am lifted up from the earth, will draw an men to myself." The magnet of the cross had begun its work, even as he breathed his last.

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Luke 23:50-56

THE MAN WHO GAVE JESUS A TOMB

Luke 23:50-56

Look you--there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, a good and a just man. He had not consented to their counsel and their action. He came from Arimathaea, a town of the Jews, and he lived in expectation of the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a rockhewn tomb where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women, who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee, followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went back home and prepared spices and ointments. And they rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandment.

It was the custom that the bodies of criminals were not buried at all but left to the dogs and the vultures to dispose of; but Joseph of Arimathaea saved the body of Jesus from that indignity. There was not much time left that day. Jesus was crucified on the Friday; the Jewish Sabbath is our Saturday. But the Jewish day begins at 6 p.m. That is to say by Friday at 6 p.m. the Sabbath had begun. That is why the women had only time to see where the body was laid and go home and prepare their spices and ointments for it and do no more, for after 6 p.m. all work became illegal.

Joseph of Arimathaea is a figure of the greatest interest.

(i) Legend has it that in the year A.D. 61 he was sent by Philip to Britain. He came to Glastonbury. With him he brought the chalice that had been used at the Last Supper, and in it the blood of Christ. That chalice became the Holy Grail, which it was the dream of King Arthur's knights to find and see. When Joseph arrived in Glastonbury they say that he drove his staff into the ground to rest on it in his weariness and the staff budded and became a bush which blooms every Christmas Day. St. Joseph's thorn still blooms at Glastonbury and to this day slips of it are sent all over the world. The first church in all England was built at Glastonbury, and that church which legend links with the name of Joseph is still a mecca of Christian pilgrims.

(ii) There is a certain tragedy about Joseph of Arimathaea. He is the man who gave Jesus a tomb. He was a member of the Sanhedrin; we are told that he did not agree with the verdict and the sentence of that court. But there is no word that he raised his voice in disagreement. Maybe he kept silent; maybe he absented himself when he saw that he was powerless to stop a course of action with which he disagreed. What a difference it would have made if he had spoken! How it would have lifted up Jesus' heart if, in that grim assembly of bleak hatred, even one lone voice had spoken for him! But Joseph waited until Jesus was dead, and then he gave him a tomb. It is one of the tragedies of life that we place on people's graves the flowers we might have given them when they were alive. We keep for their obituary notices and for the tributes paid to them at memorial services and in committee minutes, the praise and thanks we should have given them when they lived. Often, often we are haunted because we never spoke. A word to the living is worth a cataract of tributes to the dead.

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Luke 24:1-12

THE WRONG PLACE TO LOOK

Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, at the first streaks of dawn, the women came to the tomb, bearing the spices which they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb. They entered in, but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were at a loss what to make of this--look you--two men stood by them in flashing raiment. They were afraid, and they bowed their faces to the ground. But they said to them, "Why are you looking for him who is alive among the dead? He is not here; he is risen. Remember how he said to you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and that he must be crucified, and that on the third day he would rise again." Then they remembered his words; and they returned from the tomb and brought the news of all these things to the eleven and to the others. Mary Magdalene was there, and Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James. They, and the other women with them, kept telling these things to the apostles.

But their words seemed to them an idle tale, and they refused to believe them. But Peter rose up and ran to the tomb; and he stooped down and saw the linen clothes lying all by themselves; and he went away wondering in himself at what had happened.

The Jewish Sabbath, our Saturday, is the last day of the week and commemorates the rest of God after the work of creation. The Christian Sunday is the first day of the week and commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. On this first Christian Sunday the women went to the tomb in order to carry out the last offices of love for the dear dead and to embalm Jesus' body with their spices.

In the east tombs were often carved out of caves in the rock. The body was wrapped in long linen strips like bandages and laid on a shelf in the rock tomb. The tomb was then closed by a great circular stone like a cart-wheel which ran in a groove across the opening. When the women came, they found the stone rolled away.

Just here we have one of those discrepancies in the accounts of the resurrection of which the opponents of Christianity make so much. In Mark the messenger in the tomb is a young man in a long white robe (Mk.16:5); in Matthew he is the angel of the Lord (Matt.28:2). Here it is two men in flashing raiment; and in John it is two angels (Jn.20:12). It is true that the differences are there; but it is also true that, whatever the attendant description, the basic fact of the empty tomb never varies, and that is the fact that matters. No two people ever described the same episode in the same terms; nothing so wonderful as the resurrection ever escaped a certain embroidery as it was repeatedly told and retold. But at the heart of this story that all-important fact of the empty tomb remains.

The women returned with their story to the rest of the disciples but they refused to believe them. They called it an idle tale. The word used is one employed by Greek medical writers to describe the babbling of a fevered and insane mind. Only Peter went out to see if it might not possibly be true. The very fact that Peter was there says much for him. The story of his denial of his Master was not a thing that could be kept silent; and yet he had the moral courage to face those who knew his

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Luke 24:1-12

shame. There was something of the hero in Peter, as well as something of the coward. The man who was a fluttering dove is on the way to become a rock.

The all-important and challenging question in this story is that of the messengers in the tomb, "Why are you looking for him who is alive among the dead?" Many of us still look for Jesus among the dead.

(i) There are those who regard him as the greatest man and the noblest hero who ever lived, as one who lived the loveliest life ever seen on earth; but who then died. That will not do. Jesus is not dead; he is alive. He is not merely a hero of the past; he is a living reality of the present.

Shakespeare is dust, and will not come
To question from his Avon tomb,
And Socrates and Shelley keep
An Attic and Italian sleep.

They see not. But, O Christians, who
Throng Holborn and Fifth Avenue,
May you not meet in spite of death,
A traveller from Nazareth?

(ii) There are those who regard Jesus simply as a man whose life must be studied, his words examined, his teaching analysed. There is a tendency to think of Christianity and Christ merely in terms of something to be studied. The tendency may be seen in the quite simple fact of the extension of the study group and the extinction of the prayer meeting. Beyond doubt study is necessary but Jesus is not only someone to be studied; he is someone to be met and lived with every day. He is not only a figure in a book, even if that book be the greatest in the world; he is a living presence.

(iii) There are those who see in Jesus the perfect pattern and example. He is that; but a perfect example can be the most heart-breaking thing in the world. For centuries the birds gave men an example of flight, and yet not till modern times could man fly. Some of us when young were presented at school with a writing book. At the top it had a line of copperplate writing; below it had blank lines on which we had to copy it. How utterly discouraging were our efforts to reproduce that perfect pattern! But then the teacher would come and, with her hand, would guide our hand over the lines and we got nearer the ideal. That is what Jesus does. He is not only the pattern and the example. He helps us and guides us and strengthens us to follow that pattern and example. He is not simply a model for life; he is a living presence to help us to live.

It may well be that our Christianity has lacked an essential something because we too have been looking for him who is alive among the dead.

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Luke 24:13-35

THE SUNSET ROAD THAT TURNED TO DAWN

Luke 24:13-35

Now--look you--on that same day two of them were on the way to a village called Emmaus, which is about seven miles from Jerusalem; and they talked with each other about all the things which had happened. As they talked about them, and discussed them, Jesus himself came up to them and joined them on their way. But their eyes were fastened so that they did not recognize him. He said to them, "What words are these that you are exchanging with each other as you walk?" And they stood with faces twisted with grief. One of them, called Cleopas, answered, "Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know the things that happened in it in these days?" "What kind of things?" he said to them. They said to him, "The story of Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and in word before God and all the people; and how our chief priests and rulers handed him over to sentence of death and how they crucified him. As for us--we were hoping that he was the one who was going to rescue Israel.

Yes--and to add to it all--this is the third day since these things happened. Yes and some women of our number astonished us, for they went early to the tomb, and, when they did not find his body, they came saying that they had seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. And some of our company went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said--but they did not see him." He said to them, "O foolish ones and slow in heart to believe in all the things that the prophets said! Was it not necessary that the anointed one should suffer and enter into his glory?" And beginning from Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them the things concerning himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he made as if he would have gone on; and they pressed him. "Stay with us," they said, "because it is towards evening, and the day is already far spent." So he came in to stay with them.

When he had taken his place at table with them, he took bread, and blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them; and their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Was not our heart burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, as he opened the scriptures to us?" And they arose that very hour and went back to Jerusalem and found the eleven gathered together and those with them, and found that they were saying, "It is a fact that the Lord has risen, and he has appeared to Simon." So they recounted all that had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of bread.

This is another of the immortal short stories of the world.

(i) It tells of two men who were walking towards the sunset. It has been suggested that that is the very reason why they did not recognize Jesus. Emmaus was west of Jerusalem. The sun was sinking, and the setting sun so dazzled them that they did not know their Lord. However that may be, it is true that the Christian is a man who walks not towards the sunset but towards the sunrise. Long ago it was said to the children of Israel that they journeyed in the wilderness towards the sunrising. (Num.21:11.) The Christian goes onwards, not to a night which falls, but to a dawn which breaks--and that is what, in their sorrow and their disappointment, the two on the Emmaus road had not realized.

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(ii) It tells us of the ability of Jesus to make sense of things. The whole situation seemed to these two men to have no explanation. Their hopes and dreams were shattered. There is all the poignant, wistful, bewildered regret in the world in their sorrowing words, "We were hoping that he was the one who was going to rescue Israel." They were the words of men whose hopes were dead and buried. Then Jesus came and talked with them, and the meaning of life became clear and the darkness became light. A story-teller makes one of his characters say to the one with whom he has fallen in love, "I never knew what life meant until I saw it in your eyes." It is only in Jesus that, even in the bewildering times, we learn what life means.

(iii) It tells us of the courtesy of Jesus. He made as if he would have gone on. He would not force himself upon them; he awaited their invitation to come in. God gave to men the greatest and the most perilous gift in the world, the gift of free-will; we can use it to invite Christ to enter our lives or to allow him to pass on.

(iv) It tells how he was known to them in the breaking of bread. This always sounds a little as if it meant the sacrament; but it does not. It was at an ordinary meal in an ordinary house, when an ordinary loaf was being divided, that these men recognized Jesus. It has been beautifully suggested that perhaps they were present at the feeding of the five thousand, and, as he broke the bread in their cottage home, they recognized his hands again. It is not only at the communion table we can be with Christ; we can be with him at the dinner table too. He is not only the host in his Church; he is the guest in every home. Fay Inchfawn wrote,

Sometimes, when everything goes wrong;
When days are short and nights are long;
When wash-day brings so dull a sky
That not a single thing will dry.
And when the kitchen chimney smokes,
And when there's naught so 'queer' as folks!
When friends deplore my faded youth,
And when the baby cuts a tooth.
While John, the baby last but one,
Clings round my skirts till day is done;
And fat, good-tempered Jane is glum,
And butcher's man forgets to come.
Sometimes I say on days like these,
I get a sudden gleam of bliss.
Not on some sunny day of ease,
He'll come ... but on a day like this!

The Christian lives always and everywhere in a Christ-filled world.

(v) It tells how these two men, when they received such great joy, hastened to share it. It was a seven miles tramp back to Jerusalem, but they could not keep the good news to themselves. The Christian message is never fully ours until we have shared it with someone else.

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Luke 24:13-35

(vi) It tells how, when they reached Jerusalem, they found others who had already shared their experience. It is the glory of the Christian that he lives in a fellowship of people who have had the same experience as he has had. It has been said that true friendship begins only when people share a common memory and can say to each other, "Do you remember?" Each of us is one of a great fellowship of people who share a common experience and a common memory of their Lord.

(vii) It tells that Jesus appeared to Peter. That must remain one of the great untold stories of the world. But surely it is a lovely thing that Jesus should make one of his first appearances to the man who had denied him. It is the glory of Jesus that he can give the penitent sinner back his self-respect.

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Luke 24:36-49

IN THE UPPER ROOM

Luke 24:36-49

While they were still speaking, Jesus stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" They were terrified and afraid, because they thought that they were seeing a spirit. He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do the questions arise in your heart? See my hands and my feet--that it is I--myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this he showed them his hands and his feet. When they still thought it too good to be true, and when they were astonished he said to them. "Have you anything to eat here?" They gave him part of a cooked fish, and he took it and ate it before them.

He said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you while I was still with you--that all the things which stand written about me in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds so that they understood the scriptures; and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the anointed one should suffer and should rise from the dead on the third day; and that repentance in his name and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And--look you--I send out the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in this city until you will be clothed with power from on high."

Here we read of how Jesus came to his own when they were gathered in the upper room. In this passage certain great notes of the Christian faith are resonantly struck.

(i) It stresses the reality of the resurrection. The risen Lord was no phantom or hallucination. He was real. The Jesus who died was in truth the Christ who rose again. Christianity is not founded on the dreams of men's disordered minds or the visions of their fevered eyes, but on one who in actual historical fact faced and fought and conquered death and rose again.

(ii) It stresses the necessity of the cross. It was to the cross that all the scriptures looked forward. The cross was not forced on God; it was not an emergency measure when all else had failed and when the scheme of things had gone wrong. It was part of the plan of God, for it is the one place on earth, where in a moment of time, we see his eternal love.

(iii) It stresses the urgency of the task. Out to all men had to go the call to repentance and the offer of forgiveness. The church was not left to live forever in the upper room; it was sent out into all the world. After the upper room came the world-wide mission of the church. The days of sorrow were past and the tidings of joy must be taken to all men.

(iv) It stresses the secret of power. They had to wait in Jerusalem until power from on high came upon them. There are occasions when the Christian may seem to be wasting time, as he waits in a wise passivity. Action without preparation must often fail. There is a time to wait on God and a time to work for God. Fay Inchfawn writes of the days when life is a losing contest with a thousand little things.

"I wrestle--how I wrestle!--through the hours.

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Nay, not with principalities and powers--
Dark spiritual foes of God's and man's--
But with antagonistic pots and pans;
With footmarks on the hall,
With smears upon the wall,
With doubtful ears and small unwashen hands,
And with a babe's innumerable demands."

And then, even in the busyness she lays aside her work to be for a moment with God.

"With leisured feet and idle hands, I sat.
I, foolish, fussy, blind as any bat,
Sat down to listen, and to learn. And lo,
My thousand tasks were done the better so."

The quiet times in which we wait on God are never wasted; for it is in these times when we lay aside life's tasks that we are strengthened for the very tasks we lay aside.

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Luke 24:50-53

THE HAPPY ENDING

Luke 24:50-53

Jesus led them out as far as Bethany; and he raised his hands and blessed them; and as he was blessing them he parted from them, and was borne up into heaven. And when they had worshipped him they returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

The ascension must always remain a mystery, for it attempts to put into words what is beyond words and to describe what is beyond description. But that something such should happen was essential. It was unthinkable that the appearances of Jesus should grow fewer and fewer until finally they petered out. That would have effectively wrecked the faith of men. There had to come a day of dividing when the Jesus of earth finally became the Christ of heaven. But to the disciples the ascension was obviously three things.

(i) It was an ending. The days when their faith was faith in a flesh and blood person and depended on his flesh and blood presence were over. Now they were linked to someone who was forever independent of space and time.

(ii) Equally it was a beginning. The disciples did not leave the scene heart-broken; they left it with great joy, because now they knew that they had a Master from whom nothing could separate them any more.

I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.

"I am sure," said Paul, "that nothing--nothing in life or death--can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom.8:38-39.)

(iii) Further, the ascension gave the disciples the certainty that they had a friend, not only on earth, but in heaven. Surely it is the most precious thing of all to know that in heaven there awaits us that self-same Jesus who on earth was wondrous kind. To die is not to go out into the dark; it is to go to him.

So they went back to Jerusalem, and they were continually in the Temple praising God. It is not by accident that Luke's gospel ends where it began--in the house of God.

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Introduction to John

THE GOSPEL OF THE EAGLE'S EYE

For many Christian people the Gospel according to St. John is the most precious book in the New Testament. It is the book on which above all they feed their minds and nourish their hearts, and in which they rest their souls. Very often on stained glass windows and the like the gospel writers are represented in symbol by the figures of the four beasts whom the writer of the Revelation saw around the throne (Rev.4:7).

The emblems are variously distributed among the gospel writers, but a common allocation is that the man stands for Mark, which is the plainest, the most straightforward and the most human of the gospels; the lion stands for Matthew, for he specially saw Jesus as the Messiah and the Lion of the tribe of Judah; the ox stands for Luke, because it is the animal of service and sacrifice, and Luke saw Jesus as the great servant of men and the universal sacrifice for all mankind; the eagle stands for John, because it alone of all living creatures can look straight into the sun and not be dazzled, and John has the most penetrating gaze of all the New Testament writers into the eternal mysteries and the eternal truths and the very mind of God. Many people find themselves closer to God and to Jesus Christ in John than in any other book in the world.

THE GOSPEL THAT IS DIFFERENT

But we have only to read the Fourth Gospel in the most cursory way to see that it is quite different from the other three. It omits so many things that they include. The Fourth Gospel has no account of the Birth of Jesus, of his baptism, of his temptations; it tells us nothing of the Last Supper, nothing of Gethsemane, and nothing of the Ascension. It has no word of the healing of any people possessed by devils and evil spirits. And, perhaps most surprising of all, it has none of the parable stories Jesus told which are so priceless a part of the other three gospels. In these other three gospels Jesus speaks either in these wonderful stories or in short, epigrammatic, vivid sentences which stick in the memory. But in the Fourth Gospel the speeches of Jesus are often a whole chapter long; and are often involved, argumentative pronouncements quite unlike the pithy, unforgettable sayings of the other three.

Even more surprising, the account in the Fourth Gospel of the facts of the life and ministry of Jesus is often different from that in the other three.

(i) John has a different account of the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. In the other three gospels it is quite definitely stated that Jesus did not emerge as a preacher until after John the Baptist had been imprisoned. "Now after John was arrested Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God" (Mk.1:14; Lk.3:18,20; Matt.4:12). But in John there is a quite considerable period during which the ministry of Jesus over-lapped with the activity of John the Baptist (Jn.3:22-30; Jn.4:1-2).

(ii) John has a different account of the scene of Jesus' ministry. In the other three gospels the main scene of the ministry is Galilee and Jesus does not reach Jerusalem until the last week of his life. In John the main scene of the ministry is Jerusalem and Judaea, with only occasional withdrawals to Galilee (Jn.2:1-13; Jn.4:35-5:1; Jn.6:1-7:14). In John, Jesus is in Jerusalem for a Passover which occurred at the same time as the cleansing of the Temple, as John tells the story (Jn.2:13); he is in

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Jerusalem at the time of an unnamed feast (Jn.5:1); he is there for the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn.7:2,10); he is there at the Feast of Dedication in the winter-time (Jn.10:22). In fact according to the Fourth Gospel Jesus never left Jerusalem after that feast; after Jn.10 he is in Jerusalem all the time, which would mean a stay of months, from the winter-time of the Feast of the Dedication to the spring-time of the Passover at which he was crucified.

In point of fact in this particular matter John is surely right. The other gospels show us Jesus mourning over Jerusalem as the last week came on. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt.23:37; Lk.13:34). It is clear that Jesus could not have said that unless he had paid repeated visits to Jerusalem and made repeated appeals to it. It was impossible for him to say that on a first visit. In this John is unquestionably right.

It was in fact this difference of scene which provided Eusebius with one of the earliest explanations of the difference between the Fourth Gospel and the other three. He said that in his day (about A.D. 300) many people who were scholars held the following view. Matthew at first preached to the Hebrew people. The day came when he had to leave them and to go to other nations. Before he went he set down his story of the life of Jesus in Hebrew, "and thus compensated those whom he was obliged to leave for the loss of his presence." After Mark and Luke had published their gospels, John was still preaching the story of Jesus orally. "Finally he proceeded to write for the following reason. The three gospels already mentioned having come into the hands of all and into his hands too, they say that he fully accepted them and bore witness to their truthfulness; but there was lacking in them an account of the deeds done by Christ at the beginning of his ministry....

They therefore say that John, being asked to do it for this reason, gave in his gospel an account of the period which had been omitted by the earlier evangelists, and of the deeds done by the Saviour during that period; that is, of the deeds done before the imprisonment of John the Baptist.... John therefore records the deeds of Christ which were performed before the Baptist was cast into prison, but the other three evangelists mention the events which happened after that time.... The Gospel according to John contains the first acts of Christ, while the others give an account of the latter part of his life." (Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History 5: 24.)

So then according to Eusebius there is no contradiction at all between the Fourth Gospel and the other three; the difference is due to the fact that the Fourth Gospel is describing a ministry in Jerusalem, at least in its earlier chapters, which preceded the ministry in Galilee, and which took place while John the Baptist was still at liberty. It may well be that this explanation of Eusebius is at least in part correct.

(iii) John has a different account of the duration of Jesus' ministry. The other three gospels, on the face of it, imply that it lasted only one year. Within the ministry there is only one Passover Feast. In John there are three Passovers, one at the Cleansing of the Temple (Jn.2:13); one near the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Jn.6:4); and the final Passover at which Jesus went to the Cross. According to John the ministry of Jesus would take a minimum of two years, and probably a period nearer three years, to cover its events. Again John is unquestionably right. If we read the other three

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gospels closely and carefully we can see that he is right. When the disciples plucked the ears of corn (Mk.2:23) it must have been spring-time. When the five thousand were fed, they sat down on the green grass (Mk.6:39); therefore it was spring-time again, and there must have been a year between the two events. There follows the tour through Tyre and Sidon, and the Transfiguration. At the Transfiguration Peter wished to build three booths and to stay there. It is most natural to think that it was the time of the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths and that that is why Peter made the suggestion (Mk.9:5). That would make the date early in October. There follows the space between that and the last Passover in April. Therefore, behind the narrative of the other three gospels lies the fact that Jesus' ministry actually did last for at least three years, as John represents it.

(iv) It sometimes even happens that John differs in matters of fact from the other three. There are two outstanding examples. First, John puts the Cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Jn.2:13-22), the others put it at the end (Mk.11:15-17; Matt.21:12-13; Lk.19:45-46). Second, when we come to study the narratives in detail, we will see that John dates the crucifixion of Jesus on the day before the Passover, while the other gospels date it on the day of the Passover.

We can never shut our eyes to the obvious differences between John and the other gospels.

JOHN'S SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE

One thing is certain--if John differs from the other three gospels, it is not because of ignorance and lack of information. The plain fact is that, if he omits much that they tell us, he also tells us much that they do not mention. John alone tells of the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee (Jn.2:1-11); of the coming of Nicodemus to Jesus (Jn.3:1-15); of the woman of Samaria (Jn.4); of the raising of Lazarus (Jn.11); of the way in which Jesus washed his disciples' feet (Jn.13:1-17); of Jesus' wonderful teaching about the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, which is scattered through Jn.14 Jn.15 Jn.16 and Jn.17. It is only in John that some of the disciples really come alive. It is in John alone that Thomas speaks (Jn.11:16; Jn.14:5; Jn.20:24-29); that Andrew becomes a real personality (Jn.1:40-41; Jn.6:8-9; Jn.12:22); that we get a glimpse of the character of Philip (Jn.6:5-7; Jn.14:8-9); that we hear the carping protest of Judas at the anointing at Bethany (Jn.12:4-5). And the strange thing is that these little extra touches are intensely revealing. John's pictures of Thomas and Andrew and Philip are like little cameos or vignettes in which the character of each man is etched in a way we cannot forget.

Further, again and again John has little extra details which read like the memories of one who was there. The loaves which the lad brought to Jesus were barley loaves (Jn.6:9); when Jesus came to the disciples as they crossed the lake in the storm they had rowed between three and four miles (Jn.6:19); there were six stone waterpots at Cana of Galilee (Jn.2:6); it is only John who tells of the four soldiers gambling for the seamless robe as Jesus died (Jn.19:23); he knows the exact weight of the myrrh and aloes which were used to anoint the dead body of Jesus (Jn.19:39); he remembers how the perfume of the ointment filled the house at the anointing at Bethany (Jn.12:3). Many of these things are such apparently unimportant details that they are inexplicable unless they are the memories of a man who was there.

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However much John may differ from the other three gospels, that difference is not to be explained by ignorance but rather by the fact that he had more knowledge or better sources or a more vivid memory than the others.

Further evidence of the specialised information of the writer of the Fourth Gospel is his detailed knowledge of Palestine and of Jerusalem. He knows how long it took to build the Temple (Jn.2:20); that the Jews and the Samaritans had a permanent quarrel (Jn.4:9); the low Jewish view of women (Jn.4:9); the way in which the Jews regard the Sabbath (Jn.5:10; Jn.7:21-23; Jn.9:14). His knowledge of the geography of Palestine is intimate. He knows of two Bethanys, one of which is beyond Jordan (Jn.1:28; Jn.12:1); he knows that Bethsaida was the home of some of the disciples (Jn.1:44; Jn.12:21); that Cana is in Galilee (Jn.2:1; Jn.4:46; Jn.21:2); that Sychar is near Shechem (Jn.4:5). He has what one might call a street by street knowledge of Jerusalem. He knows the sheep-gate and the pool near it (Jn.5:2); the pool of Siloam (Jn.9:7); Solomon's Porch (Jn.10:23); the brook Kidron (Jn.18:1); the pavement which is called Gabbatha (Jn.19:13); Golgotha, which is like a skull (Jn.19:17).

It must be remembered that Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 and that John did not write until A.D. 100 or thereby; and yet from his memory he knows Jerusalem like the back of his hand.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH JOHN WROTE

We have seen that there are very real differences between the Fourth and the other three gospels; and we have seen that, whatever the reason, it was not lack of knowledge on John's part. We must now go on to ask, What was the aim with which John wrote? If we can discover this we will discover why he selected and treated his facts as he did.

The Fourth Gospel was written in Ephesus about the year A.D. 100. By that time two special features had emerged in the situation of the Christian church. First, Christianity had gone out into the Gentile world. By that time the Christian church was no longer predominantly Jewish; it was in fact overwhelmingly gentile. The vast majority of its members now came, not from a Jewish, but an Hellenistic background. That being so, Christianity had to be restated. It was not that the truth of Christianity had changed; but the terms and the categories in which it found expression had to be changed.

Take but one instance. A Greek might take up the Gospel according to St. Matthew. No sooner had he opened it than he was confronted with a long genealogy. Genealogies were familiar enough to the Jew but quite unintelligible to the Greek. He would read on. He would be confronted with a Jesus who was the Son of David, a king of whom the Greeks had never heard, and the symbol of a racial and nationalist ambition which was nothing to the Greek. He would be faced with the picture of Jesus as Mesias, a term of which the Greek had never heard. Must the Greek who wished to become a Christian be compelled to reorganize his whole thinking into Jewish categories? Must he learn a good deal about Jewish history and Jewish apocalyptic literature (which told about the coming of the Messiah) before he could become a Christian? As E. J.

Goodspeed phrased it: "Was there no way in which he might be introduced directly to the values of Christian salvation without being for ever routed, we might even say, detoured, through Judaism?"

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The Greek was one of the world's great thinkers. Had he to abandon all his own great intellectual heritage in order to think entirely in Jewish terms and categories of thought?

John faced that problem fairly and squarely. And he found one of the greatest solutions which ever entered the mind of man. Later on, in the commentary, we shall deal much more fully with John's great solution. At the moment we touch on it briefly. The Greeks had two great conceptions.

(a) They had the conception of the Logos. In Greek logos (GSN3056) means two things--it means word and it means reason. The Jew was entirely familiar with the all-powerful word of God. "God said, Let there be light; and there was light" (Gen.1:3). The Greek was entirely familiar with the thought of reason. He looked at this world; he saw a magnificent and dependable order. Night and day came with unfailing regularity; the year kept its seasons in unvarying course; the stars and the planets moved in their unaltering path; nature had her unvarying laws. What produced this order? The Greek answered unhesitatingly, The Logos (GSN3056), the mind of God, is responsible for the majestic order of the world. He went on, What is it that gives man power to think, to reason and to know? Again he answered unhesitatingly, The Logos (GSN3056), the mind of God, dwelling within a man makes him a thinking rational being.

John seized on this. It was in this way that he thought of Jesus. He said to the Greeks, "All your lives you have been fascinated by this great, guiding, controlling mind of God. The mind of God has come to earth in the man Jesus. Look at him and you see what the mind and thought of God are like." John had discovered a new category in which the Greek might think of Jesus, a category in which Jesus was presented as nothing less than God acting in the form of a man.

(b) They had the conception of two worlds. The Greek always conceived of two worlds. The one was the world in which we live. It was a wonderful world in its way but a world of shadows and copies and unrealities. The other was the real world, in which the great realities, of which our earthly things are only poor, pale copies, stand for ever. To the Greek the unseen world was the real one; the seen world was only shadowy unreality.

Plato systematized this way of thinking in his doctrine of forms or ideas. He held that in the unseen world there was the perfect pattern of everything, and the things of this world were shadowy copies of these eternal patterns. To put it simply, Plato held that somewhere there was a perfect pattern of a table of which all earthly tables are inadequate copies; somewhere there was the perfect pattern of the good and the beautiful of which all earthly goodness and earthly beauty are imperfect copies. And the great reality, the supreme idea, the pattern of all patterns and the form of all forms was God. The great problem was how to get into this world of reality, how to get out of our shadows into the eternal truths.

John declares that that is what Jesus enables us to do. He is reality come to earth. The Greek word for real in this sense is alethinos (GSN0228); it is very closely connected with the word alethes (GSN0227), which means true, and aletheia (GSN0225), which means "the truth." The King James and Revised Standard Versions translate alethinos (GSN0228) true; they would be far better to translate it "real." Jesus is the real light (Jn.1:9); Jesus is the real bread (Jn.6:32); Jesus is the real

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vine (Jn.15:1); to Jesus belongs the real judgment (Jn.8:16). Jesus alone has reality in our world of shadows and imperfections.

Something follows from that. Every action that Jesus did was, therefore, not only an act in time but a window which allows us to see into reality. That is what John means when he talks of Jesus' miracles as signs (semeia - GSN4592). The wonderful works of Jesus were not simply wonderful; they were windows opening onto the reality which is God. This explains why John tells the miracle stories in a quite different way from the other three gospel writers. There are two differences.

(a) In the Fourth Gospel we miss the note of compassion which is in the miracle stories of the others. In the others Jesus is moved with compassion for the leper (Mk.1:41); his sympathy goes out to Jairus (Mk.5:22); he is sorry for the father of the epileptic boy (Mk.9:14); when he raises to life the son of the widow of Nain, Luke says with an infinite tenderness, "He gave him to his mother" (Lk.7:15). But in John the miracles are not so much deeds of compassion as deeds which demonstrate the glory of Christ. After the miracle at Cana of Galilee, John comments: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory" (Jn.2:11). The raising of Lazarus happens "for the glory of God" (Jn.11:4). The blind man's blindness existed to allow a demonstration of the glory of the works of God (Jn.9:3). To John it was not that there was no love and compassion in the miracles; but in every one of them he saw the glory of the reality of God breaking into time and into human affairs.

(b) Often the miracles of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel are accompanied by a long discourse. The feeding of the five thousand is followed by the long discourse on the bread of life (Jn.6); the healing of the blind man springs from the saying that Jesus is the light of the world (Jn.9); the raising of Lazarus leads up to the saying that Jesus is the resurrection and the life (Jn.11). To John the miracles were not simply single events in time; they were insights into what God is always doing and what Jesus always is; they were windows into the reality of God. Jesus did not merely once feed five thousand people; that was an illustration that he is for ever the real bread of life. Jesus did not merely once open the eyes of a blind man; he is for ever the light of the world. Jesus did not merely once raise Lazarus from the dead; he is for ever and for all men the resurrection and the life.

To John a miracle was never an isolated act; it was always a window into the reality of what Jesus always was and always is and always did and always does.

It was with this in mind that that great scholar Clement of Alexandria (about A.D. 230) arrived at one of the most famous and true of all verdicts about the origin and aim of the Fourth Gospel. It was his view that the gospels containing the genealogies had been written first--that is, Luke and Matthew; that then Mark at the request of many who had heard Peter preach composed his gospel, which embodied the preaching material of Peter; and that then "last of all, John, perceiving that what had reference to the bodily things of Jesus' ministry had been sufficiently related, and encouraged by his friends, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote a spiritual gospel" (quoted in Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History* 6 : 14). What Clement meant was that John was not so much interested in the mere facts as in the meaning of the facts, that it was not facts he was after but truth.

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John did not see the events of Jesus' life simply as events in time; he saw them as windows looking into eternity, and he pressed towards the spiritual meaning of the events and the words of Jesus' life in a way that the other three gospels did not attempt.

That is still one of the truest verdicts on the Fourth Gospel ever reached. John did write, not an historical, but a spiritual gospel.

So then, first of all, John presented Jesus as the mind of God in a person come to earth, and as the one person who possesses reality instead of shadows and able to lead men out of the shadows into the real world of which Plato and the great Greeks had dreamed. The Christianity which had once been clothed in Jewish categories had taken to itself the greatness of the thought of the Greeks.

THE RISE OF THE HERESIES

The second of the great facts confronting the church when the Fourth Gospel was written was the rise of heresy. It was now seventy years since Jesus had been crucified. By this time the church was an organisation and an institution. Theologies and creeds were being thought out and stated; and inevitably the thoughts of some people went down mistaken ways and heresies resulted. A heresy is seldom a complete untruth; it usually results when one facet of the truth is unduly emphasised. We can see at least two of the heresies which the writer of the Fourth Gospel sought to combat.

(a) There were certain Christians, especially Jewish Christians, who gave too high a place to John the Baptist. There was something about him which had an inevitable appeal to the Jews. He walked in the prophetic succession and talked with the prophetic voice. We know that in later times there was an accepted sect of John the Baptist within the orthodox Jewish faith. In Ac.19:1-7 we come upon a little group of twelve men on the fringe of the Christian church who had never gotten beyond the baptism of John.

Over and over again the Fourth Gospel quietly, but definitely, relegates John to his proper place. Over and over again John himself denies that he has ever claimed or possessed the highest place, and without qualification yields that place to Jesus. We have already seen that in the other gospels the ministry of Jesus did not begin until John the Baptist had been put into prison, but that in the Fourth Gospel their ministries overlap. The writer of the Fourth Gospel may well have used that arrangement to show John and Jesus in actual meeting and to show that John used these meetings to admit, and to urge others to admit, the supremacy of Jesus. It is carefully pointed out that John is not that light (Jn.1:8). He is shown as quite definitely disclaiming all Messianic aspirations (Jn.1:20ff; Jn.3:28; Jn.4:1; Jn.10:41). It is not even permissible to think of him as the highest witness (Jn.5:36).

There is no criticism at all of John the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel; but there is a rebuke to those who would give him a place which ought to belong to Jesus and to Jesus alone.

(b) A certain type of heresy which was very widely spread in the days when the Fourth Gospel was written is called by the general name of Gnosticism. Without some understanding of it much of John's greatness and much of his aim will be missed. The basic doctrine of Gnosticism was that matter is essentially evil and spirit is essentially good. The Gnostics went on to argue that on that

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basis God himself cannot touch matter and therefore did not create the world. What he did was to put out a series of emanations. Each of these emanations was further from him, until at last there was one so distant from him that it could touch matter. That emanation was the creator of the world.

By itself that idea is bad enough, but it was made worse by an addition. The Gnostics held that each emanation knew less and less about God, until there was a stage when the emanations were not only ignorant of God but actually hostile to him. So they finally came to the conclusion that the creator god was not only different from the real God, but was also quite ignorant of and actively hostile to him. Cerinthus, one of the leaders of the Gnostics, said that "the world was created, not by God, but by a certain power far separate from him, and far distant from that Power who is over the universe, and ignorant of the God who is over all."

The Gnostics believed that God had nothing to do with the creating of the world. That is why John begins his gospel with the ringing statement: "All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn.1:3). That is why John insists that "God so loved the world" (Jn.3:16). In face of the Gnostics who so mistakenly spiritualized God into a being who could not possibly have anything to do with the world, John presented the Christian doctrine of the God who made the world and whose presence fills the world that he has made.

The beliefs of the Gnostics impinged on their ideas of Jesus.

(a) Some of the Gnostics held that Jesus was one of the emanations which had proceeded from God. They held that he was not in any real sense divine; that he was only a kind of demigod who was more or less distant from the real God; that he was simply one of a chain of lesser beings between God and the world.

(b) Some of the Gnostics held that Jesus had no real body. A body is matter and God could not touch matter; therefore Jesus was a kind of phantom without real flesh and blood. They held, for instance, that when he stepped on the ground he left no footprint, for his body had neither weight nor substance. They could never have said: "The Word became flesh" (Jn.1:14). Augustine tells how he had read much in the work of the philosophers of his day; he had found much that was very like what was in the New Testament, but, he said: "'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us' I did not read there." That is why John in his First Letter insists that Jesus came in the flesh, and declares that any one who denies that fact is moved by the spirit of antichrist (1Jn.4:3). This particular heresy is known as Docetism. Docetism comes from the Greek word *dokein* (GSN1380) which means to seem ; and the heresy is so called because it held that Jesus only seemed to be a man.

(c) Some Gnostics held a variation of that heresy. They held that Jesus was a man into whom the Spirit of God came at his baptism; that Spirit remained with him throughout his life until the end; but since the Spirit of God could never suffer and die, it left him before he was crucified. They gave Jesus' cry on the Cross as : "My power, my power, why hast thou forsaken me?" And in their books they told of people talking on the Mount of Olives to a form which looked exactly like Jesus while the man Jesus died on the Cross.

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So then the Gnostic heresies issued in one of two beliefs. They believed either that Jesus was not really divine but simply one of a series of emanations from God, or that he was not in any sense human but a kind of phantom in the shape of a man. The Gnostic beliefs at one and the same time destroyed the real godhead and the real manhood of Jesus.

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

The fact that John is out to correct both these Gnostic tendencies explains a curious paradoxical double emphasis in his gospel. On the one hand, there is no gospel which so uncompromisingly stresses the real humanity of Jesus. Jesus was angry with those who bought and sold in the Temple courts (Jn.2:15); he was physically tired as he sat by the well which was near Sychar in Samaria (Jn.4:6); his disciples offered him food in the way in which they would offer it to any hungry man (Jn.4:31); he had sympathy with those who were hungry and with those who were afraid (Jn.6:5,20); he knew grief and he wept tears as any mourner might do (Jn.11:33,35,38); in the agony of the Cross the cry of his parched lips was: "I thirst" (Jn.19:28). The Fourth Gospel shows us a Jesus who was no shadowy, docetic figure; it shows us one who knew the weariness of an exhausted body and the wounds of a distressed mind and heart. It is the truly human Jesus whom the Fourth Gospel sets before us.

THE DEITY OF JESUS

On the other hand, there is no gospel which sets before us such a view of the deity of Jesus.

(a) John stresses the preexistence of Jesus. "Before Abraham was," said Jesus, "I am" (Jn.8:58). He talks of the glory which he had with the Father before the world was made (Jn.17:5). Again and again he speaks of his coming down from heaven (Jn.6:33-38). John saw in Jesus one who had always been, even before the world began.

(b) The Fourth Gospel stresses more than any of the others the omniscience of Jesus. It is John's view that apparently miraculously Jesus knew the past record of the woman of Samaria (Jn.4:16-17); apparently without anyone telling him he knew how long the man beside the healing pool had been ill (Jn.5:6); before he asked it, he knew the answer to the question he put to Philip (Jn.6:6); he knew that Judas would betray him (Jn.6:61-64); he knew of the death of Lazarus before anyone told him of it (Jn.11:14). John saw in Jesus one who had a special and miraculous knowledge independent of anything which any man might tell him. He needed to ask no questions because he knew all the answers.

(c) The Fourth Gospel stresses the fact, as John saw it, that Jesus always acted entirely on his own initiative and uninfluenced by anyone else. It was not his mother's request which moved him to the miracle at Cana of Galilee; it was his own personal decision (Jn.2:4); the urging of his brothers had nothing to do with the visit which he paid to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn.7:10); no man took his life from him--no man could; he laid it down purely voluntarily (Jn.10:18; Jn.19:11). As John saw it, Jesus had a divine independence from all human influence. He was self-determined.

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To meet the Gnostics and their strange beliefs John presents us with a Jesus who was undeniably human and who yet was undeniably divine.

THE AUTHOR OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

We have seen that the aim of the writer of the Fourth Gospel was to present the Christian faith in such a way that it would commend itself to the Greek world to which Christianity had gone out, and also to combat the heresies and mistaken ideas which had arisen within the church. We go on to ask, Who is that writer? Tradition answers unanimously that the author was John the apostle. We shall see that beyond doubt the authority of John lies behind the gospel, although it may well be that its actual form and penmanship did not come from his hand. Let us, then, collect what we know about him.

He was the younger son of Zebedee, who possessed a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee and was well enough off to be able to employ hired servants to help him with his work (Mk.1:19-20). His mother was Salome, and it seems likely that she was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matt.27:56; Mk.16:1). With his brother James he obeyed the call of Jesus (Mk.1:20). It would seem that James and John were in partnership with Peter in the fishing trade (Lk.5:7-10). He was one of the inner circle of the disciples, for the lists of the disciples always begin with the names of Peter, James and John, and there were certain great occasions when Jesus took these three specially with him (Mk.3:17; Mk.5:37; Mk.9:2; Mk.14:33).

In character he was clearly a turbulent and ambitious man. Jesus gave to him and to his brother the name Boanerges, which the gospel writers take to mean Sons of Thunder. John and his brother James were completely exclusive and intolerant (Mk.9:38; Lk.9:49). So violent was their temper that they were prepared to blast a Samaritan village out of existence because it would not give them hospitality when they were on their journey to Jerusalem (Lk.9:54). Either they or their mother Salome had the ambition that when Jesus came into his kingdom, they might be his principal ministers of state (Mk.10:35; Matt.20:20). In the other three gospels John appears as a leader of the apostolic band, one of the inner circle, and yet a turbulent ambitious and intolerant character.

In the Book of Acts John always appears as the companion of Peter, and he himself never speaks at all. His name is still one of the three names at the head of the apostolic list (Acts 1:13). He is with Peter when the lame man is healed at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple (Ac.3:1ff). With Peter he is brought before the Sanhedrin and faces the Jewish leaders with a courage and a boldness that astonished them (Ac.4:1-13). With Peter he goes from Jerusalem to Samaria to survey the work done by Philip (Ac.8:14).

In Paul's letters he appears only once. In Galatians 2:9 he is named as one of the pillars of the church along with Peter and James, and with them is depicted as giving his approval to the work of Paul.

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John was a strange mixture. He was one of the leaders of the Twelve; he was one of the inner circle of Jesus' closest friends; at the same time he was a man of temper and ambition and intolerance, and yet of courage.

We may follow John into the stories told of him in the early church. Eusebius tells us that he was banished to Patmos in the reign of Domitian (Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History* 3 : 23). In the same passage Eusebius tells a characteristic story about John, a story which he received from Clement of Alexandria. John became a kind of bishop of Asia Minor and was visiting one of his churches near Ephesus. In the congregation he saw a tall and exceptionally fine-looking young man. He turned to the elder in charge of the congregation and said to him: "I commit that young man into your charge and into your care, and I call this congregation to witness that I do so." The elder took the young man into his own house and cared for him and instructed him, and the day came when he was baptized and received into the church. But very soon afterwards he fell in with evil friends and embarked on such a career of crime that he ended up by becoming the leader of a band of murdering and pillaging brigands.

Some time afterwards John returned to the congregation. He said to the elder: "Restore to me the trust which I and the Lord committed to you and to the church of which you are in charge." At first the elder did not understand of what John was speaking. "I mean," said John, "that I am asking you for the soul of the young man whom I entrusted to you." "Alas!" said the elder, "he is dead." "Dead?" said John. "He is dead to God," said the elder. "He fell from grace; he was forced to flee from the city for his crimes and now he is a brigand in the mountains." Straightway John went to the mountains. Deliberately he allowed himself to be captured by the robber band. They brought him before the young man who was now the chief of the band and, in his shame, the young man tried to run away from him. John, though an old man, pursued him. "My son," he cried, "are you running away from your father? I am feeble and far advanced in age; have pity on me, my son; fear not; there is yet hope of salvation for you.

I will stand for you before the Lord Christ. If need be I will gladly die for you as he died for me. Stop, stay, believe! It is Christ who has sent me to you." The appeal broke the heart of the young man. He stopped, threw away his weapons, and wept. Together he and John came down the mountainside and he was brought back into the church and into the Christian way. There we see the love and the courage of John still in operation.

Eusebius (3 : 28) tells another story of John which he got from the works of Irenaeus. We have seen that one of the leaders of the Gnostic heresy was a man called Cerinthus. "The apostle John once entered a bath to bathe; but, when he learned that Cerinthus was within, he sprang from his place and rushed out of the door, for he could not bear to remain under the same roof with him. He advised those who were with him to do the same. 'Let us flee,' he said, 'lest the bath fall, for Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.'" There we have another glimpse of the temper of John. Boanerges was not quite dead.

Cassian tells another famous story about John. One day he was found playing with a tame partridge. A narrower and more rigid brother rebuked him for thus wasting his time, and John answered: "The bow that is always bent will soon cease to shoot straight."

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It is Jerome who tells the story of the last words of John. When he was dying, his disciples asked him if he had any last message to leave them. "Little children," he said, "love one another." Again and again he repeated it; and they asked him if that was all he had to say. "It is enough," he said, "for it is the Lord's command."

Such then is our information about John; and he emerges a figure of fiery temper, of wide ambition, of undoubted courage, and, in the end, of gentle love.

THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

If we have been following our references closely we will have noticed one thing. All our information about John comes from the first three gospels. It is the astonishing fact that the Fourth Gospel never mentions the apostle John from beginning to end. But it does mention two other people.

First, it speaks of the disciple whom Jesus loved. There are four mentions of him. He was leaning on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper (Jn.13:23-25); it is into his care that Jesus committed Mary as he died upon his Cross (Jn.19:25-27); it was Peter and he whom Mary Magdalene met on her return from the empty tomb on the first Easter morning (Jn.20:2); he was present at the last resurrection appearance of Jesus by the lake-side (Jn.21:20).

Second, the Fourth Gospel has a kind of character whom we might call the witness. As the Fourth Gospel tells of the spear thrust into the side of Jesus and the issue of the water and the blood, there comes the comment: "He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth--that you also may believe" (Jn.19:35). At the end of the gospel comes the statement that it was the beloved disciple who testified of these things "and we know that his testimony is true" (Jn.21:24).

Here we are faced with rather a strange thing. In the Fourth Gospel John is never mentioned, but the beloved disciple is and in addition there is a witness of some kind to the whole story. It has never really been doubted in tradition that the beloved disciple is John. A few have tried to identify him with Lazarus, for Jesus is said to have loved Lazarus (Jn.11:3,5), or with the Rich Young Ruler, of whom it is said that Jesus, looking on him, loved him (Mk.10:21). But although the gospel never says so in so many words, tradition has always identified the beloved disciple with John, and there is no real need to doubt the identification.

But a very real point arises--suppose John himself actually did the writing of the gospel, would he really be likely to speak of himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved? Would he really be likely to pick himself out like this, and, as it were, to say: "I was his favourite; he loved me best of all"? It is surely very unlikely that John would confer such a title on himself. If it was conferred by others, it is a lovely title; if it was conferred by himself, it comes perilously near to an almost incredible self-conceit.

Is there any way then that the gospel can be John's own eye-witness story, and yet at the same time have been actually written down by someone else?

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THE PRODUCTION OF THE CHURCH

In our search for the truth we begin by noting one of the outstanding and unique features of the Fourth Gospel. The most remarkable thing about it is the long speeches of Jesus. Often they are whole chapters long, and are entirely unlike the way in which Jesus is portrayed as speaking in the other three gospels. The Fourth Gospel, as we have seen, was written about the year A.D. 100, that is, about seventy years after the crucifixion. Is it possible after these seventy years to look on these speeches as word for word reports of what Jesus said? Or can we explain them in some way that is perhaps even greater than that? We must begin by holding in our minds the fact of the speeches and the question which they inevitably raise.

And we have something to add to that. It so happens that in the writings of the early church we have a whole series of accounts of the way in which the Fourth Gospel came to be written. The earliest is that of Irenaeus who was bishop of Lyons about A.D. 177; and Irenaeus was himself a pupil of Polycarp, who in turn had actually been a pupil of John. There is therefore a direct link between Irenaeus and John. Irenaeus writes:

"John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leant upon his breast, himself also published the gospel in Ephesus, when he was living in Asia."

The suggestive thing there is that Irenaeus does not merely say that John wrote the gospel; he says that John published (exedoke) it in Ephesus. The word that Irenaeus uses makes it sound, not like the private publication of some personal memoir, but like the public issue of some almost official document.

The next account is that of Clement who was head of the great school of Alexandria about A.D. 230. He writes:

"Last of all, John perceiving that the bodily facts had been made plain in the gospel, being urged by his friends, composed a spiritual gospel."

The important thing here is the phrase being urged by his friends. It begins to become clear that the Fourth Gospel is far more than one man's personal production and that there is a group, a community, a church behind it. On the same lines, a tenth-century manuscript called the Codex Toletanus, which prefaces the New Testament books with short descriptions, prefaces the Fourth Gospel thus:

The apostle John, whom the Lord Jesus loved most, last of all

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wrote this gospel, at the request of the bishops of Asia, against Cerinthus and other heretics."

Again we have the idea that behind the Fourth Gospel there is the authority of a group and of a church.

We now turn to a very important document, known as the Muratorian Canon. It is so called after a scholar Muratori who discovered it. It is the first list of New Testament books which the church ever issued and was compiled in Rome about A.D. 170. Not only does it list the New Testament books, it also gives short accounts of the origin and nature and contents of each of them. Its account of the way in which the Fourth Gospel came to be written is extremely important and illuminating.

"At the request of his fellow-disciples and of his bishops, John, one of the disciples, said: 'Fast with me for three days from this time and whatsoever shall be revealed to each of us, whether it be favourable to my writing or not, let us relate it to one another.' On the same night it was revealed to Andrew that John should relate all things, aided by the revision of all."

We cannot accept all that statement, because it is not possible that Andrew, the apostle, was in Ephesus in A.D. 100; but the point is that it is stated as clearly as possible that, while the authority and the mind and the memory behind the Fourth Gospel are that of John, it is clearly and definitely the product, not of one man, but of a group and a community.

Now we can see something of what happened. About the year A.D. 100 there was a group of men in Ephesus whose leader was John. They revered him as a saint and they loved him as a father. He must have been almost a hundred years old. Before he died, they thought most wisely that it would be a great thing if the aged apostle set down his memories of the years when he had been with Jesus. But in the end they did far more than that. We can think of them sitting down and reliving the old days. One would say: "Do you remember how Jesus said ... ?" And John would say: "Yes, and now we know that he meant..."

In other words this group was not only writing down what Jesus said; that would have been a mere feat of memory. They were writing down what Jesus meant; that was the guidance of the Holy Spirit. John had thought about every word that Jesus had said; and he had thought under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who was so real to him. W. M. Macgregor has a sermon entitled: "What Jesus becomes to a man who has known him long." That is a perfect description of the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel. A. H. N. Green Armytage puts the thing perfectly in his book John who saw. Mark, he says, suits the missionary with his clear-cut account of the facts of Jesus' life; Matthew suits the teacher with his systematic account of the teaching of Jesus; Luke suits the parish minister or priest with his wide sympathy and his picture of Jesus as the friend of all; but John is the gospel of the contemplative.

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He goes on to speak of the apparent contrast between Mark and John. "The two gospels are in a sense the same gospel. Only, where Mark saw things plainly, bluntly, literally, John saw them subtly, profoundly, spiritually. We might say that John lit Mark's pages by the lantern of a lifetime's meditation." Wordsworth defined poetry as "Emotion recollected in tranquillity". That is a perfect description of the Fourth Gospel. That is why John is unquestionably the greatest of all the gospels. Its aim is, not to give us what Jesus said like a newspaper report, but to give us what Jesus meant. In it the Risen Christ still speaks. John is not so much The Gospel according to St. John; it is rather The Gospel according to the Holy Spirit. It was not John of Ephesus who wrote the Fourth Gospel; it was the Holy Spirit who wrote it through John.

THE PENMAN OF THE GOSPEL

We have one question still to ask. We can be quite sure that the mind and the memory behind the Fourth Gospel is that of John the apostle; but we have also seen that behind it is a witness who was the writer, in the sense that he was the actual penman. Can we find out who he was? We know from what the early church writers tell us that there were actually two Johns in Ephesus at the same time. There was John the apostle, but there was another John, who was known as John the elder.

Papias, who loved to collect all that he could find about the history of the New Testament and the story of Jesus, gives us some very interesting information. He was Bishop of Hierapolis, which is quite near Ephesus, and his dates are from about A.D. 70 to about A.D. 145. That is to say, he was actually a contemporary of John. He writes how he tried to find out "what Andrew said or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord; and what things Aristion and the elder John, the disciples of the Lord, say." In Ephesus there was the apostle John, and the elder John; and the elder John was so well-loved a figure that he was actually known as The Elder. He clearly had a unique place in the church. Both Eusebius and Dionysius the Great tell us that even to their own days in Ephesus there were two famous tombs, the one of John the apostle, and the other of John the elder.

Now let us turn to the two little letters, Second John and Third John. The letters come from the same hand as the gospel, and how do they begin? The second letter begins: "The elder unto the elect lady and her children" (2Jn.1). The third letter begins: "The elder unto the beloved Gaius" (3Jn.1). Here we have our solution. The actual penman of the letters was John the elder; the mind and memory behind them was the aged John the apostle, the master whom John the elder always described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

THE PRECIOUS GOSPEL

The more we know about the Fourth Gospel the more precious it becomes. For seventy years John had thought of Jesus. Day by day the Holy Spirit had opened out to him the meaning of what Jesus said. So when John was near the century of life and his days were numbered, he and his friends sat down to remember. John the elder held the pen to write for his master, John the apostle; and the last of the apostles set down, not only what he had heard Jesus say, but also what he now knew Jesus had meant. He remembered how Jesus had said: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth"

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(Jn.16:12-13). There were many things which seventy years ago he had not understood; there were many things which in these seventy years the Spirit of Truth had revealed to him. These things John set down even as the eternal glory was dawning upon him.

When we read this gospel let us remember that we are reading the gospel which of all the gospels is most the work of the Holy Spirit, speaking to us of the things which Jesus meant, speaking through the mind and memory of John the apostle and by the pen of John the elder. Behind this gospel is the whole church at Ephesus, the whole company of the saints, the last of the apostles, the Holy Spirit, the Risen Christ himself.

NOTE ON THE STORY OF THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY

John 8:2-11

To many this is one of the loveliest and the most precious stories in the gospels; and yet it has great difficulties attaching to it.

The older the manuscripts of the New Testament are, the more valuable they are. They were all copied by hand, and obviously the nearer they are to the original writings the more likely they are to be correct. We call these very early manuscripts the Uncial manuscripts, because they are written in capital letters; and we base the text of the New Testament on the earliest ones, which date from the fourth to the sixth century. The fact is that out of all these early manuscripts this story occurs only in one, and that is not one of the best. Six of them omit it completely. Two leave a blank space where it should come. It is not till we come to the late Greek manuscripts and the medieval manuscripts that we find this story, and even then it is often marked to show that it is doubtful.

Another source of our knowledge of the text of the New Testament is what are called the versions; that is, the translations into languages other than Greek. This story is not included in the early Syriac version, nor in the Coptic or Egyptian version, nor in some of the early Latin versions.

Again, none of the early fathers seems to know anything about it. Certainly they never mention it or comment on it. Origen, Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Cyril of Alexandria on the Greek side do not mention it. The first Greek commentator to remark on it is Euthymius Zigabenus whose date is A.D. 1118, and even he says that it is not in the best manuscripts.

Where, then, did this incident come from? Jerome certainly knew it in the fourth century, for he included it in the Vulgate. We know that Augustine and Ambrose both knew it, for they comment on it. We know that it is in all the later manuscripts. It is to be noted that its position varies a great deal. In some manuscripts it is put at the end of the fourth gospel; and in some it is inserted after Lk.21:38.

But we can trace it even further back. It is quoted in a third century book called The Apostolic Constitutions, where it is given as a warning to bishops who are too strict. Eusebius, the Church historian, says that Papias tells a story "of a woman who was accused of many sins before the Lord," and Papias lived not very long after A.D. 100.

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Here, then, are the facts. This story can be traced as far back as very early in the second century. When Jerome produced the Vulgate he, without question, included it. The later manuscripts and the medieval manuscripts all have it. And yet none of the great manuscripts includes it. None of the great Greek fathers of the Church ever mentions it. But some of the great Latin fathers did know it, and speak of it.

What is the explanation? We need not be afraid that we shall have to let this lovely story go; for it is guarantee enough of its genuineness that we can trace it back to almost A.D. 100. But we do need some explanation of the fact that none of the great manuscripts includes it. Moffatt, Weymouth and Rieu print it in brackets; and the Revised Standard Version prints it in small type at the foot of the page.

Augustine gives us a hint. He says that this story was removed from the text of the gospel because "some were of slight faith," and "to avoid scandal." We cannot tell for certain, but it would seem that in the very early days the people who edited the text of the New Testament thought that this was a dangerous story, a justification for a light view of adultery, and therefore omitted it. After all, the Christian Church was a little island in a sea of paganism. Its members were so apt to relapse into a way of life where chastity was unknown; and were for ever open to pagan infection. But as time went on the danger grew less, or was less feared, and the story, which had always circulated by word of mouth and which one manuscript retained, came back.

It is not likely that it is now in the place where it ought to be. It was probably inserted here to illustrate Jesus' saying in Jn.8:15: "I judge no man." In spite of the doubt that the modern translations cast on it, and in spite of the fact that the early manuscripts do not include it, we may be sure that this is a real story about Jesus, although one so gracious that for long men were afraid to tell it.

NOTE ON THE DATE OF THE CRUCIFIXION

There is one great problem in the fourth gospel which we did not take note of at all when we were studying it. Here we can note it only very briefly, for it is really an unsolved problem on which the literature is immense.

It is quite certain that the fourth gospel and the other three give different dates for the Crucifixion, and take different views of what the last meal together was.

In the Synoptic gospels it is clear that the Last Supper was the Passover and that Jesus was crucified on Passover Day. It must be remembered that the Jewish day began at 6 p.m. on what to us is the day before. The Passover fell on 15th Nisan; but 15th Nisan began on what to us is 14th Nisan at 6 p.m. Mark seems to be quite clear; he says: "And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the passover?" Jesus gives them instructions. Then Mark goes on: "And they prepared the passover, and when it was evening he came with the twelve." (Mk.14:12-17) Undoubtedly Mark wished to show the Last Supper as a Passover meal and that Jesus was crucified on Passover day; and Matthew and Luke follow Mark.

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On the other hand John is quite clear that Jesus was crucified on the day before the passover. He begins his story of the last meal: "Now before the feast of the Passover..." (Jn.13:1). When Judas left the upper room, they thought he had gone to prepare for the Passover (Jn.13:29). The Jews would not enter the judgment hall lest they should become unclean and be prevented from eating the Passover (Jn.18:28). The judgment is during the preparation for the Passover (Jn.19:14).

There is here a contradiction for which there is no compromise solution. Either the Synoptic gospels are correct or John is. Scholars are much divided. But it seems most likely that the Synoptics are correct. John was always looking for hidden meanings. In his story Jesus is crucified as somewhere near the sixth hour (Jn.19:14). It was just then that in the Temple the Passover lambs were being killed. By far the likeliest thing is that John dated things in order that Jesus would be crucified at exactly the same time as the Passover lambs were being killed, so that he might be seen as the great Passover Lamb who saved his people and took away the sins of the world. It seems that the Synoptic gospels are right intact, while John is right in truth; and John was always more interested in eternal truth than in mere historic fact.

There is no full explanation of this obvious discrepancy; but this seems to us the best.

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John 1:1-18

THE WORD

John 1:1-18

When the world had its beginning, the Word was already there; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. This Word was in the beginning with God. He was the agent through whom all things were made; and there is not a single thing which exists in this world which came into being without him. In him was life and the life was the light of men; and the light shines in the darkness, because the darkness has never been able to conquer it. There emerged a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness, in order to bear witness to the light, that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; his function was to bear witness to the light. He was the real light, who, in his coming into the world, gives light to every man. He was in the world, and, although the world was made by him, the world did not recognize him. It was into his own home that he came, and yet his own people did not receive him.

To all those who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God. These were born, not of blood, nor of any human impulse, nor of any man's will, but their birth was of God. So the Word became a person, and took up his abode in our being, full of grace and truth; and we beheld his glory, glory such as an only son receives from his father. John was his witness, for he cried: "This is he of whom I said to you, he who comes after me has been advanced before me, because he was before me. On his fullness we all of us have drawn, and we have received grace upon grace, because it was the law which was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the unique one, he who is God, he who is in the bosom of the Father, who has told us all about God."

We shall go on to study this passage in short sections and in detail; but, before we do so, we must try to understand what John was seeking to say when he described Jesus as the Word.

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

The first chapter of the Fourth Gospel is one of the greatest adventures of religious thought ever achieved by the mind of man.

It was not long before the Christian church was confronted with a very basic problem. It had begun in Judaism. In the beginning all its members had been Jews. By human descent Jesus was a Jew, and, to all intents and purposes, except for brief visits to the districts of Tyre and Sidon, and to the Decapolis, he was never outside Palestine. Christianity began amongst the Jews; and therefore inevitably it spoke in the Jewish language and used Jewish categories of thought.

But although it was cradled in Judaism it very soon went out into the wider world. Within thirty years of Jesus' death it had travelled all over Asia Minor and Greece and had arrived in Rome. By A.D. 60 there must have been a hundred thousand Greeks in the church for every Jew who was a Christian. Jewish ideas were completely strange to the Greeks. To take but one outstanding example, the Greeks had never heard of the Messiah. The very centre of Jewish expectation, the coming of the Messiah, was an idea that was quite alien to the Greeks. The very category in which

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the Jewish Christians conceived and presented Jesus meant nothing to them. Here then was the problem--how was Christianity to be presented to the Greek world?

Lecky, the historian, once said that the progress and spread of any idea depends, not only on its strength and force but on the predisposition to receive it of the age to which it is presented. The task of the Christian church was to create in the Greek world a predisposition to receive the Christian message. As E. J. Goodspeed put it, the question was, "Must a Greek who was interested in Christianity be routed through Jewish Messianic ideas and through Jewish ways of thinking, or could some new approach be found which would speak out of his background to his mind and heart?" The problem was how to present Christianity in such a way that a Greek would understand.

Round about the year A.D. 100 there was a man in Ephesus who was fascinated by that problem. His name was John. He lived in a Greek city. He dealt with Greeks to whom Jewish ideas were strange and unintelligible and even uncouth. How could he find a way to present Christianity to these Greeks in a way that they would welcome and understand? Suddenly the solution flashed upon him. In both Greek and Jewish thought there existed the conception of the word. Here was something which could be worked out to meet the double world of Greek Jew. Here was something which belonged to the heritage of both races and that both could understand.

Let us then begin by looking at the two backgrounds of the conception of the word.

THE JEWISH BACKGROUND

In the Jewish background four strands contributed something to the idea of the word.

(i) To the Jew a word was far more than a mere sound; it was something which had an independent existence and which actually did things. As Professor John Paterson has put it: "The spoken word to the Hebrew was fearfully alive.... It was a unit of energy charged with power. It flies like a bullet to its billet." For that very reason the Hebrew was sparing of words. Hebrew speech has fewer than 10,000; Greek speech has 200,000.

A modern poet tells how once the doer of an heroic deed was unable to tell it to his fellow-tribesmen for lack of words. Whereupon there arose a man "afflicted with the necessary magic of words," and he told the story in terms so vivid and so moving that "the words became alive and walked up and down in the hearts of his hearers." The words of the poet became a power. History has many an example of that kind of thing.

When John Knox preached in the days of the Reformation in Scotland it was said that the voice of that one man put more courage into the hearts of his hearers than ten thousand trumpets braying in their ears. His words did things to people. In the days of the French Revolution Rouget de Lisle wrote the Marseillaise and that song sent men marching to revolution. The words did things. In the days of the Second World War, when Britain was bereft alike of allies and of weapons, the words of the Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, as he broadcast to the nation, did things to people.

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It was even more so in the East, and still is. To the eastern people a word is not merely a sound; it is a power which does things. Once when Sir George Adam Smith was travelling in the desert in the East, a group of Moslems gave his party the customary greeting: "Peace be upon you." At the moment they failed to notice that he was a Christian. When they discovered that they had spoken a blessing to an infidel, they hurried back to ask for the blessing back again. The word was like a thing which could be sent out to do things and which could be brought back again. Will Carleton, the poet, expresses something like that:

"Boys flying kites haul in their white-winged birds;
You can't do that way when you're flying words:
'Careful with fire,' is good advice we know,
'Careful with words,' is ten times doubly so.
Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead,
But God himself can't kill them when they're said."

We can well understand how to the eastern peoples words had an independent, power-filled existence.

(ii) Of that general idea of the power of words, the Old Testament is full. Once Isaac had been deceived into blessing Jacob instead of Esau, nothing he could do could take that word of blessing back again (Gen.27). The word had gone out and had begun to act and nothing could stop it. In particular we see the word of God in action in the Creation story. At every stage of it we read: "And God said..." (Gen.1:3,6,11). The word of God is the creating power. Again and again we get this idea of the creative, acting, dynamic word of God. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made" (Ps.33:6). "He sent forth his word and healed them" (Ps.107:20). "He sent forth his commands to the earth; his word runs swiftly" (Ps.147:15). "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa.55:11).

"Is not my word like fire, and, says the Lord, like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" (Jer.23:29). "Thou spakest from the beginning of creation, even the first day, and saidst thus: 'Let heaven and earth be made.' And thy word was a perfect work" (2Esdr.6:38). The writer of the Book of Wisdom addresses God as the one, "who hast made an things with thy word" (Wis.9:1). Everywhere in the Old Testament there is this idea of the powerful, creative word. Even men's words have a kind of dynamic activity; how much more must it be so with God?

(iii) There came into Hebrew religious life something which greatly accentuated the development of this idea of the word of God. For a hundred years and more before the coming of Jesus Hebrew was a forgotten language. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew but the Jews no longer knew the language. The scholars knew it, but not the ordinary people. They spoke a development of Hebrew called Aramaic which is to Hebrew somewhat as modern English is to Anglo-Saxon. Since that was so the Scriptures of the Old Testament had to be translated into this language that the people could understand, and these translations were called the Targums. In the synagogue the scriptures were read in the original Hebrew, but then they were translated into Aramaic and Targums were used as translations.

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The Targums were produced in a time when men were fascinated by the transcendence of God and could think of nothing but the distance and the difference of God. Because of that the men who made the Targums were very much afraid of attributing human thoughts and feelings and actions to God. To put it in technical language, they made every effort to avoid anthropomorphism in speaking of him.

Now the Old Testament regularly speaks of God in a human way; and wherever they met a thing like that the Targums substituted the word of God for the name of God. Let us see how this custom worked. In Exo.19:17 we read that "Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God." The Targums thought that was too human a way to speak of God, so they said that Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet the word of God. In Exo.31:13 we read that God said to the people that the Sabbath "is a sign between me and you throughout your generations." That was far too human a way to speak for the Targums, and so they said that the Sabbath is a sign "between my word and you." Deut.9:3 says that God is a consuming fire, but the Targums translated it that the word of God is a consuming fire.

Isa.48:13 has a great picture of creation: "My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens." That was much too human a picture of God for the Targums and they made God say: "By my word I have founded the earth; and by my strength I have hung up the heavens." Even so wonderful a passage as Deut.33:27 which speaks of God's "everlasting arms" was changed, and became: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and by his word the world was created."

In the Jonathan Targum the phrase the word of God occurs no fewer than about 320 times. It is quite true that it is simply a periphrasis for the name of God; but the fact remains that the word of God became one of the commonest forms of Jewish expression. It was a phrase which any devout Jew would recognize because he heard it so often in the synagogue when scripture was read. Every Jew was used to speaking of the Memra, the word of God.

(iv) At this stage we must look more fully at something we already began to look at in the introduction. The Greek term for word is Logos (GSN3056); but Logos (GSN3056) does not only mean word; it also means reason. For John, and for all the great thinkers who made use of this idea, these two meanings were always closely intertwined. Whenever they used Logos (GSN3056) the twin ideas of the Word of God and the Reason of God were in their minds.

The Jews had a type of literature called The Wisdom Literature which was the concentrated wisdom of sages. It is not usually speculative and philosophical, but practical wisdom for the living and management of life. In the Old Testament the great example of Wisdom Literature is the Book of Proverbs. In this book there are certain passages which give a mysterious life-giving and eternal power to Wisdom (Sophia). In these passages Wisdom has been, as it were, personified, and is thought of as the eternal agent and co-worker of God. There are three main passages.

The first is Prov.3:13-26. Out of that passage we may specially note:

"She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge

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the deeps broke forth, and the clouds drop down the dew"
(Prov.3:18-20).

We remember that Logos (GSN3056) means Word and also means Reason. We have already seen how the Jews thought of the powerful and creative word of God. Here we see the other side beginning to emerge. Wisdom is God's agent in enlightenment and in creation; and Wisdom and Reason are very much the same thing. We have seen how important Logos (GSN3056) was in the sense of Word; now we see it beginning to be important in the sense of Wisdom or Reason.

The second important passage is Prov.4:5-13. In it we may notice:

"Keep hold of instruction, do not let go; guard her, for she is your life."

The Word is the light of men and Wisdom is the light of men. The two ideas are amalgamating with each other rapidly now.

The most important passage of all is in Prov.8:1-9; Prov.2. In it we may specially note:

"The Lord created me (Wisdom is speaking) at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep; when he made firm the skies above; when he established the fountains of the deep; when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command; when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always" (Prov.8:22-30).

When we read that passage there is echo after echo of what John says of the word in the Jn.1. Wisdom had that eternal existence, that light-giving function, that creative power which John attributed to the word, the Logos (GSN3056), with which he identified Jesus Christ.

The development of this idea of wisdom did not stop here. Between the Old and the New Testament, men went on producing this kind of writing called Wisdom Literature. It had so much concentrated wisdom in it and drew so much from the experience of wise men that it was a priceless guide for life. In particular two very great books were written, which are included in the Apocrypha and which it will do any man's soul good to read.

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(a) The first is called The Wisdom of Jesus, the son of Sirach, or, as it is better known, Ecclesiasticus. It too makes much of this great conception of the creative and eternal wisdom of God.

"The sand of the sea, and the drops of the rain,
And the days of eternity who shall number?
The height of the heaven and the breadth of the earth
And the deep and wisdom, who shall search them out?
Wisdom hath been created before all things,
And the understanding of prudence from everlasting"
(Sir.1:1-10).

"I came forth from the mouth of the Most High,
And covered the earth as a mist.
I dwelt in high places,
And my throne is in the pillar of the cloud.
Alone I compassed the circuit of the heaven,
And walked in the depth of the abyss"
(Sir.24:3-5).

"He created me from the beginning of the world,
And to the end I shall not fail"
(Sir.24:9).

Here again we find wisdom as the eternal, creative power which was at God's side in the days of creation and the beginning of time.

(b) Ecclesiasticus was written in Palestine about the year 100 B.C.; and at almost the same time an equally great book was written in Alexandria in Egypt, called The Wisdom of Solomon. In it there is the greatest of all pictures of wisdom. Wisdom is the treasure which men use to become the friends of God (Wis.7:14). Wisdom is the artificer of all things (Wis.7:22). She is the breath of the power of God and a pure effluence flowing from the Almighty (Wis.7:25). She can do all things and makes all things new (Wis.7:27).

But the writer does more than talk about wisdom; he equates wisdom and the word. To him the two ideas are the same. He can talk of the wisdom of God and the word of God in the same sentence and with the same meaning. When he prays to God, his address is:

O God of my fathers, and Lord of mercy, who hast made all
things with thy word, and ordained man through thy wisdom
(Wis.9:2).

He can speak of the word almost as John was to speak:

"For while all things were in quiet silence, and that night was in the

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John 1:1-18

midst of her swift course, thine Almighty word leaped down from heaven out of thy royal throne, as a fierce man of war into the midst of a land of destruction, and brought thine unfeigned commandment as a sharp sword, and standing up filled all things with death; and it touched the heaven but it stood upon the earth (Wis.18:14-16).

To the writer of the Book of Wisdom, wisdom was God's eternal, creative, illuminating power; wisdom and the word were one and the same. It was wisdom and the word who were God's instruments and agents in creation and who ever bring the will of God to the mind and heart of man.

So when John was searching for a way in which he could commend Christianity he found in his own faith and in the record of his own people the idea of the word, the ordinary word which is in itself not merely a sound, but a dynamic thing, the word of God by which God created the world, the word of the Targums which expressed the very idea of the action of God, the wisdom of the Wisdom Literature which was the eternal creative and illuminating power of God. So John said: "If you wish to see that word of God, if you wish to see the creative power of God, if you wish to see that word which brought the world into existence and which gives light and life to every man, look at Jesus Christ. In him the word of God came among you."

THE GREEK BACKGROUND

We began by seeing that John's problem was not that of presenting Christianity to the Jewish world, but of presenting it to the Greek world. How then did this idea of the word fit into Greek thought? It was already there waiting to be used. In Greek thought the idea of the word began away back about 560 B.C., and, strangely enough, in Ephesus where the Fourth Gospel was written.

In 560 B.C. there was an Ephesian philosopher called Heraclitus whose basic idea was that everything is in a state of flux. Everything was changing from day to day and from moment to moment. His famous illustration was that it was impossible to step twice into the same river. You step into a river; you step out; you step in again; but you do not step into the same river, for the water has flowed on and it is a different river. To Heraclitus everything was like that, everything was in a constantly changing state of flux. But if that be so, why was life not complete chaos? How can there be any sense in a world where there was constant flux and change?

The answer of Heraclitus was: all this change and flux was not haphazard; it was controlled and ordered, following a continuous pattern all the time; and that which controlled the pattern was the Logos (GSN3056), the word, the reason of God. To Heraclitus, the Logos (GSN3056) was the principle of order under which the universe continued to exist. Heraclitus went further. He held that not only was there a pattern in the physical world; there was also a pattern in the world of events. He held that nothing moved with aimless feet; in all life and in all the events of life there was a purpose, a plan and a design. And what was it that controlled events? Once again, the answer was Logos (GSN3056).

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Heraclitus took the matter even nearer home. What was it that in us individually told us the difference between right and wrong? What made us able to think and to reason? What enabled us to choose aright and to recognize the truth when we saw it? Once again Heraclitus gave the same answer. What gave a man reason and knowledge of the truth and the ability to judge between right and wrong was the Logos (GSN3056) of God dwelling within him. Heraclitus held that in the world of nature and events "all things happen according to the Logos (GSN3056)," and that in the individual man "the Logos (GSN3056) is the judge of truth." The Logos (GSN3056) was nothing less than the mind of God controlling the world and every man in it.

Once the Greeks had discovered this idea they never let it go. It fascinated them, especially the Stoics. The Stoics were always left in wondering amazement at the order of the world. Order always implies a mind. The Stoics asked: "What keeps the stars in their courses? What makes the tides ebb and flow? What makes day and night come in unalterable order? What brings the seasons round at their appointed times?" And they answered; "All things are controlled by the Logos (GSN3056) of God." The Logos (GSN3056) is the power which puts sense into the world, the power which makes the world an order instead of a chaos, the power which set the world going and keeps it going in its perfect order. "The Logos (GSN3056)," said the Stoics, "pervades all things."

There is still another name in the Greek world at which we must look. In Alexandria there was a Jew called Philo who had made it the business of his life to study the wisdom of two worlds, the Jewish and the Greek. No man ever knew the Jewish scriptures as he knew them; and no Jew ever knew the greatness of Greek thought as he knew it. He too knew and used and loved this idea of the Logos (GSN3056), the word, the reason of God. He held that the Logos (GSN3056) was the oldest thing in the world and the instrument through which God had made the world. He said that the Logos (GSN3056) was the thought of God stamped upon the universe; he talked about the Logos (GSN3056) by which God made the world and all things; he said that God, the pilot of the universe, held the Logos (GSN3056) as a tiller and with it steered all things. He said that man's mind was stamped also with the Logos (GSN3056), that the Logos (GSN3056) was what gave a man reason, the power to think and the power to know. He said that the Logos (GSN3056) was the intermediary between the world and God and that the Logos (GSN3056) was the priest who set the soul before God.

Greek thought knew all about the Logos (GSN3056); it saw in the Logos (GSN3056) the creating and guiding and directing power of God, the power which made the universe and kept it going. So John came to the Greeks and said: "For centuries you have been thinking and writing and dreaming about the Logos (GSN3056), the power which made the world, the power which keeps the order of the world, the power by which men think and reason and know, the power by which men come into contact with God. Jesus is that Logos (GSN3056) come down to earth." "The word," said John, "became flesh." We could put it another way--"The Mind of God became a person."

BOTH JEW AND GREEK

Slowly the Jews and Greeks had thought their way to the conception of the Logos (GSN3056), the Mind of God which made the world and makes sense of it. So John went out to Jews and Greeks to tell them that in Jesus Christ this creating, illuminating, controlling, sustaining mind of

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God had come to earth. He came to tell them that men need no longer guess and grope; all that they had to do was to look at Jesus and see the Mind of God.

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John 1:1-2

THE ETERNAL WORD

John 1:1-2

When the world had its beginning, the word was already there; and the word was with God; and the word was God. This word was in the beginning with God.

The beginning of John's gospel is of such importance and of such depth of meaning that we must study it almost verse by verse. It is John's great thought that Jesus is none other than God's creative and life-giving and light-giving word, that Jesus is the power of God which created the world and the reason of God which sustains the world come to earth in human and bodily form.

Here at the beginning John says three things about the word; which is to say that he says three things about Jesus.

(i) The word was already there at the very beginning things. John's thought is going back to the first verse of the Bible. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen.1:1). What John is saying is this--the word is not one of the created things; the word was there before creation. the word is not part of the world which came into being in time; the word is part of eternity and was there with God before time and the world began. John was thinking of what is known as the preexistence of Christ.

In many ways this idea of preexistence is very difficult, if not altogether impossible, to grasp. But it does mean one very simple, very practical, and very tremendous thing. If the word was with God before time began, if God's word is part of the eternal scheme of things, it means that God was always like Jesus. Sometimes we tend to think of God as stern and avenging; and we tend to think that something Jesus did changed God's anger into love and altered his attitude to men. The New Testament knows nothing of that idea. The whole New Testament tells us, this passage of John especially, that God has always been like Jesus. What Jesus did was to open a window in time that we might see the eternal and unchanging love of God.

We may well ask, "What then about some of the things that we read in the Old Testament? What about the passages which speak about commandments of God to wipe out whole cities and to destroy men, women and children? What of the anger and the destructiveness and the jealousy of God that we sometimes read of in the older parts of Scripture?" The answer is this--it is not God who has changed; it is men's knowledge of him that has changed. Men wrote these things because they did not know any better; that was the stage which their knowledge of God had reached.

When a child is learning any subject, he has to learn it stage by stage. He does not begin with full knowledge; he begins with what he can grasp and goes on to more and more. When he begins music appreciation, he does not start with a Bach Prelude and Fugue; he starts with something much more simple; and goes through stage after stage until his knowledge grows. It was that way with men and God. They could only grasp and understand God's nature and his ways in part. It was only when Jesus came that they saw fully and completely what God has always been like.

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John 1:1-2

It is told that a little girl was once confronted with some of the more bloodthirsty and savage parts of the Old Testament. Her comment was: "But that happened before God became a Christian!" If we may so put it with all reverence, when John says that the word was always there, he is saying that God was always a Christian. He is telling us that God was and is and ever shall be like Jesus; but men could never know and realize that until Jesus came.

(ii) John goes on to say that the word was with God. What does he mean by that? He means that always there has been the closest connection between the word and God. Let us put that in another and a simpler way--there has always been the most intimate connection between Jesus and God. That means no one can tell us what God is like, what God's will is for us, what God's love and heart and mind are like, as Jesus can.

Let us take a simple human analogy. If we want to know what someone really thinks and feels about something, and if we are unable to approach the person ourselves, we do not go to someone who is merely an acquaintance of that person, to someone who has known him only a short time; we go to someone whom we know to be an intimate friend of many years' standing. We know that he will really be able to interpret the mind and the heart of the other person to us.

It is something like that that John is saying about Jesus. He is saying that Jesus has always been with God. Let us use every human language because it is the only language we can use. John is saying that Jesus is so intimate with God that God has no secrets from him; and that, therefore, Jesus is the one person in all the universe who can reveal to us what God is like and how God feels towards us.

(iii) Finally John says that the word was God. This is a difficult saying for us to understand, and it is difficult because Greek, in which John wrote, had a different way of saying things from the way in which English speaks. When Greek uses a noun it almost always uses the definite article with it. The Greek for God is *theos* (GSN2316) and the definite article is *ho* (GSN3588). When Greek speaks about God it does not simply say *theos* (GSN2316); it says *ho theos* (GSN2316). Now when Greek does not use the definite article with a noun that noun becomes much more like an adjective. John did not say that the word was *ho* (GSN3588) *theos* (GSN2316); that would have been to say that the word was identical with God. He said that the word was *theos* (GSN2316)--without the definite article--which means that the word was, we might say, of the very same character and quality and essence and being as God.

When John said the word was God he was not saying that Jesus was identical with God; he was saying that Jesus was so perfectly the same as God in mind, in heart, in being that in him we perfectly see what God is like.

So right at the beginning of his gospel John lays it down that in Jesus, and in him alone, there is perfectly revealed to men all that God always was and always will be, and all that he feels towards and desires for men.

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John 1:3

THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

John 1:3

He was the agent through whom all things were made; and there is not a single thing which exists in this world which came into being without him.

It may seem strange to us that John so stresses the way in which the world was created; and it may seem strange that he so definitely connects Jesus with the work of creation. But he had to do this because of a certain tendency in the thought of his day.

In the time of John there was a kind of heresy called Gnosticism. Its characteristic was that it was an intellectual and philosophical approach to Christianity. To the Gnostics the simple beliefs of the ordinary Christian were not enough. They tried to construct a philosophic system out of Christianity. They were troubled about the existence of sin and evil and sorrow and suffering in this world, so they worked out a theory to explain it. The theory was this.

In the beginning two things existed--the one was God and the other was matter. Matter was always there and was the raw material out of which the world was made. The Gnostics held that this original matter was flawed and imperfect. We might put it that the world got off to a bad start. It was made of material which had the seeds of corruption in it.

The Gnostics went further. God, they said, is pure spirit, and pure spirit can never touch matter at all, still less matter which is imperfect. Therefore it was not possible for God to carry out the work of creation himself. So he put out from himself a series of emanations. Each emanation was further and further away from God and as the emanations got further and further away from him, they knew less and less about him. About halfway down the series there was an emanation which knew nothing at all about God. Beyond that stage the emanations began to be not only ignorant of but actually hostile to God. Finally in the series there was an emanation which was so distant from God that it was totally ignorant of him and totally hostile to him--and that emanation was the power which created the world, because it was so distant from God that it was possible for it to touch this flawed and evil matter. The creator god was utterly divorced from and utterly at enmity with the real God.

The Gnostics took one step further. They identified the creator god with the God of the Old Testament; and they held that the God of the Old Testament was quite different from, quite ignorant of and quite hostile to the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

In the time of John this kind of belief was widespread. Men believed that the world was evil and that an evil God had created it. It is to combat this teaching that John here lays down two basic Christian truths. In point of fact the connection of Jesus with creation is repeatedly laid down in the New Testament, just because of this background of thought which divorced God from the world in which we live. In Col. 1:16 Paul writes: "For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth ... all things were created through him and for him." In 1 Cor. 8:6 he writes of the Lord Jesus Christ "through whom are all things." The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the one who was the Son,

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"through whom also God created the world" (Heb.1:2). John and the other New Testament writers who spoke like this were stressing two great truths.

(i) Christianity has always believed in what is called creation out of nothing. We do not believe that in his creation of the world God had to work with alien and evil matter. We do not believe that the world began with an essential flaw in it. We do not believe that the world began with God and something else. It is our belief that behind everything there is God and God alone.

(ii) Christianity has always believed that this is God's world. So far from being so detached from the world that he could have nothing to do with it, God is intimately involved in it. The Gnostics tried to put the blame for the evil of the world on the shoulders of its creator. Christianity believes that what is wrong with the world is due to man's sin. But even though sin has injured the world and kept it from being what it might have been, we can never despise the world, because it is essentially God's. If we believe this it gives us a new sense of the value of the world and a new sense of responsibility to it.

There is a story of a child from the back streets of a great city who was taken for a day in the country. When she saw the bluebells in the woods, she asked: "Do you think God would mind if I picked some of his flowers?" This is God's world; because of that nothing is out of his control; and because of that we must use all things in the awareness that they belong to God. The Christian does not belittle the world by thinking that it was created by an ignorant and a hostile god; he glorifies it by remembering that everywhere God is behind it and in it. He believes that the Christ who re-creates the world was the co-worker of God when the world was first created, and that, in the act of redemption, God is seeking to win back that which was always his own.

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John 1:4

LIFE AND LIGHT

John 1:4 (Part 1)

In him was life and the life was the light of men.

In a great piece of music the composer often begins by stating the themes which he is going to elaborate in the course of the work. That is what John does here. Life and light are two of the great basic words on which the Fourth Gospel is built up. They are two of the main themes which it is the aim of the gospel to develop and to expound. Let us look at them in detail.

The Fourth Gospel begins and ends with life. At the very beginning we read that in Jesus was life; and at the very end we read that John's aim in writing the gospel was that men might "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn.20:31). The word is continually on the lips of Jesus. It is his wistful regret that men will not come to him that they might have life (Jn.5:40). It is his claim that he came that men might have life and that they might have it abundantly (Jn.10:10). He claims that he gives men life and that they will never perish because no one will snatch them out of his hand (Jn.10:28). He claims that he is the way, the truth and the life (Jn.14:6). In the gospel the word "life" (zoe, GSN2222) occurs more than thirty-five times and the verb "to live" or "to have life" (zao, GSN2198) more than fifteen times. What then does John mean by "life"?

(i) Quite simply, he means that life is the opposite of destruction, condemnation and death. God sent his Son that the man who believes should not perish but have eternal life (Jn.3:16). The man who hears and believes has eternal life and will not come into judgment (Jn.5:24). There is a contrast between the resurrection to life and the resurrection to judgment (Jn.5:29). Those to whom Jesus gives life will never perish (Jn.10:28). There is in Jesus that which gives a man security in this life and in the life to come. Until we accept Jesus and take him as our saviour and enthrone him as our king we cannot be said to live at all. The man who lives a Christless life exists, but he does not know what life is. Jesus is the one person who can make life worth living, and in whose company death is only--the prelude to fuller life.

(ii) But John is quite sure that, although Jesus is the bringer of this life, the giver of life is God. Again and again John uses the phrase the living God, as indeed the whole Bible does. It is the will of the Father who sent Jesus that everyone who sees him and believes on him should have life (Jn.6:40). Jesus is the giver of life because the Father has set his own seal of approval upon him (Jn.6:27). He gives life to as many as God has given him (Jn.17:2). At the back of it all there is God. It is as if God was saying: "I created men that they should have real life; through their sin they have ceased to live and only exist; I have sent them my Son to enable them to know what real life is."

(iii) We must ask what this life is. Again and again the Fourth Gospel uses the phrase eternal life. We shall discuss the full meaning of that phrase later. At present we note this. The word John uses for eternal is *aionios* (GSN0166). Clearly whatever else eternal life is, it is not simply life which lasts for ever. A life which lasted for ever could be a terrible curse; often the thing for which men

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John 1:4

long is release from life. In eternal life there must be more than duration of life; there must be a certain quality of life.

Life is not desirable unless it is a certain kind of life. Here we have the clue. Aionios (GSN0166) is the adjective which is repeatedly used to describe God. In the true sense of the word only God is aionios (GSN0166), eternal; therefore eternal life is that life which God lives. What Jesus offers us from God is God's own life. Eternal life is life which knows something of the serenity and power of the life of God himself. When Jesus came offering men eternal life, he was inviting them to enter into the very life of God.

(iv) How, then, do we enter into that life? We enter into it by believing in Jesus Christ. The word to believe (pisteuein, GSN4100) occurs in the Fourth Gospel no fewer than seventy times. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (Jn.3:36). "He who believes", says Jesus, "has eternal life" (Jn.6:47). It is God's will that men should see the Son, and believe in him, and have eternal life (Jn.5:24). What does John mean by to believe? He means two things.

(a) He means that we must be convinced that Jesus is really and truly the Son of God. He means that we must make up our minds about him. After all, if Jesus is only a man, there is no reason why we should give him the utter and implicit obedience that he demands. We have to think out for ourselves who he was. We have to look at him, learn about him, study him, think about him until we are driven to the conclusion that this is none other than the Son of God. (b) But there is more than intellectual belief in this. To believe in Jesus means to take Jesus at his word, to accept his commandments as absolutely binding, to believe without question that what he says is true.

For John, belief means the conviction of the mind that Jesus is the Son of God, the trust of the heart that everything he says is true and the basing of every action on the unshakable assurance that we must take him at his word. When we do that we stop existing and begin living. We know what Life with a capital L really means.

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John 1:4

LIFE AND LIGHT

John 1:4 (Part 2)

In him was life and the life was the light of men.

The second of the great Johannine key-words which we meet here is the word light. This word occurs in the Fourth Gospel no fewer than twenty-one times. Jesus is the light of men. The function of John the Baptist was to point men to that light which was in Christ. Twice Jesus calls himself the light of the world (Jn.8:12; Jn.9:5). This light can be in men (Jn.11:10), so that they can become children of the light (Jn.12:36), "I have come," said Jesus, "as light into the world" (Jn.12:46). Let us see if we can understand something of this idea of the light which Jesus brings into the world. Three things stand out.

(i) The light Jesus brings is the light which puts chaos to flight. In the creation story God moved upon the dark, formless chaos which was before the world began and said: "Let there be light" (Gen.1:3). The new-created light of God routed the empty chaos into which it came. So Jesus is the light which shines in the darkness (Jn.1:5). He is the one person who can save life from becoming a chaos. Left to ourselves we are at the mercy of our passions and our fears.

When Jesus dawns upon life, light comes. One of the oldest fears in the world is the fear of the dark. There is a story of a child who was to sleep in a strange house. His hostess, thinking to be kind, offered to leave the light on when he went to bed. Politely he declined the offer. "I thought," said his hostess, "that you might be afraid of the dark." "Oh, no," said the lad, "you see, it's God's dark." With Jesus the night is light about us as the day.

(ii) The light which Jesus brings is a revealing light. It is the condemnation of men that they loved the darkness rather than the light; and they did so because their deeds were evil; and they hated the light lest their deeds should be exposed (Jn.3:19-20). The light which Jesus brings is something which shows things as they are. It strips away the disguises and the concealments; it shows things in all their nakedness; it shows them in their true character and their true values.

Long ago the Cynics said that men hate the truth for the truth is like the light to sore eyes. In Caedmon's poem there is a strange picture. It is a picture of the last day and in the centre of the scene there is the Cross; and from the Cross there flows a strange blood-red light, and the mysterious quality of that light is such that it shows things as they are. The externals, the disguises, the outer wrappings and trappings are stripped away; and everything stands revealed in the naked and awful loneliness of what it essentially is.

We never see ourselves until we see ourselves through the eyes of Jesus. We never see what our lives are like until we see them in the light of Jesus. Jesus often drives us to God by revealing us to ourselves.

(iii) The light which Jesus brings is a guiding light. If a man does not possess that light he walks in darkness and does not know where he is going (Jn.12:36). When a man receives that light and

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believes in it, he walks no more in darkness (Jn.12:46). One of the features of the gospel stories which no one can miss is the number of people who came running to Jesus asking: "What am I to do?" When Jesus comes into life the time of guessing and of groping is ended, the time of doubt and uncertainty and vacillation is gone. The path that was dark becomes light; the decision that was wrapped in a night of uncertainty is illumined. Without Jesus we are like men groping on an unknown road in a black-out. With him the way is clear.

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John 1:5

THE HOSTILE DARK

John 1:5

And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not put it out.

Here we meet another of John's key-words--darkness (skotos, GSN4655, skotia, GSN4653). This word occurs seven times in the gospel. To John there was a darkness in the world that was as real as the light.

(i) The darkness is hostile to the light. The light shines in the darkness, but, however hard the darkness tries, it cannot extinguish it. Sinning man loves the darkness and hates the light, because the light shows up too many things.

It may well be that in John's mind there is a borrowed thought here. John, as we know, was prepared to go out and to take in new ideas, if by so doing he could present and commend the Christian message to men. The great Persian religion of Zoroastrianism had at this time a very great influence on men's thoughts. It believed that there were two great opposing powers in the universe, the god of the light and the god of the dark, Ahriman and Ormuzd. This whole universe was a battle-ground in the eternal, cosmic conflict between the light and the dark; and all that mattered in life was the side a man chose.

So John is saying: "Into this world there comes Jesus, the light of the world; there is a darkness which would seek to eliminate him, to banish him from life, to extinguish him. But there is a power in Jesus that is undefeatable. The darkness can hate him, but it can never get rid of him." As has been truly said: "Not all the darkness in the world can extinguish the littlest flame." The unconquerable light win in the end defeat the hostile dark. John is saying: "Choose your side in the eternal conflict and choose aright."

(ii) The darkness stands for the natural sphere of all those who hate the good. It is men whose deeds are evil who fear the light (Jn.3:19-20). The man who has something to hide loves the dark; but it is impossible to hide anything from God. His searchlight sweeps the shadows and illuminates the skulking evils of the world.

(iii) There are certain passages where the darkness seems to stand for ignorance, especially for that wilful ignorance which refuses the light of Jesus Christ. Jesus says: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness" (Jn.8:12). He says to his disciples that the light will be with them only for so short a time; let them walk in it; if they do not, the darkness comes and a man who walks in darkness does not light that men should not abide in darkness (Jn.12:46). Without Jesus Christ a man cannot find or see the way. He is like a blindfolded man or even a blind man. Without Jesus Christ life goes lost. It was Goethe who cried out for: "Light, more light!" It was one of the old Scots leaders who said to his friends towards the end: "Light the candle that I may see to die." Jesus is the light which shows a man the road, and which lights the road at every step of the way.

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John 1:5

There are times when John uses this word darkness symbolically. He uses it at times to mean more than merely the dark of an earthly night. He tells of Jesus walking on the water. He tells how the disciples had embarked on their boat and were crossing the lake without Jesus; and then he says, "And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them" (Jn.6:17). Without the presence of Jesus there was nothing but the threatening dark. He tells of the Resurrection morning and of the hours before those who had loved Jesus realized that he had risen from the dead. He begins the story: "Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came, while it was still dark" (Jn.20:1). She was living at the moment in a world from which she thought Jesus had been eliminated, and a world like that was dark. He tells the story of the Last Supper.

He tells how Judas received the sop and then went out to do his terrible work and arrange for the betrayal of Jesus; and he says with a kind of terrible symbolism: "So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night" (Jn.13:30). Judas was going out into the night of a life which had betrayed Christ.

To John the Christless life was life in the dark. The darkness stands for life without Christ, and especially for that which has turned its back on Christ.

Before we leave this passage there is one other thing to note. The word which we have translated put out is in Greek katalambanein (GSN2638). This word can have three meanings.

(a) It can mean that the darkness never understood the light. There is a sense in which the man of the world simply cannot understand the demands of Christ and the way Christ offers him. To him it seems sheer foolishness. A man cannot understand Christ until he first submits to him.

(b) It can mean the darkness never overcame the light. Katalambanein (GSN2638) can mean to pursue until one overtakes and so lays hold on and overcomes. This could mean that the darkness of the world had done everything possible to eliminate Jesus Christ, even to crucifying him, but it could never destroy him. This could be a reference to the crucified and conquering Christ.

(c) It can be used of extinguishing a fire or flame. That is the sense in which we have taken it here. Although men did all they could to obscure and extinguish the light of God in Christ, they could not quench it. In every generation the light of Christ still shines in spite of the efforts of men to extinguish the flame.

Barclay's Commentary

John 1:6-8

THE WITNESS TO JESUS CHRIST

John 1:6-8

There emerged a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness, in order to bear witness to the light, that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; his function was to bear witness to the light.

It is a strange fact that in the Fourth Gospel every reference to John the Baptist is a reference of depreciation. There is an explanation of that. John was a prophetic voice; for four hundred years the voice of prophecy had been silent, and in John it spoke again. It seems that certain people were so fascinated by John that they gave him a higher place than he ought to have had. There are, in fact, indications that there was actually a sect who put John the Baptist in the highest place. We find an echo of them in Ac.19:3-4. In Ephesus Paul came upon certain people who knew nothing but the baptism of John. It was not that the Fourth Gospel wished to criticize John or that it under-rated his importance. It was simply that John knew that there were certain people who gave John the Baptist a place that encroached upon the place of Jesus himself

So all through the Fourth Gospel John is careful to point out that the place of John the Baptist in the scheme of things was high, but that nonetheless it was still subordinate to the place of Jesus Christ. Here he is careful to say that John was not that light, but only a witness to the light (Jn.1:8). He shows us John denying that he was the Christ, or even that he was the great prophet whom Moses had promised (Jn.1:20). When the Jews came to John and told him that Jesus had begun his career as a teacher they must have expected John to resent this intrusion. But the Fourth Gospel shows us John denying that the first place was his and declaring that he must decrease while Jesus increased (Jn.3:25-30). It is pointed out that Jesus was more successful in his appeal to men than John was (Jn.4:1). It is pointed out that even the people said that John was not able to do the things that Jesus did (Jn.10:41).

Somewhere in the church there was a group of men who wished to give John the Baptist too high a place. John the Baptist himself gave no encouragement to that but rather did everything to discourage it. But the Fourth Gospel knew that that tendency was there and took steps to guard against it. It can still happen that men may worship a preacher rather than Christ. It can still happen that men's eyes may be fixed upon the herald rather than upon the King of whom he is the messenger. John the Baptist was not in the least to blame for what had happened; but John the evangelist was determined to see that none should shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche.

It is more important to note that in this passage we come upon another of the great key-words of the Fourth Gospel. That is the word witness. The Fourth Gospel presents us with witness after witness to the supreme place of Jesus Christ, eight no less.

(i) There is the witness of the Father. Jesus said: "The Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me" (Jn.5:37). "The Father who sent me bears witness to me" (Jn.8:18). What did Jesus mean by this? He meant two things.

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John 1:6-8

He meant something which affected himself. In his heart the inner voice of God spoke, and that voice left him in no doubt as to who he was and what he was sent to do. Jesus did not regard himself as having himself chosen his task. His inner conviction was that God had sent him into the world to live and to die for men.

He meant something which affected men. When a man is confronted with Christ there comes an inner conviction that this is none other than the Son of God. Father Tyrrell has said that the world can never get away from that "strange man upon the Cross." That inner power which always brings our eyes back to Christ even when we wish to forget him, that inner voice which tells us that this Jesus is none other than the Son of God and the Saviour of the world is the witness of God within our souls.

(ii) There is the witness of Jesus himself. "I bear witness," he said, "to myself" (Jn.8:18). "Even if I do bear witness to myself," he said, "my testimony is true" (Jn.8:14). What does this mean? It means that it was what Jesus was that was his best witness. He claimed to be the light and the life and the truth and the way. He claimed to be the Son of God and one with the Father. He claimed to be the Saviour and the Master of all men. Unless his life and character had been what they were, such claims would have been merely shocking and blasphemous. What Jesus was in himself was the best witness that his claims were true.

(iii) There is the witness of his works. He said: "The works which the Father has granted me to accomplish ... bear me witness" (Jn.5:36). "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me" (Jn.10:25). He tells Philip of his complete identity with the Father, and then goes on to say: "Believe me for the sake of the works themselves" (Jn.14:11). One of the condemnations of men is that they have seen his works, and have not believed (Jn.15:24). We must note one thing--when John spoke of the works of Jesus, he was not speaking only of the miracles of Jesus; he was thinking of Jesus' whole life. He was thinking not only of the great outstanding moments, but of the life that Jesus lived every minute of the day.

No man could have done the mighty works that Jesus did unless he was closer to God than any other man ever was; but, equally, no man could have lived that life of love and pity, compassion and forgiveness, service and help in the life of the everyday unless he had been in God and God in him. It is not by working miracles that we can prove that we belong to Christ, but by living a Christ-like life every moment of every day. It is in the ordinary things of life that we show that we belong to him.

(iv) There is the witness which the Scriptures bear to him. Jesus said: "Search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (Jn.5:39). "If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me" (Jn.5:46). It is Philip's conviction that he has found him of whom Moses and the law and the prophets wrote (Jn.1:45). All through the history of Israel men had dreamed of the day when God's Messiah would come. They had drawn their pictures and set down their ideas of him. And now in Jesus all these dreams and pictures and hopes were finally and fully realized. He for whom the world was waiting had come.

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John 1:6-8

(v) There is the witness of the last of the prophets, John the Baptist. "He came for testimony to bear witness to the light" (Jn.1:7-8). John bore witness that he saw the Spirit descending upon Jesus. The one in whom the prophetic witness culminated was the one who bore witness to Jesus to whom all the prophetic witness pointed.

(vi) There is the witness of those with whom Jesus came into contact. The woman of Samaria bore witness to the insight and to the power of Jesus (Jn.4:39). The man born blind bore witness to his healing power (Jn.9:25; Jn.9:38). The people who witnessed his miracles told of their wonder at the things he did (Jn.12:17). There is a legend which tells how the Sanhedrin sought for witnesses when Jesus was on trial. There came a crowd of people saying: "I was a leper and he healed me"; "I was blind and he opened my eyes"; "I was deaf and he made me able to hear." That was precisely the kind of witness the Sanhedrin did not want. In every age and in every generation there have always been a great crowd ready to bear witness to what Christ had done for them.

(vii) There is the witness of the disciples and especially of the writer of the gospel himself. It was Jesus' commission to his disciples: "You also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning" (Jn.15:27). The writer of the gospel is a personal witness and guarantor of the things he relates. Of the crucifixion he writes: "He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true" (Jn.19:35). "This" he says, "is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things" (Jn.21:24). The story he tells is no carried story, no second-hand tale, but what he had seen and experienced himself. The best kind of witness of all is the one which can say: "This is true, because I know it from my own experience."

(viii) There is the witness of the Holy Spirit. "When the Counsellor comes ... even the Spirit of truth ... he will bear witness to me" (Jn.15:26). In the First Epistle John writes: "And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth" (1Jn.5:7). To the Jew the Spirit had two functions. The Spirit brought God's truth to men, and the Spirit enabled men to recognize that truth when they saw it. It is the work of the Spirit within our hearts which enables us to recognize Jesus for what he is and to trust him for what he can do.

John wrote his gospel to present the unanswerable witness that Jesus Christ is the mind of God fully revealed to men.

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John 1:9

THE LIGHT OF EVERY MAN

John 1:9

He was the real light, who, in his coming into the world, gives light to every man.

In this verse John uses a very significant word to describe Jesus. He says that Jesus was the real light. In Greek there are two words which are very like each other. The King James Version and the Revised Standard use the word true to translate both of them; but they have different shades of meaning. The first is alethes (GSN0227). Alethes (GSN0227) means true as opposed to false; it is the word that would be used of a statement which is true. The other word is alethinos (GSN0228). Alethinos (GSN0228) means real or genuine as opposed to unreal.

So what John is saying is that Jesus is the real light come to illumine men. Before Jesus came there were other lights which men followed. Some were flickers of the truth; some were faint glimpses of reality; some were will o' the wisps which men followed and which led them out into the dark and left them there. It is still the case. There are still the partial lights; and there are still the false lights; and men still follow them. Jesus is the only genuine light, the real light to guide men on their way.

John says that Jesus, by his coming into the world, brought the real light to men. His coming was like a blaze of light. It was like the coming of the dawn. A traveller tells how once in Italy he was standing on a hill overlooking the Bay of Naples. It was so dark that nothing could be seen; then all of a sudden there came a lightning flash and everything, in every detail, was lit up. When Jesus came into this world he came like a light in the dark.

(i) His coming dissipated the shadows of doubt. Until he came men could only guess about God. "It is difficult to find out about God," said one of the Greeks, "and when you have found out about him it is impossible to tell anyone else about him." To the pagan, God either dwelt in the shadows that no man can penetrate or in the light that no man can approach. But when Jesus came men saw full-displayed what God is like. The shadows and the mists were gone; the days of guessing were at an end; there was no more need for a wistful agnosticism. The light had come.

(ii) His coming dissipated the shadows of despair. Jesus came to a world that was in despair. "Men," as Seneca said, "are conscious of their helplessness in necessary things." They were longing for a hand let down to help them up. "They hate their sins but cannot leave them." Men despaired of ever making themselves or the world any better. But with the coming of Jesus a new power came into life. He came not only with knowledge but with power. He came not only to show them the right way but to enable them to walk in it. He gave them not only instruction but a presence in which all the impossible things had become possible. The darkness of pessimism and despair was gone for ever.

(iii) His coming dissipated the darkness of death. The ancient world feared death. At the best, death was annihilation and the soul of man shuddered at the thought. At the worst, it was torture by whatever gods there be and the soul of man was afraid. But Jesus by his coming, by his life, his

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John 1:9

death, his Resurrection showed that death was only the way to a larger life. The darkness was dispelled. Stevenson has a scene in one of his stories in which he draws the picture of a young man who has almost miraculously escaped in a duel in which he was certain he would be killed. As he walks away his heart is singing: "The bitterness of death is past." Because of Jesus the bitterness of death is past for every man.

Further, Jesus is the light who lights every man who comes into the world. The ancient world was exclusive. The Jew hated the Gentile and held that Gentiles were created for no other purpose than to be fuel for the fires of hell. True, there was a lonely prophet who saw that Israel's destiny was to be a light to the Gentiles (Isa.42:6; Isa.49:6) but that was a destiny which Israel had always definitely refused. The Greek world never dreamed that knowledge was for every man. The Roman world looked down on the barbarians, the lesser breeds without the law. But Jesus came to be a light to every man. Only the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has a heart big enough to hold all the world.

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John 1:10-11

UNRECOGNIZED

John 1:10-11 (Part 1)

He was in the world, and, although the world came into being through him, the world did not recognize him. It was into his own home that he came, and his own people did not welcome him.

When John wrote this passage two thoughts were in his mind.

(i) He was thinking of the time before Jesus Christ came into the world in the body. From the beginning of time God's Logos (GSN3056) has been active in the world. In the beginning God's creating, dynamic word brought the world into being; and ever since it is the word, the Logos (GSN3056), the reason of God which has made the world an ordered whole and man a thinking being. If men had only had the sense to see him, the Logos (GSN3056) was always recognizable in the universe.

The Westminster Confession of Faith begins by saying that "the lights of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God as to leave men inexcusable." Long ago Paul had said that the visible things of the world were so designed by God as to lead men's thoughts to the invisible things, and that if men had looked with open eyes and an understanding heart at the world their thoughts would have been inevitably led to the creator of the world (Rom.1:19-20). The world has always been such that, looked at in the right way, it would lead men's minds to God.

Theology has always made a distinction between natural theology and revealed theology. Revealed theology deals with the truths that came to us directly from God in the words of the prophets, the pages of his book, and supremely in Jesus Christ. Natural theology deals with the truths that man could discover by the exercise of his own mind and intellect on the world in which he lives. How, then, can we see God's word, God's Logos (GSN3056), God's reason, God's mind in the world in which we live?

(a) We must look outwards. It was always a basic Greek thought that where there is order there must be a mind. When we look at the world we see an amazing order. The planets keep to their appointed courses. The tides observe their appointed times. Seed times and harvest, summer and winter, day and night come in their appointed order. Clearly there is order in nature, and, therefore, equally clearly there must be a mind behind it all. Further, that mind must be greater than any human mind because it achieves results that the human mind can never achieve. No man can make day into night, or night into day; no man can make a seed that will have in it the power of growth; no man can make a living thing. If in the world there is order, there must be mind; and if in that order there are things which are beyond the mind of man to do, then the mind behind the order of nature must be a mind above and beyond the mind of man--and straightway we have reached God. To look outwards upon the world is to come face to face with the God who made it.

(b) We must look upwards. Nothing demonstrates the amazing order of the universe so much as the movement of the world. Astronomers tell us that there are as many stars as there are grains of

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John 1:10-11

sand upon the seashore. If we may put it in human terms, think of the traffic problem of the heavens; and yet the heavenly bodies keep their appointed courses and travel their appointed way. An astronomer is able to forecast to the minute and to the inch when and where a certain planet will appear. An astronomer can tell us when and where an eclipse of the sun will happen hundreds of years from now, and he can tell us to the second how long it will last. It has been said that "no astronomer can be an atheist." When we look upwards we see God.

(c) We must look inwards. Where did we get the power to think, to reason and to know? Where did we get our knowledge of right and of wrong? Why does even the most evil-ridden man know in his heart of hearts when he is doing a wrong thing? Kant said long ago that two things convinced him of the existence of God--the starry heavens above him and the moral law within him. We neither gave ourselves life, nor did we give ourselves the reason which guides and directs life. It must have come from some power outside ourselves. Where do remorse and regret and the sense of guilt come from? Why can we never do what we like and be at peace? When we look inwards we find what Marcus Aurelius called "the god within," and what Seneca called "the holy spirit which sits within our souls." No man can explain himself apart from God.

(d) We must look backwards. Froude, the great historian, said that the whole of history is a demonstration of the moral law in action. Empires rise and empires collapse. As Kipling wrote:

Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!

And it is a demonstrable fact of history that moral degeneration and national collapse go hand in hand. "No nation," said George Bernard Shaw, "has ever outlived the loss of its gods." AU history is the practical demonstration that there is a God.

So, then, even if Jesus Christ had never come into this world in bodily form, it would still have been possible for men to see God's word, God's Logos (GSN3056), God's reason in action. But, although the action of the word was there for all to see, men never recognized him.

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John 1:10-11

UNRECOGNIZED

John 1:10-11 (Part 2)

He was in the world, and, although the world came into being through him, the world did not recognize him. It was into his own home that he came, and his own people did not welcome him.

(ii) In the end God's creating and directing word did come into this world in the form of the man Jesus. John says that the word came to his own home and his own people gave him no welcome. What does he mean by that? He means that when God's word entered this world, he did not come to Rome or to Greece or to Egypt or to the Eastern Empires. He came to Palestine; Palestine was specially God's land and the Jews were specially God's people.

The very titles by which the Old Testament calls the land and the people show that. Palestine is repeatedly called the holy land (Zech.2:12; 2Macc.1:7; Wis.12:3). It is called the Lord's land; God speaks of it as his land (Hos.9:3; Jer.2:7; Jer.16:18; Lev.25:23). The Jewish nation is called God's peculiar treasure (Exo.19:5; Ps.135:4). The Jews are called God's special people (Deut.7:6). They are called God's peculiar people (Deut.14:2; Deut.26:18). They are called the Lord's portion (Deut.32:9).

Jesus came to a land which was peculiarly God's land and a people who were peculiarly God's people. He ought, therefore, to have been coming to a nation that would welcome him with open arms; the door should have been wide open for him; he should have been welcomed like a wayfarer coming home; or, even more, like a king coming to his own--but he was rejected. He was received with hate and not with adoration.

Here is the tragedy of a people being prepared for a task and then refusing that task. It may be, that parents plan and save and sacrifice to give a son or a daughter a chance in life, to prepare that son or daughter for some special task and opportunity--and then when the chance comes, the one for whom so much sacrifice was made refuses to grasp the opportunity, or fails miserably when confronted with the challenge. Therein is tragedy. And that is what happened to God.

It would be wrong to think that God prepared only the Jewish people. God is preparing every man and woman and child in this world for some task that he has in store for them. A novelist tells of a girl who refused to touch the soiling things of life. When she was asked why, she said: "Some day something fine is going to come into my life, and I want to be ready for it." The tragedy is that so many people refuse the task God has for them.

We may put it in another way--a way that strikes home there are so few people who become what they have it in them to be. It may be through lethargy and laziness, it may be through timidity and cowardice, it may be through lack of discipline and self-indulgence, it may be through involvement in second-bests and byways; but the world is full of people who have never realized the possibilities which are in them. We need not think of the task God has in store for us in terms of some great act or achievement of which all men will know. It may be to fit a child for life; it may be at some crucial moment to speak that word and exert that influence which will stop someone

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ruining his life; it may be to do some quite small job superlatively well; it may be to touch the lives of many by our hands, our voices or our minds. The fact remains that God is preparing us by all the experiences of life for something; and many refuse the task when it comes and never even realize that they are refusing it.

There is all the pathos in the world in the simple saying: "He came to his own home and his own people gave him no welcome." It happened to Jesus long ago--and it is happening yet.

Barclay's Commentary

John 1:12-13

CHILDREN OF GOD

John 1:12-13

To all those who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God. These were born not of blood, nor of any human impulse, nor of any man's will, but their birth was of God.

Not everyone rejected Jesus when he came; there were some who did receive him and welcome him; and to them Jesus gave the right to become children of God.

There is a sense in which a man is not naturally a child of God. There is a sense in which he has to become a child of God. We may think of this in human terms, because human terms are the only ones open to us.

There are two kinds of sons. There is the son who never does anything else but use his home. All through his youth he takes everything that the home has to offer and gives nothing in return. His father may work and sacrifice to give him his chance in life, and he takes it as a right, never realizing what he is taking and making no effort to deserve it or repay it. When he leaves home, he makes no attempt to keep in touch. The home has served his purpose and he is finished with it. He realizes no bond to be maintained and no debt to be paid. He is his father's son; to his father he owes his existence; and to his father he owes what he is; but between him and his father there is no bond of love and intimacy. The father has given all in love; but the son has given nothing in return.

On the other hand there is the son who all his life realizes what his father is doing and has done for him. He takes every opportunity to show his gratitude by trying to be the son his father would wish him to be; as the years go on he grows closer and closer to his father; the relationship of father and son becomes the relationship of fellowship and friendship. Even when he leaves home the bond is still there and he is still conscious of a debt that can never be repaid.

In the one case the son grows further and further away from the father; in the other he grows nearer and nearer the father. Both are sons, but the sonship is very different. The second has become a son in a way that the first never was.

We may illustrate this kind of relationship from another, but a kindred, sphere. The name of a certain younger man was mentioned to a famous teacher, whose student the younger man claimed to be. The older man answered: "He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students." There is a world of difference between sitting in a teacher's class room and being one of his students. There can be contact without communion; there can be relationship without fellowship. All men are the sons of God in the sense that they owe to him the creation and the preservation of their lives; but only some men become the sons of God in the depth and intimacy of the true father and son relationship.

It is the claim of Jn. that men can enter into that true and real sonship only through Jesus Christ. When he says that it does not come from blood, he is using Jewish thought, for the Jews believed

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John 1:12-13

that a physical son was born from the union of the seed of the father with the blood of the mother. This sonship does not come from any human impulse or desire or from any act of the human will; it comes entirely from God. We cannot make ourselves sons of God; we have to enter into a relationship which God offers us. No man can ever enter into friendship with God by his own will and power; there is a great gulf fixed between the human and the divine. Man can only enter into friendship with God when God himself opens the way.

Again let us think in human terms. A commoner cannot approach a king with the offer of friendship; if there is ever to be such a friendship it must depend entirely on the approach of the king. It is so with us and God. We cannot by will or achievement enter into fellowship with God, for we are men and he is God. We can enter into it only when God in his totally undeserved grace condescends to open the way to himself.

But there is a human side to this. What God offers, man has to appropriate. A human father may offer his son his love, his advice, his friendship, and the son may refuse it and prefer to take his own way. It is so with God; God offers us the right to become sons but we need not accept it.

We do accept it through believing in the name of Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Hebrew thought and language had a way of using the name which is strange to us. By that expression Jewish thought did not so much mean the name by which a person was called as his nature in so far as it was revealed and known. For instance, in Ps.9:10 the psalmist says: "Those who know thy name put their trust in thee." Clearly that does not mean that those who know that God is called Jehovah will trust him; it means that those who know God's character, God's nature, who know what God is like, will be ready and willing to trust him for everything. In Ps.20:7 the psalmist says: "Some boast of chariots and some of horses: but we boast of the name of the Lord our God." Clearly that does not mean that we will boast that God is called Jehovah. It means that some people will put their trust in human aids, but we will put our trust in God because we know what he is like.

To trust in the name of Jesus therefore means to put our trust in what he is. He was the embodiment of kindness and love and gentleness and service. It is John's great central doctrine that in Jesus we see the very mind of God, the attitude of God to men. If we believe that, then we also believe that God is like Jesus, as kind, as loving as Jesus was. To believe in the name of Jesus is to believe that God is like him; and it is only when we believe that, that we can submit ourselves to God and become his children. Unless we had seen in Jesus what God is like we would never even have dared to think of ourselves as being able to become the children of God. It is what Jesus is that opens to us the possibility of becoming the children of God.

Barclay's Commentary

John 1:14

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

John 1:14 (Part 1)

So the Word of God became a person, and took up his abode in our being, full of grace and truth; and we looked with our own eyes upon his glory, glory like the glory which an only son receives from a father.

Here we come to the sentence for the sake of which John wrote his gospel. He has thought and talked about the word of God, that powerful, creative, dynamic word which was the agent of creation, that guiding, directing, controlling word which puts order into the universe and mind into man. These were ideas which were known and familiar to both Jew and Greek. Now he says the most startling and incredible thing that he could have said. He says quite simply: "This word which created the world, this reason which controls the order of the world, has become a person and with our own eyes we saw him." The word that John uses for seeing this word is *theasthai* (GSN2300); it is used in the New Testament more than twenty times and is always used of actual physical sight. This is no spiritual vision seen with the eye of the soul or of the mind. John declares that the word actually came to earth in the form of a man and was seen by human eyes. He says: "If you want to see what this creating word, this controlling reason, is like, look at Jesus of Nazareth."

This is where John parted with all thought which had gone before him. This was the entirely new thing which John brought to the Greek world for which he was writing. Augustine afterwards said that in his pre-Christian days he had read and studied the great pagan philosophers and had read many things, but he had never read that the word became flesh.

To a Greek this was the impossible thing. The one thing that no Greek would ever have dreamed of was that God could take a body. To the Greek the body was an evil, a prison-house in which the soul was shackled, a tomb in which the spirit was confined. Plutarch, the wise old Greek, did not even believe that God could control the happenings of this world directly; he had to do it by deputies and intermediaries, for, as Plutarch saw it, it was nothing less than blasphemy to involve God in the affairs of the world. Philo could never have said it. He said: "The life of God has not descended to us; nor has it come as far as the necessities of the body." The great Roman Stoic Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, despised the body in comparison with the spirit. "Therefore despise the flesh-blood and bones and a net-work, a twisted skein of nerves and veins and arteries." "The composition of the whole body is under corruption."

Here was the shatteringly new thing--that God could and would become a human person, that God could enter into this life that we live, that eternity could appear in time, that somehow the Creator could appear in creation in such a way that men's eyes could actually see him.

So staggeringly new was this conception of God in a human form that it is not surprising that there were some even in the church who could not believe it. What John says is that the word became *sarx* (GSN4561). Now *sarx* (GSN4561) is the very word Paul uses over and over again to describe what he called the flesh, human nature in all its weakness and in all its liability to sin. The

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John 1:14

very thought of taking this word and applying it to God, was something that their minds staggered at. So there arose in the church a body of people called Docetists.

Dokein (GSN1380) is the Greek word for to seem to be. These people held that Jesus in fact was only a phantom; that his human body was not a real body; that he could not really feel hunger and weariness, sorrow and pain; that he was in fact a disembodied spirit in the apparent form of a man. John dealt with these people much more directly in his First Letter. "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of Antichrist" (1Jn.4:2-3). It is true that this heresy was born of a kind of mistaken reverence which recoiled from saying that Jesus was really, fully and truly human. To John it contradicted the whole Christian gospel.

It may well be that we are often so eager to conserve the fact that Jesus was fully God that we tend to forget the fact that he was fully man. The word became flesh--here, perhaps as nowhere else in the New Testament, we have the full manhood of Jesus gloriously proclaimed. In Jesus we see the creating word of God, the controlling reason of God, taking manhood upon himself. In Jesus we see God living life as he would have lived it if he had been a man. Supposing we said nothing else about Jesus we could still say that he shows us how God would live this life that we have to live.

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THE WORD BECAME FLESH

John 1:14 (Part 2)

So the word of God became a person, and took up his abode in our being, full of grace and truth; and we looked with our own eyes upon his glory, glory like the glory which an only son receives from a father.

It might well be held that this is the greatest single verse in the New Testament; we must therefore spend much time upon it so that we may enter the more fully into its riches.

We have already seen how John has certain great words which haunt his mind and dominate his thought and we are the themes out of which his whole message is elaborated. Here we have three more of these words.

(i) The first is grace. This word has always two basic ideas in it.

(a) It always has the idea of something completely undeserved. It always has the idea of something that we could never have earned or achieved for ourselves. The fact that God came to earth to live and to die for men is not something which humanity deserved; it is an act of pure love on the part of God. The word grace emphasizes at one and the same time the helpless poverty of man and the limitless kindness of God.

(b) It always has the idea of beauty in it. In modern Greek the word means charm. In Jesus we see the sheer winsomeness of God. Men had thought of God in terms of might and majesty and power and judgment. They had thought of the power of God which could crush all opposition and defeat all rebellion; but in Jesus men are confronted with the sheer loveliness of God.

(ii) The second is truth. This word is one of the dominant notes of the Fourth Gospel. We meet it again and again. Here we can only briefly gather together what John has to say about Jesus and the truth.

(a) Jesus is the embodiment of the truth. He said: "I am the truth" (Jn.14:6). To see truth we must look at Jesus. Here is something infinitely precious for every simple mind and soul. Very few people can grasp abstract ideas; most people think in pictures. We could think and argue for ever and we would very likely be no nearer arriving at a definition of beauty. But if we can point at a beautiful person and say that is beauty, the thing becomes clear. Ever since men began to think about God they have been trying to define just who and what he is--and their puny minds get no nearer a definition. But we can cease our thinking and look at Jesus Christ and say: "That is what God is like." Jesus did not come to talk to men about God; he came to show men what God is like, so that the simplest mind might know him as intimately as the mind of the greatest philosopher.

(b) Jesus is the communicator of the truth. He told his disciples that if they continued with him they would know the truth (Jn.8:31). He told Pilate that his object in coming into this world was to witness to the truth (Jn.18:37). Men will flock to a teacher or preacher who can really give them

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guidance for the tangled business of thinking and living. Jesus is the one who, amidst the shadows, makes things clear; who, at the many crossroads of life, shows us the right way; who, in the baffling moments of decision, enables us to choose aright; who, amidst the many voices which clamour for our allegiance, tells us what to believe.

(c) Even when Jesus left this earth in the body, he left us his Spirit to guide us into the truth. His Spirit is the Spirit of truth (Jn.14:17; Jn.15:26; Jn.16:13). He did not leave us only a book of instruction and a body of teaching. We do not need to search through some unintelligible textbook to find out what to do. Still, to this day, we can ask Jesus what to do, for his Spirit is with us every step of the way.

(d) The truth is what makes us free (Jn.8:32). There is always a certain liberating quality in the truth. A child often gets queer, mistaken notions about things when he thinks about them himself; and often he becomes afraid. When he is told the truth he is emancipated from his fears. A man may fear that he is ill; he goes to the doctor; even if the verdict is bad he is at least liberated from the vague fears which haunted his mind. The truth which Jesus brings liberates us from estrangement from God; it liberates us from frustration; it liberates us from our fears and weaknesses and defeats. Jesus Christ is the greatest liberator on earth.

(e) The truth can be resented. They sought to kill Jesus because he told them the truth (Jn.8:40). The truth may well condemn a man; it may well show him how far wrong he was. "Truth," said the Cynics, "can be like the light to sore eyes." The Cynics declared that the teacher who never annoyed anyone never did anyone any good. Men may shut their ears and their minds to the truth; they may kill the man who tells them the truth--but the truth remains. No man ever destroyed the truth by refusing to listen to the voice that told it to him; and the truth will always catch up with him in the end.

(f) The truth can be disbelieved (Jn.8:45). There are two main reasons why men disbelieve the truth. They may disbelieve it because it seems too good to be true; or they may disbelieve it because they are so fastened to their half-truths that they will not let them go. In many instances a half-truth is the worst enemy of a whole truth.

(g) The truth is not something abstract; it is something which must be done (Jn.3:21). It is something which must be known with the mind, accepted with the heart, and acted out in the life.

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John 1:14

THE WORD BECAME FLESH

John 1:14 (Part 3)

So the word of God became a person, and took up his abode in our being, full of grace and truth; and we looked with our own eyes upon his glory, glory like the glory which an only son receives from a father.

A life-time of study and thought could not exhaust the truth of this verse. We have already looked at two of the great theme words in it; now we look at the third-glory. Again and again John uses this word in connection with Jesus Christ. We shall first look at what John says about the glory of Christ, and then we shall go on to see if we can understand a little of what he means.

(i) The life of Jesus Christ was a manifestation of glory. When he performed the miracle of the water and the wine at Cana of Galilee, John says that he manifested forth his glory (Jn.2:11). To look at Jesus and to experience his power and love was to enter into a new glory.

(ii) The glory which he manifests is the glory of God. It is not from men that he receives it (Jn.5:41). He seeks not his own glory but the glory of him who sent him (Jn.7:18). It is his Father who glorifies him (Jn.8:50,54). It is the glory of God that Martha will see in the raising of Lazarus (Jn.11:4). The raising of Lazarus is for the glory of God, that the Son may be glorified thereby (Jn.11:4). The glory that was on Jesus, that clung about him, that shone through him, that acted in him is the glory of God.

(iii) Yet that glory was uniquely his own. At the end he prays that God will glorify him with the glory that he had before the world began (Jn.17:5). He shines with no borrowed radiance; his glory is his and his by right.

(iv) The glory which is his he has transmitted to his disciples. The glory which God gave him he has given to them (Jn.17:22). It is as if Jesus shared in the glory of God and the disciple shares in the glory of Christ. The coming of Jesus is the coming of God's glory among men.

What does John mean by all this? To answer that we must turn to the Old Testament. To the Jew the idea of the Shechinah was very dear. The Shechinah (compare HSN7931) means that which dwells; and it is the word used for the visible presence of God among men. Repeatedly in the Old Testament we come across the idea that there were certain times when God's glory was visible among men. In the desert, before the giving of the manna, the children of Israel "looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud" (Exo.16:10). Before the giving of the Ten Commandments, "the glory of the Lord settled upon Mount Sinai" (Exo.24:16). When the Tabernacle had been erected and equipped, "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exo.40:34). When Solomon's Temple was dedicated the priests could not enter in to minister "for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1Kgs.8:11). When Isaiah had his vision in the Temple, he heard the angelic choir singing that "the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa.6:3). Ezekiel in his ecstasy saw "the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Eze.1:28). In the Old Testament the glory of the Lord came at times when God was very close.

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John 1:14

The glory of the Lord means quite simply the presence of God. John uses a homely illustration. A father gives to his eldest son his own authority, his own honour. The heir apparent to the throne, the king's heir, is invested with all the royal glory of his father. It was so with Jesus. When he came to this earth men saw in him the splendour of God, and at the heart of that splendour was love. When Jesus came to this earth men saw the wonder of God, and the wonder was love. They saw that God's glory and God's love were one and the same thing. The glory of God is not that of a despotic eastern tyrant, but the splendour of love before which we fall not in abject terror but lost in wonder, love and praise.

Barclay's Commentary

John 1:15-17

THE INEXHAUSTIBLE FULLNESS

John 1:15-17

John was his witness and his statement still sounds out: "This is he of whom I said to you, he who comes after me has been advanced before me, because he was before me." On his fullness we all of us have drawn, and from him we have received grace upon grace, for it was the law which was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

We have already seen that the Fourth Gospel was written in a situation where it was necessary to make sure that John the Baptist did not occupy an exaggerated position in men's thoughts. So John begins this passage with a saying of John the Baptist which gives to Jesus the first place.

John the Baptist says of Jesus: "He who comes after me was before me." He may mean more than one thing by that. (a) Jesus was actually six months younger in age than John, and John may be saying quite simply: "He who is my junior has been advanced beyond me." (b) John may be saying: "I was in the field before Jesus; I occupied the centre of the stage before he did; my hand was laid to work before his was; but all that I was doing was to prepare the way for his coming; I was only the advance guard of the main force and the herald of the king." (c) It may be that John is thinking in terms much more deep than that. He may be thinking not in terms of time but of eternity. He may be thinking of Jesus as the one who existed before the world began, and beside whom any human figure has no standing at all. It may be that all three ideas are in John's mind. It was not he who had exaggerated his own position; that was the mistake that some of his followers had made. To John the topmost place belonged to Jesus.

This passage then goes on to say three great things about Jesus.

(i) On his fullness we all have drawn. The word that John uses for fullness is a great word; it is *pleroma* (GSN4138), and it means the sum total of all that is in God. It is a word which Paul uses often. In Col. 1:19 he says that all *pleroma* (GSN4138) dwelt in Christ. In Col. 2:9 he says in Christ there dwelt the *pleroma* (GSN4138) of deity in a bodily form. He meant that in Jesus there dwelt the totality of the wisdom, the power, the love of God. Just because of that Jesus is inexhaustible. A man can go to Jesus with any need and find that need supplied. A man can go to Jesus with any ideal and find that ideal realized. In Jesus the man in love with beauty will find the supreme beauty. In Jesus the man to whom life is the search for knowledge will find the supreme revelation. In Jesus the man who needs courage will find the pattern and the secret of being brave. In Jesus the man who feels that he cannot cope with life will find the Master of life and the power to live. In Jesus the man who is conscious of his sin will find the forgiveness for his sin and the strength to be good. In Jesus the *pleroma* (GSN4138), the fullness of God, all that is in God, what Westcott called "the spring of divine life," becomes available to men.

(ii) From him we have received grace upon grace. Literally the Greek means grace instead of grace. What does that strange phrase mean?

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John 1:15-17

(a) It may mean that in Christ we have found one wonder leading to another. One of the old missionaries came to one of the ancient Pictish kings. The king asked him what he might expect if he became a Christian. The missionary answered: "You will find wonder upon wonder and every one of them true." Sometimes when we travel a very lovely road, vista after vista opens to us. At every view we think that nothing could be lovelier, and then we turn another corner and an even greater loveliness opens before us. When a man enters on the study of some great subject, like music or poetry or art, he never gets to the end of it. Always there are fresh experiences of beauty waiting for him. It is so with Christ. The more we know of him, the more wonderful he becomes. The longer we live with him, the more loveliness we discover. The more we think about him and with him, the wider the horizon of truth becomes. This phrase may be John's way of expressing the limitlessness of Christ.

It may be his way of saying that the man who companies with Christ will find new wonders dawning upon his soul and enlightening his mind and enchaining his heart every day.

(b) It may be that we ought to take this expression quite literally. In Christ we find grace instead of grace. The different ages and the different situations in life demand a different kind of grace. We need one grace in the days of prosperity and another in the days of adversity. We need one grace in the sunlit days of youth and another when the shadows of age begin to lengthen. The church needs one grace in the days of persecution and another when the days of acceptance have come. We need one grace when we feel that we are on the top of things and another when we are depressed and discouraged and near to despair. We need one grace to bear our own burdens and another to bear one another's burdens. We need one grace when we are sure of things and another when there seems nothing certain left in the world. The grace of God is never a static but always a dynamic thing. It never fads to meet the situation. One need invades life and one grace comes with it. That need passes and another need assaults us and with it another grace comes. All through life we are constantly receiving grace instead of grace, for the grace of Christ is triumphantly adequate to deal with any situation.

(iii) The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. In the old way, life was governed by law. A man had to do a thing whether he liked it or not, and whether he knew the reason for it or not; but with the coming of Jesus we no longer seek to obey the law of God like slaves; we seek to answer the love of God like sons. It is through Jesus Christ that God the law-giver has become God the Father, that God the judge has become God the lover of the souls of men.

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John 1:18

THE REVELATION OF GOD

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God. It is the unique one, he who is God, he who is in the bosom of the Father, who has told us all about God.

When John said that no man has ever seen God, everyone in the ancient world would fully agree with him. Men were fascinated and depressed and frustrated by what they regarded as the infinite distance and the utter unknowability of God. In the Old Testament God is represented as saying to Moses: "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Exo.33:20). When God reminds the people of the giving of the law, he says: "You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut.4:12). No one in the Old Testament thought it possible to see God. The great Greek thinkers felt exactly the same. Xenophanes said: "Guesswork is over all." Plato said: "Never man and God can meet." Celsus laughed at the way that the Christians called God Father, because "God is away beyond everything." At the best, Apuleius said, men could catch a glimpse of God as a lightning flash lights up a dark night--one split second of illumination, and then the dark.

As Glover said: "Whatever God was, he was far from being within the reach of ordinary men." There might be very rare moments of ecstasy when men caught a glimpse of what they called "Absolute Being," but ordinary men were the prisoners of ignorance and fancy. There would be none to disagree with John when he said that no man has ever seen God.

But John does not stop there; he goes on to make the startling and tremendous statement that Jesus has fully revealed to men what God is like. What has come to men is what J. H. Bernard calls "the exhibition to the world of God in Christ." Here again the keynote of John's gospel sounds: "If you want to see what God is like, look at Jesus."

Why should it be that Jesus can do what no one else has ever done? Wherein lies his power to reveal God to men? John says three things about him.

(i) Jesus is unique. The Greek word is monogenes (GSN3439), which the King James Version translates only-begotten. It is true that that is what monogenes (GSN3439) literally means; but long before this it had lost its purely physical sense, and had come to have two special meanings. It had come to mean unique and specially beloved. Obviously an only son has a unique place and a unique love in his father's heart. So this word came to express uniqueness more than anything else. It is the conviction of the New Testament that there is no one like Jesus. He alone can bring God to men and bring men to God.

(ii) Jesus is God. Here we have the very same form of expression as we had in the first verse of the chapter. This does not mean that Jesus is identical with God; it does mean that in mind and character and being he is one with God. In this case it might be better if we thought of it as meaning that Jesus is divine. To see him is to see what God is.

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John 1:18

(iii) Jesus is in the bosom of the Father. To be in the bosom of someone is the Hebrew phrase which expresses the deepest intimacy possible in human life. It is used of mother and child; it is used of husband and wife; a man speaks of the wife of his bosom (Num.11:12; Deut.13:6); it is used of two friends who are in complete communion with one another. When John uses this phrase about Jesus, he means that between Jesus and God there is complete and uninterrupted intimacy. It is because Jesus is so intimate with God, that he is one with God and can reveal him to men.

In Jesus Christ the distant, unknowable, invisible, unreachable God has come to men; and God can never be a stranger to us again.

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John 1:19-28

THE WITNESS OF JOHN

John 1:19-28 (Part 1)

This is the witness of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites to him from Jerusalem to ask him: "Who are you?" He quite definitely affirmed and stated: "I am not the Messiah." So they asked him: "What then are we to think? Are you Elijah?" He said: "I am not Are you the promised prophet?" He answered: "No." So they said to him: "Who are you? Tell us, so that we can give an answer to those who sent us. What claim do you make for yourself." He said: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make the Lord's road straight,' as Isaiah the prophet said." Now they had been sent by the Pharisees. So they asked him and said to him: "If you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the promised prophet, why then do you baptize?" John answered: "I baptize with water. But there is one standing among you, whom you do not know, I mean the one who is coming after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to unloose." These things happened at Bethany, on the far side of Jordan, where John was baptizing.

With this passage John begins the narrative part of his gospel. In the prologue he has shown what he intends to do; he is writing his gospel to demonstrate that Jesus is the Mind, the Reason, the Word of God come into this world in the form of a human person. Having set down his central thought, he now begins the story of the life of Jesus.

No one is so careful of details of time as John is. Starting from this passage and going on to Jn.2:11 he tells step by step the story of the first momentous week in the public life of Jesus. The events of the first day are in Jn.1:19-28; the story of the second day is Jn.1:29-34; the third day is unfolded in Jn.1:35-39. The three verses Jn.1:40-42 tell the story of the fourth day. The events of the fifth day are told in Jn.1:43-51. The sixth day is left a blank. And the events of the last day of the week are told in Jn.2:1-11.

In this same section from Jn.1:19 to Jn.2:11 the Fourth Gospel gives us three different kinds of witness to the greatness and the uniqueness of Jesus. (i) There is the witness of John the Baptist (Jn.1:19-34). (ii) There is the witness of those who accepted Jesus as their Master, and who became his disciples (Jn.1:41-51). (iii) There is the witness of Jesus' own wonderful powers (Jn.2:1-11). John is setting Jesus before us in three different contexts, and in each showing us his supreme wonder.

We have already seen that the Fourth Gospel had to take account of a situation in which John the Baptist was given a position far higher than he himself had claimed. As late as A.D. 250 the Clementine Recognitions tell us that "there were some of John's disciples who preached about him as if their master was the Messiah." In this passage we see that that was a view that John the Baptist himself would have definitely repudiated.

Let us now turn to the passage itself. Right at the beginning we come upon a characteristic of the Fourth Gospel. It is emissaries of the Jews who come to cross-examine John. The word Jews (Ioudaioi, GSN2453) occurs in this gospel no fewer than seventy times; and always the Jews are

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John 1:19-28

the opposition. They are the people who have set themselves against Jesus. The mention of the Jews brings the opposition thus early upon the stage. The Fourth Gospel is two things. First, as we have seen, it is the exhibition of God in Jesus Christ. But, second, it is equally the story of the rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jews, the story of God's offer and man's refusal, the story of God's love and man's sin, the story of Jesus Christ's invitation and man's rejection. The Fourth Gospel is the gospel in which love and warning are uniquely and vividly combined.

The deputation which came to interview John was composed of two kinds of people. First, there were the priests and the Levites. Their interest was very natural, for John was the son of Zacharias, and Zacharias was a priest (Lk.1:5). In Judaism the only qualification for the priesthood was descent. If a man was not a descendant of Aaron nothing could make him a priest; if he was a descendant of Aaron nothing could stop him being one. Therefore, in the eyes of the authorities John the Baptist was in fact a priest and it was very natural that the priests should come to find out why he was behaving in such an unusual way. Second, there were emissaries of the Pharisees. It may well be that behind them was the Sanhedrin. One of the functions of the Sanhedrin was to deal with any man who was suspected of being a false prophet. John was a preacher to whom the people were flocking in hordes. The Sanhedrin may well have felt it their duty to check up on this man in case he was a false prophet.

The whole thing shows how suspicious orthodoxy was of anything unusual. John did not conform to the normal idea of a priest; and he did not conform to the normal idea of a preacher; therefore the ecclesiastical authorities of the day looked upon him askance. The church always runs the danger of condemning a new way just because it is new. In one sense there is hardly any institution in the world which resents change so much as the church does. It has often rejected a great teacher and often refused some great adventure simply because it suspected all things new.

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John 1:19-28

THE WITNESS OF JOHN

John 1:19-28 (Part 2)

The emissaries of the orthodox could think of three things that John might claim to be.

(i) They asked him if he was the Messiah. The Jews were waiting, and are waiting to this day, for the Messiah. There was no one idea of the Messiah. Some people expected one who would bring peace over all the earth. Some expected one who would bring in the reign of righteousness. Most expected one who would be a great national champion to lead the armies of the Jews as conquerors over all the world. Some expected a supernatural figure straight from God. Still more expected a prince to rise from David's line. Frequently Messianic pretenders arose and caused rebellions. The time of Jesus was an excited age. It was natural to ask John if he claimed to be the Messiah. John completely rejected that claim; but he rejected it with a certain hint. In the Greek the word I is stressed by its position. It is as if John said: "I am not the Messiah, but, if you only knew, the Messiah is here."

(ii) They asked him if he was Elijah. It was the Jewish belief that, before the Messiah came, Elijah would return to herald his coming and to prepare the world to receive him. Particularly, Elijah was to come to arrange all disputes. He would settle what things and what people were clean and unclean; he would settle who were Jews and who were not Jews; he would bring together again families which were estranged. So much did the Jews believe this that the traditional law said that money and property whose owners were disputed, or anything found whose owner was unknown, must wait "until Elijah comes." The belief that Elijah would come before the Messiah goes back to Mal.4:5. It was even believed that Elijah would anoint the Messiah to his kingly office, as all kings were anointed, and that he would raise the dead to share in the new kingdom; but John denied that any such honour was his.

(iii) They asked him if he was the expected and promised prophet. It was sometimes believed that Isaiah and, especially, Jeremiah would return at the coming of the Messiah. But this is really a reference to the assurance which Moses gave to the people in Deut.18:15: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren--him you shall heed." That was a promise that no Jew ever forgot. They waited and longed for the emergence of the prophet who would be the greatest of all prophets, the Prophet par excellence. But once again John denied that this honour was his.

So they asked him who he was; his answer was that he was nothing but a voice bidding men prepare the way for the king. The quotation is from Isa.40:3. All the gospels cite it (Mk.1:3; Matt.3:3; Lk.3:4). The idea behind it is this. Eastern roads were not surfaced and metalled. They were mere tracks. When a king was about to visit a province, when a conqueror was about to travel through his domains, the roads were smoothed and straightened out and put in order. What John was saying was: "I am nobody; I am only a voice telling you to get ready for the coming of the king, for he is on the way."

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John 1:19-28

John was what every true preacher and teacher ought to be--only a voice, a pointer to the king. The last thing that he wanted men to do was to look at him; he wanted them to forget him and see only the king.

But the Pharisees were puzzled about one thing--what right had John to baptize? If he had been the Messiah, or even Elijah or the prophet, he might have baptized. Isaiah had written: "So shall he sprinkle many nations" (Isa.52:15). Ezekiel had said: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean" (Eze.36:25). Zechariah had said: "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness" (Zech.13:1). But why should John baptize?

What made the matter still more strange was this. Baptism at the hands of men was not for Israelites at all. It was proselytes, incomers from other faiths, who were baptized. An Israelite was never baptized; he was God's already and did not need to be washed. But Gentiles had to be washed in baptism. John was making Israelites do what only Gentiles had to do. He was suggesting that the chosen people had to be cleansed. That was indeed precisely what John believed. But he did not answer directly.

He said: "I am baptizing only with water; but there is One among you--you don't recognize him--and I am not worthy to untie the straps of his shoes." John could not have cited a more menial office. To untie the straps of sandals was slaves' work. There was a Rabbinic saying which said that a disciple might do for his master anything that a servant did, except only to untie his sandals. That was too menial a service for even a disciple to render. So John said: "One is coming whose slave I am not fit to be." We are to understand that by this time the baptism of Jesus had taken place at which John had recognized Jesus. So here John is saying again: "The king is coming. And, for his coming, you need to be cleansed as much as any Gentile. Prepare yourself for the entry into history of the king."

John's function was to be only the preparer of the way. Any greatness he had came from the greatness of the one whose coming he foretold. He is the great example of the man prepared to obliterate himself in order that Jesus Christ may be seen. He was only, as he saw it, a finger-post pointing to Christ. God give us grace to forget ourselves and to remember only Christ.

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John 1:29-31

THE LAMB OF GOD

John 1:29-31

On the next day, John saw Jesus as he was coming towards him, and said: "See! The Lamb of God who is taking away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said to you: 'There is a man who is coming after me, who has been advanced before me, because he was before me.' Even I did not know him. All the same, the reason that I came baptizing with water is that he might be shown forth to Israel."

Here we come to the second day of this momentous week in the life of Jesus. By this time his baptism and his temptations were past and he was about to set his hand to the work which he came into the world to do. Once again the Fourth Gospel shows us John paying spontaneous tribute to Jesus. He calls him by that tremendous title which has become woven into the very language of devotion--The Lamb of God. What was in John's mind when he used that title? There are at least four pictures which may well contribute something to it.

(i) It may well have been that John was thinking of the Passover Lamb. The Passover Feast was not very far away (Jn.2:13). The old story of the Passover was that it was the blood of the slain lamb which protected the houses of the Israelites on the night when they left Egypt (Exo.12:11-13). On that night when the Angel of Death walked abroad and slew the first-born of the Egyptians, the Israelites were to smear their doorposts with the blood of the slain lamb, and the angel, seeing it, would pass over that house. The blood of the lamb delivered them from destruction. It has been suggested that even as John the Baptist saw Jesus, there passed by flocks of lambs, being driven up to Jerusalem from the country districts to serve as sacrifices for the Passover Feast. The blood of the Passover Lamb delivered the Israelites in Egypt from death; and it may be that John was saying: "There is the one true sacrifice who can deliver you from death." Paul too thought of Jesus as the Passover Lamb (1Cor.5:7).

There is a deliverance that only Jesus Christ can win for us.

(ii) John was the son of a priest. He would know all the ritual of the Temple and its sacrifices. Every morning and every evening a lamb was sacrificed in the Temple for the sins of the people (Exo.29:38-42). So long as the Temple stood this daily sacrifice was made. Even when the people were starving in war and in siege they never omitted to offer the lamb until in A.D. 70 the Temple was destroyed. It may be that John is saying: "In the Temple a lamb is offered every night and every morning for the sins of the people; but in this Jesus is the only sacrifice which can deliver men from sin."

(iii) There are two great pictures of the lamb in the prophets. Jeremiah writes: "But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter" (Jer.11:19). And Isaiah has the great picture of the one who was brought "like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa.53:7). Both these great prophets had the vision of one who by his sufferings and his sacrifice, meekly and lovingly borne, would redeem his people. Maybe John is saying: "Your prophets dreamed of the one who was to love and suffer and die for the people; that one is come." It is certainly true that in later times the picture of Isa.53 became to

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John 1:29-31

the church one of the most precious forecasts of Jesus in all the Old Testament. It may be that John the Baptist was the first to see it so.

(iv) There is a fourth picture which would be very familiar to the Jews, although very strange to us. Between the Old and New Testaments there were the days of the great struggles of the Maccabees. In those days the lamb, and especially the horned lamb, was the symbol of a great conqueror. Judas Maccabaeus is so described, as are Samuel and David and Solomon. The lamb--strange as it may sound to us--stood for the conquering champion of God. It may well be that this is no picture of gentle and helpless weakness, but rather a picture of conquering majesty and power. Jesus was the champion of God who fought with sin and mastered it in single contest.

There is sheer wonder in this phrase, the Lamb of God. It haunted the writer of the Revelation. Twenty-nine times he used it. It becomes one of the most precious titles of Christ. In one word it sums up the love, the sacrifice, the suffering and the triumph of Christ.

John says that he did not know Jesus. Now John was a relation of Jesus (Lk.1:36), and he must have been acquainted with him. What John is saying is not that he did not know who Jesus was, but that he did not know what Jesus was. It had suddenly been revealed to him that Jesus was none other than the Son of God.

Once again John makes clear what his only function was. It was to point men to Christ. He was nothing and Christ was everything. He claimed no greatness and no place for himself; he was only the man who, as it were, drew back the curtain and left Jesus occupying the lonely centre of the stage.

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John 1:32-34

THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT

John 1:32,34

So John bore his witness. "With my own eyes," he said, "I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven, as it might have been a dove, and the Spirit remained upon him. And I d[d not know him. But it was he who sent me to baptize with water who said to me: 'The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and remaining is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I saw it happen; and my witness stands that this is the Son of God."

Something had happened at the baptism of Jesus which had convinced John beyond all doubt that Jesus was the Son of God. As the fathers of the church saw centuries ago, it was something which only the eye of the mind and soul could see. But John saw it and was convinced.

In Palestine the dove was a sacred bird. It was not hunted and it was not eaten. Philo noticed the number of doves at Ascalon, because it was not permitted to catch and kill them, and they were tame. In Gen.1:2 we read of the creative Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters. The Rabbis used to say that the Spirit of God moved and fluttered like a dove over the ancient chaos breathing order and beauty into it. The picture of the dove was one which the Jews knew and loved.

It was at his baptism that the Spirit came down upon Jesus with power. We must remember that at this time the Christian doctrine of the Spirit had not yet come into being. We have to wait for the last chapters of John's gospel and for Pentecost for that to emerge. When John the Baptist spoke of the Spirit coming upon Jesus, he must have been thinking in Jewish terms. What then was the Jewish idea of the Spirit?

The Jewish word for Spirit is ruach (HSN7307), the word which means wind. To the Jew there were always three basic ideas of the Spirit. The Spirit was power, power like a mighty rushing wind; the Spirit was life, the very dynamic of the existence of man; the Spirit was God; the power and the life of the Spirit were beyond mere human achievement and attainment; the coming of the Spirit into a man's life was the coming of God. Above all it was the Spirit who controlled and inspired the prophets. "I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Mic.3:8). God speaks to Isaiah of "My Spirit which is upon you and my words which I have put in your mouth" (Isa.59:21). "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings" (Isa.61:1). "A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you.... I will put my Spirit within you" (Eze.36:26-27).

We may say that the Spirit of God did three things for the man on whom he came. First, he brought to men the truth of God. Second, he gave men the power to recognize that truth when they saw it. Third, he gave them the ability and the courage to preach that truth to men. To the Jew the Spirit was God coming into a man's life.

At his baptism the Spirit came upon Jesus in a different way from that in which he ever came on any other person. Most men have what might be called spasmodic experiences of the Spirit. They have their moments of dazzling illumination, of extraordinary power, of superhuman courage. But

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John 1:32-34

these moments come and go. Twice (Jn.1:32-33) John goes out of his way to point out that the Spirit remained on Jesus. Here was no momentary inspiration. In Jesus the Spirit took up his permanent abode. That is still another way of saying that the mind and the power of God were uniquely in Jesus.

Here we can learn a great deal of what the word baptism means. The Greek verb baptizein (GSN0907) means to dip or to submerge. It can be used of clothes being dipped in dye; it can be used of a ship submerged beneath the waves; it can be used of a person who is so drunk that he is soaked in drink. When John says that Jesus will baptize men with the Holy Spirit, he means that Jesus can bring God's Spirit to us in such a way that we are saturated and our life and being are flooded with that Spirit.

Now what did this baptism mean for John? His own baptism meant two things. (i) It meant cleansing. It meant that a man was being washed from the impurities that clung to him. (ii) It meant dedication. It meant that he went out to a new and a different and a better life. But Jesus' baptism was a baptism of the Spirit. If we remember the Jewish conception of the Spirit we can say that when the Spirit takes possession of a man certain things happen.

(i) His life is illumined. There comes to him the knowledge of God and God's will. He knows what God's purpose is, what life means, where duty lies. Some of God's wisdom and light has come into him.

(ii) His life is strengthened. Knowledge without power is a haunting and frustrating thing. But the Spirit gives us not only knowledge to know the right, but also strength and power to do it. The Spirit gives us a triumphant adequacy to cope with life.

(iii) His life is purified. Christ's baptism with the Spirit was to be a baptism of fire (Matt.3:11; Lk.3:16). The dross of evil things, the alloy of the lower things, the base admixture is burned away until a man is clean and pure.

Often our prayers for the Spirit are a kind of theological and liturgical formality; but when we know that for which we are praying, these prayers become a desperate cry from the heart.

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John 1:35-39

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

John 1:35-39

On the next day John was again standing with two of his disciples. John looked at Jesus as he walked. "See!" he said, "The Lamb of God!" And the two disciples heard him speaking and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him. "What are you looking for?" he said to them. "Rabbi" (the word means Teacher), they said to him, "where are you staying?" He said to them: "Come and see!" They came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him throughout that day. And it was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Never was a passage of scripture fuller of little revealing touches than this.

Once again we see John the Baptist pointing beyond himself. He must have known very well that to speak to his disciples about Jesus like that was to invite them to leave him and transfer their loyalty to this new and greater teacher; and yet he did it. There was no jealousy in John. He had come to attach men not to himself but to Christ. There is no harder task than to take the second place when once the first place was enjoyed. But as soon as Jesus emerged on the scene John never had any other thought than to send men to him.

So the two disciples of John followed Jesus. It may well be that they were too shy to approach him directly and followed respectfully some distance behind. Then Jesus did something entirely characteristic. He turned and spoke to them. That is to say, he met them half way. He made things easier for them. He opened the door that they might come in.

Here we have the symbol of the divine initiative. It is always God who takes the first step. When the human mind begins to seek and the human heart begins to long, God comes to meet us far more than half way. God does not leave a man to search and search until he comes to him; God goes out to meet the man. As Augustine said, we could not even have begun to seek for God unless he had already found us. When we go to God we do not go to one who hides himself and keeps us at a distance; we go to one who stands waiting for us, and who even takes the initiative by coming to meet us on the road.

Jesus began by asking these two men the most fundamental question in life. "What are you looking for?" he asked them. It was very relevant to ask that question in Palestine in the time of Jesus. Were they legalists, looking only for subtle and recondite conversations about the little details of the Law, like the scribes and Pharisees? Were they ambitious time-servers looking for position and power like the Sadducees? Were they nationalists looking for a political demagogue and a military commander who would smash the occupying power of Rome like the Zealots? Were they humble men of prayer looking for God and for his will, like the Quiet in the Land? Or were they simply puzzled, bewildered sinful men looking for light on the road of life and forgiveness from God?

It would be well if every now and again we were to ask ourselves: "What am I looking for? What's my aim and goal? What am I really trying to get out of life?"

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Some are searching for security. They would like a position which is safe, money enough to meet the needs of life and to put some past for the time when work is done, a material security which will take away the essential worry about material things. This is not a wrong aim, but it is a low aim, and an inadequate thing to which to direct all life; for, in the last analysis, there is no safe security in the chances and the changes of this life.

Some are searching for what they would call a career, for power, prominence, prestige, for a place to fit the talents and the abilities they believe themselves to have, for an opportunity to do the work they believe themselves capable of doing. If this be directed by motives of personal ambition it can be a bad aim; if it be directed by motives of the service of our fellow men it can be a high aim. But it is not enough, for its horizon is limited by time and by the world.

Some are searching for some kind of peace, for something to enable them to live at peace with themselves, and at peace with God, and at peace with men. This is the search for God; this aim only Jesus Christ can meet and supply.

The answer of John's disciples was that they wished to know where Jesus stayed. They called him Rabbi (GSN4461); that is a Hebrew word (HSN7227) which literally means My great one. It was the title of respect given by students and seekers after knowledge to their teachers and to wise men. John, the evangelist, was writing for Greeks. He knew they would not recognize that Hebrew word, so he translated it for them by the Greek word didaskalos (GSN1320), teacher. It was not mere curiosity which made these two ask this question. What they meant was that they did not wish to speak to Jesus only on the road, in the passing, as chance acquaintances might stop and exchange a few words. They wished to linger long with him and talk out their problems and their troubles. The man who would be Jesus' disciple can never be satisfied with a passing word. He wants to meet Jesus, not as an acquaintance in the passing, but as a friend in his own house.

Jesus' answer was: "Come and see!" The Jewish Rabbis had a way of using that phrase in their teaching. They would say: "Do you want to know the answer to this question? Do you want to know the solution to this problem? Come and see, and we will think about it together." When Jesus said: "Come and see!" he was inviting them, not only to come and talk, but to come and find the things that he alone could open out to them.

John who wrote the gospel finishes the paragraph--"It was about four o'clock in the afternoon." It may very well be that he finishes that way because he was one of the two himself. He could tell you the very hour of the day and no doubt the very stone of the road he was standing on when he met Jesus. At four o'clock on a spring afternoon in Galilee, life became a new thing for him.

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John 1:40-42

SHARING THE GLORY

John 1:40-42

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who had heard John speaking about Jesus, and who had followed him. First thing in the morning, he went and found his own brother Simon. "We have found the Messiah," he said to him. (The word Messiah means the same as the word Christ.) He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked intently at him. "You are Simon, Jona's son," he said. "You will be called Cephas." Cephas is the same name as Peter and means a rock.

The Revised Standard Version has it that Andrew "first found his brother Simon." In the Greek manuscripts there are two readings. Some manuscripts have the word *proton* (GSN4412), which means first, and that is the reading that the Revised Standard Version has translated. Other manuscripts have *proi* (GSN4404), which means early in the morning. In our translation we have taken the second reading because it suits better the story of the first momentous week in Jesus' life to regard this event as taking place on the next day.

Again John explains a Hebrew word in order to help his Greek readers to understand better. Messiah and Christ are the same word. Messiah is Hebrew and Christ is Greek; both mean anointed. In the ancient world, as today in our own country, kings were anointed with oil at their coronation. Messiah and Christos both mean God's Anointed King.

We do not possess a great deal of information about Andrew, but even the little that we know perfectly paints his character. He is one of the most attractive men in the apostolic band. He has two outstanding characteristics.

(i) Andrew was characteristically the man who was prepared to take the second place. Again and again he is identified as Simon Peter's brother. It is clear that he lived under the shadow of Peter. People might not know who Andrew was, but everyone knew Peter; and when men spoke of Andrew they described him as Peter's brother. Andrew was not one of the inner circle of the disciples. When Jesus healed Jairus' daughter, when he went up to the Mount of Transfiguration, when he underwent his temptation in Gethsemane, it was Peter, James and John whom he took with him. It would have been so easy for Andrew to resent this. Was he not one of the first two disciples who ever followed Jesus? Did Peter not owe his meeting with Jesus to him? Might he not reasonably have expected a foremost place in the apostolic band? But all that never even occurred to Andrew. He was quite content to stand back and let his brother have the limelight; he was quite content to play a humble part in the company of the Twelve.

To Andrew matters of precedence and place and honour mattered nothing at all. All that mattered was to be with Jesus and to serve him as well as he could. Andrew is the patron saint of all who humbly and loyally and ungrudgingly take the second place.

(ii) Andrew is characteristically the man who was always introducing others to Jesus. There are only three times in the gospel story when Andrew is brought into the centre of the stage. There is this incident here, in which he brings Peter to Jesus. There is the incident in Jn.6:8-9 when he brings to Jesus the boy with the five loaves and two small fishes. And there is the incident in

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Jn.12:22 when he brings the enquiring Greeks into the presence of Jesus. It was Andrew's great joy to bring others to Jesus. He stands out as the man whose one desire was to share the glory. He is the man with the missionary heart. Having himself found the friendship of Jesus, he spent all his life in introducing others to that friendship. Andrew is our great example in that he could not keep Jesus to himself.

When Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, Jesus looked at Peter. The word used of that look is *emblepein* (GSN1689). It describes a concentrated, intent gaze, the gaze which does not see only the superficial things that lie on the surface, but which reads a man's heart. When Jesus saw Simon, as he was then called, he said to him: "Your name is Simon; but you are going to be called Cephas, which means a rock."

In the ancient world nearly everyone had two names. Greek was the universal language and nearly everyone had a name in his own native tongue, by which he was known to his friends. Thomas was the Aramaic and Didymus (Didumos - GSN1324) the Greek for a twin; Tabitha (GSN5000; compare HSN6646) was the Aramaic and Dorcas (Dorkas - GSN1393) the Greek for a gazelle. Sometimes the Greek name was chosen because it sounded like the Aramaic name. A Jew who was called Eliakim or Abel in his own tongue might become Alcimur or Apelles to his Greek circle of acquaintances. So then Peter (GSN4074) and Cephas (GSN2786) are not different names; they are the same name in different languages.

In the Old Testament a change of name often denoted a new relationship with God. For instance, Jacob became Israel (Gen.32:28), and Abram became Abraham (Gen.17:5) when they entered into a new relationship with God. When a man enters into a new relationship with God, it is as if life began all over again and he became a new man, so that he needs a new name.

But the great thing about this story is that it tells us how Jesus looks at men. He does not only see what a man is; he also sees what a man can become. He sees not only the actualities in a man; he also sees the possibilities. Jesus looked at Peter and saw in him not only a Galilean fisherman but one who had it in him to become the rock on which his church would be built. Jesus sees us not only as we are, but as we can be; and he says: "Give your life to me, and I will make you what you have it in you to be." Once someone came on Michelangelo chipping away with his chisel at a huge shapeless piece of rock. He asked the sculptor what he was doing. "I am releasing the angel imprisoned in this marble," he answered. Jesus is the one who sees and can release the hidden hero in every man.

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John 1:43-51

THE SURRENDER OF NATHANAEL

John 1:43-51

On the next day Jesus determined to go away to Galilee; and there he found Philip. Jesus said to him: "Follow me!" Now Philip came from Bethsaida, which was the town from which Andrew and Peter came. Philip went and found Nathanael and said to him: "We have found the One about whom Moses wrote in the law, and about whom the prophets spoke--I mean Jesus, the son of Joseph, the man from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him: "Come and see!" When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said: "See! A man who is really an Israelite! A man in whom there is no guile!" Nathanael said to him: "How do you know me?" "Before Philip called you," said Jesus, "I saw you when you were under the fig-tree." "Rabbi," answered Nathanael, "you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus answered: "Do you believe because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig-tree'? You will see greater things than these." He said to him: "This is the truth I tell you--you will see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

At this point in the story Jesus left the south and went north to Galilee. There, perhaps in Cana, he found and called Philip. Philip, like Andrew, could not keep the good news to himself. As Godet said: "One lighted torch serves to light another." So Philip went and found his friend Nathanael. He told him that he believed that he had discovered the long promised Messiah in Jesus, the man from Nazareth. Nathanael was contemptuous. There was nothing in the Old Testament which foretold that God's Chosen One should come from Nazareth. Nazareth was a quite undistinguished place. Nathanael himself came from Cana, another Galilaean town, and, in country places, jealousy between town and town, and rivalry between village and village, is notorious. Nathanael's reaction was to declare that Nazareth was not the kind of place that anything good was likely to come out of. Philip was wise. He did not argue. He said simply: "Come and see!"

Not very many people have ever been argued into Christianity. Often our arguments do more harm than good. The only way to convince a man of the supremacy of Christ is to confront him with Christ. On the whole it is true to say that it is not argumentative and philosophical preaching and teaching which have won men for Christ; it is the presentation of the story of the Cross.

There is a story which tells how, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Huxley, the great agnostic, was a member of a house-party at a country house. Sunday came round, and most of the members prepared to go to church; but, very naturally, Huxley did not propose to go. Huxley approached a man known to have a simple and radiant Christian faith. He said to him: "Suppose you don't go to church today. Suppose you stay at home and you tell me quite simply what your Christian faith means to you and why you are a Christian." "But," said the man, "you could demolish my arguments in an instant. I'm not clever enough to argue with you." Huxley said gently: "I don't want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you." The man stayed at home and told Huxley most simply of his faith. When he had finished there were tears in the great agnostic's eyes. "I would give my right hand," he said, "if only I could believe that."

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It was not clever argument that touched Huxley's heart. He could have dealt efficiently and devastatingly with any argument that that simple Christian was likely to have produced, but the simple presentation of Christ caught him by the heart. The best argument is to say to people: "Come and see!" Of course, we have to know Christ ourselves before we can invite others to come to him. The true evangelist must himself have met Christ first.

So Nathanael came; and Jesus could see into his heart. "Here," said Jesus, "is a genuine Israelite, a man in whose heart there is no guile." That was a tribute that any devout Israelite would recognize. "Blessed is the man," said the Psalmist, "to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Ps.32:2). "He had done no violence," said the prophet of the Servant of the Lord "and there was no deceit in his mouth" (Isa.53:9).

Nathanael was surprised that anyone could give a verdict like that on so short an acquaintance, and he demanded how Jesus could possibly know him. Jesus told him that he had already seen him under the fig-tree. What is the significance of that? To the Jews the fig-tree always stood for peace. Their idea of peace was when a man could be undisturbed under his own vine and his own fig-tree (compare 1Kgs.4:25; Mic.4:4). Further, the fig-tree was leafy and shady and it was the custom to sit and meditate under the roof of its branches. No doubt that was what Nathanael had been doing; and no doubt as he sat under the fig-tree he had prayed for the day when God's Chosen One should come. No doubt he had been meditating on the promises of God. And now he felt that Jesus had seen into the very depths of his heart.

It was not so much that Jesus had seen him under the fig-tree that surprised Nathanael; it was the fact that Jesus had read the thoughts of his inmost heart. Nathanael said to himself: "Here is the man who understands my dreams! Here is the man who knows my prayers! Here is the man who has seen into my most intimate and secret longings, longings which I have never even dared put into words! Here is the man who can translate the inarticulate sigh of my soul! This must be God's promised anointed one and no other." Nathanael capitulated for ever to the man who read and understood and satisfied his heart.

It may be that Jesus smiled. He quoted the old story of Jacob at Bethel who had seen the golden ladder leading up to heaven (Gen.28:12-13). It was as if Jesus said: "Nathanael, I can do far more than read your heart. I can be for you and for all men the way, the ladder that leads to heaven." It is through Jesus and Jesus alone that the souls of men can mount the ladder which leads to heaven.

This passage presents us with a problem. Who was Nathanael? In the Fourth Gospel he is one of the first group of disciples; in the other three gospels he never appears at all. More than one explanation has been given.

(i) It has been suggested that Nathanael is not a real figure at all, but an ideal figure standing for all the true Israelites who burst the bonds of national pride and prejudice and gave themselves to Jesus Christ.

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John 1:43-51

(ii) On the same basis, it has been suggested that he stands either for Paul or for the beloved disciple. Paul was the great example of the Israelite who had accepted Christ; the beloved disciple was the ideal disciple. Again the supposition is that Nathanael stands for an ideal; that he is a type and not a person. If this were the only mention of Nathanael that might be true; but Nathanael appears again in Jn.21:2 and there is no thought of him as an ideal there.

(iii) He has been identified with Matthew, because both Matthew and Nathanael mean the gift of God. We saw that in those days most people had two names; but then one name was Greek and the other Jewish. In this case both Matthew and Nathanael are Jewish names.

(iv) There is a simpler explanation. Nathanael was brought to Jesus by Philip. Nathanael's name is never mentioned in the other three gospels; and in the Fourth Gospel Bartholomew's name is never mentioned. Now, in the list of the disciples in Matt.10:3 and Mk.3:18, Philip and Bartholomew come together, as if it was natural and inevitable to connect them. Moreover, Bartholomew is really a second name. It means Son of Tholmai or Ptolemy. Bartholomew must have had another name, a first name; and it is at least possible that Bartholomew and Nathanael are the same person under different names. That certainly fits the facts.

Whatever else, it is true that Nathanael stands for the Israelite whose heart was cleansed of pride and prejudice and who saw in Jesus the one who satisfied the longing of his waiting, seeking heart.

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John 2:1-11

THE NEW EXHILARATION

John 2:1-11 (Part 1)

Two days after this there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee; and Jesus' mother was there. And Jesus was invited to the wedding and so were his disciples. When the wine had run short, Jesus' mother said to him: "They have no wine." Jesus said to her: "Lady, let me handle this in my own way. My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you to do." There were six stone waterpots standing there--they were needed for the Jewish purifying customs--and each of them held about twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them: "Fill the waterpots with water." They filled them up to the very brim. He said to them: "Draw from them now, and take what you draw to the steward in charge." They did so.

When the steward had tasted the water which had become wine--he did not know where it came from, but the servants who had drawn the water knew--the steward called the bridegroom and said to him: "Everyone first sets before the guests the good wine, and then, when they have drunk their fill, he sets before them the inferior wine. You have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus did the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee, and displayed his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

The very richness of the Fourth Gospel presents those who would study it and him who would expound it with a problem. Always there are two things. There is a simple surface story that anyone can understand and re-tell; but there is also a wealth of deeper meaning for him who has the eagerness to search and the eye to see and the mind to understand. There is so much in a passage like this that we must take three days to study it. We shall look at it first of all quite simply to set it within its background and to see it come alive. We shall then look at certain of the things it tells us about Jesus and his work. And finally we shall look at the permanent truth which John is seeking to tell us in it.

Cana of Galilee is so called to distinguish it from Cana in Coelo-Syria. It was a village quite near to Nazareth. Jerome, who stayed in Palestine, says that he saw it from Nazareth. In Cana there was a wedding feast to which Mary went and at which she held a special place. She had something to do with the arrangements, for she was worried when the wine ran done; and she had authority enough to order the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do. Some of the later gospels which never got into the New Testament add certain details to this story. One of the Coptic gospels tells us that Mary was a sister of the bridegroom's mother. There is an early set of Prefaces to the books of the New Testament called the Monarchian Prefaces which tell us that the bridegroom was no other than John himself, and that his mother was Salome, the sister of Mary. We do not know whether these extra details are true or not, but the story is so vividly told that it is clearly an eye-witness account.

There is no mention of Joseph. The explanation most probably is that by this time Joseph was dead. It would seem that Joseph died quite soon, and that the reason why Jesus spent eighteen long years in Nazareth was that he had to take upon himself the support of his mother and his family. It was only when his younger brothers and sisters were able to look after themselves that he left home.

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John 2:1-11

The scene is a village wedding feast. In Palestine a wedding was a really notable occasion. It was the Jewish law that the wedding of a virgin should take place on a Wednesday. This is interesting because it gives us a date from which to work back; and if this wedding took place on a Wednesday it must have been the Sabbath day when Jesus first met Andrew and John and they stayed the whole day with him. The wedding festivities lasted far more than one day. The wedding ceremony itself took place late in the evening, after a feast. After the ceremony the young couple were conducted to their new home. By that time it was dark and they were conducted through the village streets by the light of flaming torches and with a canopy over their heads. They were taken by as long a route as possible so that as many people as possible would have the opportunity to wish them well. But a newly married couple did not go away for their honeymoon; they stayed at home; and for a week they kept open house.

They wore crowns and dressed in their bridal robes. They were treated like a king and queen, were actually addressed as king and queen, and their word was law. In a life where there was much poverty and constant hard work, this week of festivity and joy was one of the supreme occasions.

It was in a happy time like this that Jesus gladly shared. But something went wrong. It is likely that the coming of Jesus caused something of a problem. He had been invited to the feast, but he had arrived not alone but with five disciples. Five extra people may well have caused complications. Five unexpected guests might provide any festival with a problem, and the wine went done.

For a Jewish feast wine was essential. "Without wine," said the Rabbis, "there is no joy." It was not that people were drunken, but in the East wine was an essential. Drunkenness was in fact a great disgrace, and they actually drank their wine in a mixture composed of two parts of wine to three parts of water. At any time the failure of provisions would have been a problem, for hospitality in the East is a sacred duty; but for the provisions to fail at a wedding would be a terrible humiliation for the bride and the bridegroom.

So Mary came to Jesus to tell him that it was so. The King James Version translation of Jesus' reply makes it sound very discourteous. It makes him say: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" That is indeed a translation of the words, but it does not in any way give the tone.

The phrase, "What have I to do with thee?" was a common conversational phrase. When it was uttered angrily and sharply it did indicate complete disagreement and reproach, but when it was spoken gently it indicated not so much reproach but misunderstanding. It means: "Don't worry; you don't quite understand what is going on; leave things to me, and I will settle them in my own way." Jesus was simply telling Mary to leave things to him, that he would have his own way of dealing with the situation.

The word woman (gunai, GSN1135) is also misleading. It sounds to us very rough and abrupt. But it is the same word as Jesus used on the Cross to address Mary as he left her to the care of John (Jn.19:26). In Homer it is the title by which Odysseus addresses Penelope, his well-loved wife. It is the title by which Augustus, the Roman Emperor, addressed Cleopatra, the famous Egyptian queen. So far from being a rough and discourteous way of address, it was a title of respect. We have no

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way of speaking in English which exactly renders it; but it is better to translate it Lady which gives at least the courtesy in it.

However Jesus spoke, Mary was confident of him. She told the servants to do as Jesus told them to do. At the door there were six great water jars. The word that the King James Version translates "firkin" (metretes, GSN3355) represents the Hebrew measure called the bath (HSN1324) which was a measure equivalent to between eight and nine gallons. The jars were very large; they would hold about twenty gallons of water apiece.

John was writing his gospel for Greeks and so he explains that these jars were there to provide water for the purifying ceremonies of the Jews. Water was required for two purposes. First, it was required for cleansing the feet on entry to the house. The roads were not surfaced. Sandals were merely a sole attached to the foot by straps. On a dry day the feet were covered by dust and on a wet day they were soiled with mud; and the water was used for cleansing them. Second, it was required for the handwashing. Strict Jews washed the hands before a meal and between each course. First the hand was held upright and the water was poured over it in such a way that it ran right to the wrist; then the hand was held pointing down and the water was poured in such a way that it ran from the wrist to the finger-tips. This was done with each hand in turn; and then each palm was cleansed by rubbing it with the fist of the other hand. The Jewish ceremonial law insisted that this should be done not only at the beginning of a meal but also between courses. If it was not done the hands were technically unclean. It was for this footwashing and handwashing that these great stone jars of water stood there.

John commanded that the jars should be filled to the brim. John mentions that point to make it clear that nothing else but water was put into them. He then told them to draw out the water and to take it to the architriklinos (GSN0755), the steward in charge. At their banquets the Romans had a toast-master called the arbiter bibendi, the arranger of the drinking. Sometimes one of the guests acted as a kind of master of ceremonies at a Jewish wedding. But our equivalent of the architriklinos (GSN0755) is really the head-waiter. He was responsible for the seating of the guests and the correct running of the feast. When he tasted the water which had become wine he was astonished. He called the bridegroom--it was the bridegroom's parents who were responsible for the feast--and spoke jestingly.

"Most people," he said, "serve the good wine first; and then, when the guests have drunk a good deal, and their palates are dulled and they are not in much of a condition to appreciate what they are drinking, they serve the inferior wine, but you have kept the best until now."

So it was at a village girl's wedding in a Galilaean village that Jesus first showed his glory; and it was there that his disciples caught another dazzling glimpse of what he was.

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John 2:1-11

THE NEW EXHILARATION

John 2:1-11 (Part 2)

We note three general things about this wonderful deed which Jesus did.

(i) We note when it happened. It happened at a wedding feast. Jesus was perfectly at home at such an occasion. He was no severe, austere killjoy. He loved to share in the happy rejoicing of a wedding feast.

There are certain religious people who shed a gloom wherever they go. They are suspicious of all joy and happiness. To them religion is a thing of black clothes, the lowered voice, the expulsion of social fellowship. It was said of Alice Freeman Palmer by one of her scholars: "She made me feel as if I was bathed in sunshine." Jesus was like that. C. H. Spurgeon in his book, *Lectures to My Students*, has some wise, if caustic, advice. "Sepulchral tones may fit a man to be an undertaker, but Lazarus is not called out of his grave by hollow moans." "I know brethren who from head to foot, in garb, tone, manner, necktie and boots are so utterly parsonic that no particle of manhood is visible....

Some men appear to have a white cravat twisted round their souls, their manhood is throttled with that starched rag." "An individual who has no geniality about him had better be an undertaker, and bury the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living." "I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls; not levity and frothiness, but a genial, happy spirit. There are more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and there will be more souls led to heaven by a man who wears heaven in his face than by one who bears Tartarus in his looks."

Jesus never counted it a crime to be happy. Why should his followers do so?

(ii) We note where it happened. It happened in a humble home in a village in Galilee. This miracle was not wrought against the background of some great occasion and in the presence of vast crowds. It was wrought in a home. A.H.N. Green *Armytage* in his book, *A Portrait of St. Luke*, speaks of how Luke delighted to show Jesus against a background of simple, homely things and people. In a vivid phrase he says that St. Luke's gospel "domesticated God"; it brought God right into the home circle and into the ordinary things of life. Jesus' action at Cana of Galilee shows what he thought of a home. As the Revised Standard Version has it, he "manifested forth his glory," and that manifestation took place within a home.

There is a strange paradox in the attitude of many people to the place they call home. They would admit at once that there is no more precious place in all the world; and yet, at the same time, they would also have to admit that in it they claim the right to be far more discourteous, far more boorish, far more selfish, far more impolite than they would dare to be in any society of strangers. Many of us treat the ones we love most in a way that we would never dare to treat a chance acquaintance. So often it is strangers who see us at our best and those who live with us who see us at our worst. We ought ever to remember that it was in a humble home that Jesus manifested forth his glory. To him home was a place for which nothing but his best was good enough.

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John 2:1-11

(iii) We note why it happened. We have already seen that in the East hospitality was always a sacred duty. It would have brought embarrassed shame to that home that day if the wine had run done. It was to save a humble Galilaean family from hurt that Jesus put forth his power. It was in sympathy, in kindness, in understanding for simple folk that Jesus acted.

Nearly everyone can do the big thing on the big occasion; but it takes Jesus to do the big thing on a simple, homely occasion like this. There is a kind of natural human maliciousness which rather enjoys the misfortunes of others and which delights to make a good story of them over the teacups. But Jesus, the Lord of all life, and the King of glory, used his power to save a simple Galilaean lad and lass from humiliation. It is just by such deeds of understanding, simple kindness that we too can show that we are followers of Jesus Christ.

Further, this story shows us very beautifully two things about Mary's faith in Jesus.

(i) Instinctively Mary turned to Jesus whenever something went wrong. She knew her son. It was not till he was thirty years old that Jesus left home; and all these years Mary lived with him. There is an old legend which tells of the days when Jesus was a little baby in the home in Nazareth. It tells how in those days when people felt tired and worried and hot and bothered and upset, they would say: "Let us go and look at Mary's child," and they would go and look at Jesus, and somehow all their troubles rolled away. It is still true that those who know Jesus intimately instinctively turn to him when things go wrong--and they never find him wanting.

(ii) Even when Mary did not understand what Jesus was going to do, even when it seemed that he had refused her request, Mary still believed in him so much that she turned to the serving folk and told them to do whatever Jesus told them to do. Mary had the faith which could trust even when it did not understand. She did not know what Jesus was going to do, but she was quite sure that he would do the right thing. In every life come periods of darkness when we do not see the way. In every life come things which are such that we do not see why they came or any meaning in them. Happy is the man who in such a case still trusts even when he cannot understand.

Still further, this story tells us something about Jesus. In answer to Mary he said: "My hour has not yet come." All through the gospel story Jesus talks about his hour. In Jn.7:6,8 it is the hour of his emergence as the Messiah. In Jn.12:23 and Jn.17:1, and in Matt.26:18; Matt.26:45 and in Mk.14:41 it is the hour of his crucifixion and his death. All through his life Jesus knew that he had come into this world for a definite purpose and a definite task. He saw his life not in terms of his wishes, but in terms of God's purpose for himself. He saw his life not against the shifting background of time, but against the steady background of eternity. All through his life he went steadily towards that hour for which he knew that he had come into the world. It is not only Jesus who came into this world to fulfil the purpose of God. As someone has said: "Every man is a dream and an idea of God." We, too, must think not of our own wishes and our own desires, but of the purpose for which God sent us into his world.

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John 2:1-11

THE NEW EXHILARATION

John 2:1-11 (Part 3)

Now we must think of the deep and permanent truth which John is seeking to teach when he tells this story.

We must remember that John was writing out of a double background. He was a Jew and he was writing for Jews; but his great object was to write the story of Jesus in such a way that it would come home also to the Greeks.

Let us look at it first of all from the Jewish point of view. We must always remember that beneath John's simple stories there is a deeper meaning which is open only to those who have eyes to see. In all his gospel John never wrote an unnecessary or an insignificant detail. Everything means something and everything points beyond.

There were six stone waterpots; and at the command of Jesus the water in them turned to wine. According to the Jews seven is the number which is complete and perfect; and six is the number which is unfinished and imperfect. The six stone waterpots stand for all the imperfections of the Jewish law. Jesus came to do away with the imperfections of the law and to put in their place the new wine of the gospel of his grace. Jesus turned the imperfection of the law into the perfection of grace.

There is another thing to note in this connection. There were six waterpots; each held between twenty and thirty gallons of water; Jesus turned the water into wine. That would give anything up to one hundred and eighty gallons of wine. Simply to state that fact is to show that John did not mean the story to be taken with crude literalness. What John did mean to say is that when the grace of Jesus comes to men there is enough and to spare for all. No wedding party on earth could drink one hundred and eighty gallons of wine. No need on earth can exhaust the grace of Christ; there is a glorious superabundance in it.

John is telling us that in Jesus the imperfections have become perfection, and the grace has become illimitable, sufficient and more than sufficient for every need.

Let us look at it now from the Greek point of view. It so happens that the Greeks actually possessed stories like this. Dionysos was the Greek god of wine. Pausanias was a Greek who wrote a description of his country and of its ancient ceremonies. In his description of Elis, he describes an old ceremony and belief: "Between the market-place and the Menius is an old theatre and a sanctuary of Dionysos; the image is by Praxiteles. No god is more revered by the Eleians than Dionysos is, and they say that he attends their festival of the Thyia. The place where they hold the festival called the Thyia is about a mile from the city. Three empty kettles are taken into the building and deposited there by the priests in the presence of the citizens and of any strangers who may happen to be staying in the country. On the doors of the buildings the priests, and all who choose to do so, put their seals. Next day they are free to examine the seals, and on entering the building they find the kettles full of wine.

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I was not there myself at the time of the festival, but the most respectable men of Elis, and strangers too, swore that the facts were as I have said."

So the Greeks, too, had their stories like this; and it is as if John said to them: "You have your stories and your legends about your gods. They are only stories and you know that they are not really true. But Jesus has come to do what you have always dreamed that your gods could do. He has come to make the things you longed for come true."

To the Jews John said: "Jesus has come to turn the imperfection of the law into the perfection of grace." To the Greeks he said: "Jesus has come really and truly to do the things you only dreamed the gods could do."

Now we can see what John is teaching us. Every story tells us not of something Jesus did once and never again, but of something which he is for ever doing. John tells us not of things that Jesus once did in Palestine, but of things that he still does today. And what John wants us to see here is not that Jesus once on a day turned some waterpots of water into wine; he wants us to see that whenever Jesus comes into a man's life, there comes a new quality which is like turning water into wine. Without Jesus, life is dull and stale and flat; when Jesus comes into it, life becomes vivid and sparkling and exciting. Without Jesus, life is drab and uninteresting; with him it is thrilling and exhilarating.

When Sir Wilfred Grenfell was appealing for volunteers for his work in Labrador, he said that he could not promise them much money, but he could promise them the time of their lives. That is what Jesus promises us. Remember that John was writing seventy years after Jesus was crucified. For seventy years he had thought and meditated and remembered, until he saw meanings and significances that he had not seen at the time. When John told this story he was remembering what life with Jesus was like; and he said, "Wherever Jesus went and whenever he came into life it was like water turning into wine." This story is John saying to us: "If you want the new exhilaration, become a follower of Jesus Christ, and there will come a change in your life which will be like water turning into wine."

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John 2:12-16

THE ANGER OF JESUS

John 2:12-16 (Part 1)

After this Jesus went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples; and they stayed there for a short time.

The Passover Feast of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the Temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money-changers sitting at their tables. He made a scourge of cords and drove them all out of the Temple, and the sheep and the oxen as well. He scattered the coins of the exchangers and overturned their tables. He said to those who were selling doves: "Take these away and stop making my Father's house a house of trade."

After the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, Jesus and his friends returned for a short visit to Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee and about twenty miles distant.

Shortly after this Jesus set out to observe the Passover Feast in Jerusalem. The Passover fell on the 15th Nisan, which is about the middle of April; and, according to the law, it was obligatory for every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem to attend the feast.

Here we have a very interesting thing. At first sight John has a quite different chronology of the life of Jesus from that of the other three gospels. In them Jesus is depicted as going to Jerusalem only once. The Passover Feast at which he was crucified is the only one they mention, and his only visit to Jerusalem except the visit to the Temple when he was a boy. But in John we find Jesus making frequent visits to Jerusalem. John tells us of no fewer than three Passovers--this present one, the one in Jn.6:4 and the one in Jn.11:55. In addition, according to John's story, Jesus was in Jerusalem for an unnamed feast in Jn.5:1; for the Feast of Tabernacles in Jn.7:2,10; and for the Feast of the Dedication in Jn.10:22. In point of fact in the other three gospels the main ministry of Jesus is in Galilee; in John Jesus is in Galilee only for brief periods (Jn.2:1-12; Jn.4:43-54; Jn.5:1; Jn.6:1-7; Jn.14), and his main ministry is in Jerusalem.

The truth is that there is no real contradiction here. John and the others are telling the story from different points of view. They do not contradict but complement each other. Matthew, Mark and Luke concentrate on the ministry in Galilee; John concentrates on the ministry in Jerusalem. Although the other three tell us of only one visit to Jerusalem and one Passover there, they imply that there must have been many others. At his last visit they show us Jesus mourning over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matt.23:37). Jesus could never have spoken like that if he had not made repeated appeals to Jerusalem and if the visit at which he was crucified was his first. We ought not to talk about the contradictions between the Fourth Gospel and the other three, but to use them all to get as complete a picture of the life of Jesus as possible.

But there is a real difficulty we must face. This passage tells of the incident known as the Cleansing of the Temple. John sets it right at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, while the other

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three gospel writers set it right at the end (Matt.21:12-13; Mk.11:15-17; Lk.19:45-46). This definitely needs explanation and various explanations have been put forward.

(i) It is suggested that Jesus cleansed the Temple twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of his ministry. That is not very likely, because if he had done this staggering thing once, it is very unlikely that he would ever have had the chance to do it again. His reappearance in the Temple would have been a sign for such precautions to be taken that a repetition of it would not have been possible.

(ii) It is suggested that John is right and that the other three are wrong. But the incident fits in much better at the end of Jesus' ministry. It is the natural succession to the blazing courage of the Triumphal Entry and the inevitable prelude to the Crucifixion. If we have to choose between John's dating and the dating of the other three, we must choose the dating of the three.

(iii) It is suggested that when John died he left his gospel not completely finished; that he left the various incidents written out on separate sheets of papyrus and not bound together. It is then suggested that the sheet containing the account of this incident got out of place and was inserted near the beginning of the manuscript instead of near the end. That is quite possible, but it involves assuming that the person who arranged the manuscript did not know the correct order, which is difficult to believe when he must have known at least some of the other gospels.

(iv) We must always remember that John, as someone has said, is more interested in the truth than in the facts. He is not interested in writing a chronological biography of Jesus but supremely interested in showing Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah. It is probable that John was thinking back to the great prophecies of the coming of the Messiah. "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight; behold he is coming, says the Lord of Hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap ... he will purify the sons of Levi ... till they present right offerings to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years" (Mal.3:1-4). John had these tremendous prophecies ringing in his mind.

He was not interested to tell men when Jesus cleansed the Temple; he was supremely interested in telling men that Jesus did cleanse the Temple, because that cleansing was the act of the promised Messiah of God. All the likelihood is that John put this tremendous incident here to set in the very forefront of his story the great fact that Jesus was the Messiah of God come to cleanse the worship of men and to open the door to God. It is not the date that John is interested in; the date does not matter; his great concern is to show that Jesus' actions prove him to be the promised one of God. Right at the beginning he shows us Jesus acting as God's Messiah must act.

Barclay's Commentary

John 2:12-16

THE ANGER OF JESUS

John 2:12-16 (Part 2)

Now let us see why Jesus acted as he did. His anger is a terrifying thing; the picture of Jesus with the whip is an awe-inspiring sight. We must see what moved Jesus to this white-hot anger in the Temple Courts.

The passover was the greatest of all the Jewish feasts. As we have already seen, the law laid it down that every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was bound to attend it. But it was not only the Jews in Palestine who came to the Passover. By this time Jews were scattered all over the world, but they never forgot their ancestral faith and their ancestral land; and it was the dream and aim of every Jew, no matter in what land he stayed, to celebrate at least one Passover in Jerusalem. Astonishing as it may sound, it is likely that as many as two and a quarter million Jews sometimes assembled in the Holy City to keep the Passover.

There was a tax that every Jew over nineteen years of age must pay. That was the Temple tax. It was necessary that all should pay that tax so that the Temple sacrifices and the Temple ritual might be carried out day by day. The tax was one half-shekel. We must always remember, when we are thinking of sums of money, that at this time a working man's wage was about less than 4 pence per day. The value of a half-shekel was about 6 p. It was, therefore, equivalent to almost two days' wages. For all ordinary purposes in Palestine all kinds of currency were valid. Silver coins from Rome and Greece and Egypt and Tyre and Sidon and Palestine itself all were in circulation and all were valid. But the Temple tax had to be paid either in Galilaean shekels or in shekels of the sanctuary. These were Jewish coins, and so could be used as a gift to the Temple; the other currencies were foreign and so were unclean; they might be used to pay ordinary debts, but not a debt to God.

Pilgrims arrived from all over the world with all kinds of coins. So in the Temple courts there sat the money-changers. If their trade had been straightforward they would have been fulfilling an honest and a necessary purpose. But what they did was to charge one ma'ah, a coin worth about 1 pence, for every half-shekel they changed, and to charge another ma'ah on every half-shekel of change they had to give if a larger coin was tendered. So, if a man came with a coin the value of which was two shekels, he had to pay 1 pence to get it changed, and other 3 pence to get his change of three half-shekels. In other words the money-changers made 4 pence out of him--and that, remember, was one day's wage.

The wealth which accrued from the Temple tax and from this method of money-changing was fantastic. The annual revenue of the Temple from the Temple tax has been estimated at 75,000 British pounds, and the annual profit of the money-changers at 9,000 British pounds. When Crassus captured Jerusalem and raided the Temple treasury in 54 B.C. he took from it 2,500,000 British pounds without coming near to exhausting it.

The fact that the money-changers received some discount when they changed the coins of the pilgrims was not in itself wrong. The Talmud laid it down: "It is necessary that everyone should

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have half a shekel to pay for himself. Therefore when he comes to the exchange to change a shekel for two half-shekels he is obliged to allow the money-changer some gain." The word for this discount was kollubos and the money-changers are called kollubistai (GSN2855). This word kollubos produced the comedy character name Kollybos in Greek and Collybus in Latin, which meant much the same as Shylock in English.

What enraged Jesus was that pilgrims to the Passover who could ill afford it, were being fleeced at an exorbitant rate by the money-changers. It was a rampant and shameless social injustice--and what was worse, it was being done in the name of religion.

Besides the money-changers there were also the sellers of oxen and sheep and doves. Frequently a visit to the Temple meant a sacrifice. Many a pilgrim would wish to make thank-offering for a favourable journey to the Holy City; and most acts and events in life had their appropriate sacrifice. It might therefore seem to be a natural and helpful thing that the victims for the sacrifices could be bought in the Temple court. It might well have been so. But the law was that any animal offered in sacrifice must be perfect and unblemished. The Temple authorities had appointed inspectors (mumcheh) to examine the victims which were to be offered. The fee for inspection was 1 pence. If a worshipper bought a victim outside the Temple, it was to all intents and purposes certain that it would be rejected after examination. Again that might not have mattered much, but a pair of doves could cost as little as 4 pence outside the Temple, and as much as 75 pence inside.

Here again was bare-faced extortion at the expense of poor and humble pilgrims, who were practically blackmailed into buying their victims from the Temple booths if they wished to sacrifice at all--once more a glaring social injustice aggravated by the fact that it was perpetrated in the name of pure religion.

It was that which moved Jesus to flaming anger. We are told that he took cords and made a whip. Jerome thinks that the very sight of Jesus made the whip unnecessary. "A certain fiery and starry light shone from his eyes, and the majesty of the Godhead gleamed in his face." Just because Jesus loved God, he loved God's children, and it was impossible for him to stand passively by while the worshippers of Jerusalem were treated in this way.

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John 2:12-16

THE ANGER OF JESUS

John 2:12-16 (Part 3)

We have seen that it was the exploitation of the pilgrims by conscienceless men which moved Jesus to immediate wrath; but there were deep things behind the cleansing of the Temple. Let us see if we can penetrate to the even deeper reasons why Jesus took this drastic step.

No two of the evangelists give Jesus' words in precisely the same way. They all remembered their own version. It is only by putting all the accounts together that we get a true picture of what Jesus said. So then let us set down the different ways in which the writers report the words of Jesus. Matthew gives them as: "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers" (Matt.21:13). Mark has it: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mk.11:17). Luke has it: "My house shall be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers" (Lk.19:46). John has it: "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade" (Jn.2:16).

There were at least three reasons why Jesus acted as he did, and why anger was in his heart.

(i) He acted as he did because God's house was being desecrated. In the Temple there was worship without reverence. Reverence is an instinctive thing. Edward Seago, the artist, tells how he took two gypsy children on a visit to a cathedral in England. They were wild enough children at ordinary times. But from the moment they came into the cathedral they were strangely quiet; all the way home they were unusually solemn; and it was not until the evening that they returned to their normal boisterousness. Instinctive reverence was in their uninstructed hearts.

Worship without reverence can be a terrible thing. It may be worship which is formalized and pushed through anyhow; the most dignified prayers on earth can be read like a passage from an auctioneer's catalogue. It may be worship which does not realize the holiness of God, and which sounds as if, in H.H. Farmer's phrase, the worshipper was "pally with the Deity." it may be worship in which leader or congregation are completely unprepared. It may be the use of the house of God for purposes and in a way where reverence and the true function of God's house are forgotten. In that court of God's house at Jerusalem there would be arguments about prices, disputes about coins that were worn and thin, the clatter of the market place. That particular form of irreverence may not be common now, but there are other ways of offering an irreverent worship to God.

(ii) Jesus acted as he did in order to show that the whole paraphernalia of animal sacrifice was completely irrelevant. For centuries the prophets had been saying exactly that. "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.... Bring no more vain offerings" (Isa.1:11-17). "For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Jer.7:22). "With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they win not find him" (Hos.5:6). "They love sacrifice; they sacrifice flesh and eat it; but the Lord has no delight in them" (Hos.8:13). "For

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John 2:12-16

thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased" (Ps.51:16).

There was a chorus of prophetic voices telling men of the sheer irrelevancy of the burnt offerings and the animal sacrifices which smoked continuously upon the altar at Jerusalem. Jesus acted as he did to show that no sacrifice of any animal can ever put a man right with God.

We are not totally free from this very tendency today. True, we will not offer animal sacrifice to God. But we can identify his service with the installation of stained glass windows, the obtaining of a more sonorous organ, the lavishing of money on stone and lime and carved wood, while real worship is far away. It is not that these things are to be condemned--far from it. They are often--thank God--the lovely offerings of the loving heart. When they are aids to true devotion they are God-blessed things; but when they are substitutes for true devotion they make God sick at heart.

(iii) There is still another reason why Jesus acted as he did. Mark has a curious little addition which none of the other gospels has: "My house shall be called the house of prayer for all the nations" (Mk.11:17). The Temple consisted of a series of courts leading into the Temple proper and to the Holy Place. There was first the Court of the Gentiles, then the Court of the Women, then the Court of the Israelites, then the Court of the Priests. All this buying and selling was going on in the Court of the Gentiles which was the only place into which a Gentile might come. Beyond that point, access to him was barred. So then if there was a Gentile whose heart God had touched, he might come into the Court of the Gentiles to mediate and pray and distantly touch God. The Court of the Gentiles was the only place of prayer he knew.

The Temple authorities and the Jewish traders were making the Court of the Gentiles into an uproar and a rabble where no man could pray. The lowing of the oxen, the bleating of the sheep, the cooing of the doves, the shouts of the hucksters, the rattle of the coins, the voices raised in bargaining disputes--all these combined to make the Court of the Gentiles a place where no man could worship. The conduct in the Temple court shut out the seeking Gentile from the presence of God. It may well be that this was most in Jesus' mind; it may well be that Mark alone preserved the little phrase which means so much. Jesus was moved to the depths of his heart because seeking men were being shut out from the presence of God.

Is there anything in our church life--a snobbishness, an exclusiveness, a coldness, a lack of welcome, a tendency to make the congregation into a closed club, an arrogance, a fastidiousness--which keeps the seeking stranger out? Let us remember the wrath of Jesus against those who made it difficult and even impossible for the seeking stranger to make contact with God.

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John 2:17-22

THE NEW TEMPLE

John 2:17-22

His disciples remembered that there is a scripture which stands written: "For zeal for your house has consumed me." Then the Jews demanded of him: "What sign do you show us to justify your acting in this way?" Jesus answered: "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said: "It has taken forty-six years to build the Temple so far, and are you going to raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. So when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed on the scripture and on the word which Jesus spoke.

It was quite certain that an act like the cleansing of the Temple would produce an immediate reaction in those who saw it happening. It was not the kind of thing that anyone could look at with complete indifference. It was much too staggering for that.

Here we have two reactions. First, there is the reaction of the disciples which was to remember the words of Ps.69:9. The point is that this Psalm was taken to refer to the Messiah. When the Messiah came he would be burned up with a zeal for the house of God. When this verse leapt into their minds, it meant the conviction that Jesus was the Messiah seized the minds of the disciples even more deeply and more definitely. This action befitted none but the Messiah, and they were surer than ever that Jesus was in fact the Anointed One of God.

Second, there is the reaction of the Jews, a very natural one. They asked what right Jesus had to act like that and demanded that he should at once prove his credentials by some sign. The point is this. They acknowledged the act of Jesus to be that of one who thereby claimed to be the Messiah. It was always expected that when the Messiah came he would confirm his claims by doing amazing things. False Messiahs did in fact arise and promise to cleave the waters of Jordan in two or make the walls of the city collapse at a word. The popular idea of the Messiah was connected with wonders. So the Jews said: "By this act of yours you have publicly claimed to be the Messiah. Now show us some wonder which will prove your claim."

Jesus' reply constitutes the great problem of this passage. What did he really say? And what did he really mean? It is always to be remembered that Jn.2:21-22 are John's interpretation written long afterwards. He was inevitably reading into the passage ideas which were the product of seventy years of thinking about and experience of the Risen Christ. As Irenaeus said long ago: "No prophecy is fully understood until after the fulfilment of it." But what did Jesus originally say and what did he originally mean?

There is no possible doubt that Jesus spoke words which were very like these, words which could be maliciously twisted into a destructive claim. When Jesus was on trial, the false witness borne against him was: "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days" (Matt.26:61). The charge levelled against Stephen was: "We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us" (Ac.6:14).

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John 2:17-22

We must remember two things and we must put them together. First, Jesus certainly never said he would destroy the material Temple and then rebuild it. Jesus in fact looked for the end of the Temple. He said to the woman of Samaria that the day was coming when men would worship God neither in Mount Gerizim, nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth (Jn.4:21). Second, the cleansing of the Temple, as we have seen, was a dramatic way of showing that the whole Temple worship with its ritual and its sacrifice was irrelevant and could do nothing to lead men to God. It is clear that Jesus did expect that the Temple would pass away; that he had come to render its worship unnecessary and obsolete; and that therefore he would never suggest that he would rebuild it.

We must now turn to Mark. As so often, we find the little extra suggestive and illuminating phrase there. As Mark relates the charge against Jesus, it ran: "I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another not made with hands" (Mk.14:58). What Jesus really meant was that his coming had put an end to all this man-made, man-arranged way of worshipping God and put in its place a spiritual worship; that he put an end to all this business of animal sacrifice and priestly ritual and put in its place a direct approach to the Spirit of God which did not need an elaborate man-made Temple and a ritual of incense and sacrifice offered by the hands of men. The threat of Jesus was: "Your Temple worship, your elaborate ritual, your lavish animal sacrifices are at an end, because I have come." The promise of Jesus was: "I will give you a way to come to God without all this human elaboration and human ritual.

I have come to destroy this Temple in Jerusalem and to make the whole earth the Temple where men can know the presence of the living God."

The Jews saw that. It was in 19 B.C. that Herod had begun to build that wondrous Temple; it was not until A.D. 64 that the building was finally finished. It was forty-six years since it had been started; it was to be another twenty before it was ended. Jesus shattered the Jews by telling them that all its magnificence and splendour and all the money and skill that had been lavished on it were completely irrelevant; that he had come to show men a way to come to God without any Temple at all.

That must be what Jesus actually said; but in the years to come John saw far more than that in Jesus' saying. He saw in it nothing less than a prophecy of the Resurrection; and John was right. He was right for this basic reason, that the whole round earth could never become the temple of the living God until Jesus was released from the body and was everywhere present; and until he was with men everywhere, even to the end of the world.

It is the presence of the living, risen Christ which makes the whole world into the Temple of God. So John says that when they remembered, they saw in this a promise of the Resurrection. They did not see that at the time; they could not; it was only their own experience of the living Christ which one day showed them the true depth of what Jesus said.

Finally John says that "they believed the scripture." What scripture? John means that scripture which haunted the early church--". . . or let thy godly one see the Pit" (Ps.16:10). Peter quoted it at Pentecost (Ac.2:31); Paul quoted it at Antioch (Ac.13:35). It expressed the confidence of the church in the power of God and in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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John 2:17-22

We have here the tremendous truth that our contact with God, our entry into his presence, on our approach to him is not dependent on anything that men's hands can build or men's minds devise. In the street, in the home, at business, on the highway, on the open road, in church we have our inner temple, the presence of the Risen Christ for ever with us throughout all the world.

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John 2:23-25

THE SEARCHER OF THE HEARTS OF MEN

John 2:23-25

When he was in Jerusalem, at the Passover, at the Feast, many believed in his name, as they saw the signs which he did; but Jesus himself would not entrust himself to them, because he knew them all, and because he had no need that anyone should testify to him what man is like, for he well knew what was in human nature.

John does not relate the story of any wonder that Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover season; but Jesus did do wonders there; and there were many who, when they saw his powers, believed in him. The question John is answering here is--if there were many who believed in Jerusalem right at the beginning, why did Jesus not there and then set up his standard and openly declare himself?

The answer is that Jesus knew human nature only too well. He knew that there were many to whom he was only a nine-days' wonder. He knew that there were many who were attracted only by the sensational things he did. He knew that there were none who understood the way that he had chosen. He knew that there were many who would have followed him while he continued to produce miracles and wonders and signs, but who, if he had begun to talk to them about service and self-denial, if he had begun to talk to them about self-surrender to the will of God, if he had begun to talk to them about a cross and about carrying a cross, would have stared at him with blank incomprehension and left him on the spot.

It is a great characteristic of Jesus that he did not want followers unless they clearly knew and definitely accepted what was involved in following him. He refused--in the modern phrase--to cash in on a moment's popularity. If he had entrusted himself to the mob in Jerusalem, they would have declared him Messiah there and then and would have waited for the kind of material action they expected the Messiah to take. But Jesus was a leader who refused to ask men ever to accept him until they understood what accepting meant. He insisted that a man should know what he was doing.

Jesus knew human nature. He knew the fickleness and instability of the heart of man. He knew that a man can be swept away in a moment of emotion, and then back out when he discovers what decision really means. He knew how human nature hungers for sensations. He wanted not a crowd of men cheering they knew not what, but a small company who knew what they were doing and who were prepared to follow to the end.

There is one thing we must note in this passage, for we shall have occasion to mark it again and again. When John speaks of Jesus' miracles he calls them signs. The New Testament uses three different words for the wonderful works of God and of Jesus, and each has something to tell us about what a miracle really is.

(i) It uses the word *teras* (GSN5059). *Teras* (GSN5059) simply means a marvellous thing. It is a word with no moral significance at all. A conjuring trick might be a *teras* (GSN5059). A *teras*

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John 2:23-25

(GSN5059) was simply an astonishing happening which left a man gasping with surprise. The New Testament never uses this word alone of the works of God or of Jesus.

(ii) It uses the word *dunamis* (GSN1411). *Dunamis* literally means power; it is the word from which dynamite comes. It can be used of any kind of extraordinary power. It can be used of the power of growth, of the powers of nature, of the power of a drug, of the power of a man's genius. It always has the meaning of an effective power which does things and which any man can recognize. (iii) It uses the word *semeion* (GSN4592). *Semeion* means a sign. This is John's favourite word. To him a miracle was not simply an astonishing happening; it was not simply a deed of power; it was a sign. That is to say, it told men something about the person who did it; it revealed something of his character; it laid bare something of his nature; it was an action through which it was possible to understand better and more fully the character of the person who did it. To John the supreme thing about the miracles of Jesus was that they told men something about the nature and the character of God.

The power of Jesus was used to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, to comfort the sorrowing; and the fact that Jesus used his power in that way was proof that God cared for the sorrows and the needs and the pains of men. To John the miracles were signs of the love of God.

In any miracle, then, there are three things. There is the wonder which leaves men dazzled, astonished, aghast. There is the power which is effective, which can deal with and mend a broken body, an unhinged mind, a bruised heart, which can do things. There is the sign which tells us of the love in the heart of the God who does such things for men.

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John 3:1-6

THE MAN WHO CAME BY NIGHT

John 3:1-6 (Part 1)

There was a man who was one of the Pharisees who was called Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do the signs which you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him: "This is the truth I tell you--unless a man is reborn from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him: "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born?" Jesus answered: "This is the truth I tell you--unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born from the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

For the most part we see Jesus surrounded by the ordinary people, but here we see him in contact with one of the aristocracy of Jerusalem. There are certain things that we know about Nicodemus.

(i) Nicodemus must have been wealthy. When Jesus died Nicodemus brought for his body "a mixture of myrrh and aloes about an hundred pound weight" (Jn.19:39), and only a wealthy man could have brought that.

(ii) Nicodemus was a Pharisee. In many ways the Pharisees were the best people in the whole country. There were never more than 6,000 of them; they were what was known as a chaburah (compare GSN2266), or brotherhood. They entered into this brotherhood by taking a pledge in front of three witnesses that they would spend all their lives observing every detail of the scribal law.

What exactly did that mean? To the Jew the Law was the most sacred thing in all the world. The Law was the first five books of the Old Testament. They believed it to be the perfect word of God. To add one word to it or to take one word away from it was a deadly sin. Now if the Law is the perfect and complete word of God, that must mean that it contained everything a man need know for the living of a good life, if not explicitly, then implicitly. If it was not there in so many words, it must be possible to deduce it. The Law as it stood consisted of great, wide, noble principles which a man had to work out for himself. But for the later Jews that was not enough.

They said: "The Law is complete; it contains everything necessary for the living of a good life; therefore in the Law there must be a regulation to govern every possible incident in every possible moment for every possible man." So they set out to extract from the great principles of the law an infinite number of rules and regulations to govern every conceivable situation in life. In other words they changed the law of the great principles into the legalism of by-laws and regulations.

The best example of what they did is to be seen in the Sabbath law. In the Bible itself we are simply told that we must remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy and that on that day no work must be done, either by a man or by his servants or his animals. Not content with that, the later Jews spent hour after hour and generation after generation defining what work is and listing the things that may and may not be done on the Sabbath day. The Mishnah is the codified scribal law. The scribes spent their lives working out these rules and regulations. In the Mishnah the section on

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the Sabbath extends to no fewer than twenty-four chapters. The Talmud is the explanatory commentary on the Mishnah, and in the Jerusalem Talmud the section explaining the Sabbath law runs to sixty-four and a half columns; and in the Babylonian Talmud it runs to one hundred and fifty-six double folio pages. And we are told about a rabbi who spent two and a half years in studying one of the twenty-four chapters of the Mishnah.

The kind of thing they did was this. To tie a knot on the Sabbath was to work; but a knot had to be defined. "The following are the knots the making of which renders a man guilty; the knot of camel drivers and that of sailors; and as one is guilty by reason of tying them, so also of untying them." On the other hand knots which could be tied or untied with one hand were quite legal. Further, "a woman may tie up a slit in her shift and the strings of her cap and those of her girdle, the straps of shoes or sandals, of skins of wine and oil." Now see what happened. Suppose a man wished to let down a bucket into a well to draw water on the Sabbath day. He could not tie a rope to it, for a knot on a rope was illegal on the Sabbath; but he could tie it to a woman's girdle and let it down, for a knot in a girdle was quite legal. That was the kind of thing which to the scribes and Pharisees was a matter of life and death; that was religion; that to them was pleasing and serving God.

Take the case of journeying on the Sabbath. Exo.16:29 says: "Remain every man of you in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." A Sabbath day's journey was therefore limited to two thousand cubits, that is, one thousand yards. But, if a rope was tied across the end of a street, the whole street became one house and a man could go a thousand yards beyond the end of the street. Or, if a man deposited enough food for one meal on Friday evening at any given place, that place technically became his house and he could go a thousand yards beyond it on the Sabbath day. The rules and regulations and the evasions piled up by the hundred and the thousand.

Take the case of carrying a burden. Jer.17:21-24 said: "Take heed for the sake of your lives and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day." So a burden had to be defined. It was defined as "food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye-salve," and so on and on. It had then to be settled whether or not on the Sabbath a woman could wear a brooch, a man could wear a wooden leg or dentures; or would it be carrying a burden to do so? Could a chair or even a child be lifted? And so on and on the discussions and the regulations went.

It was the scribes who worked out these regulations; it was the Pharisees who dedicated their lives to keeping them. Obviously, however misguided a man might be, he must be desperately in earnest if he proposed to undertake obedience to every one of the thousands of rules. That is precisely what the Pharisees did. The name Pharisee means the Separated One; and the Pharisees were those who had separated themselves from all ordinary life in order to keep every detail of the law of the scribes.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and it is astonishing that a man who regarded goodness in that light and who had given himself to that kind of life in the conviction that he was pleasing God should wish to talk to Jesus at all.

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(iii) Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. The word is archon (GSN0758). This is to say that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a court of seventy members and was the supreme court of the Jews. Of course under the Romans its powers were more limited than once they had been; but they were still extensive. In particular the Sanhedrin had religious jurisdiction over every Jew in the world; and one of its duties was to examine and deal with anyone suspected of being a false prophet. Again it is amazing that Nicodemus should come to Jesus at all.

(iv) It may well be that Nicodemus belonged to a distinguished Jewish family. Away back in 63 B.C. when the Romans and the Jews had been at war, Aristobulus, the Jewish leader, sent a certain Nicodemus as his ambassador to Pompey, the Roman Emperor. Much later in the terrible last days of Jerusalem, the man who negotiated the surrender of the garrison was a certain Gorion, who was the son either of Nicomedes or Nicodemus. It may well be that both these men belonged to the same family as our Nicodemus, and that it was one of the most distinguished families in Jerusalem. If that is true it is amazing that this Jewish aristocrat should come to this homeless prophet who had been the carpenter of Nazareth that he might talk to him about his soul.

It was by night that Nicodemus came to Jesus. There were probably two reasons for that.

(i) It may have been a sign of caution. Nicodemus quite frankly may not have wished to commit himself by coming to Jesus by day. We must not condemn him. The wonder is that with his background, he came to Jesus at all. It was infinitely better to come at night than not at all. It is a miracle of grace that Nicodemus overcame his prejudices and his upbringing and his whole view of life enough to come to Jesus.

(ii) But there may be another reason. The rabbis declared that the best time to study the law was at night when a man was undisturbed. Throughout the day Jesus was surrounded by crowds of people all the time. It may well be that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night because he wanted an absolutely private and completely undisturbed time with Jesus.

Nicodemus was a puzzled man, a man with many honours and yet with something lacking in his life. He came to Jesus for a talk so that somehow in the darkness of the night he might find light.

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John 3:1-6

THE MAN WHO CAME BY NIGHT

John 3:1-6 (Part 2)

When John relates conversations that Jesus had with enquirers, he has a way of following a certain scheme. We see that scheme very clearly here. The enquirer says something (Jn.3:2). Jesus answers in a saying that is hard to understand (Jn.3:3). That saying is misunderstood by the enquirer (Jn.3:4). Jesus answers with a saying that is even more difficult to understand (Jn.3:5). And then there follows a discourse and an explanation. John uses this method in order that we may see men thinking things out for themselves and so that we may do the same.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus, he said that no one could help being impressed with the signs and wonders that he did. Jesus' answer was that it was not the signs and the wonders that were really important; the important thing was such a change in a man's inner life that it could only be described as a new birth.

When Jesus said that a man must be born anew Nicodemus misunderstood him, and the misunderstanding came from the fact that the word which the Revised Standard Version translates anew, the Greek word *anōthen* (GSN0509), has three different meanings. (i) It can mean from the beginning, completely radically. (ii) It can mean again, in the sense of for the second time. (iii) It can mean from above, and, therefore, from God. It is not possible for us to get all these meanings into any English word; and yet all three of them are in the phrase born anew. To be born anew is to undergo such a radical change that it is like a new birth; it is to have something happen to the soul which can only be described as being born all over again; and the whole process is not a human achievement, because it comes from the grace and power of God.

When we read the story, it looks at first sight as if Nicodemus took the word anew in only the second sense, and with a crude literalism. How can anyone, he said, enter again into his mother's womb and be born a second time when he is already an old man? But there is more to Nicodemus' answer than that. In his heart there was a great unsatisfied longing. It is as if he said with infinite, wistful yearning: "You talk about being born anew; you talk about this radical, fundamental change which is so necessary. I know that it is necessary; but in my experience it is impossible. There is nothing I would like more; but you might as well tell me, a full grown man, to enter into my mother's womb and be born all over again." It is not the desirability of this change that Nicodemus questioned; that he knew only too well; it is the possibility. Nicodemus is up against the eternal problem, the problem of the man who wants to be changed and who cannot change himself.

This phrase born anew, this idea of rebirth, runs all through the New Testament. Peter speaks of being born anew by God's great mercy (1Pet.1:3); he talks about being born anew not of perishable seed, but of imperishable (1Pet.1:22-23). James speaks of God bringing us forth by the word of truth (Jas.1:18). The Letter to Titus speaks of the washing of regeneration (Tit.3:5). Sometimes this same idea is spoken of as a death followed by a resurrection or a re-creation. Paul speaks of the Christian as dying with Christ and then rising to life anew (Rom.6:1-11). He speaks of those who have lately come into the Christian faith as babes in Christ (1Cor.3:1-2). If any man is in Christ it is as if he had been created all over again (2Cor.5:17). In Christ there is a new creation (Gal.6:15).

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John 3:1-6

The new man is created after God in righteousness (Eph.4:22-24). The person who is at the first beginnings of the Christian faith is a child (Heb.5:12-14). All over the New Testament this idea of rebirth, re-creation occurs.

Now this was not an idea which was in the least strange to the people who heard it in New Testament times. The Jew knew all about rebirth. When a man from another faith became a Jew and had been accepted into Judaism by prayer and sacrifice and baptism, he was regarded as being reborn. "A proselyte who embraces Judaism," said the rabbis, "is like a new-born child." So radical was the change that the sins he had committed before his reception were all done away with, for now he was a different person. It was even theoretically argued that such a man could marry his own mother or his own sister, because he was a completely new man, and all the old connections were broken and destroyed. The Jew knew the idea of rebirth.

The Greek also knew the idea of rebirth and knew it well. By far the most real religion of the Greeks at this time was the faith of the mystery religions. The mystery religions were all founded on the story of some suffering and dying and rising god. This story was played out as a passion play. The initiate had a long course of preparation, instruction, asceticism and fasting. The drama was then played out with gorgeous music, marvelous ritual, incense and everything to play upon the emotions. As it was played out, the worshipper's aim was to become one with the god in such a way that he passed through the god's sufferings and shared the god's triumph and the god's divine life. The mystery religions offered mystic union with some god. When that union was achieved the initiate was, in the language of the Mysteries, a twice-born.

The Hermetic Mysteries had as part of their basic belief: "There can be no salvation without regeneration." Apuleius, who went through initiation, said that he underwent "a voluntary death," and that thereby he attained "his spiritual birthday," and was "as it were reborn." Many of the Mystery initiations took place at midnight when the day dies and is reborn. In the Phrygian, the initiate, after his initiation, was fed with milk as if he was a new-born babe.

The ancient world knew all about rebirth and regeneration. It longed for it and searched for it everywhere. The most famous of all Mystery ceremonies was the taurobolium. The candidate was put into a pit. On the top of the pit there was a lattice-work cover. On the cover a bug was slain by having its throat cut. The blood poured down and the initiate lifted up his head and bathed himself in the blood; and when he came out of the pit he was renatus in aeternum, reborn for all eternity. When Christianity came to the world with a message of rebirth, it came with precisely that for which all the world was seeking.

What, then, does this rebirth mean for us? In the New Testament, and especially in the Fourth Gospel, there are four closely inter-related ideas. There is the idea of rebirth; there is the idea of the kingdom of heaven, into which a man cannot enter unless he is reborn; there is the idea of sonship of God; and there is the idea of eternal life. This idea of being reborn is not something which is peculiar to the thought of the Fourth Gospel. In Matthew we have the same great truth put more simply and more vividly: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.18:3). All these ideas have a common thought behind them.

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John 3:1-6

BORN AGAIN

John 3:1-6 (Part 3)

Let us start with the kingdom of heaven. What does it mean? We get our best definition of it from the Lord's Prayer. There are two petitions side by side:

Thy Kingdom come:

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

It is characteristic of Jewish style to say things twice, the second way explaining and amplifying the first. Any verse of the Psalms will show us this Jewish habit of what is technically known as parallelism:

The Lord of hosts is with us:

The God of Jacob is our refuge (Ps.46:7).

For I know my transgressions:

And my sin is ever before me (Ps.51:3).

He makes me lie down in green pastures:

He leads me beside still waters (Ps.23:2).

Let us apply that principle to these two petitions in the Lord's Prayer. The second petition amplifies and explains the first; we then arrive at the definition: the kingdom of heaven is a society where God's will is as perfectly done on earth as it is in heaven. To be in the kingdom of heaven is therefore to lead a life in which we have willingly submitted everything to the will of God; it is to have arrived at a stage when we perfectly and completely accept the will of God.

Now let us take sonship. In one sense sonship is a tremendous privilege. To those who believe there is given the power to become sons (Jn.1:12). But the very essence of sonship is necessarily obedience. "He who has commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves me" (Jn.14:21). The essence of sonship is love; and the essence of love is obedience. We cannot with any reality say that we love a person and then do things which hurt and grieve that person's heart. Sonship is a privilege, but a privilege which is entered into only when full obedience is given. So then to be a son of God and to be in the kingdom are one and the same thing. The son of God and the citizen of the kingdom are both people who have completely and willingly accepted the will of God.

Now let us take eternal life. It is far better to speak of eternal life than to speak of everlasting life. The main idea behind eternal life is not simply that of duration. It is quite clear that a life which went on for ever could just as easily be hell as heaven. The idea behind eternal life is the idea of a certain quality of life. What kind? There is only one person who can properly be described by this adjective eternal (aionios, GSN0166) and that one person is God. Eternal life is the kind of life that God lives; it is God's life. To enter into eternal life is to enter into possession of that kind of life which is the life of God. It is to be lifted up above merely human, transient things into that joy and

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John 3:1-6

peace which belong only to God. Clearly a man can enter into this close fellowship with God only when he renders to him that love, that reverence, that devotion, that obedience which truly bring him into fellowship with him.

Here then we have three great kindred conceptions, entry into the kingdom of heaven, sonship of God and eternal life; and all are dependent on and are the products of perfect obedience to the will of God. It is just here that the idea of being reborn comes in. It is what links all these three conceptions together. It is quite clear that, as we are and in our own strength, we are quite unable to render to God this perfect obedience; it is only when God's grace enters into us and takes possession of us and changes us that we can give to him the reverence and the devotion we ought to give. It is through Jesus Christ that we are reborn; it is when he enters into possession of our hearts and lives that the change comes.

When that happens we are born of water and the Spirit. There are two thoughts there. Water is the symbol of cleansing. When Jesus takes possession of our lives, when we love him with all our heart, the sins of the past are forgiven and forgotten. The Spirit is the symbol of power. When Jesus takes possession of our lives it is not only that the past is forgotten and forgiven; if that were all, we might well proceed to make the same mess of life all over again; but into life there enters a new power which enables us to be what by ourselves we could never be and to do what by ourselves we could never do. Water and the Spirit stand for the cleansing and the strengthening power of Christ, which wipes out the past and gives victory in the future.

Finally, in this passage, John lays down a great law. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. A man by himself is flesh and his power is limited to what the flesh can do. By himself he cannot be other than defeated and frustrated; that we know only too well; it is the universal fact of human experience. But the very essence of the Spirit is power and life which are beyond human power and human life; and when the Spirit takes possession of us, the defeated life of human nature becomes the victorious life of God.

To be born again is to be changed in such a way that it can be described only as rebirth and re-creation. The change comes when we love Jesus and allow him into our hearts. Then we are forgiven for the past and armed by the Spirit for the future; then we can truly accept the will of God. And then we become citizens of the kingdom; then we become sons of God; then we enter into eternal life, which is the very life of God.

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John 3:7-13

THE DUTY TO KNOW AND THE RIGHT TO SPEAK

John 3:7-13

Do not be surprised that I said to you: "You must be reborn from above. The wind blows where it will, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes and whither it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered: "How can these things happen?" Jesus answered: "Are you the man whom everyone regards as the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand these things? This is the truth I tell you--we speak what we know, and we bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our witness. If I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe me, how will you believe me if I speak to you about heavenly things." No one has gone up to heaven, except he who came down from heaven, I mean, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.

There are two kinds of misunderstanding. There is the misunderstanding of the man who misunderstands because he has not yet reached a stage of knowledge and of experience at which he is able to grasp the truth. When a man is in that state our duty is to do all that we can to explain things to him so that he will be able to grasp the knowledge which is being offered to him. There is also the misunderstanding of the man who is unwilling to understand; there is a failure to see which comes from the refusal to see. A man can deliberately shut his mind to truth which he does not wish to accept.

Nicodemus was like that. The teaching about a new birth from God should not have been strange to him. Ezekiel, for instance, had spoken repeatedly about the new heart that must be created in a man. "Cast away from you all the transgressions, which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why win you die, O house of Israel?" (Eze.18:31). "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Eze.36:26). Nicodemus was an expert in scripture and again and again the prophets had spoken of that very experience of which Jesus was speaking. If a man does not wish to be reborn, he will deliberately misunderstand what rebirth means. If a man does not wish to be changed, he will deliberately shut his eyes and his mind and his heart to the power which can change him.

In the last analysis what is the matter with so many of us is simply the fact that, when Jesus Christ comes with his offer to change us and re-create us, we more or less say: "No thank you: I am quite satisfied with myself as I am, and I don't want to be changed."

Nicodemus was driven back on another defence. In effect he said: "This rebirth about which you talk may be possible; but I can't understand how it works." The answer of Jesus depends for its point on the fact that the Greek word for spirit, *pneuma* (GSN4151), has two meanings. It is the word for spirit, but it is also the regular word for wind. The same is true of the Hebrew word *ruach* (HSN7307); it too means both spirit and wind. So Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You can hear and see and feel the wind (*pneuma*, GSN4151); but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going to. You may not understand how and why the wind blows; but you can see what it does. You may not understand where a gale came from or where it is going to, but you can see the trail of flattened fields and uprooted trees that it leaves behind it. There are many things about the wind

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you may not understand; but its effect is plain for all to see." He went on, "the Spirit (pneuma, GSN4151) is exactly the same.

You may not know how the Spirit works; but you can see the effect of the Spirit in human lives."

Jesus said: "This is no theoretical thing of which we are speaking. We are talking of what we have actually seen. We can point to man after man who has been re-born by the power of the Spirit." Dr. John Hutton used to tell of a workman who had been a drunken reprobate and was converted. His work-mates did their best to make him feel a fool. "Surely," they said to him, "you can't believe in miracles and things like that. Surely, for instance, you don't believe that Jesus turned water into wine." "I don't know," the man answered, "whether he turned water into wine when he was in Palestine, but I do know that in my own house and home he has turned beer into furniture!"

There are any number of things in this world which we use every day without knowing how they work. Comparatively few of us know how electricity or radio or television works; but we do not deny that they exist because of that. Many of us drive an automobile with only the haziest notion of what goes on below its hood; but our lack of understanding does not prevent us using and enjoying the benefits which an automobile confers. We may not understand how the Spirit works; but the effect of the Spirit on the lives of men is there for all to see. The unanswerable argument for Christianity is the Christian life. No man can disregard a faith which is able to make bad men good.

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "I have tried to make things simple for you; I have used simple human pictures taken from everyday life; and you have not understood. How can you ever expect to understand the deep things, if even the simple things are beyond you?" There is a warning here for every one of us. It is easy to sit in discussion groups, to sit in a study and to read books, it is easy to discuss the intellectual truth of Christianity; but the essential thing is to experience the power of Christianity. And it is fatally easy to start at the wrong end and to think of Christianity as something to be discussed, not as something to be experienced. It is certainly important to have an intellectual grasp of the orb of Christian truth; but it is still more important to have a vital experience of the power of Jesus Christ.

When a man undergoes treatment from a doctor, when he has to have an operation, when he is given some medicine to take, he does not need to know the anatomy of the human body, the scientific effect of the anaesthetic, the way in which the drug works on his body, in order to be cured. 99 men out of every 100 accept the cure without being able to say how it was brought about. There is a sense in which Christianity is like that. At its heart there is a mystery, but it is not the mystery of intellectual appreciation; it is the mystery of redemption.

In reading the Fourth Gospel there is the difficulty of knowing when the words of Jesus stop and the words of the writer of the gospel begin. John has thought so long about the words of Jesus that insensibly he glides from them to his own thoughts about them. Almost certainly the last words of this passage are the words of John. It is as if someone asked: "What right has Jesus to say these things? What guarantee do we have that they are true?" John's answer is simple and profound. "Jesus," he says, "came down from heaven to tell us the truth of God. And, when he had companied with men and died for them, he returned to his glory." It was John's contention that Jesus' right to speak came from the fact that he knew God personally, that he had come direct from the secrets of

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John 3:7-13

heaven to earth, that what he said to men was most literally God's own truth, for Jesus was and is the embodied mind of God.

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John 3:14-15

THE UPLIFTED CHRIST

John 3:14-15

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that every one who believes in him may have eternal life.

John goes back to a strange Old Testament story which is told in Num.21:4-9. On their journey through the wilderness the people of Israel murmured and complained and regretted that they had ever left Egypt. To punish them God sent a plague of deadly, fiery serpents; the people repented and cried for mercy. God instructed Moses to make an image of a serpent and to hold it up in the midst of the camp; and those who looked upon the serpent were healed. That story much impressed the Israelites. They told how in later times that brazen serpent became an idol and in the days of Hezekiah had to be destroyed because people were worshipping it (2Kgs.18:4). The Jews themselves were always a little puzzled by this incident in view of the fact that they were absolutely forbidden to make graven images. The rabbis explained it this way: "It was not the serpent that gave life. So long as Moses lifted up the serpent, they believed on him who had commanded Moses to act thus.

It was God who healed them." The healing power lay not in the brazen serpent; it was only a symbol to turn their thoughts to God; and when they did that they were healed.

John took that old story and used it as a kind of parable of Jesus. He says: "The serpent was lifted up; men looked at it; their thoughts were turned to God; and by the power of that god in whom they trusted they were healed. Even so Jesus must be lifted up; and when men turn their thoughts to him, and believe in him, they too will find eternal life."

There is a wonderfully suggestive thing here. The verb to lift up is *hupsoun* (GSN5312). The strange thing is that it is used of Jesus in two senses. It is used of his being lifted up upon the Cross; and it is used of his being lifted up into glory at the time of his ascension into heaven. It is used of the Cross in Jn.8:28; Jn.12:32. It is used of Jesus' ascension into glory in Ac.2:33; Ac.5:31; Php.2:9. There was a double lifting up in Jesus' life--the lifting on the Cross and the lifting into glory. And the two are inextricably connected. The one could not have happened without the other. For Jesus the Cross was the way to glory; had he refused it, had he evaded it, had he taken steps to escape it, as he might so easily have done, there would have been no glory for him. It is the same for us. We can, if we like, choose the easy way; we can, if we like, refuse the cross that every Christian is called to bear; but if we do, we lose the glory.

It is an unalterable law of life that if there is no cross, there is no crown.

In this passage we have two expressions whose meaning we must face. It will not be possible to extract all their meaning, because they both mean more than ever we can discover; but we must try to grasp at least something of it.

(i) There is the phrase which speaks of believing in Jesus. It means at least three things.

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John 3:14-15

(a) It means believing with all our hearts that God is as Jesus declared him to be. It means believing that God loves us, that God cares for us, that God wants nothing more than to forgive us. It was not easy for a Jew to believe that. He looked on God as one who imposed his laws upon his people and punished them if they broke them. He looked on God as a judge and on man as a criminal at his judgment seat. He looked on God as one who demanded sacrifices and offerings; to get into his presence man had to pay the price laid down. It was hard to think of God not as a judge waiting to exact penalty, not as a task-master waiting to pounce, but as a Father who longed for nothing so much as to have his erring children come back home. It cost the life and the death of Jesus to tell men that. And we cannot begin to be Christians until with all our hearts we believe that.

(b) How can we be sure that Jesus knew what he was talking about? What guarantee is there that his wonderful good news is true? Here we come upon the second article in belief. We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that in him is the mind of God, that he knew God so well, was so close to God, was so one with God, that he could tell us the absolute truth about him.

(c) But belief has a third element. We believe that God is a loving Father because we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that therefore what he says about God is true. Then comes this third element. We must stake everything on the fact that what Jesus says is true. Whatever he says we must do; whenever he commands we must obey. When he tells us to cast ourselves unreservedly on the mercy of God we must do so. We must take Jesus at his word. Every smallest action in life must be done in unquestioning obedience to him.

So then belief in Jesus has these three elements--belief that God is our loving Father, belief that Jesus is the son of God and therefore tells us the truth about God and life, and unswerving and unquestioning obedience to Jesus.

(ii) The second great phrase is eternal life. We have already seen that eternal life is the very life of God himself. But let us ask this: if we possess eternal life, what do we have? If we enter into eternal life, what is it like? To have eternal life envelops every relationship in life with peace.

(a) It gives us peace with God. We are no longer cringing before a tyrannical king or seeking to hide from an austere judge. We are at home with our Father.

(b) It gives us peace with men. If we have been forgiven we must be forgiving. It enables us to see men as God sees them. It makes us and all men into one great family joined in love.

(c) It gives us peace with life. If God is Father, God is working all things together for good. Lessing used to say that if he had one question to ask the Sphinx, who knew everything, it would be: "Is this a friendly universe?" When we believe that God is Father, we also believe that such a father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear. We may not understand life any better, but we will not resent life any longer.

(d) It gives us peace with ourselves. In the last analysis a man is more afraid of himself than of anything else. He knows his own weakness; he knows the force of his own temptations; he knows

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John 3:14-15

his own tasks and the demands of his own life. But now he knows that he is facing it all with God. It is not he who lives but Christ who lives in him. There is a peace founded on strength in his life.

(e) It makes him certain that the deepest peace on earth is only a shadow of the ultimate peace which is to come. It gives him a hope and a goal to which he travels. It gives him a life of glorious wonder here and yet, at the same time, a life in which the best is yet to be.

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John 3:16

THE LOVE OF GOD

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that every one who believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

All great men have had their favourite texts; but this has been called "Everybody's text." Herein for every simple heart is the very essence of the gospel. This text tells us certain great things.

(i) It tells us that the initiative in all salvation lies with God. Sometimes Christianity is presented in such a way that it sounds as if God had to be pacified, as if he had to be persuaded to forgive. Sometimes men speak as if they would draw a picture of a stern, angry, unforgiving God and a gentle, loving, forgiving Jesus. Sometimes men present the Christian message in such a way that it sounds as if Jesus did something which changed the attitude of God to men from condemnation to forgiveness. But this text tells us that it was with God that it all started. It was God who sent his Son, and he sent him because he loved men. At the back of everything is the love of God.

(ii) It tells us that the mainspring of God's being is love. It is easy to think of God as looking at men in their heedlessness and their disobedience and their rebellion and saying: "I'll break them: I'll discipline them and punish them and scourge them until they come back." It is easy to think of God as seeking the allegiance of men in order to satisfy his own desire for power and for what we might call a completely subject universe. The tremendous thing about this text is that it shows us God acting not for his own sake, but for ours, not to satisfy his desire for power, not to bring a universe to heel, but to satisfy his love. God is not like an absolute monarch who treats each man as a subject to be reduced to abject obedience. God is the Father who cannot be happy until his wandering children have come home. God does not smash men into submission; he yearns over them and woos them into love.

(iii) It tells us of the width of the love of God. It was the world that God so loved. It was not a nation; it was not the good people; it was not only the people who loved him; it was the world. The unlovable and the unlovely, the lonely who have no one else to love them, the man who loves God and the man who never thinks of him, the man who rests in the love of God and the man who spurns it--all are included in this vast inclusive love of God. As Augustine had it: "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love."

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John 3:17-21

LOVE AND JUDGMENT

John 3:17-21

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe already stands condemned. And this is the reason of this condemnation--the light came into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. Every one of whose deeds are depraved hates the light, and does not come to the light, but his deeds stand convicted. But he who puts the truth into action comes to the light, that his deeds may be made plain for all to see, because they are done in God.

Here we are faced with one other apparent paradox of the Fourth Gospel--the paradox of love and judgment. We have just been thinking of the love of God, and now suddenly we are confronted with judgment and condemnation and conviction. John has just said that it was because God so loved the world that he sent his Son into the world. Later he will go on to show us Jesus saying: "For judgment I came into this world" (Jn.9:39). How can both things be true?

It is quite possible to offer a man an experience in nothing but love and for that experience to turn out a judgment. It is quite possible to offer a man an experience which is meant to do nothing but bring joy and bliss and yet for that experience to turn out a judgment. Suppose we love great music and get nearer to God in the midst of the surge and thunder of a great symphony than anywhere else. Suppose we have a friend who does not know anything about such music and we wish to introduce him to this great experience, to share it with him, and give him this contact with the invisible beauty which we ourselves enjoy. We have no aim other than to give our friend the happiness of a great new experience. We take him to a symphony concert; and in a very short time he is fidgeting and gazing around the hall, extremely bored. That friend has passed judgment on himself that he has no music in his soul. The experience designed to bring him new happiness has become only a judgment.

This always happens when we confront a man with greatness. We may take him to see some great masterpiece of art; we may take him to listen to a prince of preachers; we may give him a great book to read; we may take him to gaze upon some beauty. His reaction is a judgment; if he finds no beauty and no thrill we know that he has a blind spot in his soul. A visitor was being shown round an art gallery by one of the attendants. In that gallery there were certain masterpieces beyond all price, possessions of eternal beauty and unquestioned genius. At the end of the tour the visitor said: "Well, I don't think much of your old pictures." The attendant answered quietly: "Sir, I would remind you that these pictures are no longer on trial, but those who look at them are." All that the man's reaction had done was to show his own pitiable blindness.

This is so with regard to Jesus. If, when a man is confronted with Jesus, his soul responds to that wonder and beauty, he is on the way to salvation. But if, when he is confronted with Jesus, he sees nothing lovely, he stands condemned. His reaction has condemned him. God sent Jesus in love. He sent him for that man's salvation; but that which was sent in love has become a condemnation. It is not God who has condemned the man; God only loved him; the man has condemned himself.

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John 3:17-21

The man who reacts in hostility to Jesus has loved the darkness rather than the light. The terrible thing about a really good person is that he always has a certain unconscious element of condemnation in him. It is when we compare ourselves with him that we see ourselves as we are. Alcibiades, the spoilt Athenian man of genius, was a companion of Socrates and every now and again he used to break out: "Socrates, I hate you, for every time I meet you, you let me see what I am." The man who is engaged on an evil task does not want a flood of light shed on it and him; but the man engaged on an honourable task does not fear the light.

Once an architect came to Plato and offered for a certain sum of money to build him a house into none of whose rooms it would be possible to see. Plato said: "I will give you double the money to build a house into whose every room everyone can see." It is only the evil-doer who does not wish to see himself and who does not wish anyone else to see him. Such a man will inevitably hate Jesus Christ, for Christ will show him what he is and that is the last thing that he wants to see. It is the concealing darkness that he loves and not the revealing light.

By his reaction to Jesus Christ, a man stands revealed and his soul laid bare. If he regards Christ with love, even with wistful yearning, for him there is hope; but if in Christ he sees nothing attractive he has condemned himself. He who was sent in love has become to him judgment.

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John 3:22-30

A MAN WITHOUT ENVY

John 3:22-30

After these things Jesus and his disciples went to the district of Judaea. He spent some time there with them, and he was baptizing; and John was baptizing at Ainon, near Salem, because there was much water there. The people kept coming to him and being baptized, for John had not yet been thrown into prison. A discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew about the matter of cleansing. So they came to John and said to him: "Rabbi, look now! The man who was with you on the other side of Jordan, the man to whom you bore your witness, is baptizing and they are all going to him." John answered: "A man can receive only what is given to him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Anointed One of God,' but, 'I have been sent before him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom who stands and listens for him, rejoices at the sound of the voice of the bridegroom. So, then, my joy is complete. He must increase, but I must decrease."

We have already seen that part of the aim of the writer of the Fourth Gospel is to ensure that John the Baptist received his proper place as the forerunner of Jesus, but no higher place than that. There were those who were still ready to call John master and lord; the writer of the Fourth Gospel wishes to show that John had a high place, but that the highest place was reserved for Jesus alone; and he also wishes to show that John himself had never any other idea than that Jesus was supreme. To that end he shows us the ministry of John and the ministry of Jesus overlapping. The synoptic gospels are different: Mk.1:14 tells us that it was after John was put into prison that Jesus began his ministry. We need not argue which account is historically correct; but the likelihood is that the Fourth Gospel makes the two ministries overlap so that by contrast the supremacy of Jesus may be clearly shown.

One thing is certain--this passage shows us the loveliness of the humility of John the Baptist. It was clear that men were leaving John for Jesus. John's disciples were worried. They did not like to see their master take second place. They did not like to see him abandoned while the crowds flocked out to hear and see this new teacher.

In answer to their complaints, it would have been very easy for John to feel injured, neglected and unjustifiably forgotten. Sometimes a friend's sympathy can be the worst possible thing for us. It can make us feel sorry for ourselves and encourage us to think that we have not had a fair deal. But John had a mind above that. He told his disciples three things.

(i) He told them that he had never expected anything else. He told them that in point of fact he had assured them that his was not the leading place, but that he was merely sent as the herald, the forerunner and the preparer for the greater one to come. It would ease life a great deal if more people were prepared to play the subordinate role. So many people look for great things to do. John was not like that. He knew well that God had given him a subordinate task. It would save us a lot of resentment and heartbreak if we realized that there are certain things which are not for us, and if we accepted with all our hearts and did with all our might the work that God has given us to do. To do

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John 3:22-30

a secondary task for God makes it a great task. As Mrs. Browning had it: "All service ranks the same with God." Any task done for God is necessarily great.

(ii) He told them that no man could receive more than God gave him. If the new teacher was winning more followers it was not because he was stealing them from John, but because God was giving them to him. There was a certain American minister called Dr. Spence; once he was popular and his church was full; but as the years passed his people drifted away. To the church across the road came a new young minister who was attracting the crowds. One evening in Dr. Spence's church there was a very small gathering. The doctor looked at the little flock. "Where have all the people gone?" he asked. There was an embarrassed silence; then one of his office-bearers said: "I think they have gone to the church across the street to hear the new minister." Dr. Spence was silent for a moment; then he smiled. "Well, then," he said, "I think we ought to follow them." And he descended from his pulpit and led his people across the road.

What jealousies, what heartburnings, what resentfulness we might escape, if we would only remember that someone else's success is given to him by God, and were prepared to accept God's verdict and God's choice.

(iii) Finally, John used a very vivid picture which every Jew would recognize, for it was part of the heritage of Jewish thought. He called Jesus the bridegroom and himself the friend of the bridegroom. One of the great pictures of the Old Testament is of Israel as the bride of God and God as the bridegroom of Israel. The union between God and Israel was so close that it could be likened only to a wedding. When Israel went after strange gods it was as if she were guilty of infidelity to the marriage bond (Exo.34:15 compare Deut.31:16; Ps.73:27; Isa.54:5). The New Testament took this picture over and spoke of the church as the bride of Christ (2Cor.11:2; Eph.5:22-32). It was this picture that was in John's mind. Jesus had come from God; he was the Son of God, Israel was his rightful bride and he was Israel's bridegroom. But one place John did claim for himself, that of the friend of the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom, the shoshben, had a unique place at a Jewish wedding. He acted as the liaison between the bride and the bridegroom; he arranged the wedding; he took out the invitations; he presided at the wedding feast. He brought the bride and the bridegroom together. And he had one special duty. It was his duty to guard the bridal chamber and to let no false lover in. He would open the door only when in the dark he heard the bridegroom's voice and recognized it. When he heard the bridegroom's voice he let him in and went away rejoicing, for his task was completed and the lovers were together. He did not grudge the bridegroom the bride. He knew that his only task had been to bring bride and bridegroom together. And when that task was done he willingly and gladly faded out of the centre of the picture.

John's task had been to bring Israel and Jesus together; to arrange the marriage between Christ the bridegroom and Israel the bride. That task completed he was happy to fade into obscurity for his work was done. It was not with envy that he said that Jesus must increase and he must decrease; it was with joy. It may be that sometimes we would do well to remember that it is not to ourselves we must try to attach people; it is to Jesus Christ. It is not for ourselves we seek the loyalty of men; it is for him.

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John 3:31-36

THE ONE FROM HEAVEN

John 3:31-36

He who comes from above is above all. He who is from the earth is from the earth and speaks from the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. It is to what he has seen and heard that he bears witness; and no one receives his witness. He who has received his witness sets his seal on the fact that God is true. He whom God sent speaks the words of God, for he does not partially measure out the Spirit upon him. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life. He who does not believe in the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.

As we have seen before, one of the difficulties in the Fourth Gospel is to know when the characters are speaking and when John is adding his own commentary. These verses may be the words of John the Baptist; but more likely they are the witness and the comment of John the evangelist.

John begins by asserting the supremacy of Jesus. If we want information, we have to go to the person who possesses that information. If we want information about a family, we will get it at first hand only from a member of that family. If we want information about a town we will get it at first hand only from someone who comes from that town. So, then, if we want information about God, we will get it only from the Son of God; and if we want information about heaven and heaven's life, we will get it only from him who comes from heaven. When Jesus speaks about God and about the heavenly things, says John, it is no carried story, no second-hand tale, no information from a secondary source; he tells us that which he himself has seen and heard. To put it very simply, because Jesus alone knows God, he alone can give us the facts about God, and these facts are the gospel.

It is John's grief that so few accept the message that Jesus brought; but when a man does accept it, he attests the fact that in his belief the word of God is true. In the ancient world, if a man wished to give his full approval to a document, such as a will or an agreement or a constitution, he affixed his seal to the foot of it. The seal was the sign that he agreed with this and regarded it as binding and true. So when a man accepts the message of Jesus, he affirms and attests that he believes what God says is true.

John goes on: we can believe what Jesus says, because on him God poured out the Spirit in full measure, keeping nothing back. Even the Jews themselves said that the prophets received from God a certain measure of the Spirit. The full measure of the Spirit was reserved for God's own chosen one. Now, in Hebrew thought the Spirit of God had two functions--first, the Spirit revealed God's truth to men; and, second, the Spirit enabled men to recognize and understand that truth when it came to them. So to say that the Spirit was on Jesus in the completest possible way is to say that he perfectly knew and perfectly understood the truth of God. To put that in another way--to listen to Jesus is to listen to the very voice of God.

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John 3:31-36

Finally, John again sets before men the eternal choice--life or death. All through history this choice had been set before Israel. Deuteronomy records the words of Moses: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil.... I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (Deut.30:15-20). The challenge was reiterated by Joshua: "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh.24:15). It has been said that all life concentrates upon a man at the crossroads. Once again John returns to his favourite thought. What matters is a man's reaction to Christ. If that reaction be love and longing, that man will know life. If it be indifference or hostility, that man will know death. It is not that God sends his wrath upon him; it is that he brings that wrath upon himself.

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John 4:1-9

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

John 4:1-9

So when the Lord learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although it was not Jesus himself who was in the habit of baptizing but his disciples), he quitted Judaea and went away again to Galilee. Now he had to pass through Samaria. He came to a town of Samaria, called Sychar, which is near the piece of ground which Jacob gave to Joseph, his son, and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, tired from the journey, was sitting by the well just as he was. It was about midday. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her: "Give me to drink." For his disciples had gone away into the town to buy provisions. So the Samaritan woman said to him: "How is it that you who are a Jew ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (For there is no familiarity between Jews and Samaritans.)

First of all, let us set the scene of this incident. Palestine is only 120 miles long from north to south. But within that 120 miles there were in the time of Jesus three definite divisions of territory. In the extreme north lay Galilee; in the extreme south lay Judaea; and in between lay Samaria. Jesus did not wish at this stage in his ministry to be involved in a controversy about baptism; so he decided to quit Judaea for the time being and transfer his operations to Galilee. There was a centuries-old feud between the Jews and the Samaritans, the cause of which we will shortly see. But the quickest way from Judaea to Galilee lay through Samaria. Using that route, the journey could be done in three days. The alternative route was to cross the Jordan, go up the eastern side of the river to avoid Samaria, recross the Jordan north of Samaria and then enter Galilee. This was a route which took twice as long. So then Jesus had to pass through Samaria if he wished to take the shortest route to Galilee.

On the way they came to the town of Sychar. Just short of Sychar the road to Samaria forks. The one branch goes north-east to Scythopolis; the other goes west to Nablus and then north to Engannim. At the fork of the road there stands to this day the well known as Jacob's well.

This was an area which had many Jewish memories attached to it. There was a piece of ground there which had been bought by Jacob (Gen.33:18-19). Jacob, on his deathbed, had bequeathed that ground to Joseph (Gen.48:22). And, on Joseph's death in Egypt, his body had been taken back to Palestine and buried there (Josh.24:32). So around this area there gathered many Jewish memories.

The well itself was more than 100 feet deep. It is not a springing well of water; it is a wet into which the water percolates and gathers. But clearly it was a well so deep that no one could gain water from it unless he had something with which to draw the water.

When Jesus and his little band came to the fork in the road Jesus sat down to rest, for he was tired with the journey. It was midday. The Jewish day runs from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the sixth hour is twelve o'clock midday. So the heat was at its greatest, and Jesus was weary and thirsty from travelling. His disciples went on ahead to buy some food in the Samaritan town. Something must have been beginning to happen to them. Before they had met Jesus it is entirely unlikely that they

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John 4:1-9

would have even thought of buying food in any Samaritan town. Little by little, perhaps even unconsciously, the barriers were going down.

As Jesus sat there, there came to the well a Samaritan woman. Why she should come to that well is something of a mystery, for it was more than half-a-mile from Sychar where she must have stayed and there was water there. May it be that she was so much of a moral outcast that the women even drove her away from the village well and she had to come here to draw water? Jesus asked her to give him a drink. She turned in astonishment. "I am a Samaritan," she said. "You are a Jew. How is it that you ask a drink from me?" And then John explains to the Greeks for whom he is writing that there was no kind of come and go at all between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Now it is certain that all we have here is the briefest possible report of what must have been a long conversation. Clearly there was much more to this meeting than is recorded here. If we may use an analogy, this is like the minutes of a committee meeting where we have only the salient points of the discussion recorded. I think that the Samaritan woman must have unburdened her soul to this stranger. How else could Jesus have known of her tangled domestic affairs? For one of the very few times in her life she had found one with kindness in his eyes instead of critical superiority; and she opened her heart.

Few stories in the Gospel record show us so much about the character of Jesus.

(i) It shows us the reality of his humanity. Jesus was weary with the journey, and he sat by the side of the well exhausted. It is very significant that John who stresses the sheer deity of Jesus Christ more than any other of the gospel writers also stresses his humanity to the full. John does not show us a figure freed from the tiredness and the struggle of our humanity. He shows us one for whom life was an effort as it is for us; he shows us one who also was tired and had to go on.

(ii) It shows us the warmth of his sympathy. From an ordinary religious leader, from one of the orthodox church leaders of the day the Samaritan woman would have fled in embarrassment. She would have avoided such a one. If by any unlikely chance he had spoken to her she would have met him with an ashamed and even a hostile silence. But it seemed the most natural thing in the world to talk to Jesus. She had at last met someone who was not a critic but a friend, one who did not condemn but who understood.

(iii) It shows us Jesus as the breaker down of barriers. The quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans was an old, old story. Away back about 720 B.C. the Assyrians had invaded the northern kingdom of Samaria and had captured and subjugated it. They did what conquerors often did in those days--they transported practically the whole population to Media (2Kgs.17:6). Into the district the Assyrians brought other people--from Babylon, from Cuthah, from Ava, from Hamath and from Sepharvaim (2Kgs.17:24). Now it is not possible to transport a whole people. Some of the people of the northern kingdom were left. Almost inevitably they began to inter-marry with the incoming foreigners; and thereby they committed what to the Jew was an unforgivable crime. They lost their racial purity. In a strict Jewish household even to this day if a son or a daughter marries a Gentile, his or her funeral service is carried out. Such a person is dead in the eyes of orthodox Judaism.

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John 4:1-9

So then the great majority of the inhabitants of Samaria were carried away to Media. They never came back but were assimilated into the country into which they were taken. They are the lost ten tribes. Those who remained in the country inter-married with the incoming strangers and lost their right to be called Jews at all.

In course of time a like invasion and a like defeat happened to the southern kingdom, whose capital was Jerusalem. Its inhabitants also were carried off to Babylon; but they did not lose their identity; they remained stubbornly and unalterably Jewish. In time there came the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and the exiles returned to Jerusalem by the grace of the Persian king. Their immediate task was to repair and rebuild the shattered Temple. The Samaritans came and offered their help in this sacred task. They were contemptuously told that their help was not wanted. They had lost their Jewish heritage and they had no right to share in the rebuilding of the house of God. Smarting under this repulse, they turned bitterly against the Jews of Jerusalem. It was about 450 B.c. when that quarrel took place, and it was as bitter as ever in the days of Jesus.

It had further been embittered when the renegade Jew, Manasseh, married a daughter of the Samaritan Sanballat (Neh.13:28) and proceeded to found a rival temple on Mount Gerizim which was in the centre of the Samaritan territory. Still later in the Maccabean days, in 129 B.C., John Hyrcanus, the Jewish general and leader, led an attack against Samaria and sacked and destroyed the temple on Mount Gerizim. Between Jews and Samaritans there was an embittered hatred. The Jews contemptuously called them Chuthites or Cuthaeans after one of the peoples whom the Assyrians had settled there. The Jewish Rabbis said: "Let no man eat of the bread of the Cuthaeans, for he who eats their bread is as he who eats swine's flesh." Ecclesiasticus depicts God as saying: "With two nations is my soul vexed, and the third is no nation; they that sit upon the mountain of Samaria, and the Philistines, and that foolish people that dwell in Sichem" (Ecc.50:25-26). Sichem or Shechem was one of the most famous of Samaritan cities.

The hatred was returned with interest. It is told that Rabbi Jochanan was passing through Samaria on his way to Jerusalem to pray. He passed by Mount Gerizim. A Samaritan saw him, and asked him: "Where are you going?" "I am going to Jerusalem," he said, "to pray." The Samaritan answered: "Would it not be better for you to pray in this holy mountain (Mount Gerizim) than in that accursed house?" Pilgrims from Galilee to Jerusalem had to pass through Samaria, if, as we have seen, they travelled by the quickest way; and the Samaritans delighted to hinder them.

The Jewish-Samaritan quarrel was more than 400 years old. But it smouldered as resentfully and as bitterly as ever. It was small wonder that the Samaritan woman was astonished that Jesus, a Jew, should speak to her, a Samaritan.

(iv) But there was still another way in which Jesus was taking down the barriers. The Samaritan was a woman. The strict Rabbis forbade a Rabbi to greet a woman in public. A Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. There were even Pharisees who were called "the bruised and bleeding Pharisees" because they shut their eyes when they saw a woman on the street and so walked into walls and houses! For a Rabbi to be seen speaking to a woman in public was the end of his reputation--and yet Jesus spoke to this woman. Not only was she a woman; she was also a woman of notorious character. No decent man, let alone a Rabbi, would have been seen in her company, or even exchanging a word with her--and yet Jesus spoke to her.

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To a Jew this was an amazing story. Here was the Son of God, tired and weary and thirsty. Here was the holiest of men, listening with understanding to a sorry story. Here was Jesus breaking through the barriers of nationality and orthodox Jewish custom. Here is the beginning of the universality of the gospel; here is God so loving the world, not in theory, but in action.

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John 4:10-15

THE LIVING WATER

John 4:10-15

Jesus answered her: "If you knew the free gift that God is offering you, and if you knew who is speaking to you, and if you knew who was saying to you: 'Give me to drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him: "Sir, you have no bucket to draw with and the well is deep. Where does this living water that you have come from? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well, and who himself drank from it with his children and his cattle?" Jesus answered her: "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again for ever. But the water that I will give him will become a well of water within him, springing up to give him life eternal." The woman said to him: "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not thirst, and so that I will not have to come here to draw water."

We have to note that this conversation with the Samaritan woman follows exactly the same pattern as the conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus makes a statement. The statement is taken in the wrong sense. Jesus remakes the statement in an even more vivid way. It is still misunderstood; and then Jesus compels the person with whom he is speaking to discover and to face the truth for herself. That was Jesus' usual way of teaching; and it was a most effective way, for, as someone has said: "There are certain truths which a man cannot accept; he must discover them for himself."

Just as Nicodemus did, the woman took the words of Jesus quite literally when she was meant to understand them spiritually. It was living water of which Jesus spoke. In ordinary language to the Jew living water was running water. It was the water of the running stream in contradistinction to the water of the stagnant cistern or pool. This well, as we have seen, was not a springing well, but a well into which the water percolated from the subsoil. To the Jew, running, living water from the stream was always better. So the woman is saying: "You are offering me pure stream water. Where are you going to get it?"

She goes on to speak of "our father Jacob." The Jews would, of course, have strenuously denied that Jacob was the father of the Samaritans, but it was part of the Samaritan claim that they were descended from Joseph, the son of Jacob, by way of Ephraim and Manasseh. The woman is in effect saying to Jesus: "This is blasphemous talk. Jacob, our great ancestor, when he came here, had to dig this well to gain water for his family and his cattle. Are you claiming to be able to get fresh, running stream water? If you are, you are claiming to be wiser and more powerful than Jacob. That is a claim that no one has any right to make."

When people were on a journey they usually carried with them a bucket made from the skin of some beast so that they could draw water from any well at which they halted. No doubt Jesus' band had such a bucket; and no doubt the disciples had taken it into the town with them. The woman saw that Jesus did not possess such a traveller's leather bucket, and so again she says in effect: "You need not talk about drawing water and giving it to me. I can see for myself that you have not a bucket with which to draw water." H. B. Tristram begins his book entitled *Eastern Customs* in

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Bible Lands with this personal experience. He was sitting beside a well in Palestine beside the scene of the inn which figures in the story of the Good Samaritan.

"An Arab woman came down from the hills above to draw water; she unfolded and opened her goatskin bottle, and then untwined a cord, and attached it to a very small leather bucket which she carried, by means of which she slowly filled her skin, fastened its mouth, placed it on her shoulder, and bucket in hand, climbed the mountain. I thought of the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, when an Arab footman, toiling up the steep path from Jericho, heated and wearied with his journey, turned aside to the well, knelt and peered wistfully down. But he had 'nothing to draw with and the well was deep.' He lapped a little moisture from the water spilt by the woman who had preceded him, and, disappointed, passed on." It was just that that the woman was thinking of when she said that Jesus had nothing wherewith to draw water from the depths of the well.

But the Jews had another way of using the word water. They often spoke of the thirst of the soul for God; and they often spoke of quenching that thirst with living water. Jesus was not using terms that were bound to be misunderstood; he was using terms that anyone with spiritual insight should have understood. In the Revelation that promise is: "To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life" (Rev.21:6). The Lamb is to lead them to springs of living waters (Rev.7:17). The promise was that the chosen people would draw water with joy from the wells of salvation (Isa.12:3). The Psalmist spoke of his soul being thirsty for the living God (Ps.42:1). God's promise was: "I will pour water on the thirsty land" (Isa.44:3). The summons was that every one who was thirsty should come to the waters and freely drink (Isa.55:1). Jeremiah's complaint was that the people had forsaken God who was the fountain of living waters and had hewed themselves out broken cisterns which could hold no water (Jer.2:13). Ezekiel had had his vision of the river of life (Eze.47:1-12). In the new world there would be a cleansing fountain opened (Zech.13:1). The waters would go forth from Jerusalem (Zech.14:8).

Sometimes the Rabbis identified this living water with the wisdom of the Law; sometimes they identified it with nothing less than the Holy Spirit of God. All Jewish pictorial religious language was full of this idea of the thirst of the soul which could be quenched only with the living water which was the gift of God. But the woman chose to understand this with an almost crude literalism. She was blind because she would not see.

Jesus went on to make a still more startling statement that he could give her living water which would banish her thirst for ever. The point is that again the woman took this literally; but in point of fact it was nothing less than a Messianic claim. In the prophetic vision of the age to come, the age of God, the promise was: "They shall not hunger or thirst" (Isa.49:10). It was with God and none other that the living fountain of the all-quenching water existed. "With thee is the fountain of life," the Psalmist had cried (Ps.36:9). It is from the very throne of God that the river of life is to flow (Rev.22:1). It is the Lord who is the fountain of living water (Jer.17:13). It is in the Messianic age that the parched ground is to become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water (Isa.35:7). When Jesus spoke about bringing to men the water which quenches thirst for ever, he was doing no less than stating that he he was the Anointed One of God who was to bring in the new age.

Again the woman did not see it. And I think that this time she spoke with a jest, as if humouring one who was a little mad. "Give me this water," she said, "so that I will never be thirsty again and

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John 4:10-15

will not have to walk to the well day after day." She was jesting with a kind of humouring contempt about eternal things.

At the heart of all this there is the fundamental truth that in the human heart there is a thirst for something that only Jesus Christ can satisfy. Sinclair Lewis in one of his books draws a picture of a respectable little business man who kicked over the traces. He is talking to the girl he loves. She says to him: "On the surface we seem quite different; but deep down we are fundamentally the same. We are both desperately unhappy about something--and we don't know what it is." In every man there is this nameless unsatisfied longing; this vague discontent; this something lacking; this frustration.

In Sorrell and Son Warwick Deeping tells of a conversation between Sorrell and his son. The boy is talking about life. He says that it is like groping in an enchanted fog. The fog breaks for a moment; you see the moon or a girl's face; you think you want the moon or the face; and then the fog comes down again; and leaves you groping for something, you don't quite know what. Wordsworth, in the Ode on the Intimations of Immortality, speaks of,

"Those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized."

Augustine talks about "our hearts being restless till they find rest in thee."

Part of the human situation is that we cannot find happiness out of the things that the human situation has to offer. As Browning had it:

"Just when we're safest, there's a sunset touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, someone's death,
A chorus ending from Euripides--
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as Nature's self.
To rap and knock and enter in our soul."

We are never safe from the longing for eternity which God has put in man's soul. There is a thirst which only Jesus Christ can satisfy.

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John 4:15-21

FACING THE TRUTH

John 4:15-21

The woman said to him: "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not thirst, and so that I will not have to come here to draw water." Jesus said to her: "Go, call your husband, and come back here." The woman answered: "I have not got a husband." Jesus said to her: "You spoke well when you said, 'I have not got a husband.' For you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. This is the truth that you have told." The woman said to him: "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain and you say Jerusalem is the place where we ought to worship." Jesus said: "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem."

We have seen how the woman jestingly asked Jesus to give her the living water in order that she should not thirst again and might be spared the tiring journey to the well. Suddenly and stabbingly Jesus brought her to her senses. The time for verbal by-play was past; the time for jesting was over. "Go," said Jesus, "and fetch your husband and come back with him." The woman stiffened as if a sudden pain had caught her; she recoiled as if hit by a sudden shock; she grew white as one who had seen a sudden apparition; and so indeed she had, for she had suddenly caught sight of herself.

She was suddenly compelled to face herself and the looseness and immorality and total inadequacy of her life. There are two revelations in Christianity: the revelation of God and the revelation of ourselves. No man ever really sees himself until he sees himself in the presence of Christ; and then he is appalled at the sight. There is another way of putting it--Christianity begins with a sense of sin. It begins with the sudden realization that life as we are living it will not do. We awake to ourselves and we awake to our need of God.

Some people have held, because of this mention of the five husbands, that this story is not an actual incident but an allegory. We have seen that, when the original people of Samaria were exiled and transported to Media, people from five other places were brought in. These five different people brought in their own gods (2Kgs.17:29); and it has been held that the woman stands for Samaria and the five husbands for the five false gods to whom the Samaritans, as it were, married themselves. The sixth husband stands for the true God, but, they worship him, not truly, but in ignorance; and therefore they are not married to him at all. It may be that there is a reminder of this Samaritan infidelity to God in the story; but it is far too vivid to be a manufactured allegory. It reads too much like life.

Someone has said that prophecy is criticism based on hope. A prophet points out to a man or a nation what is wrong; but he does so not to push them into despair but to point the way to cure and to amendment and to rightness of life. So Jesus began by revealing to this woman her own sinful state; but goes on to tell her of the true worship in which our souls can meet God.

The woman's question comes strangely to us. She says, and she is obviously troubled when she says it: "Our fathers say--that we ought to worship here on Mount Gerizim; you say that we ought to worship in Jerusalem; what am I to do?" The Samaritans adjusted history to suit themselves.

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John 4:15-21

They taught that it was on Mount Gerizim that Abraham had been willing to sacrifice Isaac; they taught that it was there that Melchizedek had appeared to Abraham; they declared that it was on Mount Gerizim that Moses had first entered an altar and sacrificed to God when the people entered the promised land, although in fact it was on Mount Ebal that was done (Deut.27:4). They tampered with the text of scripture and with history to glorify Mount Gerizim. The woman had been brought up to regard Mount Gerizim as the most sacred spot in the world and to despise Jerusalem. What was in her mind was this.

She was saying to herself: "I am a sinner before God; I must offer to God an offering for my sin; I must take that offering to the house of God to put myself right with him; where am I going to take it?" To her, as to all her contemporaries, the only cure for sin was sacrifice. Her great problem was, where was that sacrifice to be made? By this time she is not arguing about the respective merits of the Temple on Mount Gerizim and the Temple on Mount Zion. All she wants to know is: Where can I find God?

Jesus' answer was that the day of the old man-made rivalries was coming to an end; and the time was on the way when men would find God everywhere. It had been Zephaniah's vision that men shall worship God "each in his place" (Zeph.2:11). It was Malachi's dream that in every place incense would be offered as a pure offering to the name of God (Mal.1:11). Jesus' answer to the woman was that she did not need to go anywhere special to find God, neither to Mount Gerizim nor to Mount Zion. She did not need to offer sacrifice in some special place; true worship finds God in every place.

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John 4:22-26

THE TRUE WORSHIP

John 4:22-26

"You do not know what you are worshipping. We do know what we worship, because the world's salvation has its origin among the Jews. But the hour is coming--the hour is now here--when the real worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for it is worshippers like that that the Father is looking for. God is Spirit; and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The woman said to him: "I know that the Messiah, he who is called Christ, is coming. When he has come he will announce all things to us." Jesus said to her: "I who am speaking to you am he."

Jesus had told the Samaritan woman that the old rivalries were on the way out, that the day was coming when controversy about the respective merits of Mount Gerizim and Mount Zion would be an irrelevancy, that he who truly sought God would find him anywhere. For all that Jesus still stressed the fact that the Jewish nation had a unique place in God's plan and revelation.

The Samaritans worshipped in ignorance, he said. There was one sense in which that was factually true. The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. They rejected all the rest of the Old Testament. They had therefore rejected all the great messages of the prophets and all the supreme devotion of the Psalms. They had in fact a truncated religion because they had a truncated Bible; they had rejected the knowledge that was open to them and that they might have had. Further, the Jewish Rabbis had always charged the Samaritans with a merely superstitious worship of the true God. They always said that the Samaritan worship was founded not on love and knowledge, but on ignorance and fear. As we have seen, when the foreign peoples were brought in to dwell in Samaria, they brought their own gods with them (2Kgs.17:29). We are told that a priest from Bethel came and told them how they should fear the Lord.(2Kgs.17:28).

But all the probability is that they merely added Jehovah to their list of gods because they were superstitiously afraid to leave him out. After all he was the God of the land in which they were living and it might be dangerous not to include him in their worship.

In a false worship we may detect three faults.

(i) A false worship is a selective worship. It chooses what it wishes to know about God and omits the rest. The Samaritans took as much of scripture as they wished and paid no attention to the rest. One of the most dangerous things in the world is a one-sided religion. It is very easy for a man to accept and hold such parts of God's truth as suit him and to disregard the remainder. We have seen, for instance, how certain thinkers and churchmen and politicians justify apartheid and racial segregation by appeal to certain parts of scripture, while they conveniently forget the far greater parts which forbid it.

A minister in a great city organized a petition to help a man who had been condemned for a certain crime. It seemed to him that this was a case where Christian mercy ought to operate. His telephone bell rang, and a woman's voice said to him: "I am astonished that you, a minister, should

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John 4:22-26

be lending your weight to this petition for mercy." "Why should you be surprised?" he asked. The voice said: "I suppose you know your Bible I hope so," he said. "Then," said the voice, "are you not aware that the Bible says, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'?" Here was a woman who took the part of the Bible which suited her argument and forgot the great merciful teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

We would do well to remember that, although no man will ever grasp the whole orb of truth, it is total truth that we should aim at, not the snatching at fragments which happen to suit ourselves and our own position.

(ii) A false worship is an ignorant worship. Worship ought to be the approach to God of the whole man. A man has a mind and he has a duty to exercise it. Religion may begin with an emotional response; but the time comes when that emotional response has to be thought out. E. F. Scott said that religion is far more than merely the strenuous exercise of the intellect, but that nonetheless a very great part of religious failure is due to nothing other than intellectual sloth. To fail to think things out is in itself a sin. In the last analysis, religion is never safe until a man can tell, not only what he believes, but why he believes it. Religion is hope, but it is hope with reason behind it (1Pet.3:15).

(ii) A false worship is a superstitious worship. It is a worship given, not out of a sense of need nor out of any real desire, but basically because a man feels that it might be dangerous not to give it. Many a person will refuse to walk beneath a ladder; many a person will have a pleased feeling when a black cat crosses his path; many a person will pick up a pin with the idea that good luck will follow; many a person will have an uncomfortable feeling when he is one of thirteen sitting at a table. He does not believe in these superstitions, but he has the feeling that there might be something in them and he had better play safe. There are many people whose religion is founded on a kind of vague fear of what might happen if they leave God out of the reckoning. But real religion is founded not on fear but on the love of God and gratitude for what God has done. Too much religion is a kind of superstitious ritual to avert the possible wrath of the unpredictable gods.

Jesus pointed to the true worship. God, he said, is spirit. Immediately a man grasps that, a new flood-light breaks over him. If God is spirit, God is not confined to things; and therefore idol worship is not only an irrelevancy, it is an insult to the very nature of God. If God is spirit, God is not confined to places; and therefore to limit the worship of God to Jerusalem or to any other spot is to set a limit to that which by its nature overpasses all limits. If God is spirit, a man's gifts to God must be gifts of the spirit. Animal sacrifices and all man-made things become inadequate. The only gifts that befit the nature of God are the gifts of the spirit--love, loyalty, obedience, devotion.

A man's spirit is the highest part of him. That is the part which lasts when the physical part has vanished. That is the part which dreams the dreams and sees the visions which, because of the weakness and faultiness of the body, may never be carried out. It is the spirit of a man which is the source of his highest dreams and thoughts and ideals and desires. The true worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. Genuine worship does not consist in coming to a certain place nor in going through a certain ritual or liturgy nor even in bringing certain

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John 4:22-26

gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, himself immortal and invisible.

This passage closes with a great declaration. There had opened before this Samaritan woman a vista which bewildered and staggered her. Here were things beyond her understanding, things full of wonder. All that she could say was: "When the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One of God comes, then we will know all about it." Jesus said to her: "I who am speaking to you am he." It is as if Jesus said this is not a dream of the truth; this is the truth itself.

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John 4:27-30

SHARING THE WONDER

John 4:27-30

Upon this his disciples came up; and they were in a state of amazement that he was talking to a woman; but no one said: "What are you looking for?" or, "Why are you talking to her?" So the woman left her water-pot, and went away to the town and said to the people: "Come and see a man who told me all things that I have done! Can this be the Anointed One of God?" They came out of the town and were coming to him.

There is little wonder that the disciples were in a state of bewildered amazement when they returned from their errand to the town of Sychar and found Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman. We have already seen the Jewish idea of women. The Rabbinic precept ran: "Let no one talk with a woman in the street, no, not with his own wife." The Rabbis so despised women and so thought them incapable of receiving any real teaching that they said: "Better that the words of the law should be burned than deliver to women." They had a saying: "Each time that a man prolongs converse with a woman he causes evil to himself, and desists from the law, and in the end inherits Gehinnom." By Rabbinic standards Jesus could hardly have done a more shatteringly unconventional thing than to talk to this woman. Here is Jesus taking the barriers down.

There follows a curiously revealing touch. It is the kind which could hardly have come from anyone except from one who had actually shared in this scene. However staggered the disciples might be, it did not occur to them to ask the woman what she was looking for or to ask Jesus why he was talking to her. They were beginning to know him; and they had already arrived at the conclusion that, however surprising his actions were, they were not to be questioned. A man has taken a great step to real discipleship when he learns to say: "It is not for me to question the actions and the demands of Jesus. My prejudices and my conventions must go down before them."

By this time the woman was on her way back to the village without her water-pot. The fact that she left her water-pot showed two things. It showed that she was in a hurry to share this extraordinary experience, and it showed that she never dreamed of doing anything else but come back. Her whole action has much to tell us of real Christian experience.

(i) Her experience began with being compelled to face herself and to see herself as she was. The same thing happened to Peter. After the draft of fishes, when Peter suddenly discovered something of the majesty of Jesus, all he could say was: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk.5:8). Our Christian experience will often begin with a humiliating wave of self-disgust. It usually happens that the last thing a man sees is himself. And it often happens that the first thing Christ does for a man is to compel him to do what he has spent his life refusing to do--look at himself.

(ii) The Samaritan woman was staggered by Christ's ability to see into her inmost being. She was amazed at his intimate knowledge of the human heart, and of her heart in particular. The Psalmist was awed by that same thought. "Thou discernest my thoughts from afar.... Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (Ps.139:1-4). It is told that once a small girl

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John 4:27-30

heard a sermon by C. H. Spurgeon, and whispered to her mother at the end of it: "Mother, how does he know what goes on in our house?" There are no wrappings and disguises which are proof against the gaze of Christ. It is his power to see into the depths of the human heart. It is not that he sees only the evil there; he sees also the sleeping hero in the soul of every man. He is like the surgeon who sees the diseased thing, but who also sees the health which will follow when the evil thing is taken away.

(iii) The first instinct of the Samaritan woman was to share her discovery. Having found this amazing person, she was compelled to share her find with others. The Christian life is based on the twin pillars of discovery and communication. No discovery is complete until the desire to share it fills our hearts; and we cannot communicate Christ to others until we have discovered him for ourselves. First to find, then to tell, are the two great steps of the Christian life.

(iv) This very desire to tell others of her discovery killed in this woman the feeling of shame. She was no doubt an outcast; she was no doubt a byword; the very fact that she was drawing water from this distant well shows how she avoided her neighbours and how they avoided her. But now she ran to tell them of her discovery. A person may have some trouble which he is embarrassed to mention and which he tries to keep secret, but once he is cured he is often so filled with wonder and gratitude that he tells everyone about it. A man may hide his sin; but once he discovers Jesus Christ as Saviour, his first instinct is to say to men: "Look at what I was and look at what I am; this is what Christ has done for me."

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John 4:31-34

THE MOST SATISFYING FOOD

John 4:31-34

Meanwhile his disciples asked him: "Rabbi! Eat something! have food," he said to them, "of which you do not know." "Surely," his disciples kept saying to each other, "someone can't have given him something to eat?" "My food," said Jesus to them, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work."

This passage follows the normal pattern of the conversations of the Fourth Gospel. Jesus says something which is misunderstood. He says something which has a spiritual meaning. It is at first taken with an uncomprehending literalism and then slowly he unfolds the meaning until it is grasped and realized. It is exactly the same as Jesus did when he talked to Nicodemus about being born again, and when he talked to the woman about the water which quenched the thirst of the heart for ever.

By this time the disciples had come back with food, and they asked Jesus to eat. They had left him so tired and exhausted that they were worried that he did not seem to want to eat any of the provisions which they had brought back. It is strange how a great task can lift a man above and beyond bodily needs. All his life Wilberforce, who freed the slaves, was a little, insignificant, ailing creature. When he rose to address the House of Commons, the members at first used to smile at this queer little figure; but as the fire and the power came from the man, they used to crowd the benches whenever he rose to speak. As it was put: "The little minnow became a whale." His message, his task, the flame of truth and the dynamic of power conquered his physical weakness. There is a picture of John Knox preaching in his old age.

He was a done old man; he was so weak that he had to be half lifted up the pulpit steps and left supporting himself on the book-board; but before he had long begun his sermon the voice had regained its old trumpet-call and he was like "to ding the pulpit into blads (to knock the pulpit into splinters) and leap out of it." The message filled the man with a kind of supernatural strength.

Jesus' answer to his disciples was that he had food of which they knew nothing. In their simplicity they wondered if someone had brought him food to eat. Then he told them: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me."

The great keynote of Jesus' life is submission to the will of God. His uniqueness lies in the very fact that he was the only person who ever was or who ever will be perfectly obedient to God's will. It can be truly said that Jesus is the only person in all the world who never did what he liked but always what God liked.

He was God-sent. Again and again the Fourth Gospel speaks of Jesus being sent by God. There are two Greek words used in the Fourth Gospel for this sending. There is apostellein (GSN0649) which is used seventeen times and pempein (GSN3992) which is used twenty-seven times. That is to say, no fewer than forty-four times the Fourth Gospel speaks, or shows us Jesus speaking, about his being sent by God. Jesus was one who was under orders. He was God's man.

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John 4:31-34

Then once Jesus had come, again and again he spoke of the work that was given him to do. In Jn.5:36 he speaks of the works which his Father has given him to do. In Jn.17:4 his only claim is that he has finished the work his Father gave him to do. When he speaks of taking up and laying down his life, of living and of dying, he says: "This commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn.10:18). He speaks continually, as he speaks here, of the will of God. "I have come down from heaven," he says, "not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (Jn.6:38). "I always do," he says, "what is pleasing to him" (Jn.8:29). In Jn.14:23 he lays it down, out of his personal experience and on his personal example, that the only proof of love lies in the keeping of the commandments of the one a man claims to love. This obedience of Jesus was not as it is with us, a spasmodic thing. It was the very essence and being, the mainspring and the core, the dynamic and the moving power of his life.

It is his great desire that we should be as he was.

(i) To do the will of God is the only way to peace. There can be no peace when we are at variance with the king of the universe.

(ii) To do the will of God is the only way to happiness. There can be no happiness when we set our human ignorance against the divine wisdom of God.

(iii) To do the will of God is the only way to power. When we go our own way, we have nothing to call on but our own power, and therefore collapse is inevitable. When we go God's way, we go in his power, and therefore victory is secure.

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John 4:35-38

THE SOWER, THE HARVEST AND THE REAPERS

John 4:35-38

"Are you not in the habit of saying: 'Four months, and the harvest will come'? Look you! I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, because they are already white for the harvesting. The harvester receives his reward and stores up fruit which makes for eternal life, so that he who sows and he who harvests may rejoice together. In this the saying is true--one sows and another harvests. I have sent you to harvest a crop which your labour did not produce. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labours."

All this that was happening in Samaria had given Jesus a vision of a world to be harvested for God. When he said: "Four months, and the harvest will come," we are not to think that he was speaking of the actual time of year that it was in Samaria at that time. If that were so, it would have been somewhere round about January. There would have been no exhausting heat; and there would have been no scarcity of water. One would not have needed a well to find water; it would have been the rainy season, and there would have been plenty of water.

What Jesus is doing is quoting a proverb. The Jews had a sixfold division of the agricultural year. Each division was held to last two months--seedtime, winter, spring, harvest, summer and the season of extreme heat. Jesus is saying: "You have got a proverb; if you sow the seed, you must wait for at least four months before you can hope to begin to reap the harvest." Then Jesus looked up. Sychar is in the midst of a region that is still famous for its corn. Agricultural land was very limited in stony, rocky Palestine; practically nowhere else in the country could a man look up and see the waving fields of golden corn. Jesus swept his gaze and his hand round. "Look," he said, "the fields are white and ready for the harvest. They took four months to grow; but in Samaria there is a harvest for the reaping now."

For once, it is the contrast between nature and grace of which Jesus is thinking. in the ordinary harvest men sowed and waited; in Samaria things had happened with such divine suddenness that the word was sown and on the spot the harvest waited. H. V. Morton has a specially interesting suggestion about the fields white for the harvest. He himself was sitting at this very spot where Jacob's well is. As he sat, he saw the people come out from the village and start to climb the hill. They came in little batches; and they were all wearing white robes and the white robes stood out against the ground and the sky. It may well be that just at this moment the people started to flock out to Jesus in response to the woman's story. As they streamed out in their white robes across the fields, perhaps Jesus said: "Look at the fields! See them now! They are white to the harvest!" The white-robed crowd was the harvest which he was eager to reap for God.

Jesus went on to show that the incredible had happened. The sower and the harvester could rejoice at the same time. Here was something no man might expect. To the Jew sowing was a sad and a laborious time; it was harvest which was the time of joy. "May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy! He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps.136:5-6).

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John 4:35-38

There is something else hidden below the surface here. The Jews had their dreams of the golden age, the age to come, the age of God, when the world would be God's world, when sin and sorrow would be done away with and God would reign supreme. Amos paints his picture of it: "Behold the days are coming, saith the Lord, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed" (Am.9:13). "Your threshing shall last the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last the time for sowing" (Lev.26:5). It was the dream of that golden age that sowing and reaping, planting and harvesting, would follow hard upon the heels of each other. There would be such fertility that the old days of waiting would be at an end. We can see what Jesus is gently doing here. His words are nothing less than a claim that with him the golden age has dawned; God's time is here; the time when the word is spoken and the seed is sown and the harvest waits.

There was another side to that--and Jesus knew it. "There is another proverb," he said, "and it too is true--one sows and another harvests." Then he went on to make two applications of that.

(a) He told his disciples that they would reap a crop which had been produced not by their labour. He meant that he was sowing the seed, that in his Cross, above all, the seed of the love and the power of God would be sown, and that the day would come when the disciples would go out into the world and reap the harvest that his life and death had sown.

(b) He told his disciples that the day would come when they would sow and others would reap. There would be a time when the Christian Church sent out its evangelists; they would never see the harvest; some of them would die as martyrs, but the blood of the martyrs would be the seed of the church. It is as if he said: "Some day you will labour and you will see nothing for it. Some day you will sow and you will pass from the scene before the harvest is reaped. Never fear! Never be discouraged! The sowing is not in vain; the seed is not wasted! Others will see the harvest which it was not given to you to see."

So in this passage there are two things.

(i) There is the reminder of an opportunity. The harvest waits to be reaped for God. There come times in history when men are curiously and strangely sensitive to God. What a tragedy it is if Christ's Church at such a time fails to reap Christ's harvest!

(ii) There is the reminder of a challenge. It is given to many a man to sow but not to reap. Many a ministry succeeds, not by its own force and merits, but because of some saintly man who lived and preached and died and left an influence which was greater in his absence than in his presence. Many a man has to work and never sees the results of his labours. I was once taken round an estate which was famous for its rhododendrons. Its owner loved their acres and knew them all by name. He showed me certain seedlings which would take twenty-five years to flower. He was nearly seventy-five and would never see their beauty--but someone would. No work for Christ and no great undertaking ever fail. If we do not see the result of our labours, others will. There is no room for despair in the Christian life.

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John 4:39-42

THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD

John 4:39-42

Many of the Samaritans from that city believed on him, because of the woman's story, for she testified: "He told me all things that I have done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay amongst them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed when they heard his word, and they said to the woman: "No longer do we believe because of your talk. We ourselves have listened to him, and we know that this is really the Saviour of the World."

In the events which happened at Samaria we have the pattern by which the gospel so often spreads. In the rise of belief among the Samaritans there were three stages.

(i) There was introduction. The Samaritans were introduced to Christ by the woman. Here we see full-displayed God's need of us. Paul said: "How are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom.10:14). The word of God must be transmitted by man to man. God cannot deliver his message to those who have never heard it unless there is someone to deliver it.

"He has no hands but our hands
To do his work today:
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in his way:
He has no voice but our voice
To tell men how he died:
He has no help but our help
To lead them to his side."

It is at once our precious privilege and our terrible responsibility to bring men to Christ. The introduction cannot be made unless there is a man to make it.

Further, that introduction is made on the strength of personal witness. The cry of the Samaritan woman was: "Look what he has done for me and to me." It was not to a theory that she called her neighbours; it was to a dynamic and changing power. The church can expand until the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of the Lord only when men and women themselves experience the power of Christ, and then transmit that experience to others.

(ii) There was nearer intimacy and growing knowledge. Once the Samaritans had been introduced to Christ, they sought his company. They asked him to stay with them that they might learn of him and come to know him better. It is true that a man must be introduced to Christ, but it is equally true that once he has been introduced he must himself go on to live in the presence of Christ. No man can go through an experience for another man. Others may lead us to the friendship of Christ, but we must claim and enjoy that friendship ourselves.

(iii) There came discovery and surrender. The Samaritans discovered in Christ the Saviour of the world. It is not likely that they themselves put it exactly that way. John was writing years

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John 4:39-42

afterwards, and was putting the discovery of the Samaritans into his own words, words which enshrine a life-time's living with and thinking about Jesus Christ. It is only in John that we find this tremendous title. We find it here and in 1Jn.4:14. To him it was the title par excellence for Christ.

John did not invent the title. In the Old Testament God had often been called the God of salvation, the Saviour, the saving God. Many of the Greek gods had acquired this title. At the time John was writing the Roman Emperor was invested with the title Saviour of the World. It is as if John said: "All that you have dreamed of has at last in Jesus come true."

We do well to remember this title. Jesus was not simply a prophet, who came with a message in words from God. He was not simply an expert psychologist with an uncanny faculty for seeing into the human mind. True, he showed that very skill in the case of the Samaritan woman, but he showed more than that. He was not simply an example. He did not come simply to show men the way in which life ought to be lived. A great example can be merely heart-breaking and frustrating when we find ourselves powerless to follow it.

Jesus was Saviour. He rescued men from the evil and hopeless situation in which they found themselves; he broke the chains that bound them to the past and gave them a power which enabled them to meet the future. The Samaritan woman is in fact the great example of his saving power. The town where she stayed would no doubt have labelled her a character beyond reformation; and she herself would no doubt have agreed that a respectable life was beyond her. But Jesus came and doubly rescued her; he enabled her to break away from the past and he opened a new future to her. There is no title adequate to describe Jesus except Saviour of the World.

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John 4:43-45

THE UNANSWERABLE ARGUMENT

John 4:43-45

Two days after Jesus left there and went to Galilee. Jesus himself declared that a prophet has no honour in his own country. But when he came into Galilee, the Galilaeans welcomed him, because they had seen all that he had done at Jerusalem at the Feast, for they too had gone to the Feast.

All three synoptic gospels tell of the saying of Jesus that a prophet has no honour in his own country (Mk.6:4; Matt.13:57; Lk.4:24). It was an ancient proverb with much the same meaning as our own "familiarity breeds contempt." But John introduces it in a very strange place. The other gospels introduce it on occasions when Jesus was rejected by his own countrymen; John introduces it on an occasion when he was accepted.

It may be that John is reading the mind of Jesus. We have already seen that Jesus had left Judaea and set out for Galilee to avoid the controversy that an increasing publicity was bringing to him. The hour of conflict had not yet come (Jn.4:1-4). It may be that his astonishing success in Samaria had actually surprised him; his words about the astonishing harvest have the ring of glad surprise about them. It may well be that Jesus set out for Galilee hoping to find rest and retirement there, because he did not expect those of his native country to respond to him. And it may be that exactly the same happened in Galilee as happened in Samaria, that against all expectations there was a surge of response to his teaching. We must either explain the saying in this way or assume that somehow it has crept into the wrong place.

However that may be, this passage and the one before give us the unanswerable argument for Christ. The Samaritans believed in Jesus, not because of someone else's story but because they themselves had heard him speak things whose like they had never heard. The Galilaeans believed in him, not because someone had told them about him but because they had seen him do in Jerusalem things whose like they had never seen. The words he spoke and the deeds he did were arguments to which there was no answer.

Here we have one of the great truths of the Christian life. The only real argument for Christianity is a Christian experience. It may be that sometimes we have to argue with people until the intellectual barriers which they have erected are battered down and the citadel of their mind capitulates. But in the great majority of cases the only persuasion we can use is to say: "I know what Jesus is like and I know what Jesus can do. All that I can ask you to do is to try him yourself and to see what happens." Effective Christian evangelism really begins when we can say: "I know what Christ has done for me," and go on to say: "Try him, and see what he can do for you."

Here again tremendous personal responsibility is laid upon us. No one is likely to attempt the experience unless our own lives show its value. There is little use in telling people that Christ will bring them joy and peace and power, if our own lives are gloomy, worried and defeated. Men will be persuaded to try the experiment only when they see that for us it has ended in an experience which is much to be desired.

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John 4:46-54

A COURTIER'S FAITH

John 4:46-54

So again he came to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water into wine. Now there was a certain courtier whose son was ill in Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judaea into Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was going to die. Jesus said to him: "Unless you see signs and wonders you will never believe." The courtier said to him: "Sir, come down before my little lad dies." Jesus said to him: "Go your way! Your son lives!" The man believed the word which Jesus spoke to him, and started on his way home. While he was still on the way down, his slaves met him and said: "Your son lives!" So he asked them at what hour his condition had improved. They told him: "Yesterday, at one o'clock in the afternoon, the fever left him." The father knew that that was the hour at which Jesus said to him: "Your son lives!" And he and his whole household believed.

This is the second sign which Jesus did after he had come from Judaea into Galilee.

Most of the commentators think this is another version of the story of the healing of the centurion's servant told in Matt.8:5-13 and Lk.7:1-10; but there are differences which justify us in treating it as quite independent. Certain things about the conduct of this courtier are an example to all men.

(i) Here is a courtier who came to a carpenter. The Greek is basilikos (GSN0937) which could even mean that he was a petty king; but it is used for a royal official and he was a man of high standing at the court of Herod. Jesus on the other hand had no greater status than that of the village carpenter of Nazareth. Further, Jesus was in Cana and this man lived in Capernaum, almost twenty miles away. That is why he took so long to get back home.

There could be no more improbable scene in the world than an important court official hastening twenty miles to beg a favour from a village carpenter. First and foremost, this courtier swallowed his pride. He was in need, and neither convention nor custom stopped him bringing his need to Christ. His action would cause a sensation but he did not care what people said so long as he obtained the help he so much wanted. If we want the help which Christ can give we must be humble enough to swallow our pride and not care what any man may say.

(ii) Here is a courtier who refused to be discouraged. Jesus met him with the at first sight bleak statement that people would not believe unless they were supplied with signs and wonders. It may well be that Jesus aimed that saying, not so much at the courtier himself, as at the crowd that must have gathered to see the outcome of this sensational happening. They would be there all agape to see what would happen.

But Jesus had a way of making sure that a person was in earnest. He did that to the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt.15:21-28). If the man had turned irritably and petulantly away; if he had been too proud to accept a rebuke; if he had given up despairingly on the spot--Jesus would have

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John 4:46-54

known that his faith was not real. A man must be in earnest before the help of Christ can come to him.

(iii) Here was a courtier who had faith. It must have been hard for him to turn away and go home with Jesus' assurance that his little lad would live. Nowadays men are beginning to realize the power of thought and of telepathy in such a way that no one would reject this miracle simply because it was wrought at a distance; but it must have been difficult for the courtier. Yet he had faith enough to turn and walk back that twenty mile road with nothing but Jesus' assurance to comfort his heart.

It is of the very essence of faith that we should believe that what Jesus says is true. So often we have a kind of vague, wistful longing that the promises of Jesus should be true. The only way really to enter into them is to believe in them with the clutching intensity of a drowning man. If Jesus says a thing, it is not a case of "It may be true"; it is a case of "It must be true."

(iv) Here was a courtier who surrendered. He was not a man who got out of Christ what he wanted and then went away to forget. He and all his household believed. That would not be easy for him, for the idea of Jesus as the Anointed One of God must have cut across all his preconceived notions. Nor would it be easy at the court of Herod to profess faith in Jesus. He would have mockery and laughter to endure; and no doubt there would be those who thought that he had gone slightly mad.

But this courtier was a man who faced and accepted the facts. He had seen what Jesus could do; he had experienced it; and there was nothing left for it but surrender. He had begun with a sense of desperate need; that need had been supplied; and his sense of need had turned into an overmastering love. That must always be the story of the Christian life.

Most New Testament scholars think that at this point in the Fourth Gospel the chapters have somehow become misplaced. They hold that Jn.6 should come before Jn.5. The reason is this. Jn.4 finishes with Jesus in Galilee (Jn.4:54). Jn.5 begins with Jesus in Jerusalem. Jn.6 again shows us Jesus in Galilee. Jn.7 begins with the implication that Jesus had just come into Galilee because of the opposition which he met in Jerusalem. The changes between Jerusalem and Galilee become very difficult to follow. On the other hand Jn.4 (Jn.4:54) ends: "This the second sign that Jesus did, when he had come from Judaea to Galilee." Jn.6 begins (Jn.6:1): "After this thing Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee," which would be a natural sequence. Jn.5 then shows us Jesus going to Jerusalem for a Feast and meeting with very serious trouble with the Jewish authorities. We are in fact told that from that time they began to persecute him (Jn.5:10). Then Jn.7 begins by saying that Jesus went about in Galilee and "would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him" (Jn.7:1).

Here we have not altered the order; but we must note that to take Jn.6 before Jn.5 does give an easier and more natural order of events.

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John 5:1-9

MAN'S HELPLESSNESS AND CHRIST'S POWER

John 5:1-9 (Part 1)

After this there was a Feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, near the sheepgate, there is a bathing-pool with five porches, which was called in Hebrew, Bethzatha. In these porches there lay a crowd of people who were ill and blind and lame and whose limbs were withered [waiting expectantly for the moving of the water. For an angel of the Lord came down into the pool every now and then and disturbed the water; so the first person to go in after the disturbing of the water regained his health from any illness which had him in its grip]. There was a man there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

When Jesus saw him lying there, and since he knew that he had already been there for a long time, he said to him: "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered: "Sir, I have no one to hurry me into the pool when the water is disturbed; so, while I am on the way, someone gets down before me." Jesus said to him: "Get up! Lift your bed! and walk!" And the man was made well, and he lifted up his bed and walked.

There were three Jewish feasts which were feasts of obligation--Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was legally bound to attend them. If we take Jn.6 before Jn.5 we may think of this feast as Pentecost, because the events of Jn.6 happened when the Passover was near (Jn.6:4). The Passover was in mid-April, and Pentecost was seven weeks later. John always shows us Jesus attending the great feasts, for Jesus did not disregard the obligations of Jewish worship. To him it was not a duty but a delight to worship with his own people.

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem he was apparently alone; there is no mention of his disciples. He found his way to a famous pool. Its name was either Bethesda, which means House of Mercy, or more likely, Bethzatha which means House of the Olive. The better manuscripts all have the second name, and we know from Josephus that there was a quarter of Jerusalem actually known as Bethzatha. The word for pool kolumbethron (GSN2861), which comes from the verb kolumban (GSN2860), to dive. The pool was deep enough to swim in. The passage we have put in brackets is not in any of the greatest and best manuscripts and was probably added later as an explanation of what people were doing at the pool. Beneath the pool was a subterranean stream which every now and again bubbled up and disturbed the waters. The belief was that the disturbance was caused by an angel, and that the first person to get into the pool after the troubling of the water would be healed from any illness from which he was suffering.

To us this is mere superstition. But it was the kind of belief which was spread all over the world in ancient days and which still exists in certain places. People believed in all kinds of spirits and demons. The air was thick with them; they had their abodes in certain places; every tree, every river, every stream, every hill, every pool had its resident spirit.

Further, ancient peoples were specially impressed with the holiness of water and especially of rivers and springs. Water was so precious and rivers in spate could be so powerful that it is not surprising that they were so impressed. In the west we may know water only as something which

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comes out of a tap; but in the ancient world, as in many places still today, water was the most valuable and potentially the most dangerous of all things.

Sir J. G. Frazer in Folk-lore in the Old Testament (ii, 412-423) quotes many instances of this reverence for water. Hesiod, the Greek poet, said that when a man was about to ford a river, he should pray and wash his hands, for he who wades through a stream with unwashed hands incurs the wrath of the gods. When the Persian king Xerxes came to the Strymon in Thrace his magicians offered white horses and went through other ceremonies before the army ventured to cross. Lucullus, the Roman general, offered a bull to the River Euphrates before he crossed it. To this day in south-east Africa some of the Bantu tribes believe that rivers are inhabited by malignant spirits which must be propitiated by flinging a handful of corn or some other offering into the river before it is crossed. When anyone is drowned in a river he is said to be "called by the spirits." The Baganda in Central Africa would not try to rescue a man carried away by a river because they thought that the spirits had taken him.

The people who waited for the pool in Jerusalem to be disturbed were children of their age believing the things of their age.

It may be that as Jesus walked around, the man of this story was pointed out to him as a most pitiable case, because his disability made it very unlikely, even impossible, that he would ever be the first to get into the pool after it had been troubled. He had no one to help him in, and Jesus was always the friend of the friendless, and the helper of the man who has no earthly help. He did not trouble to read the man a lecture on the useless superstition of waiting for the water to be moved. His one desire was to help and so he healed the man who had waited so long.

In this story we see very clearly the conditions under which the power of Jesus operated. He gave his orders to men and, in proportion as they tried to obey, power came to them.

(i) Jesus began by asking the man if he wanted to be cured. It was not so foolish a question as it may sound. The man had waited for thirty-eight years and it might well have been that hope had died and left behind a passive and dull despair. In his heart of hearts the man might be well content to remain an invalid for, if he was cured, he would have to shoulder all the burden of making a living. There are invalids for whom invalidism is not unpleasant, because someone else does all the working and all the worrying. But this man's response was immediate. He wanted to be healed, though he did not see how he ever could be since he had no one to help him.

The first essential towards receiving the power of Jesus is to have intense desire for it. Jesus says: "Do you really want to be changed?" If in our inmost hearts we are well content to stay as we are, there can be no change for us.

(ii) Jesus went on to tell the man to get up. It is as if he said to him: "Man, bend your will to it and you and I will do this thing together!" The power of God never dispenses with the effort of man. Nothing is truer than that we must realize our own helplessness; but in a very real sense it is true that miracles happen when our will and God's power cooperate to make them possible.

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(iii) In effect Jesus was commanding the man to attempt the impossible. "Get up!" he said. His bed would simply be a light stretcher-like frame--the Greek is *krabbatos* (GSN2895), a colloquial word which really means a pallet--and Jesus told him to pick it up and carry it away. The man might well have said with a kind of injured resentment that for thirty-eight years his bed had been carrying him and there was not much sense in telling him to carry it. But he made the effort along with Christ--and the thing was done.

(iv) Here is the road to achievement. There are so many things in this world which defeat us. When we have intensity of desire and determination to make the effort, hopeless though it may seem, the power of Christ gets its opportunity, and with him we can conquer what for long has conquered us.

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John 5:1-9

THE INNER MEANING

John 5:1-9 (Part 2)

Certain scholars think this passage is an allegory.

The man stands for the people of Israel. The five porches stand for the five books of the law. In the porches the people lay ill. The law could show a man his sin, but could never mend it; the law could uncover a man's weakness, but could never cure it. The law, like the porches, sheltered the sick soul but could never heal it. The thirty-eight years stand for the thirty-eight years in which the Jews wandered in the desert before they entered the promised land; or for the number of the centuries men had been waiting for the Messiah. The stirring of the waters stands for baptism. In point of fact in early Christian art a man is often depicted as rising from the baptismal waters carrying a bed upon his back.

It may well be that it is now possible to read all these meanings into this story; but it is highly unlikely that John wrote it as an allegory. It has the vivid stamp of factual truth. But we do well to remember that any Bible story has in it far more than fact. There are always deeper truths below the surface and even the simple stories are meant to leave us face to face with eternal things.

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John 5:10-18

HEALING AND HATRED

John 5:10-18

It was Sabbath on that day. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured: "It is Sabbath and you have no right to lift your bed." He answered them: "He who made me well, it was he who said to me: 'Lift your bed and walk!'" They asked him: "Who is the fellow who said to you: 'Lift your bed and walk?'" The man who had been cured did not know who he was, for Jesus had slipped away, for there was a crowd in the place. Afterwards Jesus found him in the Temple and said to him: "Look now! You have been made well. Sin no more in case something worse happens to you!" The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Because of this the Jews were out to persecute Jesus, because he had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them: "My Father continues his work until now, and so do I continue mine." Because of this the Jews tried all the harder to find a way to kill him, because not only was he habitually breaking the Sabbath, but he also kept on saying that God was his own Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

A man had been healed from a disease which, humanly speaking, was incurable. We might expect this to be an occasion of universal joy and thanksgiving; but some met the whole business with bleak and black looks. The man who had been healed was walking through the streets carrying his bed; the orthodox Jews stopped him and reminded him that he was breaking the law by carrying a burden on the Sabbath day.

We have already seen what the Jews did with the law of God. It was a series of great wide principles which men were left to apply and carry out but throughout the years the Jews had made it into thousands of little rules and regulations. The law simply said that the Sabbath day must be different from other days and that on it neither a man nor his servants nor his animals must work; the Jews set out thirty-nine different classifications of work, one of which was that it consisted in carrying a burden.

They founded particularly on two passages. Jeremiah had said: "Thus saith the Lord: take heed for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers" (Jer.17:19-27). Nehemiah had been worried at the work and the trading that went on on the Sabbath day and had stationed servants at the gates of Jerusalem to see that no burdens were carried in or out on the Sabbath (Neh.13:15-19).

Neh.13:15 makes it perfectly clear that what was in question was trading on the Sabbath as if it had been an ordinary day. But the Rabbis of Jesus' day solemnly argued that a man was sinning if he carried a needle in his robe on the Sabbath. They even argued as to whether he could wear his artificial teeth or his wooden leg. They were quite clear that any kind of brooch could not be worn on the Sabbath. To them all this petty detail was a matter of life and death--and certainly this man was breaking the rabbinic law by carrying his bed on the Sabbath day.

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His defence was that the man who had healed him had told him to do it, but he did not know his identity. Later Jesus met him in the Temple; at once the man hastened to tell the authorities that Jesus was the one in question. He was not seeking to get Jesus into trouble, but the actual words of the law were: "If anyone carries anything from a public place to a private house on the Sabbath intentionally he is punishable by death by stoning." He was simply trying to explain that it was not his fault that he had broken the law.

So the authorities levelled their accusations against Jesus. The verbs in Jn.5:18 are imperfect tense, which describes repeated action in past time. Clearly this story is only a sample of what Jesus habitually did.

His defence was shattering. God did not stop working on the Sabbath day and neither did he. Any scholarly Jew would grasp its full force. Philo had said: "God never ceases doing, but as it is the property of fire to burn and snow to chin, so it is the property of God to do." Another writer said: "The sun shines; the rivers flow; the processes of birth and death go on on the Sabbath as on any other day; and that is the work of God." True, according to the creation story, God rested on the seventh day; but he rested from creation; his higher works of judgment and mercy and compassion and love still went on.

Jesus said: "Even on the Sabbath God's love and mercy and compassion act; and so do mine." It was this last passage which shattered the Jews, for it meant nothing less than that the work of Jesus and the work of God were the same. It seemed that Jesus was putting himself on an equality with God. What Jesus really was saying we shall see in our next section; but at the moment we must note this--Jesus teaches that human need must always be helped; that there is no greater task than to relieve someone's pain and distress and that the Christian's compassion must be like God's--unceasing. Other work may be laid aside but the work of compassion never.

Another Jewish belief enters into this passage. When Jesus met the man in the Temple he told him to sin no more in case something worse might happen to him. To the Jew sin and suffering were inextricably connected. If a man suffered, necessarily he had sinned; nor could he ever be cured until his sin was forgiven. The Rabbis said: "The sick arises not from sickness, until his sins be forgiven." The man might argue that he had sinned and been forgiven and had, so to speak, got away with it; and he might go on to argue that, since he had found someone who could release him from the consequences of sin, he could very well go on sinning and escaping. There were those in the church who used their liberty as an excuse for the flesh (Gal.5:13). There were those who sinned in the confidence that grace would abound (Rom.6:1-18). There have always been those who have used the love and the forgiveness and the grace of God as an excuse to sin. But we have only to think what God's forgiveness cost, we have only to look at the Cross of Calvary, to know that we must ever hate sin because every sin breaks again the heart of God.

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John 5:19-29

THE TREMENDOUS CLAIMS

John 5:19-29

This is the truth I tell you--the Son cannot do anything which proceeds from himself. He can only do what he sees the Father doing. In whatever way the Father acts, the Son likewise acts in the same way; for the Father loves the son and has shown him everything that he does. And he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be moved to wondering amazement. For, as the Father raises the dead and makes them alive, so also the Son makes alive those whom he wishes. Neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given the whole process of judging to the Son, that all may honour the Son, as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.

This is the truth I tell you--he who listens to my word and believes on him who sent me has eternal life, and is not on the way to judgment, but he has crossed from death to life.

This is the truth I tell you--the hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and, when they have heard, they will live. For, as the Father has life in himself, so he has given to the Son to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to exercise the process of judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when everyone in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come forth; those who have done good will come out to a resurrection which will give them life, but those whose actions were base will come out to a resurrection which will issue in judgment.

Here we come to the first of the long discourses of the Fourth Gospel. When we read passages like this we must remember that John is not seeking so much to give us the words that Jesus spoke as the things which Jesus meant. He was writing somewhere round about A.D. 100. For seventy years he had thought about Jesus and the wonderful things which Jesus had said. Many of these things he had not fully understood when he had heard them. But more than half a century of thinking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit had shown him deeper and deeper meaning in the words of Jesus. And so he sets down for us not only what Jesus said, but also what Jesus meant.

This passage is so important that we must first study it as a whole and then take it in shorter sections.

First, then let us look at it as a whole. We must try to think not only how it sounds to us, but also how it sounded to the Jews who heard it for the first time. They had a background of thoughts and ideas, of theology and belief, of literature and religion which is very far from our background; and, to understand a passage like this, we must try to think ourselves into the mind of a Jew who listened to it for the first time.

This is an amazing passage, because it is woven together of thoughts and expressions which are all claims by Jesus to be the promised Messiah. Many of these claims we do not now readily see, but they would be crystal clear to the Jews and would leave them aghast.

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John 5:19-29

(i) The clearest claim is the statement that Jesus is the Son of Man. We know how common that strange title is in the gospels. It has a long history. It was born in Dn.7:1-14. The King James Version mistranslates the Son of Man for a son of man (Dn.7:13).

The point of the passage is this. Daniel was written in days of terror and of persecution, and it is a vision of the glory which will some day replace the suffering which the people are undergoing. In Dn.7:1-7 the seer describes the great heathen empires which have held sway under the symbolism of beasts. There is the lion with eagle's wings (Dn.7:4), which stands for the Babylonian Empire; the bear with the three ribs in his mouth, as one devouring the carcass (Dn.7:5), which stands for the Median Empire; the leopard with four wings and four heads (Dn.7:6), which stands for the Persian Empire; the beast, great and terrible, with iron teeth and with ten horns (Dn.7:7), which stands for the Macedonian Empire. All these terrible powers will pass away and the power and the dominion will be given to one like a son of man.

The meaning is that the Empires which have held sway have been so savage that they could be described only in terms of wild beasts; but into the world there is going to come a power so gentle and kind that it will be human and not bestial. In Daniel the phrase describes the kind of power which is going to rule the world.

Someone has to introduce and exercise that power; and the Jews took this title and gave it to the chosen one of God who some day would bring in the new age of gentleness and love and peace; and so they came to call the Messiah Son of Man. Between the Old and the New Testaments there arose a whole literature which dealt with the golden age which was to come.

One book which was specially influential was the Book of Enoch and in it there appears again and again a great figure called That Son of Man, who is waiting in heaven until God sends him to earth to bring in his kingdom and rule over it. So when Jesus called himself the Son of Man, he was doing nothing less than call himself the Messiah. Here was a claim so clear that it could not be misunderstood.

(ii) But not only is this claim to be God's Messiah made in so many words; in phrase after phrase it is implicit. The very miracle which had happened to the paralysed man was a sign that Jesus was Messiah. It was Isaiah's picture of the new age of God that "then shall the lame man leap like a hart" (Isa.35:6). It was Jeremiah's vision that the blind and the lame would be gathered in (Jer.31:8-9).

(iii) There is Jesus' repeated claim to raise the dead and to be their judge when they are raised. In the Old Testament God alone can raise the dead and alone has the right to judge. "I, even I, am he and there is no god beside me: I kill and I make alive" (Deut.32:39). "The Lord kills and brings to life" (1Sam.2:6). When Naaman, the Syrian, came seeking to be cured from leprosy, the king of Israel said in bewildered despair: "Am I God to kill and to make alive?" (2Kgs.5:6). The function of killing and making alive belonged inalienably to God. It is the same with judgment. "The judgment is God's" (Deut.1:17).

In later thought this function of resurrecting the dead and then acting as judge became part of the duty of God's chosen one when he brought in the new age of God. Enoch says of the Son of Man:

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John 5:19-29

"The sum of judgment was committed to him" (Enoch 69: 26-27). Jesus in our passage speaks of those who have done good being resurrected to life and of those who have done evil being resurrected to death. The Apocalypse of Baruch lays it down that when God's age comes: "The aspect of those who now act wickedly shall become worse than it is, as they shall suffer torment," whereas those who have trusted in the law and acted upon it shall be clothed in beauty and in splendour (Bar.51:1-4). Enoch has it that in that day: "The earth shall be wholly rent asunder, and all that is on earth shall perish, and there shall be judgment on all men" (Enoch 1: 5-7). The Testament of Benjamin has it: "All men shall rise, some to the exalted, and some to be humbled and put to shame."

For Jesus to speak like this was an act of the most extraordinary and unique courage. He must have known well that to make claims like this would sound the sheerest blasphemy to the orthodox Jewish leaders and was to court death. The man who listened to words like this had only two alternatives--he must either accept Jesus as the Son of God or hate him as a blasphemer.

We now go on to take this passage section by section.

Barclay's Commentary

John 5:19-20

THE FATHER AND THE SON

John 5:19-20

This is the truth I tell you--the Son cannot do anything which proceeds from himself. He can only do what he sees the Father doing. In whatever way the Father acts, the Son likewise acts in the same way; for the Father loves the Son, and has shown him everything that he does. And he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be moved to wondering amazement.

This is the beginning of Jesus' answer to the Jews' charge that he was making himself equal to God. He lays down three things about his relationship with God.

(i) He lays down his identity with God. The salient truth about Jesus is that in him we see God. If we wish to see how God feels to men, if we wish to see how God reacts to sin, if we wish to see how God regards the human situation, we must look at Jesus. The mind of Jesus is the mind of God; the words of Jesus are the words of God; the actions of Jesus are the actions of God.

(ii) This identity is not so much based on equality as on complete obedience. Jesus never did what he wanted to do but always what God wanted him to do. It is because his will was completely submitted to God's will that we see God in him. Jesus is to God as we must be to Jesus.

(iii) This obedience is not based on submission to power; it is based on love. The unity between Jesus and God is a unity of love. We speak of two minds having only a single thought and two hearts beating as one. In human terms that is a perfect description of the relationship between Jesus and God. There is such complete identity of mind and will and heart that Father and Son are one.

But this passage has something still more to tell us about Jesus.

(i) It tells us of his complete confidence. He is quite sure that what men were seeing then was only a beginning. On purely human grounds the one thing Jesus might reasonably expect was death. The forces of Jewish orthodoxy were gathering against him and the end was already sure. But Jesus was quite certain that the future was in the hands of God and that men could not stop what God had sent him to do.

(ii) It tells of his complete fearlessness. That he would be misunderstood was certain. That his words would inflame the minds of his hearers and endanger his own life was beyond argument. There was no human situation in which Jesus would lower his claims or adulterate the truth. He would make his claim and speak his truth no matter what men might threaten to do. To him it was much more important to be true to God than to fear men.

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John 5:21-23

LIFE, JUDGMENT AND HONOUR

John 5:21-23

For as the Father raises the dead and makes them alive, so the Son also makes alive those whom he wishes. Neither does the Father judge anyone, but he has given the whole process of judging to the Son, that all may honour the Son, as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.

Here we see three great functions which belong to Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

(i) He is the giver of life. John meant this in a double sense. He meant it in time. No man is fully alive until Jesus Christ enters into him and he enters into Jesus Christ. When we make the discovery of the realm of music or of literature or of art or of travel, we sometimes speak of a new world opening out to us. That man into whose life Jesus Christ has entered finds life made new. He himself is changed; his personal relationships are changed; his conception of work and duty and pleasure is changed; his relationship to God is changed. He meant it in eternity. After this life is ended, for the man who has accepted Jesus Christ there opens life still more fun and still more wonderful; while for the man who has refused Jesus Christ, there comes that death which is separation from God. Jesus Christ gives life both in this world and the world to come.

(ii) He is the bringer of judgment. John says that God committed the whole process of judgment to Jesus Christ. What he means is this--a man's judgment depends on his reaction to Jesus. If he finds in Jesus the one person to be loved and followed, he is on the way to life. If he sees in Jesus an enemy, he has condemned himself. Jesus is the touchstone by which all men are tested; reaction to him is the test by which all men are divided.

(iii) He is the receiver of honour. The most uplifting thing about the New Testament is its unquenchable hope and its unconquerable certainty. It tells the story of a crucified Christ and yet never has any doubt that at the end all men will be drawn to that crucified figure and that all men will know him and acknowledge him and love him. Amid persecution and disregard, in spite of smallness of numbers and poverty of influence, in the face of failure and disloyalty, the New Testament and the early church never doubted the ultimate triumph of Christ. When we are tempted to despair we would do well to remember that the salvation of men is the purpose of God and that nothing, in the end, can frustrate his will. The evil will of man may delay God's purpose; it cannot defeat it.

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John 5:24

ACCEPTANCE MEANS LIFE

John 5:24

This is the truth I tell you--he who listens to my word and believes on him who sent me has eternal life, and is not on the way to judgment, but he has crossed from death to life.

Jesus says quite simply that to accept him is life; and to reject him is death. What does it mean to listen to Jesus' word and to believe in the Father who sent him? To put it at its briefest it means three things. (i) It means to believe that God is as Jesus says he is; that he is love; and so to enter into a new relationship with him in which fear is banished. (ii) It means to accept the way of life that Jesus offers us, however difficult it may be and whatever sacrifices it may involve, certain that to accept it is the ultimate way to peace and to happiness, and to refuse it the ultimate way to death and judgment. (iii) It means to accept the help that the Risen Christ gives and the guidance that the Holy Spirit offers, and so to find strength for all that the way of Christ involves.

When we do that we enter into three new relationships. (i) We enter into a new relationship with God. The judge becomes the father; the distant becomes the near; strangeness becomes intimacy and fear becomes love. (ii) We enter into a new relationship with our fellow men. Hatred becomes love; selfishness becomes service; and bitterness becomes forgiveness. (iii) We enter into a new relationship with ourselves. Weakness becomes strength; frustration becomes achievement; and tension becomes peace.

To accept the offer of Jesus Christ is to find life. Everyone in one sense may be said to be alive; but there are few who can be said to know life in the real sense of the term. When Grenfell was writing to a nursing sister about her decision to come out to Labrador to help in his work there, he told her that he could not offer her much money, but that if she came she would discover that in serving Christ and the people of the country she would have the time of her life. Browning describes the meeting of two people into whose hearts love had entered. She looked at him, he looked at her, and "suddenly life awoke." A modern novelist makes one character say to another: "I never knew what life was till I saw it in your eyes."

The person who accepts the way of Christ has passed from death to life. In this world life becomes new and thrilling; in the world to come eternal life with God becomes a certainty.

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John 5:25-29

DEATH AND LIFE

John 5:25-29

This is the truth I tell you--the hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and, when they have heard, they will live. For, as the Father has life in himself, so he has given to the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to exercise the process of judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when everyone in the tombs will hear his voice and will come forth; those who have done good will come out to a resurrection which will give them life, but those whose actions were base will come out to a resurrection which will issue in judgment.

Here the Messianic claims of Jesus stand out most clearly. He is the Son of Man; he is the life-giver and the life-bringer; he will raise the dead to life and, when they are raised, he will be their judge.

In this passage John seems to use the word dead in two senses.

(i) He uses it of those who are spiritually dead; to them Jesus will bring new life. What does it mean?

(a) To be spiritually dead is to have stopped trying. It is to have come to look on all faults as ineradicable and all virtues as unattainable. But the Christian life cannot stand still; it must either go on or slip back; and to stop trying is therefore to slip back to death.

(b) To be spiritually dead is to have stopped feeling. There are many people who at one time felt intensely in face of the sin and the sorrow and the suffering of the world; but slowly they have become insensitive. They can look at evil and feel no indignation; they can look at sorrow and suffering and feel no answering sword of grief and pity pierce their heart. When compassion goes the heart is dead.

(c) To be spiritually dead is to have stopped thinking. J. Alexander Findlay tells of a saying of a friend of his--"When you reach a conclusion you're dead." He meant that when a man's mind becomes so shut that it can accept no new truth, he is mentally and spiritually dead. The day when the desire to learn leaves us, the day when new truth, new methods, new thought become simply a disturbance with which we cannot be bothered, is the day of our spiritual death.

#(d) To be spiritually dead is to have stopped rethinking. The day when a man can sin in peace is the day of his spiritual death; and it is easy to slip into that frame of mind. The first time we do a wrong thing, we do it with fear and regret. If we do it a second time, it is easier to do it. If we do it a third time, it is easier yet. If we go on doing it, the time comes when we scarcely give it a thought. To avoid spiritual death a man must keep himself sensitive to sin by keeping himself sensitive to the presence of Jesus Christ.

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(ii) John also uses the word dead literally. Jesus teaches that the resurrection will come and that what happens to a man in the after-life is inextricably bound up with what he has done in this life. The awful importance of this life is that it determines eternity. All through it we are fitting or unfitting ourselves for the life to come, making ourselves fit or unfit for the presence of God. We choose either the way which leads to life or the way which leads to death.

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John 5:30

THE ONLY TRUE JUDGMENT

John 5:30

I cannot do anything which originates in myself. As I hear, so I judge. But the judgment which I exercise is just, because I do not seek to do what I wish to do, but I seek to do what he who sent me wishes to do.

In the preceding passage Jesus has claimed the right of judgment. It was not unnatural that men should ask by what right he proposed to judge others. His answer was that his judgment was true and final because he had no desire to do anything other than the will of God. His claim was that his judgment was the judgment of God.

It is very difficult for any man to judge another man fairly. If we will honestly examine ourselves we will see that many motives may affect our judgment. It may be rendered unfair by injured pride. It may be rendered blind by our prejudices. It may be made bitter by jealousy. It may be made arrogant by contempt. It may be made harsh by intolerance. It may be made condemnatory by self-righteousness. It may be affected by our own self-conceit. It may be based on envy. It may be vitiated by an insensitive or deliberate ignorance. Only a man whose heart is pure and whose motives are completely unmixed can rightly judge another man--which means to say that no man can.

On the other hand the judgment of God is perfect.

God alone is holy and therefore he alone knows the standards by which all men must be judged. God alone is perfectly loving and his judgment alone is delivered in the charity in which all true judgment must be given. God alone has full knowledge and judgment can be perfect only when it takes into account all the circumstances. The claim of Jesus to judge is based on the claim that in him is the perfect mind of God. He does not judge with the inevitable mixture of human motives; he judges with the perfect holiness, the perfect love and the perfect sympathy of God.

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John 5:31-36

WITNESS TO CHRIST

John 5:31-36

If I bear witness about myself, my witness need not be accepted as true; but it is Another who is bearing witness about me, and I know that the witness which he bears about me is true. You sent your envoys to John, and he bore witness to the truth; but the testimony which I receive is not from any man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was the lamp which burns and shines. For a time you were pleased to take pleasure in his light. But I have a greater testimony than John's. The works which the Father granted to me to accomplish, the very works which I do, are evidence about me to prove that my Father has sent me.

Once again Jesus is answering the charges of his opponents. His opponents are demanding. "What evidence can you adduce that your claims are true?" Jesus argues in a way that the Rabbis would understand for he uses their own methods.

(i) He begins by admitting the universal principle that the unsupported evidence of one person cannot be taken as proof. There must be at least two witnesses. "On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses he that is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness" (Deut.17:6). "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained" (Deut.19:15). When Paul threatens to come to the Corinthians with rebuke and discipline he says that all his charges will be confirmed by two or three witnesses (2Cor.13:1). Jesus says that when a Christian has a legitimate complaint against a brother he must take with him some others to confirm the charge (Matt.18:16). In the early church it was the rule that no charge against an elder was entertained unless it was supported by two or three witnesses (1Tim.5:19). Jesus began by fully admitting the normal Jewish law of evidence.

Further, it was universally held that a man's evidence about himself could not be accepted. The Mishnah said: "A man is not worthy of belief when he is speaking about himself." Demosthenes, the great Greek orator, laid it down as a principle of justice: "The laws do not allow a man to give evidence on his own behalf." Ancient law well knew that self-interest had an effect on a man's statements about himself. So Jesus agrees that his own unsupported testimony to himself need not be true.

(ii) But there are other witnesses to him. He says that "Another" is his witness, meaning God. He will return to that, but for the moment he cites John the Baptist who had repeatedly borne witness to him (Jn.1:19-20,26; Jn.1:29; Jn.1:35-36). Then Jesus pays a tribute to John and issues a rebuke to the Jewish authorities.

He says that John was the lamp which burns and shines. That was the perfect tribute to him. (a) A lamp bears a borrowed light. It does not light itself; it is lit. (b) John had warmth, for his was not the cold message of the intellect but the burning message of the kindled heart. (c) John had light. The function of light is to guide, and John pointed men on the way to repentance and to God. (d) In

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John 5:31-36

the nature of things a lamp burns itself out; in giving light it consumes itself. John was to decrease while Jesus increased. The true witness burns himself out for God.

In paying tribute to John, Jesus rebukes the Jews. They were pleased to take pleasure in John for a time, but they never really took him seriously. They were, as one has put it, like "gnats dancing in the sunlight," or like children playing while the sun shone. John was a pleasant sensation, to be listened to as long as he said the things they liked, and to be abandoned whenever he became awkward. Many people listen to God's truth like that; they enjoy a sermon as a performance. A famous preacher tells how after he had preached a somber sermon on judgment, he was greeted with the comment: "That sermon was sure cute!" God's truth is not a thing by which to be pleasantly titillated; it is often something to be received in the dust and ashes of humiliation and repentance.

But Jesus does not even plead John's evidence. He says it is not the human evidence of any fallible man he is going to adduce to support his claims.

(iii) So he adduces the witness of his works. He had done that when John sent from prison to ask if he was the Messiah. He had told John's enquiring envoys to go back and tell him what they saw happening (Matt. 11:4; Lk. 7:22). But Jesus cites his works, not to point to himself but to point to the power of God working in him and through him. His supreme witness is God.

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John 5:37-43

THE WITNESS OF GOD

John 5:37-43

And the Father who sent me has borne witness about me. You have never heard his voice, nor have you ever seen his form. You do not have his word dwelling in you, because you do not believe in the One whom he sent. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life. It is they which bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I receive no glory from men; but I know you and I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I came in the name of my Father and yet you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.

The early part of this section may be taken in two ways.

(i) It may be that it refers to the unseen witness of God in a man's heart. In his first letter John writes: "He who believes in the Son of God, has the testimony (of God) in himself" (1Jn.5:9-10). The Jew would have insisted that no man can ever see God. Even in the giving of the Ten Commandments "you heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut.4:12). So this may mean: "It is true that God is invisible; and so is his witness, for it is the response which rises in the human heart when a man is confronted with me." When we are confronted with Christ we see in him the altogether lovely and the altogether wise; that conviction is the witness of God in our hearts. The Stoics held that the highest kind of knowledge comes not by thought but by what they called "arresting impressions;" a conviction seizes a man like someone laying an arresting hand on his shoulder. It may be that Jesus here means that the conviction in our hearts of his supremacy is the witness of God within.

(ii) It may be that John is really meaning that God's witness to Christ is to be found in the scriptures. To the Jew the scriptures were all in all. "He who has acquired the words of the law has acquired eternal life." "He who has the Law has a cord of grace drawn around him in this world and in the world to come." "He who says that Moses wrote even one verse of the Law in his own knowledge is a despiser of God." "This is the book of the commandments of God and the Law that endureth for ever. All they that hold it fast are appointed to life, but such as leave it shall die" (Bar.4:1-2). "If food which is your life but for an hour, requires a blessing before and after it be eaten, how much more does the Law, in which lies the world that is to be, require a blessing?" The Jew searched the Law and yet failed to recognize Christ when he came. What was wrong? The best Bible students in the world, people who meticulously and continuously read scripture, rejected Jesus. How could that happen?

One thing is clear--they read scripture in the wrong way.

(i) They read it with a shut mind. They read it not to search for God but to find arguments to support their own positions. They did not really love God; they loved their own ideas about him. Water has as much chance of getting into concrete as the word of God had of getting into their minds. They did not humbly learn a theology from scripture; they used scripture to defend a

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John 5:37-43

theology which they themselves had produced. There is still danger that we should use the Bible to prove our beliefs and not to test them.

(ii) They made a still bigger mistake--they regarded God as having given men a written revelation. The revelation of God is a revelation in history. It is not God speaking, but God acting. The Bible itself is not his revelation; it is the record of his revelation. But they worshipped the Bible's words.

There is only one proper way to read the Bible--to read it as all pointing to Jesus Christ. Then many of the things which puzzle us, and sometimes distress us, are clearly seen as stages on the way, a pointing forward to Jesus Christ, who is the supreme revelation and by whose light all other revelation is to be tested. The Jews worshipped a God who wrote rather than a God who acted and therefore when Christ came they did not recognize him. The function of the scriptures is not to give life, but to point to him who can.

There are two most revealing things here.

(i) In Jn.5:34 Jesus had said the purpose of his words was "that you may be saved." Here he says: "I am not looking for any glory from man." That is to say: "I am not arguing like this because I want to win an argument. I am not talking like this because I want to score off you and win the applause of men. It is because I love you and want to save you."

There is something tremendous here. When people oppose us and we argue back, what is our main feeling? Wounded pride? The conceit that hates any kind of failure? Annoyance? A desire to cram our opinions down other people's throats because we think them fools? Jesus talked as he did only because he loved men. His voice might be stern, but in the sternness there was still the accent of yearning love; his eyes might flash fire, but the flame was the flame Of love.

(ii) Jesus says: "if another comes in his own name, him you will receive." The Jews had their succession of impostors claiming to be the Messiah and every one had his following (compare Mk.13:6; Mk.13:22; Matt.24:5; Matt.24:24). Why do men follow impostors? Because they are "men whose claims correspond with men's own desires." The impostors came promising empires and victory and material prosperity; Jesus came offering a Cross. The characteristic of the impostor is the offer of the easy way; Jesus offered men the hard way of God. The impostors perished and Christ lives on.

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John 5:44-47

THE ULTIMATE CONDEMNATION

John 5:44-47

How can you believe when you are out for the glory that you get from each other, and when you do not search for the glory which comes from the only God? Do not think that it is I who will accuse you to the Father. You have an accuser--it is Moses I mean--on whom you set your hopes. If you had believed in Moses, you would have believed in me, for he wrote about me. If you do not believe in his writings, how will you believe in my words?

The scribes and Pharisees desired the praise of men. They dressed in such a way that everyone would recognize them. They prayed in such a way that everyone would see. They loved the front seats in the Synagogue. They loved the deferential greetings of men on the street. And just because of that they could not hear the voice of God. Why? So long as a man measures himself against his fellow men he will be well content. But the point is not: "Am I as good as my neighbour?" The point is: "Am I as good as God?" "What do I look like to him?" So long as we judge ourselves by human comparisons there is plenty of room for self-satisfaction, and that kills faith, for faith is born of the sense of need. But when we compare ourselves with Jesus Christ, we are humbled to the dust, and then faith is born, for there is nothing left to do but trust to the mercy of God.

Jesus finishes with a charge that would strike home. The Jews believed the books which they believed Moses had given them to be the very word of God. Jesus said: "If you had read these books aright, you would have seen that they all pointed to me." He went on: "You think that because you have Moses to be your mediator you are safe; but Moses is the very one who will condemn you. Maybe you could not be expected to listen to me, but you are bound to listen to the words of Moses to which you attach such value and they all spoke of me."

Here is the great and threatening truth. What had been the greatest privilege of the Jews had become their greatest condemnation. No one could condemn a man who had never had a chance. But knowledge had been given to the Jews; and the knowledge they had failed to use had become their condemnation. Responsibility is always the other side of privilege.

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John 6:1-13

THE LOAVES AND FISHES

John 6:1-13 (Part 1)

After these things Jesus went away across the Sea of Galilee, that is, the Sea of Tiberias. A great crowd was following him, because they were watching the signs which he did on those who were ill. Jesus went up into the hill and he was sitting there with his disciples. The Passover, the Feast of the Jews, was near. When Jesus lifted up his eyes and saw that a great crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip: "Where are we to buy bread for these to eat?" He was testing Philip when he said this, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him: "Seven pounds worth of bread is not enough to give each of them a little to eat." One of the disciples said to him--it was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother--"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two little fishes. But what use are they among so many?" Jesus said: "Make the men sit down." There was much grass in the place. So the men sat down to the number of about five thousand. So Jesus took the loaves and gave thanks for them, and dividing them up among those who were reclining there. So too he gave them of the fishes, as much as they wished. When they were satisfied, he said to the disciples: "Collect the broken pieces that are left over, so that nothing may be wasted." So they collected them, and they rifled twelve baskets with the broken pieces of the loaves which remained over after the people had eaten.

There were times when Jesus desired to withdraw from the crowds. He was under continuous strain and needed rest. Moreover, it was necessary that sometimes he should get his disciples alone to lead them into a deeper understanding of himself. In addition, he needed time for prayer. On this particular occasion it was wise to go away before a head-on collision with the authorities took place, for the time of the final conflict had not yet come.

From Capernaum to the other side of the Sea of Galilee was a distance of about four miles and Jesus set sail. The people had been watching with astonishment the things he did; it was easy to see the direction the boat was taking; and they hastened round the top of the lake by land. The River Jordan flows into the north end of the Sea of Galilee. Two miles up the river were the fords of Jordan. Near the fords was a village called Bethsaida Julias, to distinguish it from the other Bethsaida in Galilee, and it was for that place that Jesus was making (Lk.9:10). Near Bethsaida Julias, almost on the lakeside, was a little plain where the grass always grew. It was to be the scene of a wondrous happening.

At first Jesus went up into the hill behind the plain and he was sitting there with his disciples. Then the crowd began to appear in droves. It was nine miles round the top of the lake and across the ford, and they had made the journey with all speed. We are told that the Feast of the Passover was near and there would be even bigger crowds on the roads at that time. Possibly many were on the way to Jerusalem by that route. Many Galilaean pilgrims travelled north and crossed the ford and went through Peraea, and then re-crossed the Jordan near Jericho. The way was longer but it avoided the territory of the hated and dangerous Samaritans. It is likely that the great crowd was swelled by detachments of pilgrims on their way to the Passover Feast.

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John 6:1-13

At sight of the crowd Jesus' sympathy was kindled. They were hungry and tired, and they must be fed. Philip was the natural man to whom to turn, for he came from Bethsaida (Jn.1:44) and would have local knowledge. Jesus asked him where food could be got. Philip's answer was despairing. He said that even if food could be got it would cost more than two hundred denarii to give this vast crowd even a little each. A denarius was worth about 4 pence and was the standard day's wage for a working man. Philip calculated that it would take more than six months' wages to begin to feed a crowd like this.

Then Andrew appeared on the scene. He had discovered a lad with five barley loaves and two little fishes. Quite likely the boy had brought them as a picnic lunch. Maybe he was out for the day, and as a boy might, had got attached himself to the crowd. Andrew, as usual, was bringing people to Jesus.

The boy had not much to bring. Barley bread was the cheapest of all bread and was held in contempt. There is a regulation in the Mishnah about the offering that a woman who has committed adultery must bring. She must, of course, bring a trespass offering. With all offerings a meat-offering was made, and the meat-offering consisted of flour and wine and oil intermixed. Ordinarily the flour used was made of wheat; but it was laid down that, in the case of an offering for adultery, the flour could be barley flour, for barley is the food of beasts and the woman's sin was the sin of a beast. Barley bread was the bread of the very poor.

The fishes would be no bigger than sardines. Pickled fish from Galilee were known all over the Roman Empire. In those days fresh fish was an unheard-of luxury, for there was no means of transporting it any distance and keeping it in an eatable condition. Small sardine-like fish swarmed in the Sea of Galilee. They were caught and pickled and made into a kind of savoury. The boy had his little pickled fish to help the dry barley bread down.

Jesus told the disciples to make the people sit down. He took the loaves and the fishes and he blessed them. When he did that he was acting as father of the family. The grace he used would be the one that was used in every home: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, who causest to come forth bread from the earth." The people ate and were filled. Even the word that is used for filled (chortazesthai, GSN5526) is suggestive. Originally, in classical Greek, it was a word used for feeding animals with fodder. When used of people it meant that they were fed to repletion.

When the people had eaten their fill, Jesus bade his disciples gather up the fragments left. Why the fragments? At Jewish feasts the regular practice was to leave something for the servants. That which was left was called the Peah; and no doubt the people left their usual part for those who had served them with the meal.

Of the fragments twelve baskets were taken up. No doubt each of the disciples had his basket (kophinos, GSN2894). It was bottle-shaped and no Jew ever travelled without his. Twice Juvenal (3: 14; 6: 542) talks of "the Jew with his basket and his truss of hay." (The truss of hay was to use as a bed, for many of the Jews lived a gypsy life.) The Jew with his inseparable basket was a notorious figure. He carried it partly because he was characteristically acquisitive, and partly because he needed to carry his own food if he was going to observe the Jewish rules of cleanness

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John 6:1-13

and uncleanness. From the fragments each of the disciples filled his basket. And so the hungry crowd were fed and more than fed.

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John 6:1-13

THE MEANING OF A MIRACLE

John 6:1-13 (Part 2)

We will never know exactly what happened on that grassy plain near Bethsaida Julias. We may look at it in three ways.

(a) We may regard it simply as a miracle in which Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes. Some may find that hard to conceive of; and some may find it hard to reconcile with the fact that that is just what Jesus refused to do at his temptations (Matt.4:3-4). If we can believe in the sheer miraculous character of this miracle, then let us continue to do so. But if we are puzzled, there are two other explanations.

(b) It may be that this was really a sacramental meal. In the rest of the chapter the language of Jesus is exactly that of the Last Supper, when he speaks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It could be that at this meal it was but a morsel, like the sacrament, that each person received; and that the thrill and wonder of the presence of Jesus and the reality of God turned the sacramental crumb into something which richly nourished their hearts and souls--as happens at every Communion Table to this day.

(c) There may be another and very lovely explanation. It is scarcely to be thought that the crowd left on a nine-mile expedition without making any preparations at all. If there were pilgrims with them, they would certainly possess supplies for the way. But it may be that none would produce what he had, for he selfishly--and very humanly--wished to keep it all for himself. It may then be that Jesus, with that rare smile of his, produced the little store that he and his disciples had; with sunny faith he thanked God for it and shared it out. Moved by his example, everyone who had anything did the same; and in the end there was enough, and more than enough, for all.

It may be that this is a miracle in which the presence of Jesus turned a crowd of selfish men and women into a fellowship of sharers. It may be that this story represents the biggest miracle of all--one which changed not loaves and fishes, but men and women.

However that may be, there were certain people there without whom the miracle would not have been possible.

(i) There was Andrew. There is a contrast between Andrew and Philip. Philip was the man who said: "The situation is hopeless; nothing can be done." Andrew was the man who said: "I'll see what I can do; and I'll trust Jesus to do the rest."

It was Andrew who brought that lad to Jesus, and by bringing him made the miracle possible. No one ever knows what will come out of it when we bring someone to Jesus. If a parent trains up his child in the knowledge and the love and the fear of God, no man can say what mighty things that child may some day do for God and for men. If a Sunday School teacher brings a child to Christ, no man knows what that child may some day do for Christ and his church.

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John 6:1-13

There is a tale of an old German schoolmaster who, when he entered his class of boys in the morning, used to remove his cap and bow ceremoniously to them. One asked him why he did this. His answer was: "You never know what one of these boys may some day become." He was right--because one of them was Martin Luther.

Andrew did not know what he was doing when he brought that lad to Jesus that day, but he was providing material for a miracle. We never know what possibilities we are releasing when we bring someone to Jesus.

(ii) There was the boy. He had not much to offer but in what he had Jesus found the materials of a miracle. There would have been one great deed fewer in history if that boy had withheld his loaves and fishes.

Jesus needs what we can bring him. It may not be much but he needs it. It may well be that the world is denied miracle after miracle and triumph after triumph because we will not bring to Jesus what we have and what we are. If we would lay ourselves on the altar of his service, there is no saying what he could do with us and through us. We may be sorry and embarrassed that we have not more to bring--and rightly so; but that is no reason for failing to bring what we have. Little is always much in the hands of Christ.

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John 6:14-15

THE RESPONSE OF THE MOB

John 6:14-15

So when the men had seen the sign which he had done, they said: "Truly, this is the prophet who is to come into the world." So Jesus, aware that they were going to come and seize him to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain alone.

Here we have the reaction of the mob. The Jews were waiting for the prophet whom they believed Moses had promised to them. "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren--him you shall heed" (Deut.18:15). In that moment at Bethsaida Julias they were willing to accept Jesus as that prophet and to carry him to power on a wave of popular acclaim. But it was not so very long before another mob was clamouring: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Why was it at that moment that the mob acclaimed Jesus?

For one thing, they were eager to support Jesus when he gave them what they wanted. He had healed them and fed them; and they would thereupon have made him their leader. There is such a thing as a bought loyalty. There is such a thing as cupboard love. Dr. Johnson, in one of his more cynical moments, defined gratitude as "a lively sense of favours still to come."

The attitude of that mob disgusts us. But are we so very different? When we want comfort in sorrow, when we want strength in difficulty, when we want peace in turmoil, when we want help in face of depression, there is no one so wonderful as Jesus and we talk to him and walk with him and open our hearts to him. But when he comes to us with some stern demand for sacrifice, with some challenge to effort, with the offer of some cross, we will have nothing to do with him. When we examine our hearts, it may be that we will find that we too love Jesus for what we can get out of him.

For another thing, they wished to use him for their own purposes and to mould him to their own dreams. They were waiting for the Messiah; but they visualized him in their own way. They looked for a Messiah who would be king and conqueror, who would set his foot upon the eagle's neck and drive the Romans from the land. They had seen what Jesus could do; and the thought in their minds was: "This man has power, marvellous power. If we can harness him and his power to our dreams, things will begin to happen." If they had been honest, they would have had to admit that they wished to make use of him.

Again, are we so very different? When we appeal to Christ, is it for strength to go on with our own schemes and ideas or is it for humility and obedience to accept his plans and wishes? Is our prayer: "Lord, give me strength to do what you want me to do" or is it in reality: "Lord, give me strength to do what I want to do"?

That crowd of Jews would have followed Jesus at that moment because he was giving them what they wanted and they wished to use him for their own purposes. That attitude still lingers. We would like Christ's gifts without his Cross; we would like to use him instead of allowing him to use us.

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John 6:16-21

A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TIME OF TROUBLE

John 6:16-21

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, and, when they had embarked upon a boat, they started across the sea to Capernaum. By this time darkness had come on, and Jesus had not yet come to them; and the sea was roused because a great wind was blowing. So, when they had rowed between three and four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea, and coming near the boat, and they were afraid. But he said to them: "It is I; don't be afraid." So they wished to take him on board the boat; and immediately the boat reached the land for which they were making.

This is one of the most wonderful stories in the Fourth Gospel, and it is all the more wonderful when we press behind the meaning of the Greek to find that it really describes not some extraordinary miracle, but a simple incident in which John found, in a way he never forgot, what Jesus was like.

Let us reconstruct the story. After the feeding of the five thousand and the attempt to make him king, Jesus slipped away to the hills alone. The day wore on. It came to the time which the Jews described as "the second evening," the time between the twilight and the dark. Jesus had still not arrived. We must not think that the disciples were forgetful or discourteous in leaving Jesus behind, for, as Mark tells the story, Jesus sent them on ahead (Mk.6:45), while he persuaded the crowds to go home. Doubtless it was his intention to walk round the head of the lake while they rowed across and to rejoin them in Capernaum.

The disciples set sail. The wind got up, as it can in the narrow, land-locked lake; and the waters were whipped to foam. It was Passover time, and that was the time of the full moon (Jn.6:4). Up on the hillside Jesus had prayed and communed with God; as he set out the silver moon made the scene almost like daylight; and down on the lake below he could see the boat and the rowers toiling at the oars, making heavy weather of it. So he came down.

We must remember two facts. At the north end the lake was no more than four miles across; and John tells us that the disciples had rowed between three and four miles; that is to say, they were very nearly at their journey's end. It is natural to suppose that in the wind they hugged the shore of the lake, seeking what shelter they might find. That is the first fact and now we come to the second. They saw Jesus, as the King James Version and Revised Standard Version have it, walking on the sea. The Greek is *epi tes thalasses* (GSN1909) *tes thalasses* (GSN3588) *thalasses* (GSN2281) which is precisely the phrase used in Jn.21:1, where it means--it has never been questioned--that Jesus was walking on the seashore. That is what the phrase means in our passage, too.

Jesus was walking *epi tes thalasses*, by the seashore. The toiling disciples looked up, and suddenly saw him. It was all so unexpected, they had been bent so long over their oars, that they were alarmed because they thought it was a spirit they were seeing. Then across the waters came that well-loved voice--"It is I; don't be afraid." They wanted him to come on board; the Greek most naturally means that their wish was not fulfilled. Why? Remember the breadth of the lake was four

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John 6:16-21

miles and they had rowed about that distance. The simple reason was that, before they could take Jesus on board, the boat grounded on the shingle, and they were there.

Here is just the kind of story that a fisherman like John would have loved and remembered. Every time he thought of it he would feel that night again, the grey silver of the moonlight, the rough oar against his hand, the flapping sail, the shriek of the wind, the sound of the surging water, the astonishingly unexpected appearance of Jesus, the sound of his voice across the waves and the crunch of the boat as it reached the Galilaean side.

As he remembered, John saw wonders which are still there for us.

(i) He saw that Jesus watches. Up on the hill Jesus had been watching them. He had not forgotten. He was not too busy with God to think of them. John suddenly realized that all the time they had pulled at the oars Jesus' loving look was on them.

When we are up against it Jesus watches. He does not make things easy for us. He lets us fight our own battles. Like a parent watching his son put up a splendid effort in some athletic contest, he is proud of us; or, like a parent watching his son let the side down, he is sad. Life is lived with the loving eye of Jesus upon us.

(ii) He saw that Jesus comes. Down from the hillside Jesus came to enable the disciples make the last pull that would reach safety.

He does not watch us with serene detachment; when strength is failing he comes with strength for the last effort which leads to victory.

(iii) He saw that Jesus helps. He watches, he comes and he helps. It is the wonder of the Christian life that there is nothing that we are left to do alone. Margaret Avery tells how there was a teacher in a little country school who had told this story to her children, and she must have told it well. Some short time afterwards there was a blizzard of wind and snow. When school finished, the teacher was helping the children home. Sometimes she had practically to drag them through the drifts. When they were all very nearly exhausted with the struggle, she overheard a little boy say, half to himself: "We could be doing with that chap Jesus here now." We could always be doing with Jesus and we never need to do without him.

(iv) He saw that Jesus brings us to the haven. It seemed to John, as he remembered it, that, as soon as Jesus arrived, the keel of the boat grated on the shingle and they were there. As the Psalmist had it: "Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven" (Ps.107:30). Somehow in the presence of Jesus the longest journey is shorter and the hardest battle easier.

One of the loveliest things in the Fourth Gospel is that John, the old fisherman turned evangelist, found all the wealth of Christ in the memory of a fisherman's story.

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John 6:22-27

THE MISTAKEN SEARCH

John 6:22-27

On the next day, the crowd which was still standing on the far side of the sea, saw that there had been only one boat, and that Jesus had not gone into the boat with his disciples, but that the disciples had gone away alone. But some boats from Tiberias put in near the place where they had eaten the bread, after the Lord had given thanks. So when they saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples either, they embarked on the boats, and came to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. When they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him: "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered: "This is the truth I tell you--you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves until your stomachs were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but work for the food which lasts, and which gives eternal life, that food which the Son of Man will give you; for the Father--God--has set his seal upon him."

The crowd had lingered on the far side of the lake. In the time of Jesus people did not need to keep office-hours. They had time to wait until he came back to them. They waited because having seen that there was only one boat and that the disciples had gone off in it without Jesus, they deduced that he must still be somewhere near at hand. After they had waited for some time, they began to realize that he was not coming back. Into the bay came some little boats from Tiberias. No doubt they had taken shelter from the storm of the night. The waiting people embarked on them and made the crossing of the lake back to Capernaum.

Discovering to their surprise that Jesus was already there, they asked him when he had arrived. To that question Jesus simply did not reply. This was no time to talk of things like that; life was too short for pleasant gossip about journeys. He went straight to the heart of the matter. "You have seen," he said, "wonderful things. You have seen how God's grace enabled a crowd to be fed. Your thoughts ought to have been turned to the God who did these things; but instead all that you are thinking about is bread." It is as if Jesus said: "You cannot think about your souls for thinking of your stomachs."

"Men," as Chrysostom said, "are nailed to the things of this life." Here were people whose eyes never lifted beyond the ramparts of the world to the eternities beyond. Once Napoleon and an acquaintance were talking of life. It was dark; they walked to the window and looked out. There in the sky were distant stars, little more than pin-points of light. Napoleon, who had sharp eyes while his friend was dim-sighted, pointed to the sky: "Do you see these stars?" he asked. "No," his friend answered. "I can't see them." "That," said Napoleon, "is the difference between you and me." The man who is earthbound is living half a life. It is the man with vision, who looks at the horizon and sees the stars, who is truly alive.

Jesus put his command in one sentence. "Don't work for the food which perishes but for that which lasts for ever and gives eternal life." Long ago a prophet called Isaiah had asked: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which does not satisfy?" (Isa.55:2). There are two kinds of hunger. There is physical hunger which physical food

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John 6:22-27

can satisfy; but there is a spiritual hunger which that food can never satisfy. A man may be as rich as Croesus and still have an incompleteness in his life.

In the years just after A.D. 60 the luxury of Roman society was unparalleled. It was at this time that they served feasts of peacocks' brains and nightingales' tongues; that they cultivated the odd habit of taking emetics between courses so that the next might taste better; that meals costing thousands of pounds were commonplace. It was at this time that Pliny tells of a Roman lady who was married in a robe so richly jewelled and gilded that it cost the equivalent of 432,000 British pounds. There was a reason for all this, and the reason was a deep dissatisfaction with life, a hunger that nothing could satisfy. They would try anything for a new thrill, because they were both appallingly rich and appallingly hungry. As Matthew Arnold wrote:

"In his cool hall with haggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay;
He drove abroad in furious guise
Along the Appian Way;
He made a feast, drank fierce and fast;
He crowned his hair with flowers;
No easier nor no quicker passed
The impracticable hours."

Jesus' point was that all that these Jews were interested in was physical satisfaction. They had received an unexpectedly free and lavish meal; and they wanted more. But there are other hungers which can be satisfied only by him. There is the hunger for truth--in him alone is the truth of God. There is the hunger for life--in him alone is life more abundant. There is the hunger for love--in him alone is the love that outlasts sin and death. Christ alone can satisfy the hunger of the human heart and soul.

Why is this so? There is a wealth of meaning in the phrase: "God has set his seal upon him." H. B. Tristram in *Eastern Customs in Bible Lands* has a most interesting section on seals in the ancient world. It was not the signature, but the seal that authenticated. In commercial and political documents it was the seal, imprinted with the signet ring, which made the document valid; it was the seal which authenticated a will; it was the seal on the mouth of a sack or a crate that guaranteed the contents. Tristram tells how on his own eastern journeys, when he made an agreement with his muleteers and his porters, they set the impression of their seal upon it to show that it was binding. Seals were made of pottery or metal or jewels. In the British Museum there are the seals of most of the Assyrian kings. The seal was fixed on clay and the clay attached to the document.

The Rabbis had a saying: "The seal of God is truth." "One day," says the Talmud, "the great synagogue (the assembly of the Jewish experts in the law) were weeping, praying and fasting together, when a little scroll fell from the firmament among them. They opened it and on it was only one word, Emeth (HSN0571), which means truth. 'That,' said the Rabbi, 'is the seal of God.'" Emeth (HSN0571) is spelled with three Hebrew letters ('-M-T): aleph, which is the first letter of the alphabet; min, the middle letter, and tau, the last. The truth of God is the beginning, the middle and the end of life.

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John 6:22-27

That is why Jesus can satisfy the eternal hunger. He is sealed by God, he is God's truth incarnate and it is God alone who can truly satisfy the hunger of the soul which he created.

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John 6:28-29

THE ONLY TRUE WORK

John 6:28-29

They said to him: "What are we to do to work the works of God?" Jesus answered: "This is the work of God, to believe in him whom he has sent."

When Jesus spoke about the works of God, the Jews immediately thought in terms of "good" works. It was their conviction that a man by living a good life could earn the favour of God. They held that men could be divided into three classes--those who were good, those who were bad and those who were in between, who, by doing one more good work, could be transferred to the category of the good. So when the Jews asked Jesus about the work of God they expected him to lay down lists of things to do. But that is not what Jesus says at au.

His answer is extremely compressed and we must expand it and see what lies behind it. He said that God's work was to believe in him whom he had sent. Paul would have put it this way--the one work that God desires from man is faith. Now what does faith mean? It means being in such a relationship with God that we are his friends, not terrified of him any more but knowing him as our Father and our friend and giving him the trust and the obedience and the submission which naturally arise from this new relationship. How does believing in Jesus tie up with that? It is only because Jesus came to tell us that God is our Father and loves us and wants nothing more than to forgive, that the old distance and enmity are taken away and the new relationship with him made possible.

But that new relationship issues in a certain kind of life. Now we know what God is like, our lives must answer to that knowledge. That answer will be in three directions, each of which corresponds to what Jesus told us of God.

(i) God is love. Therefore in our lives there must be love and service of others corresponding to the love and the service of God, and forgiveness of others corresponding to his forgiveness of God.

(ii) God is holiness. Therefore in our lives there must be purity corresponding to the holiness of God.

(iii) God is wisdom. Therefore in our lives there must be complete submission and trust corresponding to the wisdom of God.

The essence of the Christian life is a new relationship to God, a relationship offered by him and made possible by the revelation which Jesus gave us of him, a relationship which issues in that service, purity and trust which are the reflection of God. This is the work which God wishes us and enables us to perform.

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John 6:30-34

THE DEMAND FOR A SIGN

John 6:30-34

They said to him: "What sign are you going to perform that we may see it and believe in you? What is your work? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it stands written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said to them: "This is the truth I tell you--Moses did not give you bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the real bread from heaven. The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world." They said to him: "Sir, always give us that bread."

Here the argument becomes specifically Jewish in its expression and assumptions and allusions. Jesus had just made a great claim. The true work of God was to believe in him. "Very well," said the Jews, "this is in effect a claim to be the Messiah. Prove it."

Their minds were still on the feeding of the crowd and inevitably that turned their thoughts to the manna in the wilderness. They could hardly help connecting the two things. The manna had always been regarded as the bread of God (Ps.78:24; Exo.16:15); and there was a strong rabbinic belief that when the Messiah came he would again give the manna. The giving of the manna was held to be the supreme work in the life of Moses and the Messiah was bound to surpass it. "As was the first redeemer so was the final redeemer; as the first redeemer caused the manna to fall from heaven, even so shall the second redeemer cause the manna to fall." "Ye shall not find the manna in this age, but ye shall find it in the age that is to come." "For whom has the manna been prepared? For the righteous in the age that is coming.

Everyone who believes is worthy and eateth of it." It was the belief that a pot of the manna had been hidden in the ark in the first temple, and that, when the temple was destroyed, Jeremiah had hidden it away and would produce it again when the Messiah came. In other words, the Jews were challenging Jesus to produce bread from God in order to substantiate his claims. They did not regard the bread which had fed the five thousand as bread from God; it had begun in earthly loaves and issued in earthly loaves. The manna, they held, was a different thing and a real test.

Jesus' answer was twofold. First, he reminded them that it was not Moses who had given them the manna; it was God. Second, he told them that the manna was not really the bread of God; it was only the symbol of the bread of God. The bread of God was he who came down from heaven and gave men not simply satisfaction from physical hunger, but life. Jesus was claiming that the only real satisfaction was in him.

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John 6:35-40

THE BREAD OF LIFE

John 6:35-40

Jesus said to them: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst any more. But I tell you, though you have seen me, yet you do not believe in me. All that the Father gives me will come to me, because I came down from heaven, not to do my will, but to do the will of him who sent me. This is the will of him who sent me--that I should lose none of those he gave to me, but that I should raise them all up on the last day. This is the will of my Father, that everyone who believes on the Son, when he sees him, should have everlasting life. And I will raise him up on the last day."

This is one of the great passages of the Fourth Gospel, and indeed of the New Testament. In it there are two great lines of thought that we must try to analyse.

First, what did Jesus mean when he said: "I am the bread of life"? It is not enough to regard this as simply a beautiful and poetical phrase. Let us analyse it step by step: (i) Bread sustains life. It is that without which life cannot go on. (ii) But what is life? Clearly by life is meant something far more than mere physical existence. What is this new spiritual meaning of life? (iii) Real life is the new relationship with God, that relationship of trust and obedience and love of which we have already thought. (iv) That relationship is made possible only by Jesus Christ. Apart from him no one can enter into it. (v) That is to say, without Jesus there may be existence, but not life. (vi) Therefore, if Jesus is the essential of life, he may be described as the bread of life. The hunger of the human situation is ended when we know Christ and through him know God. The restless soul is at rest; the hungry heart is satisfied.

Second, this passage opens out to us the stages of the Christian life. (i) We see Jesus. We see him in the pages of the New Testament, in the teaching of the church, sometimes even face to face. (ii) Having seen him, we come to him. We regard him not as some distant hero and pattern, not as a figure in a book, but as someone accessible. (iii) We believe in him. That is to say, we accept him as the final authority on God, on man, on life. That means that our coming is not a matter of mere interest, nor a meeting on equal terms; it is essentially a submission. (iv) This process gives us life. That is to say, it puts us into a new and lovely relationship with God, wherein he becomes an intimate friend; we are now at home with the one whom we feared or never knew. (v) The possibility of this is free and universal. The invitation is to all men. The bread of life is ours for the taking. (vi) The only way to that new relationship is through Jesus.

Without him it never would have been possible; and apart from him it is still impossible. No searching of the human mind or longing of the human heart can fully find God apart from Jesus. (vii) At the back of the whole process is God. It is those whom God has given him who come to Christ. God not only provides the goal; he moves in the human heart to awaken desire for him; and he works in the human heart to take away the rebellion and the pride which would hinder the great submission. We could never even have sought him unless he had already found us. (viii) There remains that stubborn something which enables us to refuse the offer of God. In the last analysis, the one thing which defeats God is the defiance of the human heart. Life is there for the taking--or the refusing.

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John 6:35-40

When we take, two things happen.

First, into life enters new satisfaction. The hunger and the thirst are gone. The human heart finds what it was searching for and life ceases to be mere existence and becomes a thing at once of thrill and of peace.

Second, even beyond life we are safe. Even on the last day when all things end we are still secure. As a great commentator said: "Christ brings us to the haven beyond which there is no danger."

The offer of Christ is life in time and life in eternity. That is the greatness and glory of which we cheat ourselves when we refuse his invitation.

Barclay's Commentary

John 6:41-51

THE FAILURE OF THE JEWS

John 6:41-51

So the Jews kept murmuring about him, because he said: "I am the bread which came down from heaven." They kept saying: "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say: 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered: "Stop murmuring to each other. No one can come to me except the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It stands written in the prophets: 'And all will be taught by God.' Everyone who has listened and learned from my Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except he who is from God--he has seen the Father. This is the truth I tell you--he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and died. This is the bread of life which comes down from heaven that a man may eat of him and not die. I am the bread of life which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever."

This passage shows the reasons why the Jews rejected Jesus, and in rejecting him, rejected eternal life.

(i) They judged things by human values and by external standards. Their reaction in face of the claim of Jesus was to produce the fact that he was a carpenter's son and that they had seen him grow up in Nazareth. They were unable to understand how one who was a tradesman and who came from a poor home could possibly be a special messenger from God.

T. E. Lawrence was a close personal friend of Thomas Hardy, the poet. In the days when Lawrence was serving as an aircraftman in the Royal Air Force he sometimes used to visit Hardy and his wife in his aircraftman's uniform. On one occasion his visit coincided with a visit of the Mayoress of Dorchester. She was bitterly affronted that she had to submit to meeting a common aircraftman, for she had no idea who he was. In French she said to Mrs. Hardy that never in all her born days had she had to sit down to tea with a private soldier. No one said anything; then Lawrence said in perfect French: "I beg your pardon, Madame, but can I be of any use as an interpreter? Mrs. Hardy knows no French." A snobbish and discourteous woman had made a shattering mistake because she judged by externals.

That is what the Jews did with Jesus. We must have a care that we never neglect a message from God because we despise or do not care for the messenger. A man would hardly refuse a cheque for 1,000 British pounds because it happened to be enclosed in an envelope which did not conform to the most aristocratic standards of notepaper. God has many messengers. His greatest message came through a Galilean carpenter, and for that very reason the Jews disregarded it.

(ii) The Jews argued with each other. They were so taken up with their private arguments that it never struck them to refer the decision to God. They were exceedingly eager to let everyone know what they thought about the matter; but not in the least anxious to know what God thought. It might well be that sometimes in a court or committee, when every man is desirous of pushing his opinion down his neighbour's throat, we would be better to be quiet and ask God what he thinks and what

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John 6:41-51

he wants us to do. After all it does not matter so very much what we think; but what God thinks matters intensely; and we so seldom take steps to find it out.

(iii) The Jews listened, but they did not learn. There are different kinds of listening. There is the listening of criticism; there is the listening of resentment; there is the listening of superiority; there is the listening of indifference; there is the listening of the man who listens only because for the moment he cannot get the chance to speak. The only listening that is worth while is that which hears and learns; and that is the only way to listen to God.

(iv) The Jews resisted the drawing of God. Only those accept Jesus whom God draws to him. The word which John uses for to draw is *helkuein* (GSN1670). The word used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew when Jeremiah hears God say as the King James Version has it: "With loving-kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer.31:3). The interesting thing about the word is that it almost always implies some kind of resistance. It is the word for drawing a heavily laden net to the shore (Jn.21:6,11). It is used of Paul and Silas being dragged before the magistrates in Philippi (Ac.16:19). It is the word for drawing a sword from the belt or from its scabbard (Jn.18:10). Always there is this idea of resistance. God can draw men, but man's resistance can defeat God's pull.

Jesus is the bread of life; which means that he is the essential for life; therefore to refuse the invitation and command of Jesus is to miss life and to die. The Rabbis had a saying: "The generation in the wilderness have no part in the life to come." In the old story in Numbers the people who cravenly refused to brave the dangers of the promised land after the report of the scouts, were condemned to wander in the wilderness until they died. Because they would not accept the guidance of God they were for ever shut out from the promised land. The Rabbis believed that the fathers who died in the wilderness not only missed the promised land, but also missed the life to come. To refuse the offer of Jesus is to miss life in this world and in the world to come; whereas to accept his offer is to find real life in this world and glory in the world to come.

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John 6:51-59

HIS BODY AND HIS BLOOD

John 6:51-59 (Part 1)

"The bread which I will give him is my flesh, which is given that the world may have life." So the Jews argued with each other. "How!" they said, "can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them: "This is the truth I tell you--unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot possess eternal life within yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. My flesh is the real food and my blood is the real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, so I live through him; and he who eats me will live through me. This is the bread which came down from heaven. It is not a case of eating, as your fathers ate and died. He who eats this bread lives for ever." He said these things when he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

To most of us this is a very difficult passage. It speaks in language and moves in a world of ideas which are quite strange to us and which may seem even fantastic and grotesque. But to those who heard it first, it was moving among familiar ideas which went back to the very childhood of the race.

These ideas would be quite normal to anyone brought up in ancient sacrifice. The animal was very seldom burned entire. Usually only a token part was burned on the altar, although the whole animal was offered to the god. Part of the flesh was given to the priests as their perquisite; and part to the worshipper to make a feast for himself and his friends within the temple precincts. At that feast the god himself was held to be a guest. More, once the flesh had been offered to the god, it was held that he had entered into it; and therefore when the worshipper ate it he was literally eating the god. When people rose from such a feast they went out, as they believed, literally god-filled. We may think of it as idolatrous worship, we may think of it as a vast delusion; yet the fact remains these people went out quite certain that in them there was now the dynamic vitality of their god. To people used to that kind of experience a section like this presented no difficulties at all.

Further, in that ancient world the one live form of religion was to be found in the Mystery Religions. The one thing the Mystery Religions offered was communion and even identity with some god. The way it was done was this. All the Mystery Religions were essentially passion plays. They were stories of a god who had lived and suffered terribly and who died and rose again. The story was turned into a moving play. Before the initiate could see it, he had to undergo a long course of instruction in the inner meaning of the story. He had to undergo all kinds of ceremonial purifications. He had to pass through a long period of fasting and abstention from sexual relationships.

At the actual presentation of a passion play everything was designed to produce a highly emotional atmosphere. There was carefully calculated lighting, sensuous incense, exciting music, a wonderful liturgy; everything was designed to work up the initiate to a height of emotion and expectation that he had never experienced before. Call it hallucination if you like; call it a combination of hypnotism and self hypnotism. But something happened; and that something was

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John 6:51-59

identity with the god. As the carefully prepared initiate watched he became one with the god. He shared the sorrows and the griefs; he shared the death, and the resurrection. He and the god became for ever one; and he was safe in life and in death.

Some of the sayings and prayers of the Mystery Religions are very beautiful. In the Mysteries of Mithra the initiate prayed: "Abide with my soul; leave me not, that I may be initiated and that the holy spirit may dwell within me." In the Hermetic Mysteries the initiate said: "I know thee Hermes, and thou knowest me; I am thou and thou art I" In the same Mysteries a prayer runs: "Come to me, Lord Hermes, as babes to mothers' wombs." In the Mysteries of Isis the worshipper said: "As truly as Osiris lives, so shall his followers live. As truly as Osiris is not dead, his followers shall die no more."

We must remember that those ancient people knew all about the striving, the longing, the dreaming for identity with their god and for the bliss of taking him into themselves. They would not read phrases like eating Christ's body and drinking his blood with crude and shocked literalism. They would know something of that ineffable experience of union, closer than any earthly union, of which these words speak. This is language that the ancient world could understand--and so can we.

It may be well that we should remember that here John is doing what he so often does. He is not giving, or trying to give, the actual words of Jesus. He has been thinking for seventy years of what Jesus said; and now, led by the Holy Spirit, he is giving the inner significance of his words. It is not the words that he reports; that would merely have been a feat of memory. It is the essential meaning of the words; that is the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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John 6:51-59

HIS BODY AND HIS BLOOD

John 6:51-59 (Part 2)

Let us see now if we can find out something of what Jesus meant and of what John understood from words like this. There are two ways in which we may take this passage.

(i) We may take it in a quite general sense. Jesus spoke about eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

Now the flesh of Jesus was his complete humanity. John in his First Letter lays it down almost passionately: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God." In fact, the spirit which denies that Jesus is come in the flesh is of antichrist (1Jn.4:2-3). John insisted that we must grasp and never let go the full humanity of Jesus, that he was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. What does this mean? Jesus, as we have seen again and again, was the mind of God become a person. This means that in Jesus we see God taking human life human problems, battling with our human temptations, working out our human relationships.

Therefore it is as if Jesus said: "Feed your heart, feed your mind, feed your soul on the thought of my manhood. When you are discouraged and in despair, when you are beaten to your knees and disgusted with life and living--remember I took that life of yours and these struggles of yours on me." Suddenly life and the flesh are clad with glory for they are touched with God. It was and is the great belief of the Greek Orthodox Christology that Jesus deified our flesh by taking it on himself. To eat Christ's body is to feed on the thought of his manhood until our own manhood is strengthened and cleansed and irradiated by his.

Jesus said we must drink his blood. In Jewish thought the blood stands for the life. It is easy to understand why. As the blood flows from a wound, life ebbs away; and to the Jew, the blood belonged to God. That is why to this day a true Jew will never eat any meat which has not been completely drained of blood. "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Gen.9:4). "Only you shall not eat its blood" (Deut.15:23). Now see what Jesus is saying--"You must drink my blood--you must take my life into the very centre of your being--and that life of mine is the life which belongs to God." When Jesus said we must drink his blood he meant that we must take his life into the very core of our hearts.

What does that mean? Think of it this way. Here in a bookcase is a book which a man has never read. It may be the glory and the wonder of the tragedies of Shakespeare; but so long as it remains unread upon his bookshelves it is external to him. One day he takes it down and reads it. He is thrilled and fascinated and moved. The story sticks to him; the great lines remain in his memory; now when he wants to, he can take that wonder out from inside himself and remember it and think about it and feed his mind and his heart upon it. Once the book was outside him. Now it is inside him and he can feed upon it. It is that way with any great experience in life. It remains external until we take it within ourselves.

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John 6:51-59

It is so with Jesus. So long as he remains a figure in a book he is external to us; but when he enters into our hearts we can feed upon the life and the strength and the dynamic vitality that he gives to us. Jesus said that we must drink his blood. He is saying: "You must stop thinking of me as a subject for theological debate; you must take me into you, and you must come into me; and then you will have real life." That is what Jesus meant when he spoke about us abiding in him and himself abiding in us.

When he told us to eat his flesh and drink his blood, he was telling us to feed our hearts and souls and minds on his humanity, and to revitalize our lives with his life until we are rifled with the life of God.

(ii) But John meant more than that, and was thinking also of the Lord's Supper. He was saying: "If you want life, you must come and sit at that table where you eat that broken bread and drink that poured-out wine which somehow, in the grace of God, bring you into contact with the love and the life of Jesus Christ." But--and here is the sheer wonder of his point of view--John has no account of the Last Supper. He brings in his teaching about it, not in the narrative of the Upper Room, but in the story of a picnic meal on a hillside near Bethsaida Julias by the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee.

There is no doubt that John is saying that for the true Christian every meal has become a sacrament. It may well be that there were those who--if the phrase be allowed--were making too much of the Sacrament within the church, making a magic of it, implying that it was the only place where we might enter into the nearer presence of the Risen Christ. It is true that the Sacrament is a special appointment with God; but John held with all his heart that every meal in the humblest home, in the richest palace, beneath the canopy of the sky with only the grass for carpet was a sacrament. He refused to limit the presence of Christ to an ecclesiastical environment and a correctly liturgical service. He said: "At any meal you can find again that bread which speaks of the manhood of the Master, that wine which speaks of the blood which is life."

In John's thought the communion table and the dinner table and the picnic on the seashore or the hillside are all alike in that at all of them we may taste and touch and handle the bread and the wine which brings us Christ. Christianity would be a poor thing if Christ were confined to churches. It is John's belief that we can find him anywhere in a Christ-filled world. It is not that he belittles the Sacrament; but he expands it, so that we find Christ at his table in church, and then go out to find him everywhere where men and women meet together to enjoy the gifts of God.

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John 6:59-65

THE ALL-IMPORTANT SPIRIT

John 6:59-65

When they had heard this discourse many of his disciples said: "This word is hard! Who is able to listen to it?" Jesus well knew within himself that his disciples were murmuring about this; so he said to them: "Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he formerly was? The life-giving power is the Spirit; the flesh is of no help. The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was who was going to betray him. So that was why he often said: "No man can come to me, except it has been given to him by the Father to do so."

It is little wonder that the disciples found the discourse of Jesus hard. The Greek word is *skleros* (GSN4642), which means not hard to understand; but hard to accept. The disciples knew quite well that Jesus had been claiming to be the very life of God come down from heaven, and that no one could live this life or face eternity without submitting to him.

Here we come upon a truth that re-emerges in every age. Time and again it is not the intellectual difficulty which keeps men from becoming Christians; it is the height of Christ's moral demand. At the heart of an religion there must be mystery, for the simple reason that at that heart there is God. In the nature of things man cannot ever fully understand God. Any honest thinker will accept that there must be mystery.

The real difficulty of Christianity is two-fold. It demands an act of surrender to Christ, an acceptance of him as the final authority; and it demands a moral standard of the highest level. The disciples were well aware that Jesus had claimed to be the very life and mind of God come down to earth; their difficulty was to accept that as true, with all its implications. To this day many a man refuses Christ, not because he puzzles intellect, but because he challenges his life.

Jesus goes on, not to try to prove his claim, but to state that some day events will prove it. What he is saying is this: "You find it difficult to believe that I am the bread, the essential of life, which came down from heaven. Well then, you will have no difficulty in accepting that claim when some day you see me ascending back to heaven." It is a forecast of the Ascension. It means that the Resurrection is the guarantee of the claims of Jesus. He was not one who lived nobly and died gallantly for a lost cause; he was the one whose claims were vindicated by the fact that he rose again.

Jesus goes on to say that the all-important thing is the life-giving power of the Spirit; the flesh is of no help. We can put that very simply in a way which will give us at least something of its meaning--the most important thing is the spirit in which any action is done. Someone has put it this way: "All human things are trivial if they exist for nothing beyond themselves." The real value of anything depends on its aim. If we eat simply for the sake of eating, we become gluttons, and it is likely to do us far more harm than good; if we eat to sustain life, to do our work better, to maintain the fitness of our body at its highest peak, food has a real significance. If a man spends a great deal

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of time on sport simply for the sake of sport, he is at least to some extent wasting his time. But if he spends that time in order to keep his body fit and thereby to do his work for God and men better, sport ceases to be trivial and becomes important.

The things of the flesh all gain their value from the spirit in which they are done.

Jesus goes on: "My words are spirit and life." He alone can tell us what life is, put into us the spirit in which it must be lived, give us the strength so to live it. Life takes its value from its purpose and its goal. Christ alone can give us true purpose in life, and the power to work out that purpose against the constant opposition that comes from without and within.

Jesus was well aware that some would not only reject his offer but would reject it with hostility. No man can accept him unless he is moved by the Spirit of God to do so but to the end of the day a man can resist that Spirit. Such a man is shut out not by God, but by himself.

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John 6:66-71

ATTITUDES TO CHRIST

John 6:66-71

After this many of his disciples turned back and would not walk with him any more. Jesus said to the Twelve: "Surely you too do not want to go away?" Simon Peter answered him: "Lord, to whom are we to go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them: "Did I not choose you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he was going to betray him--and he was one of the Twelve.

Here is a passage instinct with tragedy, for in it is the beginning of the end. There was a time when men came to Jesus in large numbers. When he was in Jerusalem at the Passover many saw his miracles and believed in his name (Jn.2:23). So many came to be baptized by his disciples that the numbers were embarrassing (Jn.4:1-3). In Samaria great things happened (Jn.4:1; Jn.4:39,45). In Galilee the crowds flocked after him just the day before (Jn.6:2). But the tone of things had changed; from now on there was a growing hatred which was going to culminate in the Cross. Already John launches us on the last act of the tragedy. It is circumstances like these which reveal men's hearts and show them in their true colours. In these circumstances there were three different attitudes to Jesus.

(i) There was defection. Some turned back and walked with him no more. They drifted away for various reasons.

Some saw quite clearly where Jesus was heading. It was not possible to challenge the authorities as he was doing and get away with it. He was heading for disaster and they were getting out in time. They were fair-weather followers. It has been said that the test of an army is how it fights when it is tired. Those who drifted away would have stuck by Jesus so long as his career was on the upward way, but at the first shadow of the Cross they left him.

Some shirked the challenge of Jesus. Fundamentally their point of view was that they had come to Jesus to get something from him; when it came to suffering for him and giving to him they quit. No one can give so much as Jesus, but if we come to him solely to get and never to give we win certainly turn back. The man who would follow Jesus must remember that in following him there is always a Cross.

(ii) There was deterioration. It is in Judas above all that we see this. Jesus must have seen in him a man whom he could use for his purposes. But Judas, who might have become the hero, became the villain; he who might have become a saint became a name of shame.

There is a terrible story about an artist who was painting the Last Supper. It was a great picture and it took him many years. As model for the face of Christ he used a young man with a face of transcendent loveliness and purity. Bit by bit the picture was filled in and one after another the disciples were painted. The day came when he needed a model for Judas whose face he had left to the last. He went out and searched in the lowest haunts of the city and in the dens of vice. At last he

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found a man with a face so depraved and vicious as matched his requirement. When the sittings were at an end the man said to the artist: "You painted me before." "Surely not," said the artist. "O yes," said the man, "I sat for your Christ." The years had brought terrible deterioration.

The years can be cruel. They can take away our ideals and our enthusiasms and our dreams and our loyalties. They can leave us with a life that has grown smaller and not bigger. They can leave us with a heart that is shrivelled instead of one expanded in the love of Christ. There can be a lost loveliness in life--God saves us from that!

(iii) There was determination. This is John's version of Peter's great confession at Caesarea Philippi (Mk.8:27; Matt.16:13; Lk.9:18). It was just such a situation as this that called out the loyalty of Peter's heart. To him the simple fact was that there was just no one else to go to. Jesus alone had the words of life.

Peter's loyalty was based on a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. There were many things he did not understand; he was just as bewildered and puzzled as anyone else. But there was something about Jesus for which he would willingly die. In the last analysis Christianity is not a philosophy which we accept, nor a theory to which we give allegiance. It is a personal response to Jesus Christ. It is the allegiance and the love which a man gives because his heart will not allow him to do anything else.

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John 7:1-9

NOT MAN'S TIME BUT GOD'S

John 7:1-9

After these things Jesus moved about in Galilee, for he did not wish to move about in Judaea, because the Jews were out to kill him. The festival of the Jews which is called the Festival of Tabernacles was near. So his brothers said to him: "Leave here and go down to Jerusalem so that your disciples will get the chance to see the works that you do. For no one goes on doing things in secret, when he wishes to draw public attention to himself. Since you can do these things, show yourself to the world." For even his brothers did not believe in him. So Jesus said to them: "The time of opportunity that I am looking for has not yet come; but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I bear witness about it that its deeds are evil. Go up to the festival yourselves. I am not yet going up to the festival, because my time has not yet come." When he had said these things to them he remained in Galilee.

The Festival of Tabernacles fell at the end of September and the beginning of October. It was one of the obligatory festivals and every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was legally bound to attend it. But devout Jews from far outside the fifteen mile radius delighted to go to it. It lasted altogether for eight days. Later in this chapter we shall have occasion to deal more fully with it. When it came round, Jesus' brothers urged him to go to Jerusalem for it; but Jesus rejected their arguments and went in his own good time.

There is one unique thing in this passage which we must note. According to the Revised Standard Version (Jn.7:7) Jesus says: "My time is not yet come." Jesus frequently spoke about his time or his hour. But here he uses a different word, and uses it for the only time. In the other passages (Jn.2:4; Jn.7:30; Jn.8:20; Jn.12:27) the word that Jesus or John uses is *hora* (GSN5610), which means the destined hour of God. Such a time or hour was not movable nor avoidable. It had to be accepted without argument and without alteration because it was the hour at which the plan of God had decided that something must happen. But in this passage the word is *kairos* (GSN2540), which characteristically means an opportunity; that is, the best time to do something, the moment when circumstances are most suitable, the psychological moment. Jesus is not saying here that the destined hour of God has not come but something much simpler.

He is saying that that was not the moment which would give him the chance for which he was waiting.

That explains why Jesus later actually did go to Jerusalem. Many people have been troubled about the fact that he first told his brothers he would not go and then went. Schopenhauer, the German philosopher, actually said: "Jesus Christ did of set purpose utter a falsehood." Other people have argued that it means that Jesus said that he was not going up to the festival publicly but that did not preclude him from going privately. But Jesus is saying simply: "If I go up with you just now I will not get the opportunity I am looking for. The time is not opportune." So he delayed his going until the middle of the festival, since to arrive with the crowds all assembled and expectant gave him a far better opportunity than to go at the very beginning. Jesus is choosing his time with careful prudence in order to get the most effective results.

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From this passage we learn two things:

(i) It is impossible to force Jesus' hand. His brothers tried to force him into going to Jerusalem. It was what we might call a dare. They were quite right from the human point of view. Jesus' great miracles had been wrought in Galilee--the changing of the water into wine (Jn.2:1 ff); the healing of the nobleman's son (Jn.4:46); the feeding of the five thousand (Jn.6:1 ff). The only miracle that he had wrought in Jerusalem was the curing of the impotent man at the pool (Jn.5:1 ff). It was not unnatural to tell Jesus to go to Jerusalem and let his supporters there see what he could do. The story makes it clear that the healing of the impotent man had been regarded far more as an act of Sabbath breaking than as a miracle. Further, if Jesus was ever to succeed in winning men, he could not hope to do so by hiding in a corner; he must act in such a way that everyone could see what he did. Still further, Jerusalem was the keypoint. The Galilaeans were notoriously hot-blooded and hot-headed.

Anyone who wanted a following would have no difficulty in raising one in the excitable atmosphere of Galilee; but Jerusalem was a very different proposition. It was the acid test.

Jesus' brothers could have put up a good case for their insistence; but Jesus' hand is not to be forced. He does things, not in man's time, but in God's. Man's impatience of man must learn to wait on God's wisdom.

(ii) It is impossible to treat Jesus with indifference. It did not matter when his brothers went to Jerusalem, for no one would notice they were there and nothing whatever depended on their going. But Jesus' going was a very different thing. Why? Because his brothers were in tune with the world and they did not make it uncomfortable. But Jesus' coming is a condemnation of the world's way of life and a challenge to selfishness and lethargy. Jesus had to choose his moment, for when he arrives something happens.

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John 7:10-13

REACTIONS TO JESUS

John 7:10-13 (Part 1)

When his brothers had gone up to the festival, then he too went up, not openly, but, as it were, in secret. So the Jews searched for him at the festival, and kept saying: "Where is he?" And there was many a heated argument about him among the crowds. Some said: "He is a good man." But others said: "No; far from it; he is leading the people astray." But no one spoke about him openly because of their fear of the Jews.

Jesus chose his own moment and went to Jerusalem. Here we have the reactions of the people when they were confronted with him. Now one of the supreme interests of this chapter is the number of such reactions of which it tells; and we collect them all here.

(i) There was the reaction of his brothers (Jn.7:1-5). It was really a reaction of half-amused and teasing contempt. They did not really believe in him; they were really egging him on, as you might egg on a precocious boy. We still meet that attitude of tolerant contempt to Christianity.

George Bernanos in *The Diary of a Country Priest* tells how the country priest used sometimes to be invited to dinner at the big aristocratic house of his parish. The owner would encourage him to speak and argue before his guests, but he did it with that half-amused, half-contemptuous tolerance with which he might encourage a child to show off or a dog to display his tricks. There are still people who forget that Christian faith is a matter of life and death.

(ii) There was the sheer hatred of the Pharisees and of the chief priests (Jn.7:7; Jn.7:19). They did not hate him for the same reason, because in point of fact they hated each other. The Pharisees hated him because he drove through their petty rules and regulations. If he was right, they were wrong; and they loved their own little system more than they loved God. The Sadducees were a political party. They did not observe the Pharisaic rules and regulations. Nearly all the priests were Sadducees. They collaborated with their Roman masters, and they had a very comfortable and even luxurious time. They did not want a Messiah; for when he came their political set-up would disintegrate and their comfort would be gone. They hated Jesus because he interfered with the vested interests which were dearer to them than God.

It is still possible for a man to love his own little system more than he loves God, and to place his own vested interests above the challenge of the adventurous and the sacrificial way.

(iii) Both these reactions issued in the consuming desire to eliminate Jesus (Jn.7:30,32). When a man's ideals clash with those of Christ, either he must submit or he must seek to destroy him. Hitler would have no Christians about him, for the Christian owed a higher loyalty than loyalty to the state. A man is faced with a simple alternative if he allows Christ into his orbit. He can either do what he likes or he can do what Christ likes; and if he wishes to go on doing as he likes, he must seek to eliminate Christ.

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John 7:10-13

(iv) There was arrogant contempt (Jn.7:15; Jn.7:47-49). What right had this man to come and lay down the law? Jesus had no cultural background; he had no training in the rabbinic schools and colleges. Surely no intelligent person was going to listen to him? Here was the reaction of academic snobbery.

Many of the greatest poets and writers and evangelists have had no technical qualifications at all. That is not for one moment to say that study and culture and education are to be despised and abandoned; but we must have a care never to wave a man away and consign him to the company who do not matter simply because he lacks the technical equipment of the schools.

(v) There was the reaction of the crowd. This was twofold. First, there was the reaction of interest (Jn.7:11). The one thing impossible when Jesus really invades life is indifference. Apart from anything else, Jesus is the most interesting figure in the world. Second, there was the reaction of discussion (Jn.7:12; Jn.7:43). They talked about Jesus; they put forward their views about him; they debated about him. There is both value and danger here. The value is that nothing helps us clarify our own opinions like pitting them against someone else's. Mind sharpens mind as iron sharpens iron. The danger is that religion can so very easily come to be regarded as a matter for argument and debate and discussion, a series of fascinating questions, about which a man may talk for a lifetime--and do nothing.

There is all the difference in the world between being an argumentative amateur theologian, willing to talk until the stars go out, and a truly religious person, who has passed from talking about Christ to knowing him.

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John 7:10-13

VERDICTS ON JESUS

John 7:10-13 (Part 2)

In this chapter there is a whole series of verdicts on Jesus.

(i) There is the verdict that he was a good man (Jn.7:12). That verdict is true, but it is not the whole truth. It was Napoleon who made the famous remark: "I know men, and Jesus Christ is more than a man." Jesus was indeed truly man; but in him was the mind of God. When he speaks it is not one man speaking to another; if that were so we might argue about his commands. When he speaks it is God speaking to men; and Christianity means not arguing about his commands, but accepting them.

(ii) There is the verdict that he was a prophet (Jn.7:40). That too is true. The prophet is the forth-teller of the will of God, the man who has lived so close to God that he knows his mind and purposes. That is true of Jesus; but there is this difference. The prophet says: "Thus saith the Lord." His authority is borrowed and delegated. His message is not his own. Jesus says: "I say unto you." He has the right to speak, not with a delegated authority, but with his own.

(iii) There is the verdict that he was a deluded madman (Jn.7:20). It is true that either Jesus is the only completely sane person in the world or he was mad. He chose a Cross when he might have had power. He was the Suffering Servant when he might have been the conquering king. He washed the feet of his disciples when he might have had men kneeling at his own feet. He came to serve when he could have subjected the world to servitude. It is not common sense that the words of Jesus give us, but uncommon sense. He turned the world's standards upside down, because into a mad world he brought the supreme sanity of God.

(iv) There is the verdict that he was a seducer. The Jewish authorities saw in him one who was leading men away from true religion. He was accused of every crime against religion in the calendar--of being a Sabbath-breaker, of being a drunkard and a glutton, of having the most disreputable friends, of destroying orthodox religion. It is quite clear that, if we prefer our idea of religion to his, he will certainly appear a seducer--and it is one of the hardest things in the world for any man to do to admit that he is wrong.

(v) There is the verdict that he was a man of courage (Jn.7:26). No one could ever doubt his sheer courage. He had the moral courage to defy convention and be different. He had the physical courage that could bear the most terrible pain. He had the courage to go on when his family abandoned him, and his friends forsook him, and one of his own circle betrayed him. Here we see him courageously entering Jerusalem when to enter it was to enter the lions' den. He "feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man."

(vi) There is the verdict that he had a most dynamic personality (Jn.7:46). The verdict of the officers who were sent to arrest him and came back empty-handed was that never had any man spoken like this. Julian Duguid tells how he once voyaged on the same Atlantic liner as Sir Wilfred Grenfell, and he says that when Grenfell came into a room you could tell it even if you had your

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back to him, for a wave of vitality emanated from him. When we think of how this Galilean carpenter faced the highest in the land and dominated them until it was they who were on trial and not he, we are bound to admit that he was at least one of the supreme personalities in history. The picture of a gentle, anemic Jesus will not do. From him flowed a power that sent those despatched to arrest him back in empty-handed bewilderment.

(vii) There is the verdict that he was the Christ, the Anointed One of God. Nothing less will do. It is the plain fact that Jesus does not fit into any of the available human categories; only the category of the divine will do.

Before we leave the general study of this chapter there are three other reactions to Jesus that we must note.

(i) There was the crowd's reaction of fear (Jn.7:13). They talked about him but they were afraid to talk too loud. The word that John uses for their talking is an onomatopoeic word--that is, a word which imitates the sound of what it describes. It is the word *goggusmos* (GSN1112) (two g's in Greek are pronounced "ng"). The King James Version translates it murmuring; the Revised Standard Version, muttering. It indicates a kind of growling, discontented undertone. It is the word used for the grumbling of the children of Israel in the wilderness when they complained against Moses. They muttered the complaints they were afraid to utter out loud. Fear can keep a man from making a clarion call of his faith and can turn it into an indistinct mutter. The Christian should never be afraid to tell the world in ringing tones that he believes in Christ.

(ii) The reaction of a certain number of the crowd was belief (Jn.7:31). These were the men and women who could not deny the evidence of their own eyes. They heard what Jesus said; they saw what he did; they were confronted with his dynamism; and they believed. If a man rids himself of prejudice and fear, he is bound in the end to finish in belief.

(iii) The reaction of Nicodemus was to defend Jesus (Jn.7:50). In that council of the Jewish authorities his was the lone voice raised in defence. There lies the duty of every one of us. Ian Maclaren, author of *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush*, used to tell students when they preached: "Speak a good word for Jesus Christ." We live today in a world which is hostile to Christianity in many ways and in many places, but the strange thing is that the world was never more ready to talk about Christ and to discuss religion. We live in a generation when every one of us can earn the royal title, "Defender of the Faith." It is the privilege that God has given us that we can all be advocates and defenders of Christ in face of the criticism --and sometimes the mockery--of men.

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John 7:14, 25-30

THE CLAIM OF CHRIST

John 7:14; John 7:25-30

When the festival was now half way through, Jesus went up to the Temple precincts and began to teach. So some of the people of Jerusalem said: "Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And look! He is speaking publicly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities have really discovered that this is the Anointed One of God? But he cannot be because we know where he comes from. When the Anointed One of God comes no one knows where he comes from." So Jesus, as he taught in the Temple, cried: "So you know me? And you know where I come from? But it is not on my own authority that I have come; but he who sent me is real--and you do not know him. But I know him, because I have come from him, and it was he who sent me." So they would like to have found a way to arrest him; but no one laid a hand upon him, because his hour had not yet come.

We have already seen that the likelihood is that Jn.7:15-24 should come after Jn.5:47; so, to get the connection, we begin at Jn.7:14 and go on to Jn.1:24.

The crowd were surprised to find Jesus preaching in the Temple precincts. Along the sides of the Court of the Gentiles ran two great pillared colonnades or porticoes--the Royal Porch and Solomon's Porch. These were places where people walked and where Rabbis talked and it would be there that Jesus was teaching. The people well knew the hostility of the authorities to Jesus; they were astonished to see his courage in thus defying the authorities; and they were still more astonished to see that he was allowed to teach unmolested. A thought suddenly struck them: "Can it be that after all this man is the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, and that the authorities know it?" But no sooner had the thought struck them than it was dismissed.

Their objection was that they knew where Jesus had come from. They knew that his home was in Nazareth; they knew who his parents and who his brothers and sisters were; there was no mystery about his antecedents. That was the very opposite of popular belief, which held that the Messiah would appear. The idea was that he was waiting concealed and some day would burst suddenly upon the world and no one would know where he had come from. They believed that they did know that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, for that was David's town, but they also believed that nothing else would be known about him. There was a rabbinic saying: "Three things come wholly unexpectedly, the Messiah, a godsend, and a scorpion." The Messiah would appear as suddenly as a man stumbles on a godsend or steps on a hidden scorpion.

In later years when Justin Martyr was talking and arguing with a Jew about his beliefs, the Jew says of the Messiah: "Although the Messiah be already born and exists somewhere, yet he is unknown and is himself ignorant of his Messiahship, nor has he any power until Elijah comes to anoint him and to make him known." AH popular Jewish belief believed the Messiah would burst upon the world mysteriously. Jesus did not measure up to that kind of standard; to the Jews there was no mystery about where he came from.

This belief was characteristic of a certain attitude of mind which prevailed among the Jews and is by no means dead--that which seeks for God in the abnormal. They could never be persuaded to see

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John 7:14, 25-30

God in ordinary things. They had to be extraordinary before God could be in them. The teaching of Christianity is just the reverse. If God is to enter the world only in the unusual, he will very seldom be in it; whereas if we can find God in the common things, it means that he is always present. Christianity does not look on this world as one which God very occasionally invades; it looks on it as a world from which he is never absent.

In answer to these objections, Jesus made two statements, both of which shocked the people and the authorities. He said that it was quite true that they knew who he was and where he came from; but it was also true that ultimately he had come direct from God. Second, he said that they did not know God but he did. It was a bitter insult to tell God's chosen people that they did not know God. It was an incredible claim to make that Jesus alone knew him, that he stood in a unique relationship to him, that he knew him as no one else did.

Here is one of the great turning-points in Jesus' life. Up to this point the authorities had looked on him as a revolutionary Sabbath breaker, which was in truth a serious enough charge; but from now on he was guilty not of Sabbath-breaking but of the ultimate sin, of blasphemy. As they saw it, he was talking of Israel and of God as no human being had any right to speak.

This is precisely the choice which is still before us. Either, what Jesus said about himself is false, in which case he is guilty of such blasphemy as no man ever dared utter; or, what he said about himself is true, in which case he is what he claimed to be and can be described in no other terms than the Son of God. Every man has to decide for or against Jesus Christ.

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John 7:15-18

THE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY

John 7:15-18

The Jews were amazed. "How," they said, "can this fellow read when he is quite uneducated?" "My teaching," said Jesus, "is not mine, but it belongs to him who sent me. If anyone is willing to do his will, he will understand whether my teaching derives from God, or whether I am speaking from no source beyond myself. The man who speaks from no other source beyond himself is out for his own glory. He who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is no wickedness in him."

We have already had occasion to see that it is very likely that some parts of John's gospel have become misplaced. Maybe he never had time to put it fully in order; maybe the leaves on which it was written were finally assembled wrongly. This section and the one which follows form one of the clearest cases of misplacement. As these two passages come in here they hardly make sense for they have no connection with their context. It is almost certain that they should come after Jn.5:47. Jn.5 tells of the healing of the impotent man at the healing pool. That miracle was done on the Sabbath and was regarded by the Jewish authorities as a breach of that day. In his defence Jesus cited the writings of Moses and said that if they really knew what these writings meant and really believed in them, they would also believe in him. The chapter finishes: "If you had believed in Moses, you would have believed in me, for he wrote about me. If you do not believe in his writings, how will you believe in my words?" (Jn.5:47).

If we go straight from there and read Jn.7:15-24 it makes a clear connection. Jesus has just referred to the writing of Moses, and immediately the astonished Jewish leaders break in: "How can this fellow read when he is quite uneducated?" We will understand the sense and the relevance of Jn.7:15-24 far better if we assume that it originally came after Jn.5:47; and with that in mind we turn to the passage itself.

The criticism was that Jesus was quite uneducated. It is exactly the same accusation that was made against Peter and John when they stood before the Sanhedrin (Ac.4:13). Jesus had been to no rabbinic school. It was the practice that only the disciple of an accredited teacher was entitled to expound scripture, and to talk about the law. No Rabbi ever made a statement on his own authority. He always began: "There is a teaching that..." He then went on to cite quotations and authorities for every statement he made. And here was this Galilaean carpenter, a man with no training whatever, daring to quote and to expound Moses to them.

Jesus could very well have walked straight into a trap here. He might have said: "I need no teacher; I am self-taught; I got my teaching and my wisdom from no one but myself." But, instead, he said in effect: "You ask who was my teacher? You ask what authority I produce for my exposition of scripture? My authority is God" Jesus claimed to be God-taught. It is in fact a claim he makes again and again. "I have not spoken on my own authority. The Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak" (Jn.12:49). "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority" (Jn.14:10).

Frank Salisbury tells of a letter he received after he had painted his great picture of the burial of the unknown warrior in Westminster Abbey. A fellow artist wrote: "I want to congratulate you on

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John 7:15-18

the great picture that you have painted--or rather the picture that God has helped you to paint." All great productions of the human mind and spirit are given by God. If we glory in being self-taught, if we claim that any discovery we have made is our own unaided work, we are, in the last analysis, glorifying only our own reputation and our own selves. The greatest of men think not of the power of their own mind or hand; they think always of the God who told them what they know and taught them what they can do.

Further, Jesus goes on to lay down a truth. Only the man who does God's will can truly understand His teaching. That is not a theological but a universal truth. We learn by doing. A doctor might learn the technique of surgery from textbooks. He might know the theory of every possible operation. But that would not make him a surgeon; he has to learn by doing. A man might learn the way in which an automobile engine works; in theory he might be able to carry out every possible repair and adjustment; but that would not make him an engineer; he has to learn by doing.

It is the same with the Christian life. If we wait until we have understood everything, we will never start at all. But if we begin by doing God's will as we know it, God's truth will become clearer and clearer to us. We learn by doing. If a man says: "I cannot be a Christian because there is so much of Christian doctrine that I do not understand, and I must wait until I understand it all," the answer is: "You never will understand it all; but if you start trying to live the Christian life, you will understand more and more of it as the days go on." In Christianity, as in all other things, the way to learn is to do.

Let us remember that this passage really ought to come after the story of the healing of the impotent man. Jesus has been accused of wickedness in that he healed the man on the Sabbath day; and he goes on to demonstrate that he was seeking only the glory of God and that there is no wickedness whatsoever in his action.

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John 7:19-24

A WISE ARGUMENT

John 7:19-24

"Did not Moses give you the law--and not one of you really keeps it? Why do you try to kill me?" The crowd answered: "You are mad! Who is trying to kill you?" Jesus answered them: "I have done only one deed and you are all astonished by it. Moses gave you the rite of circumcision (not that it had its origin in Moses--it came down from your fathers) and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man can be circumcised on the Sabbath, without breaking the law of Moses, are you angry at me for making the entire body of a man whole on the Sabbath? Stop judging by appearances, and make your judgment just."

Before we begin to look at this passage in detail, we must note one point. We must picture this scene as a debate between Jesus and the leaders of the Jews, with the crowd standing all around. The crowd is listening as the debate goes on. Jesus is aiming to justify his action in healing the man on the Sabbath day and thereby technically breaking the Sabbath law. He begins by saying that Moses gave them the Sabbath law, and yet none of them keeps it absolutely. (What he meant by that we shall shortly see.) If he then breaks the law to heal a man, why do they, who themselves break the law, seek to kill him?

At this point the crowd break in with the exclamation: "You are mad!" and the question: "Who is trying to kill you?" The crowd have not yet realized the malignant hatred of their leaders; they are not yet aware of the plots to eliminate him. They think that Jesus has a persecution mania, that his imagination is disordered and his mind upset; and they think in this fashion because they do not know the facts. Jesus does not answer the question of the crowd which was not really a question so much as a kind of bystanders' interjection; but goes on with his argument.

Jesus' argument is this. It was the law that a child should be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. "And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Lev.12:3). Obviously that day would often fall on a Sabbath; and the law was quite clear that "everything necessary for circumcision may be done on the Sabbath day." So Jesus' argument runs like this. "You say that you fully observe the law which came to you through Moses which lays it down that there must be no work done on the Sabbath day, and under work you have included every kind of medical attention which is not necessary actually to save life. And yet you have allowed circumcision to be carried out on the Sabbath day.

"Now circumcision is two things. It is medical attention to one part of a man's body; and the body has actually two hundred and forty-eight parts. (That was the Jewish reckoning.) Further, circumcision is a kind of mutilation; it is actually taking something from the body. How can you in reason blame me for making a man's body whole when you allow yourselves to mutilate it on the Sabbath day?" That is an extremely clever argument.

Jesus finishes by telling them to try to see below the surface of things and to judge fairly. If they do, they will not be able any longer to accuse him of breaking the law. A passage like this may sound remote to us; but when we read it we can see the keen, clear, logical mind of Jesus in

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John 7:19-24

operation, we can see him meeting the wisest and most subtle men of his day with their own weapons and on their own terms, and we can see him defeating them.

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John 7:31-36

SEARCHING--IN TIME

John 7:31-36

Many of the crowd believed in him. "When the Anointed One of God comes," they said, "surely he cannot do greater signs than this man has done?" The Pharisees heard the crowds carrying on these discussions about him; and the chief priests and Pharisees despatched officers to arrest him. So Jesus said: "For a little while I am to be with you, and then I go back to him who sent me. You will search for me and you will not find me. You cannot come where I am." So the Jew., said to each other: "Where is this fellow going to go that we will not be able to find him? Surely he is not going to go to the Jews who are dispersed among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What can this word of his mean-- 'You will search for me and you will not find me' and 'You cannot come where I am'?"

Certain of the crowd could not help believing that Jesus was the Anointed One of God. They believed that no one could possibly do greater things than he was doing. That was in fact the argument which Jesus himself used when John the Baptist was in doubt about whether he was the one who was to come or if they had to look for another. When John sent his messengers, Jesus' answer was: "Go and tell John what you hear and see" (Matt.11:1-6). The very fact that there were those who were trembling on the brink of acceptance moved the authorities to action. They sent their officers--most likely, the Temple police--to arrest him. Jesus said that he was only with them for a little time; and the day would come when they would search for him, not to arrest him, but to obtain what only he could give, and it would be too late. He would be gone where they could never follow.

Jesus meant that he would return to his Father, from whom by their disobedience they had shut themselves out. But his hearers did not understand. Throughout the centuries the Jews had been scattered across the world. Sometimes they had been forcibly removed as exiles; sometimes in the time of their country's misfortune they had emigrated to other lands. There was one comprehensive term for the Jews who lived outside Palestine. They were called the Diaspora, the dispersion, and scholars still use this term to describe the Jews who live outside Palestine. That is the phrase the people used here. "Is Jesus going away to the Diaspora? Will he even go the length of going away and preaching to the Greeks and so become lost in the masses of the Gentile world? Is he going to run away so far that he will be completely out of reach?" It is amazing how a taunt became a prophecy. The Jews meant it for a jest, but as the years went on it became blessedly true that it was to the Gentiles that the Risen Christ went out.

This passage brings us face to face with the promise and the threat of Jesus. Jesus had said: "Seek and you will find" (Matt.7:7). Now he says: "You will seek me and you will not find me" (Jn.7:34). Long ago the ancient prophet had put the two things together in a wonderful way: "Seek the Lord while he may be found" (Isa.55:6). It is characteristic of this life that time is limited. Physical strength decays and there are things a man can do at thirty that he cannot do at sixty. Mental vigour weakens and there are mental tasks to which a man can address himself in his youth and in his prime which are beyond him in his age. Moral fibre grows less muscular; and if a man allows some

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John 7:31-36

habit to dominate him there may come the day when he cannot break himself of it, even if at the beginning he could easily have ejected it from his life.

It is like that with us and Jesus Christ. What Jesus was saying to these people was: "You can awaken to a sense of need too late." A man may so long refuse Christ, that in the end he does not even see his beauty; evil becomes his good and repentance becomes impossible. So long as sin still hurts us, and the unattainable good still beckons us, the chance to seek and find is still there. But a man must have a care lest he grow so used to sin that he does not know that he is sinning and neglect God so long that he forgets that he exists. For then the sense of need dies, and if there is no sense of need, we cannot seek, and if we cannot seek, we will never find. The one thing a man must never lose is his sense of sin.

Barclay's Commentary

John 7:37-44

THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER

John 7:37-44 (Part 1)

On the last, the great day of the festival, Jesus stood and cried: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. As the scripture says: 'He who believes in me--rivers of living water shall flow from his belly.'" It was about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, that he said this. For as yet there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified. When they heard these words some of the crowd said: "This is really the promised Prophet." Others said: "This is the Anointed One of God." But some said: "Surely the Anointed One of God does not come from Galilee? Does the scripture not say that the Anointed One of God is a descendant of David, and that he is to come from Bethlehem, the village where David used to live?" So there was a division of opinion in the crowd because of him. Some of them would have liked to arrest him, but none laid hands on him.

All the events of this chapter took place during the Festival of Tabernacles; and properly to understand them we must know the significance, and at least some of the ritual of that Festival.

The Festival of Tabernacles or Booths was the third of the trio of great Jewish Festivals, attendance at which was compulsory for all adult male Jews who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem--the Passover, the Festival of Pentecost, and the Festival of Tabernacles. It fell on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, that is, about 15th October. Like all the great Jewish festivals it had a double significance.

First, it had an historical significance. It received its name from the fact that all through it people left their houses and lived in little booths. During the Festival the booths sprang up everywhere, on the flat roofs of the houses, in the streets, in the city squares, in the gardens, and even in the very courts of the Temple. The law laid it down that the booths must not be permanent structures but built specially for the occasion. Their walls were made of branches and fronds, and had to be such that they would give protection from the weather but not shut out the sun. The roof had to be thatched, but the thatching had to be wide enough for the stars to be seen at night. The historical significance of all this was to remind the people in unforgettable fashion that once they had been homeless wanderers in the desert without a roof over their heads (Lev.23:40-43).

Its purpose was "that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." Originally it lasted seven days, but by the time of Jesus an eighth day had been added.

Second, it had an agricultural significance. It was supremely a harvest-thanksgiving festival. It is sometimes called the Festival of the Ingathering (Exo.23:16; Exo.34:22); and it was the most popular festival of all. For that reason it was sometimes called simply The Feast (1Kgs.8:2), and sometimes The Festival of the Lord (Lev.23:39). It stood out above all others. The people called it "the season of our gladness," for it marked the ingathering of all the harvests, since by this time the barley, the wheat, and the grapes were all safely gathered in. As the law had it, it was to be celebrated "at the end of the year when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labour" (Exo.23:16); it was to be kept "when you make your ingathering from your threshing floor and your

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John 7:37-44

wine press" (Deut.16:13,16). It was not only thanksgiving for one harvest; it was glad thanksgiving for all the bounty of nature which made life possible and living happy.

In Zechariah's dream of the new world it was this festival which was to be celebrated everywhere (Zech.14:16-18). Josephus called it "the holiest and the greatest festival among the Jews" (Antiquities of the Jews, 3: 10: 4). It was not only a time for the rich; it was laid down that the servant, the stranger, the widow and the poor were all to share in the universal joy.

One particular ceremony was connected with it. The worshippers were told to take "the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook" (Lev.23:40). The Sadducees said that was a description of the material out of which the booths had to be built; the Pharisees said it was a description of the things the worshippers had to bring with them when they came to the Temple. Naturally the people accepted the interpretation of the Pharisees, for it gave them a vivid ceremony in which to participate.

This special ceremony is very closely connected with this passage and with the words of Jesus. Quite certainly he spoke with it in his mind, and possibly even with it as an immediate background. Each day of the festival the people came with their palms and their willows to the Temple; with them they formed a kind of screen or roof and marched round the great altar. At the same time a priest took a golden pitcher which held three logs--that is, about two pints--and went down to the Pool of Siloam and filled it with water. It was carried back through the Water Gate while the people recited Isa.12:3: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." The water was carried up to the Temple altar and poured out as an offering to God. While this was being done The Hallel--that is, Ps.113-118--was sung to the accompaniment of flutes by the Levite choir. When they came to the words, "O give thanks to the Lord" (Ps.118:1), and again to the words, "O work now then salvation" (Ps.118:25), and finally to the closing words, "O give thanks to the Lord" (Ps.118:29), the worshippers shouted and waved their palms towards the altar. The whole dramatic ceremony was a vivid thanksgiving for God's good gift of water and an acted prayer for rain, and a memory of the water which sprang from the rock when they travelled through the wilderness. On the last day the ceremony was doubly impressive for they marched seven times round the altar in memory of the sevenfold circuit round the walls of Jericho, whereby the walls fell down and the city was taken.

Against this background and perhaps at that very moment, Jesus' voice rang out: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink." It is as if Jesus said: "You are thanking and glorifying God for the water which quenches the thirst of your bodies. Come to me if you want water which will quench the thirst of your soul." He was using that dramatic moment to turn men's thoughts to the thirst for God and the eternal things.

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John 7:37-44

THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER

John 7:37-44 (Part 2)

Now that we have seen the vivid background of this passage we must look at it in more detail.

The promise of Jesus presents us with something of a problem. He said: "He who believes in me-- rivers of water shall flow from his belly." And he introduces that statement by saying, "as scripture says." No one has ever been able to identify that quotation satisfactorily, and the question is, just what does it mean? There are two distinct possibilities.

(i) It may refer to the man who comes to Jesus and accepts him. He will have within him a river of refreshing water. It would be another way of saying what Jesus said to the woman of Samaria: "The water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn.4:14). It would be another way of putting Isaiah's beautiful saying: "And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your desire with good things, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Isa.58:11). The meaning would be that Jesus can give a man the refreshment of the Holy Spirit.

The Jews placed all the thoughts and the emotions in certain parts of the body. The heart was the seat of the intellect; the kidneys and the belly were the seat of the inmost feelings. As the writer of the Proverbs had it: "The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts" (Prov.20:27). This would mean that Jesus was promising a cleansing, refreshing, life-giving stream of the Holy Spirit so that our thoughts and feelings would be purified and revitalized. It is as if Jesus said: "Come to me and accept me; and I will put into you through my Spirit a new life which will give you purity and satisfaction, and give you the kind of life you have always longed for and never had." Whichever interpretation we take, it is quite certain that what this one stands for is true.

(ii) The other interpretation is that "rivers of living water shall flow from his belly" may refer to Jesus himself. It may be a description of the Messiah which Jesus is taking from somewhere which we cannot place. The Christians always identified Jesus with the rock which gave the Israelites water in the wilderness (Exo.17:6). Paul took that image and applied it to Christ (1Cor.10:4). John tells how there came forth at the thrust of the soldier's spear water and blood from Jesus' side (Jn.19:34). The water stands for the purification which comes in baptism and the blood for the atoning death of the Cross. This symbol of the life-giving water which comes from God is often in the Old Testament (Ps.105:41; Eze.47:1; Eze.47:12). Joel has the great picture: "And a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord" (Jl.3:18). It may well be that John is thinking of Jesus as the fountain from which the cleansing stream flows.

Water is that without which man cannot live; and Christ is the one without whom man cannot live and dare not die. Again, whichever interpretation we choose, that, too, is deeply true.

Whether we take this picture as referring to Christ or to the man who accepts him, it means that from Christ there flows the strength and power and cleansing which alone give us life in the real sense of the term.

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John 7:37-44

In this passage there is a startling thing. The King James Version and the Revised Standard tone it down, but in the best Greek manuscript there is the strange statement in Jn.7:39: "For as yet there was no Spirit." What is the meaning of that? Think of it this way. A great power can exist for years and even centuries without men being able to tap it. To take a very relevant example there has always been atomic power in this world; men did not invent it. But only in our own time have men tapped and used it. The Holy Spirit has always existed; but men never really enjoyed his full power until after Pentecost. As it has been finely said, "There could be no Pentecost without Calvary." It was only when men had known Jesus that they really knew the Spirit. Before that the Spirit had been a power, but now he is a person, for he has become to us nothing other than the presence of the Risen Christ always with us.

In this apparently startling sentence John is not saying that the Spirit did not exist; but that it took the life and death of Jesus Christ to open the floodgates for the Spirit to become real and powerful to all men.

We must notice how this passage finishes. Some people thought that Jesus was the prophet whom Moses had promised (Deut.18:15). Some thought that he was the Anointed One of God; and there followed a wrangle about whether or not the Anointed One of God must come from Bethlehem. Here is tragedy. A great religious experience had ended in the aridity of a theological wrangle.

That is what above all we must avoid. Jesus is not someone about whom to argue; he is someone to know and love and enjoy. If we have one view of him and someone else has another, it does not matter so long as both of us find him Saviour and accept him as Lord. Even if we explain our religious experience in different ways, that should never divide us, for it is the experience that is important, and not our explanation of it.

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John 7:45-52

UNWILLING ADMIRATION AND TIMID DEFENCE

John 7:45-52

So the officers came to the chief priests and the Pharisees. They said to them: "Why did you not bring him here?" The attendants answered: "Never did a man speak as he speaks." So the Pharisees answered: "Surely you too have not been led astray? Has anyone from the authorities believed in him? Or anyone from the Pharisees? They have not; but the mob which is ignorant of the law and which is accursed believes in him!" Nicodemus (the man who came to him before) said to them, for he was one of them; "Surely our law does not condemn a man unless it first hears a statement of the case from him, and has first-hand information about what he is doing?" They answered him: "Surely you too are not from Galilee? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

We have certain vivid reactions to Jesus.

(i) The reaction of the officers was bewildered amazement. They had gone out to arrest Jesus and had come back without him, because never in their lives had they heard anyone speak as he did. Really to listen to Jesus is an unparalleled experience for any man.

(ii) The reaction of the chief priests and Pharisees was contempt. The Pharisees had a phrase by which they described the ordinary, simple people who did not observe the thousands of regulations of the ceremonial law. They called them the People of the Land; to them they were beneath contempt. To marry a daughter to one of them was like exposing her bound and helpless to a beast. "The masses who do not know the law are accursed." The rabbinic law said: "Six things are laid down about the People of the Land: entrust no testimony to them, take no testimony from them, trust them with no secret, do not appoint them guardians of an orphan, do not make them custodians of charitable funds, do not accompany them on a journey." It was forbidden to be a guest of one of the People of the Land, or to entertain such a person as a guest. It was even laid down that, wherever it was possible, nothing should be bought or sold from one of them. In their proud aristocracy and intellectual snobbery and spiritual pride, the Pharisees looked down in contempt on the ordinary man. Their plea was: "Nobody who is spiritually and academically of any account has believed on Jesus. Only ignorant fools accept him." It is indeed a terrible thing when a man thinks himself either too clever or too good to need Jesus Christ--and it happens still.

(iii) There was the reaction of Nicodemus. It was a timid reaction, for he did not defend Jesus directly. He dared only to quote certain legal maxims which were relevant. The law laid it down that every man must receive justice (Exo.23:1; Deut.1:16); and part of justice was and is that he must have a right to state his case and cannot be condemned on secondhand information. The Pharisees proposed to break that law, but it is clear that Nicodemus did not carry his protest any further. His heart told him to defend Jesus but his head told him not to take the risk. The Pharisees flung catchwords at him; they told him that obviously no prophet could come out of Galilee and taunted him with having a connection with the Galilaean rabble, and he said no more.

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John 7:45-52

Often a man finds himself in a situation in which he would like to defend Jesus and in which he knows he ought to show his colours. Often he makes a kind of half-hearted defence, and is then reduced to an uncomfortable and ashamed silence. In our defence of Jesus Christ it is better to be reckless with our hearts than prudent with our heads. To stand up for him may bring us mockery and unpopularity; it may even mean hardship and sacrifice. But the fact remains that Jesus said he would confess before his Father the man who confessed him on earth, and deny before his Father the man who denied him on earth. Loyalty to Christ may produce a cross on earth, but it brings a crown in eternity.

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John 7:53-8:11

WRETCHEDNESS AND PITY

John 7:53-8:11 (Part 1)

And each of them went to his own house; but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he was again in the Temple precincts, and all the people came to him. He sat down and went on teaching them. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman arrested for adultery. They set her in the midst and said to him: "Teacher, this woman was arrested as she was committing adultery--in the very act. In the law Moses enjoined us to stone women like this. What do you say about her?" They were testing him when they said this, so that they might have some ground on which to accuse him. Jesus stooped down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they went on asking him their question, he straightened himself and said to them: "Let the man among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her." And again he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. One by one those who had heard what he said went out, beginning from the eldest down to the youngest.

So Jesus was left alone, and the woman was still there in the midst. Jesus straightened himself and said to her: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said: "No one, sir." Jesus said: "I am not going to pass judgment on you either. Go, and from now on, sin no more."

[This incident is not included in all the ancient manuscripts and appears only in a footnote in the Revised Standard Version; see: NOTE ON THE STORY OF THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY]

The scribes and Pharisees were out to get some charge on which they could discredit Jesus; and here they thought they had impaled him inescapably on the horns of a dilemma. When a difficult legal question arose, the natural and routine thing was to take it to a Rabbi for a decision. So the scribes and Pharisees approached Jesus as a Rabbi with a woman taken in adultery.

In the eyes of the Jewish law adultery was a serious crime. The Rabbis said: "Every Jew must die before he will commit idolatry, murder or adultery." Adultery was, in fact one of the three gravest sins and it was punishable by, death, although there were certain differences in respect of the way in which the death penalty was to be carried out. Lev.20:10 lays it down: "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death." There the method of death is not specified. Deut.22:13-24 lays down the penalty in the case of a girl who is already betrothed. In a case like that she and the man who seduced her are to be brought outside the city gates, "and you shall stone them to death with stones." The Mishnah, that is, the Jewish codified law, states that the penalty for adultery is strangulation, and even the method of strangulation is laid down.

"The man is to be enclosed in dung up to his knees, and a soft towel set within a rough towel is to be placed around his neck (in order that no mark may be made, for the punishment is God's punishment). Then one man draws in one direction and another in the other direction, until he be dead." The Mishnah reiterates that death by stoning is the penalty for a girl who is betrothed and who then commits adultery. From the purely legal point of view the scribes and Pharisees were perfectly correct. This woman was liable to death by stoning.

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John 7:53-8:11

The dilemma into which they sought to put Jesus was this: If he said that the woman ought to be stoned to death, two things followed. First, he would lose the name he had gained for love and for mercy and never again would be called the friend of sinners. Second, he would come into collision with the Roman law, for the Jews had no power to pass or carry out the death sentence on anyone. If he said that the woman should be pardoned, it could immediately be said that he was teaching men to break the law of Moses, and that he was condoning and even encouraging people to commit adultery. That was the trap in which the scribes and Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus. But he turned their attack in such a way that it recoiled against themselves.

At first Jesus stooped down and wrote with his finger on the ground. Why did he do that? There may be four possible reasons.

(i) He may quite simply have wished to gain time and not be rushed into a decision. In that brief moment he may have been both thinking the thing out and taking it to God.

(ii) Certain manuscripts add, "As though he did not hear them." Jesus may well have deliberately forced the scribes and Pharisees to repeat their charges, so that, in repeating them, they might possibly realize the sadistic cruelty which lay behind them.

(iii) Seeley in *Ecce Homo* makes an interesting suggestion. "Jesus was seized with an intolerable sense of shame. He could not meet the eye of the crowd, or of the accusers, and perhaps at that moment least of all of the woman.... In his burning embarrassment and confusion he stooped down so as to hide his face, and began writing with his fingers upon the ground." It may well be that the leering, lustful look on the faces of the scribes and Pharisees, the bleak cruelty in their eyes, the prurient curiosity of the crowd, the shame of the woman, all combined to twist the very heart of Jesus in agony and pity, so that he hid his eyes.

(iv) By far the most interesting suggestion emerges from certain of the later manuscripts. The Armenian translates the passage this way: "He himself, bowing his head, was writing with his finger on the earth to declare their sins; and they were seeing their several sins on the stones." The suggestion is that Jesus was writing in the dust the sins of the very men who were accusing the woman. There may be something in that. The normal Greek word for to write is *graphein* (GSN1125); but here the word used is *katagraphein*, which can mean to write down a record against someone. (One of the meanings of *kata* (GSN2596) is against). So in Jb.13:26 Job says: "Thou writest (*katagraphein*) bitter things against me." It may be that Jesus was confronting those self-confident sadists with the record of their own sins.

However that may be, the scribes and Pharisees continued to insist on an answer--and they got it. Jesus said in effect: "All right! Stone her! But let the man that is without sin be the first to cast a stone." It may well be that the word for without sin (*anamatetos*, GSN0361) means not only without sin, but even without a sinful desire. Jesus was saying: "Yes, you may stone her--but only if you never wanted to do the same thing yourselves." There was a silence--and then slowly the accusers drifted away.

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John 7:53-8:11

So Jesus and the woman were left alone. As Augustine put it: "There remained a great misery (miseria) and a great pity (misericordia)." Jesus said to the woman: "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. Jesus said: "I am not for the moment going to pass judgment on you either. Go, and make a new start, and don't sin any more."

Barclay's Commentary

John 7:53-8:11

WRETCHEDNESS AND PITY

John 7:53-8:11 (Part 2)

This passage shows us two things about the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees.

(i) It shows us their conception of authority. The scribes and the Pharisees were the legal experts of the day; to them problems were taken for decision. It is clear that to them authority was characteristically critical, censorious and condemnatory. That authority should be based on sympathy, that its aim should be to reclaim the criminal and the sinner, never entered their heads. They conceived of their function as giving them the right to stand over others like grim invigilators, to watch for every mistake and every deviation from the law, and to descend on them with savage and unforgiving punishment; they never dreamed that it might lay upon them the obligation to cure the wrongdoer.

There are still those who regard a position of authority as giving them the right to condemn and the duty to punish. They think that such authority as they have has given them the right to be moral watch-dogs trained to tear the sinner to pieces; but all true authority is founded on sympathy. When George Whitefield saw the criminal on the way to the gallows, he uttered the famous sentence: "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

The first duty of authority is to try to understand the force of the temptations which drove the sinner to sin and the seductiveness of the circumstances in which sin became so attractive. No man can pass judgment on another unless he at least tries to understand what the other has come through. The second duty of authority is to seek to reclaim the wrongdoer. Any authority which is solely concerned with punishment is wrong; any authority, which, in its exercise, drives a wrongdoer either to despair or to resentment, is a failure. The function of authority is not to banish the sinner from all decent society, still less to wipe him out; it is to make him into a good man. The man set in authority must be like a wise physician; his one desire must be to heal.

(ii) This incident shows vividly and cruelly the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees to people. They were not looking on this woman as a person at all; they were looking on her only as a thing, an instrument whereby they could formulate a charge against Jesus. They were using her, as a man might use a tool, for their own purposes. To them she had no name, no personality, no feelings; she was simply a pawn in the game whereby they sought to destroy Jesus.

It is always wrong to regard people as things; it is always unchristian to regard people as cases. It was said of Beatrice Webb, afterwards Lady Passfield, the famous economist, that "she saw men as specimens walking." Dr. Paul Tournier in *A Doctor's Casebook* talks of what he calls "the personalism of the Bible." He points out how fond the Bible is of names. God says to Moses: "I know you by name" (Exo.33:17). God said to Cyrus; "It is I, the God of Israel, who call you by your name" (Isa.45:3). There are whole pages of names in the Bible. Dr. Tournier insists that this is proof that the Bible thinks of people first and foremost, not as fractions of the mass, or abstractions, or ideas, or cases, but as persons. "The proper name," Dr. Tournier writes, "is the symbol of the person."

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John 7:53-8:11

If I forget my patients' names, if I say to myself, 'Ah! There's that gall-bladder type or that consumptive that I saw the other day,' I am interesting myself more in their gall-bladders or in their lungs than in themselves as persons." He insists that a patient must be always a person, and never a case.

It is extremely unlikely that the scribes and the Pharisees even knew this woman's name. To them she was nothing but a case of shameless adultery that could now be used as an instrument to suit their purposes. The minute people become things the spirit of Christianity is dead.

God uses his authority to love men into goodness; to God no person ever becomes a thing. We must use such authority as we have always to understand and always at least to try to mend the person who has made the mistake; and we will never even begin to do that unless we remember that every man and woman is a person, not a thing.

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John 7:53-8:11

WRETCHEDNESS AND PITY

John 7:53-8:11 (Part 3)

Further, this incident tells us a great deal about Jesus and his attitude to the sinner.

(i) It was a first principle of Jesus that only the man who himself is without fault has the right to express judgment on the fault of others. "Judge not," said Jesus, "that you be not judged" (Matt.7:1). He said that the man who attempted to judge his brother was like a man with a plank in his own eye trying to take a speck of dust out of someone else's eye (Matt.7:3-5). One of the commonest faults in life is that so many of us demand standards from others that we never even try to meet ourselves; and so many of us condemn faults in others which are glaringly obvious in our own lives. The qualification for judging is not knowledge--we all possess that; it is achievement in goodness--none of us is perfect there. The very facts of the human situation mean that only God has the right to judge, for the simple reason that no man is good enough to judge any other.

(ii) It was also a first principle with Jesus that our first emotion towards anyone who has made a mistake should be pity. It has been said that the duty of the doctor is "sometimes to heal, often to afford relief and always to bring consolation." When a person suffering from some ailment is brought to a doctor, he does not regard him with loathing even if he is suffering from a loathsome disease. In fact the physical revulsion which is sometimes inevitable is swallowed up by the great desire to help and to heal. When we are confronted with someone who has made a mistake, our first feeling ought to be, not, "I'll have nothing more to do with someone who could act like that," but, "What can I do to help? What can I do to undo the consequences of this mistake?" Quite simply, we must always extend to others the same compassionate pity we would wish to be extended to ourselves if we were involved in a like situation.

(iii) It is very important that we should understand just how Jesus did treat this woman. It is easy to draw the wrong lesson altogether and to gain the impression that Jesus forgave lightly and easily, as if the sin did not matter. What he said was: "I am not going to condemn you just now; go, and sin no more." In effect what he was doing was not to abandon judgment and say, "Don't worry; it's quite all right." What he did was, as it were, to defer sentence. He said, "I am not going to pass a final judgment now; go and prove that you can do better. You have sinned; go and sin no more and I'll help you all the time. At the end of the day we will see how you have lived." Jesus' attitude to the sinner involved a number of things.

(a) It involved the second chance. It is as if Jesus said to the woman: "I know you have made a mess of things; but life is not finished yet; I am giving you another chance, the chance to redeem yourself." Someone has written the lines:

"How I wish that there was some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning Again,
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,

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And never put on again."

In Jesus there is the gospel of the second chance. He was always intensely interested, not only in what a person had been, but also in what a person could be. He did not say that what they had done did not matter; broken laws and broken hearts always matter; but he was sure that every man has a future as well as a past.

(b) It involved pity. The basic difference between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees was that they wished to condemn; he wished to forgive. If we read between the lines of this story it is quite clear that they wished to stone this woman to death and were going to take pleasure in doing so. They knew the thrill of exercising the power to condemn; Jesus knew the thrill of exercising the power to forgive. Jesus regarded the sinner with pity born of love; the scribes and Pharisees regarded him with disgust born of self-righteousness.

(c) It involved challenge. Jesus confronted this woman with the challenge of the sinless life. He did not say: "It's all right; don't worry; just go on as you are doing." He said: "It's all wrong; go out and fight; change your life from top to bottom; go, and sin no more." Here was no easy forgiveness; here was a challenge which pointed a sinner to heights of goodness of which she had never dreamed. Jesus confronts the bad life with the challenge of the good.

(d) It involved belief in human nature. When we come to think of it, it is a staggering thing that Jesus should say to a woman of loose morals: "Go, and sin no more." The amazing, heart-uplifting thing about him was his belief in men and women. When he was confronted with someone who had gone wrong, he did not say: "You are a wretched and a hopeless creature." He said: "Go, and sin no more." He believed that with his help the sinner has it in him to become the saint. His method was not to blast men with the knowledge--which they already possessed--that they were miserable sinners, but to inspire them with the unglimped discovery that they were potential saints.

(e) It involved warning, clearly unspoken but implied. Here we are face to face with the eternal choice. Jesus confronted the woman with a choice that day--either to go back to her old ways or to reach out to the new way with him. This story is unfinished, for every life is unfinished until it stands before God.

[As we noted at the beginning, this story does not appear in all the ancient manuscripts. A discussion of the textual questions involved will be found under: NOTE ON THE STORY OF THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY]

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John 8:12-20

THE LIGHT MEN FAILED TO RECOGNIZE

John 8:12-20 (Part 1)

So Jesus again continued to speak to them. "I am the Light of the World," he said. "He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but he will have the light of life." So the Pharisees said to him: "You are bearing witness about yourself. Your witness is not true." Jesus answered: "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my witness is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going to. You do not know where I came from and where I am going to. You form your judgments on purely human grounds. I do not judge anyone. But if I do form a judgment, my judgment is true, because I am not alone in my judgment, but I and the Father who sent me join in such a judgment. It stands written in your law, that the witness of two persons is to be accepted as true. It is I who witness about myself, and the Father who sent me also witnesses about me." They said to him: "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered: "You know neither me nor my Father. If you had known me you would know my Father too." He spoke these words in the treasury while he was teaching in the Temple precincts; and no one laid violent hands upon him, because his hour had not yet come.

The scene of this argument with the Jewish authorities was in the Temple treasury, which was in the Court of the Women. The first Temple court was the Court of the Gentiles; the second was the Court of the Women. It was so called because women might not pass beyond it unless they were actually about to offer sacrifice on the altar which was in the Court of the Priests. Round the Court of the Women there was a colonnade or porch; and, in that porch, set against the wall, there were thirteen treasure chests into which people dropped their offerings. These were called The Trumpets because they were shaped like trumpets, narrow at the top and swelling out towards the foot.

The thirteen treasure chests all had their allotted offering. Into the first two were dropped the half shekels which every Jew had to pay towards the upkeep of the Temple. Into the third and fourth were dropped sums which would purchase the two pigeons which a woman had to offer for her purification after the birth of a child (Lev. 12:8). Into the fifth were put contributions towards the cost of the wood which was needed to keep the altar fire alight. Into the sixth were dropped contributions towards the cost of the incense which was used at the Temple services. Into the seventh went contributions towards the upkeep of the golden vessels which were used at these services. Sometimes a man or a family set apart a certain sum to make some trespass- or thank-offering; into the remaining six trumpets people dropped any money which remained after such an offering had been made, or anything extra which they wished to offer.

Clearly the Temple treasury would be a busy place, with a constant flow of worshippers coming and going. There would be no better place to collect an audience of devout people and to teach them than the Temple treasury.

In this passage Jesus makes the great claim: "I am the Light of the World." It is very likely that the background against which he made it made it doubly vivid and impressive. The festival with which John connects these discourses is the Festival of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:2). We have already seen

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(Jn.7:37) how its ceremonies lent drama to Jesus' claim to give to men the living water. But there was another ceremony connected with this festival.

On the evening of its first day there was a ceremony called The Illumination of the Temple. It took place in the Court of the Women. The court was surrounded with deep galleries, erected to hold the spectators. In the centre four great candelabra were prepared. When the dark came the four great candelabra were lit and, it was said, they sent such a blaze of light throughout Jerusalem that every courtyard was lit up with their brilliance. Then all night long, until cock-crow the next morning, the greatest and the wisest and the holiest men in Israel danced before the Lord and sang psalms of joy and praise while the people watched. Jesus is saying: "You have seen the blaze of the Temple illuminations piercing the darkness of the night. I am the Light of the World, and, for the man who follows me there will be light, not only for one exciting night, but for all the pathway of his life. The light in the Temple is a brilliant light, but in the end it flickers and dies. I am the Light which lasts for ever."

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John 8:12-20

THE LIGHT MEN FAILED TO RECOGNIZE

John 8:12-20 (Part 2)

Jesus said: "He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." The light of life means two things. The Greek can mean either the light which issues from the source of life or the light which gives life. In this passage it means both. Jesus is the very light of God come among men; and he is the light which gives men life. Just as the flower can never blossom when it never sees the sunlight, so our lives can never flower with the grace and beauty they ought to have until they are irradiated with the light of the presence of Jesus.

In this passage Jesus talks of following himself. We often speak of following Jesus; we often urge men to do so. What do we mean? The Greek for to follow is *akolouthein* (GSN0190); and its meanings combine to shed a flood of light on what it means to follow Jesus. *Akolouthein* (GSN0190) has five different but closely connected meanings.

(i) It is often used of a soldier following his captain. On the long route marches, into battle, in campaigns in strange lands, the soldier follows wherever the captain may lead. The Christian is the soldier whose commander is Christ.

(ii) It is often used of a slave accompanying his master. Wherever the master goes the slave is in attendance upon him, always ready to spring to his service and to carry out the tasks he gives him to do. He is literally at his master's beck and call. The Christian is the slave whose joy it is always to serve Christ.

(iii) It is often used of accepting a wise counsellor's opinion. When a man is in doubt he goes to the expert, and if he is wise he accepts the judgment he receives. The Christian is the man who guides his life and conduct by the counsel of Christ.

(iv) It is often used of giving obedience to the laws of a city or a state. If a man is to be a useful member of any society or citizen of any community, he must agree to abide by its laws. The Christian, being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, accepts the law of the kingdom and of Christ as the law which governs his life.

(v) It is often used of following a teacher's line of argument, or of following the gist of someone's speech. The Christian is the man who has understood the meaning of the teaching of Christ. He has not listened in dull incomprehension or with slack inattention. He takes the message into his mind and understands, receives the words into his memory and remembers, and hides them in his heart and obeys.

To be a follower of Christ is to give oneself body, soul and spirit into the obedience of the Master; and to enter upon that following is to walk in the light. When we walk alone we are bound to stumble and grope, for so many of life's problems are beyond our solution. When we walk alone we are bound to take the wrong way, because we have no secure map of life. We need the heavenly wisdom to walk the earthly way. The man who has a sure guide and an accurate map is the man

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who is bound to come in safety to his journey's end. Jesus Christ is that guide; he alone possesses the map to life. To follow him is to walk in safety through life and afterwards to enter into glory.

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John 8:12-20

THE LIGHT THAT MEN FAILED TO RECOGNIZE

John 8:12-20 (Part 3)

When Jesus made his claim to be the Light of the World the scribes and Pharisees reacted with hostility. That claim would sound even more astonishing to them than to us. To them it would sound like a claim--as indeed it was--to be the Messiah, and, even more, to do the work that only God could do. The word light was specially associated in Jewish thought and language with God. "The Lord is my light" (Ps.27:1). "The Lord will be your everlasting light" (Isa.60:19). "By his light I walked through darkness" (Jb.29:3). "When I sit in darkness the Lord will be a light to me" (Mic.7:8). The Rabbis declared that the name of the Messiah was Light. When Jesus claimed to be the Light of the World, he was making a claim than which none could possibly be higher.

The argument of this passage is difficult and complicated, but it involves three strands.

(i) The Jews first insisted that a statement such as Jesus made could not be regarded as accurate because it was backed by insufficient witness. It was, as they saw it, backed by his word alone; and it was Jewish law that any statement must be founded on the evidence of two witnesses before it could be regarded as true. "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained" (Deut.19:15). "On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses he that is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness" (Deut.17:6). "No person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness" (Num.35:30). Jesus' answer was twofold.

First, he answered that his own witness was enough. He was so conscious of his own authority that no other witness was necessary. This was not pride or self-confidence. It was simply the supreme instance of the kind of thing which happens every day. A great surgeon is confident in his own verdict; he does not need anyone to support him; his witness is his own skill. A great lawyer or judge is sure of his own interpretation and application of the law. It is not that he is proud of his own knowledge; it is simply that he knows that he knows. Jesus was so aware of his closeness to God that he needed no other authority for his claims than his own relationship to God.

Second, Jesus said that in point of fact he had a second witness, and that second witness was God. How does God bear witness to the supreme authority of Jesus? (a) The witness of God is in Jesus' words. No man could speak with such wisdom unless God had given him knowledge. (b) The witness of God is in Jesus' deeds. No man could do such things unless God was acting through him. (c) The witness of God is in the effect of Jesus upon men. He works changes in men which are obviously beyond human power to work. The very fact that Jesus can make bad men good is proof that his power is not simply a man's power, but God's. (d) The witness of God is in the reaction of men to Jesus. Wherever and whenever Jesus has been fully displayed, wherever and whenever the Cross has been preached in all its grandeur and its splendour, there has been an immediate and overwhelming response in the hearts of men. That response is the Holy Spirit of God working and witnessing in the hearts of men.

It is God in our hearts who enables us to see God in Jesus.

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Jesus dealt in this way with the argument of the scribes and Pharisees that his words could not be accepted because of inadequate witness. His words were in fact backed by a double witness, that of his own consciousness of authority and that of God.

(ii) Second, Jesus dealt with his right to judge. His coming into the world was not primarily for judgment; it was for love. At the same time a man's reaction to Jesus is in itself a judgment; if he sees no beauty in him, he condemns himself. Here Jesus draws a contrast between two kinds of judgment.

(a) There is the judgment that is based on human knowledge and human standards and which never sees below the surface. That was the judgment of the scribes and Pharisees; and, in the last analysis, that is any human judgment, for in the nature of things men can never see below the surface of things.

(b) There is the judgment that is based on knowledge of all the facts, even the hidden facts, and that can belong only to God. Jesus claims that any judgment he passes is not a human one; it is God's--because He is so one with God. Therein lies at once our comfort and our warning. Only Jesus knows all the facts. That makes him merciful as none other can ever be; but it also enables him to see the sins in us which are hidden from the eyes of men. The judgment of Jesus is perfect because it is made with the knowledge which belongs to God.

(iii) Lastly, Jesus bluntly told the scribes and Pharisees that they had no real knowledge of God. The fact that they did not recognize him for who and what he was was the proof that they did not. The tragedy was that the whole history of Israel had been designed so that the Jews should recognize the Son of God when he came; but they had become so involved with their own ideas, so intent on their own way, so sure of their own conception of what religion was that they had become blind to God.

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John 8:21-30

THE FATAL INCOMPREHENSION

John 8:21-30 (Part 1)

So he said to them again: "I am going away, and you will search for me, and you will die in your sin. You cannot come where I am going." So the Jews said: "Surely he is not going to kill himself, because he is saying: 'You cannot come where I am going'?" He said to them: "You are from below, but I am from above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world. I said to you that you will die in your sins. For if you will not believe that I am who I am, you will die in your sins." They said to him: "Who are you?" Jesus said to them: "Anything I am saying to you is only the beginning. I have many things to say about you, and many judgments to deliver on you; but he who sent me is true, and I speak to the world what I have heard from him." They did not know that it was about the Father that he was speaking to them.

So Jesus said to them: "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am who I am, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but that I speak these things as the Father has taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do the things that are pleasing to him." As he said these things, many believed in him.

This is one of the passages of argument and debate so characteristic of the Fourth Gospel and so difficult to elucidate and to understand. In it various strands of argument are all woven together.

Jesus begins by telling his opponents that he is going away; and that, after he is gone, they will realize what they have missed, and will search for him and not find him. This is the true prophetic note. It reminds us of three things: (i) There are certain opportunities which come and which do not return. To every man is given the opportunity to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord; but that opportunity can be refused and lost. (ii) Implicit in this argument is the truth that life and time are limited. It is within an allotted span that we must make our decision for Christ. The time we have to make that decision is limited--and none of us knows what his limit is. There is therefore every reason for making it now. (iii) Just because there is opportunity in life there is also judgment. The greater the opportunity, the more clearly it beckons, the oftener it comes, the greater the judgment if it be refused or missed.

This passage brings us face to face with the glory of our opportunity, and the limitation of time in which to seize it.

When Jesus spoke about going away, he was speaking about his return to his Father and to his glory. That was precisely where his opponents could not follow him, because by their continuous disobedience and their refusal to accept him, they had shut themselves off from God. His opponents met his words with a grim and mocking jest. Jesus said that they could not follow where he went; and they suggested that perhaps he was going to kill himself. The point is that, according to Jewish thought, the depths of hell were reserved for those who took their own lives. With a kind of grim blasphemy, they were saying: "Maybe he will take his own life; maybe he is on the way to the depths of Hell"; it is true that we cannot and will not follow him there.

Jesus said that if they continued to refuse him they would die in their sins. That is a prophetic phrase (compare Eze.3:18; Eze.18:18). There are two things involved there: (i) The word for sin is

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hamartia, which originally had to do with shooting and literally means a missing of the target. The man who refuses to accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord has missed the target in life. He dies with life unrealized; and he therefore dies unfitted to enter into the higher life with God. (ii) The essence of sin is that it separates a man from God. When Adam, in the old story, committed the first sin, his first instinct was to hide himself from God (Gen.3:8-10). The man who dies in sin dies at enmity with God; the man who accepts Christ already walks with God, and death only opens the way to a closer walk. To refuse Christ is to be a stranger to God; to accept him is to be the friend of God, and in that friendship the fear of death is for ever banished.

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John 8:21-30

THE FATAL INCOMPREHENSION

John 8:21-30 (Part 2)

Jesus goes on to draw a series of contrasts. His opponents belong to earth, he is from heaven; they are of the world; he is not of the world.

John frequently talks about the world; the word in Greek is kosmos (GSN2889). He uses it in a way that is all his own.

(i) The kosmos (GSN2889) is the opposite of heaven. Jesus came from heaven into the world (Jn.1:9). He was sent by God into the world (Jn.3:17). He is not of the world; his opponents are of the world (Jn.8:23). The kosmos (GSN2889) is the changing, transient life that we live; it is all that is human as opposed to all that is divine.

(ii) Yet the kosmos (GSN2889) is not separated from God. First and foremost, it is God's creation (Jn.1:10). It was through God's word that his world was made. Different as the world is from heaven, there is yet no unbridgeable gulf between them.

(iii) More than that, the kosmos (GSN2889) is the object of God's love. God so loved the world that he sent his Son (Jn.3:16). However different it may be from all that is divine, God has never abandoned it; it is the object of his love and the recipient of his greatest gift.

(iv) But at the same time there is something wrong with the kosmos (GSN2889). There is a blindness in it; when the Creator came into the world, it did not recognize him (Jn.1:10). The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth (Jn.14:17). The world does not know God (Jn.17:25). There is, too, an hostility to God in the kosmos (GSN2889) and to his people. The world hates Christ and hates his followers (Jn.15:18-19). In its hostility Christ's followers can look only for trouble and tribulation (Jn.16:33).

(v) Here we have a strange sequence of facts. The world is separate from God; and yet between it and God there is no gulf which cannot be spanned. God created the world; God loves it; God sent his Son into it. And yet in it, there is this blindness and hostility to him.

There is only one possible conclusion. G. K. Chesterton once said that there was only one thing certain about man--that man is not what he was meant to be. There is only one thing certain about the kosmos (GSN2889), it is not what it was meant to be. Something has gone wrong. That something is sin. It is sin which separated the world from God; it is sin which blinds it to God; it is sin which is fundamentally hostile to God.

Into this world which has gone wrong comes Christ; and Christ comes with the cure. He brings forgiveness; he brings cleansing; he brings strength and grace to live as man ought and to make the world what it ought to be. But a man can refuse a cure. A doctor may tell a patient that a certain treatment is able to restore him to health; he may actually tell him that if he does not accept the

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treatment, death is inevitable. That is precisely what Jesus is saying: "If you will not believe that I am who I am you will die in your sins."

There is something wrong with the world--anyone can see that. Only recognition of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, obedience to his perfect wisdom and acceptance of him as Saviour and Lord can cure the individual soul and cure the world.

We are only too well aware of the disease which haunts and wrecks the world; the cure lies before us. The responsibility is ours if we refuse to accept it.

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John 8:21-30

THE TRAGIC INCOMPREHENSION

John 8:21-30 (Part 3)

There is no verse in all the New Testament more difficult to translate than Jn.8:25. No one can really be sure what the Greek means. It could mean: "Even what I have told you from the beginning," which is the meaning the Revised Standard Version takes. Other suggested translations are: "Primarily, essentially, I am what I am telling you." "I declare to you that I am the beginning." "How is it that I even speak to you at all?" which is the translation of Moffatt. It is suggested in our translation that it may mean: "Everything I am saying to you now is only a beginning." If we take it like that, the passage goes on to say that men will see the real meaning of Christ in three ways.

(i) They will see it in the Cross. It is when Christ is lifted up that we really see what he is. It is there we see the love that will never let men go and which loves them to the end.

(ii) They will see it in the Judgment. He has many judgments still to pass. At the moment he might look like the outlawed carpenter of Nazareth; but the day will come when they will see him as judge and know what he is.

(iii) When that happens they will see in him the embodied will of God. "I always do the things that are pleasing to him," Jesus said. Other men however good are spasmodic in their obedience. The obedience of Jesus is continuous, perfect and complete. The day must come when men see that in him is the very mind of God.

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John 8:31-32

THE TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

John 8:31-32

So Jesus said to the Jews who had come to believe in him: "If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples: and you will know the truth: and the truth will make you free."

Few New Testament passages have such a complete picture of discipleship as this.

(i) Discipleship begins with belief. Its beginning is the moment when a man accepts what Jesus says as true, all that he says about the love of God, all that he says about the terror of sin, all that he says about the real meaning of life.

(ii) Discipleship means constantly remaining in the word of Jesus and that involves four things.

(a) It involves constant listening to the word of Jesus. It was said of John Brown of Haddington that when he preached he paused every now and then as if listening for a voice. The Christian is the man who all his life listens for the voice of Jesus and will take no decision until he has first heard what he has to say.

(b) It involves constant learning from Jesus. The disciple (mathetes, GSN3101) is literally the learner, for that is what the Greek word means. All his life a Christian should be learning more and more about Jesus. The shut mind is the end of discipleship.

(c) It involves constant penetrating into the truth which the words of Jesus bear. No one can hear or read the words of Jesus once and then say that he understands their full meaning. The difference between a great book and an ephemeral one lies in the fact that we read an ephemeral book once and never wish to go back to it; whereas we read a great book many times. To remain in the word of Jesus means constantly to study and think about what he said until more and more of its meaning becomes ours.

(d) It involves constant obeying of the word of Jesus. We study it not simply for academic satisfaction or for intellectual appreciation, but in order to find out what God wishes us to do. The disciple is the teamer who learns in order to do. The truth which Jesus brought is designed for action.

(iii) Discipleship issues in knowledge of the truth. To learn from Jesus is to learn the truth. "You will know the truth," said Jesus. What is that truth? There are many possible answers to that question but the most comprehensive way to put it is that the truth which Jesus brings shows us the real values of life. The fundamental question to which every man has consciously or unconsciously to give an answer is: "To what am I to give my life? To a career? To the amassing of material possessions? To pleasure? To the service of God?" In the truth of Jesus we see what things are really important and what are not.

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John 8:31-32

(iv) Discipleship results in freedom. "The truth will make you free." "In his service is perfect freedom." Discipleship brings us four freedoms. (a) It brings us freedom from fear. The man who is a disciple never again has to walk alone. He walks for ever in the company of Jesus, and in that company fear is gone. (b) It brings freedom from self. Many a man fully recognizes that his greatest handicap is his own self. And he may in despair cry out: "I cannot change myself. I have tried, but it is impossible." But the power and presence of Jesus can re-create a man until he is altogether new. (c) It brings freedom from other people. There are many whose lives are dominated by the fear of what other people may think and say. H. G. Wells once said that the voice of our neighbours sounds louder in our ears than the voice of God. The disciple is the man who has ceased to care what people say, because he thinks only of what God says. (d) It brings freedom from sin. Many a man has come to the stage when he sins, not because he wants to, but because he cannot help it. His sins have so mastered him that, try as he will, he cannot break away from them. Discipleship breaks the chains which bind us to them and enables us to be the persons we know we ought to be.

O that a man may arise in me
That the man I am may cease to be

That is the very prayer which the disciple of Christ will find answered.

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John 8:33-36

FREEDOM AND SLAVERY

John 8:33-36

They answered him: "We are the descendants of Abraham and we have never been slaves to any man. How do you say: 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them: "This is the truth I tell you--everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave is not a permanent resident in the house; the son is a permanent resident. If the son shall make you free you will be really free."

Jesus' talk of freedom annoyed the Jews. They claimed that they had never been slaves to any man. Obviously there was a sense in which this was simply not true. They had been captives in exile in Babylon; and at the moment they were subjects of the Romans. But the Jews set a tremendous value on freedom which they held to be the birthright of every Jew. In the Law it was laid down that no Jew, however poor, must descend to the level of being a slave. "And if your brother becomes poor beside you, and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: ... For they are my servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves" (Lev.25:39-42). Again and again Jewish rebellions flared up because some fiery leader arose who insisted that the Jews could obey no earthly ruler because God was their only King.

Josephus writes of the followers of Judas of Galilee who led a famous revolt against the Romans: "They have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and they say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord" (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 18: 1, 6). When the Jews said that they had been no man's slaves they were saying something which was a fundamental article of their creed of life. And even if it was true that there had been times when they were subject to other nations, even if it was true that at that very moment they were subject to Rome, it was also true that even in servitude they maintained an independence of spirit which meant that they might be slaves in body but never in soul. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote of Joseph: "Joseph was sold to be a bond slave, yet he was free, all radiant in the nobility of his soul." Even to suggest to a Jew that he might be regarded as a slave was a deadly insult.

But it was another slavery of which Jesus was speaking. "Everyone," he said, "who commits sin is the slave of sin." Jesus was reiterating a principle which the wise Greeks had stated again and again. The Stoics said: "Only the wise man is free; the foolish man is a slave." Socrates had demanded: "How can you call a man free when his pleasures rule over him?" Paul later was to thank God that the Christian was freed from slavery to sin (Rom.6:17-20).

There is something very interesting and very suggestive here. Sometimes when a man is rebuked for doing something wrong or warned against such a thing, his answer is: "Surely I can do what I like with my own life." But the point is that the man who sins does not do what he likes; he does what sin likes. A man can let a habit get such a grip of him that he cannot break it. He can allow a pleasure to master him so completely that he cannot do without it. He can let some self-indulgence so dominate him that he is powerless to break away from it. He can get into such a state that in the end, as Seneca said, he hates and loves his sins at one and the same time. So far from doing what he likes, the sinner has lost the power to do what he likes. He is a slave to the habits, the self-

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John 8:33-36

indulgences, the wrong pleasures which have mastered him. This is precisely Jesus' point. No man who sins can ever be said to be free.

Then Jesus makes a veiled threat, but one which the listening Jews would well understand. The word slave reminds him that in any household there is a difference between the slave and the son. The son is a permanent dweller in the household, but the slave can be ejected at any time. In effect Jesus is saying to the Jews: "You think that you are sons in God's house and that nothing, therefore, can ever banish you from God. Have a care; by your conduct you are making yourselves slaves, and the slave can be ejected from the master's presence at any time." Here is a threat. It is a terrible thing to trade on the mercy of God--and that is what the Jews were doing. There is warning here for more than the Jews.

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John 8:37-41

REAL SONSHIP

John 8:37-41

"I know that you are the descendants of Abraham, but you are trying to find a way to kill me, because there is no room in you for my word. I speak what I have seen in the presence of the Father. So you must do what you have heard from the Father." "Our father is Abraham," they answered. "If," answered Jesus, "you are the children of Abraham, act as Abraham acted. But, as it is, you are trying to find a way to kill me, a man who has spoken the truth to you, truth which I heard from God. That Abraham did not do. As for you, you do the works of your father."

In this passage Jesus is dealing a death-blow to a claim which to the Jews was all-important. For the Jew Abraham was the greatest figure in all religious history; and the Jew considered himself safe and secure in the favour of God simply because he was a descendant of Abraham. The psalmist could address the people as : "O offspring of Abraham his servant, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!" (Ps.105:6). Isaiah said to the people: "But you, Israel, (are) my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend" (Isa.41:8). The admiration which the Jews gave to Abraham was perfectly legitimate, for he is a giant in the religious history of mankind, but the deductions they drew from his greatness were quite misguided. They believed that Abraham had gained such merit from his goodness that this merit was sufficient, not only for himself, but for all his descendants also.

Justin Martyr had a discussion with Trypho the Jew about Jewish religion and the conclusion was that, "the eternal kingdom will be given to those who are the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, even though they be sinners and unbelievers and disobedient to God" (Justin Martyr, The Dialogue with Trypho, 140). Quite literally the Jew believed that he was safe because he was a descendant of Abraham.

The attitude of the Jews is not without parallel in modern life.

(a) There are still those who try to live on a pedigree? and a name. At some time in the history of their family someone performed some really outstanding service to church or state, and ever since they have claimed a special place because of that. But a great name should never be an excuse for comfortable inaction; it should always be an inspiration to new effort.

(b) There are those who try to live on a history and a tradition. Many a church has a quite undue sense of its own importance because at one time it had a famous ministry. There is many a congregation living on the spiritual capital of the past; but if capital be always drawn upon and never butt up anew, the day inevitably comes when it is exhausted.

No man or church or nation can live on the achievements of the past. That is what the Jews were trying to do.

Jesus is quite blunt about this. He declares in effect that the real descendant of Abraham is the man who acts in the way in which Abraham acted. That is exactly what John the Baptist had said before. He had told the people plainly that the day of judgment was on the way and that it was no

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John 8:37-41

good pleading that they were descendants of Abraham, for God could raise up descendants to Abraham from the very stones, if he chose to do so (Matt.3:9; Lk.3:8). It was the argument which again and again Paul was to use. It was not flesh and blood which made a man a descendant of Abraham; it was moral quality and spiritual fidelity.

In this particular matter Jesus ties it down to one thing. They are seeking a way to kill him; that is precisely the opposite of what Abraham did. When a messenger from God came to him, Abraham welcomed him with all eagerness and reverence (Gen.18:1-8). Abraham had welcomed God's messenger; the Jews of the present were trying to kill God's messenger. How could they dare call themselves descendants of Abraham, when their conduct was so very different?

By calling to mind the old story in Gen.18, Jesus is implying that he too is the messenger of God. Then he makes the claim explicit: "I speak what I have seen in the presence of the Father." The fundamental thing about Jesus is that he brought to men, not his own opinions, but a message from God. He was not simply a man telling other men what he thought about things; he was the Son of God telling men what God thought. He told men the truth as God sees it.

At the end of this passage comes a shattering statement. "You," said Jesus, "do the works of your father." He has just said that Abraham is not their father. Who then is their father? For a moment the full impact is held back. It comes in Jn.8:44--their father is the devil. Those who had gloried in the claim that they are the children of Abraham are devastatingly confronted with the charge that they are children of the devil. Their works had revealed their true sonship, for man can prove his kinship to God only by his conduct.

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John 8:41-45

CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL

John 8:41-45

They said to him: "We were born of no adulterous union. We have one Father--God." "If God was your Father," said Jesus, "you would love me. For it was from God that I came forth and have come here. I had nothing to do with my own coming, but it was he who sent me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? The reason is that you are unable to hear my word. You belong to your father, the devil, and it is the evil desires of your father that you wish to do. He was a murderer from the very beginning, and he never took his stand in the truth, because the truth is not in him. When he speaks falsehood it is his characteristic way of speaking, because he is a liar and the father of falsehood. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe in me."

Jesus had just told the Jews that by their life and conduct and by their reaction to him they had made it clear that they were no real children of Abraham. Their reaction was to make an even greater claim. They claimed that God was their Father. All over the Old Testament there is repeated the fact that God was in a special way the Father of his people Israel. God commanded Moses to say to Pharaoh: "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son" (Exo.4:22). When Moses was chiding the people for their disobedience, his appeal was: "Do you thus requite the Lord, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your Father who created you?" (Deut.32:6). Isaiah speaks of his trust in God: "For thou art our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old is thy name" (Isa.63:16). "Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father" (Isa.64:8). "Have we not all one Father?" demanded Malachi. "Has not one God created us?" (Mal.2:10). So the Jews claimed that God was their Father.

"We," they said proudly, "were born of no adulterous union." There may be two things there. In the Old Testament one of the loveliest descriptions of the nation of Israel is that which sees in her the Bride of God. Because of that when Israel forsook God, she was said to go awhoring after strange gods; her infidelity was spiritual adultery. When the nation was thus faithless, the apostate people were said to be "children of harlotry" (Hos.2:4). So when the Jews said to Jesus that they were not the children of any adulterous union, they meant that they did not belong to a nation of idolaters but they had always worshipped the true God. It was a claim that they had never gone astray from God--a claim that only a people steeped in self-righteousness would ever have dared make.

But when the Jews spoke like this, there may have been something much more personal in it. It is certainly true in later times that the Jews spread abroad a most malicious slander against Jesus. The Christians very early preached the miraculous birth of Jesus. The Jews put it about that Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph; that her paramour had been a Roman soldier called Panthers; and that Jesus was the child of that adulterous union. It is just possible that the Jews were flinging at Jesus even then an insult over his birth, as if to say: "What right have you to speak to the like of us as you do?"

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John 8:41-45

Jesus' answer to the claim of the Jews is that it is false; and the proof is that if God was really their Father, they would have loved and welcomed him. Here again is the key thought of the Fourth Gospel; the test of a man is his reaction to Jesus. To be confronted with Jesus is to be confronted with judgment; he is the touchstone of God by which all men are judged.

Jesus' closeknit indictment goes on. He asks "Why do you not understand what I am saying?" The answer is terrible--not that they are intellectually stupid, but that they are spiritually deaf. They refuse to hear and they refuse to understand. A man can stop his ears to any warning; if he goes on doing that long enough, he becomes spiritually deaf. In the last analysis, a man will only hear what he wishes to hear; and if for long enough he attunes his ears to his own desires and to the wrong voices, in the end he will be unable to tune in at all to the wavelength of God. That is what the Jews had done.

Then comes the scarifying accusation. The real father of the Jews is the devil. Jesus chooses two characteristics of him.

(i) The devil is characteristically a murderer. There may be two things in Jesus' mind. He may be thinking back to the old Cain and Abel story. Cain was the first murderer and he was inspired by the devil. He may be thinking of something even more serious than that. It was the devil who first tempted man in the old Genesis story. Through the devil sin entered into the world; and through sin came death (Rom.5:13). If there had been no temptation, there would have been no sin; and, if there had been no sin, there would have been no death; and therefore, in a sense, the devil is the murderer of the whole human race.

But, even apart from the old stories, the fact remains that Christ leads to life and the devil to death. The devil murders goodness, chastity, honour, honesty, beauty, all that makes life lovely; he murders peace of mind and happiness and even love. Evil characteristically destroys; Christ characteristically brings life. At that very moment the Jews were plotting how to kill Christ; they were taking the devil's way.

(ii) The devil characteristically loves falsehood. Every lie is inspired by the devil and does the devil's work. Falsehood always hates the truth, and always tries to destroy it. When the Jews and Jesus met, the false way met the true, and inevitably the false tried to destroy the true.

Jesus indicted the Jews as children of the devil because their thoughts were bent on the destruction of the good and the maintaining of the false. Every man who tries to destroy the truth is doing the devil's work.

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John 8:46-50

THE GREAT INDICTMENT AND THE SHINING FAITH

John 8:46-50

"Who of you can convict me of sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe in me? He who is from God hears God's words. That is why you do not hear, because you are not from God." The Jews answered: "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan, and that you have a devil?" Jesus answered: "It is not I who have a devil. I honour my Father, but you dishonour me. I do not seek my own glory. There is One who seeks and judges."

We must try to see this scene happening before our eyes. There is drama here, and it is not only in the words, but in the pauses between them. Jesus began with a tremendous claim. "Is there anyone here," he demanded, "who can point the finger at any evil in my life?" Then must have followed a silence during which the eyes of Jesus ranged round the crowd waiting for anyone to accept the extraordinary challenge that he had thrown down. The silence went on. Search as they like, none could formulate a charge against him. When he had given them their chance, Jesus spoke again. "You admit," he said, "that you can find no charge against me. Then why do you not accept what I say?" Again there was an uncomfortable silence. Then Jesus answered his own question. "You do not accept my words," he said, "because you are not from God."

What did Jesus mean? Think of it this way. No experience can enter into a man's mind and heart unless there is something there to answer to it; and a man may lack the something essential which will enable him to have the experience. A man who is tone deaf cannot experience the thrill of music. A man who is colour blind cannot fully appreciate a picture. A man with no sense of time and rhythm cannot fully appreciate ballet or dancing.

Now the Jews had a very wonderful way of thinking of the Spirit of God. They believed that he had two great functions. He revealed God's truth to men; and he enabled men to recognize and grasp that truth when they saw it. That quite clearly means that unless the Spirit of God is in a man's heart he cannot recognize God's truth when he sees it. And it also means that if a man shuts the door of his heart against the Spirit of God, then, even when the truth is full displayed before his eyes, he is quite unable to see it and recognize it and grasp it and make it his.

Jesus was saying to the Jews: "You have gone your own way and followed your own ideas; the Spirit of God has been unable to gain an entry into your hearts; that is why you cannot recognize me and that is why you will not accept my words." The Jews believed they were religious people; but because they had clung to their idea of religion instead of to God's idea, they had in the end drifted so far from God that they had become godless. They were in the terrible position of men who were godlessly serving God.

To be told that they were strangers to God stung the Jews to the quick. They hurled their invective against Jesus. As our present form of the words has it they accused him of being a Samaritan and of being mad. What did they mean by calling him a Samaritan? They meant that he was a foe of Israel, for there was deadly enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans, that he was a law breaker because he did not observe the law, and above all that he was a heretic, for Samaritan

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John 8:46-50

and heretic had become synonymous. It would be extraordinary that the Son of God should be branded as a heretic. And beyond a doubt it would happen to him again if he returned to this world and its churches.

But it is just possible that the word Samaritan is really a corruption of something else. To begin with, we note that Jesus replied to the charge that he was mad, but did not reply to the charge that he was a Samaritan. That makes us wonder if we have the charge of the Jews rightly stated. In the original Aramaic the word for Samaritan would be Shomeroni (compare HSN8111). Shomeron was also a title for the prince of the devils, otherwise called Ashmedai and Sammael and Satan. In point of fact the Koran, the Mohammedan bible, actually says that the Jews were seduced into idolatry by Shomeron, the prince of the devils. So the word Shomeroni could quite well mean a child of the devil. It is very likely that what the Jews said to Jesus was: "You are a child of the devil; you have a devil; you are mad with the madness of the Evil One."

His answer was that, so far from being a servant of the devil, his one aim was to honour God, while the conduct of the Jews was a continual dishonouring of God. He says in effect: "It is not I who have a devil; it is you."

Then comes the radiance of the supreme faith of Jesus. He says: "I am not looking for honour in this world: I know that I will be insulted and rejected and dishonoured and crucified. But there is One who will one day assess things at their true value and assign to men their true honour; and he will give me the honour which is real because it is his." Of one thing Jesus was sure--ultimately God will protect the honour of his own. In time Jesus saw nothing but pain and dishonour and rejection; in eternity he saw only the glory which he who is obedient to God will some day receive. In Paracelsus Browning wrote:

"If I stoop
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day."

Jesus had the supreme optimism born of supreme faith, the optimism which is rooted in God.

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John 8:51-55

THE LIFE AND THE GLORY

John 8:51-55

"This is the truth I tell you--if anyone keeps my word, he will not see death for ever." The Jews said to him: "Now we are certain that you are mad. Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you are saying: 'If anyone keeps my word, he will not taste of death for ever.' Surely you are not greater than our father Abraham who did die? And the prophets died too. Who are you making yourself out to be?" Jesus answered: "It is my Father who glorifies me, that Father, who, you claim, is your God, and yet you know nothing about him. But I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar, like you. But I know him and I keep his word."

This chapter passes from lightning flash to lightning flash of astonishment. Jesus makes claim after claim, each more tremendous than the one which went before. Here he makes the claim that if anyone keeps his words, he will never know death. It shocked the Jews. Zechariah had said: "Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever?" (Zech.1:5). Abraham was dead; the prophets were dead; and had they not, in their day and generation, kept the word of God? Who is Jesus to set himself above the great ones of the faith? It is the literal-mindedness of the Jews which blocks their intelligence. It is not physical life and physical death of which Jesus is thinking. He means that, for the man who fully accepts him, death has lost its finality; he has entered into a relationship with God which neither time nor eternity can sever. He goes, not from life to death, but from life to life; death is only the introduction to the nearer presence of God.

From that Jesus goes on to make a great statement--all true honour must come from God. It is not difficult to honour oneself; it is easy enough--in fact, fatally easy--to bask in the sunshine of one's own approval. It is not over difficult to win honour from men; the world honours the successful man. But the real honour is the honour which only eternity can reveal; and the verdicts of eternity are not the verdicts of time.

Then Jesus makes the two claims which are the very foundation of his life.

(i) He claims unique knowledge of God. He claims to know him as no one else ever has known him or ever will. Nor will he lower that claim, for to do so would be a lie. The only way to full knowledge of the heart and mind of God is through Jesus Christ. With our own minds we can reach fragments of knowledge about God; but only in Jesus Christ is the full orb of truth, for only in him do we see what God is like.

(ii) He claims unique obedience to God. To look at Jesus is to be able to say; "This is how God wishes me to live." To look at his life is to say: "This is serving God."

In Jesus alone we see what God wants us to know and what God wants us to be.

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John 8:56-59

THE TREMENDOUS CLAIM

John 8:56-59

"Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad." The Jews said to him: "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them: "This is the truth I tell you--before Abraham was I am." So they lifted stones to throw them at him, but Jesus slipped out of their sight, and went out of the Temple precincts.

All the previous lightning flashes pale into significance before the blaze of this passage. When Jesus said to the Jews that Abraham rejoiced to see his day, he was talking language that they could understand. The Jews had many beliefs about Abraham which would enable them to see what Jesus was implying. There were altogether five different ways in which they would interpret this passage.

(a) Abraham was living in Paradise and able to see what was happening on earth. Jesus used that idea in the Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk.16:22-31). That is the simplest way to interpret this saying.

(b) But that is not the correct interpretation. Jesus said Abraham rejoiced to see my day, the past tense. The Jews interpreted many passages of scripture in a way that explains this. They took the great promise to Abraham in Gen.12:3: "By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves," and said that when that promise was made, Abraham knew that it meant that the Messiah of God was to come from his line and rejoiced at the magnificence of the promise.

(c) Some of the Rabbis held that in Gen.15:8-21 Abraham was given a vision of the whole future of the nation of Israel and therefore had a vision beforehand of the time when the Messiah would come.

(d) Some of the Rabbis took Gen.17:17, which tells how Abraham laughed when he heard that a son would be born to him, not as a laugh of unbelief, but as a laugh of sheer joy that from him the Messiah would come.

(e) Some of the Rabbis had a fanciful interpretation of Gen.24:1. There the Revised Standard Version has it that Abraham was "well advanced in years." The margin of the King James Version tells us that the Hebrew literally means that Abraham had "gone into days." Some of the Rabbis held that to mean that in a vision given by God Abraham had entered into the days which lay ahead, and had seen the whole history of the people and the coming of the Messiah.

From all this we see clearly that the Jews did believe that somehow Abraham, while he was still alive, had a vision of the history of Israel and the coming of the Messiah. So when Jesus said that Abraham had seen his day, he was making a deliberate claim that he was the Messiah. He was really saying: "I am the Messiah Abraham saw in his vision."

Immediately Jesus goes on to say of Abraham: "He saw it (my day) and was glad." Some of the early Christians had a very fanciful interpretation of that. In 1Pet.3:18-22 and 1Pet.4:6 we have the

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John 8:56-59

two passages which are the basis of that doctrine which became imbedded in the creed in the phrase, "He descended into Hell." It is to be noted that the word Hell gives the wrong idea; it ought to be Hades. The idea is not that Jesus went to the place of the tortured and the damned, as the word Hell suggests. Hades was the land of the shadows where all the dead, good and bad alike, went; in which the Jews believed before the full belief in immortality came to them. The apocryphal work called the Gospel of Nicodemus or the Acts of Pilate has a passage which runs: "O Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life of the world, give us grace that we may tell of thy resurrection and of thy marvellous works, which thou didst in Hades. We.

then, were in Hades together with all them that have fallen asleep since the beginning. And at the hour of midnight there rose upon those dark places as it were the light of the sun, and shined, and all we were enlightened and beheld one another. And straightway our father Abraham, together with the patriarchs and the prophets, were at once filled with joy and said to one another: 'This light cometh of the great lightening.'" The dead saw Jesus and were, given the chance to believe and to repent; and at that sight Abraham rejoiced.

To us these ideas are strange; to a Jew they were quite normal, for he believed that Abraham had already seen the day when the Messiah would come.

The Jews, although they knew better, chose to take this literally. "How," they demanded, "can you have seen Abraham when you are not yet fifty?" Why fifty? That was the age at which the Levites retired from their service (Num.4:3). The Jews were saying to Jesus: "You are a young man, still in the prime of life, not even old enough to retire from service. How can you possibly have seen Abraham? This is mad talk." It was then that Jesus made that most staggering statement: "Before Abraham was, I am." We must note carefully that Jesus did not say: "Before Abraham was, I was," but, "Before Abraham was, I am." Here is the claim that Jesus is timeless. There never was a time when he came into being; there never will be a time when he is not in being.

What did he mean? Obviously he did not mean that he, the human figure Jesus, had always existed. We know that Jesus was born into this world at Bethlehem; there is more than that here. Think of it this way. There is only one person in the universe who is timeless; and that one person is God. What Jesus is saying here is nothing less than that the life in him is the life of God; he is saying, as the writer of the Hebrews put it more simply, that he is the same yesterday, today and forever. In Jesus we see, not simply a man who came and lived and died; we see the timeless God, who was the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, who was before time and who will be after time, who always is. In Jesus the eternal God showed himself to men.

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John 9:1-5

LIGHT FOR THE BLIND EYES

John 9:1-5 (Part 1)

As Jesus was passing by, he saw a man who was blind from the day of his birth. "Rabbi." his disciples said to him, "who was it who sinned that he was born blind--this man or his parents?" "It was neither he nor his parents who sinned," answered Jesus, "but it happened that in him there might be a demonstration of what God can do. We must do the works of him who sent me while day lasts; the night is coming when no man is able to work. So long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

This is the only miracle in the gospels in which the sufferer is said to have been afflicted from his birth. In Acts we twice hear of people who had been helpless from their birth (the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple in Ac.3:2, and the cripple at Lystra in Ac.14:8), but this is the only man in the gospel story who had been so afflicted. He must have been a well-known character, for the disciples knew all about him.

When they saw him, they used the opportunity to put to Jesus a problem with which Jewish thought had always been deeply concerned, and which is still a problem. The Jews connected suffering and sin. They worked on the assumption that wherever there was suffering, somewhere there was sin. So they asked Jesus their question. "This man," they said, "is blind. Is his blindness due to his own sin, or to the sin of his parents?"

How could the blindness possibly be due to his own sin, when he had been blind from his birth? To that question the Jewish theologians gave two answers.

(i) Some of them had the strange notion of prenatal sin. They actually believed that a man could begin to sin while still in his mother's womb. In the imaginary conversations between Antoninus and Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, Antoninus asks: "From what time does the evil influence bear sway over a man, from the formation of the embryo in the womb or from the moment of birth?" The Rabbi first answered: "From the formation of the embryo." Antoninus disagreed and convinced Judah by his arguments, for Judah admitted that, if the evil impulse began with the formation of the embryo, then the child would kick in the womb and break his way out. Judah found a text to support this view. He took the saying in Gen.4:7: "Sin is couching at the door." And he put the meaning into it that sin awaited man at the door of the womb, as soon as he was born. But the argument does show us that the idea of prenatal sin was known.

(ii) In the time of Jesus the Jews believed in the preexistence of the soul. They really got that idea from Plato and the Greeks. They believed that all souls existed before the creation of the world in the garden of Eden, or that they were in the seventh heaven, or in a certain chamber, waiting to enter into a body. The Greeks had believed that such souls were good, and that it was the entry into the body which contaminated them; but there were certain Jews who believed that these souls were already good and bad. The writer of The Book of Wisdom says: "Now I was a child good by nature, and a good soul fell to my lot" (Wis.8:19).

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John 9:1-5

In the time of Jesus certain Jews did believe that a man's affliction, even if it be from birth, might come from sin that he had committed before he was born. It is a strange idea, and it may seem to us almost fantastic; but at its heart lies the idea of a sin-infected universe.

The alternative was that the man's affliction was due to the sin of his parents. The idea that children inherit the consequences of their parents' sin is woven into the thought of the Old Testament. "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exo.20:5: compare Exo.34:7, Num.14:18). Of the wicked man the psalmist says: "May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out" (Ps.109:14). Isaiah talks about their iniquities and the "iniquities of their fathers," and goes on to say: "I will measure into their bosom payment for their former doings" (Isa.65:6-7). One of the keynotes of the Old Testament is that the sins of the fathers are always visited upon the children. It must never be forgotten that no man lives to himself and no man dies to himself. When a man sins, he sets in motion a train of consequences which has no end.

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John 9:1-5

LIGHT FOR THE BLIND EYES

John 9:1-5 (Part 2)

In this passage there are two great eternal principles.

(i) Jesus does not try to follow out or to explain the connection of sin and suffering. He says that this man's affliction came to him to give an opportunity of showing what God can do. There are two senses in which that is true.

(a) For John the miracles are always a sign of the glory and the power of God. The writers of the other gospels had a different point of view; and regarded them as a demonstration of the compassion of Jesus. When Jesus looked on the hungry crowd he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd (Mk.6:34). When the leper came with his desperate request for cleansing Jesus was moved with compassion (Mk.1:41). It is often urged that in this the Fourth Gospel is quite different from the others. Surely there is no real contradiction here. It is simply two ways of looking at the same thing. At its heart is the supreme truth that the glory of God lies in his compassion, and that he never so fully reveals his glory as when he reveals his pity.

(b) But there is another sense in which the man's suffering shows what God can do. Affliction, sorrow, pain, disappointment, loss always are opportunities for displaying God's grace. First, it enables the sufferer to show God in action. When trouble and disaster fall upon a man who does not know God, that man may well collapse; but when they fall on a man who walks with God they bring out the strength and the beauty, and the endurance and the nobility, which are within a man's heart when God is there. It is told that when an old saint was dying in an agony of pain, he sent for his family, saying: "Come and see how a Christian can die." It is when life hits us a terrible blow that we can show the world how a Christian can live, and, if need be, die. Any kind of suffering is an opportunity to demonstrate the glory of God in our own lives. Second, by helping those who are in trouble or in pain, we can demonstrate to others the glory of God.

Frank Laubach has the great thought that when Christ, who is the Way, enters into us "we become part of the Way. God's highway runs straight through us." When we spend ourselves to help those in trouble, in distress, in pain, in sorrow, in affliction, God is using us as the highway by which he sends his help into the lives of his people. To help a fellow-man in need is to manifest the glory of God, for it is to show what God is like.

Jesus goes on to say that he and all his followers must do God's work while there is time to do it. God gave men the day for work and the night for rest; the day comes to an end and the time for work is also ended. For Jesus it was true that he had to press on with God's work in the day for the night of the Cross lay close ahead. But it is true for every man. We are given only so much time. Whatever we are to do must be done within it. There is in Glasgow a sundial with the motto: "Tak' tent of time ere time be tint." "Take thought of time before time is ended." We should never put things off until another time, for another time may never come. The Christian's duty is to fill the time he has--and no man knows how much that will be--with the service of God and of his fellow-men. There is no more poignant sorrow than the tragic discovery that it is too late to do something which we might have done.

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John 9:1-5

But there is another opportunity we may miss. Jesus said: "So long as I am in the world I am the light of the world." When Jesus said that, he did not mean that the time of his life and work were limited but that our opportunity of laying hold on him is limited. There comes to every man a chance to accept Christ as his Saviour, his Master and his Lord; and if that Starbuck in *The Psychology of Religion* has some interesting and warning statistics about the age at which conversion normally occurs. It can occur as early as seven or eight; it increases gradually to the age of ten or eleven; it increases rapidly to the age of sixteen; it declines steeply up to the age of twenty; and after thirty it is very rare. God is always saying to us: "Now is the time." It is not that the power of Jesus grows less, or that his light grows dim; it is that if we put off the great decision we become ever less able to take it as the years go on.

Work must be done, decisions must be taken, while it is day, before the night comes down.

Barclay's Commentary

John 9:6-12

THE METHOD OF A MIRACLE

John 9:6-12

When he had said this he spat on the ground, and made clay from the spittle, and he smeared the clay on his eyes and said to him: "Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam." (The word "Siloam" means "sent.") So he went away and washed, and he came able to see. So the neighbours and those who formerly knew him by sight and knew that he was a beggar, said: "Is this not the man who sat begging?" Some said: "It is he." Others said: "It is not he, but it is someone like him." The man himself said: "I am he." "How then," they said to him, "have your eyes been opened?" "The man they call Jesus made clay," he said, "and smeared it on my eyes, and said to me: 'Go to the Pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and sight came to me." They said to him: "Where is this man you are talking about?" He said: "I don't know."

This is one of two miracles in which Jesus is said to have used spittle to effect a cure. The other is the miracle of the deaf stammerer (Mk.7:33). The use of spittle seems to us strange and repulsive and unhygienic; but in the ancient world it was quite common. Spittle, and especially the spittle of some distinguished person, was believed to possess certain curative qualities. Tacitus tells how, when Vespasian visited Alexandria, there came to him two men, one with diseased eyes and one with a diseased hand, who said that they had been advised by their god to come to him. The man with the diseased eyes wished Vespasian "to moisten his eye-balls with spittle"; the man with the diseased hand wished Vespasian "to trample on his hand with the sole of his foot." Vespasian was very unwilling to do so but was finally persuaded to do as the men asked. "The hand immediately recovered its power; the blind man saw once more.

Both facts are attested to this day, when falsehood can bring no reward, by those who were present on the occasion" (Tacitus, Histories 4: 8 1).

Pliny, the famous Roman collector of what was then called scientific information, has a whole chapter on the use of spittle. He says that it is a sovereign preservative against the poison of serpents; a protection against epilepsy; that lichens and leprosy spots can be cured by the application of fasting spittle; that ophthalmia can be cured by anointing the eyes every morning with fasting spittle; that carcinomata and crick in the neck can be cured by the use of spittle. Spittle was held to be very effective in averting the evil eye. Perseus tells how the aunt or the grandmother, who fears the gods and is skilled in averting the evil eye, will lift the baby from his cradle and "with her middle finger apply the lustrous spittle to his forehead and slobbering lips." The use of spittle was very common in the ancient world. To this day, if we burn a finger our first instinct is to put it into our mouth; and there are many who believe that warts can be cured by licking them with fasting spittle.

The fact is that Jesus took the methods and customs of his time and used them. He was a wise physician; he had to gain the confidence of his patient. It was not that he believed in these things, but he kindled expectation by doing what the patient would expect a doctor to do. After all, to this day the efficacy of any medicine or treatment depends at least as much on the patient's faith in it as in the treatment or the drug itself.

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John 9:6-12

After anointing the man's eyes with spittle, Jesus sent him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. The Pool of Siloam was one of the landmarks of Jerusalem; and it was the result of one of the great engineering feats of the ancient world. The water supply of Jerusalem had always been precarious in the event of a siege. It came mainly from the Virgin's Fountain or the Spring Gihon, which was situated in the Kidron Valley. A staircase of thirty-three rock-cut steps led down to it; and there, from a stone basin, people drew the water. But the spring was completely exposed and, in the event of a siege, could be completely cut off, with disastrous consequences.

When Hezekiah realized that Sennacherib was about to invade Palestine he determined to cut through the solid rock a tunnel or conduit from the spring into the city (2Chr.32:2-8; 2Chr.32:30; Isa.22:9-11; 2Kgs.20:20). If the engineers had cut straight it would have been a distance of 366 yards; but because they cut in a zig-zag, either because they were following a fissure in the rock, or to avoid sacred sites, the conduit is actually 583 yards. The tunnel is at places only about two feet wide, but its average height is about six feet. The engineers began their cutting from both ends and met in the middle--a truly amazing feat for the equipment of the time.

In 1880 a tablet was discovered commemorating the completion of the conduit. It was accidentally discovered by two boys who were wading in the pool. It runs like this: "The boring through is completed. Now is the story of the boring through. While the workmen were still lifting pick to pick, each towards his neighbour, and while three cubits remained to be cut through, each heard the voice of the other who called his neighbour, since there was a crevice in the rock on the right side. And on the day of the boring through the stonecutters struck, each to meet his fellow, pick to pick; and there flowed the waters to the pool for a thousand and two hundred cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the stone-cutters."

The Pool of Siloam was the place where the conduit from the Virgin's Fountain issued in the city. It was an open air basin twenty by thirty feet. That is how the pool got its name. It was called Siloam, which, it was said, meant sent, because the water in it had been sent through the conduit into the city. Jesus sent this man to wash in this pool; and the man washed and saw.

Having been cured, he had some difficulty in persuading the people that a real cure had been effected. But he stoutly maintained the miracle which Jesus had wrought. Jesus is still doing things which seem to the unbeliever far too good and far too wonderful to be true.

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John 9:13-16

PREJUDICE AND CONVICTION

John 9:13-16

They brought him, the man who had been blind, to the Pharisees. The day on which Jesus had made the clay and opened his eyes was the Sabbath day. So the Pharisees asked him again how sight had come to him. He said to them: "He put clay on my eyes; and I washed; and now I can see." So some of the Pharisees said: "This man is not from God, because he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said: "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division of opinion among them. So they said to the blind man: "What is your opinion about him, in view of the fact that he opened your eyes?" He said: "He is a prophet."

Now comes the inevitable trouble. It was the Sabbath day on which Jesus had made the clay and healed the man. Undoubtedly Jesus had broken the Sabbath law, as the scribes had worked it out, and done so in fact in three different ways.

(i) By making clay he had been guilty of working on the Sabbath when even the simplest acts constituted work. Here are some of the things which were forbidden on the Sabbath. "A man may not fill a dish with oil and put it beside a lamp and put the end of the wick in it." "If a man extinguishes a lamp on the Sabbath to spare the lamp or the oil or the wick, he is culpable." "A man may not go out on the Sabbath with sandals shod with nails." (The weight of the nails would have constituted a burden, and to carry a burden was to break the Sabbath.) A man might not cut his finger nails or pull out a hair of his head or his beard. Obviously in the eyes of such a law to make clay was to work and so to break the Sabbath.

(ii) It was forbidden to heal on the Sabbath. Medical attention could be given only if life was in actual danger. Even then it must be only such as to keep the patient from getting worse, not to make him any better. For instance, a man with toothache might not suck vinegar through his teeth. It was forbidden to set a broken limb. "If a man's hand or foot is dislocated he may not pour cold water over it." Clearly the man who was born blind was in no danger of his life; therefore Jesus broke the Sabbath when he healed him.

(iii) It was quite definitely laid down: "As to fasting spittle, it is not lawful to put it so much as upon the eyelids."

The Pharisees are typical of the people in every generation who condemn anyone whose idea of religion is not theirs. They thought that theirs was the only way of serving God. But some of them thought otherwise and declared that no one who did the things Jesus did could be a sinner.

They brought the man and examined him. When he was asked his opinion of Jesus, he gave it without hesitation. He said that Jesus was a prophet. In the Old Testament a prophet was often tested by the signs he could produce. Moses guaranteed to Pharaoh that he really was God's messenger by the signs and wonders which he performed (Exo.4:1-17). Elijah proved that he was the prophet of the real God by doing things the prophets of Baal could not do (1Kgs.18). No doubt

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John 9:13-16

the man's thoughts were running on these things when he said that in his opinion Jesus was a prophet.

Whatever else, this was a brave man. He knew quite well what the Pharisees thought of Jesus. He knew quite well that if he came out on Jesus' side he was certain to be excommunicated. But he made his statement and took his stand. It was as if he said: "I am bound to believe in him, I am bound to stand by him because of all that he has done for me." Therein he is our great example.

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John 9:17-35

THE PHARISEES DEFIED

John 9:17-35

Now the Jews refused to believe that he had been blind and had become able to see, until they called the parents of the man who had become able to see, and asked them: "Is this your son? And do you say that he was born blind? How, then, can he now see?" His parents answered: "We know that this is our son; and we know that he was born blind; how he has now come to see we do not know; or who it was who opened his eyes we do not know. Ask himself. He is of age. He can answer his own questions." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged Jesus to be the Anointed One of God, he should be excommunicated from the synagogue. That is why his parents said: "He is of age. Ask him." A second time they called the man who used to be blind. "Give the glory to God" they said. "We know that this man is a sinner." "Whether he is a sinner or not," the man answered, "I do not know. One thing I do know--I used to be blind and now I can see." "What did he do to you?" they said. "How did he open your eyes?" "I have already told you," the man said, "and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear the story all over again? Surely you can't want to become his disciples?" They heaped abuse on him. "It is you who are his disciple," they said. "We are Moses' disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; but, as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered: "It is an astonishing thing that you do not know where he comes from, when he opened my eyes. It is a fact known to all of us that God does not listen to sinners. But if a man is a reverent man and does his will, God hears him. Since time began no one has ever heard of anyone who opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man was not from God, he could not have done anything." "You were altogether born in sin" they said to him, "and are you trying to teach us?" And they ordered him to get out.

There is no more vivid character drawing in all literature than this. With deft and revealing touches John causes the people involved to live before us.

(i) There was the blind man himself. He began by being irritated at the persistence of the Pharisees. "Say what you like," he said, "about this man; I don't know anything about him except that he made me able to see." It is the simple fact of Christian experience that many a man may not be able to put into theologically correct language what he believes Jesus to be, but in spite of that he can witness to what Jesus has done for his soul. Even when a man cannot understand with his intellect, he can still feel with his heart. It is better to love Jesus than to love theories about him.

(ii) There were the man's parents. They were obviously uncooperative, but at the same time they were afraid. The synagogue authorities had a powerful weapon, the weapon of excommunication, whereby a man was shut off from the congregation of God's people. Away back in the days of Ezra we read of a decree that whosoever did not obey the command of the authorities "his property should be forfeited and he himself banned from the congregation" (Ezr.10:8). Jesus warned his disciples that their name would be cast out for evil (Lk.6:22). He told them that they would be put out of the synagogues (Jn.16:2). Many of the rulers in Jerusalem really believed in Jesus, but were afraid to say so "lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (Jn.12:42).

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John 9:17-35

There were two kinds of excommunication. There was the ban, the *cherem* (HSN2764), by which a man was banished from the synagogue for life. In such a case he was publicly anathematized. He was cursed in the presence of the people, and he was cut off from God and from man. There was sentence of temporary excommunication which might last for a month, or for some other fixed period. The terror of such a situation was that a Jew would regard it as shutting him out, not only from the synagogue but from God. That is why the man's parents answered that their son was quite old enough to be a legal witness and to answer his own questions. The Pharisees were so venomously embittered against Jesus that they were prepared to do what ecclesiastics at their worst have sometimes done--to use ecclesiastical procedure to further their own ends.

(iii) There were the Pharisees. They did not believe at first that the man had been blind. That is to say, they suspected that this was a miracle faked between Jesus and him. Further, they were well aware that the law recognized that a false prophet could produce false miracles for his own false purposes (Deut. 13:1-5 warns against the false prophet who produces false signs in order to lead people away after strange gods). So the Pharisees began with suspicion. They went on to try to browbeat the man. "Give the glory to God," they said. "We know that this man is a sinner." "Give the glory to God," was a phrase used in cross-examination which really meant: "Speak the truth in the presence and the name of God." When Joshua was cross-examining Achan about the sin which had brought disaster to Israel, he said to him: "Give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and render praise to him; and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me" (Josh. 7:19).

They were annoyed because they could not meet the man's argument which was based on scripture. It was: "Jesus has done a very wonderful thing; the fact that he has done it means that God hears him; now God never hears the prayers of a bad man; therefore Jesus cannot be a bad man." The fact that God did not hear the prayer of a bad man is a basic thought of the Old Testament. When Job is speaking of the hypocrite, he says: "Will God hear his cry when trouble comes upon him?" (Jb. 27:9). The psalmist says: "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." (Ps. 66:18). Isaiah hears God say to the sinning people: "When you spread forth your hands (the Jews prayed with the hands stretched out, palms upwards), I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood" (Isa. 1:15). Ezekiel says of the disobedient people: "Though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them" (Eze. 8:18).

Conversely they believed that the prayer of a good man was always heard. "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears toward their cry" (Ps. 34:15). "He fulfils the desire of all who fear him, he also hears their cry, and saves them." (Ps. 145:19). "The Lord is far from the wicked; but he hears the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. 15:29). The man who had been blind presented the Pharisees with an argument which they could not answer.

When they were confronted with such an argument, see what they did. First, they resorted to abuse. "They heaped abuse on him." Second, they resorted to insult. They accused the man of being born in sin. That is to say, they accused him of prenatal sin. Third, they resorted to threatened force. They ordered him out of their presence.

Often we have our differences with people, and it is well that it should be so. But the moment insult and abuse and threat enter into an argument, it ceases to be an argument and becomes a

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John 9:17-35

contest in bitterness. If we become angry and resort to wild words and hot threats, all we prove is that our case is disturbingly weak.

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John 9:35-41

REVELATION AND CONDEMNATION

John 9:35-41

Jesus heard that they had put him out, so he found him and said to him: "Do you believe in the Son of God?" "But who is he, sir," he answered him, "that I might believe in him?" Jesus said to him: "You have both seen him, and he who is talking with you is he." "Lord," he said, "I believe." And he knelt before him. Jesus said: "It was for judgment that I came into this world that those who do not see might see, and that those who see might become blind." Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this. "Surely," they said, "we are not blind?" Jesus said to them: "If you were blind, you would not have sin. As it is, your claim is, 'We see.' Your sin remains."

This section begins with two great spiritual truths.

(i) Jesus looked for the man. As Chrysostom put it: "The Jews cast him out of the Temple; the Lord of the Temple found him." If any man's Christian witness separates him from his fellow-men, it brings him nearer to Jesus Christ. Jesus is always true to the man who is true to him.

(ii) To this man there was made the great revelation that Jesus was the Son of God. Loyalty always brings revelation; it is to the man who is true to him that Jesus most fully reveals himself. The penalty of loyalty may well be persecution and ostracism at the hands of men; its reward is a closer walk with Christ, and an increasing knowledge of his wonder.

John finishes this story with two of his favourite thoughts.

(i) Jesus came into this world for judgment. Whenever a man is confronted with Jesus, that man at once passes a judgment on himself. If he sees in Jesus nothing to desire, nothing to admire, nothing to love, then he has condemned himself. If he sees in Jesus something to wonder at, something to respond to, something to reach out to, then he is on the way to God. The man who is conscious of his own blindness, and who longs to see better and to know more, is the man whose eyes can be opened and who can be led more and more deeply into the truth. The man who thinks he knows it all, the man who does not realize that he cannot see, is the man who is truly blind and beyond hope and help. Only the man who realizes his own weakness can become strong. Only the man who realizes his own blindness can learn to see. Only the man who realizes his own sin can be forgiven.

(ii) The more knowledge a man has the more he is to be condemned if he does not recognize the good when he sees it. If the Pharisees had been brought up in ignorance, they could not have been condemned. Their condemnation lay in the fact that they knew so much and claimed to see so well, and yet failed to recognize God's Son when he came. The law that responsibility is the other side of privilege is written into life.

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John 9 (Misc. Comments)

GREATER AND GREATER

John 9 (Misc. Comments)

Before we leave this very wonderful chapter we would do well to read it again, this time straight through from start to finish. If we do so read it with care and attention, we will see the loveliest progression in the blind man's idea of Jesus. It goes through three stages, each one higher than the last.

(i) He began by calling Jesus a man. "A man that is called Jesus opened mine eyes" (Jn.9:11). He began by thinking of Jesus as a wonderful man. He had never met anyone who could do the kind of things Jesus did; and he began by thinking of Jesus as supreme among men.

We do well sometimes to think of the sheer magnificence of the manhood of Jesus. In any gallery of the world's heroes he must find a place. In any anthology of the loveliest lives ever lived, his would have to be included. In any collection of the world's greatest literature his parables would have to be listed. Shakespeare makes Mark Antony say of Brutus:

"His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'This was a man!'"

Whatever else is in doubt, there is never any doubt that Jesus was a man among men.

(ii) He went on to call Jesus a prophet. When asked his opinion of Jesus in view of the fact that he had given him his sight, his answer was: "He is a prophet" (Jn.9:17). Now a prophet is a man who brings God's message to men. "Surely the Lord God does nothing," said Amos, "without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Am.3:7). A prophet is a man who lives close to God and has penetrated into his inner councils. When we read the wisdom of the words of Jesus, we are bound to say: "This is a prophet!" Whatever else may be in doubt, this is true--if men followed the teachings of Jesus, all personal, all social, all national, all international problems would be solved. If ever any man had the right to be called a prophet, Jesus has.

(iii) Finally the blind man came to confess that Jesus was the Son of God. He came to see that human categories were not adequate to describe him. Napoleon was once in a company in which a number of clever skeptics were discussing Jesus. They dismissed him as a very great man and nothing more. "Gentlemen," said Napoleon, "I know men, and Jesus Christ was more than a man."

"If Jesus Christ is a man
And only a man--I say
That of all mankind I cleave to him
And to him will I cleave alway.
If Jesus Christ is a god--
And the only God--I swear
I will follow him through heaven and hell,

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John 9 (Misc. Comments)

The earth, the sea, and the air!"

It is a tremendous thing about Jesus that the more we know him the greater he becomes. The trouble with human relationships is that often the better we know a person the more we know his weaknesses and his failings; but the more we know Jesus, the greater the wonder becomes; and that will be true, not only in time, but also in eternity.

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John 10:1-6

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

John 10:1-6 (Part 1)

Jesus said: "This is the truth I tell you; he who does not enter the sheepfold through the door, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. But he who comes in through the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The keeper of the door opens the door to him; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Whenever he puts his own sheep out, he walks in front of them; and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. But they will not follow a stranger, but they will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus spoke this parable to them, but they did not know what he was saying to them.

There is no better loved picture of Jesus than the Good Shepherd. The picture of the shepherd is woven into the language and imagery of the Bible. It could not be otherwise. The main part of Judaea was a central plateau, stretching from Bethel to Hebron for a distance of about 35 miles and varying from 14 to 17 miles across. The ground, for most part, was rough and stony. Judaea was, much more a pastoral than an agricultural country and was, therefore, inevitable that the most familiar figure of the Judean uplands was the shepherd.

His life was very hard. No flock ever grazed without a shepherd, and he was never off duty. There being little grass, the sheep were bound to wander, and since there were no protecting walls, the sheep had constantly to be watched. On either side of the narrow plateau the ground dipped sharply down to the craggy deserts and the sheep were always liable to stray away and get lost. The shepherd's task was not only constant but dangerous, for, in addition, he had to guard the flock against wild animals. especially against wolves, and there were always thieves and robbers ready to steal the sheep.

Sir George Adam Smith, who travelled in Palestine, writes: "On some high moor, across which at night the hyenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, leaning on his staff, and looking out over his scattered sheep, every one of them on his heart, you understand why the shepherd of Judaea sprang to the front in his people's history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice." Constant vigilance, fearless courage, patient love for his flock, were the necessary characteristics of the shepherd.

In the Old Testament God is often pictured as the shepherd, and the people as his flock. "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want" (Ps.23:1). "Thou didst lead thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Ps.77:20). "We thy people, the flock of thy pasture, will give thanks to thee for ever" (Ps.79:13). "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest Joseph like a flock" (Ps.80:1). "He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Ps.95:7). "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps.100:3). God's Anointed One, the Messiah, is also pictured as the shepherd of the sheep. "He will feed his flock like a shepherd: he will gather the lambs in his arms, and will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isa.40:11). "He will be shepherding the flock of the Lord faithfully and righteously, and will suffer none of them to stumble in their pasture. He will lead them all aright" (SS.17:45).

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John 10:1-6

The leaders of the people are described as the shepherds of God's people and nation. "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" (Jer.23:1-4). Ezekiel has a tremendous indictment of the false leaders who seek their own good rather than the good of the flock. "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel who have been themselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?" (Eze.34).

This picture passes over into the New Testament. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is the shepherd who will risk his life to seek and to save the one straying sheep (Matt.18:12; Lk.15:4). He has pity upon the people because they are as sheep without a shepherd (Matt.9:36; Mk.6:34). His disciples are his little flock (Lk.12:32). When he, the shepherd, is smitten the sheep are scattered (Mk.14:27; Matt.26:31). He is the shepherd of the souls of men (1Pet.2:25), and the great shepherd of the sheep (Heb.13:20).

Just as in the Old Testament picture, the leaders of the Church are the shepherds and the people are the flock. It is the duty of the leader to feed the flock of God, to accept the oversight willingly and not by constraint, to do it eagerly and not for love of money, not to use the position for the exercise of power and to be an example to the flock (1Pet.5:2-3). Paul urges the elders of Ephesus to take heed to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (Ac.20:28). It is Jesus' last command to Peter that he should feed his lambs and his sheep (Jn.21:15-19). The very word pastor (Eph.4:11) is the Latin word for shepherd.

The Jews had a lovely legend to explain why God chose Moses to be the leader of his people. "When Moses was feeding the sheep of his father-in-law in the wilderness, a young kid ran away. Moses followed it until it reached a ravine, where it found a well to drink from. When Moses got up to it he said: 'I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty. Now you must be weary.' He took the kid on his shoulders and carried it back. Then God said: 'Because you have shown pity in leading back one of a flock belonging to a man, you shall lead my flock Israel.'"

The word shepherd should paint a picture to us of the unceasing vigilance and patience of the love of God; and it should remind us of our duty towards our fellow-men, especially if we hold any kind of office in the church of Christ.

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John 10:1-6

THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP

John 10:1-6 (Part 2)

The Palestinian shepherd had different ways of doing things from the shepherds of our country; and, to get the full meaning of this picture, we must look at the shepherd and the way in which he worked.

His equipment was very simple. He had his scrip, a bag made of the skin of an animal, in which he carried his food. In it he would have no more than bread, dried fruit, some olives and cheese. He had his sling. The skill of many of the men of Palestine was such that they "could sling a stone at a hair and not miss" (Judg.20:16). The shepherd used his sling as a weapon of offence and defence; but he made one curious use of it. There were no sheep dogs in Palestine, and, when the shepherd wished to call back a sheep which was straying away, he fitted a stone into his sling and landed it just in front of the straying sheep's nose as a warning to turn back. He had his staff, a short wooden club which had a lump of wood at the end often studded with nails. It usually had a slit in the handle at the top, through which a thong passed; and by the thong the staff swung at the shepherd's belt. His staff was the weapon with which he defended himself and his flock against marauding beasts and robbers.

He had his rod, which was like the shepherd's crook. With it he could catch and pull back any sheep which was moving to stray away. At the end of the day, when the sheep were going into the fold, the shepherd held his rod across the entrance, quite close to the ground; and every sheep had to pass under it (Eze.20:37; Lev.27:32); and, as each sheep passed under, the shepherd quickly examined it to see if it had received any kind of injury throughout the day.

The relationship between sheep and shepherd is quite different in Palestine. In Britain the sheep are largely kept for killing; but in Palestine largely for their wool. It thus happens that in Palestine the sheep are often with the shepherd for years and often they have names by which the shepherd calls them. Usually these names are descriptive, for instance, "Brown-leg," "Black-ear." In Palestine the shepherd went in front and the sheep followed. The shepherd went first to see that the path was safe, and sometimes the sheep had to be encouraged to follow. A traveller tells how he saw a shepherd leading his flock come to a ford across a stream. The sheep were unwilling to cross. The shepherd finally solved the problem by carrying one of the lambs across. When its mother saw her lamb on the other side she crossed too, and soon all the rest of the flock had followed her.

It is strictly true that the sheep know and understand the eastern shepherd's voice; and that they will never answer to the voice of a stranger. H. V. Morton has a wonderful description of the way in which the shepherd talks to the sheep. "Sometimes he talks to them in a loud sing-song voice, using a weird language unlike anything I have ever heard in my life. The first time I heard this sheep and goat language I was on the hills at the back of Jericho. A goat-herd had descended into a valley and was mounting the slope of an opposite hill, when turning round, he saw his goats had remained behind to devour a rich patch of scrub. Lifting his voice, he spoke to the goats in a language that Pan must have spoken on the mountains of Greece. It was uncanny because there was nothing human about it. The words were animal sounds arranged in a kind of order. No sooner had he

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spoken than an answering bleat shivered over the herd, and one or two of the animals turned their heads in his direction.

But they did not obey him. The goat-herd then called out one word, and gave a laughing kind of whinny. Immediately a goat with a bell round his neck stopped eating, and, leaving the herd, trotted down the hill, across the valley, and up the opposite slopes. The man, accompanied by this animal, walked on and disappeared round a ledge of rock. Very soon a panic spread among the herd. They forgot to eat. They looked up for the shepherd. He was not to be seen. They became conscious that the leader with the bell at his neck was no longer with them. From the distance came the strange laughing call of the shepherd, and at the sound of it the entire herd stampeded into the hollow and leapt up the hill after him" (H. V. Morton, *In the Steps of the Master*, pp. 154, 155). W. M.

Thomson in *The Land and the Book* has the same story to tell. "The shepherd calls sharply from time to time, to remind them of his presence.

They know his voice, and follow on; but, if a stranger call, they stop short, lift up their heads in alarm, and if it is repeated, they turn and flee, because they know not the voice of a stranger. I have made the experiment repeatedly." That is exactly John's picture.

H. V. Morton tells of a scene that he saw in a cave near Bethlehem. Two shepherds had sheltered their flocks in the cave during the night. How were the flocks to be sorted out? One of the shepherds stood some distance away and gave his peculiar call which only his own sheep knew, and soon his whole flock had run to him, because they knew his voice. They would have come for no one else, but they knew the call of their own shepherd. An eighteenth century traveller actually tells how Palestinian sheep could be made to dance, quick or slow, to the peculiar whistle or the peculiar tune on the flute of their own shepherd.

Every detail of the shepherd's life lights up the picture of the Good Shepherd whose sheep hear his voice and whose constant care is for his flock.

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John 10:7-10

THE DOOR TO LIFE

John 10:7-10

So Jesus said to them again: "This is the truth I tell you--I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If any man enter in through me, he will be saved, and he will go in and out, and he will find pasture. The thief comes only to kill and to steal and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

The Jews did not understand the meaning of the story of the Good Shepherd. So Jesus, plainly and without concealment, applied it to himself.

He began by saying: "I am the door." In this parable Jesus spoke about two kinds of sheep-folds. In the villages and towns themselves there were communal sheep-folds where all the village flocks were sheltered when they returned home at night. These folds were protected by a strong door of which only the guardian of the door held the key. It was to that kind of fold Jesus referred in Jn.10:2-3. But when the sheep were out on the hills in the warm season and did not return at night to the village at all, they were collected into sheep-folds on the hillside. These hillside sheep-folds were just open spaces enclosed by a wall. In them there was an opening by which the sheep came in and went out; but there was no door of any kind. What happened was that at night the shepherd himself lay down across the opening and no sheep could get out or in except over his body. In the most literal sense the shepherd was the door.

That is what Jesus was thinking of when he said: "I am the door." Through him, and through him alone, men find access to God. "Through him," said Paul, "we have access to the Father" (Eph.2:18). "He," said the writer to the Hebrews, "is the new and living way" (Heb.10:20). Jesus opens the way to God. Until Jesus came men could think of God only as, at best, a stranger and as, at worst, an enemy. But Jesus came to show men what God is like, and to open the way to him. He is the door through whom alone entrance to God becomes possible for men.

To describe something of what that entrance to God means, Jesus uses a well-known Hebrew phrase. He says that through him we can go in and come out. To be able to come and go unmolested was the Jewish way of describing a life that is absolutely secure and safe. When a man can go in and out without fear, it means that his country is at peace, that the forces of law and order are supreme, and that he enjoys perfect security. The leader of the nation is to be one who can bring them out and lead them in (Num.27:17). Of the man who is obedient to God it is said that he is blessed when he comes in and blessed when he goes out (Deut.28:6). A child is one who is not yet able by himself to go out and to come in (1Kgs.3:7). The Psalmist is certain that God will keep him in his going out and in his coming in (Ps.121:8). Once a man discovers, through Jesus Christ, what God is like, a new sense of safety and of security enters into life. If life is known to be in the hands of a God like that, the worries and the fears are gone.

Jesus said that those who came before him were thieves and robbers. He was of course not referring to the great succession of the prophets and the heroes, but to these adventurers who were

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continually arising in Palestine and promising that, if people would follow them, they would bring in the golden age. All these claimants were insurrectionists. They believed that men would have to wade through blood to the golden age. At this very time Josephus speaks of there being ten thousand disorders in Judaea, tumults caused by men of war. He speaks of men like the Zealots who did not mind dying themselves and who did not mind slaughtering their own loved ones, if their hopes of conquest could be achieved. Jesus is saying: "There have been men who claimed that they were leaders sent to you from God. They believed in war, murder, assassination. Their way only leads for ever farther and farther away from God.

My way is the way of peace and love and life; and if you will only take it, it leads ever closer and closer to God." There have been, and still are, those who believe that the golden age must be brought in with violence, class warfare, bitterness, destruction. It is the message of Jesus that the only way that leads to God in heaven and to the golden age on earth is the way of love.

Jesus claims that he came that men might have life and might have it more abundantly. The Greek phrase used for having it more abundantly means to have a superabundance of a thing. To be a follower of Jesus, to know who he is and what he means, is to have a superabundance of life. A Roman soldier came to Julius Caesar with a request for permission to commit suicide. He was a wretched dispirited creature with no vitality. Caesar looked at him. "Man," he said, "were you ever really alive?" When we try to live our own lives, life is a dull, dispirited thing. When we walk with Jesus, there comes a new vitality, a superabundance of life. It is only when we live with Christ that life becomes really worth living and we begin to live in the real sense of the word.

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John 10:11-15

THE TRUE AND THE FALSE SHEPHERD

John 10:11-15

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. The hireling, who is not a real shepherd, and to whom the sheep do not really belong, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and runs away; and the wolf seizes them and scatters them. He abandons the sheep because he is a hireling, and the sheep are nothing to him. I am the good shepherd, and I know my own sheep, and my own sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep."

This passage draws the contrast between the good and the bad, the faithful and the unfaithful shepherd. The shepherd was absolutely responsible for the sheep. If anything happened to a sheep, he had to produce some kind of proof that it was not his fault. Amos speaks about the shepherd rescuing two legs or a piece of an ear out of a lion's mouth (Am.3:12). The law laid it down: "If it is torn by beasts, let him bring it as evidence" (Exo.22:13). The idea is that the shepherd must bring home proof that the sheep had died, and that he had been unable to prevent the death. David tells Saul how when he was keeping his father's sheep, he had the battle with the lion and the bear (1Sam.17:34-36). Isaiah speaks of the crowd of shepherds being called out to deal with the lion (Isa.31:4). To the shepherd it was the most natural thing to risk his life in defence of his flock. Sometimes the shepherd had to do more than risk his life: sometimes he had to lay it down, perhaps when thieves and robbers came to despoil the flock. Dr W. M. Thomson in *The Land and the Book* writes: "I have listened with intense interest to their graphic descriptions of downright and desperate fights with these savage beasts. And when the thief and the robber come (and come they do), the faithful shepherd has often to put his life in his hand to defend his flock. I have known more than one case where he had literally to lay it down in the contest. A poor faithful fellow last spring, between Tiberias and Tabor, instead of fleeing, actually fought three Bedawin robbers until he was hacked to pieces with their khanjars, and died among the sheep he was defending." The true shepherd never hesitated to risk, and even to lay down, his life for his sheep.

But, on the other hand, there was the unfaithful shepherd. The difference was this. A real shepherd was born to his task. He was sent out with the flock as soon as he was old enough to go; the sheep became his friends and his companions; and it became second nature to think of them before he thought of himself. But the false shepherd came into the job, not as a calling, but as a means of making money. He was in it simply and solely for the pay he could get. He might even be a man who had taken to the hills because the town was too hot to hold him. He had no sense of the height and the responsibility of his task; he was only a hireling.

Wolves were a threat to a flock. Jesus said of his disciples that he was sending them out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt.10:16); Paul warned the elders of Ephesus that grievous wolves would come, not sparing the flock (Ac.20:29). If these wolves attacked, the hireling shepherd forgot everything but the saving of his own life and ran away. Zechariah marks it as the characteristic of a false shepherd that he made no attempt to gather together the scattered sheep (Zech.11:16). Carlyle's father once took this imagery caustically to his speech. In Ecclefechan they were having

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John 10:11-15

trouble with their minister; and it was the worst of all kinds of such trouble--it was about money. Carlyle's father rose and said bitingly: "Give the hireling his wages and let him go."

Jesus' point is that the man who works only for reward thinks chiefly of the money; the man who works for love thinks chiefly of the people he is trying to serve. Jesus was the good shepherd who so loved his sheep that for their safety he would risk, and one day give, his life.

We may note two further points before we leave this passage. Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd. Now in Greek, there are two words for good. There is *agathos* (GSN0018) which simply describes the moral quality of a thing; there is *kalos* (GSN2570) which means that in the goodness there is a quality of winsomeness which makes it lovely. When Jesus is described as the good shepherd, the word is *kalos* (GSN2570). In him there is more than efficiency and more than fidelity; there is loveliness. Sometimes in a village or town people speak about the good doctor. They are not thinking only of the doctor's efficiency and skill as a physician; they are thinking of the sympathy and the kindness and the graciousness which he brought with him and which made him the friend of all. In the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd there is loveliness as well as strength and power.

The second point is this. In the parable the flock is the Church of Christ; and it suffers from a double danger. It is always liable to attack from outside, from the wolves and the robbers and the marauders. It is always liable to trouble from the inside, from the false shepherd. The Church runs a double danger. It is always under attack from outside and often suffers from the tragedy of bad leadership, from the disaster of shepherds who see their calling as a career and not as a means of service. The second danger is by far the worse; because, if the shepherd is faithful and good, there is a strong defence from the attack from outside; but if the shepherd is faithless and a hireling, the foes from outside can penetrate into and destroy the flock. The Church's first essential is a leadership based on the example of Jesus Christ.

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John 10:16

THE ULTIMATE UNITY

John 10:16

"But I have other sheep which are not of this fold. These too I must bring in, and they will hear my voice; and they will become one flock, and there will be one shepherd."

One of the hardest things in the world to unlearn is exclusiveness. Once a people, or a section of a people, gets the idea that they are specially privileged, it is very difficult for them to accept that the privileges which they believed belonged to them and to them only are in fact open to all men. That is what the Jews never learned. They believed that they were God's chosen people and that God had no use for any other nation. They believed that, at the best, other nations were designed to be their slaves, and, at the worst, that they were destined for elimination from the scheme of things. But here Jesus is saying that there will come a day when all men will know him as their shepherd.

Even the Old Testament is not without its glimpses of that day. Isaiah had that very dream. It was his conviction that God had given Israel for a light to the nations (Isa.42:6; Isa.49:6; Isa.56:8) and always there had been some lonely voices which insisted that God was not the exclusive property of Israel, but that her destiny was to make him known to all men.

At first sight it might seem that the New Testament speaks with two voices on this subject; and some passages of the New Testament may well trouble and perplex us a little. As Matthew tells the story, when Jesus sent out his disciples, he said to them: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt.10:5-6). When the Syro-Phoenician woman appealed to Jesus for help, his first answer was that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt.15:24). But there is much to be set on the other side. Jesus himself stayed and taught in Samaria (Jn.4:40); he declared that descent from Abraham was no guarantee of entry into the kingdom (Jn.8:39).

It was of a Roman centurion that Jesus said that he had never seen such faith in Israel (Matt.8:10); it was a Samaritan leper who alone returned to give thanks (Lk.17:18-19); it was the Samaritan traveller who showed the kindness that all men must copy (Lk.10:37); many would come from the east and the west and the north and the south to sit down in the Kingdom of God (Matt.8:11; Lk.13:29); the command in the end was to go out and to preach the gospel to all nations (Mk.16:15; Matt.28:19); Jesus was, not the light of the Jews, but the light of the world (Jn.8:12).

What is the explanation of the sayings which seem to limit the work of Jesus to the Jews? The explanation is in reality very simple. The ultimate aim of Jesus was the world for God. But any great commander knows that he must in the first instance limit his objectives. If he tries to attack on too wide a front, he only scatters his forces, diffuses his strength, and gains success nowhere. In order to win an ultimately complete victory he must begin by concentrating his forces at certain limited objectives. That is what Jesus did. Had he gone here, there and everywhere, had he sent his disciples out with no limitation to their sphere of work, nothing would have been achieved. At the moment he deliberately concentrated on the Jewish nation, but his ultimate aim was the gathering of the whole world into his love.

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John 10:16

There are three great truths in this passage.

(i) It is only in Jesus Christ that the world can become one. Egerton Young was the first missionary to the Red Indians. In Saskatchewan he went out and told them of the love of God. To the Indians it was like a new revelation. When the missionary had told his message, an old chief said: "When you spoke of the great Spirit just now, did I hear you say, 'Our Father'?" "Yes," said Egerton Young. "That is very new and sweet to me," said the chief. "We never thought of the great Spirit as Father. We heard him in the thunder; we saw him in the lightning, the tempest and the blizzard, and we were afraid. So when you tell us that the great Spirit is our Father, that is very beautiful to us." The old man paused, and then he went on, as a glimpse of glory suddenly shone on him. "Missionary, did you say that the great Spirit is your Father?" "Yes," said the missionary. "And," said the chief, "did you say that he is the Indians' Father?" "I did," said the missionary. "Then," said the old chief, like a man on whom a dawn of joy had burst, "you and I are brothers!"

The only possible unity for men is in their common sonship with God. In the world there is division between nation and nation; in the nation there is division between class and class. There can never be one nation; and there can never be one class. The only thing which can cross the barriers and wipe out the distinctions is the gospel of Jesus Christ telling men of the universal fatherhood of God.

(ii) In the King James Version there is a mistranslation. It has: "There shall be one fold and one shepherd." That mistranslation goes back to Jerome and the Vulgate. And on that mistranslation the Roman Catholic Church has based the teaching that, since there is only one fold, there can only be one Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and that, outside it there is no salvation. But the real translation beyond all possible doubt as given in the Revised Standard Version, is: "There shall be one flock, one shepherd," or, even better, "They shall become one flock and there shall be one shepherd." The unity comes from the fact, not that all the sheep are forced into one fold, but they all hear, answer and obey one shepherd. It is not an ecclesiastical unity; it is a unity of loyalty to Jesus Christ. The fact that there is one flock does not mean that there can be only one Church, one method of worship, one form of ecclesiastical administration. But it does mean that all the different churches are united by a common loyalty to Jesus Christ.

(ii) But this saying of Jesus becomes very personal; for it is a dream which every one of us can help Jesus to realize. Men cannot hear without a preacher; the other sheep cannot be gathered in unless someone goes out to bring them in. Here is set before us the tremendous missionary task of the Church. And we must not think of that only in terms of what we used to call foreign missions. If we know someone here and now who is outside his love, we can find him for Christ. The dream of Christ depends on us; it is we who can help him make the world one flock with him as its shepherd.

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John 10:17-18

LOVE'S CHOICE

John 10:17-18

"The reason why my Father loves me is that I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have full authority to lay it down, and I have full authority to take it again. I have received this injunction from my Father."

Few passages in the New Testament tell us so much about Jesus in so short a compass.

(i) It tells us that Jesus saw his whole life as an act of obedience to God. God had given him a task to do, and he was prepared to carry it out to the end, even if it meant death. He was in a unique relationship to God which we can describe only by saying that he was the Son of God. But that relationship did not give him the right to do what he liked; it depended on his doing always, cost what it may, what God liked. Sonship for him, and sonship for us, could never be based on anything except obedience.

(ii) It tells us that Jesus always saw the Cross and the glory together. He never doubted that he must die; and equally he never doubted that he would rise again. The reason was his confidence in God; he was sure that God would never abandon him. All life is based on the fact that anything worth getting is hard to get. There is always a price to be paid. Scholarship can be bought only at the price of study; skill in any craft or technique can be bought only at the price of practice; eminence in any sport can be bought only at the price of training and discipline. The world is full of people who have missed their destiny because they would not pay the price. No one can take the easy way and enter into glory or greatness; no one can take the hard way and fail to find these things.

(iii) It tells us in a way that we cannot possibly mistake that Jesus' death was entirely voluntary. Jesus stresses this again and again. In the garden he bade his would-be defender put up his sword. If he had wished, he could have called in the hosts of heaven to his defence (Matt.26:53). He made it quite clear that Pilate was not condemning him, but that he was accepting death (Jn.19:10-11). He was not the victim of circumstance. He was not like some animal, dragged unwillingly and without understanding to the sacrifice. Jesus laid down his life because he chose to do so.

It is told that in the First World War there was a young French soldier who was seriously wounded. His arm was so badly smashed that it had to be amputated. He was a magnificent specimen of young manhood, and the surgeon was grieved that he must go through life maimed. So he waited beside his bedside to tell him the bad news when he recovered consciousness. When the lad's eyes opened, the surgeon said to him: "I am sorry to tell you that you have lost your arm." "Sir," said the lad, "I did not lose it; I gave it--for France."

Jesus was not helplessly caught up in a mesh of circumstances from which he could not break free. Apart from any divine power he might have called in, it is quite clear that to the end he could have turned back and saved his life. He did not lose his life: he gave it. The Cross was not thrust upon him: he willingly accepted it-for us.

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John 10:19-21

MADMAN OR SON OF GOD

John 10:19-21

There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said: "He has an evil spirit, and he is mad. Why do you listen to him?" Others said: "These are not the words of a man possessed by an evil spirit. Can a man with an evil spirit open the eyes of the blind?"

The people who listened to Jesus on this occasion were confronted with a dilemma which is for ever confronting men. Either Jesus was a megalomaniac madman, or he was the Son of God. There is no escape from that choice. If a man speaks about God and about himself in the way in which Jesus spoke, either he is completely deluded, or else he is profoundly right. The claims which Jesus made signify either insanity or divinity. How can we assure ourselves that they were indeed justified and not the world's greatest delusion?

(i) The words of Jesus are not the words of a madman. We could cite witness after witness to prove that the teaching of Jesus is the supreme sanity. Thinking men and women in every generation have judged the teaching of Jesus the one hope of sanity for a mad world. His is the one voice which speaks God's sense in the midst of man's delusions.

(ii) The deeds of Jesus are not the deeds of a madman. He healed the sick and fed the hungry and comforted the sorrowing. The madness of megalomania is essentially selfish. It seeks for nothing but its own glory and prestige. But Jesus' life was spent in doing things for others. As the Jews themselves said, a man who was mad would not be able to open the eyes of the blind.

(iii) The effect of Jesus is not the effect of a madman. The undeniable fact is that millions upon millions of lives have been changed by the power of Jesus Christ. The weak have become strong, the selfish have become selfless, the defeated have become victorious, the worried have become serene, the bad have become good. It is not madness which produces such a change, but wisdom and sanity.

The choice remains--Jesus was either mad or divine. No honest person can review the evidence and come to any other conclusion than that Jesus brought into the world, not a deluded madness, but the perfect sanity of God.

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John 10:22-28

THE CLAIM AND THE PROMISE

John 10:22-28 (Part 1)

It was the Festival of the Dedication in Jerusalem. It was wintry weather, and Jesus was walking in the Temple precincts in Solomon's Porch. So the Jews surrounded him. "How long," they said to him, "are you going to keep us hanging in suspense? If you really are God's Anointed One, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them: "I did tell you and you did not believe me. The works that I do in the name of my Father, these are evidence about me. But you do not believe because you are not among the number of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them from my hand."

John begins by giving us both the date and the place of this discussion. The date was the Festival of the Dedication. This was the latest of the great Jewish festivals to be founded. It was sometimes called The Festival of Lights; and its Jewish name was Hanukkah. Its date is the 25th of the Jewish month called Chislew which corresponds with our December. This Festival therefore falls very near our Christmas time and is still universally observed by the Jews.

The origin of the Festival of the Dedication lies in one of the greatest times of ordeal and heroism in Jewish history. There was a king of Syria called Antiochus Epiphanes who reigned from 175 to 164 B.C. He was a lover of all things Greek. He decided that he would eliminate the Jewish religion once and for all, and introduce Greek ways and thoughts, Greek religion and gods into Palestine. At first he tried to do so by peaceful penetration of ideas. Some of the Jews welcomed the new ways, but most were stubbornly loyal to their ancestral faith. It was in 170 B.C. that the deluge really came. In that year Antiochus attacked Jerusalem. It was said that 80,000 Jews perished, and as many were sold into slavery. 1,800 talents--a talent is equal to 240 British pounds--were stolen from the Temple treasury. It became a capital offence to possess a copy of the law, or to circumcise a child; and mothers who did circumcise their children were crucified with their children hanging round their necks.

The Temple courts were profaned; the Temple chambers were turned into brothels; and finally Antiochus took the dreadful step of turning the great altar of the burnt-offering into an altar to Olympian Zeus, and on it proceeded to offer swine's flesh to the pagan gods.

It was then that Judas Maccabaeus and his brother arose to fight their epic fight for freedom. In 164 B.C. the struggle was finally won; and in that year the Temple was cleansed and purified. The altar was rebuilt and the robes and the utensils were replaced, after three years of pollution. It was to commemorate that purification of the Temple that the Feast of the Dedication was instituted. Judas Maccabaeus enacted that "the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept in their season from year to year, by the space of eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month of Chislew, with gladness and joy" (1Macc.4:59). For that reason the festival was sometimes called the Festival of the Dedication of the Altar, and sometimes the Memorial of the Purification of the Temple.

But as we have already seen, it had still another name. It was often called the Festival of Lights. There were great illuminations in the Temple; and there were also illuminations in every Jewish

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John 10:22-28

home. In the window of every Jewish house there were set lights. According to Shammai, eight lights were set in the window, and they were reduced each day by one until on the last day only one was left burning. According to Hillel, one light was kindled on the first day, and one was added each day until on the last day eight were burning. We can see these lights in the windows of every devout Jewish home to this day.

These lights had two significances. First, they were a reminder that at the first celebrating of the festival the light of freedom had come back to Israel. Second, they were traced back to a very old legend. It was told that when the Temple had been purified and the great seven branched candlestick re-lit, only one little cruse of unpolluted oil could be found. This cruse was still intact, and still sealed with the impress of the ring of the High Priest. By all normal measures, there was only oil enough in that cruse to light the lamps for one single day. But by a miracle it lasted for eight days, until new oil had been prepared according to the correct formula and had been consecrated for its sacred use. So for eight days the lights burned in the Temple and in the homes of the people in memory of the cruse which God had made to last for eight days instead of one.

It is not without significance that it must have been very close to this time of illumination that Jesus said: "I am the Light of the world." When all the lights were being kindled in memory of the freedom won to worship God in the true way, Jesus said: "I am the Light of the world; I alone can light men into the knowledge and the presence of God."

John also gives us the place of this discussion, Solomon's Porch. The first court in the Temple precincts was the Court of the Gentiles. Along two sides of it ran two magnificent colonnades called the Royal Porch and Solomon's Porch. They were rows of magnificent pillars, almost forty feet high and roofed over. People walked there to pray and meditate; and Rabbis strolled there as they talked to their students and expounded the doctrines of the faith. It was there that Jesus was walking, because, as John says with a pictorial touch, "it was wintry weather."

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John 10:22-28

THE CLAIM AND THE PROMISE

John 10:22-28 (Part 2)

As Jesus walked in Solomon's Porch the Jews came to him. "How long," they said to him, "are you going to keep us in suspense? Tell us plainly, are you or are you not God's promised Anointed One?" There is no doubt that behind that question were two attitudes of mind. There were those who genuinely wished to know. They were on an eager tip-toe of expectation. But there were others who beyond a doubt asked the question as a trap. They wished to inveigle Jesus into making a statement which could be twisted either into a charge of blasphemy with which their own courts could deal or a charge of insurrection with which the Roman governor would deal.

Jesus' answer was that he had already told them who he was. True, he had not done so in so many words; for, as John tells the story, Jesus' two great claims had been made in private. To the Samaritan woman he had revealed himself as the Messiah (Jn.4:26) and to the man born blind he had claimed to be the Son of God (Jn.9:37). But there are some claims which do not need to be made in words, especially to an audience well-qualified to perceive them. There were two things about Jesus which placed his claim beyond all doubt whether he stated it in words or not. First, there were his deeds. It was Isaiah's dream of the golden age: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy" (Isa.35:5-6). Every one of Jesus' miracles was a claim that the Messiah had come. Second, there were his words. Moses had forecast that God would raise up the Prophet who must be listened to (Deut.18:15).

The very accent of authority with which Jesus spoke, the way in which he regally abrogated the old law and put his own teaching in its place, was a claim that God was speaking in him. The words and deeds of Jesus were a continuous claim to be the Anointed One of God.

But the great majority of the Jews had not accepted that claim. As we have seen in Palestine the sheep knew their own shepherd's special call and answered it; these were not of Jesus' flock. In the fourth gospel there is behind it all a doctrine of predestination, things were happening all the time as God meant them to happen. John is really saying that these Jews were predestined not to follow Jesus. Somehow or other the whole New Testament keeps two opposite ideas in balance--the fact that everything happens within the purpose of God and yet in such a way that man's free-will is responsible. These had made themselves such that they were predestined not to accept Jesus; and yet, as John sees it, that does not make them any the less to be condemned.

But though most did not accept Jesus, some did; and to them Jesus promised three things.

(i) He promised eternal life. He promised that if they accepted him as Master and Lord, if they became members of his flock, all the littleness of earthly life would be gone and they would know the splendour and the magnificence of the life of God.

(ii) He promised a life that would know no end. Death would not be the end but the beginning; they would know the glory of indestructible life.

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John 10:22-28

(iii) He promised a life that was secure. Nothing could snatch them from his hand. This would not mean that they would be saved from sorrow, from suffering and from death; but that in the sorest moment and the darkest hour they would still be conscious of the everlasting arms underneath and about them. Even in a world crashing to disaster they would know the serenity of God.

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John 10:29-30

THE TREMENDOUS TRUST AND THE TREMENDOUS CLAIM

John 10:29-30

My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all; and no one can snatch them from the hand of the Father. I and the Father are one.

This passage shows at one and the same time the tremendous trust and the tremendous claim of Jesus.

His trust was something which traced everything back to God. He has just been speaking about his sheep and his flock; he has just been saying that no one will ever snatch his own from his hand, that he is the shepherd who will keep the sheep for ever safe. At first sight, and if he had stopped there, it would have seemed that Jesus put his trust in his own keeping power. But now we see the other side of it. It is his Father who gave him his sheep; that both he and his sheep are in his Father's hand. Jesus was so sure of himself because he was so sure of God. His attitude to life was not self-confidence, but God-confidence. He was secure, not in his own power, but in God's. He was so certain of ultimate safety and ultimate victory, not because he arrogated all power to himself, but because he assigned all power to God.

Now we come to the supreme claim. "I and the Father are one," said Jesus. What did he mean? Is it absolute mystery, or can we understand at least a little of it? Are we driven to interpret it in terms of essence and hypostasis and all the rest of the metaphysical and philosophic notions about which the makers of the creeds fought and argued? Has one to be a theologian and a philosopher to grasp even a fragment of the meaning of this tremendous statement?

If we go to the Bible itself for the interpretation, we find that it is in fact so simple that the simplest mind can grasp it. Let us turn to the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel, which tells of the prayer of Jesus for his followers before he went to his death: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one" (Jn.17:11). Jesus conceived of the unity of Christian with Christian as the same as his unity with God. In the same passage he goes on: "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (Jn.17:20-22).

Jesus is saying with simplicity and a clarity none can mistake that the end of the Christian life is that Christians should be one as he and his Father are one.

What is the unity which should exist between Christian and Christian? Its secret is love. "A new commandment I give to you, That you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn.13:34). Christians are one because they love one another; even so, Jesus is one with God because of his love of God. But we can go further. What is the only test of love? Let us go again to the words of Jesus. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love; just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (Jn.15:10). "If a man loves me, he

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John 10:29-30

will keep my word" (Jn.14:23-24). "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn.14:15). "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me" (Jn.14:21).

Here is the essence of the matter. The bond of unity is love; the proof of love is obedience. Christians are one with each other when they are bound by love, and obey the words of Christ. Jesus is one with God, because as no other ever did, he obeyed and loved him. His unity with God is a unity of perfect love, issuing in perfect obedience.

When Jesus said: "I and the Father are one," he was not moving in the world of philosophy and metaphysics and abstractions; he was moving in the world of personal relationships. No one can really understand what a phrase like "a unity of essence" means; but any one can understand what a unity of heart means. Jesus' unity with God came from the twin facts of perfect love and perfect obedience. He was one with God because he loved and obeyed him perfectly; and he came to this world to make us what he is.

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John 10:31-39

INVITING THE ACID TEST

John 10:31-39

The Jews again lifted up stones to stone him. Jesus said to them: "I have showed you many lovely deeds, which came from my Father. For which of these deeds are you trying to stone me?" The Jews answered him: "It is not for any lovely deed that we propose to stone you; it is for insulting God, and because you, being a man, make yourself God." "Does it not stand written in your law," Jesus answered them, "I said you are gods"? If he called those to whom the word came gods--and the scripture cannot be destroyed--are you going to say about me, whom the Father consecrated and despatched into the world: 'You insult God,' because I said: 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me. But if I do, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and recognize that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father." They again tried to lay violent hands on him, but he evaded their grasp.

To the Jews Jesus' statement that he and the Father were one was blasphemy. It was the invasion by a man of the place which belonged to God alone. The Jewish law laid down the penalty of stoning for blasphemy. "He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him" (Lev.24:16). So they made their preparations to stone Jesus. The Greek really means that they went and fetched stones to fling at him. Jesus met their hostility with three arguments.

(i) He told them that he had spent all his days doing lovely things, healing the sick feeding the hungry, and comforting the sorrowing, deeds so full of help and power and beauty that they obviously came from God. For which of these deeds did they wish to stone him? Their answer was that it was not for anything he had done that they wished to stone him, but for the claim he was making.

(ii) This claim was that he was the Son of God. To meet their attack Jesus used two arguments. The first is a purely Jewish argument which is difficult for us to understand. He quoted Ps.82:6. That psalm is a warning to unjust judges to cease from unjust ways and defend the poor and the innocent. The appeal concludes: "I say, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.'" The judge is commissioned by God to be god to men. This idea comes out very clearly in certain of the regulations in Exodus. Exo.21:1-6 tells how the Hebrew servant may go free in the seventh year. As the King James Version has it, Exo.21:6 says "Then his master shall bring him unto the judges." But in the Hebrew, the word which is translated judges is actually 'elohiym (HSN0430), which means gods. The same form of expression is used in Exo.22:9; Exo.22:28. Even scripture said of men who were specially commissioned to some task by God that they were gods. So Jesus said: "If scripture can speak like that about men, why should I not speak so about myself?"

Jesus claimed two things for himself. (a) He was consecrated by God to a special task. The word for to consecrate is hagiazein (GSN0037), the verb from which comes the adjective hagios (GSN0040), holy. This word always has the idea of rendering a person or a place or a thing different from other persons and places and things, because it is set aside for a special purpose or task. So, for instance, the Sabbath is holy (Exo.20:11). The altar is holy (Lev.16:19). The priests are

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holy (2Chr.26:18). The prophet is holy (Jer.1:5). When Jesus said that God had consecrated him, made him holy, he meant that he had set him apart from other men, because he had given him a special task to do. The very fact that Jesus used this word shows how conscious he was of his special task. (b) He said that God had despatched him into the world. The word used is the one which would be used for sending a messenger or an ambassador or an army.

Jesus did not so much think of himself as coming into the world, as being sent into the world His coming was an act of God; and he came to do the task which God had given him to do.

So Jesus said: "In the old days it was possible for scripture to speak of judges as gods, because they were commissioned by God to bring his truth and justice into the world. Now I have been set apart for a special task; I have been despatched into the world by God; how can you then object if I call myself the Son of God? I am only doing what scripture does." This is one of those biblical arguments the force of which it is difficult for us to feel; but which to a Jewish Rabbi would have been entirely convincing.

(iii) Jesus went on to invite the acid test. "I do not ask you, he said in effect," to accept my words. But I do ask you to accept my deeds." A word is something about which a man can argue; but a deed is something beyond argument. Jesus is the perfect teacher in that he does not base his claims on what he says, but on what he is and does. His invitation to the Jews was to base their verdict on him, not on what he said, but on what he did; and that is a test which all his followers ought to be able and willing to meet. The tragedy is that so few can meet it, still less invite it.

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John 10:40-42

PEACE BEFORE THE STORM

John 10:40-42

And he went away again to the other side of Jordan, to the place where John first used to baptize; and he stayed there. And many came to him, and they kept saying: "John did no sign; but everything John said about this man is true." And then many believed in him.

For Jesus the time was running out; but he knew his hour. He would not recklessly court danger and throw his life away; nor would he in cowardice avoid danger to preserve his life. But he desired quietness before the final struggle. He always armed himself to meet men by first meeting God. That is why he retired to the other side of Jordan. He was not running away: he was preparing himself for the final contest.

The place to which Jesus went is most significant. He went to the place where John had been accustomed to baptize, the place where he himself had been baptized. It was there that the voice of God had come to him and assured him that he had taken the right decision and was on the right way. There is everything to be said for a man returning every now and then to the place where he had the supreme experience of his life. When Jacob was up against it, when things had gone wrong and badly wrong, he went back to Bethel (Gen.35:1-5). When he needed God, he went back to the place where he had first found him. Jesus, before the end, went back to the place where the beginning had happened. It would often do our souls a world of good to make a pilgrimage to the place where we first found God.

Even on the far side of Jordan the Jews came to Jesus, and they too thought of John. They remembered that he had spoken with the words of a prophet; but had done no mighty deeds. They saw that there was a difference between Jesus and John. To John's proclamation Jesus added God's power. John could diagnose the situation; Jesus brought the power to deal with the situation. These Jews had looked on John as a prophet; now they saw that what John had foretold of Jesus was true, and many of them believed.

It often happens that a man for whom a great future is painted, and who sets out with the hopes of men upon him, disappoints that future and belies these hopes. But Jesus was even greater than John had said he would be. Jesus is the one person who never disappoints those who set their hopes upon him. In him the dream always comes true.

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John 11:1-5

ON THE ROAD TO GLORY

John 11:1-5

There was a man Lazarus, who came from Bethany from the village where Mary and her sister Martha lived, and he was ill. It was Mary who had anointed the Lord with perfumed ointment, and who had wiped his feet with her hair, and it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus. "Lord," they said, "See! The one you love is ill." When Jesus heard the message, he said: "This illness is not going to prove fatal; rather it has happened for the sake of the glory of God, so that God's Son should be glorified by means of it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

It is one of the most precious things in the world to have a house and a home into which one can go at any time and find rest and understanding and peace and love. That was doubly true for Jesus, for he had no home of his own; he had nowhere to lay his head (Lk.9:58). In the home at Bethany he had just such a place. There were three people who loved him; and there he could find rest from the tension of life.

The greatest gift any human being can give another is understanding and peace. To have someone to whom we can go at any time knowing that they will not laugh at our dreams or misunderstand our confidences is a most wonderful thing. It is open to us all to make our own homes like that. It does not cost money, and does not need lavish hospitality. It costs only the understanding heart. Sir William Watson, in his poem Wordsworth's Grave, paid a great tribute to Wordsworth:

"What hadst thou that could make so large amends,
For all thou hadst not and thy peers possessed?
Motion and fire, swift means to radiant ends?
Thou hadst for weary feet, the gift of rest."

No man can have a greater gift to offer his fellow men than rest for weary feet; and that is the gift which Jesus found in the house in Bethany, where Martha and Mary and Lazarus lived.

The name Lazarus means God is my help, and is the same name as Eleazar. Lazarus fell ill, and the sisters sent to Jesus a message that it was so. It is lovely to note that the sisters' message included no request to Jesus to come to Bethany. They knew that was unnecessary; they knew that the simple statement that they were in need would bring him to them. Augustine noted this. and said it was sufficient that Jesus should know; for it is not possible that any man should at one and the same time love a friend and desert him. C. F. Andrews tells of two friends who served together in the First World War. One of them was wounded and left lying helpless and in pain in no-man's-land. The other, at peril of his life, crawled out to help his friend; and, when he reached him, the wounded man looked up and said simply: "I knew you would come." The simple fact of human need brings Jesus to our side in the twinkling of an eye.

When Jesus came to Bethany he knew that whatever was wrong with Lazarus he had power to deal with it. But he went on to say that his sickness had happened for God's glory and for his. Now

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this was true in a double sense--and Jesus knew it. (i) The cure would undoubtedly enable men to see the glory of God in action. (ii) But there was more to it than that. Again and again in the Fourth Gospel Jesus talks of his glory in connection with the Cross. John tells us in Jn.7:39 that the Spirit had not yet come because Jesus was not yet glorified, that is to say, because he had not yet died upon his Cross. When the Greeks came to him, Jesus said: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (Jn.12:23). And it was of his Cross that he spoke, for he went straight on to speak of the corn of wheat which must fall into the ground and die. In Jn.12:16 John says that the disciples remembered these things after Jesus had been glorified, that is after he had died and risen again. In the Fourth Gospel it is clear that Jesus regarded the Cross both as his supreme glory and as the way to glory. So when he said that the cure of Lazarus would glorify him, he was showing that he knew perfectly well that to go to Bethany and to cure Lazarus was to take a step which would end in the Cross--as indeed it did.

With open eyes Jesus accepted the Cross to help his friend. He knew the cost of helping and was well prepared to pay it.

When some trial or affliction comes upon us, especially if it is the direct result of fidelity to Jesus Christ, it would make all the difference in the world if we saw that the cross we have to bear is our glory and the way to a greater glory still. For Jesus there was no other way to glory than through the Cross; and so it must ever be with those who follow him.

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John 11:6-10

TIME ENOUGH BUT NOT TOO MUCH

John 11:6-10 (Part 1)

Now, when Jesus had received the news that Lazarus was ill, he continued to stay where he was for two days. But after that he said to his disciples: "Let us go to Judaea again." His disciples said to him: "Rabbi, things had got to a stage when the Jews were trying to find a way to stone you, and do you propose to go back there?" Jesus answered: "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walks in the day-time, he does not stumble because he has the light of this world. But if a man walks in the night-time, he does stumble because the light is not in him."

We may find it strange that John shows us Jesus staying two whole days where he was when he received the news about Lazarus. Commentators have advanced different reasons to explain this delay. (i) It has been suggested that Jesus waited so that when he arrived Lazarus would be indisputably dead. (ii) It has therefore been suggested that Jesus waited because the delay would make the miracle he proposed to perform all the more impressive. The wonder of raising to life a man who had been dead for four days would be all the greater. (iii) The real reason why John tells the story in this way is that he always shows us Jesus taking action entirely on his own initiative and not on the persuasion of anyone else. In the story of the turning of the water into wine at Cana of Galilee (Jn.2:1-11) John shows us Mary coming to Jesus and telling him of the problem. Jesus' first answer to Mary is: "Don't bother about this.

Let me handle it in my own way." He takes action, not because he is persuaded or compelled to do so, but entirely on his own initiative. When John tells the story of Jesus' brothers trying to dare him into going to Jerusalem (Jn.7:1-10), he shows us Jesus at first refusing to go to Jerusalem and then going in his own good time. It is always John's aim to show that Jesus did things, not because he was pressed to do them, but because he chose to do them in his own good time. That is what John is doing here. It is a warning to us. So often we would like Jesus to do things in our way; we must leave him to do them in his own way.

When Jesus finally announced that he was going to Judaea, his disciples were shocked and staggered. They remembered that the last time he was there the Jews had tried to find a way to kill him. To go to Judaea at that time seemed to them--as indeed humanly speaking it was--the surest way to commit suicide.

Then Jesus said something which contains a great and permanent truth. "Are there not," he asked, "twelve hours in the day?" There are three great truths implied in that question.

(i) A day cannot finish before it ends. There are twelve hours in the day, and they will be played out no matter what happens. The day's period is fixed, and nothing will shorten or lengthen it. In God's economy of time a man has his day, whether it be short or long.

(ii) If there are twelve hours in the day there is time enough for everything a man should do. There is no need for a rushed haste.

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John 11:6-10

(iii) But, even if there are twelve hours in the day, there are only twelve hours. They cannot be extended; and therefore, time cannot be wasted. There is time enough, but not too much; the time we have must be used to the utmost.

The legend of Dr. Faustus was turned into great drama and poetry by Christopher Marlowe. Faustus had struck a bargain with the devil. For twenty-four years the devil would be his servant and his every wish would be realized; but at the end of the years the devil would claim his soul. The twenty-four years have run their course, the last hour has come, and Faustus now sees what a terrible bargain he has struck.

"Ah, Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually;
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come.
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!
O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd."

Nothing in the world could give Faustus more time. That is one of the great threatening facts in the life of man. There are twelve hours in the day--but there are only twelve hours in the day. There is no necessity for haste; but, equally, there is no room for waste. There is time enough in life, but there is never time to spare.

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John 11:6-10

THE DAY AND THE NIGHT

John 11:6-10 (Part 2)

Jesus goes on to develop what he has just said about time. He says that if a man walks in the light, he will not stumble; but if he tries to walk in the night, he will stumble.

John again and again says things which have two meanings, one which lies on the surface and is true, and another which lies below the surface and is truer yet. It is so here.

(i) There is a surface meaning which is perfectly true and which we must learn. The Jewish day, like the Roman day, was divided into twelve equal hours, from sunrise to sunset. That of course means that the length of an hour varied according to the length of the day and the season of the year. On the surface Jesus simply means that a man will not stumble when the sun is shining, but when the dark comes down he cannot see the way. There was no street lighting in those days, at least not in the country places. With the dark, the time for journeying was done.

Jesus is saying that a man must finish the day's work within the day, for the night comes when work is ended. If a man had one wish it might well be that he might come to the end of each day with its work completed. The unrest and the hurry of life are so often simply due to the fact that we are trying to catch up on work which should have been done before. A man should so spend his precious capital of time and not dissipate it on useless extravagances, however pleasant, that at the end of each day he is never in debt to time.

(ii) But below the surface meaning is another meaning. Who can hear the phrase the light of the world without thinking of Jesus? Again and again John uses the words the dark and the night to describe life without Christ, life dominated by evil. In his dramatic account of the last meal together, John describes how Judas went out to make the dreadful final arrangements for the betrayal. "So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night" (Jn.13:30). The night is the time when a man goes from Christ and when evil possesses him.

The gospel is based on the love of God; but whether we like it or not, there is a threat also at its heart. A man has only so much time to make his peace with God through Christ; and if he does not do so the judgment must follow. So Jesus says: "Finish your greatest work; finish the work of getting yourself right with God while you have the light of the world; for the time comes when for you, too, the dark must come down and then it will be too late."

No gospel is so sure that God loved the world as the Fourth Gospel is; but also no gospel is so sure that love may be refused. It has in it two notes--the glory of being in time; and the tragedy of being too late.

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John 11:11-16

THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT QUIT

John 11:11-16

Jesus said these things, and then he went on to say: "Our friend Lazarus is sleeping; but I am going to waken him up." "Lord," the disciples said to him, "if he is sleeping he will recover." But Jesus had spoken about his death. They thought that he was speaking about the sleep of natural sleep. So Jesus then said to them plainly: "Lazarus has died, and, for your sakes, I am glad that I was not there, because it is all designed in order that you may come to believe. But let us go to him." Thereupon Thomas, who was called Didymus, said: "Let us, too, go that we may die with him."

John here uses his normal method of relating a conversation of Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' conversations always follow the same pattern. Jesus says something which sounds quite simple. His saying is misunderstood, and he goes on to explain more fully and unmistakably what he meant. So it is with his conversation with Nicodemus about being born again (Jn.3:3-8); and his conversation with the woman at the well about the water of life (Jn.4:10-15).

Jesus here began by saying that Lazarus was sleeping. To the disciples that sounded good news, for there is no better medicine than sleep. But the word sleep has always had a deeper and a more serious meaning. Jesus said of Jairus' daughter that she was asleep (Matt.9:24); at the end of Stephen's martyrdom we are told that he fell asleep (Ac.7:60). Paul speaks about those who sleep in Jesus (1Th.4:13); and of those witnesses of the Resurrection who are now fallen asleep (1Cor.15:6). So Jesus had to tell them plainly that Lazarus was dead; and then he went on to say that for their sake this was a good thing, because it would produce an event which would buttress them even more firmly in their faith.

The final proof of Christianity is the sight of what Jesus Christ can do. Words may fail to convince, but there is no argument against God in action. It is the simple fact that the power of Jesus Christ has made the coward into a hero, the doubter into a man of certainty, the selfish man into the servant of all. Above all, it is the plain fact of history that again and again the power of Christ has made the bad man good.

That is what lays so tremendous a responsibility on the individual Christian. The design of God is that every one of us should be a living proof of his power. Our task is not so much to commend Christ in words--against which there is always an argument, for no one can ever write Q.E.D. after a Christian verbal proof--but to demonstrate in our lives what Christ has done for us. Sir John Reith once said: "I do not like crises; but I like the opportunities which they supply." The death of Lazarus brought a crisis to Jesus, and he was glad, because it gave him the opportunity to demonstrate in the most amazing way what God can do. For us every crisis should be a like opportunity.

At that moment the disciples might well have refused to follow Jesus; then one lonely voice spoke up. They were all feeling that to go to Jerusalem was to go to their deaths, and they were hanging back. Then came the voice of Thomas: "Let us, too, go that we may die with him."

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John 11:11-16

All Jews in those days had two names--one a Hebrew name by which a man was known in his own circle, the other a Greek name by which he was known in a wider circle. Thomas is the Hebrew and Didymus (GSN1324) the Greek for a twin. So Peter is the Greek and Cephas (HSN3710 and GSN2786) is the Hebrew for a rock; Tabitha (HSN5000) is the Hebrew, and Dorcas (GSN1393) the Greek for a gazelle. In later days the apocryphal Gospels wove their stories around Thomas, and they actually in the end came to say that he was the twin of Jesus himself.

At this moment Thomas displayed the highest kind of courage. In his heart, as R. H. Strachan said, "There was not expectant faith, but loyal despair." But upon one thing Thomas was determined--come what may, he would not quit.

Gilbert Frankau tells of an officer friend of his in the 1914-18 war, an artillery observation officer. His duty was to go up in a captive balloon and to indicate to the gunners whether their shells fell short of or over the target. It was one of the most dangerous assignments that could be given. Because the balloon was captive, there was no way to dodge; he was a sitting target for the guns and planes of the enemy. Gilbert Frankau said of his friend: "Every time he went up in that balloon he was sick with nerves, but he wouldn't quit."

That is the highest form of courage. It does not mean not being afraid. If we are not afraid it is the easiest thing in the world to do a thing. Real courage means being perfectly aware of the worst that can happen, being sickeningly afraid of it, and yet doing the right thing. That was what Thomas was like that day. No man need ever be ashamed of being afraid; but he may well be ashamed of allowing his fear to stop him doing what in his heart of hearts he knows he ought to do.

Barclay's Commentary

John 11:17-19

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING

John 11:17-19

So, when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, less than two miles away. Many of the Jews had gone to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother.

In order to visualize this scene we must first see what a Jewish house of mourning was like. Normally in Palestine, because of the climate, burial followed death as quickly as possible. There was a time when a funeral was an exceedingly costly thing. The finest spices and ointments were used to anoint the body; the body itself was clothed in the most magnificent robes; all kinds of valuables were buried in the tomb along with the body. By midway through the first century all this had become a ruinous expenditure. Naturally no one wished on such an occasion to be outdone by his neighbour, and the wrappings and robes with which the body was covered, and the treasures left in the tomb, became ever more expensive. The matter had become almost an intolerable burden which no one liked to alter--until the advent of a famous Rabbi called Gamaliel the Second. He gave orders that he was to be buried in the simplest possible linen robe, and so broke the extravagance of funeral customs.

To this day at Jewish funerals a cup is drunk to Rabbi Gamaliel who rescued the Jews from their own ostentatious extravagance. From his time on the body was wrapped in a simple linen dress which was sometimes called by the very beautiful name of the travelling-dress.

As many as possible attended a funeral. Everyone who could was supposed, in courtesy and respect, to join the procession on its way. One curious custom was that the woman walked first, for it was held that since woman by her first sin brought death into the world, she ought to lead the mourners to the tomb. At the tomb memorial speeches were sometimes made. Everyone was expected to express the deepest sympathy, and, on leaving the tomb, the others stood in two long lines while the principal mourners passed between them. But there was this very wise rule--the mourners were not to be tormented by idle and uninvited talk. They were to be left, at that moment, alone with their sorrow.

In the house of mourning there were set customs. So long as the body was in the house it was forbidden to eat meat or to drink wine, to wear phylacteries or to engage in any kind of study. No food was to be prepared in the house, and such food as was eaten must not be eaten in the presence of the dead. As soon as the body was carried out all furniture was reversed, and the mourners sat on the ground or on low stools.

On the return from the tomb a meal was served, which had been prepared by the friends of the family. It consisted of bread, hard-boiled eggs and lentils; the round eggs and lentils symbolized life which was always rolling to death.

Deep mourning lasted for seven days, of which the first three were days of weeping. During these seven days it was forbidden to anoint oneself, to put on shoes, to engage in any kind of study or

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John 11:17-19

business, and even to wash. The week of deep mourning was followed by thirty days of lighter mourning.

So when Jesus found a crowd in the house at Bethany, he found what anyone would expect to find in a Jewish house of mourning. It was a sacred duty to come to express loving sympathy with the sorrowing friends and relations of one who had died. The Talmud says that whoever visits the sick shall deliver his soul from Gehenna; and Maimonides, the great medieval Jewish scholar, declared that to visit the sick takes precedence of all other good works. Visits of sympathy to the sick, and to the sorrowing, were an essential part of Jewish religion. A certain Rabbi expounded the text in Deut.13:4: "You shall walk after the Lord your God." He said that text commands us to imitate the things which God is depicted as doing in scripture. God clothed the naked (Gen.3:21); God visited the sick (Gen.18:1). God comforted the mourners (Gen.25:11); God buried the dead (Deut.34:6). In all these things we must imitate the actions of God.

Respect for the dead and sympathy for the mourner were an essential part of Jewish duty. As the mourners left the tomb, they turned and said: "Depart in peace," and they never mentioned the name of the one who had died without invoking a blessing on it. There is something very lovely in the way in which the Jews stressed the duty of showing sympathy to the mourner.

It would be to a household crowded with sympathizers that Jesus came that day.

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John 11:20-27

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:20-27 (Part 1)

So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary remained sitting in the house. So Martha said to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even as things are, I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you." Jesus said to her: "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him: "I know that he will rise at the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live even if he has died; and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him; "Yes, Lord. I am convinced that you are God's Anointed One, the Son of God, the One who is to come into the world."

In this story, too, Martha is true to character. When Luke tells us about Martha and Mary (Lk.10:38-42), he shows us Martha as the one who loved action, and Mary as the one whose instinct was to sit still. It is so here. As soon as it was announced that Jesus was coming near, Martha was up to meet him, for she could not sit still, but Mary lingered behind.

When Martha met Jesus her heart spoke through her lips. Here is one of the most human speeches in all the Bible, for Martha spoke, half with a reproach that she could not keep back, and half with a faith that nothing could shake. "If you had been here," she said, "my brother would not have died." Through the words we read her mind. Martha would have liked to say: "When you got our message, why didn't you come at once? And now you have left it too late." No sooner are the words out than there follow the words of faith, faith which defied the facts and defied experience: "Even yet," she said with a kind of desperate hope, "even yet, I know that God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus said "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered: "I know quite well that he will rise in the general resurrection on the last day." Now that is a notable saying. One of the strangest things in scripture is the fact that the saints of the Old Testament had practically no belief in any real life after death. In the early days, the Hebrews believed that the soul of every man, good and bad alike, went to Sheol. Sheol is wrongly translated Hell; for it was not a place of torture, it was the land of the shades. All alike went there and they lived a vague, shadowy, strengthless, joyless ghostly kind of life. This is the belief of by far the greater part of the Old Testament. "In death there is no remembrance of thee: in Sheol who can give thee praise?" (Ps.6:5). "What profit is there in my death if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?" (Ps.30:9). The Psalmist speaks of "the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom thou dost remember no more; for they are cut off from thy hand" (Ps.88:5). "Is thy steadfast love declared in the grave," he asks, "or thy faithfulness in Abaddon? Are thy wonders known in the darkness, or thy saving help in the land of forgetfulness?" (Ps.88:10-12). "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence" (Ps.115:17). The preacher says grimly: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going" (Ecc.9:10). It is Hezekiah's pessimistic belief that: "For Sheol cannot thank thee, death cannot praise thee; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness" (Isa.38:18). After

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John 11:20-27

death came the land of silence and of forgetfulness, where the shades of men were separated alike from men and from God. As J. E.

McFadyen wrote: "There are few more wonderful things than this in the long history of religion, that for centuries men lived the noblest lives, doing their duties and bearing their sorrows, without hope of future reward."

Just very occasionally someone in the Old Testament made a venturesome leap of faith. The Psalmist cries: "My body also dwells secure. For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the pit. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Ps.16:9-11). "I am continually with thee; thou dost hold my right hand. Thou dost guide the with thy counsel, and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory" (Ps.73:23-24). The Psalmist was convinced that when a man entered into a real relationship with God, not even death could break it. But at that stage it was a desperate leap of faith rather than a settled conviction. Finally in the Old Testament there is the immortal hope we find in Job. In face of all his disasters Job cried out:

"I know that there liveth a champion,
Who will one day stand over my dust;
Yea, another shall rise as my witness,
And, as sponsor, shall I behold--God;
Whom mine eyes shall behold, and no stranger's."
(Jb.14:7-12; translated by J. E. McFadyen).

Here in Job we have the real seed of the Jewish belief in immortality.

The Jewish history was a history of disasters, of captivity, slavery and defeat. Yet the Jewish people had the utterly unshakable conviction that they were God's own people. This earth had never shown it and never would; inevitably, therefore, they called in the new world to redress the inadequacies of the old. They came to see that if God's design was ever fully to be worked out, if his justice was ever completely to be fulfilled, if his love was ever finally to be satisfied, another world and another life were necessary. As Galloway (quoted by McFadyen) put it: "The enigmas of life become at least less baffling, when we come to rest in the thought that this is not the last act of the human drama." It was precisely that feeling that led the Hebrews to a conviction that there was a life to come.

It is true that in the days of Jesus the Sadducees still refused to believe in any life after death. But the Pharisees and the great majority of the Jews did. They said that in the moment of death the two worlds of time and of eternity met and kissed. They said that those who died beheld God, and they refused to call them the dead but called them the living. When Martha answered Jesus as she did she bore witness to the highest reach of her nation's faith.

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John 11:20-27

THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

John 11:20-27 (Part 2)

When Martha declared her belief in the orthodox Jewish belief in the life to come, Jesus suddenly said something which brought to that belief a new vividness and a new meaning. "I am the Resurrection and the Life," he said. "He who believes in me will live even if he has died; and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." What exactly did he mean? Not even a lifetime's thinking will reveal the full meaning of this; but we must try to grasp as much of it as we can.

One thing is clear--Jesus was not thinking in terms of physical life; for, speaking physically, it is not true that the man who believes in him will never die. The Christian experiences physical death as any other man does. We must look for a more than physical meaning.

(i) Jesus was thinking of the death of sin. He was saying: "Even if a man is dead in sin, even if, through his sins, he has lost all that makes life worth calling life, I can make him alive again." In point of historical fact that is abundantly true. A. M. Chirgwin quotes the example of Tokichi Ishii. Ishii had an almost unparalleled criminal record. He had murdered men, women and children in the most brutal way. Anyone who stood in his way was pitilessly eliminated. Now he was in prison awaiting death. While in prison he was visited by two Canadian women who tried to talk to him through the bars, but he only glowered at them like a caged and savage animal. In the end they abandoned the attempt; but they gave him a Bible, hoping that it might succeed where they had failed. He began to read it, and, having started, could not stop. He read on until he came to the story of the Crucifixion. He came to the words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." and these words broke him.

"I stopped," he said. "I was stabbed to the heart, as if pierced by a five-inch nail. Shall I call it the love of Christ? Shall I call it his compassion? I do not know what to call it. I only know that I believed, and my hardness of heart was changed." Later, when the condemned man went to the scaffold, he was no longer the hardened, surly brute he once had been, but a smiling radiant man. The murderer had been born again; Christ had brought Tokichi Ishii to life.

It does not need to be so dramatic as that. A man can become so selfish that he is dead to the needs of others. A man can become so insensitive that he is dead to the feelings of others. A man can become so involved in the petty dishonesties and the petty disloyalties of life, that he is dead to honour. A man can become so hopeless that he is filled with an inertia, which is spiritual death. Jesus Christ can resurrect these men. The witness of history is that he has resurrected millions and millions of people like them and his touch has not lost its ancient power.

(ii) Jesus was also thinking of the life to come. He brought into life the certainty that death is not the end. The last words of Edward the Confessor were: "Weep not, I shall not die; and as I leave the land of the dying I trust to see the blessings of the Lord in the land of the living." We call this world the land of the living; but it would in fact be more correct to call it the land of the dying. Through Jesus Christ we know that we are journeying, not to the sunset, but to the sunrise; we know, as

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John 11:20-27

Mary Webb put it, that death is a gate on the sky-line. In the most real sense we are not on our way to death, but on our way to life.

How does this happen? It happens when we believe in Jesus Christ. What does that mean? To believe in Jesus means to accept everything that Jesus said as absolutely true, and to stake our lives upon that in perfect trust. When we do that we enter into two new relationships.

(i) We enter into a new relationship with God. When we believe that God is as Jesus told us that he is, then we become absolutely sure of his love; we become absolutely sure that he is above all a redeeming God. The fear of death vanishes, for death means going to the great lover of the souls of men.

(ii) We enter into a new relationship with life. When we accept Jesus' way, when we take his commands as our laws, and when we realize that he is there to help us to live as he has commanded, life becomes a new thing. It is clad with a new loveliness, a new winsomeness, a new strength. And when we accept Christ's way as our way, life becomes so lovely a thing that we cannot conceive of it ending incomplete.

When we believe in Jesus, when we accept what he says about God and about life and stake everything on it, in truth we are resurrected for we are freed from the fear which is characteristic of the godless life; we are freed from the frustration which is characteristic of the sin-ridden life; we are freed from the futility of the Christless life. Life is raised from sin's death and becomes so rich that it cannot die but must find in death only the transition to a higher life.

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John 11:28-33

THE EMOTION OF JESUS

John 11:28-33

When Martha had said this, she went away and called Mary her sister. Without letting the rest of the people know, she said to her: "The Teacher has arrived and is calling for you." When she heard this, she rose quickly and began to go to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village, but he was still in the place where Martha met him. So when the Jews, who were in the house with Mary, and who were condoling with her, saw her rise quickly and go out, they followed her, for they thought that she was going back to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was, when she saw him, she knelt at his feet. "Lord" she said, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and when he saw the Jews who had come with her weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit so that an involuntary groan burst from him, and he trembled with deep emotion.

Martha went back to the house to tell Mary that Jesus had come. She wanted to give the news to her secretly, without letting the visitors know, because she wanted Mary to have a moment or two alone with Jesus, before the crowds engulfed them and made privacy impossible. But when the visitors saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they immediately assumed that she had gone to visit the tomb of Lazarus. It was the custom, especially for the women, for a week after the burial to go to the tomb to weep on every possible occasion. Mary's greeting was exactly the same as that of Martha. If only Jesus had come in time, Lazarus would still be alive.

Jesus saw Mary and all the sympathizing crowd weeping. We must remember that this would be no gentle shedding of tears. It would be almost hysterical wailing and shrieking, for it was the Jewish point of view that the more unrestrained the weeping, the more honour it paid to the dead.

Now we have a problem of translation. The word which the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version translate as deeply moved in spirit comes from the verb *embrimasthai* (GSN1690). It is used three other times in the New Testament. It is used in Matt.9:30 when Jesus sternly charged the blind men not to publish abroad the fact that he had given them their sight. It is used in Mk.1:43 when Jesus sternly charged the leper not to publish the fact that he had healed him. It is used in Mk.14:5 when the spectators reproached the woman who anointed Jesus' head with the costly ointment, because they thought that this deed of love was wastefully extravagant. In every one of these instances the word has a certain sternness, almost anger, in it. It means rather to rebuke, to give a stern order to. Some who wish to take it in that way and would translate: "Jesus was moved to anger in his spirit."

Why the anger? It is suggested that the display of tears by the Jewish visitors to Bethany was sheer hypocrisy, that this artificial grief raised Jesus' wrath. It is possible that this was true of the visitors, although there is no indication that their grief was synthetic. But it was certainly not true of Mary and it can hardly be right here to take *embrimasthai* (GSN1690) to imply anger. Moffatt translates it: "Jesus chafed in spirit," but chafed is weak. The Revised Standard Version translates: "Jesus was deeply moved in spirit," but again that is colourless for this most unusual word. Rieu translates: "He gave way to such distress of spirit as made his body tremble." With this we are

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John 11:28-33

getting nearer the real meaning. In ordinary classical Greek the usual usage of *embrimasthai* (GSN1690) is of a horse snorting. Here it must mean that such deep emotion seized Jesus that an involuntary groan was wrung from his heart.

Here is one of the most precious things in the gospel. So deeply did Jesus enter into men's sorrows that his heart was wrung with anguish

"In every pang that rends the heart,
The Man of Sorrows had a part."

But there is more. To any, Greek reading this--and we must remember that it was written for Greeks--this would be a staggering and incredible picture. John had written his whole gospel on the theme that in Jesus we see the mind of God. To the Greek the primary characteristic of God was what he called *apatheia*, which means total inability to feel any emotion whatsoever.

How did the Greeks come to attribute such a characteristic to God? They argued like this. If we can feel sorrow or joy, gladness or grief, it means that someone can have an effect upon us. Now, if a person has an effect upon us, it means that for the moment that person has power over us. No one can have any power over God; and this must mean that God is essentially incapable of feeling any emotion whatsoever. The Greeks believed in an isolated, passionless and compassionless God.

What a different picture Jesus gave. He showed us a God whose heart is wrung with anguish for the anguish of his people. The greatest thing Jesus did was to bring us the news of a God who cares.

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John 11:34-44

THE VOICE THAT WAKES THE DEAD

John 11:34-44

Jesus said to them: "Where have you laid him?" "Lord," they said to him: "Come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said: "Look how he loved him!" Some of them said: "Could not this man who opened the eyes of the blind have so acted that Lazarus would not have died?" Again a groan was wrung from Jesus' inner being. He went to the tomb. It was a cave; and a stone had been laid upon it. Jesus said: "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him: "Lord, by this time the stench of death is on him, for he has been in the tomb for four days." Jesus said to her: "Did I not tell you that, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they took the stone away. Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me.

But I said this for the sake of the crowd which is standing round, because I want them to believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come out!" The man who had been dead came out, bound hand and foot in grave-clothes, and with his face encircled with a napkin. Jesus said to them: "Set him free from his wrappings and let him go!"

We come to the last scene. Once again we are shown the picture of Jesus wrung with anguish as he shared the anguish of the human heart. To the Greek reader that little sentence: "Jesus wept," would be the most astonishing thing in an astonishing story. That the Son of God could weep would be almost beyond belief.

We must have in our minds a picture of the usual Palestinian tomb. It was either a natural cave or hewn out of the rock. There was an entrance in which the bier was first laid. Beyond that was a chamber, usually about six feet long, nine feet wide and ten feet high. There were usually eight shelves cut in the rock, three on each side and two on the wall facing the entrance, and on these shelves the bodies were laid. The bodies were enveloped in linen but the hands and feet were swathed in bandage-like wrappings and the head was wrapped separately. The tomb had no door, but in front of the opening ran a groove in which was set a great stone like a cartwheel that was rolled across the entrance to seal the grave.

Jesus asked that the stone should be moved. Martha could think of only one reason for opening the tomb--that Jesus wished to look on the face of his dead friend for the last time. Martha could see no consolation there. She pointed out that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. The point is this. It was Jewish belief that the spirit of the departed hovered around his tomb for four days, seeking an entrance again into his body. But after four days the spirit finally left for the face of the body was so decayed that it could no longer be recognized.

Then Jesus spoke his word of command which even death was powerless to oppose.

"He speaks, and, listening to his voice,
New life the dead receive."

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John 11:34-44

And Lazarus came forth. It is weird to think of the bandaged figure staggering out from the tomb. Jesus told them to unloose the hampering grave-clothes and wrappings and let him go.

There are certain things to note.

(i) Jesus prayed. The power which flowed through him was not his; it was God's, "Miracles," said Godet, "are just so many answered prayers."

(ii) Jesus sought only the glory of God; he did not do this to glorify himself. When Elijah had his epic contest with the prophets of Baal, he prayed: "Answer me, O Lord, that this people may know that thou art God" (1Kgs.18:37).

Everything Jesus did was due to the power of God and designed for the glory of God. How different men are! So much that we do is attempted in our own power and designed for our own prestige. It may be that there would be more wonders in our life, too, if we ceased to act by ourselves and for ourselves and set God in the central place.

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John 11:1-44

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

John 11:1-44

We have tried to expound the raising of Lazarus simply as the story stands written. But we can not evade the fact that of all the miracles of Jesus this presents the greatest problem. Let us honestly face the difficulties.

(i) In the other three gospels there are accounts of people being raised from the dead. There is the story of the raising of Jairus' daughter (Matt.9:18-26; Mk.5:21-43; Lk.8:40-56). There is the story of the raising of the widow's son at Nain (Lk.7:11-16). In both cases the raising followed immediately after death. It would be quite possible to believe that in both these miracles the person raised was in a coma. We have seen how burial had to follow hard upon death in the climate of Palestine; and we know from the evidence of the graves that people were not infrequently buried alive, because of that haste. It could well be that these were miracles of diagnosis in which Jesus saved two young people from a dreadful death. But there is no parallel whatever for the raising of a man who had been dead for four days and whose body had begun to putrefy.

(ii) In the other three gospels there is no account, not even a mention, of the raising of Lazarus. If the other writers knew about this miracle, how could they possibly omit it? If it actually happened, how could they fail to know of it? It has been suggested that the answer is this. We know that Mark drew his information from Peter. The fact is that Peter does not appear in the Fourth Gospel at all in Jn.5 and Jn.7-12. Thomas is, in fact, the spokesman of the disciples. It has been suggested that Peter was not with Jesus at this time, and only came up later to the Passover Feast. On the face of it that does not seem likely, and, even if Peter was not there, surely the writers of the gospels must have heard from other sources of so amazing a miracle.

(iii) Perhaps the greatest difficulty is that John sees in this miracle the essential cause which moved the Jewish authorities to take definite steps to have Jesus eliminated (Jn.11:47-54). In other words, the raising of Lazarus was the direct cause of the Cross. In the other three gospels the great moving cause of the crucifixion was the Cleansing of the Temple. It is difficult to understand why the other three gospel writers have nothing to say of it, if indeed it was the immediate cause of Jesus' crucifixion.

(iv) On the other hand, it might well be argued that the Triumphal Entry is inexplicable without this miracle to go before it. Why otherwise did Jesus receive that tremendous reception when he arrived in Jerusalem? Yet the fact remains that, in the story as the other three gospels tell it, there is just no space into which this miracle can be fitted.

If, then, this is not a record of actual historical fact, how can we explain it?

(i) Renan suggested that the whole thing was a deliberate fraud arranged by Jesus and Martha and Mary and Lazarus. That explanation has only to be stated to be dismissed as incredible; and, later, Renan himself departed from it.

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John 11:1-44

(ii) It has been suggested that Lazarus was in a coma. It would be impossible to argue that from the story as it stands. The details of death are too vivid.

(iii) It has been suggested that the story is an allegory written round the saying of Jesus: "I am the Resurrection and the Life," a story composed to illustrate that saying and to give it a setting. That may be an oversimplified and overstated version of the truth.

(iv) It has been suggested that the story is to be connected with the Parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk.16:19-31). That story ends with the saying that even if someone was raised from the dead the Jews would still not believe. It is suggested that the story was produced to show that someone did rise from the dead and the Jews did not believe.

When we consider the difficulties of this story, we are in the end compelled to say that we do not know what happened, although undoubtedly something tremendous did happen. It is worth noting that to this day Bethany is known as Azariyeh, which is derived from the name Lazarus. But we do know for certain the truth which it teaches.

Robert McAfee Brown, an American professor, tells of something which this story did. He was an American army chaplain on a troopship in which 1,500 marines were returning from Japan to America for discharge. Greatly to his surprise he was approached by a small group to do Bible study with them. He leapt at the opportunity. Near the end of the voyage, they were studying this chapter and afterwards a marine came to him. "Everything in that chapter," he said, "is pointing at me." He went on to say that he had been in hell for the last six months. He had gone straight into the marines from college. He had been sent out to Japan. He had been bored with life; and he had gone out and got into trouble--bad trouble. Nobody knew about it--except God. He felt guilty; he felt his life was ruined; he felt he could never face his family although they need never know; he felt he had killed himself and was a dead man. "And," said this young marine, "after reading this chapter I have come alive again.

I know that this resurrection Jesus was talking about is real here and now, for he has raised me from death to life." That lad's troubles were not finished; he had a hard road to go; but in his sin and his sense of guilt he had found Jesus as the resurrection and the life.

That is the end of the whole matter. It does not really matter whether or not Jesus literally raised a corpse to life in A.D. 30, but it matters intensely that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life for every man who is dead in sin and dead to God today. There may be problems in this story; we may never know what exactly happened at Bethany so many years ago; but we do know for certain that Jesus is still the Resurrection and the Life. That is what this story tells us--and that is what really matters.

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John 11:47-53

THE TRAGIC IRONY

John 11:47-53

The chief priests and Pharisees assembled the Sanhedrin: "What are we going to do?" they said, "because this man does many signs. If we leave him alone like this, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and will take away our place and will destroy our nation." One of them, called Caiaphas, who was High Priest for that year, said to them: "You are witless creatures. You do not think it out that it is to our good that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish." It was not he who was responsible for what he said; but, since he was High Priest for that year, he was really prophesying that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and, not only for the nation, but that the scattered children of God should be gathered into one. So from that day they plotted to kill him.

The Jewish authorities are very vividly sketched before us. The wonderful happening at Bethany had forced their hand; it was impossible to allow Jesus to continue unchecked, otherwise the people would follow him in ever larger numbers. So the Sanhedrin was called to deal with the situation.

In the Sanhedrin there were both Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees were not a political party at all; their sole interest was in living according to every detail of the law; and they cared not who governed them so long as they were allowed to continue in meticulous obedience to the law. On the other hand, the Sadducees were intensely political. They were the wealthy and aristocratic party. They were also the collaborationist party. So long as they were allowed to retain their wealth, comfort and position of authority, they were well content to collaborate with Rome. All the priests were Sadducees. And it is clear that it was the priests who dominated this meeting of the Sanhedrin. That is to say, it was the Sadducees who did all the talking.

With a few masterly strokes John delineates their characteristics. First, they were notoriously discourteous. Josephus said of them (The Wars of the Jews 2: 8, 14) that: "The behaviour of the Sadducees to one another is rather rude, and their intercourse with their equals is rough, as with strangers." "You know nothing at all," said Caiaphas (Jn. 11:49). "You are witless, brainless creatures." Here we see the innate, domineering arrogance of the Sadducees in action; this was exactly in character. Their contemptuous arrogance is an implicit contrast to the accents of love of Jesus.

Second, the one thing at which the Sadducees always aimed was the retention of their political and social power and prestige. What they feared was that Jesus might gain a following and raise a disturbance against the government. Now, Rome was essentially tolerant, but, with such a vast empire to govern, it could never afford civil disorder, and always quelled it with a firm and merciless hand. If Jesus was the cause of civil disorder, Rome would descend in all her power, and, beyond a doubt the Sadducees would be dismissed from their positions of authority. It never even occurred to them to ask whether Jesus was right or wrong. Their only question was: "What effect will this have on our ease and comfort and authority?" They judged things, not in the light of principle but in the light of their own career. And it is still possible for a man to set his own career before the will of God.

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John 11:47-53

Then comes the first tremendous example of dramatic irony. Sometimes in a play a character says something whose full significance he does not realize; that is dramatic irony. So the Sadducees insisted that Jesus must be eliminated or the Romans would come and take their authority away. In A.D. 70 that is exactly what happened. The Romans, weary of Jewish stubbornness, besieged Jerusalem, and left it a heap of ruins with a plough drawn across the Temple area. How different things might have been if the Jews had accepted Jesus! The very steps they took to save their nation destroyed it. This destruction happened in A.D. 70; John's gospel was written about A.D. 100; and all who read it would see the dramatic irony in the words of the Sadducees.

Then Caiaphas, the High Priest, made his two-edged statement. "If you had any sense," he said, "you would come to the conclusion that it is far better that one man should perish for the nation than that the whole nation should perish." It was the Jewish belief that when the High Priest asked God's counsel for the nation, God spoke through him. In the old story Moses chose Joshua to be his successor in the leadership of Israel. Joshua was to have a share in his honour and when he wished for God's counsel he was to go to Eleazar the High Priest: "And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him ... at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in" (Num.27:18-21). The High Priest was to be the channel of God's word to the leader and to the nation. That is what Caiaphas was that day.

Here is another tremendous example of dramatic irony. Caiaphas meant that it was better that Jesus should die than that there should be trouble with the Romans. It was true that Jesus must die to save the nation. That was true--but not in the way that Caiaphas meant. It was true in a far greater and more wonderful way. God can speak through the most unlikely people; sometimes he sends his message through a man without the man being aware; he can use even the words of bad men.

Jesus was to die for the nation and also for all God's people throughout the world. The early Church made a very beautiful use of these words. Its first service order book was called the Didache, or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. It dates back to shortly after A.D. 100. When the bread was being broken, it was laid down that it should be said: "Even as this bread was scattered upon the mountains, and was brought into one, so let thy Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into the kingdom" (Didache 9: 4). The bread had been put together from the scattered elements of which it was composed; so some day the scattered elements of the Church must be united into one. That is something about which to think as we look on the broken bread of the Sacrament.

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John 11:54-57

JESUS THE OUTLAW

John 11:54-57

So Jesus walked no longer openly among the Jews, but he went away from them to a place near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and he stayed there with his disciples.

Now the Passover Feast of the Jews was near; and many from the country areas went up to Jerusalem before the Passover Feast to purify themselves. So they were looking for Jesus; and, as they stood in the Temple precincts, they were talking with each other and saying: "What do you think? Surely it is impossible that he should come to the Feast?" Now the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, he should lodge information with them, that they might seize him.

Jesus did not unnecessarily court danger. He was willing to lay down his life, but not so foolishly reckless as to throw it away before his work was done. So he retired to a town called Ephraim, which was near Bethel in the mountainous country north of Jerusalem (compare 2Chr.13:19).

By this time Jerusalem was beginning to fill up with people. Before the Jew could attend any feast he had to be ceremonially clean; and uncleanness could be contracted by touching a vast number of things and people. Many of the Jews, therefore, came up to the city early to make the necessary offerings and go through the necessary washings in order to ensure ceremonial cleanness. The law had it: "Every man is bound to purify himself before the Feast."

These purifications were carried out in the Temple. They took time, and in the time of waiting the Jews gathered in excited little groups. They knew what was going on. They knew about this mortal contest of wills between Jesus and the authorities; and people are always interested in the man who gallantly faces fearful odds. They wondered if he would appear at the feast; and concluded that he could not possibly come. This Galilean carpenter could not take on the whole might of Jewish ecclesiastical and political officialdom.

But they had underrated Jesus. When the time arrived for him to come, nothing on earth would stop him coming. Martin Luther was a man who hurled defiance at cautious souls who sought to hold him back from being too venturesome. He took what seemed to him the right course "despite all cardinals, popes, kings and emperors, together with all devils and hell." When he was cited to appear at Worms to answer for his attack on the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, he was well warned of the danger. His answer was: "I would go if there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops." When told that Duke George would capture him, he answered: "I would go if it rained Duke Georges." It was not that Luther was not afraid, for often he made his greatest statements when both voice and knees were shaking; but he had a courage which conquered fear. The Christian does not fear the consequences of doing the right thing; he fears rather the consequences of not doing it.

From the concluding verses of the chapter, it seems that by this time, Jesus had been classed as an outlaw. It may be that the authorities had offered a reward for information leading to his

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John 11:54-57

apprehension and that it was this that Judas sought and received. In spite of that Jesus came to Jerusalem, and not skulking in the back streets but openly and in such a way as to focus attention upon himself. Whatever else we may say of Jesus, we must bow in admiration before his death-defying courage. For these last days of his life he was the bravest outlaw of all time.

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John 12:1-8

LOVE'S EXTRAVAGANCE

John 12:1-8 (Part 1)

Now six days before the Passover Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was whom he raised from the dead. So they made him a meal there, and Martha was serving while Lazarus was one of those who reclined at table with him. Now Mary took a pound of very precious genuine spikenard ointment, and anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the perfume of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, the one who was going to betray him, said: "Why was this ointment not sold for ten pounds, and the proceeds given to the poor?" He said this, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had charge of the money-box, and pilfered from what was put into it. So Jesus said: "Let her observe it now against the day of my burial. The poor you have always with you, but me you have not always."

We have seen on other occasions that many scholars believe that certain parts of John's gospel have become displaced. Some suspect a dislocation here. Moffatt, for instance, prints it in the order Jn.12:19-29; Jn.12:1-18 and Jn.12:30; Jn.12:31-42. We have retained the order of the King James Version (and the Revised Standard Version) for our studies, but if the reader will read the chapter in the rearranged order he will see the connection of events and thought more clearly.

It was coming very near the end for Jesus. To come to Jerusalem for the Passover was an act of the highest courage, for the authorities had made him in effect an outlaw (Jn.11:57). So great were the crowds who came to the Passover that they could not all possibly obtain lodging within the city itself, and Bethany was one of the places outside the city boundaries which the law laid down as a place for the overflow of the pilgrims to stay.

When Jesus came to Bethany they made him a meal. It must have been in the house of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, for where else would Martha be serving but in her own house? It was then that Mary's heart ran over in love. She had a pound of very precious spikenard ointment. Both John and Mark describe it by the adjective pistikos (GSN4101) (Mk.14:3). Oddly enough, no one really knows what that word means. There are four possibilities. It may come from the adjective pistos (GSN4103) which means faithful or reliable, and so may mean genuine. It may come from the verb pinein (GSN4095) which means to drink, and so may mean liquid. It may be a kind of trade name, and may have to be translated simply pistic nard (GSN3487). It may come from a word meaning the pistachio nut, and be a special kind of essence extracted from it. In any event it was a specially valuable kind of perfume. With this perfume Mary anointed Jesus' feet. Judas ungraciously questioned her action as sheer waste.

Jesus silenced him by saying that money could be given to the poor at any time, but a kindness done to him must be done now, for soon the chance would be gone for ever.

There is a whole series of little character sketches here.

(i) There is the character of Martha. She was serving at table. She loved Jesus; she was a practical woman; and the only way in which she could show her love was by the work of her hands. Martha always gave what she could. Many and many a great man has been what he was only because of

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John 12:1-8

someone's loving care for his creature comforts in his home. It is just as possible to serve Jesus in the kitchen as on the public platform or in a career lived in the eyes of men.

(ii) There is the character of Mary. Mary was the one who above all loved Jesus; and here in her action we see three things about love.

(a) We see love's extravagance. Mary took the most precious thing she possessed and spent it all on Jesus. Love is not love if it nicely calculates the cost. It gives its all and its only regret is that it has not still more to give. O. Henry, the master of the short story, has a moving story called *The Gift of the Magi*. A young American couple, Della and Jim, were very poor but very much in love. Each had one unique possession. Della's hair was her glory. When she let it down it almost served as a robe. Jim had a gold watch which had come to him from his father and was his pride. It was the day before Christmas, and Della had exactly one dollar eighty-seven cents to buy Jim a present. She went out and sold her hair for twenty dollars; and with the proceeds bought a platinum fob for Jim's precious watch. When Jim came home at night and saw Della's shorn head, he stopped as if stupefied. It was not that he did not like it or love her any less; for she was lovelier than ever. Slowly he handed her his gift; it was a set of expensive tortoise-shell combs with jewelled edges for her lovely hair--and he had sold his gold watch to buy them. Each had given the other all there was to give. Real love cannot think of any other way to give.

(b) We see love's humility. It was a sign of honour to anoint a person's head. "Thou anointest my head with oil," says the psalmist (Ps.23:5). But Mary would not look so high as the head of Jesus; she anointed his feet. The last thing Mary thought of was to confer an honour upon Jesus; she never dreamed she was good enough for that.

(c) We see love's unselfconsciousness. Mary wiped Jesus' feet with the hair of her head. In Palestine no respectable woman would ever appear in public with her hair unbound. On the day a girl was married her hair was bound up, and never again would she be seen in public with her long tresses flowing loose. That was the sign of an immoral woman. But Mary never even thought of that. When two people really love each other they live in a world of their own. They will wander slowly down a crowded street hand in hand heedless of what other people think. Many are self-conscious about showing their Christianity, concerned always about what others are thinking about them. Mary loved Jesus so much that it was nothing to her what others thought.

But there is something else about love here. John has the sentence: "The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment." We have seen that so many of John's statements have two meanings, one which lies on the surface and one which is underneath. Many fathers of the Church and many scholars have seen a double meaning here. They have taken it to mean that the whole Church was filled with the sweet memory of Mary's action. A lovely deed becomes the possession of the whole world and adds to the beauty of life in general, something which time cannot ever take away.

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John 12:1-8

LOVE'S EXTRAVAGANCE

John 12:1-8 (Part 2)

(iii) There is the character of Judas. There are three things here about him.

(a) We see Jesus' trust in Judas. As far back as Jn.6:70-71, John shows us Jesus well aware that there was a traitor within the ranks. It may well be that he tried to touch Judas' heart by making him the treasurer of the apostolic company. It may well be that he tried to appeal to his sense of honour. It may well be that he was saying in effect to him: "Judas, here's something that you can do for me. Here is proof that I need you and want you." That appeal failed with Judas, but the fact remains that often the best way to reclaim someone who is on the wrong path is to treat him not with suspicion but with trust; not as if we expected the worst, but as if we expected the best.

(b) We see one of the laws of temptation. Jesus would not have put Judas in charge of the money-box unless he had some capabilities in that direction. Westcott in his commentary said: "Temptation commonly comes through that for which we are naturally fitted." If a man is fitted to handle money, his temptation may be to regard money as the most important thing in the world. If a man is fitted to occupy a place of prominence, his temptation may be to think first and foremost of reputation. If a man has a particular gift, his temptation may be to become conceited about that gift. Judas had a gift for handling money and became so fond of it that he became first a thief and then a traitor for its sake. The King James Version says that he bare the bag. The verb is *bastazein* (GSN0941); *bastazein* does not mean to bear, or carry, or lift. But in colloquial English to lift a thing can also mean to steal it. We talk, for instance, of a shop-lifter. And Judas did not only carry the bag; he pilfered from it. Temptation struck him at the point of his special gift.

(c) We see how a man's view can be warped. Judas had just seen an action of surpassing loveliness; and he called it extravagant waste. He was an embittered man and he took an embittered view of things. A man's sight depends on what is inside him. He sees only what he is fit and able to see. If we like a person, he can do little wrong. If we dislike him, we may misinterpret his finest action. A warped mind brings a warped view of things; and, if we find ourselves becoming very critical of others and imputing unworthy motives to them, we should, for a moment, stop examining them and start examining ourselves.

Lastly, there is here one great truth about life. Some things we can do almost any time, but some things we will never do, unless we grasp the chance when it comes. We are seized with the desire to do something fine and generous and big-hearted. But we put it off--we will do it tomorrow; and the fine impulse goes, and the thing is never done. Life is an uncertain thing. We think to utter some word of thanks or praise or love but we put it off; and often the word is never spoken.

Here is one tragic instance of how a man realized too late the things he had never said and done. Thomas Carlyle loved Jane Welsh Carlyle, but he was a cross-grained, irritable creature and he never made life happy for her. Unexpectedly she died. J. A. Froude tells us of Carlyle's feelings when he lost her. "He was looking through her papers, her notebooks and journals; and old scenes

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came mercilessly back to him in the vistas of mournful memory. In his long sleepless nights, he recognized too late what she had felt and suffered under his childish irritabilities. His faults rose up in remorseless judgment, and as he had thought too little of them before, so now he exaggerated them to himself in his helpless repentance . . . 'Oh!' he cried again and again, 'if I could see her but once more, were it but for five minutes, to let her know that I always loved her through all that. She never did know it, never.'" There is a time for doing and for saying things; and, when it is past, they may never be said and never be done.

It was Judas' ill-natured complaint that the money which that ointment could have raised should have been given to the poor. But as scripture said: "The poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee saying, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (Deut.15:11). To help the poor was something that could be done any time. To show the heart's devotion to Jesus had to be done before the Cross on Calvary took him to its cruel arms. Let us remember to do things now, for the chance so often never comes again, and the failure to do them, especially the failure to express love brings bitter remorse.

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John 12:9-11

A PLAN TO DESTROY THE EVIDENCE

John 12:9-11

The mob of the Jews knew that Jesus was there; and they came, not only because of Jesus, but to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. The chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus too, because many of the Jews were withdrawing from them because of him and were coming to believe in Jesus.

For the leaders of the Jews things were getting into an impossible position. This was specially the case for the Sadducees, to which party belonged all the priests, for them the position was doubly threatening.

First, it was threatening from the political point of view. The Sadducees were the wealthy aristocratic class and they worked in close collaboration with the Roman government. Their aim was to ensure their own wealth and ease and comfort. So long as they were allowed to retain the ruling places in the government they were quite prepared to collaborate. The Romans allowed their subject kingdoms a large amount of freedom. Broadly speaking, under a Roman governor, they allowed them to govern themselves, but at the slightest outbreak of civil disorder Rome's hand came down heavily, and those who were responsible for good government and had failed to produce it were summarily dismissed. The Sadducees saw Jesus as the possible leader of a rebellion. He was stealing away the hearts of the people. The atmosphere was electric; and the Sadducees were determined to get rid of him in case there should be an uprising of the people and their own case and comfort and authority be threatened.

Second, they regarded it as theologically intolerable. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead; and, here they were confronted with Lazarus who had been raised from the grave. Unless they could do something about it, the foundations of their power, their influence and their teaching, were slipping from beneath their feet.

So they proposed to destroy the evidence by doing away with Lazarus. H. G. Wood tells of a remark of two old ladies in the days when Charles Darwin had made public the conception of evolution and when it was thought that that meant that man was sprung from and akin to the beasts. They were heard to say: "Let's hope it's not true, and, if it is, let's hush it up!" When a man has to support a position by destroying the evidence which threatens it, it means that he is using dishonest methods to support a lie--and knows it.

The Sadducees were prepared to suppress the truth to further their own self-interest. For many people self-interest is the most powerful motive in life. Many discoveries which might produce cheaper goods never see the light of day because the patents are bought up and rendered inoperative by those whose products they threaten. Self-interest dictates policy and action.

In order to maintain their own place and their own influence the priests and the Sadducees were prepared to destroy the evidence for the truth. A man has come to a sorry pass when he is afraid of the truth and sets his personal prestige and profit before it.

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John 12:12-19

A KING'S WELCOME

John 12:12-19 (Part 1)

On the next day the great crowd that was coming to the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took the branches of palm trees and went out to meet him. They kept up a shout: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, he who is the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young ass and sat on it, as it stands written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion. Look! Your King is coming sitting upon an ass' colt." At first the disciples did not realize the significance of these things; but when Jesus was glorified then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him. The crowd who were with him testified that he had called Lazarus from the tomb, and had raised him from among the dead. It was because they had heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to each other: "You can see that all the steps you have taken have been completely ineffective. See! The whole world has gone off after him!"

Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were the three compulsory festivals of the Jews. To the Passover in Jerusalem Jews came from the ends of the earth. Wherever a Jew might live it was his ambition to observe one such Passover. To this day, when Jews in foreign lands observe the Passover, they say: "This year here; next year in Jerusalem."

At such a time Jerusalem and the villages round about were crowded. On one occasion a census was taken of the lambs slain at the Passover Feast. The number was given as 256,000. There had to be a minimum of ten people per lamb; and if that estimate is correct it means that there must have been as many as 2,700,000 people at that Passover Feast. Even if that figure is exaggerated, it remains true that the numbers must have been immense.

News and rumour had gone out that Jesus the man who had raised Lazarus from the dead was on his way to Jerusalem. There were two crowds, the crowd which was accompanying Jesus from Bethany, and the crowd which surged out from Jerusalem to see him; and they must have flowed together in a surging mass like two tides of the sea. Jesus came riding on a ass' colt. As the crowds met him they received him like a conqueror. And the sight of this tumultuous welcome sent the Jewish authorities into the depths of despair, for it seemed that nothing they could do could stop the tide of the people who had gone after Jesus. This is an incident so important that we must try to understand just what was happening.

(i) Certain among the crowds were simply sightseeing. Here was a man who, as rumour had it, had raised a man from the dead; and many had simply gone out to gaze on a sensational figure. It is always possible to attract people for a time by sensationalism and shrewd publicity; but it never lasts. Those who were that day regarding Jesus as a sensation were within a week shouting for his death.

(ii) Many among these crowds were greeting Jesus as a conqueror. That, in fact, is the predominant atmosphere of the whole scene. They greeted him with the words: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord!" The word Hosanna (Greek, GSN5614) is the Hebrew

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John 12:12-19

(HSN3467 and HSN4994) for "Save now!" And the shout of the people was almost precisely like that of the British people: "God save the King!"

The words with which the people greeted Jesus are illuminating. They are a quotation from Ps.118:25-26. That psalm had many connections, which were bound to be in the minds of the people. It was the last psalm of the group (Ps.113-118) known as the Hallel. The word Hallel (HSN1984) means Praise God! and these are all praising psalms. They were part of the first memory work every Jewish boy had to do; they were sung often at great acts of praise and thanksgiving in the Temple; they were an integral part of the Passover ritual. Further, this particular psalm was intimately connected with the ritual of the Feast of Tabernacles. At that feast worshippers carried bundles made up of palm, myrtle and willow branches called lulabs. Daily they went with them to the Temple. On every day of the feast they marched round the great altar of the burnt offering--once on each of the first six days, seven times on the seventh--and as they marched they triumphantly sang verses from this psalm and especially these very ones.

In fact it may well be that this psalm was written for the first celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles when Nehemiah had rebuilt the shattered walls and city and the Jews came home from Babylon and could worship again (Neh.8:14-18). This was indeed the psalm of the great occasion--and the people knew it.

Further, this was characteristically the conqueror's psalm. To take but one instance, these very verses were sung and shouted by the Jerusalem crowd when they welcomed back Simon Maccabaeus after he had conquered Acra and wrested it from Syrian dominion more than a hundred years before. There is no doubt that when the people sang this psalm they were looking on Jesus as God's Anointed One, the Messiah, the Deliverer, the One who was to come. And there is no doubt that they were looking on him as the Conqueror. To them it must have been only a matter of time until the trumpets rang out and the call to arms sounded and the Jewish nation swept to its long delayed victory over Rome and the world. Jesus approached Jerusalem with the shout of the mob hailing a conqueror in his ears--and it must have hurt him, for they were looking in him for that very thing which he refused to be.

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John 12:12-19

A KING'S WELCOME

John 12:12-19 (Part 2)

(iii) In such a situation it was obviously impossible for Jesus to speak to the crowd. His voice could not have reached that vast assembly of people. So he did something that all could see; he came riding upon an ass' colt. Now that was two things. First, it was a deliberate claim to be the Messiah. It was a dramatic enactment of the words of Zechariah the prophet (Zech.9:9). John does not quote accurately because obviously he is quoting from memory. Zechariah had said: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem, Lo your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." There is no doubt at all that Jesus' claim was a messianic claim.

But, second, it was a claim to be a particular kind of Messiah. We must not misunderstand this picture. With us the ass is lowly and despised; but in the East it was a noble animal. Jair, the Judge, had thirty sons who rode on asses' colts (Judg.10:4). Ahithopel rode upon an ass (2Sam.17:23). Mephibosheth, the royal prince, the son of Saul, came to David riding upon an ass (2Sam.19:26). The point is that a king came riding upon a horse when he was bent on war; he came riding upon an ass when he was coming in peace. This action of Jesus is a sign that he was not the warrior figure men dreamed of, but the Prince of Peace. No one saw it that way at that time, not even the disciples, who should have known so much better. The minds of all were filled with a kind of mob hysteria. Here was the one who was to come. But they looked for the Messiah of their own dreams and their own wishful thinking; they did not look for the Messiah whom God had sent. Jesus drew a dramatic picture of what he claimed to be, but none understood the claim.

(iv) In the background there were the Jewish authorities. They felt frustrated and helpless; nothing they could do seemed able to stop the attraction of this Jesus. "The whole world," they said, "is gone off after him!" In this saying of the authorities there is a magnificent example of that irony in which John is so skilled. No writer in the New Testament can say so much with such amazing reticence. It was because God so loved the world that Jesus came into the world; and here, all unwittingly, his enemies are saying that the world has gone after him. In the very next section John is going to tell of the coming of the Greeks to Jesus. The first representatives of that wider world, the first seekers from outside, are about to come. The Jewish authorities were speaking truer than they knew.

We cannot leave this passage without noticing the simplest thing of all. Seldom in the world's history has there been such a display of magnificently deliberate courage as the Triumphal Entry. We must remember that Jesus was an outlaw and that the authorities were determined to kill him. All prudence would have warned him to turn back and make for Galilee or the desert places. If he was to enter Jerusalem at all, all caution would have demanded that he enter secretly and go into hiding; but he came in such a way as to focus every eye upon himself. It was an act of the most superlative courage, for it was the defiance of all that man could do; and it was an act of the most superlative love, for it was love's last appeal before the end.

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John 12:20-22

THE SEEKING GREEKS

John 12:20-22

There were some Greeks among those whose practice it was to come up to the feast. Now these came to Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request to him. "Sir," they said, "we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

None of the other gospels tells of this incident, but it is very fitting to find it in the Fourth. The Fourth Gospel was the one written to present the truth of Christianity in a way that the Greeks could appreciate and understand; and it is natural that in it the first Greeks to come to Jesus should find a place.

It need not seem strange to find Greeks in Jerusalem at the Passover time. They need not even have been proselytes. The Greek was an inveterate wanderer, driven by wanderlust and by the desire to find out new things. "You Athenians," said one of the ancients, "will never rest yourselves, nor will you ever let anyone else rest." "You Greeks," said another, "are like children, always young in your souls." More than five hundred years before this Herodotus had travelled the world, as he said himself, to find things out. Far up the Nile to this day there stands a great Egyptian statue on which a Greek tourist, even as modern tourists do, had scratched his name. The Greek voyaged for trade and for commerce of course; but he was the first man to wander for the sake of wandering in the ancient world. There is no need to be surprised to find a detachment of sightseeing Greeks even in Jerusalem.

But the Greek was more than that. He was characteristically a seeker after truth. It was no unusual thing to find a Greek who had passed through philosophy after philosophy, and religion after religion, and gone from teacher to teacher in the search for truth. The Greek was the man with the seeking mind.

How had these Greeks come to hear of Jesus and to be interested in him? J. H. Bernard throws out a most interesting suggestion. It was in the last week of his ministry that Jesus cleansed the Temple and swept the money-changers and the sellers of doves from the Temple court. Now these traders had their stance in the Court of the Gentiles, that great court which was the first of the Temple courts and where Gentiles were allowed to come but no further. If these Greeks were in Jerusalem at all they would be certain to visit the Temple and to stand in the Court of the Gentiles. Perhaps they had actually witnessed that tremendous scene when Jesus had driven the traders from the Temple court; and perhaps they wished to know more of a man who could do things like that.

However that may be, this is one of the great moments of the story, for here is the first faint hint of a gospel which is to go out to all the world.

The Greeks came with their request to Philip. Why Philip? No one can say for certain, but Philip is a Greek name and perhaps they thought that a man with a Greek name would treat them sympathetically. But Philip did not know what to do, and he went to Andrew. Andrew was in no doubt and he led them to Jesus.

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John 12:20-22

Andrew had discovered that no one could ever be a nuisance to Jesus. He knew that Jesus would never turn any seeking soul away.

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John 12:23-26

THE AMAZING PARADOX

John 12:23-26 (Part 1)

Jesus answered them: "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. This is the truth I tell you--unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains all by itself alone; but, if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life is losing it; and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone will serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there will my servants also be."

Hardly any passage in the New Testament would come with such a shock to those who heard it for the first time as this. It begins with a saying which everyone would expect; and it finishes with a series of sayings which were the last things anyone would expect.

"The hour has come," began Jesus. "when the Son of Man should be glorified." It was clear that things had been budding up to a crisis and that crisis had now come. But Jesus' idea of what that crisis involved was quite different from anyone else's. When he talked about the Son of man, he did not mean what other people meant. To understand the shocking nature of this short paragraph we must grasp something of what the Jews understood by Son of Man. That term took its origin in Dn.7:13. In that passage the King James Version mistranslates. It has it that one like unto the Son of Man came to the Ancient of Days, and received a kingdom, a glory and a dominion that were to be universal and for ever. The correct translation is not the Son of Man, but a son of man as the Revised Standard Version has it.

The point of the passage is this. In Dn.7:1-8 the writer has been describing the world powers which have held sway, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes and the Persians. They were so cruel, so savage, so sadistic that they could be described only under the imagery of wild beasts--the lion with the eagle's wings, the bear with the three ribs between its teeth, the leopard with the four wings and the four heads, and the terrible beast with iron teeth and ten horns. These were the symbols of the powers which had hitherto held sway. But it was the dream of the seer that into the world there was going to come a new power, and that power was to be gentle and humane and gracious, so that it could be depicted under the symbol, not of a savage beast, but of a man. This passage means that the day of savagery would pass and the day of humanity was coming.

That was the dream of the Jews, the golden age, when life would be sweet and they would be masters of the world. But how was that age to come? It became clearer and clearer to them that their nation was so small and their power so weak, that the golden age could never come by human means and human power; it must come by the direct intervention of God. He would send his champion to bring it in. So they thought back to the picture in the book of Daniel, and what more natural than that they should call the champion the Son of Man? The phrase which had once been merely a symbol came to describe a person. Between the Old and the New Testament there arose a whole series of books about the golden age and how it was to come. Amidst their troubles and their sufferings, in their subjections and their slaveries, the Jews never forgot and never gave up their dream. One of these books was specially influential--the Book of Enoch and it repeatedly speaks about that Son of Man.

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John 12:23-26

In Enoch the Son of Man is a tremendous figure who, as it were, is being held in leash by God. But the day will come when God will release him and he will come with a divine power against which no man and no kingdom will be able to stand, and smash the way to world empire for the Jews.

To the Jews the Son of Man stood for the undefeatable world conqueror sent by God. So Jesus says: "The hour has come when the Son of Man must be glorified." When he said that, the listeners would catch their breath. They would believe that the trumpet call of eternity had sounded, that the might of heaven was on the march, and that the campaign of victory was on the move. But Jesus did not mean by glorified what they understood. They meant that the subjected kingdoms of the earth would grovel before the conqueror's feet; by glorified he meant crucified. When the Son of Man was mentioned they thought of the conquest of the armies of God; he meant the conquest of the Cross.

The first sentence which Jesus spoke would excite the hearts of those who heard it; then began a succession of sayings which must have left them staggered and bewildered by their sheer incredibility, for they spoke. not in terms of conquest, but in terms of sacrifice and death. We will never understand Jesus nor the attitude of the Jews to him, until we understand how he turned their ideas upside down, replacing a dream of conquest with a vision of a Cross. No wonder they did not understand him; the tragedy is that they refused to try.

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John 12:23-26

THE AMAZING PARADOX

John 12:23-26 (Part 2)

What was this amazing paradox which Jesus was teaching? He was saying three things, which are all variations of one central truth and all at the heart of the Christian faith and life.

(i) He was saying that only by death comes life. The grain of wheat was ineffective and unfruitful so long as it was preserved, as it were, in safety and security. It was when it was thrown into the cold ground, and buried there as if in a tomb, that it bore fruit. It was by the death of the martyrs that the Church grew. In the famous phrase: "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church."

It is always because men have been prepared to die that the great things have lived. But it becomes more personal than that. It is sometimes only when a man buries his personal aims and ambitions that he begins to be of real use to God. Cosmo Lang became Archbishop of Canterbury. At one time he had had great worldly ambitions. A godly friend's influence led him to abandon these and enter the Church of England. When he was studying for the ministry at Cuddesdon, one day as he was praying in the chapel he heard unmistakably a voice saying to him: "You are wanted!" It was when he had buried his personal ambitions that he became useful to God.

By death comes life. By the loyalty which was true to death there have been preserved and born the most precious things which humanity possesses. By the death of personal desire and personal ambition a man becomes a servant of God.

(i) He was saying that only by spending life do we retain it. The man who loves his life is moved by two aims, by selfishness and by the desire for security. Not once or twice but many times Jesus insisted that the man who hoarded his life must in the end lose it, and the man who spent his life must in the end gain it. There was a famous evangelist called Christmas Evans who was always on the move preaching for Christ. His friends besought him to take things easier but his answer always was: "It is better to burn out than to rust out." When Joan of Arc knew that her enemies were strong and her time was short, she prayed to God: "I shall only last a year, use me as you can." Again and again Jesus laid down this law (Mk.8:35; Matt.16:25; Lk.9:24; Matt.10:39; Lk.17:33).

We have only to think of what this world would have lost if there had not been men prepared to forget their personal safety, security, selfish gain and selfish advancement. The world owes everything to people who recklessly spent their strength and gave themselves to God and to others. No doubt we will exist longer if we take things easily, if we avoid all strain, if we sit at the fire and husband life, if we look after ourselves as a hypochondriac looks after his health. No doubt we will exist longer--but we will never live.

(iii) He was saying that only by service comes greatness. The people whom the world remembers with love are the people who serve others. A certain Mrs. Berwick had been very active in Salvation Army work in Liverpool. She retired to London. There came the war and the air raids. People get queer ideas and the idea got about that somehow Mrs. Berwick's poor house and her shelter were specially safe. She was old now; her Liverpool days of social service were long behind

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her; but she felt she must do something about it. So she got together a simple first-aid box and she put a notice on her window: "If you need help, knock here." That is the Christian attitude to our fellow men.

Once a schoolboy was asked what parts of speech my and mine are. He answered--more truly than he knew--that they were aggressive pronouns. It is all too true that in the modern world the idea of service is in danger of getting lost. So many people are in business only for what they can get out of it. They may well become rich, but one thing is certain--they will never be loved, and love is the true wealth of life.

Jesus came to the Jews with a new view of life. They looked on glory as conquest, the acquisition of power, the right to rule. He looked on it as a cross. He taught men that only by death comes life; that only by spending life do we retain it; that only by service comes greatness. And the extraordinary thing is that when we come to think of it, Christ's paradox is nothing other than the truth of common sense.

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John 12:27-34

FROM TENSION TO CERTAINTY

John 12:27-34 (Part 1)

"Now, my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, rescue me from this hour.' But it was for this reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." A voice came from heaven: "I have both glorified it and I will glorify it again." So the crowd who were standing by, and who heard it, said that there had been thunder. Others said: "An angel spoke to him." Jesus answered: "It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this in indication of what death he was going to die by. The crowd answered him: "We have heard from the law that God's Anointed One remains for ever. And do you say: 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

In this passage John shows us both Jesus' tension and his triumph, and shows us what turned the tension into the triumph.

(i) John does not tell us of the agony in Gethsemane. It is here that he shows us Jesus fighting his battle with his human longing to avoid the Cross. No one wishes to die at thirty-three; and no one wishes to die upon a cross. There would have been no virtue in Jesus' obedience to God, if it had come easily and without cost. Real courage does not mean not being afraid. It means to be terribly afraid, and yet to do the thing that ought to be done. That was the courage of Jesus. As Bengel put it: "Here there met the horror of death and the ardour of obedience." God's will meant the Cross and Jesus had to nerve himself to accept it.

(ii) But the end of the story is not tension; it is triumph and certainty. Jesus was certain that if he went on, something would happen which would break the power of evil once and for all. If he was obedient to the Cross, he was sure that a death-blow would be struck to the ruler of this world, Satan. It was to be one last struggle which would break for ever the power of evil. Further, he was certain that if he went to the Cross, the sight of his upraised and crucified figure would in the end draw all men to him. Jesus, too, wanted conquest; he, too, wanted to subdue men; but he knew that the only way to conquer and to subdue the hearts of men for ever was to show himself to them on the Cross. He began with the tension; he ended with the triumph.

(iii) What came between the tension and the triumph and changed the one into the other? It was the voice of God. Behind this coming of the voice of God lies something great and deep.

There was a time when the Jews really and fully believed that God spoke direct to men. It was directly that God spoke to the child Samuel (1Sam.3:1-14). It was directly that God spoke to Elijah, when he had fled from the avenging Jezebel (1Kgs.19:1-18). It was directly that Eliphaz the Temanite had claimed to hear the voice of God (Jb.4:16). But by the time of Jesus they had ceased to believe that God spoke directly. The great days were past; God was far too far away now; the voice that had spoken to the prophets was silent. Nowadays they believed in what they called the Bath (HSN1323) Qol (HSN6963), a Hebrew phrase which means "the daughter voice" or "the daughter of a voice." When the Bath (HSN1323) Qol (HSN6963) spoke it quoted Scripture most

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John 12:27-34

often. It was not really the direct voice of God; it was what we might call the echo of his voice, a distant, faint whisper instead of a direct, vital communication.

But it was not the echo of his voice that Jesus heard; it was the very voice of God Himself. Here is a great truth. With Jesus there comes to men not some distant whisper of the voice of God, not some faint echo from the heavenly places, but the unmistakable accents of God's direct voice.

It is to be noted that the voice of God came to Jesus at an the great moments of his life. It came at his baptism when he first set out upon the work God had given him to do (Mk.1:11). It came on the Mount of Transfiguration when he finally decided to take the way which led to Jerusalem and the Cross (Mk.9:7). And now it came to him when his human flesh and blood had to be strengthened by divine aid for the ordeal of the Cross.

What God did for Jesus, he does for every man. When he sends us out upon a road, he does not send us without directions and without guidance. When he gives us a task, he does not leave us to do it in the lonely weakness of our own strength. God is not silent, and ever and again, when the strain of life is too much for us, and the effort of his way is beyond our human resources, if we listen we will hear him speak, and we will go on with his strength surging through our frame. Our trouble is not that God does not speak, but that we do not listen.

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John 12:27-34

FROM TENSION TO CERTAINTY

John 12:27-34 (Part 2)

Jesus claimed that, when he was lifted up, he would draw all men to him. Some take this to refer to the Ascension and think it means that when Jesus was exalted in his risen power, he would draw all men to him. But that is far from the truth. Jesus was referring to his Cross--and the people knew it. And once again--inevitably--they were moved to incredulous astonishment. How could anyone possibly connect the Son of Man and a cross? Was not the Son of Man the invincible leader at the head of the irresistible armies of heaven? Was not his kingdom to last for ever? "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dn.7:14). Was it not said of the prince of the golden age: "David my servant shall be their prince for ever"? (Eze.37:25). Had Isaiah not said of the ruler of the new world: "Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end"? (Isa.9:7).

Did the Psalmists not sing of this endless kingdom?"I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your thrones for all generations" (Ps.89:4). The Jews connected the Son of Man with an everlasting kingdom, and here was he, who claimed to be the Son of Man, talking about being lifted up upon a cross. Who was this Son of Man, whose kingdom was to end before it had begun?

The lesson of history is that Jesus was right. It was on the magnet of the Cross that he pinned his hopes; and he was right because love will live long after might is dead.

As Kipling had it:

Far-called our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire;
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!

Nineveh and Tyre are only names now, but Christ lives on.

One of the great sonnets of the English language is Ozymandias by Shelley:

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

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John 12:27-34

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Ozymandias was king of kings, yet all that he has left is a shattered statue in the desert, and a name that a chance sonnet keeps alive.

H. E. Fosdick quotes a poem in one of his books:

"I saw the conquerors riding by
With cruel lips and faces wan:
Musing on kingdoms sacked and burned
There rode the Mongol Genghis Khan;
And Alexander, like a god,
Who sought to weld the world in one:
And Caesar with his laurel wreath;
And like a thing from Hell the Hun;
And, leading like a star, the van,
Heedless of upstretched arm and groan,
Inscrutable Napoleon went,
Dreaming of Empire, and alone....
Then all they perished from the earth,
As fleeting shadows from a glass,
And, conquering down the centuries,
Came Christ the swordless on an ass."

The empires founded on force have vanished, leaving only a memory which with the years becomes ever fainter. But the empire of Christ, founded upon a Cross, each year extends its sway.

In Shaw's play, when Joan of Arc knows that she has been betrayed to the stake by the leaders of her own people, she turns to them and says: "I will go out now to the common people, and let the love in their eyes comfort me for the hate in yours. You will all be glad to see me burnt; but if I go through the fire I shall go through it to their hearts for ever and ever." That is a parable of what happened to Jesus. His death upon the Cross made him go through men's hearts for ever and for ever. The conquering Messiah of the Jews is a figure about whom scholars write their books; but the Prince of Love on the Cross is a king who has his throne for ever in the hearts of men. The only secure foundation for a kingdom is sacrificial love.

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John 12:35-36

SONS OF THE LIGHT

John 12:35-36

Jesus said to them: "For a little while yet the light is among you. Walk while you have the light that the darkness may not overtake you. He who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become the sons of the light."

There is in this passage the implicit promise and the implicit threat which are never very far from the heart of the Christian faith.

(i) There is the promise of light. The man who walks with Jesus is delivered from the shadows. There are certain shadows which cast their shade sooner or later on every light. There is the shadow of fear. Sometimes we are afraid to look forward. Sometimes, especially when we see what they can do to others, we are afraid of the chances and the changes of life. There are the shadows of doubts and uncertainties. Sometimes the way ahead is far from being clear and we feel like people groping among the shadows with nothing firm to cling to. There are the shadows of sorrow. Sooner or later the sun sets at midday and the lights go out. But the man who walks with Jesus is delivered from fear; he is liberated from doubt; he has a joy that no man takes from him.

(ii) There is the implicit threat. The decision to trust life and all things to Jesus, the decision to take him as Master and Guide and Saviour, must be made in time. In life all things must be done in time, or they will not be done at all. There is work which we can do only when we have the physical strength to do it. There is study which can be carried out only when our minds are keen enough and our memories retentive enough to cope with it. There are things which have to be said and done or the time for saying and doing them is gone for ever. It is so with Jesus. At the actual moment Jesus said this, he was appealing to the Jews to believe in him before the Cross came and he was taken from them. But this is an eternal truth. It is a statistical fact that there is a steep rise in the number of conversions up to the age of seventeen and an equally steep fall afterwards. The more a man lets himself become fixed in his ways the harder it is to jerk himself out of them. In Christ the supreme blessedness is offered to men; in one sense it is never too late to grasp it; but nonetheless it remains true that it must be grasped in time.

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John 12:37-41

BLIND UNBELIEF

John 12:37-41

When Jesus had said these things, he went away and hid himself from them. Although he had done such great signs in their presence they did not believe in him. It happened thus that the word which Isaiah the prophet spoke should be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" It was for this reason that they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: "He has blinded their eyes, he has hardened their heart, so that they may not see with their eyes and understand with their heart. and turn, and I will heal them." Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke about him.

This is a passage which is bound to trouble many minds. John quotes two passages from Isaiah. The first is from Isa.53:1-2. In it the prophet asks if there is anyone who has believed what he has been saying, and if there is anyone who recognizes the power of God when it is revealed to him. But it is the second passage which troubles the mind. The original is in Isa.6:9-10. It runs: "And God said, Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and be healed." That is a passage which runs all through the New Testament. It is quoted or echoed in Matt.13:14-15; Mk.4:12; Lk.8:10; Rom.11:8; 2Cor.3:14; Ac.28:27.

The terrible and the troubling thing is that it seems to say that man's unbelief is due to God's action; that God has ordained that certain people must not and win not believe. Now in whatever way we explain this passage, we cannot believe that the God whom Jesus told us about would make it impossible for his children to believe.

There are two things to be said.

(i) We must try to think ourselves back into Isaiah's heart and mind. He had proclaimed the word of God and put everything he had into his message. And men had refused to listen. In the end he was forced to say: "For all the good I have done I might as well never have spoken. Instead of making men better my message seems to have made them worse. They might as well never have heard it, for they are simply confirmed in their lethargy and their disobedience and their unbelief. You would think that God had meant them not to believe." Isaiah's words spring from a broken heart. They are the words of a man bewildered by the fact that his message seemed to make men worse instead of better. To read them with cold literalness is completely to misunderstand.

(ii) But there is something else. It was a basic belief of the Jews that God is behind everything. They believed that nothing could happen outside the purpose of God. If that is so they were bound to believe that when men would not accept God's message their unbelief was still within God's purpose. To put that into modern terms and into our way of thought--we would not say that unbelief is God's purpose, but we would say that God in his controlling wisdom and power can use even men's unbelief for his purposes. That is how Paul saw it. He saw God using the unbelief of the Jews for the conversion of the Gentiles.

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John 12:37-41

We must understand this passage to mean, not that God predestined certain people to unbelief, but that even man's unbelief can be used to further God's eternal purposes. These Jews did not believe in Jesus; that was not God's fault but theirs; but even that has somehow its place in God's scheme. "Ill that he blesses is our good." God is so great that there is nothing in this world, not even sin, which is outside his power.

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John 12:42-43

THE COWARD'S FAITH

John 12:42-43

Nevertheless many of the rulers believed in him, but they did not publicly confess their faith for they did not wish to be excommunicated; for they loved the glory of men rather than the glory of God.

Jesus did not speak entirely to deaf ears; there were those even of the Jewish authorities, who in their heart of hearts believed. But they were afraid to confess their faith, because they did not wish to run the risk of being excommunicated from the synagogue. These people were seeking to carry out the impossible; they were trying to be secret disciples. Secret discipleship is a contradiction in terms for, "either the secrecy kills the discipleship, or the discipleship kills the secrecy."

They feared that by becoming confessed followers of Jesus they would lose so much. It is strange how often men have got their values mixed up. Again and again they have failed to support some great cause because it interfered with some lesser interest. When Joan of Arc realized that she stood forsaken and alone, she said: "Yes: I am alone on earth: I have always been alone. My father told my brothers to drown me if I would not stay to mind his sheep while France was bleeding to death; France might perish if only our lambs were safe." That French farmer preferred the safety of his sheep to the safety of his country. These Jewish rulers were a little like that. They knew that Jesus was right; they knew that their fellow-rulers were out to destroy him and all that he was seeking to do for God; but they were not prepared to take the risk of openly declaring for him. It would have meant an end of their place, their profit, and their prestige.

They would have been ostracized from society and banished from orthodox religion. It was too high a price to pay. So they lived a lie because they were not big enough to stand up for the truth.

In one vivid phrase John diagnoses their position. They preferred to stand well with men rather than with God. No doubt they thought themselves wise and prudent; but their wisdom did not extend to remembering that while the opinion of men might matter for the few years in which they lived upon this earth, the judgment of God mattered for all eternity. It is true wisdom and prudence to prefer the good opinion of God to the good opinion of men; it is always better to be right for eternity than to be right for time.

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John 12:44-50

THE INESCAPABLE JUDGMENT

John 12:44-50

Jesus cried and said: "He who believes in me does not believe in me, but in him who sent me. And he who looks upon me, looks upon him who sent me. It was as light that I came into the world, that every one who believes in me should not remain in darkness. And, if anyone hears my words and does not keep them, it is not I who judge him. I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who completely disregards me as of no account, and who does not receive my words, has one who judges him. The word which I spoke, that will judge him on the last day. That is so because it was not out of my own self that I spoke. But the Father who sent me, it was he who gave me the commandment which laid down what I should speak and what I should say. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. The things that I speak, I speak as the Father spoke to me."

These, according to John, are Jesus' last words of public teaching. Hereafter he will teach his disciples and hereafter he will stand before Pilate, but these are the last words he will address to people at large.

Jesus makes the claim which is the basis of his whole life, that in him men are confronted with God. To listen to him is to listen to God; to see him is to see God. In him God meets man, and man meets God. That confrontation has two results and both have in them the core of judgment.

(i) Once again Jesus returns to a thought that is never far away in the Fourth Gospel. He did not come into the world to condemn; he came to save. It was not the wrath of God which sent Jesus to men; it was his love. Yet the coming of Jesus inevitably involves judgment. Why should that be? Because by his attitude to Jesus a man shows what he is and therefore judges himself. If he finds in Jesus an infinite magnetism and attraction, even if he never succeeds in making his life what he knows he ought to make it, he has felt the tug of God upon his heart; and therefore he is safe. If on the other hand he sees in Jesus nothing lovely and his heart remains completely untouched in his presence, it means that he is impervious to God; and he has therefore judged himself. Always in the Fourth Gospel there is this essential paradox; Jesus came in love, yet his coming is a judgment. As we have said before, we can in perfect, unmixed love offer a person some great experience, and find that he sees nothing in it; the experience offered in love has become a judgment. Jesus is God's touchstone. By a man's attitude to him he himself stands revealed.

(ii) Jesus said that at the last day the words which these people had heard would be their judges. That is one of the great truths of life. A man cannot be blamed for not knowing. But if he knows the right and does the wrong his condemnation is all the more serious. Therefore every wise thing that we have heard, and every opportunity we have had to know the truth, will in the end be a witness against us.

An old eighteenth century divine wrote a kind of catechism of the Christian faith for ordinary people. At the end there was a question which asked what would happen to a person if he disregarded the Christian message. The answer was that condemnation would follow, "and so much the more because thou hast read this book."

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All that we have known and did not do will be a witness against us at the last.

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John 13:1-17

THE ROYALTY OF SERVICE

John 13:1-17 (Part 1)

Before the Festival of the Passover, Jesus, in the knowledge that his hour had come to leave this world and to go to the Father, although he had always loved his own people in the world, decided to show them what his love was like in a way which went to the ultimate limit. The meal was in progress; and the devil had already put it into his heart that Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, should betray him. Well knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come forth from God, and that he was going back to God, Jesus rose from the meal and laid aside his outer robe, and took a towel and put it round himself. Then he poured water into a ewer and began to wash the feet of his disciples and to wipe them with the towel which he had put round himself. He came to Simon Peter.

Peter said to him: "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered him: "You do not know now what I am doing, but you will understand afterwards." Peter said to him: "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him: "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me." Simon Peter said to him: "Lord, if that is so, do not wash my feet only, but my hands and my head too." Jesus said to him: "He who has been bathed has need only to have his feet washed. After that is done, he is altogether clean. And you are clean--but not all of you." He knew the one who was engineering his betrayal. That is why he said: "You are not all clean." So when he had washed their feet, and when he had taken his outer robe again, and when he had taken his place at table, he said to them: "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me 'Teacher,' and you call me 'Lord.' And you are quite right to do so, for so I am.

If then I, the Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, so you ought to wash each other's feet, for I have given you an example, that, as I have done to you, you too should do to each other. This is the truth I tell you--the servant is not greater than his master, nor he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things you are blessed if you do them."

We shall have to look at this passage in far more aspects than one, but first of all we must take it as a whole.

Few incidents in the gospel story so reveal the character of Jesus and so perfectly show his love. When we think of what Jesus might have been and of what he might have done the supreme wonder of what he was and did comes home to us.

(i) Jesus knew all things had been given into his hands. He knew that his hour of humiliation was near, but he knew that his hour of glory was also near. Such a consciousness might well have filled him with pride; and yet, with the knowledge of the power and the glory that were his, he washed his disciples' feet. At that moment when he might have had supreme pride, he had supreme humility. Love is always like that. When, for example, someone falls ill, the person who loves him will perform the most menial services and delight to do them, because love is like that. Sometimes men feel that they are too distinguished to do the humble things, too important to do some menial task. Jesus was not so. He knew that he was Lord of all, and yet he washed his disciples' feet.

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John 13:1-17

(ii) Jesus knew that he had come from God and that he was going to God. He might well have had a certain contempt for men and for the things of this world. He might well have thought that he was finished with the world now, for he was on the way to God. It was just at that time when God was nearest to him that Jesus went to the depths and the limits of his service of men. To wash the feet of the guests at a feast was the office of a slave. The disciples of the Rabbis were supposed to render their masters personal service, but a service like this would never have been dreamed of. The wonderful thing about Jesus was that his nearness to God, so far from separating him from men, brought him nearer than ever to them.

It is always true that there is no one closer to men than the man who is close to God. T. R. Glover said of certain clever intellectuals: "They thought they were being religious when they were merely being fastidious." There is a legend of St. Francis of Assisi. In his early days he was very wealthy; nothing but the best was good enough for him; he was an aristocrat of the aristocrats. But he was ill at ease and there was no peace in his soul. One day he was riding alone outside the city when he saw a leper, a mass of sores, a horrible sight. Ordinarily the fastidious Francis would have recoiled in horror from this hideous wreck of humanity. But something moved within him; he dismounted from his horse and flung his arms around the leper; and as he embraced him the leper turned into the figure of Jesus. The nearer we are to suffering humanity, the nearer we are to God.

(iii) Jesus knew this also. He was well aware that he was about to be betrayed. Such knowledge might so easily have turned him to bitterness and hatred; but it made his heart run out in greater love than ever. The astounding thing was that the more men hurt him, the more Jesus loved them. It is so easy and so natural to resent wrong and to grow bitter under insult and injury; but Jesus met the greatest injury and the supreme disloyalty, with the greatest humility and the supreme love.

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John 13:1-17

THE ROYALTY OF SERVICE

John 13:1-17 (Part 2)

There is more in the background of this passage than even John tells us. If we turn to Luke's account of the last meal together, we find the tragic sentence: "A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as greatest" (Lk.22:24). Even within sight of the Cross, the disciples were still arguing about matters of precedence and prestige.

It may well be that this very argument produced the situation which made Jesus act as he did. The roads of Palestine were unsurfaced and uncleaned. In dry weather they were inches deep in dust and in wet they were liquid mud. The shoes ordinary people wore were sandals, which were simply soles held on to the foot by a few straps. They gave little protection against the dust or the mud of the roads. For that reason there were always great waterpots at the door of a house; and a servant was there with a ewer and a towel to wash the soiled feet of the guests as they came in. Jesus' little company of friends had no servants. The duties which servants would carry out in wealthier circles they must have shared among each other.

It may well be that on the night of this last meal together they had got themselves into such a state of competitive pride that not one of them would accept the duty of seeing that the water and the towels were there to wash the feet of the company as they came in; and Jesus mended their omission in the most vivid and dramatic way.

He himself did what none of them was prepared to do. Then he said: "You see what I have done. You call me your master and your Lord; and you are quite right; for so I am; and yet I am prepared to do this for you. Surely you don't think that a pupil deserves more honour than a teacher, or a servant than a master. Surely if I do this, you ought to be prepared to do it. I am giving you an example of how you ought to behave towards each other."

This ought to make us think. So often, even in churches, trouble arises because someone does not get his place. So often even ecclesiastical dignitaries are offended because they did not receive the precedence to which their office entitled them. Here is the lesson that there is only one kind of greatness, the greatness of service. The world is full of people who are standing on their dignity when they ought to be kneeling at the feet of their brethren. In every sphere of life desire for prominence and unwillingness to take a subordinate place wreck the scheme of things. A player is one day omitted from the team and refuses to play any more. An aspiring politician is passed over for some office to which he thought he had a right and refuses to accept any subordinate office. A member of a choir is not given a solo and will not sing any more. In any society it may happen that someone is given a quite unintentional slight and either explodes in anger or broods in sulkiness for days afterwards.

When we are tempted to think of our dignity, our prestige, our rights, let us see again the picture of the Son of God, girt with a towel, kneeling at his disciples' feet.

That man is truly great who has this regal humility, which makes him both servant and king among men. In *The Beloved Captain* by Donald Hankey, there is a passage which describes how the beloved captain cared for his men after a route march. "We all knew instinctively that he was

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John 13:1-17

our superior--a man of finer fibre than ourselves, a 'toff' in his own right. I suppose that was why he could be so humble without loss of dignity. For he was humble, too, if that is the right word, and I think it is. No trouble of ours was too small for him to attend to. When we started route marches, for instance, and our feet were blistered and sore, as they often were at first, you would have thought that they were his own feet from the trouble he took. Of course after the march there was always an inspection of feet. That is the routine. But with him it was no mere routine. He came into our room, and, if any one had a sore foot, he would kneel down on the floor and look at it as carefully as if he had been a doctor.

Then he would prescribe, and the remedies were ready at hand, being borne by a sergeant. If a blister had to be lanced, he would very likely lance it himself there and then, so as to make sure it was done with a clean needle and that no dirt was allowed to get in. There was no affectation about this, no striving after effect. It was simply that he felt that our feet were pretty important, and that he knew that we were pretty careless. So he thought it best at the start to see to the matter himself. Nevertheless, there was in our eyes something almost religious about this care for our feet. It seemed to have a touch of Christ about it, and we loved and honoured him the more." The strange thing is that it is the man who stoops like that--like Christ--whom men in the end honour as a king, and the memory of whom they will not willingly let die.

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John 13:1-17

THE ESSENTIAL WASHING

John 13:1-17 (Part 3)

We have already seen that in John we have always to be looking for two meanings, the meaning which lies on the surface and the meaning which is beneath the surface. In this story there is undoubtedly a second meaning. On the surface it is a dramatic and unforgettable lesson in humility. But there is more to it than that.

There is one very difficult passage. At first Peter refuses to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus tells him that unless he accepts this washing, he will have no part with him. Peter then begs that not only his feet, but his hands and his head should also be washed. But Jesus tells him that it is enough that his feet should be washed. The difficult sentence and the one with an inner meaning, is: "He who has been bathed has need only to have his feet washed."

Beyond doubt there is a reference to Christian baptism here. "Unless you are washed you can have no part in me" is a way of saying: "Unless you pass through the gate of baptism, you have no part in the Church."

The point is this. It was the custom that before people went to a feast they bathed themselves. When they came to the house of their host, they did not need to be bathed again; all they needed was to have their feet washed. The washing of the feet was the ceremony which preceded entry into the house where they were to be guests. It was what we might call the washing of entry into the house. So Jesus says to Peter: "It is not the bathing of your body that you require. That you can do for yourself. What you need is the washing which marks entry into the household of the faith." This explains another thing. Peter at first is going to refuse to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus says that if he does, he will have no part in him. It is as if Jesus said: "Peter, are you going to be too proud to let me do this for you? If you are, you will lose everything."

In the early Church, and still today, the way in is the way of baptism; baptism is what we might call the washing of entry. This is not to say that a man cannot be saved unless he is baptized. But it does mean that if he is able to be baptized and is too proud to enter by that gate, his pride shuts him out from the family of the faith.

Things are different now. In the early days it was grown men and women who came to be baptized because they were coming direct from heathenism into the faith. Now in many of our churches we bring our children too. But in this passage Jesus was drawing a picture of the washing which is the entry to the Church and telling men that they must not be too proud to submit to it.

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John 13:18-20

THE SHAME OF DISLOYALTY AND THE GLORY OF FIDELITY

John 13:18-20

"It is not about you all that I am speaking. I know the kind of men whom I have chosen. It is all happening that the Scripture should be fulfilled: 'He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against me.' I am telling you this now, before it happens, so that, when it does happen, you may believe that I am who I claim to be. This is the truth I tell you--he who receives whomsoever I will send, receives me; and he who receives me, receives him who sent me."

There are three things stressed in this passage.

(i) The sheer cruelty of Judas' disloyalty is vividly pictured in a way which would be specially poignant to an eastern mind. Jesus used a quotation from Ps.41:9. In full the quotation runs: "Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me." In the east to eat bread with anyone was a sign of friendship and an act of loyalty. 2Sam.9:7,13 tell how David granted it to Mephibosheth to eat bread at his table, when he might well have eliminated him as a descendant of Saul. 1Kgs.18:19 tells how the prophets of Baal ate bread at the table of Jezebel. For one who had eaten bread at someone's table to turn against the person, to whom by that very act he had pledged his friendship, was a bitter thing. This disloyalty of friends is for the Psalmist the sorest of all hurts. "It is not an enemy who taunts me--then I could bear it--it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me--then I could hide from him. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.

We used to hold sweet converse together; within God's house we walked in fellowship" (Ps.12-14).

There is all the poignant sorrow in the world when a friend is guilty of such heart-breaking disloyalty. The very phrase that is used is full of cruelty. "He lifted up his heel against me." Literally the Hebrew is, "He made great the heel," and it is a phrase which describes "brutal violence." In this passage there is no hint of anger, only of sorrow; Jesus, with a last appeal, is revealing the wound upon his heart to Judas.

(ii) This passage also stresses the fact that all this tragedy is somehow within the purpose of God, and that it is fully and unquestionably accepted by Jesus. It was as Scripture said it would be. There was never any doubt that the redeeming of the world would cost the broken heart of God. Jesus knew what was happening. He knew the cost and he was ready to pay it. He did not want the disciples to think that he was caught up in a blind web of circumstances from which he could not escape. He was not going to be killed; he was choosing to die. At the moment they did not, and could not, see that, but he wanted to be sure that a day would come when they would look back and remember and understand.

(iii) If this passage stresses the bitterness of disloyalty, it also stresses the glory of fidelity. Some day these same disciples would take the message of Jesus out to the world. When they did, they would be nothing less than the representatives of God himself. An ambassador does not go out as a private individual, armed with only his own personal qualities and qualifications. He goes out with all the honour and glory of his country upon him. To listen to him is to listen to his country; to

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honour him is to honour the country he represents; to welcome him is to welcome the ruler who sent him out. The great honour and the great responsibility of being a pledged Christian is that we stand in the world for Jesus Christ. We speak for him; we act for him. The honour of the Eternal is in our hands.

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John 13:21-30

LOVE'S LAST APPEAL

John 13:21-30 (Part 1)

When Jesus had said these things, he was troubled in spirit. Solemnly he declared: "This is the truth I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples began to look at each other, because they were at a loss to know about whom he was speaking. One of his disciples, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining with his head on Jesus' breast. So Simon Peter made a sign to him and said to him: "Ask who it is that he is speaking about." The disciple who was reclining with his head on Jesus' breast said to him: "Lord who is it?" Jesus said: "It is he for whom I will dip the morsel in the dish and give it to him." So he took the morsel and dipped it in the dish and gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after that man had received the morsel, Satan entered into him. So Jesus said to him: "Hurry on what you are going to do." None of those who were reclining at table understood why he said this to him.

Some of them thought that, since Judas had the money-box, Jesus was saying to him: "Buy the things we need for the feast"; or that he was telling him to give something to the poor. So that man took the morsel and went out at once--and it was night.

When we visualize this scene certain most dramatic things emerge.

The treachery of Judas is seen at its worst. He must have been the perfect actor and the perfect hypocrite. One thing is clear--if the other disciples had known what Judas was about, he would never have left that room alive. All the time Judas must have been putting on an act of love and loyalty which deceived everyone except Jesus. He was not only a bare-faced villain; he was a suave hypocrite. There is warning here. By our outward actions we may deceive men; but there is no hiding things from the eye of Christ.

There is more. When we understand aright what was happening, we can see that there was appeal after appeal to Judas. First, there were the seating arrangements at the meal. The Jews did not sit at table; they reclined. The table was a low solid block, with couches round it. It was shaped like a "U" and the place of the host was in the centre. They reclined on their left side, resting on the left elbow, thus leaving the right hand free to deal with the food. Sitting in such a way, a man's head was literally in the breast of the person reclining on his left. Jesus would be sitting in the place of the host, at the centre of the single side of the low table. The disciple whom Jesus loved must have been sitting on his right, for as he lent on his elbow at the table, his head was in Jesus' breast.

The disciple whom Jesus loved is never named. Some have thought that he was Lazarus, for Jesus loved Lazarus (Jn.11:36). Some have thought that he was the rich young ruler, for Jesus loved him (Mk.10:21); and it has been imagined that in the end he did decide to stake everything on Jesus. Some have thought that he was some otherwise unknown young disciple who was specially near and dear to Jesus. Some have thought that he was not a flesh and blood person at all, but only an ideal picture of what the perfect disciple ought to be. But the general opinion has always been that the beloved disciple was none other than John himself; and we may well believe that.

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John 13:21-30

But it is the place of Judas that is of special interest. It is quite clear that Jesus could speak to him privately without the others overhearing. If that be so, there is only one place Judas could have been occupying. He must have been on Jesus' left, so that, just as John's head was in Jesus' breast, Jesus' head was in Judas'. The revealing thing is that the place on the left of the host was the place of highest honour, kept for the most intimate friend. When that meal began, Jesus must have said to Judas: "Judas, come and sit beside me tonight; I want specially to talk to you." The very inviting of Judas to that seat was an appeal.

But there is more. For the host to offer the guest a special tit-bit, a special morsel from the dish, was again a sign of special friendship. When Boaz wished to show how much he honoured Ruth, he invited her to come and dip her morsel in the wine (Ru.2:14). T. E. Lawrence told how when he sat with the Arabs in their tents, sometimes the Arab chief would tear a choice piece of fat mutton from the whole sheep before them and hand it to him (often a most embarrassing favour to a western palate, for it had to be eaten!) When Jesus handed the morsel to Judas, again it was a mark of special affection. And we note that even when Jesus did this the disciples did not gather the import of his words. That surely shows that Jesus was so much in the habit of doing this that it seemed nothing unusual. Judas had always been picked out for special affection.

There is tragedy here. Again and again Jesus appealed to that dark heart, and again and again Judas remained unmoved. God save us from being completely impervious to the appeal of love.

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John 13:21-30

LOVE'S LAST APPEAL

John 13:21-30 (Part 2)

So this tragic drama played itself out to the end. Again and again Jesus showed his affection to Judas. Again and again Jesus tried to save him from what he was planning to do.

Then quite suddenly the crucial moment came, the moment when the love of Jesus admitted defeat. "Judas," he said, "hurry on what you propose to do." There was no point in further delay. Why carry on this useless appeal in the mounting tension? If it was to be done, it were better done quickly.

Still the disciples did not see. They thought Judas was being despatched to make the arrangements for the feast. It was always the custom at the Passover that those who had shared with those who had not. It was the time of all times when people gave to the poor. To this day it is the custom in many churches to take a special offering at Communion services for those in need. So the disciples thought that Jesus was sending Judas out to give the usual present to the poor, that they too might be enabled to celebrate the Passover.

When Judas received the morsel, the devil entered into him. It is a terrible thing that what was meant to be love's appeal became hate's dynamic. That is what the devil can do. He can take the loveliest things and twist them until they become the agents of hell. He can take love and turn it into lust; he can take holiness and turn it into pride; he can take discipline and turn it into sadistic cruelty; he can take affection and turn it into spineless complacency. We must be on the watch so that in our lives the devil never warps the lovely things until he can use them for his own purposes.

Judas went out--and it was night. John has a way of using words in the most pregnant way. It was night for the day was late; but there was another night there. It is always night when a man goes from Christ to follow his own purposes. It is always night when a man listens to the call of evil rather than the summons of good. It is always night when hate puts out the light of love. It is always night when a man turns his back on Jesus.

If we submit ourselves to Christ we walk in the light; if we turn our backs on him we go into the dark. The way of light and the way of dark are set before us. God give us wisdom to choose aright--for in the dark a man always goes lost.

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John 13:31-32

THE FOURFOLD GLORY

John 13:31-32

When Judas had gone out, Jesus said: "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him; and now God will glorify himself in him; and he will glorify him immediately."

This passage tells of the fourfold glory.

(i) The glory of Jesus has come; and that glory is the Cross. The tension is gone; any doubts that remained have been finally removed. Judas has gone out, and the Cross is a certainty. Here we are face to face with something which is of the very warp and woof of life. The greatest glory in life is the glory which comes from sacrifice. In any warfare the supreme glory belongs, not to those who survive but to those who lay down their lives. As Laurence Binyon wrote:

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."

In medicine it is not the physicians who made a fortune who are remembered; it is those who gave their lives that healing might come to men. It is the simple lesson of history that those who have made the great sacrifices have entered into the great glory.

(ii) In Jesus God has been glorified. It was the obedience of Jesus which brought glory to God. There is only one way for a man to show that he loves and admires and trusts a leader; and that is by obeying him, if need be to the bitter end. The only way in which a child can honour a parent is by obeying him. Jesus gave the supreme honour and the supreme glory to God, because he gave to God the supreme obedience, even to a Cross.

(iii) In Jesus God glorifies himself. It is a strange thought that the supreme glory of God lies in the Incarnation and the Cross. There is no glory like that of being loved. Had God remained aloof and majestic, serene and unmoved, untouched by any sorrow and unhurt by any pain, men might have feared him and men might have admired him; but they would never have loved him. The law of sacrifice is not only a law of earth; it is a law of heaven and earth. It is in the Incarnation and the Cross that God's supreme glory is displayed.

(iv) God will glorify Jesus. Here is the other side of the matter. At that moment the Cross was the glory of Jesus; but there was more to follow--the Resurrection; the Ascension; the full and final triumph of Christ, which is what the New Testament means when it talks of his Second Coming. In the Cross Jesus found his own glory; but the day came, and the day will come, when that glory will be demonstrated to all the world and all the universe. The vindication of Christ must follow his humiliation; the enthronement of Christ must follow his crucifixion; the crown of thorns must change into the crown of glory. It is the campaign of the Cross, but the King will yet enter into a triumph which all the world can see.

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John 13:33-35

THE FAREWELL COMMAND

John 13:33-35

"Little children, I am still going to be with you for a little while. You will search for me; and, as I said to the Jews, so now I say to you too: 'You cannot go where I am going.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another; that you too love one another, as I have loved you; it is by this that all will know that you are my disciples--if you have love amongst each other."

Jesus was laying down his farewell commandment to his disciples. The time was short; if they were ever to hear his voice they must hear it now. He was going on a journey on which none might accompany him; he was taking a road that he had to walk alone; and before he went, he gave them the commandment that they must love one another as he had loved them. What does this mean for us, and for our relationships with our fellow-men? How did Jesus love his disciples?

(i) He loved his disciples selflessly. Even in the noblest human love there remains some element of self. We so often think--maybe unconsciously--of what we are to get. We think of the happiness we will receive, or of the loneliness we will suffer if love fails or is denied. So often we are thinking: What will this love do for me? So often at the back of things it is our happiness that we are seeking. But Jesus never thought of himself. His one desire was to give himself and all he had for those he loved.

(ii) Jesus loved his disciples sacrificially. There was no limit to what his love would give or to where it would go. No demand that could be made upon it was too much. If love meant the Cross, Jesus was prepared to go there. Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that love is meant to give us happiness. So in the end it does, but love may well bring pain and demand a cross.

(iii) Jesus loved his disciples understandingly. He knew his disciples through and through. We never really know people until we have lived with them. When we are meeting them only occasionally, we see them at their best. It is when we live with them that we find out their moods and their irritabilities and their weaknesses. Jesus had lived with his disciples day in and day out for many months and knew all that was to be known about them--and he still loved them. Sometimes we say that love is blind. That is not so, for the love that is blind can end in nothing but bleak and utter disillusionment. Real love is open-eyed. It loves, not what it imagines a man to be, but what he is. The heart of Jesus is big enough to love us as we are.

(iv) Jesus loved his disciples forgivingly. Their leader was to deny him. They were all to forsake him in his hour of need. They never, in the days of his flesh, really understood him. They were blind and insensitive, slow to learn, and lacking in understanding. In the end they were craven cowards. But Jesus held nothing against them; there was no failure which he could not forgive. The love which has not learned to forgive cannot do anything else but shrivel and die. We are poor creatures, and there is a kind of fate in things which makes us hurt most of all those who love us best. For that very reason all enduring love must be built on forgiveness, for without forgiveness it is bound to die.

Barclay's Commentary

John 13:36-38

THE FALTERING LOYALTY

John 13:36-38

Simon Peter said to him: "Lord, where are you going?" "Where I am going," Jesus answered, "you cannot now follow; but afterwards you will follow." Peter said to him: "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered: "Will you lay down your life for me? This is the truth I tell you--the cock will not crow until you will deny me three times."

What was the difference between Peter and Judas? Judas betrayed Jesus, and Peter, in his hour of need, denied him even with oaths and curses; and yet, while the name of Judas has become one of blackest shame, there is something infinitely lovable about Peter. The difference is this. Judas' betrayal of Jesus was deliberate; it was carried out in cold blood; it must have been the result of careful thought and planning; and in the end it callously refused the most poignant appeal. But there was never anything less deliberate than Peter's denial of Jesus. He never meant to do it; he was swept away by a moment of weakness. For the moment, his will was too weak, but his heart was always right.

There is always a difference between the sin which is coldly and deliberately calculated, and the sin which involuntarily conquers a man in a moment of weakness or of passion; always a difference between the sin which knows what it is doing, and the sin that comes when a man is so weakened or so inflamed that he scarcely knows what he is doing. God save us from deliberately hurting himself or those who love us!

There is something very lovely in the relationship between Jesus and Peter.

(i) Jesus knew Peter in all his weakness. He knew his impulsiveness; he knew his instability; he knew how he had a habit of speaking with his heart before he had thought with his head. He knew well the strength of his loyalty and the weakness of his resolution. Jesus knew Peter as he was.

(ii) Jesus knew Peter in all his love. He knew that whatever Peter did he loved him. If we would only understand that often when people hurt us, fail us, wound us, or disappoint us, it is not the real person who is acting. The real person is not the one who wounds us or fails us, but the one who loves us. The basic thing is not his failure, but his love. Jesus knew that about Peter. It would save us many a heartbreak and many a tragic breach if we remembered the basic love and forgave the moment's failure.

(iii) Jesus knew, not only what Peter was, but also what he could become. He knew that at the moment Peter could not follow him; but he was sure that the day would come when he, too, would take the same red road to martyrdom. It is the greatness of Jesus that he sees the hero even in the coward; he sees not only what we are, but also what he can make us. He has the love to see what we can be and the power to make us attain it.

Barclay's Commentary

John 14:1-3

THE PROMISE OF GLORY

John 14:1-3 (Part 1)

"Do not let your heart be distressed. Believe in God and believe in me. There are many abiding-places in my Father's house. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And, if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again, and I will welcome you to myself, that where I am, there you too may be."

In a very short time life for the disciples was going to fall in. Their world was going to collapse in chaos around them. At such a time there was only one thing to do--stubbornly to hold on to trust in God. As the Psalmist had had it: "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps.27:13). "But my eyes are toward thee, O Lord God; in thee I seek refuge" (Ps.141:8). There comes a time when we have to believe where we cannot prove and to accept where we cannot understand. If, in the darkest hour, we believe that somehow there is a purpose in life and that that purpose is love, even the unbearable becomes bearable and even in the darkness there is a glimmer of light.

Jesus adds something to that. He says not only: "Believe in God." He says also: "Believe in me." If the Psalmist could believe in the ultimate goodness of God, how much can we. For Jesus is the proof that God is willing to give us everything he has to give. As Paul put it: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom.8:32). If we believe that in Jesus we see the picture of God, then, in face of that amazing love, it becomes, not easy, but at least possible, to accept even what we cannot understand, and in the storms of life to retain a faith that is serene.

Jesus went on to say: "There are many abiding places in my Father's house." By his Father's house he meant heaven. But what did he mean when he said there were many abiding places in heaven? The word used for abiding places is the word *monai* (GSN3438) and there are three suggestions.

(i) The Jews held that in heaven there were different grades of blessedness which would be given to men according to their goodness and their fidelity on earth. In the Book of the Secrets of Enoch it is said: "In the world to come there are many mansions prepared for men; good for good; evil for evil." That picture likens heaven to a vast palace in which there are many rooms, with each assigned a room such as his life has merited.

(ii) In the Greek writer Pausanias the word *monai* (GSN3438) means stages upon the way. If that is how to take it here, it means that there are many stages on the way to heaven and even in heaven there is progress and development and advance. At least some of the great early Christian thinkers had that belief. Origen was one. He said that when a man died, his soul went to some place called Paradise, which is still upon earth. There he received teaching and training and, when he was worthy and fit, his soul ascended into the air. It then passed through various *monai* (GSN3438), stages, which the Greeks called spheres and which the Christians called heavens, until finally it reached the heavenly kingdom. In so doing the soul followed Jesus who, as the writer to the

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John 14:1-3

Hebrews said, "passed through the heavens" (Heb.4:14). Irenaeus speaks of a certain interpretation of the sentence which tells how the seed that is sown produces sometimes a hundredfold, sometimes sixtyfold and sometimes thirtyfold (Matt.13:8).

There was a different yield and therefore a different reward. Some men will be counted worthy to pass all their eternity in the very presence of God; others will rise to Paradise; and others will become citizens of "the city." Clement of Alexandria believed that there were degrees of glory, rewards and stages in proportion to a man's achievement in holiness in this life.

There is something very attractive here. There is a sense in which the soul shrinks from what we might call a static heaven. There is something attractive in the idea of a development which goes on even in the heavenly places. Speaking in purely human and inadequate terms, we sometimes feel that we would be dazzled with too much splendour, if we were immediately ushered into the very presence of God. We feel that even in heaven we would need to be purified and helped until we could face the greater glory.

(iii) But it may well be that the meaning is very simple and very lovely. "There are many abiding-places in my Father's house" may simply mean that in heaven there is room for all. An earthly house becomes overcrowded; an earthly inn must sometimes turn away the weary traveller because its accommodation is exhausted. It is not so with our Father's house, for heaven is as wide as the heart of God and there is room for all. Jesus is saying to his friends: "Don't be afraid. Men may shut their doors upon you. But in heaven you will never be shut out."

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John 14:1-3

THE PROMISE OF GLORY

John 14:1-3 (Part 2)

There are certain other great truths within this passage.

(i) It tells us of the honesty of Jesus. "If it were not so," asked Jesus, "would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?" No one could ever claim that he had been inveigled into Christianity by specious promises or under false pretenses. Jesus told men bluntly that the Christian must bid farewell to comfort (Lk.9:57-58). He told them of the persecution, the hatred, the penalties they would have to bear (Matt.10:16-22). He told them of the cross which they must carry (Matt.16:24), even although he told them also of the glory of the ending of the Christian way. He frankly and honestly told men what they might expect both of glory and of pain if they followed him. He was not a leader who tried to bribe men with promises of an easy way; he tried to challenge them into greatness.

(ii) It tells us of the function of Jesus. He said, "I am going to prepare a place for you." One of the great thoughts of the New Testament is that Jesus goes on in front for us to follow. He opens up a way so that we may follow in his steps. One of the great words which is used to describe Jesus is the word *prodromos* (GSN4274) (Heb.6:20). The King James Version and the Revised Standard translate it forerunner. There are two uses of this word which light up the picture within it. In the Roman army the *prodromoi* (GSN4274) were the reconnaissance troops. They went ahead of the main body of the army to blaze the trail and to ensure that it was safe for the rest of the troops to follow. The harbour of Alexandria was very difficult to approach. When the great corn ships came into it a little pilot boat was sent out to guide them along the channel into safe waters. That pilot boat was called the *prodromos* (GSN4274). It went first to make it safe for others to follow. That is what Jesus did.

He blazed the way to heaven and to God that we might follow in his steps.

(iii) It tells us of the ultimate triumph of Jesus. He said: "I am coming again." The Second Coming of Jesus is a doctrine which has to a large extent dropped out of Christian thinking and preaching. The curious thing about it is that Christians seem either entirely to disregard it or to think of nothing else. It is true that we cannot tell when it will happen or what will happen, but one thing is certain--history is going somewhere. Without a climax it would be necessarily incomplete. History must have a consummation, and that consummation will be the triumph of Jesus Christ; and he promises that in the day of his triumph he will welcome his friends.

(iv) Jesus said: "Where I am, there you will also be." Here is a great truth put in the simplest way; for the Christian, heaven is where Jesus is. We do not need to speculate on what heaven will be like. It is enough to know that we will be for ever with him. When we love someone with our whole heart, we are really alive only when we are with that person. It is so with Christ. In this world our contact with him is shadowy, for we can see only through a glass darkly, and spasmodic, for we are poor creatures and cannot live always on the heights. But the best definition is to say that heaven is that state where we will always be with Jesus.

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John 14:4-6

THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

John 14:4-6

"And you know the way to where I go." Thomas said to him: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How do we know the way?" Jesus said to him: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Again and again Jesus had told his disciples where he was going, but somehow they had never understood. "Yet a little while I am with you," he said, "and then I go to him that sent me" (Jn.7:33). He had told them that he was going to the Father who had sent him, and with whom he was one, but they still did not understand what was going on. Even less did they understand the way by which Jesus was going, for that way was the Cross. At this moment the disciples were bewildered men. There was one among them who could never say that he understood what he did not understand, and that was Thomas. He was far too honest and far too much in earnest to be satisfied with any vague pious expressions. Thomas had to be sure. So he expressed his doubts and his failure to understand, and the wonderful thing is that it was the question of a doubting man which provoked one of the greatest things Jesus ever said.

No one need be ashamed of his doubts; for it is amazingly and blessedly true that he who seeks will in the end find.

Jesus said to Thomas: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." That is a great saying to us, but it would be still greater to a Jew who heard it for the first time. In it Jesus took three of the great basic conceptions of Jewish religion, and made the tremendous claim that in him all three found their full realization.

The Jews talked much about the way in which men must walk and the ways of God. God said to Moses: "You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you" (Deut.5:32-33). Moses said to the people: "I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you" (Deut.31:29). Isaiah had said: "Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, This is the way, walk in it" (Isa.30:21). In the brave new world there would be a highway called the Way of Holiness, and in it the wayfaring man, even though a simple soul, would not go lost (Isa.35:8). It was the Psalmist's prayer: "Teach me thy way, O Lord" (Ps.27:11). The Jews knew much about the way of God in which a man must walk. And Jesus said: "I am the Way."

What did he mean? Suppose we are in a strange town and ask for directions. Suppose the person asked says: "Take the first to the right, and the second to the left. Cross the square, go past the church, take the third on the right and the road you want is the fourth on the left." The chances are that we will be lost before we get half-way. But suppose the person we ask says: "Come. I'll take you there." In that case the person to us is the way, and we cannot miss it. That is what Jesus does for us. He does not only give advice and directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us; he strengthens us and guides us personally every day. He does not tell us about the way; he is the Way.

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John 14:4-6

Jesus said: "I am the Truth." The Psalmist said: "Teach me Thy way, O Lord, that I may walk in thy truth" (Ps.86:11). "For thy steadfast love is before my eyes," he said, "and I walk in faithfulness to thee" (Ps.26:3). "I have chosen the way of truth," he said (Ps.119:30). Many men have told us the truth, but no man ever embodied it. There is one all-important thing about moral truth. A man's character does not really affect his teaching of geometry or astronomy or Latin verbs. But if a man proposes to teach moral truth, his character makes all the difference in the world. An adulterer who teaches the necessity of purity, a grasping person who teaches the value of generosity, a domineering person who teaches the beauty of humility, an irascible creature who teaches the beauty of serenity, an embittered person who teaches the beauty of love, is bound to be ineffective. Moral truth cannot be conveyed solely in words; it must be conveyed in example.

And that is precisely where the greatest human teacher must fall down. No teacher has ever embodied the truth he taught--except Jesus. Many a man could say: "I have taught you the truth." Only Jesus could say: "I am the Truth." The tremendous thing about Jesus is not simply that the statement of moral perfection finds its peak in him; it is that the fact of moral perfection finds its realization in him.

Jesus said: "I am the Life." The writer of the Proverbs said: "The commandment is a lamp, and the teaching a light; and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life" (Prov.6:23). "He who heeds instructions is on the path to life" (Prov.10:17). "Thou dost show me the path of life," said the Psalmist (Ps.16:11). In the last analysis what man is always seeking for is life. His search is not for knowledge for its own sake: but what will make life worth living. A novelist makes one of his characters who has fallen in love say: "I never knew what life was until I saw it in your eyes." Love had brought life. That is what Jesus does. Life with Jesus is life indeed.

And there is one way of putting all this. "No one," said Jesus, "comes to the Father except through me." He alone is the way to God. In him alone we see what God is like; and he alone can lead men into God's presence without fear and without shame.

Barclay's Commentary

John 14:7-11

THE VISION OF GOD

John 14:7-11 (Part 1)

"If you had known me, you would have known my Father too. From now on you are beginning to know him, and you have seen him." Philip said to him: "Lord, show us the Father, and that is enough for us." Jesus said to him: "Have I been with you for so long, and you did not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say: 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? I am not the source of the words that I speak to you. It is the Father who dwells in me who is doing his own work. Believe me that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me. If you cannot believe it because I say it, believe it because of the very works I do."

It may well be that to the ancient world this was the most staggering thing Jesus ever said. To the Greeks God was characteristically The Invisible, the Jews would count it as an article of faith that no man had seen God at any time. To people who thought like that Jesus said: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father too." Then Philip asked what he must have believed to be the impossible. Maybe he was thinking back to that tremendous day when God revealed his glory to Moses (Exo.33:12-32). But even in that great day. God had said to Moses: "You shall see my back: but my face shall not be seen." In the time of Jesus men were oppressed and fascinated by what is called the transcendence of God and by thought of the difference and the distance between God and man. They would never have dared to think that they could see God. Then Jesus says with utter simplicity: "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

To see Jesus is to see what God is like. A recent writer said that Luke in his gospel "domesticated God." He meant that Luke shows us God in Jesus taking a share in the most intimate and homely things. When we see Jesus we can say: "This is God living our life." That being so, we can say the most precious things about God.

(i) God entered into an ordinary home and into an ordinary family. As Francis Thompson wrote so beautifully in *Ex Ore Infantum*:

Little Jesus, wast thou shy
Once, and just so small as I?
And what did it feel to be
Out of Heaven and just like me?

Anyone in the ancient world would have thought that if God did come into this world, he would come as a king into some royal palace with all the might and majesty which the world calls greatness. As George Macdonald wrote:

They all were looking for a king
To slay their foes and lift them high;
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing,
That made a woman cry.

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John 14:7-11

As the child's verse says:

"There was a knight of Bethlehem
Whose wealth was tears and sorrows;
His men at arms were little lambs,
His trumpeters were sparrows."

In Jesus, God once and for all sanctified human birth, sanctified the humble home of ordinary folk and sanctified all childhood.

(ii) God was not ashamed to do a man's work. It was as a working man that he entered into the world; Jesus was the carpenter of Nazareth. We can never sufficiently realize the wonder of the fact that God understands our day's work. He knows the difficulty of making ends meet; he knows the difficulty of the ill-mannered customer and the client who will not pay his bills. He knew all the difficulty of living in an ordinary home and in a big family, and he knew every problem which besets us in the work of every day. According to the Old Testament work is a curse; according to the old story, the curse on man for the sin of Eden was: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Gen.3:19). But according to the New Testament, common work is tinged with glory for it has been touched by the hand of God.

(iii) God knows what it is to be tempted. The life of Jesus shows us, not the serenity, but the struggle of God. Anyone might conceive of a God who lived in a serenity and peace which were beyond the tensions of this world; but Jesus shows us a God who goes through the struggle that we must undergo. God is not like a commander who leads from behind the lines; he too knows the firing-line of life.

(iv) In Jesus we see God loving. The moment love enters into life pain enters in. If we could be absolutely detached, if we could so arrange life that nothing and nobody mattered to us, then there would be no such thing as sorrow and pain and anxiety. But in Jesus we see God caring intensely, yearning over men, feeling poignantly for them and with them, loving them until he bore the wounds of love upon his heart.

(v) In Jesus we see God upon a Cross. There is nothing so incredible as this in all the world. It is easy to imagine a god who condemns men; it is still easier to imagine a God who, if men oppose him, wipes them out. No one would ever have dreamed of a God who chose the Cross to obtain our salvation.

"He who has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus is the revelation of God and that revelation leaves the mind of man staggered and amazed.

Barclay's Commentary

John 14:7-11

THE VISION OF GOD

John 14:7-11 (Part 2)

Jesus goes on to say something else. One thing no Jew would ever lose was the grip of sheer loneliness of God. The Jews were unswerving monotheists. The danger of the Christian faith is that we may set up Jesus as a kind of secondary God. But Jesus himself insists that the things he said and the things he did did not come from his own initiative or his own power or his own knowledge but from God. His words were God's voice speaking to men; His deeds were God's power flowing through him to men. He was the channel by which God came to men.

Let us take two simple and imperfect analogies, from the relationship between student and teacher. Dr Lewis Muirhead said of that great Christian and expositor, A. B. Bruce, that men "came to see in the man the glory of God." Every teacher has the responsibility of transmitting something of the glory of his subject to those who listen to him; and he who teaches about Jesus Christ can, if he is saint enough, transmit the vision and the presence of God to his students. That is what A. B. Bruce did, and in an infinitely greater way that is what Jesus did. He transmitted the glory and the love of God to men.

Here is the other analogy. A great teacher stamps his students with something of himself. W. M. Macgregor was a student of A. B. Bruce. A. J. Gossip tells in his memoir of W. M. Macgregor that, "when it was rumoured that Macgregor thought of deserting the pulpit for a chair, men, in astonishment, asked, Why? He replied, with modesty, that he had learned some things from Bruce that he would fain pass on." Principal John Cairns wrote to his teacher Sir William Hamilton: "I do not know what life, or lives, may lie before me. But I know this, that, to the end of the last of them, I shall bear your mark upon me." Sometimes if a divinity student has been trained by a great preacher whom he loves, we will see in the student something of the teacher and hear something of his voice. Jesus did something like that only immeasurably more so. He brought God's accent, God's message, God's mind, God's heart to men.

We must every now and then remember, that all is of God. it was not a self-chosen expedition to the world which Jesus made. He did not do it to soften a hard heart in God. He came because God sent him, because God so loved the world. At the back of Jesus, and in him, there is God.

Jesus went on to make a claim and to offer a test, based on two things; his words and his works.

(i) He claimed to be tested by what he said. It is as if Jesus said: "When you listen to me, can you not realize at once that what I am saying is God's own truth?" The words of any genius are always self-evidencing. When we read great poetry we cannot for the most part say why it is great and grips our heart. We may analyse the vowel sounds and so on, but in the end there is something which defies analysis, but nevertheless easily and immediately recognizable. It is so with the words of Jesus. When we hear them we cannot help saying; "If only the world would live on these principles, how different it would be! If only I would live on these principles, how different I would be!"

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John 14:7-11

(ii) He claimed to be tested by his deeds. He said to Philip: "If you cannot believe in me because of what I say, surely you will allow what I can do to convince you." That was the same answer as Jesus sent back to John when he sent his messengers to ask whether Jesus was the Messiah, or if they must look for another. "Go back," he said, "and tell John what is happening--and that will convince him" (Matt. 11:1-6). Jesus' proof is that no one else ever succeeded in making bad men good.

Jesus said in effect to Philip: "Listen to me! Look at me! And believe!" Still the way to Christian belief is not to argue about Jesus but to listen to him and to look at him. If we do that, the sheer personal impact will compel us to believe.

Barclay's Commentary

John 14:12-14

THE TREMENDOUS PROMISES

John 14:12-14

"This is the truth I tell you--he that believes on me will do the works that I do, and he will do greater works than these, because I go to my Father. And I will do whatever you shall ask in my name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

There could scarcely be any greater promises than the two contained in this passage. But they are of such a nature that we must try to understand what they mean. Unless we do, the experience of life is bound to disappoint us.

(i) First of all Jesus said that one day his disciples would do what he did, and even greater works. What did he mean?

(a) It is quite certain that in the early days the early Church possessed the power of working cures. Paul enumerates among the gifts which different people had that of healing (1Cor.12:9; 1Cor.12:28,30). James urged that when any Christian was sick, the elders should pray over him and anoint him with oil (Jas.5:14). But it is clear that that is by no means all that Jesus meant; for though it could be said that the early Church did the things which Jesus did, it certainly could not be said that it did greater things than he did.

(b) As time has gone on man has more and more learned to conquer disease. The physician and the surgeon nowadays have powers which to the ancient world would have seemed miraculous and even godlike. The surgeon with his new techniques, the physician with his new treatments and his miracle drugs, can now effect the most amazing cures. There is a long way to go yet, but one by one the citadels of pain and disease have been stormed. The salient thing about all this is that it was the power and the influence of Jesus Christ which brought it about.

Why should men strive to save the weak and the sick and the dying, those whose bodies are broken and whose minds are darkened? Why is it that men of skill and science have felt moved, and even compelled, to spend their time and their strength, to ruin their health and sometimes to sacrifice their lives, to find cures for disease and relief from pain? The answer is that, whether they knew it or not, Jesus was saying to them through his Spirit: "These people must be helped and healed. You must do it. It is your responsibility and your privilege to do all you can for them." It is the Spirit of Jesus who has been behind the conquest of disease; and, as a result, men can do things nowadays which in the time of Jesus no one would ever have imagined possible.

(c) But we are still not at the meaning of this. Think of what Jesus in the days of his flesh had actually done. He had never preached outside Palestine. Within his lifetime Europe had never heard the gospel. He had never personally met moral degradation of a city like Rome. Even his opponents in Palestine were religious men; the Pharisees and the scribes had given their lives to religion as they saw it and there was never any doubt that they revered and practised purity of life. It was not in his lifetime that Christianity went out to a world where the marriage bond was set at naught, where adultery was not even a conventional sin, and where vice flourished like a tropical forest.

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John 14:12-14

It was into that world the early Christians went; and it was that world which they won for Christ. When it came to a matter of numbers and extent and changing power, the triumphs of the message of the Cross were even greater than the triumphs of Jesus in the days of his flesh. It is of moral recreation and spiritual victory that Jesus is speaking. He says that this will happen because he is going to his Father. What does he mean by that? He means this. In the days of his flesh he was limited to Palestine; when he had died and risen again, he was liberated from these limitations and his Spirit could work mightily anywhere.

(ii) In his second promise Jesus says that any prayer offered in his name will be granted. It is here of all places that we must understand. Note carefully what Jesus said--not that all our prayers would be granted, but that our prayers made in his name would be granted. The test of any prayer is: Can I make it in the name of Jesus? No man, for instance, could pray for personal revenge, for personal ambition, for some unworthy and unchristian object in the name of Jesus. When we pray, we must always ask: Can we honestly make this prayer in the name of Jesus? The prayer which can stand the test of that consideration, and which, in the end says, Thy will be done, is always answered. But the prayer based on self cannot expect to be granted.

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John 14:15-17

THE PROMISED HELPER

John 14:15-17

"If you love me, keep my commandments; and I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper to be with you for ever, I mean the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot receive him, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him because he remains among you and will be within you."

To John there is only one test of love and that is obedience. It was by his obedience that Jesus showed his love of God; and it is by our obedience that we must show our love of Jesus. C. K. Barrett says: "John never allowed love to devolve into a sentiment or emotion. Its expression is always moral and is revealed in obedience." We know all too well how there are those who protest their love in words but who, at the same time, bring pain and heartbreak to those whom they claim to love. There are children and young people who say that they love their parents, and who yet cause them grief and anxiety. There are husbands who say they love their wives and wives who say they love their husbands, and who yet, by their inconsiderateness and their irritability and their thoughtless unkindness bring pain the one to the other. To Jesus real love is not an easy thing. It is shown only in true obedience.

But Jesus does not leave us to struggle with the Christian life alone. He would send us another Helper. The Greek word is the word *parakletos* (GSN3875) which is really untranslatable. The King James Version renders it Comforter, which, although hallowed by time and usage, is not a good translation. Moffatt translates it Helper. It is only when we examine this word *parakletos* (GSN3875) in detail that we catch something of the riches of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It really means someone who is called in; but it is the reason why the person is called in which gives the word its distinctive associations. The Greeks used the word in a wide variety of ways. A *parakletos* (GSN3875) might be a person called in to give witness in a law court in someone's favour; he might be an advocate called in to plead the cause of someone under a charge which would issue in serious penalty; he might be an expert called in to give advice in some difficult situation; he might be a person called in when, for example, a company of soldiers were depressed and dispirited to put new courage into their minds and hearts. Always a *parakletos* (GSN3875) is someone called in to help in time of trouble or need. Comforter was once a perfectly good translation. It actually goes back to Wicliffe, the first person to use it. But in his day it meant much more than it means now. The word comes from the Latin *fortis* which means brave; and a comforter was someone who enabled some dispirited creature to be brave. Nowadays comfort has to do almost solely with sorrow; and a comforter is someone who sympathizes with us when we are sad. Beyond a doubt the Holy Spirit does that, but to limit his work to that function is sadly to belittle him. We often talk of being able to cope with things. That is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit. He takes away our inadequacies and enables us to cope with life. The Holy Spirit substitutes victorious for defeated living.

So what Jesus is saying is: "I am setting you a hard task, and I am sending you out on a very difficult engagement. But I am going to send you someone, the *parakletos* (GSN3875), who will guide you as to what to do and enable you to do it."

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John 14:15-17

Jesus went on to say that the world cannot recognize the Spirit. By the world is meant that section of men who live as if there was no God. The point of Jesus' saying is: we can see only what we are fitted to see. An astronomer will see far more in the sky than an ordinary man. A botanist will see far more in a hedgerow than someone who knows no botany. Someone who knows about art will see far more in a picture than someone who is quite ignorant of art. Someone who understands a little about music will get far more out of a symphony than someone who understands nothing. Always what we see and experience depends on what we bring to the sight and the experience. A person who has eliminated God never listens for him; and we cannot receive the Holy Spirit unless we wait in expectation and in prayer for him to come to us.

The Holy Spirit gate-crashes no man's heart; He waits to be received. So when we think of the wonderful things which the Holy Spirit can do, surely we will set apart some time amidst the bustle and the rush of life to wait in silence for his coming.

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John 14:18-24

THE WAY TO FELLOWSHIP AND TO REVELATION

John 14:18-24

"I will not leave you forlorn. I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me; but you will see me because I will be alive and you too will be alive. In that day you will know that I am in the Father, and that you are in me, even as I am in you. It is he who grasps my commandments and keeps them who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him." Judas, not Iscariot, said to him: "Why has it happened that you are going to reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered: "If any man loves me, he will keep my word; and the Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words. And the word which you hear is not mine, but it belongs to the Father who sent me."

By this time a sense of foreboding must have enveloped the disciples. Even they must now have seen that there was tragedy ahead. But Jesus says: "I will not leave you forlorn." The word he uses is orphanos (GSN3737). It means without a father, but it was also used of disciples and students bereft of the presence and the teaching of a beloved master. Plato says that, when Socrates died, his disciples "thought that they would have to spend the rest of their lives forlorn as children bereft of a father, and they did not know what to do about it." But Jesus told his disciples that would not be the case with them. "I am coming back," he said.

He is talking of his Resurrection and his risen presence. They will see him because he will be alive; and because they will be alive. What he means is that they will be spiritually alive. At the moment they are bewildered and numbed with the sense of impending tragedy; but the day will come when their eyes will be opened, their minds will understand and their hearts will be kindled--and then they will really see him. That in fact is precisely what happened when Jesus rose from the dead. His rising changed despair to hope and it was then they realized beyond a doubt that he was the Son of God.

In this passage John is playing on certain ideas which are never far from his mind.

(i) First and foremost there is love. For John love is the basis of everything. God loves Jesus; Jesus loves God; God loves men; Jesus loves men; men love God through Jesus; men love each other; heaven and earth, man and God, man and man are all bound together by the bond of love.

(ii) Once again John stresses the necessity of obedience, the only proof of love. It was to those who loved him that Jesus appeared when he rose from the dead, not to the scribes and the Pharisees and the hostile Jews.

(iii) This obedient, trusting love leads to two things. First, it leads to ultimate safety. On the day of Christ's triumph those who have been his obedient lovers will be safe in a crashing world. Second, it leads to a fuller and fuller revelation. The revelation of God is a costly thing. There is always a moral basis for it; it is to the man who keeps his commandments that Christ reveals himself. No evil man can ever receive the revelation of God. He can be used by God, but he can

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John 14:18-24

have no fellowship with him. It is only to the man who is looking for him that God reveals himself, and it is only to the man who, in spite of failure, is reaching up that God reaches down. Fellowship with God and the revelation of God are dependent on love; and love is dependent on obedience. The more we obey God, the more we understand him; and the man who walks in his way inevitably walks with him.

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John 14:25-31

THE BEQUESTS OF CHRIST

John 14:25-31

"I have spoken these things to you while I am still with you. The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I have said. I am leaving you peace: I am giving you my peace. I do not give it to you as the world gives peace. Let not your heart be distressed or fear-stricken. You have heard that I said to you: 'I am going away and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to my Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you about it before it happens, so that whenever it does happen, you will believe. I shall not say much more to you, because the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me. His coming will only make the world know that I love the Father, and that I do as the Father has commanded me. Rise, let us be going."

This a passage close-packed with truth. In it Jesus speaks of five things.

(i) He speaks of his ally, the Holy Spirit, and says two basic things about him.

(a) The Holy Spirit will teach us all things. To the end of the day the Christian must be a learner, for to the end of the day the Holy Spirit will be leading him deeper and deeper into the truth of God. There is never any excuse in the Christian faith for the shut mind. The Christian who feels that he has nothing more to learn is the Christian who has not even begun to understand what the doctrine of the Holy Spirit means.

(b) The Holy Spirit will remind us of what Jesus has said. This means two things. 1. In matters of belief, the Holy Spirit is constantly bringing back to us the things Jesus said. We have an obligation to think, but all our conclusions must be tested against the words of Jesus. It is not so much the truth that we have to discover; he told us the truth. What we have to discover is the meaning of that truth. The Holy Spirit saves us from arrogance and error of thought. 2. The Holy Spirit will keep us right in matters of conduct. Nearly all of us have this sort of experience in life. We are tempted to do something wrong and are on the very brink of doing it, when back into our mind comes a saying of Jesus, the verse of a psalm, the picture of Jesus, words of someone we love and admire, teaching we received when very young. In the moment of danger these things flash unbidden into our minds. That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

(ii) He speaks of his gift, and his gift is peace. In the Bible the word for peace, *shalom* (HSN7965), never means simply the absence of trouble. It means everything which makes for our highest good. The peace which the world offers us is the peace of escape, the peace which comes from the avoidance of trouble and from refusing to face things. The peace which Jesus offers us is the peace of conquest. No experience of life can ever take it from us and no sorrow, no danger, no suffering can ever make it less. It is independent of outward circumstances.

(iii) He speaks of his destination. He is going back to his Father; and he says that if his disciples really loved him, they would be glad that it was so. He was being released from the limitations of

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John 14:25-31

this world; he was being restored to his glory. If we really grasped the truth of the Christian faith, we would always be glad when those whom we love go to be with God. That is not to say that we would not feel the sting of sorrow and the sharpness of loss; but even in our sorrow and our loneliness, we would be glad that after the troubles and the trials of earth those whom we loved have gone to something better. We would never grudge them their rest but would remember that they had entered, not into death, but into blessedness.

(iv) He speaks of his struggle. The Cross was the final battle of Jesus with the powers of evil. But he was not afraid of it, for he knew that evil had no ultimate power over him. He went to his death in the certainty, not of defeat, but of conquest.

(v) He speaks of his vindication. At the moment men saw in the Cross only his humiliation and his shame; but the time would come when they would see in it his obedience to God and his love to men. The very things which were the keynotes of Jesus' life found their highest expression in the Cross.

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John 15:1-10

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

John 15:1-10 (Part 1)

"I am the real vine and my Father is the vine-dresser. He destroys every branch in me which does not bear fruit; and he cleanses every branch which does bear fruit, so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean through the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me even as I abide in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit in its own strength, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The man who abides in me, and in whom I abide, bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he will be cast out like a withered branch. And they gather such branches and throw them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask what you will, and it will be given to you. It is by the fact that you bear such fruit, and that you show yourselves to be my disciples, that my Father is glorified. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

As I have kept my Father's commandments, so I abide in his love."

Jesus, as so often, is working in this passage with pictures and ideas which were part of the religious heritage of the Jewish nation. Over and over again in the Old Testament, Israel is pictured as the vine or the vineyard of God. "The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel" (Isa.5:1-7). "Yet I planted you a choice vine" is God's message to Israel through Jeremiah (Jer.2:21). Eze.15 likens Israel to the vine, as does Eze.19:10. "Israel is a luxuriant vine," said Hosea (Hos.10:1). "Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt," sang the Psalmist, thinking of God's deliverance of his people from bondage (Ps.80:8). The vine had actually become the symbol of the nation of Israel. It was the emblem on the coins of the Maccabees. One of the glories of the Temple was the great golden vine upon the front of the Holy Place. Many a great man had counted it an honour to give gold to mould a new bunch of grapes or even a new grape on to that vine. The vine was part and parcel of Jewish imagery, and the very symbol of Israel.

Jesus calls himself the true vine. The point of that word *alethinos* (GSN0228), true, real, genuine, is this. It is a curious fact that the symbol of the vine is never used in the Old Testament apart from the idea of degeneration. The point of Isaiah's picture is that the vineyard has run wild. Jeremiah complains that the nation has turned into "degenerate and become a wild vine." It is as if Jesus said: "You think that because you belong to the nation of Israel you are a branch of the true vine of God. But the nation it is; a degenerate vine, as all your prophets saw. It is I who am the true vine. The fact that you are a Jew will not save you. The only thing that can save you is to have an intimate living fellowship with me, for I am the vine of God and you must be branches joined to me." Jesus was laying it down that not Jewish blood but faith in him was the way to God's salvation. No external qualification can set a man right with God; only the friendship of Jesus Christ can do that.

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John 15:1-10

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

John 15:1-10 (Part 2)

When Jesus drew his picture of the vine he knew what he was talking about. The vine was grown all over Palestine as it still is. It is a plant which needs a great deal of attention if the best fruit is to be got out of it. It is grown commonly on terraces. The ground has to be perfectly clean. It is sometimes trained on trellises; it is sometimes allowed to creep over the ground upheld by low forked sticks; it sometimes even grows round the doors of the cottages; but wherever it grows careful preparation of the soil is essential. It grows luxuriantly and drastic pruning is necessary. So luxuriant is it that the slips are set in the ground at least twelve feet apart, for it will creep over the ground at speed. A young vine is not allowed to fruit for the first three years and each year is cut drastically back to develop and conserve its life and energy. When mature, it is pruned in December and January.

It bears two kinds of branches, one that bears fruit and one that does not; and the branches that do not bear fruit are drastically pruned back, so that they will drain away none of the plant's strength. The vine can not produce the crop of which it is capable without drastic pruning--and Jesus knew that.

Further, the wood of the vine has the curious characteristic that it is good for nothing. It is too soft for any purpose. At certain times of the year, it was laid down by the law, the people must bring offerings of wood to the Temple for the altar fires. But the wood of the vine must not be brought. The only thing that could be done with the wood pruned out of a vine was to make a bonfire of it and destroy it. This adds to the picture Jesus draws.

He says that his followers are like that. Some of them are lovely fruit-bearing branches of himself; others are useless because they bear no fruit. Who was Jesus thinking of when he spoke of the fruitless branches? There are two answers. First, he was thinking of the Jews. They were branches of God's vine. Was not that the picture that prophet after prophet had drawn? But they refused to listen to him; they refused to accept him; therefore they were withered and useless branches. Second, he was thinking of something more general. He was thinking of Christians whose Christianity consisted of profession without practice, words without deeds; he was thinking of Christians who were useless branches, all leaves and no fruit. And he was thinking of Christians who became apostates, who heard the message and accepted it and then fell away, becoming traitors to the Master they had once pledged themselves to serve.

So then there are three ways in which we can be useless branches. We can refuse to listen to Jesus Christ at all. We can listen to him, and then render him a lip service unsupported by any deeds. We can accept him as Master, and then, in face of the difficulties of the way or the desire to do as we like, abandon him. One thing we must remember. It is a first principle of the New Testament that uselessness invites disaster. The fruitless branch is on the way to destruction.

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John 15:1-10

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

John 15:1-10 (Part 3)

In this passage there is much about abiding in Christ. What is meant by that? It is true that there is a mystical sense in which the Christian is in Christ and Christ is in the Christian. But there are many--maybe they are in the majority--who never have this mystical experience. If we are like that, we must not blame ourselves. There is a much simpler way of looking at this and of experiencing it, a way open to anyone.

Let us take a human analogy. All analogies are imperfect but we must work with the ideas which we possess. Suppose a person is weak. He has fallen to temptation; he has made a mess of things; he is on the way down to degeneracy of mind and heart and mental fibre. Now suppose that he has a friend of a strong and lovely and loving nature, who rescues him from his degraded situation. There is only one way in which he can retain his reformation and keep himself on the right way. He must keep contact with his friend. If he loses that contact; all the chances are that his weakness will overcome him; the old temptations will rear their heads again; and he will fall. His salvation lies in continual contact with the strength of his friend.

Many a time a down-and-out has been taken to live with someone fine. So long as he continued in that fine home and that fine presence he was safe. But when he kicked over the traces and went off on his own, he fell. We must keep contact with the fine thing in order to defeat the evil thing. Robertson of Brighton was one of the great preachers. There was a tradesman who had a little shop; in the back room he kept a photograph of Robertson, for he was his hero and his inspiration. Whenever he was tempted to carry out a bit of sharp practice, he would rush into the back room and look at the photograph and the temptation was defeated. When Kingsley was asked the secret of his life, referring to F. D. Maurice he said: "I had a friend." The contact with loveliness made him lovely.

Abiding in Christ means something like that. The secret of the life of Jesus was his contact with God; again and again he withdrew into a solitary place to meet him. We must keep contact with Jesus. We cannot do that unless we deliberately take steps to do it. To take but one example--to pray in the morning, if it be for only a few moments, is to have an antiseptic for the whole day; for we cannot come out of the presence of Christ to touch the evil things. For some few of us, abiding in Christ will be a mystical experience which is beyond words to express. For most of us, it will mean a constant contact with him. It will mean arranging life, arranging prayer, arranging silence in such a way that there is never a day when we give ourselves a chance to forget him.

Finally, we must note that here there are two things laid down about the good disciple. First, he enriches his own life; his contact makes him a fruitful branch. Second, he brings glory to God; the sight of his life turns men's thoughts to the God who made him like that. God is glorified, when we bear much fruit and show ourselves to be disciples of Jesus. The greatest glory of the Christian life is that by our life and conduct we can bring glory to God.

Barclay's Commentary

John 15:11-17

THE LIFE OF JESUS' CHOSEN PEOPLE

John 15:11-17 (Part 1)

"I have spoken these things to you that my joy might be in you, and that your joy might be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friend. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because the slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I heard from my Father. You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and I have appointed you to go out and to bear fruit, of such a kind that it will remain. I have done so, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. These are my orders to you, that you love one another."

The central words of this passage are those in which Jesus says that his disciples have not chosen him, but he has chosen them. It was not we who chose God, but God who, in his grace, approached us with a call and an offer made out of his love.

Out of this passage we can compile a list of things for which we are chosen and to which we are called.

(i) We are chosen for joy. However hard the Christian way is, it is, both in the travelling and in the goal, the way of joy. There is always a joy in doing the right thing. The Christian is the man of joy, the laughing cavalier of Christ. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces. It is true that the Christian is a sinner, but he is a redeemed sinner; and therein lies his joy. How can any man fail to be happy when he walks the ways of life with Jesus?

(ii) We are chosen for love. We are sent out into the world to love one another. Sometimes we live as if we were sent into the world to compete with one another, or to dispute with one another, or even to quarrel with one another. But the Christian is to live in such a way that he shows what is meant by loving his fellow men. It is here that Jesus makes another of his great claims. If we ask him: What right have you to demand that we love one another? His answer is: "No man can show greater love than to lay down his life for his friends--and I did that." Many a man tells men to love each other, when his whole life is a demonstration that that is the last thing he does himself. Jesus gave men a commandment which he had himself first fulfilled.

(iii) Jesus called us to be his friends. He tells his men that he does not call them slaves any more; he calls them friends. Now that is a saying which would be even greater to those who heard it for the first time than it is to us. *Doulos* (GSN1401), the slave, the servant of God was no title of shame; it was a title of the highest honour. Moses was the *doulos* (GSN1401) of God (Deut.34:5); so was Joshua (Josh.24:29); so was David (Ps.89:20). It is a title which Paul counted it an honour to use (Tit.1:1); and so did James (Jas.1:1). The greatest men in the past had been proud to be called the *douloi* (GSN1401), the slaves of God. And Jesus says: "I have something greater for you yet, you are no longer slaves; you are friends." Christ offers an intimacy with God which not even the greatest men knew before he came into the world.

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John 15:11-17

The idea of being the friend of God has also a background. Abraham was the friend of God (Isa.41:8). In Wis.7:27 Wisdom is said to make men the friends of God. But this phrase is lit up by a custom which obtained both at the courts of the Roman Emperors and of the eastern kings. At these courts there was a very select group of men called the friends of the king, or the friends of the Emperor. At all times they had access to the king: they had even the right to come to his bedchamber at the beginning of the day. He talked to them before he talked to his generals, his rulers, and his statesmen. The friends of the king were those who had the closest and the most intimate connection with him.

Jesus called us to be his friends and the friends of God. That is a tremendous offer. It means that no longer do we need to gaze longingly at God from afar off; we are not like slaves who have no right whatever to enter into the presence of the master; we are not like a crowd whose only glimpse of the king is in the passing on some state occasion. Jesus gave us this intimacy with God, so that he is no longer a distant stranger, but our close friend.

Barclay's Commentary

John 15:11-17

THE LIFE OF JESUS' CHOSEN PEOPLE

John 15:11-17 (Part 2)

(iv) Jesus did not only choose us for a series of tremendous privileges. He called us to be his partners. The slave could never be a partner. He was defined in Greek law as a living tool. His master never opened his mind to him; the slave simply had to do what he was told without reason and without explanation. But Jesus said: "You are not my slaves; you are my partners. I have told you everything; I have told you what I am trying to do, and why I am trying to do it. I have told you everything which God told me." Jesus has given us the honour of making us partners in his task. He has shared his mind with us, and opened his heart to us. The tremendous choice laid before us is that we can accept or refuse partnership with Christ in the work of leading the world to God.

(v) Jesus chose to be ambassadors. "I have chosen you," he said, "to send you out." He did not choose us to live a life retired from the world, but to represent him in the world. When a knight came to the court of King Arthur, he did not come to spend the rest of his days in knightly feasting and in knightly fellowship there. He came to the king saying: "Send me out on some great task which I can do for chivalry and for you." Jesus chose us, first to come in to him, and then to go out to the world. And that must be the daily pattern and rhythm of our lives.

(vi) Jesus chose us to be advertisements. He chose us to go out to bear fruit, and to bear fruit which will stand the test of time. The way to spread Christianity is to be Christian. The way to bring others into the Christian faith is to show them the fruit of the Christian life. Jesus sends us out, not to argue men into Christianity, still less to threaten them into it, but to attract them into it; so to live that its fruits may be so wonderful that others will desire them for themselves.

(vii) Jesus chose us to be privileged members of the family of God. He chose us so that whatever we ask in his name the Father will give to us. Here again we are face to face with one of those great sayings about prayer which we must understand aright. If we come to it thoughtlessly, it sounds as if the Christian will receive everything for which he prays. We have already thought about this, but we may well think about it again. The New Testament lays down certain definite laws about prayer.

(a) Prayer must be the prayer of faith (Jas.5:15). When it is a formality, merely the routine and conventional repetition of a form of words, it cannot be answered. When prayer is hopeless it cannot be effective. There is little use in a man praying to be changed, if he does not believe it possible that he can be changed. To pray with power a man must have an invincible belief in the all-sufficient love of God.

(b) Prayer must be in the name of Christ. We cannot pray for things of which we know that Jesus would disapprove. We cannot pray that we should be given possession of some forbidden person or some forbidden thing; we cannot pray that some personal ambition should be realized, if that ambition means that someone else must be hurt to fulfil it. We cannot pray in the name of him who is love for vengeance on our enemies. Whenever we try to turn prayer into something to enable us to realize our own ambitions and to satisfy our own desires, it must be ineffective, for it is not real prayer at all.

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John 15:11-17

(c) Prayer must say: "Thy will be done." When we pray we must first realize that we never know better than God. The essence of prayer is not that we say to God: "Thy will be changed," but that we say to him: "Thy will be done." So often real prayer must be, not that God would send us the things we wish, but that he would make us able to accept the things he wills.

(d) Prayer must never be selfish. Almost in the passing Jesus said a very illuminating thing. He said that, if two people agreed in asking anything in his name, it would be granted (Matt.18:19). We are not to take that with a crude literalism, because it would simply mean that if you can mobilize enough people to pray for anything you will get it. What it does mean is this--no man when he prays should think entirely of his own needs. To take the simplest example, the holiday-maker might be praying for sunshine while the farmer is praying for rain. When we pray, we must ask, not only: "Is this for my good?" but: "Is this for the good of all men?" The greatest temptation of all in prayer is to pray as if nobody but ourselves mattered.

Jesus chose us to be privileged members of the family of God. We can and must take everything to God in prayer; but when we have done so we must accept the answer which God in his perfect wisdom and perfect love sends to us. And the more we love God, the easier it will be to do that.

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John 15:18-21

THE WORLD'S HATRED

John 15:18-21 (Part 1)

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but the world hates you, because you are not of the world, but I have picked you out of the world. Remember the word which I spoke to you--the servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours. But they will do these things to you because of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."

It is always John's way to see things in terms of black and white. To him there are two great entities--the Church and the world. And there is no contact and no fellowship between them. To John it is,

"Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

As he saw it, a man is either of the world or of Christ, and there is no stage between.

Further, we must remember that by this time the Church was living under the constant threat of persecution. Christians were indeed persecuted because of the name of Christ. Christianity was illegal. A magistrate needed only to ask whether or not a man was a Christian, and, if he was, no matter what he had done or had not done, he was liable to punishment by death. John was speaking of a situation which existed in the most clear-cut and agonizing way.

One thing is certain--no Christian who was involved in persecution could say that he had not been warned. On this matter Jesus was quite explicit. He had told his people beforehand what they might expect. "They will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them.... And brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Mk.13:9-13; compare Matt.10:17-22; Matt.10:23-29; Lk.12:2-9; Lk.12:51-53).

When John wrote, this hatred had long since begun. Tacitus spoke of the people "hated for their crimes, whom the mob call Christians." Suetonius had spoken of "a race of men who belong to a new and evil superstition." Why was this hatred so virulent?

The Roman government hated the Christians because it regarded them as disloyal citizens. The position of the government was quite simple and understandable. The Empire was vast; it stretched from the Euphrates to Britain, from Germany to North Africa. It included all kinds of peoples and all kinds of countries within it. Some unifying force had to be found to weld this varied mass into one; and it was found in Caesar worship.

Now Caesar worship was not imposed on the world; it actually arose from the people themselves. Away back in the old days there had been the goddess Roma--the spirit of Rome. It is easy to see

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John 15:18-21

how men could think of that spirit of Rome symbolized in the Emperor. He stood for Rome; he embodied Rome; the spirit of Rome found its home in him. It is a great mistake to think that the subject peoples resented Roman government; for the most part they were profoundly grateful for it. Rome brought justice, and freed them from capricious kings. Rome brought peace and prosperity. The land was cleared of brigands and the sea of pirates. The pax Romana, the Roman peace, stretched over all the world.

It was in Asia Minor that men began to think of Caesar, the Emperor, as the god who embodied Rome, and they did so in sheer gratitude for the blessings Rome had brought. At first the Emperors discouraged and deprecated this worship; they insisted that they were men and must not be worshipped as gods. But they saw that they could not stop this movement. At first they confined it to the excitable Asiatics of Asia Minor, but soon it spread everywhere. Then the government saw that they could use it. Here was the unifying principle which was needed. So there came the day when once a year every inhabitant of the Empire had to burn his pinch of incense to the godhead of Caesar. By so doing, he showed that he was a loyal citizen of Rome. When he had done this, he received a certificate to say that he done it.

Here was the practice and the custom which made all men feel that they were part of Rome, and which guaranteed their loyalty to her. Now Rome was the essence of toleration. After he had burned his pinch of incense and said, "Caesar is Lord," a man could go away and worship any god he liked, so long as the worship did not affect public decency and public order. But that is precisely what the Christians would not do. They would call no man "Lord" except Jesus Christ. They refused to conform, and therefore the Roman government regarded them as dangerous and disloyal.

The government persecuted the Christians because they insisted they had no king but Christ. Persecution came to the Christians because they put Christ first. Persecution always comes to the man who does that.

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John 15:18-21

THE WORLD'S HATRED

John 15:18-21 (Part 2)

It was not only that the government persecuted the Christians; the mob hated them. Why? It was because the mob believed certain slanderous things about the Christians. There is no doubt that the Jews were at least to some extent responsible for these slanders. It so happened that they had the ear of the government. To take but two examples, Nero's favourite actor Aliturus, and his harlot empress Poppaea, were both adherents of the Jewish faith. The Jews whispered their slanders to the government, slanders which they must have well known to be untrue, and four slanderous reports were spread about the Christians.

(i) They were said to be insurrectionaries. We have already seen the reason for that. It was futile for the Christians to point out that in fact they were the best citizens in the country. The fact remained they would not burn their pinch of incense and say, "Caesar is Lord," and so they were branded as dangerous and disloyal men.

(ii) They were said to be cannibals. This charge came from the words of the sacrament. "This is my body which is for you." "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." On the basis of these words, it was not difficult to disseminate amongst ignorant people, prepared to believe the worst, the story that the Christians' private meal was based on cannibalism. The charge stuck, and it is little wonder that the mob looked on the Christians with loathing.

(iii) They were said to practise the most flagrant immorality. The weekly meal of the Christians was called the Agape (GSN0026), the Love Feast. When the Christians met each other in the early days they greeted each other with the kiss of peace. It was not difficult to spread abroad the report that the Love Feast was an orgy of sexual indulgence, of which the kiss of peace was the symbol and the sign.

(iv) They were said to be incendiaries. They looked to the Second Coming of Christ. To it they had attached all the Old Testament pictures of the Day of the Lord, which foretold of the flaming disintegration and destruction of the world. "The elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up" (2Pet.3:10). In the reign of Nero came the disastrous fire which devastated Rome and it was easy to connect it with people who preached of the consuming fire which would destroy the world.

(v) There was actually another charge brought and for this fifth charge there were understandable grounds. It was that the Christians "tampered with family relationships," divided families, split up homes and broke up marriages. In a way that was true. Christianity did bring not peace but a sword (Matt.10:34). Often a wife became a Christian and a husband did not. Often children became Christians and parents did not. Then the home was split in two and the family divided.

These were the charges which were spread about the Christians with the help of the Jews. It is little wonder that the name of Christian was hated.

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John 15:18-21

THE WORLD'S HATRED

John 15:18-21 (Part 3)

Such were the causes of hatred in the early days. but it is still true that the world will hate the Christian. As we have already said, by the world John meant human society organizing itself without God. There is bound to be a cleavage between the man who regards God as the only reality in life and the man who regards God as totally irrelevant for life. In any event the world has certain characteristics, which are always part of the human situation.

(i) The world suspects people who are different. That comes out in the simplest ways. One of the commonest things in the world nowadays is an umbrella; but when Jonas Hanway tried to introduce the umbrella into England and walked down the street beneath one he was pelted with stones and dirt. In the early days of the Boys' Brigade, the boys who marched down the street in uniform often received similar treatment. Anyone who is different, who wears different clothes, who has different ideas, is automatically suspect. He may be regarded as an eccentric or a madman or a danger; but life is likely to be made uncomfortable for him.

(ii) The world acutely dislikes people whose lives are a condemnation of it. It is in fact dangerous to be good. The classic instance is the fate which befell Aristides in Athens. He was called Aristides the Just; and yet he was banished. When one of the citizens was asked why he had voted for his banishment, he answered: "Because I am tired of hearing him always called the Just." That was why men killed Socrates; they called him the human gadfly. He was always compelling men to think and to examine themselves, and men hated that and killed him. It is dangerous to practise a higher standard than the standard of the world. Nowadays a man can be persecuted even for working too hard or too long.

(ii) To put it at its widest--the world always suspects nonconformity. It likes a pattern; it likes to be able to label a person and to put him in a pigeon-hole. Anyone who does not conform to the pattern will certainly meet trouble. It is even said that if a hen with different markings is put among hens that are all alike, the others will peck her to death.

The basic demand on the Christian is the demand that he should have the courage to be different. To be different will be dangerous, but no man can be a Christian unless he accepts that risk, for there must be a difference between the man of the world and the man of Christ.

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John 15:22-25

KNOWLEDGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

John 15:22-25

"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have no excuse for their sins. He who hates me hates the Father too. If I had not done deeds among them, which no one else had ever done, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen and they have heard both me and my Father. But it has all happened that the word which stands written in their law might be fulfilled-- 'They have hated me without a cause.'"

Here Jesus has returned to a thought which in the Fourth Gospel is never far from his mind, the conviction that knowledge and privilege bring with them responsibility. Until Jesus came men never had the opportunity really to know God; they had never fully heard his voice, and they had never seen perfectly demonstrated the kind of life he wished them to live. They could scarcely be blamed for being such as they were. There are things which are allowable in a child which are not allowable in an adult, because the child does not know any better. There are things which are allowable in someone whose upbringing has been bad which are not allowable in someone who has been brought up in all the benefits of a Christian home. No one expects the same kind of conduct from a savage as from a civilized man. The more knowledge a man has and the more privileges he enjoys, the greater the responsibility laid upon him.

Jesus did two things. First, he exposed sin. He told men of the things which grieved God and of the way in which God wished them to walk. He set the true way before men. Second, he provided the remedy for sin; and he did that in a double sense. He opened the way to forgiveness for past sin, and he provided the power which would enable a man to overcome sin and do the right. These were the privileges and the knowledge which he brought to men. Suppose a man to be ill; suppose he consults a doctor, and the doctor diagnoses what is wrong and prescribes a cure. If that man disregards the diagnosis and refuses to use the cure, he has no one to blame but himself if he dies, or comes to a condition which makes life wretched for himself. That is what the Jews had done. As John saw it, they had only done what it was foretold they would do. Twice the Psalmist had said: "They hated me without a cause" (Ps.35:19; Ps.69:4).

It is still possible for us to do the same. Not many are actively hostile to Christ, but many live their lives as if Christ had never come and simply disregard him. But no man can know life in this world or in the world to come if he disregards the Lord of all good life.

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John 15:26-27

WITNESS DIVINE AND HUMAN

John 15:26-27

"When the Helper comes, the Helper whom I will send to you from my Father, I mean the Spirit of Truth who comes forth from the Father, he will be a witness about me. And you will be witness about me because you have been with me from the beginning."

Here John uses two ideas which lie very close to his heart and are constantly entwined in his thought.

The first is the witness of the Holy Spirit. What does he mean by this? We shall have occasion to think of this again very soon, but for the moment think of it this way. When the story of Jesus is told us and his picture is set before us, what makes us feel that this is none other than the picture of the Son of God? That reaction of the human mind, that answer of the human heart is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit within us who moves us to respond to Jesus Christ.

The second is the witness which men must bear to Christ. "You," said Jesus to his disciples, "win be witnesses about me." There are three elements in Christian witness.

(i) Christian witness comes from long fellowship and intimacy with Christ. The disciples are his witnesses because they have been with him from the beginning. A witness is a man who says of something: "This is true, and I know it." There can be no witness without personal experience. We can witness for Christ only when we have been with him.

(ii) Christian witness comes from inner conviction. The accent of personal inner conviction is one of the most unmistakable in the world. A man hardly starts to speak before we know whether or not he really believes what he is saying. There can be no effective Christian witness without this inner conviction which comes from personal intimacy with Christ.

(iii) Christian witness issues in outward testimony. A witness is not only someone who knows that something is true; he is someone who is prepared to say that he knows that it is true. A Christian witness is a man who not only knows Christ but wants others to know him too.

It is our privilege and our task to be witnesses for Christ in the world; and we cannot be witnesses without the personal intimacy, the inner conviction and the outward testimony to our faith.

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John 16:1-4

WARNING AND CHALLENGE

John 16:1-4

"I have spoken these things to you in case you should be caused to stumble in the way. They will excommunicate you from the synagogue. Yes, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think that he is rendering a service to God; and they will do these things because they did not recognize the Father or me. But I have spoken these things to you, so that when their time comes, you will remember that I spoke them to you."

By the time John was writing it was inevitable that some Christians should fall away, for persecution had struck the Church. Revelation condemns those who are unbelieving and fearful (Rev.21:8). When Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, was examining people to see whether or not they were Christians, he wrote to his emperor Trajan to say that some admitted "that they had been Christians, but they had ceased to be so many years ago, some as much as twenty years ago." Even amidst the heroism of the early Church, there were those whose faith was not great enough to resist persecution and whose endurance was not strong enough to stay the course.

Jesus foresaw this and gave warning beforehand. He did not want anyone to be able to say that he had not known what to expect when he became a Christian. When Tyndale was persecuted and his enemies were out for his life because he sought to give the Bible to the people in the English language, he said calmly: "I never expected anything else." Jesus offered men glory, but he offered them a cross as well.

Jesus spoke of two ways in which his followers would be persecuted.

They would be excommunicated from the synagogue. This for a Jew would be a very hard fate. The synagogue, the House of God, had a very special place in Jewish life. Some of the Rabbis went the length of saying that prayer was not effective unless it was offered in the synagogue. But there was more to it than that. It may be that a great scholar or a great theologian does not need human company; he may be able to live alone and solitary, keeping company with the great thoughts and adventures of his mind. But the disciples were simple folk; they needed fellowship. They needed the synagogue and its worship. It would be hard for them to be ostracized, with all doors shut against them. Men have sometimes to learn, as Joan of Arc said, that: "It is better to be alone with God." Sometimes loneliness among men is the price of fellowship with God.

Jesus also said that men would think they were rendering a service to God when they killed his followers. The word Jesus uses for service is *latreia* (GSN2999), which is the normal word for the service that a priest rendered at the altar in the Temple of God and is the standard word for religious service. One of the tragedies of religion has been that men have so often thought that they were serving God by persecuting those whom they believed to be heretics. No man ever more truly thought that he was serving God than Paul did, when he was trying to eliminate the name of Jesus and to wipe out the Church (Ac.26:9-11). The torturers and judges of the Spanish Inquisition have left a name which is loathed; yet they were quite sure that they were serving God by torturing heretics into accepting what they considered to be the true faith. As they saw it, they were saving

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John 16:1-4

men from hell. "O Liberty." said Madame Roland, "what crimes are committed in thy name!" And that is also true of religion.

It happens, as Jesus said, because they do not recognize God. The tragedy of the Church is that men have so often laboured to propagate their idea of religion; they have so often believed that they have a monopoly of God's truth and grace. The staggering fact is that it still happens; that is the barrier to union and unity between the Churches. There will always be persecution--not necessarily killing and torture, but exclusion from the house of God--so long as men believe that there is only one way to him.

Jesus knew how to deal with men. He was in effect saying: "I am offering you the hardest task in the world. I am offering you something which will lacerate your body and tear out your heart. Are you big enough to accept it?" All the world knows Garibaldi's proclamation at the siege of Rome in 1849, when he appealed for recruits in these terms: "I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions; I offer hunger, thirst, forced marches, battles and death. Let him who loves his country in his heart, and not with his lips only, follow me." And join they did in their hundreds. When the Spaniards were conquering South America Pizarro presented his men with a choice. They might have the wealth of Peru with its dangers, or the comparative poverty of Panama with its safety. He drew a line in the sand with his sword and he said: "Comrades, on that side are toil, hunger, nakedness, storm, desertion and death; on this side is ease. There lies Peru with its riches; here lies Panama with its poverty.

Choose, each man, what best becomes a brave Castilian. For my part, I go to the south." There was silence and hesitation; and then an old pilot and twelve soldiers stepped across to Pizarro's side. It was with them that the discovery and the conquest of Peru began.

Jesus offered, and still offers, not the way of ease, but the way of glory. He wants men who are prepared with open eyes to venture for his name.

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John 16:5-11

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John 16:5-11

"I did not tell you these things at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going away to him who sent me, and none of you asks me: 'Where are you going?' But grief has filled your hearts because I have spoken these things to you. But it is the truth I am telling you--it is to your interest that I should go away, for If I do not go away the Helper will not come to you. But when he has come, he will convict the world of sin, and convince it of righteousness and judgment; of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and you no longer see me; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

The disciples were bewildered and grief-stricken men. All they knew was that they were going to lose Jesus. But he told them that in the end this was all for the best, because, when he went away, the Holy Spirit, the Helper, would come. When he was in the body he could not be everywhere with them; it was always a case of greetings and farewells. When he was in the body, he could not reach the minds and hearts and consciences of men everywhere, he was confined by the limitations of place and time. But there are no limitations in the Spirit. Everywhere a man goes the Spirit is with him. The coming of the Spirit would be the fulfilment of the promise: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt.28:20). The Spirit would bring to men an uninterrupted fellowship for ever; and would bring to the Christian preacher a power and an effectiveness no matter where he preached.

We have here an almost perfect summary of the work of the Spirit. The word that John uses of the work of the Spirit is the word *elegchein* (GSN1651), translated convince by the Revised Standard Version. The trouble is that no one word can translate it adequately. It is used for the cross-examination of a witness, or a man on trial, or an opponent in an argument. It has always this idea of cross-examining a man until he sees and admits his errors, or acknowledges the force of some argument which he had not yet seen. It is, for instance, sometimes used by the Greeks for the action of conscience on a man's mind and heart. Clearly such cross-examination can do two things--it can convict a man of the crime he has committed or the wrong that he has done; or it can convince a man of the weakness of his own case and the strength of the case which he has opposed. In this passage we need both meanings, both convict and convince. Now let us go on to see what Jesus says the Holy Spirit will do.

(i) The Holy Spirit will convict men of sin. When the Jews crucified Jesus, they did not believe that they were sinning; they believed that they were serving God. But when the story of that crucifixion was later preached, they were pricked in their heart (Ac.2:37). They suddenly had the terrible conviction that the crucifixion was the greatest crime in history and that their sin had caused it. What is it that gives a man a sense of sin? What is it that abases him in face of the Cross? In an Indian village a missionary was telling the story of Christ by means of lantern slides flung on the white-washed wall of a village house. When the picture of the Cross was shown, an Indian stepped forward, as if he could not help it: "Come down!" he cried. "I should be hanging there not you." Why should the sight of a man crucified as a criminal in Palestine two thousand years ago

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John 16:5-11

tear the hearts of people open throughout the centuries and still today? It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

(ii) The Holy Spirit will convince men of righteousness. It becomes clear what this means when we see that it is Jesus Christ's righteousness of which men will be convinced. Jesus was crucified as a criminal. He was tried; he was found guilty; he was regarded by the Jews as an evil heretic, and by the Romans as a dangerous character; he was given the punishment that the worst criminals had to suffer, branded as a felon and an enemy of God. What changed that? What made men see in this crucified figure the Son of God, as the centurion saw at the Cross (Matt.27:54) and Paul on the Damascus Road (Ac.9:1-9)? It is amazing that men should put their trust for all eternity in a crucified Jewish criminal. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is he who convinces men of the sheer righteousness of Christ, backed by the fact that Jesus rose again and went to his Father.

(iii) The Holy Spirit convinces men of judgment. On the Cross evil stands condemned and defeated. What makes a man feel certain that judgment lies ahead? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is he who gives us the inner and unshakable conviction that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.

(iv) There remains one thing which at the moment John does not go on to mention. When we are convicted of our own sin, when we are convinced of Christ's righteousness, when we are convinced of judgment to come, what gives us the certainty that in the Cross of Christ is our salvation and that with Christ we are forgiven, and saved from judgment? This, too, is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is he who convinces us and makes us sure that in this crucified figure we can find our Saviour and our Lord. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and convinces us of our Saviour.

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John 16:12-15

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

John 16:12-15

"I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth has come, he will lead you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own authority and out of his own knowledge, but he will speak all that he will hear, and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of the things which belong to me, and will tell you of them. All things that the Father has are mine. That is why I said that the Spirit will take of the things which belong to me, and tell them to you."

To Jesus the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, whose great work is to bring God's truth to men. We have a special name for this bringing of God's truth to men; we call it revelation, and no passage in the New Testament shows us what we might call the principles of revelation better than this one.

(i) Revelation is bound to be a progressive process. Many things Jesus knew he could not at that moment tell his disciples, because they were not yet able to receive them. It is only possible to tell a man as much as he can understand. We do not start with the binomial theorem when we wish to teach a boy algebra; we work up to it. We do not start with advanced theorems when we wish to teach a child geometry; we approach them gradually. We do not start with difficult passages when we teach a lad Latin or Greek; we start with the easy and the simple things. God's revelation to men is like that. He teaches men what they are able and fit to learn. This most important fact has certain consequences.

(a) It is the explanation of the parts of the Old Testament which sometimes worry and distress us. At that stage they were all of God's truth that men could grasp. Take an actual illustration--in the Old Testament there are many passages which call for the wiping out of men and women and children when an enemy city is taken. At the back of these passages there is the great thought that Israel must not risk the taint of any heathen and lower religion. To avoid that risk, those who do not worship the true God must be destroyed. That is to say, the Jews had at that stage grasped the fact that the purity of religion must be safeguarded; but they wished to preserve that purity by destroying the heathen. When Jesus came, men came to see that the way to preserve that purity is to convert the heathen. The people of the Old Testament times had grasped a great truth, but only one side of it. Revelation has to be that way; God can reveal only as much as a man can understand.

(b) It is the proof that there is no end to God's revelation. One of the mistakes men sometimes make is to identify God's revelation solely with the Bible. That would be to say that since about A.D. 120, when the latest book in the New Testament was written, God has ceased to speak. But God's Spirit is always active; he is always revealing himself. It is true that his supreme and unsurpassable revelation came in Jesus; but Jesus is not just a figure in a book, he is a living person and in him God's revelation goes on. God is still leading us into greater realization of what Jesus means. He is not a God who spoke Up to A.D. 120 and is now silent. He is still revealing his truth to men.

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John 16:12-15

(ii) God's revelation to men is a revelation of all truth. It is quite wrong to think of it as confined to what we might call theological truth. The theologians and the preachers are not the only people who are inspired. When a poet delivers to men a great message in words which defy time, he is inspired. When H. F. Lyte wrote the words of Abide with me he had no feeling of composing them; he wrote them as to dictation. A great musician is inspired. Handel, telling of how he wrote The Hallelujah Chorus, said: "I saw the heavens opened, and the Great White God sitting on the Throne." When a scientist discovers something which will help the world's toil and make life better for men, when a surgeon discovers a new technique which will save men's lives and ease their pain, when someone discovers a new treatment which will bring life and hope to suffering humanity, that is a revelation from God. All truth is God's truth, and the revelation of all truth is the work of the Holy Spirit.

(iii) That which is revealed comes from God. He is alike the possessor and the giver of all truth. Truth is not men's discovery; it is God's gift. It is not something which we create; it is something already waiting to be discovered. At the back of all truth there is God.

(iv) Revelation is the taking of the things of Jesus and revealing their significance to us. Part of the greatness of Jesus is his inexhaustibleness. No man has ever grasped all that he came to say. No man has fully worked out all the significance of his teaching for life and for belief, for the individual and for the world, for society and for the nation. Revelation is a continual opening out of the meaning of Jesus.

There we have the crux of the matter. Revelation comes to us, not from any book or creed, but from a living person. The nearer we live to Jesus, the better we will know him. The more we become like him, the more he will be able to tell us. To enjoy his revelation we must accept his mastery.

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John 16:16-24

SORROW TURNED TO JOY

John 16:16-24

"In a little while you will not see me any more; and again in a little while you will see me." Some of his disciples said to each other: "What is the meaning of this that he is saying to us-- 'In a little while you will not see me, and again in a little while you will see me'? And what does he mean when he says: 'I am going to my Father'? What does he mean when he talks about 'A little'? We do not know what he means." Jesus knew that they wished to ask him their questions, and he said to them: "You are discussing among yourselves what I meant when I said: 'In a little while you will not see me, and again in a little while you will see me.' This is the truth I tell you--you will weep and you will lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be grieved, but your grief will turn into joy. When a woman bears a child she has grief, because her hour has come. But, when the child is born, she does not remember her pain because of her joy that a man is born into the world. So you too for the present have grief.

But I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will not have any questions to ask me. This is the truth I tell you--the Father will give you in my name whatever you will ask him. Up till now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may stand complete."

Here Jesus is looking beyond the present to the new age which is to come. When he does, he uses a conception deeply rooted in Jewish thought. The Jews believed that all time was divided into two ages--the present age and the age to come. The present age was wholly bad and wholly under condemnation; the age to come was the golden age of God. In between the two ages, preceding the coming of the Messiah, who would bring in the new age, there lay the Day of the Lord; and the Day of the Lord was to be a terrible day, when the world would be shattered into fragments before the golden age would dawn. The Jews were in the habit of calling that terrible between-time "the birth travail of the days of the Messiah."

The Old Testament and the literature written between the Testaments are both full of pictures of this terrible between-time. "Behold the Day of the Lord comes, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it" (Isa.13:9). "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Jl.2:1-2). "And honour shall be turned into shame, and strength humiliated into contempt, and probity destroyed, and beauty shall become ugliness" (2 Baruch 27). "The Day of the Lord will come as a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up" (2Pet.3:10). Such was the picture of the birthpangs of the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus knew the scriptures and these pictures were in his mind and memory. And now he was saying to his disciples: "I am leaving you; but I am coming back; the day will come when my reign will begin and my kingdom will come; but before that you will have to go through terrible things, with pain like birthpangs upon you. But, if you faithfully endure, the blessings will be very precious." Then he went on to outline the life of the Christian who endures.

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John 16:16-24

(i) Sorrow will turn to joy. There may be a time when it looks as if to be a Christian brings nothing but sorrow, and to be of the world brings nothing but joy. But the day will come when the roles are reversed. The world's careless joy will turn to sorrow; and the Christian's apparent sorrow will turn to joy. The Christian must always remember, when his faith costs him dear, that this is not the end of things and that sorrow will give way to joy.

(ii) There will be two precious things about this Christian joy. (a) It will never be taken away. It will be independent of the chances and changes of the world. It is the simple fact that in every generation people who were suffering terribly have spoken of sweet times with Christ. The joy the world gives is at the mercy of the world. The joy which Christ gives is independent of anything the world can do. (b) It will be complete. In life's greatest joy there is always something lacking. It may be that somehow there lingers some regret; that there is a cloud no bigger than a man's hand to mar it; that the memory that it cannot last is always at the back of our minds. In Christian joy, the joy of the presence of Christ, there is no tinge of imperfection. It is perfect and complete.

(iii) In Christian joy the pain which went before is forgotten. The mother forgets the pain in the wonder of the child. The martyr forgets the agony in the glory of heaven. As Browning wrote of the martyr's tablet on the wall:

"I was some time in being burned.
At last a hand came through
The flames and drew
My soul to Christ whom now I see;
Sergius a brother writes for me
This testimony on the wall.
For me--I have forgot it all."

If a man's fidelity costs him much, he will forget the cost in the joy of being for ever with Christ.

(iv) There will be fullness of knowledge. "In that day," said Jesus, "you will not need to ask me any questions any more." In this life there are always some unanswered questions and some unsolved problems. In the last analysis we must always walk by faith and not by sight; we must always be accepting what we cannot understand. It is only fragments of the truth that we can grasp and glimpses of God that we may see; but in the age to come with Christ there will be fullness of knowledge.

As Browning had it in Abt Vogler:

"The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good
more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power

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John 16:16-24

Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once we shall hear it by-and-by."

When we are fully with Christ the time of questions will be gone and the time of answers will have come.

(iv) There will be a new relationship with God. When we really and truly know God we are able to go to him and ask him for anything. We know that the door is open; we know that, his name is Father; we know that his heart is love. We are like children who never doubt that their father delights to see them or that they can talk to him as they wish. In that relationship Jesus says we may ask for anything. But let us think of it in human terms--the only terms we have. When a child loves and trusts his father, he knows quite well that sometimes his father will say no because his wisdom and his love know best. We can become so intimate with God that we may take everything to him, but always we must end by saying: "Thy will be done."

(v) That new relationship is made possible by Jesus; it exists in his name. It is because of him that our joy is indestructible and perfect, that our knowledge is complete, that the new way to the heart of God is open to us. All that we have, came to us through Jesus Christ. It is in his name that we ask and receive, that we approach and are welcomed.

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John 16:25-28

THE DIRECT ACCESS

John 16:25-28

"I have spoken these things to you in sayings that are hard to understand; but the hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in sayings that are hard to understand, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name. I do not say that I will ask the Father for you, because the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. I came forth from the Father, and I came into the world; I am leaving the world again, and I am going to the Father."

The Revised Standard Version has it that up till now Jesus has been speaking to his disciples in figures. The Greek is *paroimia* (GSN3942); it is the word used for Jesus' parables, but basically it means a saying that is hard to understand, a saying whose meaning is veiled to the casual listener, a saying which demands thought before its meaning can become clear. It can, for instance, be used for the pithy sayings of wise men with whose pregnant brevity the mind must grapple; it can be used for a riddle whose meaning a man must guess as best he can. Jesus is saying: "So far I have been giving you hints and indications; I have been giving you the truth with a veil on it; I have been saying things which you had to think your way through; but now I am going to speak the truth in all its stark clarity." Then he tells them plainly that he came from God, and that he is going back to God.

Here is a tremendous claim--that he is none other than the Son of God and that the Cross is not for him a criminal's death, but the way back to God.

Then Jesus says something we must ever remember. His men can approach God direct, because God loves them; he does not need to take their requests to God; they can take their own. Here is the final proof of something which must never be forgotten. Often we tend to think in terms of an angry God and a gentle Jesus; what Jesus did is presented in a way which seems to mean that he changed the attitude of God to men, and made him a God of love instead of a God of judgment. But here Jesus is saying: "You can go to God, because he loves you," and he is saying that before the Cross. He did not die to change God into love; he died to tell us that God is love. He came, not because God so hated the world, but because he so loved the world. Jesus brought to men the love of God.

He tells them that his work is done. He came from the Father, and now, by way of the Cross, he goes back. And for every man the way is open to God. He does not need to take their prayers to God; they can take their own. The lover of Christ is the beloved of God.

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John 16:29-33

CHRIST AND HIS GIFTS

John 16:29-33

His disciples said: "See! now you are speaking clearly, and you are not speaking in hard sayings. Now we know that you know all things, and that you do not need that anyone should ask you anything. Because of this we believe that you came forth from God." Jesus answered them: "So you believe at this moment? See! the hour is coming--it has come--when each of you will be scattered to your own homes, and you will leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have spoken these things to you that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have tribulation. But courage! I have conquered the world."

There is a strange light here on how the disciples finally surrendered to Jesus. They suddenly leapt into full belief because they realized that Jesus did not need to ask any man anything. What did they mean? Back in Jn.16:17-18 we find them puzzled by what Jesus had said. Beginning in Jn.16:19 Jesus begins to answer their questions without asking them what they were. In other words he could read their hearts like an open book. That is why they believed in him. A traveller in Scotland in the old days described two preachers whom he had heard. Of one he said: "He showed me the glory of God." Of the other he said: "He showed me my whole heart." Jesus could do both of these things. It was his knowledge of God and his knowledge of the human heart which convinced the disciples that he was the Son of God.

But Jesus was a realist. He told them that, in spite of their belief, the hour was coming when they would desert him. Here is perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Jesus. He knew the weakness of his men; he knew their failure; he knew that they would let him down in the moment of his direst need; and yet he still loved them; and what is even more wonderful--he still trusted them. He knew men at their worst and still loved and trusted them. It is quite possible for a man to forgive someone and, at the same time, to make it clear that he is never prepared to trust that person again. But Jesus said: "I know that in your weakness you will desert me; nevertheless I know that you will still be conquerors." Never in all the world were forgiveness and trust so combined. What a lesson is there! Jesus teaches us how to forgive, and how to trust the man who was guilty of failure.

There are four things about Jesus which this passage makes very clear.

(i) There is the loneliness of Jesus. He was to be left alone by men. And yet he was never alone, because he still had God. No man ever stands alone for the right; he always stands with God. No good man is ever completely forsaken, for he is never forsaken by God.

(ii) There is the forgiveness of Jesus. Of that we have already thought. He knew that his friends would abandon him, yet at the moment he did not upbraid them, and afterwards he did not hold it against them. He loved men in all their weakness; saw them and loved them as they were. Love must be clear-sighted. If we idolize a person and think him faultless, we are doomed to disappointment. We must love him as he really is.

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John 16:29-33

(iii) There is the sympathy of Jesus. One verse here at first sight seems out of place: "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace." The point is this--if Jesus had not foretold the weakness of the disciples, afterwards when they realized how they had failed him, might well have been driven to utter and absolute despair. It is as if he said: "I know what's going to happen; you must not think that your disloyalty came as a shock to me; I knew it was coming; and it does not make any difference to my love. When you think about it afterwards, don't despair." Here is divine pity and divine forgiveness. Jesus was thinking, not of how men's sin would hurt him, but of how it would hurt them. Sometimes it would make all the difference if we thought, not of how much someone has hurt us, but of how much the fact that they hurt us has driven them to regret and the sorrow of an aching heart.

(iv) There is the gift of Jesus--courage and conquest. Very soon something was going to be unanswerably proved to the disciples. They were going to see that the world could do its worst to Jesus and still not defeat him. And he says: "The victory which I will win can be your victory too. The world did its worst to me, and I emerged victorious. Life can do its worst to you, and you too can emerge victorious. You too can possess the courage and the conquest of the Cross."

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John 17:1-5

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

John 17:1-5 (Part 1)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify the Son that the Son may glorify you. Glorify him, just as you gave him authority over mankind, that he may give eternal life to every one whom you have given to him. It is eternal life to know you, who are the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom you sent. I have glorified you upon earth, because I have finished the work which you gave me to do; and now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world began."

For Jesus life had a climax, and that was the Cross. To him the Cross was the glory of life and the way to the glory of eternity. "The hour has come," he said, "for the Son of Man to be glorified" (Jn.12:23). What did Jesus mean when he repeatedly spoke of the Cross as his glory and his glorification? There is more than one answer to that question.

(i) It is one of the facts of history that again and again it was in death that the great ones found their glory. It was when they died, and how they died, which showed people what and who they really were. They may have been misunderstood, undervalued, condemned as criminals in their lives, but their deaths showed their true place in the scheme of things.

Abraham Lincoln had his enemies during his lifetime; but even those who had criticized him saw his greatness when he died. Someone came out of the room where Lincoln lay, after the assassin's shot had killed him, saying: "Now he belongs to the ages." Stanton, his war minister, who had always regarded Lincoln as crude and uncouth and who had taken no pains to conceal his contempt, looked down at his dead body with tears in his eyes. "There lies," he said, "the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen."

Joan of Arc was burned as a witch and a heretic by the English. Amidst the crowd there was an Englishman who had sworn to add a faggot to the fire. "Would that my soul," he said, "were where the soul of that woman is!" One of the secretaries of the King of England left the scene saying: "We are all lost because we have burned a saint."

When Montrose was executed, he was taken down the High Street of Edinburgh to the Mercat Cross. His enemies had encouraged the crowd to revile him and had actually provided them with ammunition to fling at him, but not one voice was raised to curse and not one hand was lifted. He had on his finest clothes, with ribbons on his shoes and fine white gloves on his hands. James Frazer, an eyewitness, said: "He stept along the street with so great state, and there appeared in his countenance so much beauty, majesty and gravity as amazed the beholder, and many of his enemies did acknowledge him to be the bravest subject in the world, and in him a gallantry that braced all that crowd." John Nicoll, the notary public, thought him more like a bridegroom than a criminal. An Englishman in the crowd, a government agent, wrote back to his superiors: "It is absolutely certain that he hath overcome more men by his death, in Scotland, than he would have done if he had lived."

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John 17:1-5

For I never saw a more sweeter carriage in a man in all my life."

Again and again a martyr's majesty has appeared in death. It was so with Jesus, for even the centurion at the foot of the Cross was left saying: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt.27:54). The Cross was the glory of Jesus because he was never more majestic than in his death. The Cross was his glory because its magnet drew men to him in a way that even his life had never done--and it is so yet.

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John 17:1-5

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

John 17:1-5 (Part 2)

(ii) Further, the Cross was the glory of Jesus because it was the completion of his work. "I have accomplished the work," he said, "which You gave me to do." For him to have stopped short of the Cross would have been to leave his task uncompleted. Why should that be so? Jesus had come into this world to tell men about the love of God and to show it to them. If he had stopped short of the Cross, it would have been to say that God's love said: "Thus far and no farther." By going to the Cross Jesus showed that there was nothing that the love of God was not prepared to do and suffer for men, that there was literally no limit to it.

H. L. Gee tells of a war incident from Bristol. Attached to one of the Air Raid Precautions Stations there was a boy messenger called Derek Bellfall. He was sent with a message to another station on his bicycle. On his way back a bomb mortally wounded him. When they found him, he was still conscious. His last whispered words were: "Messenger Bellfall reporting--I have delivered my message."

A famous painting from the First World War showed an engineer fixing a field telephone line. He had just completed the line so that an essential message might come through, when he was shot. The picture shows him in the moment of death, and beneath it there is the one word, "Through!" He had given his life, that the message might get through.

That is exactly what Jesus did. He completed his task; he brought God's love to men. For him that meant the Cross; and the Cross was his glory because he finished the work God gave him to do; he made men for ever certain of God's love.

(iii) There is another question--how did the Cross glorify God? The only way to glorify God is to obey him. A child brings honour to his parents when he brings them obedience. A citizen brings honour to his country when he obeys it. A scholar brings honour to his teacher when he obeys his master's teaching. Jesus brought glory and honour to God by his perfect obedience to him. The gospel story makes it quite clear that Jesus could have escaped the Cross. Humanly speaking, he could have turned back and need never have gone to Jerusalem. As we look at Jesus in the last days, we are bound to say: "See how he loved God! See to what lengths his obedience would go!" He glorified God on the Cross by rendering the perfect obedience of perfect love.

(iv) But there is still more. Jesus prayed to God to glorify him and to glorify himself. The Cross was not the end. There was the Resurrection to follow. This was the vindication of Jesus. It was the proof that men could do their worst, and that Jesus could still triumph. It was as if God pointed at the Cross and said: "That is what men think of my Son," and then pointed at the resurrection and said: "That is what I think of my Son." The Cross was the worst that men could do to Jesus; but not all their worst could conquer him. The glory of the resurrection obliterated the shame of the Cross.

(v) For Jesus the Cross was the way back. "Glorify me," he prayed, "with the glory which I had before the world began." He was like a knight who left the king's court to perform some perilous

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and awful deed, and who, having performed it, came home in triumph to enjoy the victor's glory. Jesus came from God, and returned to him. The exploit between his coming forth and his going back was the Cross. For him, therefore, it was the gateway to glory; and, if he had refused to pass through it, there would have been no glory for him to enter into. For Jesus the Cross was his return to God.

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John 17:1-5

ETERNAL LIFE

John 17:1-5 (Part 3)

There is another important thought in this passage, for it contains the great New Testament definition of eternal life. It is eternal life to know God and to know Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Let us remind ourselves of what eternal means. In Greek it is *aionios* (GSN0166). This word has to do, not so much with duration of life, for life which went on for ever would not necessarily be a boon. Its main meaning is quality of life. There is only one person to whom the word *aionios* (GSN0166) can properly be applied, and that is God. Eternal life is, therefore, nothing other than the life of God. To possess it, to enter into it, is to experience here and now something of the splendour, and the majesty, and the joy, and the peace, and the holiness which are characteristic of the life of God.

To know God is a characteristic thought of the Old Testament. Wisdom is "a tree of life to those who lay hold of her" (Prov.3:18). "To know thy power," said the writer of Wisdom, "is the root of immortality" (Wis.5:3). "By knowledge are the righteous delivered" (Prov.11:9). Habbakuk's dream of the golden age is that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God" (Hab.2:14). Hosea hears God's voice saying to him: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos.4:6). A Rabbinic exposition asks what is the smallest section of scripture on which all the essentials of the law hang? It answers, Prov.3:6, which literally means: "Know him, and he shall direct thy paths." Again there was a Rabbinic exposition which said that Amos had reduced all the many commandments of the Law to one, when he said: "Seek me, and live" (Am.5:4), for seeking God means seeking to know him. The Jewish teachers had long insisted that to know God is necessary to true life. What then does it mean to know God?

(i) Undoubtedly there is an element of intellectual knowledge. It means, at least in part, to know what God is like; and to know that does make the most tremendous difference to life. Take two examples. Heathen peoples in primitive countries believe in a horde of gods. Every tree, brook, hill, mountain, river, stone has its gods and its spirit; all these spirits are hostile to man; and primitive people are haunted by the gods; living in perpetual fear of offending one of them. Missionaries tell us that it is almost impossible to understand the sheer wave of relief which comes to these people when they discover that there is only one God. This new knowledge makes all the difference in the world. Further, it makes a tremendous difference to know that God is not stern and cruel, but love.

We know these things; but we could never have known them unless Jesus had come to tell them. We enter into a new life, we share something of the life of God himself, when, through the work of Jesus, we discover what God is like. It is eternal life to know what God is like.

(ii) But there is something else. The Old Testament regularly uses know for sexual knowledge. "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived, and bore Cain" (Gen.4:1). Now the knowledge of husband and wife is the most intimate there can be. Husband and wife are no longer two; they are one flesh. The sexual act itself is not the important thing; the important thing is the intimacy of heart and mind and soul which in true love precede that act. To know God is therefore not merely to have intellectual knowledge of him; it is to have an intimate personal relationship with him,

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which is like the nearest and dearest relationship in life. Once again, without Jesus such intimacy with God would have been unthinkable and impossible. It is Jesus who taught men that God is not remote and unapproachable, but the Father whose name and nature are love.

To know God is to know what he is like, and to be on the most intimate terms of friendship with him; and neither of these things is possible without Jesus Christ.

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John 17:6-8

THE WORK OF JESUS

John 17:6-8 (Part 1)

"I have shown forth your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they realize that everything you gave me comes from you, because I gave to them the words you gave to me, and they received them, and they truly know that I came forth from you, and they believe that you sent me."

Jesus gives us a definition of the work that he did. He says to God: "I have shown forth your name."

There are two great ideas here, both of which would be quite clear to those who heard this saying for the first time.

(i) There is an idea which is an essential and characteristic idea of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament name is used in a very special way. It does not mean simply the name by which a person is called; it means the whole character of the person in so far as it can be known. The Psalmist says: "Those who know thy name put their trust in thee" (Ps.9:10). Clearly that does not mean that those who know what God is called will trust him; it means that those who know what God is like, those who know his character and nature will be glad to put their trust in him.

The psalmist says: "Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God" (Ps.20:7). This means that he can trust God because he knows what he is like. The Psalmist says: "I will tell of thy name to my brethren" (Ps.22:22). This was a psalm which the Jews believed to be a prophecy of the Messiah and of the work that he would do; and it means that the Messiah's work would be to declare to his fellow-men what God is like. It is the vision of Isaiah that in the new age, "My people shall know my name" (Isa.52:6). That is to say that in the golden days men will know fully and truly what God is like.

So when Jesus says: "I have shown forth your name," he is saying: "I have enabled men to see what the real nature of God is like." It is in fact another way of saying: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn.14:9). It is Jesus' supreme claim that in him men see the mind, the character, the heart of God.

(ii) But there is another idea here. In later times when the Jews spoke of the name of God they meant the sacred four-letter symbol, the tetragrammaton as it is called, YHWH. That name was held to be so sacred that it was never pronounced, except by the High Priest when he went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.

These four letters stand for the name Yahweh (HSN3068 and HSN3069). We usually speak about Jehovah and the change in the vowels is due to the fact that the vowels of Jehovah are those of 'Adonai (HSN0136), which means "Lord." In the Hebrew alphabet there were no vowels at all. Later the vowel sounds were shown by little signs put above and below the consonants. The four letters Y-H-W-H were so sacred that the vowels of 'Adonai were put below them, so that when the

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reader came to YHWH he would read, not Yahweh, but 'Adonai. That is to say, in the time of Jesus the name of God was so sacred that ordinary people were not even supposed to know it, far less to speak it. God was the remote, invisible king, whose name was not for ordinary men to speak. So Jesus is saying: "I have told you God's name; that name which is so sacred can be spoken now because of what I have done. I have brought the remote, invisible God so close that even the simplest people can speak to him and take his name upon their lips."

It is Jesus' great claim that he showed to men the true nature and the true character of God; and that he brought him so close that the humblest Christian can take his unutterable name upon his lips.

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John 17:6-8

THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP

John 17:6-8 (Part 2)

This passage also sheds an illuminating light on the meaning of discipleship.

(i) Discipleship is based on the realization that Jesus came forth from God. The disciple is essentially a person who has realized that Jesus is God's ambassador, and that in his words we hear God's voice, and in his deeds we see God's action. The disciple is one who sees God in Jesus and is aware that no one in all the universe is one with God as Jesus is.

(ii) Discipleship issues in obedience. The disciple is one who keeps God's word as he hears it in Jesus. He is one who has accepted the mastery of Jesus. So long as we wish to do what we like, we cannot be disciples; discipleship involves submission.

(iii) Discipleship is something which is destined. Jesus' men were given to him by God. In God's plan they were destined for discipleship. That does not mean that God destined some men to be disciples and some to refuse discipleship. Think of it this way. A parent dreams great dreams for his son; he works out a future for him; but the son can refuse that future and go his own way. A teacher thinks out a great future for a student; he sees that he has it in him to do great work for God and man; but the student can lazily or selfishly refuse the offered task. If we love someone we are always dreaming of his future and planning for greatness; but the dream and the plan can be frustrated. The Pharisees believed in fate, but they also believed in free-will. One of their great sayings was: "Everything is decreed except the fear of God." God has his plan, his dream, his destiny for every man; and our tremendous responsibility is that we can accept or reject it. As someone has said: "Fate is what we are compelled to do; destiny is what we are meant to do."

There is throughout this whole passage, and indeed throughout this whole chapter, a ringing confidence about the future in the voice of Jesus. He was with his men, the men God had given him; he thanked God for them; and he never doubted that they would carry on the work he had given them to do. Let us remember who and what they were. A great commentator said: "Eleven Galilaean peasants after three years' labour! But it is enough for Jesus, for in these eleven he beholds the pledge of the continuance of God's work upon earth." When Jesus left this world; he did not seem to have great grounds for hope. He seemed to have achieved so little and to have won so few, and it was the great and the orthodox and the religious of the day who had turned against him. But Jesus had that confidence which springs from God. He was not afraid of small beginnings. He was not pessimistic about the future. He seemed to say: "I have won only eleven very ordinary men; but give me these eleven ordinary men and I will change the world."

Jesus had two things--belief in God and belief in men. It is one of the most uplifting things in the world to think that Jesus put his trust in men like ourselves. We too must never be daunted by human weakness or by the small beginning. We too must go forward with confident belief in God and in men. Then we will never be pessimists, because with these two beliefs the possibilities of life are infinite.

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John 17:9-19

JESUS' PRAYER FOR HIS DISCIPLES

John 17:9-19 (Part 1)

"It is for them that I pray. It is not for the world that I pray, but for those whom you have given me because they are yours. All that I have is yours, and all that you have is mine. And through them glory has been given to me. I am no longer in the world and they are no longer in the world, and I go to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you gave to me, that they may be one, as we are one. When I was with them I kept them in your name, which you gave to me. I guarded them and none of them went lost, except the one who was destined to be lost--and this happened that the scriptures might be fulfilled. And now I come to you. I am saying these things while I am still in the world that they may have my joy completed in themselves. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world. I do not ask that you should take them out of the world, but that you should preserve them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Consecrate them by the truth; your word is truth. As you send me into the world, I send them into the world. And for their sakes I consecrate myself, that they too may be consecrated by the truth."

Here is a passage close-packed with truths so great that we can grasp only fragments of them.

First of all, it tells us something about the disciple of Jesus.

(i) The disciple is given to Jesus by God. What does that mean? It means that the Spirit of God moves our hearts to respond to the appeal of Jesus.

(ii) Through the disciple, glory has come to Jesus. The patient whom he has cured brings honour to a doctor; the scholar whom he has taught brings honour to the teacher; the athlete whom he has trained brings honour to his trainer. The men whom Jesus has redeemed bring honour to him. The bad man made good is the honour of Jesus.

(iii) The disciple is the man who is commissioned to a task. As God sent out Jesus, so Jesus sends out his disciples. Here is the explanation of a puzzling thing in this passage. Jesus begins by saying that he does not pray for the world; and yet he came because God so loved the world. But, as we have seen, in John's gospel the world stands for "human society organizing itself without God." What Jesus does for the world is to send out his disciples into it, in order to lead it back to God and to make it aware of God. He prays for his men in order that they may be such as to win the world for him.

Further, this passage tells us that Jesus offered his men two things.

(i) He offered them his joy. All he was saying to them was designed to bring them joy.

(ii) He also offered them warning. He told them that they were different from the world, and that they could not expect anything else but hatred from it. Their values and standards were different

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John 17:9-19

from the world's. But there is a joy in battling against the storm and struggling against the tide; it is by facing the hostility of the world that we enter into the Christian joy.

Still further, in this passage Jesus makes the greatest claim he ever made. He prays to God and says: "All that I have is yours, and all that you have is mine." The first part of that sentence is natural and easy to understand, for all things belong to God, and again and again Jesus had said so. But the second part of this sentence is the astonishing claim--"All that you have is mine." Luther said: "This no creature can say with reference to God." Never did Jesus so vividly lay down his oneness with God. He is so one with him that he exercises his very power and prerogatives.

Barclay's Commentary

John 17:9-19

JESUS' PRAYER FOR HIS DISCIPLES

John 17:9-19 (Part 2)

The great interest of this passage is that it tells us of the things for which Jesus prayed for his disciples.

(i) The first essential is to note that Jesus did not pray that his disciples should be taken out of this world. He never prayed that they might find escape; he prayed that they might find victory. The kind of Christianity which buries itself in a monastery or a convent would not have seemed Christianity to Jesus at all. The kind of Christianity which finds its essence in prayer and meditation and in a life withdrawn from the world, would have seemed to him a sadly truncated version of the faith he died to bring. He insisted that it was in the rough and tumble of life that a man must live out his Christianity.

Of course there is need of prayer and meditation and quiet times, when we shut the door upon the world to be alone with God, but all these things are not the end of life, but means to the end; and the end is to demonstrate the Christian life in the ordinary work of the world. Christianity was never meant to withdraw a man from life, but to equip him better for it. It does not offer us release from problems, but a way to solve them. It does not offer us an easy peace, but a triumphant warfare. It does not offer us a life in which troubles are escaped and evaded, but a life in which troubles are faced and conquered. However much it may be true that the Christian is not of the world, it remains true that it is within the world that his Christianity must be lived out. He must never desire to abandon the world, but always desire to win it.

(ii) Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples. Where there are divisions, where there is exclusiveness, where there is competition between the Churches, the cause of Christianity is harmed and the prayer of Jesus frustrated. The gospel cannot truly be preached in any congregation which is not one united band of brothers. The world cannot be evangelized by competing Churches. Jesus prayed that his disciples might be as fully one as he and the Father are one; and there is no prayer of his which has been so hindered from being answered by individual Christians and by the Churches than this.

(iii) Jesus prayed that God would protect his disciples from the attacks of the Evil One. The Bible is not a speculative book; it does not discuss the origin of evil; but it is quite certain that in this world there is a power of evil which is in opposition to the power of God. It is uplifting to feel that God is the sentinel who stands over our lives to guard us from the assaults of evil. The fact that we fall so often is due to the fact that we try to meet life in our own strength and forget to seek the help and to remember the presence of our protecting God.

(iv) Jesus prayed that his disciples might be consecrated by the truth. The word for to consecrate is *hagiazein* (GSN0037) which comes from the adjective *hagios* (GSN0040). In the King James Version *hagios* (GSN0040) is usually translated "holy" but its basic meaning is "different" or "separate." So then *hagiazein* (GSN0037) has two ideas in it.

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John 17:9-19

(a) It means to set apart for a special task. When God called Jeremiah, he said to him: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer.1:5). Even before his birth God had set Jeremiah apart for a special task. When God was instituting the priesthood in Israel he told Moses to ordain the sons of Aaron and to consecrate them that they might serve in the office of the priests (Exo.28:41). Aaron's sons were to be set apart for a special office and a special duty.

(b) But *hagiazein* (GSN0037) means not only to set apart for some special office and task, it also means to equip a man with the qualities of mind and heart and character which are necessary for that task. If a man is to serve God, he must have something of God's goodness and God's wisdom in him. He who would serve the holy God must himself be holy too. And so God does not only choose a man for his special service, and set him apart for it, he also equips a man with the qualities he needs to carry it out.

We must always remember that God has chosen us out and dedicated us for his special service. That special service is that we should love and obey him and should bring others to do the same. And God has not left us to carry out that great task in our own strength, but out of his grace he fits us for our task, if we place our lives in his hands.

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John 17:20-21

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

John 17:20-21

"It is not only for these that I pray, but also for those who are going to believe in their word of testimony to me. And my prayer is that they may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so that they may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me."

Gradually in this section Jesus' prayer has been going out to the ends of the earth. First, he prayed for himself as the Cross faced him. Second, he prayed for his disciples, and for God's keeping power for them. Now his prayers take a sweep into the distant future, and he prays for those who in distant lands and far-off ages will also enter the Christian faith.

Here two great characteristics of Jesus are full displayed. First, we see his complete faith and his radiant certainty. At that moment his followers were few, but even with the Cross facing him, his confidence was unshaken, and he was praying for those who would come to believe in his name. This passage should be specially precious to us, for it is Jesus' prayer for us. Second, we see his confidence in his men. He knew that they did not fully understand him; he knew that in a very short time they were going to abandon him in his hour of sorest need. Yet to these very same men he looked with complete confidence to spread his name throughout the world. Jesus never lost his faith in God or his confidence in men.

What was his prayer for the Church which was to be? It was that all its members would be one as he and his Father are one. What was that unity for which Jesus prayed? It was not a unity of administration or organization; it was not in any sense an ecclesiastical unity. It was a unity of personal relationship. We have already seen that the union between Jesus and God was one of love and obedience. It was a unity of love for which Jesus prayed, a unity in which men loved each other because they loved him, a unity based entirely on the relationship between heart and heart.

Christians will never organize their Churches all in the same way. They will never worship God all in the same way. They will never even all believe precisely the same things. But Christian unity transcends all these differences and joins men together in love. The cause of Christian unity at the present time, and indeed all through history, has been injured and hindered, because men loved their own ecclesiastical organizations, their own creeds, their own ritual, more than they loved each other. If we really loved each other and really loved Christ, no Church would exclude any man who was Christ's disciple. Only love implanted in men's hearts by God can tear down the barriers which they have erected between each other and between their Churches.

Further, as Jesus saw it and prayed for it, it was to be precisely that unity which convinced the world of the truth of Christianity and of the place of Christ. It is more natural for men to be divided than to be united. It is more human for men to fly apart than to come together. Real unity between all Christians would be a "supernatural fact which would require a supernatural explanation." It is the tragic fact that it is just that united front that the Church has never shown to men. Faced by the disunity of Christians, the world cannot see the supreme value of the Christian faith. It is our individual duty to demonstrate that unity of love with our fellow men which is the answer to

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John 17:20-21

Christ's prayer. The rank and file of the Churches can do and must do what the leaders of the Church refuse officially to do.

Barclay's Commentary

John 17:22-26

THE GIFT AND THE PROMISE OF GLORY

John 17:22-26

"And I have given them the glory which you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I am in them, and you are in me, so that their unity with us and with each other may stand consummated and complete. I pray for this that the world may realize that you sent me, and that you loved them as you loved me. Father, it is my will that those whom you have given me should be with me where I am going, that they may see my glory which you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world did not know you, but I knew you, and these realized that you sent me. I have told them what you are like, and I will go on telling them, that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and that I may be in them."

Bengel, an old commentator, exclaimed as he began to comment on this passage: "O how great is the Christians' glory!" And indeed it is.

First, Jesus said that he had given his disciples the glory which his Father had given him. We must fully understand what that means. What was the glory of Jesus? There were three ways in which he talked of it.

(a) The Cross was his glory. Jesus did not speak of being crucified; he spoke of being glorified. Therefore, first and foremost, a Christian's glory is the cross that he must bear. It is an honour to suffer for Jesus Christ. We must never think of our cross as our penalty; we must think of it as our glory. The harder the task a knight was given, the greater he considered its glory. The harder the task we give a student, or a craftsman, or a surgeon, the more we honour him. In effect, we say that we believe that nobody but he could attempt that task at all. So when it is hard to be a Christian, we must regard it as our glory given to us by God.

(b) Jesus' perfect obedience to the will of God was his glory. We find our glory, not in doing as we like, but in doing as God wills. When we try to do as we like--as many of us have done--we find nothing but sorrow and disaster both for ourselves and for others. We find the real glory of life in doing God's will; the greater the obedience, the greater the glory.

(c) Jesus' glory lay in the fact that, from his life, men recognized his special relationship with God. They saw that no one could live as he did unless he was uniquely near to God. As with Christ, it is our glory when men see in us the reflection of God.

Second, Jesus said that it was his will that his disciples should see his glory in the heavenly places. It is the Christian's conviction that he will share all the experiences of Christ. If he has to share Christ's Cross, he will also share his glory. "The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2Tim.2:11-12). Here in this world at best we see dimly in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face (1Cor.13:12). The joy we have now is only a faint foretaste of the joy which is to come. It is Christ's promise that if we share his glory and his sufferings on earth, we shall share his glory and his triumph when life on this earth is ended. What greater promise could there be than that?

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John 17:22-26

From this prayer Jesus was to go straight out to the betrayal, the trial and the Cross. He was not to speak to his disciples again. It is a wonderful and a precious thing to remember that before these terrible hours his last words were not of despair but of glory.

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John 18:1-11

THE ARREST IN THE GARDEN

John 18:1-11 (Part 1)

When Jesus had said these things he went out with his disciples across the Kedron Valley to a place where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered; and Judas, his betrayer, knew the place for Jesus often met with his disciples there. So Judas took a company of soldiers, together with officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, and went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus knew the things which were going to happen to him, so he came out and said: "Who are you looking for?" They answered: "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them: "I am he." And Judas, his betrayer, stood there with them. When he said to them: "I am he," they stepped back and fell on the ground. So Jesus again asked them: "Who are you looking for?" They said: "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said: "I told you that I am he.

If it is I for whom you are looking, let these go, so that the word which scripture said may be fulfilled--I have lost none of those whom you gave me." Now Simon Peter had a sword and he drew it; and he struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter: "Put your sword in its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which my Father gave me?"

When the last meal was finished and when Jesus' talk and prayer with his disciples were ended, he and his friends left the upper room. They were bound for the Garden of Gethsemane. They would leave by the gate, go down the steep valley and cross the channel of the brook Kedron. There a symbolic thing must have happened. All the Passover lambs were killed in the Temple, and the blood of the lambs was poured on the altar as an offering to God. The number of lambs slain for the Passover was immense. On one occasion, thirty years later than the time of Jesus, a census was taken and the number was 256,000. We may imagine what the Temple courts were like when the blood of all these lambs was dashed on to the altar. From the altar there was a channel down to the brook Kedron, and through that channel the blood of the Passover lambs drained away. When Jesus crossed the brook Kedron it would still be red with the blood of the lambs which had been sacrificed; and as he did so, the thought of his own sacrifice would surely be vivid in his mind.

Having crossed the channel of the Kedron, they came to the Mount of Olives. On its slopes lay the little garden of Gethsemane, which means the oil-press, the press where the oil was extracted from the olives which grew on the hill. Many well-to-do people had their private gardens there. Space in Jerusalem was too limited for private gardens, for it was built on the top of a hill. Furthermore there were ceremonial prohibitions which forbade the use of manure on the soil of the sacred city. That was why the wealthy people had their private gardens outside the city on the slopes of the mount of Olives.

They show pilgrims to this day a little garden on the hillside. It is lovingly tended by the Franciscan friars, and in it there are eight old olive trees of such girth that they seem, as H. V. Morton says, more like rocks than trees. They are very old; it is known that they go back to a time before the Moslem conquest of Palestine. It is scarcely possible that they go back to the time of

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John 18:1-11

Jesus himself; but certainly the little paths criss-crossing the Mount of Olives were trodden by the feet of Jesus.

So to this garden Jesus went. Some wealthy citizen--an anonymous friend of Jesus whose name will never be known--must have given him the key of the gate and the right to use it when he was in Jerusalem. Often Jesus and his disciples had gone there for peace and quiet. Judas knew that he would find Jesus there and it was there that he had decided it would be easiest to engineer the arrest.

There is something astonishing about the force which came out to arrest Jesus. John said that there was a company of soldiers, together with officers from the chief priests and Pharisees. The officers would be the Temple police. The Temple authorities had a kind of private police force to keep good order, and the Sanhedrin hid its police officers to carry out its decrees. The officers, therefore, were the Jewish police force. But there was a band of Roman soldiers there too. The word is *speira* (GSN4686). Now that word, if it is correctly used, can have three meanings. It is the Greek word for a Roman cohort and a cohort had 600 men. If it was a cohort of auxiliary soldiers, a *speira* (GSN4686) had 1,000 men--240 cavalry and 760 infantry. Sometimes, much more rarely, the word is used for the detachment of men called a *maniple* which was made up of 200 men.

Even if we take this word to mean the smallest force, the *maniple*, what an expedition to send out against an unarmed Galilaean carpenter! At the Passover time there were always extra soldiers in Jerusalem, quartered in the Tower of Antonia which overlooked the Temple, and men would be available. But what a compliment to the power of Jesus! When the authorities decided to arrest him, they sent what was almost an army to do it.

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John 18:1-11

THE ARREST IN THE GARDEN

John 18:1-11 (Part 2)

Few scenes in scripture so show us the qualities of Jesus as does the arrest in the garden.

(i) It shows us his courage. At Passover time it was full moon and the night was almost like daylight. Yet the enemies of Jesus had come with lamps and torches. Why? They did not need them to see the way. They must have thought that they would have to search among the trees and in the hillside nooks and crannies to find Jesus. So far from hiding, when they arrived, Jesus stepped out. "Who are you looking for?" he demanded. "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. Back came the answer: "I am he." The man they had thought they would have to search for as he skulked in the trees and the caves was standing before them with glorious defiance. Here is the courage of the man who will face things out. During the Spanish Civil War a city was besieged. There were some who wished to surrender, but a leader arose. "It is better," he said, "to die on our feet than to live on our knees."

(ii) It shows us his authority. There he was, one single, lonely, unarmed figure; there they were, hundreds of them, armed and equipped. Yet face to face with him, they retreated and fell to the ground. There flowed from Jesus an authority which in all his loneliness made him stronger than the might of his enemies.

(iii) It shows us that Jesus chose to die. Here again it is clear that he could have escaped death if he had so wished. He could have walked through them and gone his way. But he did not. He even helped his enemies to arrest him. He chose to die.

(iv) It shows his protective love. It was not for himself that he took thought; it was for his friends. "Here I am," he said. "It is I whom you want. Take me, and let them go." Among the many immortal stories of the Second World War that of Alfred Sadd, missionary of Tarawa, stands out. When the Japanese came to his island, he was lined up with twenty other men, mostly New Zealand soldiers who had been part of the garrison. The Japanese laid a Union Jack on the ground and ordered Sadd to walk over it. He approached the flag and, as he came to it, he turned off to the right. They ordered him again to trample on it; this time he turned off to the left. The third time he was compelled to go up to the flag; and he gathered it in his arms and kissed it. When the Japanese took them all out to be shot, many were so young that they were heavy-hearted, but Alfred Sadd cheered them up. They stood in a line, he in the middle, but presently he went out and stood in front of them and spoke words of cheer.

When he had finished, he went back but still stood a little in front of them, so that he would be the first to die. Alfred Sadd thought more of others' troubles than his own. Jesus' protecting love surrounded his disciples even in Gethsemane.

(v) It shows his utter obedience. "Shall I not drink," he said, "the cup that God has given me to drink?" This was God's will, and that was enough. Jesus was himself faithful unto death.

There is a figure in this story to whom we must do justice, and that is Peter. He, one man, drew his sword against hundreds. As Macaulay had it:

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John 18:1-11

How can man die better
Than facing fearful odds?

Peter was soon to deny his master, but at that moment he was prepared to take on hundreds all alone for the sake of Christ. We may talk of the cowardice and the failure of Peter; but we must never forget the sublime courage of this moment.

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John 18:12-14, 19-24

JESUS BEFORE ANNAS

John 18:12-14; John 18:19-24

The company of soldiers and their commander and the officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, and led him first of all to Annas. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was High Priest in that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it was better that one man should die for the people.... The High Priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered him: "I spoke openly in the world. I taught at all times in the synagogue and in the precincts of the Temple, where all the Jews assemble, and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you ask me questions? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. See! These know what I have said." When he had said these things, one of the officers who was standing by, dealt Jesus a blow. "Do you answer the High Priest like this?" he said. Jesus answered: "If I have spoken ill, produce evidence about the ill; if I have spoken well, why do you strike me?" So Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the High Priest.

For the sake of keeping the narrative continuous we take together the two passages which deal with the trial before Annas; and we will do the same with the two passages which deal with the tragedy of Peter.

Only John tells us that Jesus was brought first of all to Annas. Annas was a notorious character. Edersheim writes of him: "No figure is better known in contemporary Jewish history than that of Annas; no person deemed more fortunate or successful, but none also more generally execrated than the late High Priest." Annas was the power behind the throne in Jerusalem. He himself had been High Priest from A.D. 6 to 15. Four of his sons had also held the high priesthood and Caiaphas was his son-in-law. That very fact is itself suggestive and illuminating. There had been a time, when the Jews were free, when the High Priest had held office for life; but when the Roman governors came, the office became a matter for contention and intrigue and bribery and corruption. It now went to the greatest sycophant and the highest bidder, to the man who was most willing to toe the line with the Roman governor.

The High Priest was the arch-collaborator, the man who brought comfort and ease and prestige and power not with bribes only but with close cooperation with his country's masters. The family of Annas was immensely rich and one by one they had intrigued and bribed their way into office, while Annas remained the power behind it all.

Even the way in which Annas made his money was most probably disgraceful. In the Court of the Gentiles there were the sellers of victims for the sacrifices, those sellers whom Jesus had driven out. They were not traders; they were extortioners. Every victim offered in the Temple had to be without spot and blemish. There were inspectors to see that it was so. If a victim was bought outside the Temple it was certain that a flaw would be found. The worshipper was then directed to buy at the Temple booths where the victims had already been examined and where there was no risk of rejection. That would have been convenient and helpful but for one thing. Outside the Temple a pair of doves could cost as little as 4 pence; inside they could cost as much as 75 pence. The whole business was sheer exploitation; and the shops where the Temple victims were sold were called The Bazaars of Annas.

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John 18:12-14, 19-24

They were the property of the family of Annas; it was by the exploitation of the worshippers, by trading on the sacred sacrifices that Annas had amassed a fortune. The Jews themselves hated the household of Annas. There is a passage in the Talmud which says: "Woe to the house of Annas! Woe to their serpent's hiss! They are High Priests; their sons are keepers of the treasury; their sons-in-law are guardians of the Temple; and their servants beat the people with staves." Annas and his household were notorious.

Now we can see why Annas arranged that Jesus should be brought first to him. Jesus was the man who had attacked Annas' vested interest; he had cleared the Temple of the sellers of victims and had hit Annas where it hurt--in his pocket. Annas wanted to be the first to gloat over the capture of this disturbing Galilaean.

The examination before Annas was a mockery of justice. It was an essential regulation of the Jewish law that a prisoner must be asked no question which would incriminate him. Maimonides, the great Jewish medieval scholar, lays it down: "Our true law does not inflict the penalty of death upon a sinner by his own confession." Annas violated the principles of Jewish justice when he questioned Jesus. It was precisely of this that Jesus reminded him. Jesus said: "Don't ask me questions. Ask those who heard me." He was, in effect, saying: "Take your evidence about me in the proper and legal way. Examine your witnesses, which you have every right to do; stop examining me, which you have no right to do." When Jesus said that, one of the officers hit him a slap across the face. He said, in effect, "Are you trying to teach the High Priest how to conduct a trial?" Jesus' answer was: "If I have said or taught anything illegal, witnesses should be called. I have only stated the law. Why hit me for that?"

Jesus never had any hope of justice. The self-interest of Annas and his colleagues had been touched; and Jesus was condemned before he was tried. When a man is engaged on an evil way, his only desire is to eliminate anyone who opposes him. If he cannot do it by fair means, he is compelled to resort to foul.

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John 18:15-18, 25-27

THE HERO AND THE COWARD

John 18:15-18; John 18:25-27 (Part 1)

Simon Peter was following Jesus with another disciple. That disciple was known to the High Priest, and he went in with Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest's house. Peter was standing at the door outside. The other disciple, who was known to the High Priest came out and spoke to the door-keeper, and brought Peter in. The maid-servant, who kept the door, said to Peter: "You are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said: "I am not." The servants and the officers stood beside a charcoal brazier they had kindled, because it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter too was standing with them warming himself ... Simon Peter was standing warming himself. They said to him: "Surely you too are one of his disciples?" He denied it, and said: "I am not." One of the servants of the High Priest, a relation of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said: "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and immediately cockcrow sounded.

When the other disciples forsook Jesus and fled, Peter refused to do so. He followed Jesus, even after his arrest, because he could not tear himself away. So he came to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest; and he was in the company of another disciple who had the right of entry to the house, because he was known to the High Priest.

There have been many speculations about who this other disciple was. Some have thought that he was simply some unknown disciple whose name we can never know. Some have connected him with either Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea who were both members of the Sanhedrin, and must both have known the High Priest well. One very interesting suggestion is that he was Judas Iscariot. Judas must have had much coming and going to arrange the betrayal and would be well known both to the maid-servant who answered the door and to the High Priest himself. The one thing that seems to invalidate this theory is that, after the scene in the garden, Judas' part in the betrayal must have been quite clear; and it is almost incredible that Peter would have had anything more to do with him. The traditional view is that the unnamed disciple was John himself; and the tradition is so strong that it is difficult to set it aside.

The question becomes, in that case, How could John from Galilee be known, apparently intimately, to the High Priest?

Two suggestions have been made to explain this.

(a) In later days a man called Polycrates wrote about the Fourth Gospel. He never doubted that John wrote the gospel and that he was the beloved disciple, but he says a very curious thing about him. He says that John was by birth a priest, and that he wore the petalos, which was the narrow gold band, or ziz, inscribed with the words, "Holiness unto the Lord." which the High Priest wore upon his forehead. If that were so, John would be actually of the High Priest's kin; but it is difficult to believe that he could be of the priestly line, for the gospels so clearly show him as a Galilean fisherman.

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John 18:15-18, 25-27

(b) The second explanation is easier to accept. It is clear that John's father had a very flourishing fishing business because he could afford to employ hired servants (Mk.1:20). One of the great Galilaean industries was salt fish. Fresh fish was a great luxury because there was no way of transporting fish in such a way that it would remain fresh. On the other hand, salt fish was a staple article of diet. It has been supposed that John's father was in the salt fish trade, and that he actually supplied the household of the High Priest. If that were so, John would be well-known to the High Priest and to his servants, because often it would be he who would bring the supplies. There is some kind of support in legend for this theory. H. V. Morton tells us of visiting in the back streets of Jerusalem a little building which was presently an Arab coffee house.

In it were certain stones and arches which once had been part of a very early Christian church, believed to have stood on the site of a house which belonged to Zebedee, John's father. The family, so the Franciscans believe, were fish merchants in Galilee with a branch office in Jerusalem and supplied the household of Caiaphas the High Priest with salt fish, which was why John had entry into the High Priest's house.

However these things may be, Peter was brought into the courtyard of the High Priest's house and there he three times denied his Lord.

There is this very interesting thing. Jesus had said that Peter would deny him three times before the cock crew. There are difficulties about that. According to Jewish ritual law, it was not lawful to keep cocks in the holy city, although we cannot be sure whether that law was kept or not. Further, it is never possible to be sure that a cock will crow. But the Romans had a certain military practice. The night was divided into four watches--6 p.m. to 9 p.m., 9 p.m. to 12 midnight, 12 midnight to 3 a.m., and 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. After the third watch the guard was changed and to mark the changing of the guard there was a trumpet call at 3 a.m. That trumpet call was called in latin gallicinium and in Greek alektorophonia, which both mean cockcrow. It may well be that Jesus said to Peter: "Before the trumpet sounds the cockcrow you will deny me three times." Everyone in Jerusalem must have known that trumpet call at 3 a.m. When sounded through the city that night Peter remembered.

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John 18:15-18, 25-27

THE HERO AND THE COWARD

John 18:15-18; John 18:25-27 (Part 2)

So in the courtyard of the High Priest's house Peter denied his Lord. No man has ever been so unjustly treated as Peter by preachers and commentators. Always what is stressed is his failure and his shame. But there are other things we must remember.

(i) We must remember that all the other disciples, except John, if he is the unnamed disciple, had forsaken Jesus and fled. Think what Peter had done. He alone drew his sword against fearful odds in the garden; he alone followed out to see the end. The first thing to remember about Peter is not his failure, but the courage which kept him near to Jesus when everyone else had run away. His failure could have happened only to a man of superlative courage. True, he failed; but he failed in a situation which none of the other disciples even dared to face. He failed, not because he was a coward, but because he was brave.

(ii) We must remember how much Peter loved Jesus. The others had abandoned Jesus; Peter alone stood by him. He loved Jesus so much that he could not leave him. True, he failed; but he failed in circumstances which only a faithful lover of Jesus would ever have encountered.

(iii) We must remember how Peter redeemed himself. Things could not have been easy for him. The story of his denial would soon get about, for people love a malicious tale. It may well be, as legend has it, that people imitated the crow of the cock when he passed. But Peter had the courage and the tenacity of purpose to redeem himself, to start from failure and attain to greatness.

The essence of the matter was that it was the real Peter who protested his loyalty in the upper room; it was the real Peter who drew his lonely sword in the moonlight of the garden; it was the real Peter who followed Jesus, because he could not allow his Lord to go alone; it was not the real Peter who cracked beneath the tension and denied his Lord. And that is just what Jesus could see. A tremendous thing about Jesus is that beneath all our failures he sees the real man. He understands. He loves us in spite of what we do because he loves us, not for what we are, but what we have it in us to be. The forgiving love of Jesus is so great that he sees our real personality, not in our faithfulness, but in our loyalty, not in our defeat by sin, but in our teaching after goodness, even when we are defeated.

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JESUS AND PILATE

John 18:28-19:16 (Part 1)

They brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early in the morning and they themselves did not enter into the headquarters, in case they should be defiled; but they wished to avoid defilement because they wished to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and said: "What charge do you bring against this man?" They answered him: "If he had not been an evildoer, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them: "You take him, and judge him according to your laws." The Jews said to Pilate: "It is not permitted to us to put anyone to death." This happened that there might be fulfilled the word of Jesus, which he spoke in indication of the kind of death he was going to die. So Pilate went again into his headquarters, and called Jesus, and said to him: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered: "Are you saying this because you have discovered it yourself?

Or did others tell it to you about me?" Pilate answered: "Am I a Jew? Your own countrymen and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom was of this world, my servants would have fought to prevent me being handed over to the Jews. But, as it is, my kingdom does not have its source here." So Pilate said to him: "So you are a king then?" Jesus said: "It is you who are saying that I am a king. The reason why I was born and came into the world is that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." "What is truth?" Pilate said to him.

When he had said this, he again went out to the Jews and said to them: "I find no fault in him. You have a custom that I should release one person to you at the Passover time. Do you wish me to release the King of the Jews for you?" They shouted: "Not this man, but Barabbas." And Barabbas was a brigand.

Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him; and the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head. And they put a purple robe on him; and they kept coming to him and saying: "Hail! King of the Jews!" And they dealt him repeated blows. Pilate came out again and said to them: "See! I bring him out to you, because I want you to know that I find no fault in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them: "See! The Man!" So, when the chief priests and officers saw him, they shouted: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them: "You take him, and crucify him! For I find no fault in him." The Jews answered him: "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself out to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this saying, he was still more alarmed.

He went into his headquarters again, and said to Jesus: "Where do you come from?" Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate said to him: "Do you refuse to speak to me? Are you not aware that I have authority to release you, and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him: "You would have no authority against me whatsoever, unless it had been given to you from above. That is why he who betrayed me to you is guilty of the greater sin." From this moment Pilate tried every way to release him; but the Jews kept insistently shouting: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Every man who makes himself a king is an opponent of Caesar." So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out. He took his seat on his judgment seat, in the place that is called the

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Pavement--in Hebrew, Gabbatha. It was the day of the preparation for the Passover. It was about twelve o'clock midday.

He said to the Jews: "See! Your king!" They shouted: "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them: "Shall I crucify your king?" The chief priests answered: "We have no king but Caesar." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

This is the most dramatic account of the trial of Jesus in the New Testament, and to have cut it into small sections would have been to lose the drama. It has to be read as one; but now that we have read it as one, we shall take several days to study it. The drama of this passage lies in the clash and interplay of personalities. It will therefore be best to study it, not section by section, but in the light of the actors within it.

We begin by looking at the Jews. In the time of Jesus the Jews were subject to the Romans. The Romans allowed them a good deal of self-government, but they had not the right to carry out the death penalty. The *ius gladii*, as it was called, the right of the sword, belonged only to the Romans. As the Talmud records: "Forty years before the destruction of the Temple, judgment in matters of life and death was taken away from Israel." The first Roman governor of Palestine was named Coponius, and Josephus, telling of his appointment as governor, says that he was sent as procurator "having the power of life and death put into his hands by Caesar." (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 2, 8, 1). Josephus also tells of a certain priest called Ananus who determined to execute certain of his enemies. Jews of more prudent mind protested against his decision on the grounds that he had no right either to take it or carry it out.

Ananus was not allowed to carry his decision into practice and was deposed from office for even thinking of doing so. (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 20, 9, 1). It is true that sometimes, as, for instance, in the case of Stephen, the Jews did take the law into their own hands; but legally they had no right to inflict the death penalty on anyone. That was why they had to bring Jesus to Pilate before he could be crucified.

If the Jews had themselves been able to carry out the death penalty, it would have been by stoning. The Law lays it down: "And he who blasphemes the name of the Lord, shall be put to death, all the congregation shall stone him" (Lev.24:16). in such a case the witnesses whose word proved the crime had to be the first to fling the stones. "The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people" (Deut.17:7). That is the point of Jn.18:32. That verse says that all this was happening that there might be fulfilled the word of Jesus in indication of the kind of death he was going to die. He had said that when he was lifted up, that is, when he was crucified, he would draw all men to him (Jn.12:32). If that prophecy of Jesus was to be fulfilled, he must be crucified, not stoned; and therefore, even apart from the fact that Roman law would not allow the Jews to carry out the death penalty, Jesus had to die a Roman death, because he had to be lifted up.

The Jews from start to finish were seeking to use Pilate for their purposes. They could not kill Jesus themselves, so they were determined that the Romans would kill him for them.

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JESUS AND PILATE

John 18:28-19:16 (Part 2)

But there were more things about the Jews than that.

(i) They began by hating Jesus; but they finished in a very hysteria of hatred, howling like wolves, with faces twisted in bitterness: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" In the end they reached such an insanity of hatred that they were impervious to reason and to mercy and even to the claims of common humanity. Nothing in this world warps a man's judgment as hatred does. Once a man allows himself to hate, he can neither think nor see straight, nor listen without distortion. Hatred is a terrible thing because it takes a man's senses away.

(ii) The hatred of the Jews made them lose all sense of proportion. They were so careful of ceremonial and ritual cleanness that they would not enter Pilate's headquarters, and yet they were busy doing everything possible to crucify the Son of God. To eat the Passover, a Jew had to be absolutely ceremonially clean. Now, if they had gone into Pilate's headquarters, they would have incurred uncleanness in a double way. First, the scribal law said: "The dwelling-places of Gentiles are unclean." Second, the Passover was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Part of the preparation for it was a ceremonial search for leaven, and the banishing of every particle of leaven from every house because it was the symbol of evil. To go into Pilate's headquarters would have been to go into a place where leaven might be found; and to go into such a place when the Passover was being prepared was to render oneself unclean.

But even if the Jews had entered a Gentile house which contained leaven, they would have been unclean only until evening. Then they would have had to undergo ceremonial bathing after which they would have been clean.

Now see what the Jews were doing. They were carrying out the details of the ceremonial law with meticulous care; and at the same time they were hounding to the Cross the Son of God. That is just the kind of thing that men are always liable to do. Many a church member fusses about the sheerest trifles, and breaks God's law of love and of forgiveness and of service every day. There is even many a church in which the details of vestments, furnishings, ritual, ceremonial are attended to with the most detailed care, and where the spirit of love and fellowship are conspicuous only by their absence. One of the most tragic things in the world is how the human mind can lose its sense of proportion and its ability to put first things first

(ii) The Jews did not hesitate to twist their charge against Jesus. In their own private examination the charge they had formulated was one of blasphemy (Matt.26:65). They knew well that Pilate would not proceed on a charge like that. He would have said it was their own private religious quarrel and they could settle it as they liked without coming to him. In the end what the Jews produced was a charge of rebellion and political insurrection. They accused Jesus of claiming to be a king, although they knew that their accusation was a lie. Hatred is a terrible thing and does not hesitate to twist the truth.

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(iv) In order to compass the death of Jesus the Jews denied every principle they had. The most astonishing thing they said that day was: "We have no king but Caesar." Samuel's word to the people was that God alone was their king (1Sam.12:12). When the crown was offered to Gideon, his answer was: "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you: the Lord will rule over you" (Judg.8:23). When the Romans had first come into Palestine, they had taken a census in order to arrange the normal taxation to which subject people were liable. And there had been the most bloody rebellion, because the Jews insisted that God alone was their king, and to him alone they would pay tribute. When the Jewish leader said: "We have no king but Caesar." it was the most astonishing volte-face in history. The very statement must have taken Pilate's breath away, and he must have looked at them in half-bewildered, half-cynical amusement.

The Jews were prepared to abandon every principle they had in order to eliminate Jesus.

It is a terrible picture. The hatred of the Jews turned them into a maddened mob of shrieking, frenzied fanatics. In their hatred they forgot all mercy, all sense of proportion, all justice, all their principles, even God. Never in history was the insanity of hatred so vividly shown.

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JESUS AND PILATE

John 18:28-19:16 (Part 3)

Now we turn to the second personality in this story--Pilate. Throughout the trial his conduct is well-nigh incomprehensible. It is abundantly clear, it could not be clearer, that Pilate knew that the charges of the Jews were a series of lies, that he knew that Jesus was completely innocent, that he was deeply impressed with him, and that he did not wish to condemn him to death--and yet he did. First, he tried to refuse to deal with the case; then he tried to release Jesus on the grounds that at the Passover a criminal was always released; then he tried to compromise by scourging Jesus; then he made a last appeal. But he refused all through to put his foot down and tell the Jews that he would have nothing to do with their evil machinations. We will never even begin to understand Pilate unless we understand his history, which is set out for us partly in the writings of Josephus and partly in the writings of Philo.

To understand the part that Pilate played in this drama we must go back a long way. To begin with, what was a Roman governor doing in Judaea at all?

In 4 B.C. Herod the Great died. He had been king of the whole of Palestine. For all his faults he was in many ways a good king, and he had been very friendly with the Romans. In his will he divided up his kingdom between three of his sons. Antipas received Galilee and Peraea; Philip received Batanea, Auranitis and Trachonitis, the wild unpopulated regions of the north-east; and Archelaus, who at the time was only eighteen years old, received Idumaea, Judaea and Samaria. The Romans approved this distribution of the kingdom, and ratified it.

Antipas and Philip governed quietly and well; but Archelaus governed with such extortion and tyranny that the Jews themselves requested the Romans to remove him, and to appoint a governor. The likelihood is that they expected to be incorporated into the large province of Syria; and had that been so, the province was so large that they would very probably have been left pretty much to carry on the way they were. All Roman provinces were divided into two classes. Those which required troops stationed in them were in the direct control of the Emperor and were imperial provinces; those which did not require troops but were peaceful and trouble-free, were in the direct control of the senate and were senatorial provinces.

Palestine was obviously a troubled land; it needed troops and therefore it was in the control of the Emperor. Really great provinces were governed either by a proconsul or a legate; Syria was like that. Smaller provinces of the second class, were governed by a procurator. He was in full control of the military and judicial administration of the province. He visited every part of the province at least once a year and heard cases and complaints. He superintended the ingathering of taxes but had no authority to increase them. He was paid a salary from the treasury and was strictly forbidden to accept either presents or bribes; and, if he exceeded his duties, the people of his province had power to report him to the Emperor.

It was a procurator that Augustus appointed to control the affairs of Palestine, and the first one took over in A.D. 6. Pilate took over in A.D. 26 and remained in office until A.D. 35. Palestine was

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a province bristling with problems, one which required a firm and a strong and a wise hand. We do not know Pilate's previous history, but we do know that he must have had the reputation of being a good administrator or he would never have been given the responsible position of governing Palestine. It had to be kept in order, for, as a glance at the map will show, it was the bridge between Egypt and Syria.

But as governor Pilate was a failure. He seemed to begin with a complete contempt and a complete lack of sympathy for the Jews. Three famous, or infamous, incidents marked his career.

The first occurred on his first visit to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not the capital of the province; its headquarters were at Caesarea. But the procurator paid many visits to Jerusalem, and, when he did, he stayed in the old palace of the Herods in the west part of the city. When he came to Jerusalem, he always came with a detachment of soldiers. The soldiers had their standards; and on the top of the standard there was a little bust in metal of the reigning Emperor. The Emperor was regarded as a god, and to the Jew that little bust on the standards was a graven image.

All previous Roman governors, in deference to the religious scruples of the Jews, had removed that image before they entered the city. Pilate refused to do so. The Jews besought him to do so. Pilate was adamant; he would not pander to the superstitions of the Jews. He went back to Caesarea. The Jews followed him. They dogged his footsteps for five days. They were humble, but determined in their requests. Finally he told them to meet him in the amphitheatre. He surrounded them with armed soldiers, and informed them that if they did not stop their requests they would be killed there and then. The Jews bared their necks and bade the soldiers strike. Not even Pilate could massacre defenceless men like that. He was beaten and compelled to agree that the images should thereafter be removed from the standards. That was how Pilate began, and it was a bad beginning.

The second incident was this. The Jerusalem water supply was inadequate. Pilate determined to build a new aqueduct. Where was the money to come from? He raided the Temple treasury which contained millions. It is very unlikely that Pilate took money that was deposited for the sacrifices and the Temple service. Much more likely, he took money which was entitled Korban, and which came from sources which made it impossible to use for sacred purposes. His aqueduct was much needed; it was a worthy and a great undertaking; the water supply would even be of great benefit to the Temple which needed much cleansing with its continual sacrifices. But the people resented it; they rioted and surged through the streets. Pilate mingled his soldiers with them in plain clothes, with concealed weapons. At a given signal they attacked the mob and many a Jew was clubbed or stabbed to death. Once again Pilate was unpopular--and he was rendered liable to be reported to the Emperor.

The third incident turned out even worse for Pilate. As we have seen, when he was in Jerusalem, he stayed in the ancient palace of the Herods. He had certain shields made; and on them he had inscribed the name of Tiberius the Emperor. These shields were what is known as votive shields; they were devoted to the honour and the memory of the Emperor. Now the Emperor was regarded as a god; so here was the name of a strange god inscribed and displayed for reverence in the holy city. The people were enraged; the greatest men, even his closest supporters, besought Pilate to

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remove them. He refused. The Jews reported the matter to Tiberius the Emperor, and he ordered Pilate to remove them.

It is relevant to note how Pilate ended up. This last incident happened after Jesus had been crucified, in the year A.D. 35. There was a revolt in Samaria. It was not very serious but Pilate crushed it with sadistic ferocity and a plethora of executions. The Samaritans had always been regarded as loyal citizens of Rome and the legate of Syria intervened. Tiberius ordered Pilate back to Rome. When he was on the way, Tiberius died; so far as we know, Pilate never came to judgment; and from that moment he vanishes from history.

It is clear why Pilate acted as he did. The Jews blackmailed him into crucifying Jesus. They said: "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend." This was, in effect: "Your record is not too good; you were reported once before; if you do not give us our way, we will report you again to the Emperor, and you will be dismissed." On that day in Jerusalem, Pilate's past rose up and haunted him. He was blackmailed into assenting to the death of Christ, because his previous mistakes had made it impossible for him both to defy the Jews and to keep his post. Somehow one cannot help being sorry for Pilate. He wanted to do the right thing; but he had not the courage to defy the Jews and do it. He crucified Jesus in order to keep his job.

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John 18:28-19:16 (Part 4)

We have seen Pilate's history; let us now look at his conduct during his trial of Jesus. He did not wish to condemn Jesus, because he knew that he was innocent; and yet he was caught in the mesh of his own past.

(i) Pilate began by trying to put the responsibility on to someone else. He said to the Jews: "You take this man and judge him according to your laws." He tried to evade the responsibility of dealing with Jesus; but that is precisely what no one can do. No one can deal with Jesus for us; we must deal with him ourselves.

(ii) Pilate went on to try to find a way of escape from the entanglement in which he found himself. He tried to use the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover in order to engineer the release of Jesus. He tried to evade dealing directly with Jesus himself; but again that is precisely what no one can do. There is no escape from a personal decision in regard to Jesus; we must ourselves decide what we will do with him, accept him or reject him.

(iii) Pilate went on to see what compromise could do. He ordered Jesus to be scourged. It must have been in Pilate's mind that a scourging might satisfy, or at least blunt the edge of, Jewish hostility. He felt that he might avoid having to give the verdict of the cross by giving the verdict of scourging. Once again, that is what no man can do. No man can compromise with Jesus; no man can serve two masters. We are either for Jesus or against him.

(iv) Pilate went on to try what appeal could do. He led Jesus out broken by the scourging and showed him to the people. He asked them: "Shall I crucify your king?" He tried to swing the balance by this appeal to emotion and to pity. But no man can hope that appeal to others can take the place of his own personal decision; and it was Pilate's place to make his own decision. No man can evade a personal verdict and a personal decision in regard to Jesus Christ.

In the end Pilate admitted defeat. He abandoned Jesus to the mob, because he had not the courage to take the right decision and to do the right thing.

But there are still more side-lights here on the character of Pilate.

(i) There is a hint of Pilate's ingrained attitude of contempt. he asked Jesus if he was a king. Jesus asked whether he asked this on the basis of what he himself had discovered, or on the basis of information indirectly received. Pilate's answer was: "Am I a Jew? How do you expect me to know anything about Jewish affairs?" He was too proud to involve himself in what he regarded as Jewish squabbles and superstitions. And that pride was exactly what made him a bad governor. No one can govern a people if he makes no attempt to understand them and to enter into their thoughts and minds.

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(ii) There is a kind of superstitious curiosity about Pilate. He wished to know whence Jesus came--and it was more than Jesus' native place that he was thinking of. When he heard that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, he was still more disturbed. Pilate was superstitious rather than religious, fearing that there might be something in it. He was afraid to come to a decision in Jesus' favour because of the Jews; he was equally afraid to come to a decision against him, because he had the lurking suspicion that God might be in this.

(iii) But at the heart of Pilate was a wistful longing. When Jesus said that he had come to witness to the truth, Pilate's answer was: "What is truth?" There are many ways in which a man might ask that question. He might ask it in cynical and sardonic humour. Bacon immortalized Pilate's answer, when he wrote: "What is truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer." But it was not in cynical humour that Pilate asked this question; nor was it the question of a man who did not care. Here was the chink in his armour. He asked the question wistfully and wearily.

Pilate by this world's standards was a successful man. He had come almost to the top of the Roman civil service; he was governor-general of a Roman province; but there was something missing. Here in the presence of this simple, disturbing hated Galilaean, Pilate felt that for him the truth was still a mystery--and that now he had got himself into a situation where there was no chance to learn it. It may be he jested, but it was the jest of despair. Philip Gibbs somewhere tells of listening to a debate between T. S. Eliot, Margaret Irwin, C. Day Lewis and other distinguished people on the subject, "Is this life worth living?" "True, they jested," he said, "but they jested like jesters knocking at the door of death."

Pilate was like that. Into his life there came Jesus, and suddenly he saw what he had missed. That day he might have found all that he had missed; but he had not the courage to defy the world in spite of his past, and to take his stand with Christ and a future which was glorious.

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JESUS AND PILATE

John 18:28-19:16 (Part 5)

We have thought of the picture of the crowd in this trial of Jesus and we have thought of the picture of Pilate. Now we must come to the central character in the drama--Jesus himself. He is depicted before us with a series of master-strokes.

(i) First and foremost, no one can read this story without seeing the sheer majesty of Jesus. There is no sense that he is on trial. When a man faces him, it is not Jesus who is on trial; it is the man. Pilate may have treated many Jewish things with arrogant contempt, but he did not so treat Jesus. We cannot help feeling that it is Jesus who is in control and Pilate who is bewildered and floundering in a situation which he cannot understand. The majesty of Jesus never shone more radiantly than in the hour when he was on trial before men.

(ii) Jesus speaks with utter directness to us of his kingdom; it is not, he says, of this earth. The atmosphere in Jerusalem was always explosive; during the Passover it was sheer dynamite. The Romans well knew that, and during the Passover time they always drafted extra troops into Jerusalem. But Pilate never at any time had more than three thousand men under his command. Some would be in Caesarea, his headquarters; some would be on garrison duty in Samaria; there cannot really have been more than a few hundred on duty in Jerusalem. If Jesus had wished to raise the standard of rebellion and to fight it out, he could have done it easily enough. But he makes it quite clear that he claims to be a king and equally clear that his kingdom is not based on force but is a kingdom in the hearts of men. He would never deny that he aimed at conquest, but it was the conquest of love.

(iii) Jesus tells us why he came into the world. He came to witness to the truth; he came to tell men the truth about God, the truth about themselves, and the truth about life. As Emerson had it:

"When half-gods go,
The gods arrive."

The days of guessings and gropings and half-truths were gone. He came to tell men the truth. That is one of the great reasons why we must either accept or refuse Christ. There is no half-way house about the truth. A man either accepts it, or rejects it; and Christ is the truth.

(iv) We see the physical courage of Jesus. Pilate had him scourged. When a man was scourged he was tied to a whipping-post in such a way that his back was fully exposed. The lash was a long leathern thong, studded at intervals with pellets of lead and sharpened pieces of bone. It literally tore a man's back into strips. Few remained conscious throughout the ordeal; some died; and many went raving mad. Jesus stood that. And after it, Pilate led him out to the crowd and said: "See! The man!" Here is one of John's double meanings. It must have been Pilate's first intention to awaken the pity of the Jews. "Look!" he said. "Look at this poor, bruised, bleeding creature! Look at this wretchedness! Can you possibly wish to hound a creature like this to an utterly unnecessary death?" But we can almost hear the tone of his voice change as he says it, and see the wonder dawn in his

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eyes. And instead of saying it half-contemptuously, to awaken pity, he says it with an admiration that will not be repressed.

The word that Pilate used is *ho* (GSN3588) *anthropos* (GSN0444), which is the normal Greek for a human being; but not so long afterwards the Greek thinkers were using that very term for the heavenly man, the ideal man, the pattern of manhood. It is always true that whatever else we say or do not say about Jesus, his sheer heroism is without parallel. Here indeed is a man.

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JESUS AND PILATE

John 18:28-19:16 (Part 6)

(v) Once again we see here in the trial of Jesus the spontaneousness of his death and the supreme control of God. Pilate warned Jesus that he had power to release him or to crucify him. Jesus answered that Pilate had no power at all, except what had been given him by God. The crucifixion of Jesus never, from beginning to end, reads like the story of a man caught up in an inexorable web of circumstances over which he had no control; it never reads like the story of a man who was hounded to his death; it is the story of a man whose last days were a triumphant procession towards the goal of the Cross.

(vi) And here also is the terrible picture of the silence of Jesus. There was a time when he had no answer to give to Pilate. There were other times when Jesus was silent. He was silent before the High Priest (Matt.26:63; Mk.14:61). He was silent before Herod (Lk.23:9). He was silent when the charges against him were made to Pilate by the Jewish authorities (Matt.27:14; Mk.15:5). We have sometimes the experience, when talking to other people, of finding that argument and discussion are no longer possible, because we and they have no common ground. It is almost as if we spoke another language. That happens when men do in fact speak another mental and spiritual language. It is a terrible day when Jesus is silent to a man. There can be nothing more terrible than for a man's mind to be so shut by his pride and his self-will, that there is nothing Jesus can say to him that will make any difference.

(vii) Finally, it is just possible that in this trial scene there is a strange, dramatic climax, which is a magnificent example of John's dramatic irony.

The scene comes to an end by saying that Pilate brought Jesus out; as we have translated it, and as the King James Version and Revised Standard translate it, Pilate came out to the place that was called the Pavement of Gabbatha--which may mean the tessellated pavement of marble mosaic--and sat upon the judgment seat. This was the bema (GSN0968), on which the magistrate sat to give his official decisions. Now the verb for to sit is kathizein (GSN2523), and that may be either intransitive or transitive; it may mean either to sit down oneself, or to seat another.

Just possibly it means here that Pilate with one last mocking gesture brought Jesus out, clad in the terrible finery of the old purple robe and with his forehead girt with the crown of thorns and the drops of blood the thorns had awakened, and set him in the judgment seat, and with a wave of his hand said: "Am I to crucify your king?" The apocryphal Gospel of Peter says that in the mockery, they set Jesus on the seat of judgment and said: "Judge justly, King of Israel." Justin Martyr too says that "they set Jesus on the judgment seat, and said, 'Give judgment for us'." It may be that Pilate jestingly caricatured Jesus as judge. If that is so, what dramatic irony is there. That which was a mockery was the truth; and one day those who had mocked Jesus as judge would meet him as judge--and would remember.

So in this dramatic trial scene we see the immutable majesty, the undaunted courage and the serene acceptance of the Cross of Jesus. Never was he so regal as when men did their worst to humiliate him.

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JESUS AND PILATE

John 18:28-19:16 (Part 7)

We have looked at the main personalities in the trial of Jesus--the Jews with their hatred, Pilate with his haunting past, and Jesus in the serenity of his regal majesty. But certain other people were on the outskirts of the scene.

(i) There were the soldiers. When Jesus was given into their hands to be scourged, they amused themselves with their crude horse-play. He was a king? Well then, let him have a robe and crown. So they put an old purple robe on him and a crown of thorns round his brow; and they slapped him on the face. They were playing a game that ancient people commonly played. Philo in his work *On Flaccus* tells of a very similar thing that the mob at Alexandria did. "There was a madman named Carabas, afflicted not with the savage and beastlike sort of madness--for this form is undisguisable both for sufferers and bystanders--but with the quiet and milder kind. He used to spend his days and nights naked in the streets, sheltering from neither heat nor frost, a plaything of children and idle lads.

They joined in driving the wretch to the gymnasium, and, setting him aloft so that he could be seen by everyone, they flattened a strip of bark for a fillet and put it on his head, and wrapped a floor-rug round his body for a mantle, and for sceptre someone catching sight of a small piece of the native papyrus that had been thrown on the road handed it to him. And when he had assumed the insignia of kingship as in theatrical mimes, and had been arrayed in the character of king, young men bearing staffs on their shoulders took their stance on either side in place of spearmen, mimic lancers. Then others approached, some as if to greet him, others as though to plead their causes, others as though to petition him about public matters. Then from the surrounding multitudes rang forth an outlandish shout of 'Marin,' the name by which it is said that kings are called in Syria." It is a poignant thing that the soldiers treated Jesus as a ribald crowd might treat an idiot boy.

And yet of all the people involved in the trial of Jesus, the soldiers were least to blame, for they did not know what they were doing. Most likely they had come up from Caesarea and did not know what it was all about. Jesus to them was only a chance criminal.

Here is another example of the dramatic irony of John. The soldiers made a caricature of Jesus as king, while in actual fact he was the only king. Beneath the jest there was eternal truth.

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John 18:28-19:16

JESUS AND PILATE

John 18:28-19:16 (Part 8)

(ii) Last of all there was Barabbas whose episode John tells very briefly indeed. Of the custom of freeing a prisoner at Passover we know nothing more than the gospels tell us. The other gospels to some extent fill out John's brief picture and when we put all our information together we find that Barabbas was a notable prisoner, a brigand, who had taken part in a certain insurrection in the city and had committed murder (Matt.27:15-26; Mk.15:6-15; Lk.23:17-25; Ac.3:14).

The name Barabbas is interesting. There are two possibilities as to its derivation. It may be compounded of Bar Abba which would mean "son of the father," or it may be compounded of Bar Rabban, which would mean "son of the Rabbi." It is not impossible that Barabbas was the son of some Rabbi, a scion of some noble family who had gone wrong; and it may well be that, criminal though he was, he was popular with the people as a kind of Robin Hood character. It is certainly true that we must not think of Barabbas as a sneak thief, or a petty pilferer, or a burglar. He was a lestes (GSN3027), which means a brigand. Either he was one of the warrior brigands who infested the Jericho road, the kind of man into whose hands the traveller in the parable fell; or, perhaps even more probable, he was one of the Zealots who had sworn to rid Palestine of the Romans, even if it meant a career of murder, robbery, assassination and crime. Barabbas was no petty criminal. A man of violence he might be, but his violence was the kind which might well have a romance and a glamour about it and make him the popular hero of the crowd and the despair of the law at one and the same time.

There is a still more interesting thing about Barabbas. It is a second name and there must have been a first name, just as, for instance, Peter had been Simon bar-Jonah, Simon the son of Jonah. Now there are certain ancient Greek manuscripts, and certain Syrian and Armenian translations of the New Testament which actually give the name of Barabbas as Jesus. That is by no means impossible, because in those days Jesus was a common name, being the Greek form of Joshua. If so, the choice of the crowd was even more dramatic, for they were shouting: "Not Jesus the Nazarene, but Jesus Barabbas."

The choice of the mob has been the eternal choice. Barabbas was the man of force and blood, the man who chose to reach his end by violent means. Jesus was the man of love and of gentleness, whose kingdom was in the hearts of men. It is the tragic fact of history that all through the ages men have chosen the way of Barabbas and refused the way of Jesus.

What happened to Barabbas no man knows; but John Oxenham in one of his books has an imaginary picture of him. At first Barabbas could think of nothing but his freedom; then he began to look at the man who had died that he might live. Something about Jesus fascinated him and he followed him out to see the end. As he saw Jesus bearing his Cross, one thought burned into his mind: "I should have been carrying that Cross, not he. He saved me!" And as he saw Jesus hanging on Calvary, the only thing of which he could think was: "I should have been hanging there, not he. He saved me!" It may be so, or it may not be so; but certainly Barabbas was one of the sinners Jesus died to save.

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John 18:28-19:16

JESUS AND PILATE

John 18:28-19:16

(Information included in Chapter 18)

Barclay's Commentary

John 19:17-22

THE WAY TO THE CROSS

John 19:17-22 (Part 1)

So they took Jesus, and he, carrying his Cross for himself, went out to the place that is called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. They crucified him there, and with him they crucified two others, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle. Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the Cross. On it was written: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this title, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek. So the chief priests repeatedly said to Pilate: "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews.' But write, 'He said I am the King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered: "What I have written, I have written."

There was no more terrible death than death by crucifixion. Even the Romans themselves regarded it with a shudder of horror. Cicero declared that it was "the most cruel and horrifying death." Tacitus said that it was a "despicable death." It was originally a Persian method of execution. It may have been used because, to the Persians, the earth was sacred, and they wished to avoid defiling it with the body of an evil-doer. So they nailed him to a cross and left him to die there, looking to the vultures and the carrion crows to complete the work. The Carthaginians took over crucifixion from the Persians; and the Romans learned it from the Carthaginians.

Crucifixion was never used as a method of execution in the homeland, but only in the provinces, and there only in the case of slaves. It was unthinkable that a Roman citizen should die such a death. Cicero says: "It is a crime for a Roman citizen to be bound; it is a worse crime for him to be beaten; it is well nigh parricide for him to be killed; what am I to say if he be killed on a cross? A nefarious action such as that is incapable of description by any word, for there is none fit to describe it." It was that death, the most dreaded in the ancient world, the death of slaves and criminals, that Jesus died.

The routine of crucifixion was always the same. When the case had been heard and the criminal condemned, the judge uttered the fateful sentence: "Ibis ad crucem," "You will go to the cross." The verdict was carried out there and then. The condemned man was placed in the centre of a quaternion, a company of four Roman soldiers. His own cross was placed upon his shoulders. Scourging always preceded crucifixion and it is to be remembered how terrible scourging was. Often the criminal had to be lashed and goaded along the road, to keep him on his feet, as he staggered to the place of crucifixion. Before him walked an officer with a placard on which was written the crime for which he was to die and he was led through as many streets as possible on the way to execution. There was a double reason for that. There was the grim reason that as many as possible should see and take warning from his fate. But there was a merciful reason. The placard was carried before the condemned man and the long route was chosen, so that if anyone could still bear witness in his favour, he might come forward and do so. In such a case, the procession was halted and the case retried.

In Jerusalem the place of execution was called The Place of a Skull, in Aramaic, Golgotha (GSN1115 and HSN1538). (Calvary is the Latin for the Place of a Skull.) It must have been outside

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John 19:17-22

the city walls, for it was not lawful to crucify a man within the boundaries of the city. Where it was we do not certainly know.

More than one reason has been put forward for the strange, grim name, 'The Place of a Skull.' There is a legend that it was so called because the skull of Adam was buried there. There is a suggestion that it was because it was littered with the skulls of crucified criminals. That is not likely. By Roman law a criminal must hang upon his cross until he died from hunger and thirst and exposure, a torture which sometimes lasted for days; but by Jewish law the body must be taken down and buried by nightfall. In Roman law the criminal's body was not buried but simply thrown away for the vultures and the crows and the pariah dogs to dispose of; but that would have been quite illegal under Jewish law and no Jewish place would be littered with skulls. It is much more likely that the place received its name because it was on a hill shaped like a skull. In any event it was a grim name for a place where grim things were done.

So Jesus went out, bruised and bleeding, his flesh torn to ribbons by the scourging, carrying his own Cross to the place where he was to die.

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John 19:17-22

THE WAY TO THE CROSS

John 19:17-22 (Part 2)

In this passage there are two further things we must note. The inscription on Jesus' Cross was in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek. These were the three great languages of the ancient world and they stood for three great nations. In the economy of God every nation has something to teach the world; and these three stood for three great contributions to the world and to world history. Greece taught the world beauty of form and of thought; Rome taught the world law and good government; the Hebrews taught the world religion and the worship of the true God. The consummation of all these things is seen in Jesus. In him was the supreme beauty and the highest thought of God. In him was the law of God and the kingdom of God. In him was the very image of God. All the world's seekings and strivings found their consummation in him. It was symbolic that the three great languages of the world should call him king.

There is no doubt that Pilate put this inscription on the Cross of Jesus to irritate and annoy the Jews. They had just said that they had no king but Caesar; they had just absolutely refused to have Jesus as their king. And Pilate, by way of a grim jest, put this inscription on his Cross. The Jewish leaders repeatedly asked him to remove it; and Pilate refused. "What I have written," he said, "I have written." Here is Pilate the inflexible, the man who will not yield an inch. So very short a time before, this same man had been weakly vacillating as to whether to crucify Jesus or to let him go; and in the end had allowed himself to be bullied and blackmailed into giving the Jews their will. Adamant about the inscription, he had been weak about the crucifixion.

It is one of the paradoxical things in life that we can be stubborn about things which do not matter and weak about things of supreme importance. If Pilate had only withstood the blackmailing tactics of the Jews and had refused to be coerced into giving them their will with Jesus, he might have gone down in history as one of its great, strong men. But because he yielded on the important thing and stood firm on the unimportant, his name is a name of shame. Pilate was the man who took a stand on the wrong things and too late.

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John 19:23-24

THE GAMBLERS AT THE CROSS

John 19:23-24

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, and they divided them into four parts, a part for each soldier; and they took his tunic. It was a tunic which had no seam, woven throughout in one piece from the top. They said to each other: "Don't let's cut it up, but let us cast lots for it, and settle that way who will have it." This happened that the passage of scripture which says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and they cast lots for my raiment," might be fulfilled. So, then, that is what the soldiers did.

We have already seen that a criminal was escorted to the place of execution by a quaternion of four soldiers. One of the perquisites of these soldiers was the clothes of the victim. Every Jew wore five articles of apparel--his shoes, his turban, his girdle, his tunic, and his outer robe. There were four soldiers, and there were five articles. They dined for them, each had his pick and the inner tunic was left. It was seamless, woven all in one piece. To have cut it into four pieces would have been to render it useless, and so they dined again to see who would possess it. There are many things in this vivid picture.

(i) Studdert Kennedy has a poem based on it. The soldiers were gamblers; and so in a sense was Jesus. He staked everything on his utter fidelity to God; he staked everything on the Cross. This was his last and greatest appeal to men, his last and greatest act of obedience towards God.

"And, sitting down, they watched him there,
The soldiers did;
There, while they played at dice,
He made his sacrifice,
And died upon his Cross to rid
God's world of sin.
He was a gambler, too, my Christ.
He took his life and threw
It for a world redeemed.
And ere the agony was done,
Before the westering sun went down,
Crowning that day with its crimson crown,
He knew that he had won."

There is a sense in which every Christian is a gambler, for every Christian must venture for his name.

(ii) No picture so shows the indifference of the world to Christ. There on the Cross Jesus was dying in agony; and there at the foot of the Cross the soldiers threw their dice as if it did not matter. An artist painted Christ standing with nail-pierced hands outstretched in a modern city, while the crowds surge by. Not one of them is even sparing him a look, except only a young hospital nurse; and beneath the picture there is the question: "Is it nothing to you all you who pass by?"

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John 19:23-24

(Lam.1:12). The tragedy is not the hostility of the world to Christ; the tragedy is the world's indifference which treats the love of God as if it did not matter.

(iii) There are two further points which we must note in this picture. There is a legend that Mary herself had woven the seamless tunic and given it as a last gift to her son when he went out into the world. If that be true--and it may well be, for it was a custom of Jewish mothers to do just that--there is a double poignancy in the picture of these insensitive soldiers gambling for the tunic of Jesus which was his mother's gift.

(iv) But there is something half-hidden here. Jesus' tunic is described as being without seam, woven in one piece from top to bottom. That is the precise description of the linen tunic which the High Priest wore. Let us remember that the function of the priest was to be the liaison between God and man. The Latin for priest is pontifex, which means bridge-builder, and the priest was to build a bridge between God and man. No one ever did that as Jesus did. He is the perfect High Priest through whom men come to God. Again and again we have seen that there are two meanings in so many of John's statements, a meaning which lies on the surface, and a deeper inner meaning. When John tells us of the seamless tunic of Jesus it is not just a description of the kind of clothes that Jesus wore; it is something which tells us that Jesus is the perfect priest, opening the perfect way for all men to the presence of God.

(v) Lastly we note that in this incident John finds a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. He reads back into it the saying of the Psalmist: "They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots" (Ps.22:18).

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John 19:25-27

A SON'S LOVE

John 19:25-27

But his mother, and his mother's sister, and Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary from Magdala, stood near the Cross of Jesus. So Jesus saw his mother, and he saw the disciple whom he loved standing by, and he said to his mother: "Woman! See! Your son." Then he said to the disciple: "See! Your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

In the end Jesus was not absolutely alone. At his Cross there were these four women who loved him. Some commentators explain their presence there by saying that in those days women were so unimportant that no one ever took any notice of women disciples, and that therefore these women were running no risk at all by being near the Cross of Jesus. That surely is a poor and unworthy explanation. It was always a dangerous thing to be an associate of a man whom the Roman government believed to be so dangerous that he deserved a Cross. It is always a dangerous thing to demonstrate one's love for someone whom the orthodox regard as a heretic. The presence of these women at the Cross was not due to the fact that they were so unimportant that no one would notice them; their presence was due to the fact that perfect love casts out fear.

They are a strange company. Of one, Mary the wife of Clopas, we know nothing; but we know something of the other three.

(i) There was Mary, Jesus' mother. Maybe she could not understand, but she could love. Her presence there was the most natural thing in the world for a mother. Jesus might be a criminal in the eyes of the law, but he was her son. As Kipling had it:

"If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!
I know whose tears would come down to me,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

If I were damned of body and soul,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!"

The eternal love of motherhood is in Mary at the Cross.

(ii) There was Jesus' mother's sister. In John she is not named, but a study of the parallel passages (Mk.15:40; Matt.27:56) makes it quite clear that she was Salome, the mother of James and John. The strange thing about her is that she had received from Jesus a very definite and stern rebuff.

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John 19:25-27

Once she had come to Jesus to ask him to give her sons the chief place in his kingdom (Matt.20:20), and Jesus had taught her how wrong such ambitious thoughts were. Salome was the woman he had rebuked--and yet she was there at the Cross. Her presence says much for her and for Jesus. It shows that she had the humility to accept rebuke and to love on with undiminished devotion; it shows that he could rebuke in such a way that his love shone through the rebuke. Salome's presence is a lesson to us on how to give and how to receive a rebuke

(ii) There was Mary from Magdala. All we know about her is that out of her Jesus cast seven devils (Mk.16:9; Lk.8:2). She could never forget what Jesus had done for her. His love had rescued her, and her love was such that it could never die. It was Mary's motto, written on her heart: "I will not forget what he has done for me."

But in this passage there is something which is surely one of the loveliest things in all the gospel story. When Jesus saw his mother, he could not but think of the days ahead. He could not commit her to the care of his brothers, for they did not believe in him yet (Jn.7:5). And, after all, John had a double qualification for the service Jesus entrusted to him--he was Jesus' cousin, being Salome's son, and he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. So Jesus committed Mary to John's care and John to Mary's, so that they should comfort each other's loneliness when he was gone.

There is something infinitely moving in the fact that Jesus in the agony of the Cross, when the salvation of the world hung in the balance, thought of the loneliness of his mother in the days ahead. He never forgot the duties that lay to his hand. He was Mary's eldest son, and even in the moment of his cosmic battle, he did not forget the simple things that lay near home. To the end of the day, even on the Cross, Jesus was thinking more of the sorrows of others than of his own.

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John 19:28-30

THE TRIUMPHANT ENDING

John 19:28-30

After that, when Jesus knew that everything was completed, he said, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled: "I thirst." There was a vessel standing there full of vinegar. So they put a sponge soaked in vinegar on a hyssop reed, and put it to his mouth. When he had received the vinegar, Jesus said; "It is finished." And he leaned his head back, and gave up his spirit.

In this passage John brings us face to face with two things about Jesus.

(i) He brings us face to face with his human suffering; when Jesus was on the Cross, he knew the agony of thirst. When John was writing his gospel, round about A.D. 100, a certain tendency had arisen in religious and philosophical thought, called gnosticism. One of its great tenets was that spirit was altogether good and matter altogether evil. Certain conclusions followed. One was that God, who was pure spirit, could never take upon himself a body, because that was matter, and matter was evil. They therefore taught that Jesus never had a real body. They said that he was only a phantom. They said, for instance, that when Jesus walked, his feet left no prints on the ground, because he was pure spirit in a phantom body.

They went on to argue that God could never really suffer, and that therefore Jesus never really suffered but went through the whole experience of the Cross without any real pain. When the Gnostics thought like that, they believed they were honouring God and honouring Jesus; but they were really destroying Jesus. If he was ever to redeem man, he must become man. He had to become what we are in order to make us what he is. That is why John stresses the fact that Jesus felt thirst; he wished to show that he was really human and really underwent the agony of the Cross. John goes out of his way to stress the real humanity and the real suffering of Jesus.

(ii) But, equally, he brings us face to face with the triumph of Jesus. When we compare the four gospels we find a most illuminating thing. The other three do not tell us that Jesus said, "It is finished." But they do tell us that he died with a great shout upon his lips (Matt.27:50; Mk.15:37; Lk.23:46). On the other hand, John does not speak of the great cry, but does say that Jesus' last words were, "It is finished." The explanation is that the great shout and the words, "It is finished," are one and the same thing. "It is finished" is one word in Greek--*tetelestai* (GSN5055)--and Jesus died with a shout of triumph on his lips. He did not say, "It is finished," in weary defeat; he said it as one who shouts for joy because the victory is won. He seemed to be broken on the Cross, but he knew that his victory was won.

The last sentence of this passage makes the thing even clearer. John says that Jesus leaned back his head and gave up his spirit. John uses the word which might be used for settling back upon a pillow. For Jesus the strife was over and the battle was won; and even on the Cross he knew the joy of victory and the rest of the man who has completed his task and can lean back, content and at peace.

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John 19:28-30

Two further things we must notice in this passage, John traces back Jesus' cry, "I thirst," to the fulfilment of a verse in the Old Testament. He is thinking of Ps.69:21. "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

The second thing is another of John's hidden things. He tells us that it was on a hyssop reed that they put the sponge containing the vinegar. Now a hyssop reed is an unlikely thing to use for such a purpose, for it was only a stalk, like strong grass, and at the most two feet long. So unlikely is it that some scholars have thought that it is a mistake for a very similar word which means a lance or a spear. But it was hyssop which John wrote and hyssop which John meant. When we go centuries back to the first Passover when the children of Israel left their slavery in Egypt, we remember how the angel of death was to walk abroad that night and to slay every first born son of the Egyptians. We remember how the Israelites were to slay the Passover lamb and were to smear the doorposts of their houses with its blood so that the avenging angel of death would pass over their houses. And the ancient instruction was: "Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin" (Exo.12:22). It was the blood of the Passover lamb which saved the people of God; it was the blood of Jesus which was to save the world from sin. The very mention of hyssop would take the thoughts of any Jew back to the saving blood of the Passover lamb; and this was John's way of saying that Jesus was the great Passover Lamb of God whose death was to save the whole world from sin.

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John 19:31-37

THE WATER AND THE BLOOD

John 19:31-37

Since it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a very important day) the Jews asked Pilate to break their limbs, and to have the bodies removed. So the soldiers came, and they broke the limbs of the first criminal, and of the other who had been crucified with him. When they came to Jesus, and when they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his limbs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately water and blood came forth. And he who saw it is a witness to this, and his word is true. And he knows that he is speaking the truth, that you also may believe. These things happened that the passage of scripture which says: "His bone shall not be broken," should be fulfilled. And again another passage says: "They shall see him whom they have pierced."

In one thing the Jews were more merciful than the Romans. When the Romans carried out crucifixion under their own customs, the victim was simply left to die on the cross. He might hang for days in the heat of the midday sun and the cold of the night, tortured by thirst and tortured also by the gnats and the flies crawling in the weals on his torn back. Often men died raving mad on their crosses. Nor did the Romans bury the bodies of crucified criminals. They simply took them down and let the vultures and the crows and the dogs feed upon them.

The Jewish law was different. It laid it down: "If a man has committed a crime punishable by death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but you shall bury him the same day" (Deut.21:22-23). The Mishnah, the Jewish scribal law, laid down: "Everyone who allows the dead to remain overnight transgresses a positive command." The Sanhedrin actually was charged to have two burying places ready for those who had suffered the death penalty and were not to be buried in the burying place of their fathers. On this occasion it was even more important that the bodies should not be allowed to hang on the crosses overnight, because the next day was the Sabbath, and the very special Sabbath of the Passover.

A grim method was used to despatch criminals who lingered on. Their limbs were smashed with a mallet. That was done to the criminals who were crucified with Jesus, but mercifully he was spared that, for he was already dead. John sees that sparing of Jesus as a symbol of another Old Testament passage. It was laid down of the Passover lamb that not a bone of it should be broken (Num.9:12). Once again John is seeing Jesus as the Passover Lamb who delivers his people from death.

Finally there follows a strange incident. When the soldiers saw that Jesus was already dead they did not break his limbs with the mallet; but one of them--it must have been to make doubly sure that Jesus was dead--thrust a spear into his side. And there flowed out water and blood. John attaches special importance to that. He sees in it a fulfilment of the prophecy in Zech.12:10: "They look on him whom they have pierced." And he goes out of his way to say that this is an eye-witness account of what actually happened, and that he personally guarantees that it is true.

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John 19:31-37

First of all, let us ask what actually happened. We cannot be sure but it may well be that Jesus died literally of a broken heart. Normally, of course, the body of a dead man will not bleed. It is suggested that what happened was that Jesus' experiences, physical and emotional, were so terrible that his heart was ruptured. When that happened the blood of the heart mingled with the fluid of the pericardium which surrounds the heart. The spear of the soldier pierced the pericardium and the mingled fluid and blood came forth. It would be a poignant thing to believe that Jesus, in the literal sense of the term, died of a broken heart.

Even so, why does John stress it so much? He does so for two reasons.

(i) To him it was the final, unanswerable proof that Jesus was a real man with a real body. Here was the answer to the gnostics with their ideas of phantoms and spirits and an unreal manhood. Here was proof that Jesus was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

(ii) But to John this was more than a proof of the manhood of Jesus. It was a symbol of the two great sacraments of the Church. There is one sacrament which is based on water-baptism; and there is one which is based on blood--the Lord's Supper with its cup of blood--red wine. The water of baptism is the sign of the cleansing grace of God in Jesus Christ; the wine of the Lord's Supper is the symbol of the blood which was shed to save men from their sins. The water and the blood which flowed from the side of Christ were to John the sign of the cleansing water of baptism and the cleansing blood commemorated and experienced in the Lord's Supper. As Toplady wrote:

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

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John 19:38-42

THE LAST GIFTS TO JESUS

John 19:38-42

After that, Joseph from Arimathaea, who because of fear of the Jews was a secret disciple of Jesus, asked Pilate to be allowed to take away Jesus' body, and Pilate gave him permission to do so. So he came and took his body away. Nicodemus, who first came to Jesus by night, came too, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds in weight. So they took Jesus' body and they wrapped it in linen clothes with spices, as it is the Jewish custom to lay a body in the tomb. There was a garden in the place where he was crucified; and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. So they laid Jesus there, because it was the day of preparation for the Sabbath, because the tomb was near at hand.

So Jesus died, and what had to be done now must be done quickly, for the Sabbath was almost begun and on the Sabbath no work could be done. The friends of Jesus were poor and could not have given him a fitting burial; but two people came forward.

Joseph of Arimathaea was one. He had always been a disciple of Jesus; he was a great man and a member of the Sanhedrin, and up to now he had kept his discipleship secret for he was afraid to make it known. Nicodemus was the other. It was the Jewish custom to wrap the bodies of the dead in linen clothes and to put sweet spices between the folds of the linen. Nicodemus brought enough spices for the burial of a king. So Joseph gave to Jesus a tomb; and Nicodemus gave him the clothes to wear within the tomb.

There is both tragedy and glory here.

(i) There is tragedy. Both Nicodemus and Joseph were members of the Sanhedrin, but they were secret disciples of Jesus. Either they had absented themselves from the meeting of the Sanhedrin which examined him and formulated the charge against him, or they had sat silent through it all. What a difference it would have made to Jesus, if, among these condemning, hectoring voices, one voice had been raised in his support. What a difference it would have made to see loyalty on one face amidst that sea of bleak, envenomed faces. But Nicodemus and Joseph were afraid.

We so often leave our tributes until people are dead. How much greater would loyalty in life have been than a new tomb and a shroud fit for a king. One flower in life is worth all the wreaths in the world in death; one word of love and praise and thanks in life is worth all the panegyrics in the world when life is gone.

(ii) But there is glory here, too. The death of Jesus had done for Joseph and Nicodemus what not even his life could do. No sooner had Jesus died on the Cross than Joseph forgot his fear and bearded the Roman governor with a request for the body. No sooner had Jesus died on the Cross than Nicodemus was there to bring a tribute that all men could see. The cowardice, the hesitation, the prudent concealment were gone. Those who had been afraid when Jesus was alive declared for him in a way that everyone could see as soon as he was dead. Jesus had not been dead an hour

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John 19:38-42

when his own prophecy came true: "I when I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself" (Jn.12:32).

It may be that the silence of Nicodemus or his absence from the Sanhedrin brought sorrow to Jesus; but it is certain that he knew of the way in which they cast their fear aside after the Cross, and it is certain that already his heart was glad, for already the power of the Cross had begun to operate, and already it was drawing all men to him. The power of the Cross was even then turning the coward into the hero, and the waverer into the man who took an irrevocable decision for Christ.

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John 20:1-10

BEWILDERED LOVE

John 20:1-10 (Part 1)

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Mary from Magdala came to the tomb; and she saw the stone taken away from the tomb. So she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and she said to them: "They have taken the Lord away from the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they set out for the tomb. The two were running together. The other disciple ran on ahead faster than Peter, and he was the first to come to the tomb. He stooped down and he saw the linen clothes lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and he went into the tomb. He saw the linen clothes lying there and he saw the napkin, which had been upon Jesus' head, not lying with the rest of the linen clothes, but lying apart from them, still in its folds, by itself. So then, the other disciple, who had arrived first at the tomb, went in too, and he saw, and believed.

For as yet they did not realize the meaning of scripture, that Jesus should rise from the dead. So the disciples went back to their lodgings.

No one ever loved Jesus so much as Mary Magdalene. He had done something for her that no one else could ever do, and she could never forget. Tradition has always had it that Mary was a scarlet sinner, whom Jesus reclaimed and forgave and purified. Henry Kingsley has a lovely poem about her.

"Magdalen at Michael's gate
Tirled at the pin;
On Joseph's thorn sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Hast thou seen the wounds?' said Michael,
'Knowest thou thy sin?'
'It is evening, evening,' sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Yes, I have seen the wounds,
And I know my sin.'
'She knows it well, well, well,' sang the blackbird.
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Thou bringest no offerings,' said Michael,
'Nought save sin.'
And the blackbird sang, 'She is sorry, sorry, sorry.'
'Let her in! Let her in!'

When he had sung himself to sleep,
And night did begin,

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John 20:1-10

One came and opened Michael's gate,
And Magdalen went in."

Mary had sinned much and she loved much; and love was all she had to bring.

It was the custom in Palestine to visit the tomb of a loved one for three days after the body had been laid to rest. It was believed that for three days the spirit of the dead person hovered round the tomb; but then it departed because the body had become unrecognizable through decay. Jesus' friends could not come to the tomb on the Sabbath, because to make the journey then would have been to break the law. Sabbath is, of course, our Saturday, so it was on Sunday morning that Mary came to the tomb. She came very early. The word used for early is *proi* (GSN4404) which was the technical word for the last of the four watches into which the night was divided, that which ran from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. It was still grey dark when Mary came, because she could no longer stay away.

When she arrived at the tomb she was amazed and shocked. Tombs in ancient times were not commonly closed by doors. In front of the opening was a groove in the ground; and in the groove ran a stone, circular like a cartwheel; and the stone was wheeled into position to close the opening. Further Matthew tells us that the authorities had actually sealed the stone to make sure that no one would move it (Matt.27:66). Mary was astonished to find it removed. Two things may have entered her mind. She may have thought that the Jews had taken away Jesus' body; that, not satisfied with killing him on a cross, they were inflicting further indignities on him. But there were ghoulis creatures who made it their business to rob tombs; and Mary may have thought that this had happened here.

It was a situation Mary felt that she could not face herself; so she returned to the city to seek out Peter and John. Mary is the supreme instance of one who went on loving and believing even when she could not understand; and that is the love and the belief which in the end finds glory.

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John 20:1-10

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

John 20:1-10 (Part 2)

One of the illuminating things in this story is that Peter was still the acknowledged leader of the apostolic band. It was to him that Mary went. In spite of his denial of Jesus--and a story like that would not be long in being broadcast--Peter was still the leader. We often talk of Peter's weakness and instability, but there must have been something outstanding about a man who could face his fellow-men after that disastrous crash into cowardice; there must have been something about a man whom others were prepared to accept as leader even after that. His moment's weakness must never blind us to the moral strength and stature of Peter, and to the fact that he was a born leader.

So, then, it was to Peter and John that Mary went; and they immediately set out for the tomb. They went at a run; and John, who must have been a younger man than Peter since he lived on until the end of the century, outstripped Peter in this breathless race. When they came to the tomb, John looked in but went no farther. Peter with typical impulsiveness not only looked in, but went in. For the moment Peter was only amazed at the empty tomb; but things began to happen in John's mind. If someone had removed Jesus' body, if tomb-robbers had been at work, why should they leave the grave-clothes?

Then something else struck him--the grave-clothes were not dishevelled and disarranged. They were lying there still in their folds--that is what the Greek means--the clothes for the body where the body had been; the napkin where the head had lain. The whole point of the description is that the grave-clothes did not look as if they had been put off or taken off; they were lying there in their regular folds as if the body of Jesus had simply evaporated out of them. The sight suddenly penetrated to John's mind; he realized what had happened--and he believed. It was not what he had read in scripture which convinced him that Jesus had risen; it was what he saw with his own eyes.

The part that love plays in this story is extraordinary. It was Mary, who loved Jesus so much, who was first at the tomb. It was John, the disciple whom Jesus loved and who loved Jesus, who was first to believe in the Resurrection. That must always be John's great glory. He was the first man to understand and to believe. Love gave him eyes to read the signs and a mind to understand.

Here we have the great law of life. In any kind of work it is true that we cannot really interpret the thought of another person, unless between us and him there is a bond of sympathy. It is at once clear, for instance, when the conductor of an orchestra is in sympathy with the music of the composer whose work he is conducting. Love is the great interpreter. Love can grasp the truth when intellect is left groping and uncertain. Love can realize the meaning of a thing when research is blind. Once a young artist brought a picture of Jesus to Dore for his verdict. Dore was slow to give it; but at last he did so in one sentence. "You don't love him, or you would paint him better." We can neither understand Jesus nor help others to understand him, unless we take our hearts to him as well as our minds.

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John 20:11-18

THE GREAT RECOGNITION

John 20:11-18 (Part 1)

But Mary stood weeping outside at the tomb. As she wept she stooped down, and looked into the tomb, and she saw two angels sitting there in white robes, one at the head, and the other at the feet of the place where Jesus' body had been lying. They said to her: "Woman, why are you crying?" She said to them: "Because they have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned round, and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her: "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?" She, thinking that he was the gardener, said to him: "Sir, if you are the man who has removed him, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her: "Mary!" She turned, and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" which means, "Master!" Jesus said to her: "Do not touch me! For I have not yet ascended to the Father.

But go to my brethren, and say to them that I am going to ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary of Magdala came to the disciples, telling them: "I have seen the Lord," and telling them what he had said to her.

Someone has called this story the greatest recognition scene in all literature. To Mary belongs the glory of being the first person to see the Risen Christ. The whole story is scattered with indications of her love. She had come back to the tomb; she had taken her message to Peter and John, and then must have been left behind in their race to the tomb so that by the time she got there, they were gone. So she stood there weeping. There is no need to seek for elaborate reasons why Mary did not know Jesus. The simple and the poignant fact is that she could not see him through her tears.

Her whole conversation with the person she thought to be the gardener shows her love. "If you are the man who has removed him, tell me where you have laid him." She never mentioned the name of Jesus; she thought everyone must know of whom she was thinking; her mind was so full of him that there was not anyone else for her in all the world. "I will take him away." How was her woman's strength to do that? Where was she going to take him? She had not even thought of these problems. Her one desire was to weep her love over Jesus' dead body. As soon as she had answered the person she took to be the gardener, she must have turned again to the tomb and so turned her back on Jesus. Then came his single word, "Mary!" and her single answer, "Master!" (Rabbouni (GSN4462) is simply an Aramaic form of Rabbi (GSN4461); there is no difference between the words).

So we see there were two very simple and yet very profound reasons why Mary did not recognize Jesus.

(i) She could not recognize him because of her tears. They blinded her eyes so that she could not see. When we lose a dear one, there is always sorrow in our hearts and tears shed or unshed in our eyes. But one thing we must always remember--at such a time our sorrow is in essence selfish. It is of our loneliness, our loss, our desolation, that we are thinking. We cannot be weeping for one who has gone to be the guest of God; it is for ourselves we weep. That is natural and inevitable. At the

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same time, we must never allow our tears to blind us to the glory of heaven. Tears there must be, but through the tears we should glimpse the glory.

(ii) She could not recognize Jesus because she insisted on facing in the wrong direction. She could not take her eyes off the tomb and so had her back to him. Again it is often so with us. At such a time our eyes are upon the cold earth of the grave; but we must wrench our eyes away from that. That is not where our loved ones are; their worn-out bodies may be there; but the real person is in the heavenly places in the fellowship of Jesus face to face, and in the glory of God.

When sorrow comes, we must never let tears blind our eyes to glory; and we must never fasten our eyes upon the grave and forget the heavens. Alan Walker in Everybody's Calvary tells of officiating at a funeral for people to whom the service "Was only a form, and who had neither Christian faith nor Christian connection. "When the service was over a young woman looked into the grave, and said brokenly: 'Goodbye, father.' It is the end for those who have no Christian hope." But for us at such a time, it is literally "Adieu!" "To God!" and it is literally "Until we meet again."

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John 20:11-18

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

John 20:11-18 (Part 2)

There is one very real difficulty in this passage. When the recognition scene is complete, at first sight, at all events, Jesus said to Mary: "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." Just a few verses later we find him inviting Thomas to touch him (Jn.20:27). In Luke we read of him inviting the terrified disciples: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see that I have" (Lk.24:39). In Matthew's story we read that "they came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him" (Matt.28:9). Even the form of John's statement is difficult. He makes Jesus say: "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father," as if to say that he could be touched after he had ascended. No explanation of this is fully satisfying.

(i) The whole matter has been given a spiritual significance. It has been argued that the only real contact with Jesus does in fact come after his Ascension; that it is not the physical touch of hand to hand that is important, but the contact which comes through faith with the Risen and Ever-living Lord. That is certainly true and precious but it does not seem to be the meaning of the passage here.

(ii) It is suggested that the Greek is really a mistranslation of an Aramaic original. Jesus of course would speak in Aramaic, and not in Greek; and what John gives us is a translation into Greek of what Jesus said. It is suggested that what Jesus really said was: "Hold me not; but before I ascend to my Father go to my brethren and say to them..." It would be as if Jesus said: "Do not spend so long in worshipping me in the joy of your new discovery. Go and tell the good news to the rest of the disciples." It may well be that here we have the explanation. The Greek imperative is a present imperative, and strictly speaking ought to mean: "Stop touching me." It may be that Jesus was saying to Mary: "don't go on clutching me selfishly to yourself. In a short time I am going back to my Father. I want to meet my disciples as often as possible before then. Go and tell them the good news that none of the time that we and they should have together may be wasted." That would make excellent sense, and that in fact is what Mary did.

(iii) There is one further possibility. In the other three gospels, the fear of those who suddenly recognized Jesus is always stressed. In Matt.28:10 Jesus' words are: "Do not be afraid." In Mk.16:8 the story finishes: "For they were afraid." In Lk.24:5 it is said that they were "frightened." In John's story as it stands there is no mention of this awe-stricken fear. Now, sometimes the eyes of the scribes who copied the manuscripts made mistakes, for the manuscripts were not easy to read. Some scholars think that what John originally wrote was not ME (GSN3361) HAPTOU (GSN0680), Do not touch me, but, ME (GSN3361) PTOOU (GSN4422), Do not be afraid. (The verb PTOEIN (GSN4422) means to flutter with fear.) In that case Jesus was saying to Mary: "Don't be afraid; I haven't gone to my Father yet; I am still here with you."

No explanation of this saying of Jesus is altogether satisfying, but perhaps the second is the best of the three which we have considered.

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John 20:11-18

Whatever happened, Jesus sent Mary back to the disciples with the message that what he had so often told them was now about to happen--he was on his way to his father; and Mary came with the news, "I have seen the Lord."

In that message of Mary there is the very essence of Christianity, for a Christian is essentially one who can say: "I have seen the Lord." Christianity does not mean knowing about Jesus; it means knowing him. It does not mean arguing about him; it means meeting him. It means the certainty of experience that Jesus is alive.

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John 20:19-23

THE COMMISSION OF CHRIST

John 20:19-23

Late on that day, the first day of the week, when for fear of the Jews the doors had been locked in the place where the disciples were, Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said: "Peace be to you." And when he had said this he showed them his hands and his side. So the disciples rejoiced because they had seen the Lord. Jesus again said to them: "Peace to you. Even as the Father sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you remit the sins of any, they are remitted; if you retain them they are retained."

It is most likely that the disciples continued to meet in the upper room where the Last Supper had been held. But they met in something very like terror. They knew the envenomed bitterness of the Jews who had compassed the death of Jesus, and they were afraid that their turn would come next. So they were meeting in terror, listening fearfully for every step on the stair and for every knock at the door, lest the emissaries of the Sanhedrin should come to arrest them too. As they sat there, Jesus was suddenly in their midst. He gave them the normal everyday eastern greeting: "Peace be to you." It means far more than: "May you be saved from trouble." It means: "May God give you every good thing." Then Jesus gave the disciples the commission which the Church must never forget.

(i) He said that as God had sent him forth, so he sent them forth. Here is what Westcott called "The Charter of the Church." It means three things.

(a) It means that Jesus Christ needs the Church which is exactly what Paul meant when he called the Church "the body of Christ" (Eph.1:23; 1Cor.12:12). Jesus had come with a message for all men and now he was going back to his Father. His message could never be taken to all men, unless the Church took it. The Church was to be a mouth to speak for Jesus, feet to run upon his errands, hands to do his work. Therefore, the first thing this means is that Jesus is dependent on his Church.

(b) It means that the Church needs Jesus. A person who is to be sent out needs someone to send him; he needs a message to take; he needs a power and an authority to back his message; he needs someone to whom he may turn when he is in doubt and in difficulty. Without Jesus, the Church has no message; without him she has no power; without him she has no one to turn to when up against it; without him she has nothing to enlighten her mind, to strengthen her arm, and to encourage her heart. This means that the Church is dependent on Jesus.

(c) There remains still another thing. The sending out of the Church by Jesus is parallel to the sending out of Jesus by God. But no one can read the story of the Fourth Gospel without seeing that the relationship between Jesus and God was continually dependent on Jesus' perfect obedience and perfect love. Jesus could be God's messenger only because he rendered to God that perfect obedience and love. It follows that the Church is fit to be the messenger and the instrument of Christ only when she perfectly loves him and perfectly obeys him. The Church must never be out to propagate her message; she must be out to propagate the message of Christ. She must never be out to follow man-made policies; she must be out to follow the will of Christ. The Church fads

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whenever she tries to solve some problem in her own wisdom and strength, and leaves out of account the will and guidance of Jesus Christ.

(ii) Jesus breathed on his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that, when John spoke in this way, he was thinking back to the old story of the creation of man. There the writer says: "And the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen.2:7). This was the same picture as Ezekiel saw in the valley of dead, dry bones, when he heard God say to the wind: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breath upon these slain that they may live" (Eze.37:9). The coming of the Holy Spirit is like the wakening of life from the dead. When he comes upon the Church she is recreated for her task.

(iii) Jesus said to the disciples: "If you remit the sins of anyone, they are remitted; if you retain them, they are retained." This is a saying whose true meaning we must be careful to understand. One thing is certain--no man can forgive any other man's sins. But another thing is equally certain--it is the great privilege of the Church to convey the message of God's forgiveness to men. Suppose someone brings us a message from another, our assessment of the value of that message will depend on how well the bringer of the message knows the sender. If someone proposes to interpret another's thought to us, we know that the value of his interpretation depends on his closeness to the other.

The apostles had the best of all rights to bring Jesus' message to men, because they knew him best. If they knew that a person was really penitent, they could with absolute certainty proclaim to him the forgiveness of Christ. But equally, if they knew that there was no penitence in his heart or that he was trading on the love and the mercy of God, they could tell him that until his heart was altered there was no forgiveness for him. This sentence does not mean that the power to forgive sins was ever entrusted to any man or men; it means that the power to proclaim that forgiveness was so entrusted; along with the power to warn that forgiveness is not open to the impenitent. This sentence lays down the duty of the Church to convey forgiveness to the penitent in heart and to warn the impenitent that they are forfeiting the mercy of God.

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John 20:24-29

THE DOUBTER CONVINCED

John 20:24-29 (Part 1)

But Thomas, who is called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him: "We have seen the Lord." He said to them: "Unless I see the print of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the print of the nails, and unless I put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Eight days later the disciples were again in the room, and Thomas was with them. When the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said: "Peace be to you." Then he said to Thomas: "Stretch out your finger here, and look at my hands; stretch out your hand and put it into my side; and show yourself not faithless but believing." Thomas answered: "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him: "You have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and who have believed."

To Thomas the Cross was only what he had expected. When Jesus had proposed going to Bethany, after the news of Lazarus' illness had come, Thomas' reaction had been: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn. 11:16). Thomas never lacked courage, but he was the natural pessimist. There can never be any doubt that he loved Jesus. He loved him enough to be willing to go to Jerusalem and die with him when the other disciples were hesitant and afraid. What he had expected had happened, and when it came, for all that he had expected it, he was broken-hearted, so broken-hearted that he could not meet the eyes of men, but must be alone with his grief.

King George the Fifth used to say that one of his rules of life was: "If I have to suffer, let me be like a well-bred animal, and let me go and suffer alone." Thomas had to face his suffering and his sorrow alone. So it happened that, when Jesus came back again, Thomas was not there; and the news that he had come back seemed to him far too good to be true, and he refused to believe it. Belligerent in his pessimism, he said that he would never believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he had seen and handled the print of the nails in his hands and thrust his hand into the wound the spear had made in Jesus' side. (There is no mention of any wound-print in Jesus' feet because in crucifixion the feet were usually not nailed, but only loosely bound to the cross.)

Another week elapsed and Jesus came back again; and this time Thomas was there. And Jesus knew Thomas' heart. He repeated Thomas' own words, and invited him to make the test that he had demanded. And Thomas' heart ran out in love and devotion, and all he could say was: "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him: "Thomas, you needed the eyes of sight to make you believe; but the days will come when men will see with the eye of faith and believe."

The character of Thomas stands out clear before us.

(i) He made one mistake. He withdrew from the Christian fellowship. He sought loneliness rather than togetherness. And because he was not there with his fellow Christians he missed the first coming of Jesus. We miss a great deal when we separate ourselves from the Christian fellowship and try to be alone. Things can happen to us within the fellowship of Christ's Church which will not happen when we are alone. When sorrow comes and sadness envelops us, we often tend to shut ourselves up and refuse to meet people. That is the very time when, in spite of our sorrow, we

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should seek the fellowship of Christ's people, for it is there that we are likeliest of all to meet him face to face.

(ii) But Thomas had two great virtues. He absolutely refused to say that he understood what he did not understand, or that he believed what he did not believe. There is an uncompromising honesty about him. He would never still his doubts by pretending that they did not exist. He was not the kind of man who would rattle off a creed without understanding what it was all about. Thomas had to be sure--and he was quite right. Tennyson wrote:

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds."

There is more ultimate faith in the man who insists on being sure than in the man who glibly repeats things which he has never thought out, and which he may not really believe. It is doubt like that which in the end arrives at certainty.

(ii) Thomas' other great virtue was that when he was sure, he went the whole way. "My Lord and my God!" said he. There was no halfway house about Thomas. He was not airing his doubts just for the sake of mental acrobatics; he doubted in order to become sure; and when he did, his surrender to certainty was complete. And when a man fights his way through his doubts to the conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord, he has attained to a certainty that the man who unthinkingly accepts things can never reach.

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John 20:24-29

THOMAS IN THE AFTER DAYS

John 20:24-29 (Part 2)

We do not know for sure what happened to Thomas in the after days; but there is an apocryphal book called The Acts of Thomas which purports to give his history. It is of course only legend, but there may well be some history beneath the legend; and certainly in it Thomas is true to character. Here is part of the story which it tells.

After the death of Jesus the disciples divided up the world among them, so that each might go to some country to preach the gospel. India fell by lot to Thomas. (The Thomist Church in South India does trace its origin to him.) At first he refused to go, saying that he was not strong enough for the long journey. He said: "I am an Hebrew man; how can I go amongst the Indians and preach the truth?" Jesus appeared to him by night and said: "Fear not, Thomas, go thou unto India and preach the word there, for my grace is with thee." But Thomas still stubbornly refused. "Whither thou wouldest send me, send me," he said, "but elsewhere, for unto the Indians I will not go."

It so happened that there had come a certain merchant from India to Jerusalem called Abbanes. He had been sent by King Gundaphorus to find a skilled carpenter and to bring him back to India, and Thomas was a carpenter. Jesus came up to Abbanes in the market-place and said to him: "Wouldest thou buy a carpenter?" Abbanes said: "Yes." Jesus said, "I have a slave that is a carpenter, and I desire to sell him," and he pointed at Thomas in the distance. So they agreed on a price and Thomas was sold, and the agreement ran: "I, Jesus, the son of Joseph the carpenter, acknowledge that I have sold my slave, Thomas by name, unto thee Abbanes, a merchant of Gundaphorus, king of the Indians." When the deed was drawn up Jesus found Thomas and took him to Abbanes. Abbanes said: "Is this your master?" Thomas said: "Indeed he is." Abbanes said: "I have bought thee from him." And Thomas said nothing. But in the morning he rose early and prayed, and after his prayer he said to Jesus: "I will go whither thou wilt, Lord Jesus, thy win be done." It is the same old Thomas, slow to be sure, slow to surrender; but once his surrender is made, it is complete.

The story goes on to tell how Gundaphorus commanded Thomas to build a palace, and Thomas said that he was well able to do so. The king gave him money in plenty to buy materials and to hire workmen, but Thomas gave it all away to the poor. Always he told the king that the palace was rising steadily. The king was suspicious. In the end he sent for Thomas: "Hast thou built me the palace?" he demanded. Thomas answered: "Yes." "When, then, shall we go and see it?" asked the king. Thomas answered: "Thou canst not see it now, but when thou departest this life, then thou shalt see it." At first the king was very angry and Thomas was in danger of his life; but in the end the king too was won for Christ, and so Thomas brought Christianity to India.

There is something very lovable and very admirable about Thomas. Faith was never an easy thing for him; obedience never came readily to him. He was the man who had to be sure; he was the man who had to count the cost. But once he was sure, and once he had counted the cost, he was the man who went to the ultimate limit of faith and obedience. A faith like Thomas' is better than any glib

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profession; and an obedience like his is better than an easy acquiescence which agrees to do a thing without counting the cost and then goes back upon its word.

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John 20:30-31

THE AIM OF THE GOSPEL

John 20:30-31

Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which have not been written in this book. These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

It is quite clear that as the gospel was originally planned, it comes to an end with this verse. Jn.21 is to be regarded as an appendix and an afterthought.

No passage in the gospels better sums up the aim of the writers than this.

(i) It is quite clear that the gospels never set out to give a full account of the life of Jesus. They do not follow him from day to day but are selective. They give us, not an exhaustive account of everything that Jesus said or did, but a selection which shows what he was like and the kind of things he was always doing.

(ii) It is also clear that the gospels were not meant to be biographies of Jesus, but appeals to take him as Saviour, Master and Lord. Their aim was, not to give information, but to give life. It was to paint such a picture of Jesus that the reader would be bound to see that the person who could speak and teach and act and heal like this could be none other than the Son of God; and that in that belief he might find the secret of real life.

When we approach the gospels as history and biography, we approach them in the wrong spirit. We must read them, not primarily as historians seeking information, but as men and women seeking God.

On any view Jn.21 is a strange chapter. The gospel comes to an end with Jn.20; and then seems to begin again in Jn.21. Unless there had been certain very special things that he wanted to say, the man who put the gospel into its final form would never have added this chapter. We know that in John's gospel there are often two meanings, one which lies on the surface, and a deeper one which lies beneath. So, then, as we study this chapter, we will try to find out why it is so strangely added after the gospel seemed to have come to an end.

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John 21:1-14

THE RISEN LORD

John 21:1-14 (Part 1)

After these things Jesus again showed himself to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. This was the way in which he showed himself. Simon Peter, and Thomas, who is called Didymus, and Nathanael, who came from Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples, were together. Simon Peter said to them: "I am going to fish." They said to him: "We, too, are coming with you." They went out, and went on board the boat, and that night they caught nothing. When early morning had come, Jesus stood on the seashore. But the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them: "Lads, have you got any fish?" They answered: "No." He said to them: "Cast your net on the right hand side of the ship, and you will find a catch." So they cast the net, and now they could not haul it in for the great number of the fishes.

The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter: "It is the Lord." So, when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he was stripped for work) and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came to shore in the boat (for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards) dragging the net full of fishes. When they had disembarked on land, they saw a charcoal fire set there, and fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them: "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." So Simon Peter went on board and hauled the net to land, full of large fishes, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and, although there were so many of them, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them: "come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared to ask him: "Who are you?" because they knew that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took bread and gave it to them, and he gave them the fish in the same way. This was the third time Jesus showed himself to the disciples after he had been raised from among the dead.

It was certainly someone who knew the fishermen of the Sea of Galilee who wrote this story. Night-time was the best for fishing. W. M. Thomson in *The Land and the Book* describes night fishing: "There are certain kinds of fishing always carried on at night. It is a beautiful sight. With blazing torch, the boat glides over the flashing sea, and the men stand gazing keenly into it until their prey is sighted, when, quick as lightning, they fling their net or fly their spear; and often you see the tired fishermen come sullenly into harbour in the morning, having toiled all night in vain."

The catch here is not described as a miracle, and it is not meant to be taken as one. The description is of something which still frequently happens on the lake. Remember that the boat was only about a hundred yards from land. H. V. Morton describes how he saw two men fishing on the shores of the lake. One had waded out from the shore and was casting a bell net into the water. "But time after time the net came up empty. It was a beautiful sight to see him casting. Each time the neatly folded net belled out in the air and fell so precisely on the water that the small lead weights hit the lake at the same moment making a thin circular splash. While he was waiting for another cast, Abdul shouted to him from the bank to fling to the left, which he instantly did. This time he was successful.... Then he drew up the net and we could see the fish struggling in it.... It happens very often that the man with the hand-net must rely on the advice of someone on shore, who tells him to cast either to the left or the right, because in the clear water he can often see a shoal of fish invisible to the man in the water." Jesus was acting as guide to his fishermen friends, just as people still do today.

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John 21:1-14

It may be that it was because it was the grey dark that they did not recognize Jesus. But the eyes of the disciple whom Jesus loved were sharp. He knew it was the Lord; and when Peter realized who it was he leaped into the water. He was not actually naked. He was girt with a loin cloth as the fisher always was when he plied his trade. Now it was the Jewish law that to offer greeting was a religious act, and to carry out a religious act a man must be clothed; so Peter, before he set out to come to Jesus, put on his fisherman's tunic, for he wished to be the first to greet his Lord.

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John 21:1-14

THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

John 21:1-14 (Part 2)

Now we come to the first great reason why this strange chapter was added to the already finished gospel. It was to demonstrate once and for all the reality of the Resurrection. There were many who said that the appearances of the Risen Christ were nothing more than visions which the disciples had. Many would admit the reality of the visions but insist that they were still only visions. Some would go further and say that they were not visions but hallucinations. The gospels go far out of their way to insist that the Risen Christ was not a vision, not an hallucination, not even a spirit, but a real person. They insist that the tomb was empty and that the Risen Christ had a real body which still bore the marks of the nails and the spear thrust in his side.

But this story goes a step further. A vision or a spirit would not be likely to point out a shoal of fish to a party of fishermen. A vision or a spirit would not be likely to kindle a charcoal fire on the seashore. A vision or a spirit would not be likely to cook a meal and to share it out. And yet, as this story has it, the Risen Christ did all these things. When John tells how Jesus came back to his disciples when the doors were shut, he says: "He showed them his hands and his side" (Jn.20:20). Ignatius, when writing to the Church at Smyrna, relates an even more definite tradition about that. He says: "I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the resurrection, and when he came to Peter and his company, he said to them: 'Take, handle me, and see that I am not a bodiless demon.' And straightway they touched him, and they believed, for they were firmly convinced of his flesh and blood.... And after his resurrection he ate and drank with them as one in the flesh."

The first and simplest aim of this story is to make quite clear the reality of the resurrection. The Risen Lord was not a vision, nor the figment of someone's excited imagination, nor the appearance of a spirit or a ghost; it was Jesus who had conquered death and come back.

Barclay's Commentary

John 21:1-14

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHURCH

John 21:1-14 (Part 3)

There is a second great truth symbolized here. In the Fourth Gospel everything is meaningful, and it is therefore hardly possible that John gives the definite number one hundred and fifty-three for the fishes without meaning something by it. It has indeed been suggested that the fishes were counted simply because the catch had to be shared out between the various partners and the crew of the boat, and that the number was recorded simply because it was so exceptionally large. But when we remember John's way of putting hidden meanings in his gospel for those who have eyes to see, we must think that there is more to it than that.

Many ingenious suggestions have been made.

(i) Cyril of Alexandria said that the number 153 is made up of three things. First, there is 100; and that represents "the fullness of the Gentiles." 100, he says, is the fullest number. The shepherd's full flock is 100 (Matt.18:12). The seed's full fertility is 100-fold. So the 100 stands for the fullness of the Gentiles who will be gathered in to Christ. Second, there is the 50; and the 50 stands for the remnant of Israel who will be gathered in. Third, there is the 3; and the 3 stands for the Trinity to whose glory all things are done.

(ii) Augustine has another ingenious explanation. he says that 10 is the number of the Law, for there are ten commandments; 7 is the number of grace, for the gifts of the Spirit are sevenfold.

"Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart."

Now 7+10 makes 17; and 153 is the sum of all the figures, 1+2+3+4..., up to 17. Thus 153 stands for all those who either by Law or by grace have been moved to come to Jesus Christ.

(iii) The simplest of the explanations is that given by Jerome. He said that in the sea there are 153 different kinds of fishes; and that the catch is one which includes every kind of fish; and that therefore the number symbolizes the fact that some day all men of all nations will be gathered together to Jesus Christ.

We may note a further point. This great catch of fishes was gathered into the net, and the net held them all and was not broken. The net stands for the Church; and there is room in the Church for all men of all nations. Even if they all come in, she is big enough to hold them all.

Here John is telling us in his own vivid yet subtle way of the universality of the Church. There is no kind of exclusiveness in her, no kind of colour bar or selectiveness. The embrace of the Church is as universal as the love of God in Jesus Christ. It will lead us on to the next great reason why this chapter was added to the gospel if we note that it was Peter who drew the net to land (Jn.21:11).

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John 21:15-19

THE SHEPHERD OF CHRIST'S SHEEP

John 21:15-19

When they had breakfasted, Jesus said to Simon Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?" He said to him: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him: "Be a shepherd to my lambs." Again he said to him a second time: "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?" He said to him: "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you." He said to him: "Be a shepherd to my sheep." He said to him the third time: "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me?" Peter was vexed when he said to him the third time: "Do you love me?" So he said to him: "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." Jesus said to him: "Feed my sheep. This is the truth I tell you--when you were young, you fastened your girdle around you and you went where you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your arms, and another will gird you, and will carry you to a place not of your own choosing." He said this to show by what kind of death Peter was going to glorify God. When he had said this, he said to Peter: "Follow me!"

Here is a scene which must have been printed for ever on the mind of Peter.

(i) First we must note the question which Jesus asked Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me more than these?" As far as the language goes that can mean two things equally well.

(a) It may be that Jesus swept his hand round the boat and its nets and equipment and the catch of fishes, and said to Peter: "Simon, do you love me more than these things? Are you prepared to give them all up, to abandon all hope of a successful career, to give up a steady job and a reasonable comfort, in order to give yourself for ever to my people and to my work?" This may have been a challenge to Peter to take the final decision to give all his life to the preaching of the gospel and the caring for Christ's folk.

(b) It may be that Jesus looked at the rest of the little group of the disciples, and said to Peter: "Simon, do you love me more than your fellow-disciples do?" It may be that Jesus was looking back to a night when Peter said: "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (Matt.26:33). It may be that he was gently reminding Peter how once he had thought that he alone could be true and how his courage had failed. It is more likely that the second meaning is right, because in his answer Peter does not make comparisons any more; he is content simply to say: "You know that I love you."

(ii) Jesus asked this question three times; and there was a reason for that. It was three times that Peter denied his Lord, and it was three times that his Lord gave him the chance to affirm his love. Jesus, in his gracious forgiveness, gave Peter the chance to wipe out the memory of the threefold denial by a threefold declaration of love.

(iii) We must note what love brought Peter. (a) It brought him a task. "If you love me." Jesus said, "then give your life to shepherding the sheep and the lambs of my flock." We can prove that we love Jesus only by loving others. Love is the greatest privilege in the world, but it brings the greatest responsibility. (b) It brought Peter a cross. Jesus said to him: "When you are young you can

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John 21:15-19

choose where you will go; but the day will come when they will stretch out your hands on a cross, and you will be taken on a way you did not choose." The day came when, in Rome, Peter did die for his Lord; he, too, went to the Cross, and he asked to be nailed to it head downwards, for he said that he was not worthy to die as his Lord had died. Love brought Peter a task, and it brought him a cross. Love always involves responsibility, and it always involves sacrifice. We do not really love Christ unless we are prepared to face his task and take up his Cross.

It was not for nothing that John recorded this incident. He recorded it to show Peter as the great shepherd of Christ's people. It may be, indeed it was inevitable, that people would draw comparisons in the early Church. Some would say that John was the great one, for his flights of thought went higher than those of any other man. Some would say that Paul was the great one, for he fared to the ends of the earth for Christ. but this chapter says that Peter, too, had his place. He might not write and think like John; he might not voyage and adventure like Paul; but he had the great honour, and the lovely task, of being the shepherd of the sheep of Christ. And here is where we can follow in the steps of Peter. We may not be able to think like John; we may not be able to go out to the ends of the earth like Paul; but each of us can guard some one else from going astray, and each of us can feed the lambs of Christ with the food of the word of God.

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John 21:20-24

THE WITNESS TO CHRIST

John 21:20-24

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, the disciple who at their meal reclined on Jesus' breast and said: "Lord, who is it who is to betray you?" When Peter saw this disciple, he said to Jesus: "Lord, what is going to happen to this man?" Jesus said to him: "If I wish him to remain till I come, what has that to do with you? Your job is to follow me." So this report went out to the brethren, that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say to him that he would not die. What he did say was: "If I wish him to remain till I come, what has that got to do with you?" This is the disciple who bears witness to these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his witness is true.

This passage makes it quite clear that John must have lived to a very old age; he must have lived on until the report went round that he was going to go on living until Jesus came again. Now, just as the previous passage assigned to Peter his place in the scheme of things, this one assigns to John his place. It was his function to be pre-eminently the witness to Christ. Again, people in the early Church must have made their comparisons. They must have pointed out how Paul went away to the ends of the earth. They must have pointed out how Peter went here and there shepherding his people. And then they may have wondered what was the function of John who had lived on in Ephesus until he was so old that he was past all activity. Here is the answer: Paul might be the pioneer of Christ, Peter might be the shepherd of Christ, but John was the witness of Christ. He was the man who was able to say: "I saw these things, and I know that they are true."

To this day the final argument for Christianity is Christian experience. To this day the Christian is the man who can say: "I know Jesus Christ, and I know that these things are true."

So, at the end, this gospel takes two of the great figures of the Church, Peter and John. To each Jesus had given his function. It was Peter's to shepherd the sheep of Christ, and in the end to die for him. It was John's to witness to the story of Christ, and to live to a great old age and to come to the end in peace. That did not make them rivals in honour and prestige, nor make the one greater or less than the other; it made them both servants of Christ.

Let a man serve Christ where Christ has set him. As Jesus said to Peter: "Never mind the task that is given to someone else. Your job is to follow me." That is what he still says to each one of us. Our glory is never in comparison with other men; our glory is the service of Christ in whatever capacity he has allotted to us.

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John 21:21-25

THE LIMITLESS CHRIST

John 21:25

There are many other things that Jesus did, and if they were written down one by one, I think that not even the world itself would be big enough to hold the written volumes.

In this last chapter the writer of the Fourth Gospel has set before the Church for whom he wrote certain great truths. He has reminded them of the reality of the Resurrection; he has reminded them of the universality of the Church; he has reminded them that Peter and John are not competitors in honour, but that Peter is the great shepherd and John the great witness. Now he comes to the end; and he comes there thinking once again of the splendour of Jesus Christ. Whatever we know of Christ, we have only grasped a fragment of him. Whatever the wonders we have experienced, they are as nothing to the wonders which we may yet experience. Human categories are powerless to describe Christ, and human books are inadequate to hold him. And so John ends with the innumerable triumphs, the inexhaustible power, and the limitless grace of Jesus Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Introduction to Acts

A PRECIOUS BOOK

In one sense Acts is the most important book in the New Testament. It is the simple truth that if we did not possess Acts, we would have, apart from what we could deduce from the letters of Paul, no information whatever about the early Church.

There are two ways of writing history. There is the way which attempts to trace the course of events from week to week and from day to day; and there is the way which, as it were, opens a series of windows and gives us vivid glimpses of the great moments and personalities of any period. The second way is the way of Acts.

We usually speak of The Acts of the Apostles. But the book neither gives nor claims to give an exhaustive account of the acts of the apostles. Apart from Paul only three apostles are mentioned in it. In Ac.12:2 we are told in one brief sentence that James, the brother of John, was executed by Herod. John appears in the narrative, but never speaks. It is only about Peter that the book gives any real information, and very soon, as a leading character, he passes from the scene. In the Greek there is no The before Acts; the correct title is Acts of Apostolic Men; and what Acts aims to do is to give us a series of typical exploits of the heroic figures of the early Church.

THE WRITER OF THE BOOK

Although the book never says so, from the earliest times Luke has been held to be its writer. About Luke we really know very little; there are only three references to him in the New Testament--Col.4:14, Phm.24, 2Tim.4:11. From these we can say two things for sure. First, Luke was a doctor; second, he was one of Paul's most valued helpers and most loyal friends, for he was a companion of his in his last imprisonment. We can deduce the fact that he was a Gentile. Col.4:11 concludes a list of mentions and greetings from those who are of the circumcision, that is, from Jews; Col.4:12 begins a new list and we naturally conclude that the new list is of Gentiles. So then we have the very interesting fact that Luke is the only Gentile author in the New Testament.

We could have guessed that Luke was a doctor because of his instinctive use of medical words. In Lk.4:35, in telling of the man who had the spirit of an unclean devil, he says "when the devil had thrown him down" and uses the correct medical word for convulsions. In Lk.9:38 when he draws the picture of the man who asked Jesus, "I beg you to look upon my son" he employs the conventional word for a doctor paying a visit to a patient. The most interesting example is in the saying about the camel and the needle's eye. All three synoptic writers give us that saying (Matt.19:24; Mk.10:25; Lk.18:25). For needle both Mark and Matthew use the Greek raphis (GSN4476), the ordinary word for a tailor's or a household needle. Luke alone uses belone, the technical word for a surgeon's needle. Luke was a doctor and a doctor's words came most naturally to his pen.

THE RECIPIENT OF THE BOOK

Luke wrote both his gospel and Acts to a man called Theophilus (Lk.1:3; Ac.1:1). We can only guess who Theophilus was. Lk.1:3 calls him "most excellent Theophilus." The phrase really means

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Introduction to Acts

"your excellency," and indicates a man high up in the service of the Roman government. There are three possibilities.

(i) Just possibly Theophilus is not a real name at all. In those days it might well be dangerous to be a Christian. Theophilus comes from two Greek words, *theos* (GSN2316) which means God and *philein* (GSN5368) which means to love. It may be that Luke wrote to a lover of God whose real name he did not mention for safety's sake.

(ii) If Theophilus was a real person, he must have been a high government official. Perhaps Luke wrote to show him that Christianity was a lovely thing and that Christians were good people. Maybe his writing was an attempt to persuade a government official not to persecute the Christians.

(iii) There is a more romantic theory than either of these based on the facts that Luke was a doctor and that doctors in the ancient days were often slaves. It has been conjectured that Luke was the doctor of Theophilus, that Theophilus had been gravely ill, that by Luke's skill and devotion he was brought back to health, and that in gratitude he gave Luke his freedom. Then, it may be, Luke wished to show how grateful he was for this gift; and since the most precious thing he had was the story of Jesus, he wrote it down and sent it to his benefactor.

LUKE'S AIM IN WRITING ACTS

When a man writes a book he does so for a reason, and maybe for more than one. Let us consider now why Luke wrote Acts.

(i) One of his reasons was to commend Christianity to the Roman government.

Again and again he goes out of his way to show how courteous Roman magistrates were to Paul. In Ac.13:12 Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus, becomes a Christian. In Ac.18:12 Gallio is absolutely impartial in Corinth. In Ac.16:35ff. the magistrates at Philippi discover their mistake and apologize publicly to Paul. In Ac.19:31 the Asiarchs in Ephesus are shown to be concerned that no harm should come to Paul. Luke was pointing out that in the years before he wrote Roman officials had often been well-disposed and always just to Christianity.

Further, Luke takes pains to show that the Christians were good and loyal citizens. and had always been regarded as such. In Ac.18:14 Gallio declares that there is no question of wickedness or villainy. In Ac.19:37 the secretary of Ephesus gives the Christians a good testimonial. In Ac.23:29 Claudius Lysias is careful to say that he has nothing against Paul. In Ac.25:25 Festus declares that Paul has done nothing worthy of death, and in the same chapter Festus and Agrippa agree that Paul might well have been released had he not appealed to Caesar.

Luke was writing in the days when Christians were disliked and persecuted; and he told his story in such a way as to show that the Roman magistrates had always been perfectly fair to Christianity and that they had never regarded the Christians as evil men. In fact, the very interesting suggestion has been made that Acts is nothing other than the brief prepared for Paul's defence when he stood his trial before the Roman Emperor.

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Introduction to Acts

(ii) One of Luke's aims was to show that Christianity was for all men of every country.

This was one of the things the Jews found it hard to grasp. They had the idea that they were God's chosen people and that God had no use for any other nation. Luke sets out to prove otherwise. He shows Philip preaching to the Samaritans; he shows Stephen making Christianity universal and being killed for it; he shows Peter accepting Cornelius into the Church; he shows the Christians preaching to the Gentiles at Antioch; he shows Paul travelling far and wide winning men of all kinds for Christ; and in Ac.15 he shows the Church making the great decision to accept the Gentiles on equal terms with the Jews.

(iii) But these were merely secondary aims. Luke's chief purpose is set out in the words of the Risen Christ in Lk.1:8, "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." It was to show the expansion of Christianity, to show how that religion which began in a little corner of Palestine had in not much more than thirty years reached Rome.

C. H. Turner has pointed out that Acts falls into six panels, each ending with what might be called a progress report. The six panels are:

(a) Ac.1-5; Ac.6:1-7; this tells of the church at Jerusalem and the preaching of Peter; and it finishes with the summary, "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem; and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."

(b) Ac.6:8-15; Ac.7-8; Ac.9:1-31 ; this describes the spread of Christianity through Palestine and the martyrdom of Stephen, followed by the preaching in Samaria. It ends with the summary, "So the Church throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied."

(c) Ac.9:32-43; Ac.10-11; Ac.12:1-24; this includes the conversion of Paul, the extension of the Church to Antioch, and the reception of Cornelius, the Gentile, into the Church by Peter. Its summary is, "The word of God grew and multiplied."

(d) Ac.12:25; Ac.13-15; Ac.16:1-5; this tells of the extension of the Church through Asia Minor and the preaching tour of Galatia. It ends, "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily."

(e) Ac.16:6-40; Ac.17-18; Ac.19:1-20; this relates the extension of the Church to Europe and the work of Paul in great Gentile cities like Corinth and Ephesus. Its summary runs, "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily."

(j) Ac.19:21-41; Ac.20-28; this tells of the arrival of Paul in Rome and his imprisonment there. It ends with the picture of Paul "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered."

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Introduction to Acts

This plan of Acts answers its most puzzling question, why does it finish where it does? It finishes with Paul in prison awaiting judgment. We would so much have liked to know what happened to him and the end is wrapped in mystery. But Luke stopped there because his purpose was accomplished; he had shown how Christianity began in Jerusalem and swept across the world until it reached Rome. A great New Testament scholar has said that the title of Acts might be, "How they brought the Good News from Jerusalem to Rome."

LUKE'S SOURCES

Luke was an historian, and the sources from which an historian draws his information is all important. Where then did Luke get his facts? In this connection Acts falls into two parts.

(i) There are the first fifteen chapters, of whose events Luke had no personal knowledge. He very likely had access to two sources.

(a) There were the records of the local churches. They may never have been set down in writing but the churches had their stories. In this section we can distinguish three records. There is the record of the Jerusalem church which we find in Ac.1-5 and in Ac.15-16. There is the record of the church at Caesarea which covers Ac.8:26-40, Ac.9:31-43 and Ac.10:1-48. There is the record of the church at Antioch which includes Ac.11:19-30, Ac.12:25, Ac.13 and Ac.14:1-28.

(b) Very likely there were cycles of stories which were the Acts of Peter, the Acts of John, the Acts of Philip and the Acts of Stephen. Beyond a doubt Luke's friendship with Paul would bring him into touch with all the great men of all the churches and all their stories would be at his disposal.

(ii) There is Ac.16-28. Of much of this section Luke had personal knowledge. When we read Acts carefully we notice a strange thing. Most of the time Luke's narrative is in the third person plural; but in certain passages it changes over to the first person plural and "they" becomes "we". The "we" passages are as follows--Ac.16:10-17; Ac.20:5-16; Ac.21:1-18; Ac.27; Ac.28:1-16. On all these occasions Luke must have been present. He must have kept a travel diary and in these passages we have eye-witness accounts. As for the times when he was not present, many were the hours he must have spent in prison with Paul and many were the stories Paul must have told him. There can have been no great figure Luke did not know and in every case he must have got his story from someone who was there.

When we read Acts we may be quite sure that no historian ever had better sources or used his sources more accurately.

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Acts 1:1-5

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES POWER TO GO ON

Acts 1:1-5

My Dear Theophilus, I have already given you an account of all the things that Jesus began to do and to teach, right up to the day when he was taken up to heaven, after he had, through the Holy Spirit, given his instructions to the apostles whom he had chosen. In the days that followed his sufferings he also showed himself living to them by many proofs, for he was seen by them on various occasions throughout a period of forty days; and he spoke to them about the kingdom of God. While he was staying with them he told them not to go away from Jerusalem but to wait for the Father's promise, "which," he said, "I told you about; for I told you that John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit before many days have passed."

In two senses Acts is the second chapter of a continued story. First, it is the second volume which Luke had sent to Theophilus. In the first volume, his Gospel, Luke had told the story of the life of Jesus upon earth. Now he goes on to tell the story of the Christian Church. Second, Acts is the second volume of a story which has no end. The Gospel was only the story of what Jesus began to do and to teach.

There are different kinds of immortality. There is an immortality of fame. In Henry the Fifth Shakespeare puts into the king's mouth a speech which promises an immortal memory if the Battle of Agincourt is won.

This story shall the good man tell his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remembered.

Beyond a doubt Jesus did win such an immortality, for his name will never be forgotten.

There is an immortality of influence. Some men leave an effect in the world which cannot die. Sir Francis Drake was the greatest of English sailors and to this day the Royal Naval Barracks at Plymouth is called H.M.S. Drake so that there may always be sailors armed with "that crested and prevailing name." Beyond a doubt Jesus won an immortality of influence for his effect upon the world and the life of men cannot die.

Above all, there is an immortality of presence and of power. Jesus not only left an immortal name and influence; he is still alive and still active. He is not the one who was; he is the one who is.

In one sense it is the whole lesson of Acts that the life of Jesus goes on in his Church. Dr. John Foster tells how an inquirer from Hinduism came to an Indian bishop. All unaided he had read the New Testament. The story had fascinated him and Christ had laid his spell upon him. "Then he read on...and felt he had entered into a new world. In the gospels it was Jesus, his works and his suffering. In the Acts ... what the disciples did and thought and taught had taken the place that Christ had occupied. The Church continued where Jesus had left off at his death. 'Therefore,' said

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Acts 1:1-5

this man to me, 'I must belong to the Church that carries on the life of Christ.'" The book of Acts tells of the Church that carries on the life of Christ.

This passage tells us how the Church was empowered to do that by the work of the Holy Spirit. We often call the Holy Spirit the Comforter. That word goes back to Wycliff; but in Wycliff's day it had a different meaning. It comes from the Latin *fortes*, which means brave; the Comforter is the one who fills men with courage and with strength. In the book of Acts, indeed all through the New Testament, it is very difficult to draw a line between the work of the Spirit and the work of the Risen Christ; and we do not need to do so, for the coming of the Spirit is the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt.28:20.)

Let us note one other thing. The apostles were enjoined to wait on the coming of the Spirit. We would gain more power and courage and peace if we learned to wait. In the business of life we need to learn to be still. "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." (Isa.40:31). Amidst life's surging activity there must be time to receive.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 1:6-8

THE KINGDOM AND ITS WITNESSES

Acts 1:6-8

So when they had met together they asked him, "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel at this time?" But he said to them, "It is not yours to know the times and the seasons which the Father has appointed by his own authority. But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power; and you will be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and in Samaria and to the farthest bounds of the earth."

Throughout his ministry Jesus laboured under one great disadvantage. The centre of his message was the kingdom of God. (Mk.1:14); but he meant one thing by the kingdom and those who listened to him meant another.

The Jews were always vividly conscious of being God's chosen people. They took that to mean that they were destined for special privilege and for world-wide dominion. The whole course of their history proved that humanly speaking that could never be. Palestine was a little country not more than 120 miles long by 40 miles wide. It had its days of independence but it had become subject in turn to the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. So the Jews began to look forward to a day when God would break directly into human history and establish that world sovereignty of which they dreamed. They conceived of the kingdom in political terms.

How did Jesus conceive of it? Let us look at the Lord's Prayer. In it there are two petitions side by side. "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." It is characteristic of Hebrew style, as any verse of the Psalms will show, to say things in two parallel forms, the second of which repeats or amplifies the first. That is what these two petitions do. The second is a definition of the first. Therefore, we see that by the kingdom Jesus meant a society upon earth where God's will would be as perfectly done as it is in heaven. Because of that it would be a kingdom founded on love and not on power.

To attain to that men needed the Holy Spirit. Twice already Luke has talked about waiting for the coming of the Spirit. We are not to think that the Spirit came into existence now for the first time. It is quite possible for a power always to exist but for men to experience or take it at some given moment. For instance, men did not invent atomic power. It always existed; but only in our time have men tapped it. So God is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but there came to men a special time when they experienced to the full that power which had always been present.

The power of the Spirit was going to make them Christ's witnesses. That witness was to operate in an ever-extending series of concentric circles, first in Jerusalem, then throughout Judaea; then Samaria, the semi-Jewish state, would be a kind of bridge leading out into the heathen world; and finally this witness was to go out to the ends of the earth.

Let us note certain things about this Christian witness. First, a witness is a man who says I know this is true. In a court of law a man cannot give in evidence a carried story; it must be his own personal experience. There was a time when John Bunyan was not quite sure. What worried him

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Acts 1:6-8

was that the Jews thought their religion the best; the Mohammedans thought theirs the best; what if Christianity were but a think-so too? A witness does not say, "I think so"; he says "I know."

Second, the real witness is not of words but of deeds. When Stanley had discovered Livingstone in Central Africa and had spent some time with him, he said, "If I had been with him any longer I would have been compelled to be a Christian and he never spoke to me about it at all." The witness of the man's life was irresistible.

Third, in Greek the word for witness and the word for martyr is the same (martus, GSN3144). A witness had to be ready to become a martyr. To be a witness means to be loyal no matter the cost.

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Acts 1:9-11

THE GLORY OF DEPARTURE AND THE GLORY OF RETURN

Acts 1:9-11

When he had said these things, while they were watching, he was taken up and a cloud received him and he passed from their sight. While they were gazing into heaven, as he went upon his way, behold, two men in white garments stood beside them; and they said to them, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing looking up into heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up into heaven from you will come again in the same way as you have seen him go to heaven."

This short passage leaves us face to face with two of the most difficult conceptions in the New Testament.

First, it tells of the Ascension. Only Luke tells this story and he has already related it in his gospel. (Lk.24:50-53.) For two reasons the Ascension was an absolute necessity. One was that there had to be a final moment when Jesus went back to the glory which was his. The forty days of the resurrection appearances had passed. Clearly that was a time which was unique and could not go on forever. Equally clearly the end to that period had to be definite. There would have been something quite wrong if the resurrection appearances had just simply petered out.

For the second reason we must transport ourselves in imagination back to the time when this happened. Nowadays we do not regard heaven as some local place beyond the sky; we regard it as a state of blessedness when we will be forever with God. But every man, even the wisest, in those days thought of the earth as flat and of heaven as a place above the sky. Therefore, if Jesus was to give his followers unanswerable proof that he had returned to his glory, the Ascension was absolutely necessary. But we must note this. When Luke tells of this in his gospel he says, "They returned to Jerusalem with great joy." (Lk.24:52.) In spite of the Ascension, or maybe because of it, the disciples were quite sure that Jesus was not gone from them but that he was with them forever.

Second, this passage brings us face to face with the Second Coming. About the Second Coming we must remember two things. First, to speculate when and how it will happen is both foolish and useless, Jesus said that not even he knew the day and the hour when the Son of Man would come. (Mk.13:32.) There is something almost blasphemous in speculating about that which was hidden from even Christ himself. Second, the essential teaching of Christianity is that God has a plan for man and the world. We are bound to believe that history is not a haphazard conglomeration of chance events which are going nowhere. We are bound to believe that there is some divine far off event to which the whole creation moves and that when that consummation comes Jesus Christ will be Judge and Lord of all. The Second Coming is not a matter for speculation and for illegitimate curiosity; it is a summons to make ourselves ready for that day when it comes.

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Acts 1:12-20

THE FATE OF THE TRAITOR

Acts 1:12-20

Then they made their way back to Jerusalem) from the hill which is called the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem, about half a mile away. When they came in. they went up to the upper room where they were staying; Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James were there. All of them with one united heart persevered in prayer, together with certain women and with Mary, Jesus' mother and with his brothers,

And in these days Peter stood up amongst the brethren and said--the number of people who were together was about one hundred and twenty "Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold through the mouth of David about Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus, because he was one of our number and had received his allotted part in our service. (This man bought a piece of ground with the proceeds of his wicked deed; and he fell headlong and burst asunder and his bowels gushed out. This became a well-known fact to all those who lived in Jerusalem so that the piece of ground was called in their language Akeldama, which means the place of blood.) For it stands written in the book of Psalms, 'Let the place where he lodged be desolate and let no one stay in it.' And, 'Let another receive his office.'"

Before we come to the fate of the traitor Judas there are certain things we may notice in this passage. For the Jew, the Sabbath was entirely a day of rest when all work was forbidden. A journey was limited to 2,000 cubits and that distance was called a Sabbath day's journey. A cubit was eighteen inches; so a Sabbath day's journey was rather more than half a mile.

It is interesting to note that Jesus' brothers are here with the company of the disciples. During Jesus' lifetime they had been among his opponents (Mk.3:21). It may well be that for them, as for so many others, the death of Jesus opened their eyes and stabbed their hearts as even his life could not do.

We are told that the number of the disciples was about 120. That is one of the most uplifting things in the New Testament. There were only 120 pledged to Christ and it is very unlikely that any of them had ever been outside the narrow confines of Palestine in his life. Since there were about 4,000,000 Jews in Palestine, this means that fewer than 1 in 30,000 were Christians. On the same basis it would mean that it was like there being only 300 Christians in the whole of Glasgow or 12 in Edinburgh; and these 120 simple folk were told to go out and evangelize the whole world. If ever anything began from small beginnings the Christian Church did. We may well be the only Christians in our shop, our factory, our office, in our circle. These men gallantly faced their task and so must we; and it may be that we too will be the small beginning from which the kingdom in our sphere will spread.

The great interest of this passage is the fate of Judas. What exactly the Greek here means is uncertain, but in Matthew's account (Matt.27:35) we are left in no doubt that Judas committed

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Acts 1:12-20

suicide. It must always be a matter of wonder why Judas betrayed Jesus. Various suggestions have been put forward.

(i) It has been suggested that Iscariot means man of Kerioth. If it does. Judas was the only non-Galilaean in the apostolic band. It may be that he felt himself the odd man out and grew so embittered that he did this terrible thing.

(ii) It may be that Judas turned king's evidence to save his own skin and then saw the enormity of what he had done.

(iii) It may be that he did it simply out of greed for money. If he did. it was the most dreadful bargain in history, for he sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver which was less than L4.

(iv) It may be that Judas came to hate Jesus. From others he could disguise his black heart; but the eyes of Jesus could penetrate to the inmost recesses of his being. It may be that in the end he was driven to destroy the one who knew him for what he was.

(v) It may be that Iscariot is a form of a Greek word which means a dagger-bearer. The "dagger-bearers" were a band of violent nationalists who were prepared to undertake assassination and murder in a campaign to set Palestine free, Perhaps Judas saw in Jesus the very person who could lead the nationalists to triumph; and when he saw that Jesus refused that way he turned against him and in his bitter disappointment betrayed him.

(vi) It is likeliest of all that Judas never meant Jesus to die but betrayed him with the intention of forcing his hand. If that be so, Judas had the tragic experience of seeing his plan go desperately wrong; and in his bitter remorse he committed suicide.

However it may be, Judas goes down to history as the blackest name among men. There can never be any peace for the man who betrays Christ.

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Acts 1:21-26

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE

Acts 1:21-26

"So then, of the men who were with us during all the time our Lord went in and out amongst us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us--of these we must choose one to be a witness of the resurrection along with us." So they selected two, Joseph, who was called Barsabbas, whose surname was Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, "O Lord, who knowest the hearts of all, do thou show us which of these two thou hast chosen to take his place in this service and in the apostleship. from which Judas fell away and went to his own place." So they made them draw lots and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was elected to be along with the eleven apostles.

We look briefly at the method of choosing someone to take Judas' place in the number of the apostles. It may seem strange to us that the method was that of casting lots. But amongst the Jews it was the natural thing to do because all the offices and duties in the Temple were settled that way. The names of the candidates were written on stones'. the stones were put into a vessel and the vessel was shaken until one stone fell out; and he whose name was on that stone was elected to office.

The great fact about this passage is that it gives us two supremely important truths.

First, it tells us that the function of an apostle was to be a witness to the resurrection. The real mark of a Christian is not that he knows about Jesus but that he knows Jesus. The basic mistake in Christianity is to regard Jesus as someone who lived and died and whose life we study and whose story we read. Jesus is not a figure in a book, he is a living presence; and the Christian is a man whose whole life is a witness to the fact that he knows and has met the Risen Lord.

Second, it tells us that the qualification of an apostle was that he had companied with Jesus. The real Christian is the man who lives day by day with Jesus. It was said of John Brown of Haddington, the great preacher, that often when he preached he paused as if listening for a voice. Jerome K. Jerome tells of an old cobbler who, on the coldest day, left the door of his shop open, and on being asked why, replied, "So that Jesus can come in if he is passing by." We often speak about what would happen if Jesus were here and how differently we would live if he were in our homes and at our work. Lady Acland tells how once her little daughter had a spasm of temper. After the storm she and the daughter were sitting on the stairs making things up again and the little girl said, "I wish Jesus would come and stay in our house all the time." But the fact is that Jesus is here; and the real Christian is the man who lives all his life with Christ.

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Acts 2

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

We may never know precisely what happened on the Day of Pentecost but we do know that it was one of the supremely great days of the Christian Church. for on that day the Holy Spirit came to the Christian Church in a very special way.

Acts has been called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit; so before we turn to detailed consideration of its second chapter let us take a general view of what Acts has to say about the Holy Spirit.

THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT

It is perhaps unfortunate that we so often speak of the events at Pentecost as the coming of the Holy Spirit. The danger is that we may think that the Holy Spirit came into existence at that time. That is not so; God is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In fact Acts makes that quite clear. The Holy Spirit was speaking in David (Ac.1:16); the Spirit spoke through Isaiah (Ac.28:25); Stephen accuses the Jews of having, all through their history, opposed the Spirit (Ac.7:51). In that sense the Spirit is God in every age revealing his truth to men. At the same time something special happened at Pentecost.

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN ACTS

From that moment the Holy Spirit became the dominant reality in the life of the early Church.

For one thing, the Holy Spirit was the source of all guidance. The Spirit moves Philip to make contact with the Ethiopian Eunuch (Ac.8:29); prepares Peter for the coming of the emissaries of Cornelius (Ac.10:19); orders Peter to go without hesitation with these emissaries (Ac.11:12); enables Agabus to foretell the coming famine (Ac.11:28); orders the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas for the momentous step of taking the gospel to the Gentiles (Ac.13:2,4); guides the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem (Ac.15:28); guides Paul past Asia, Mysia and Bithynia, down into Troas and thence to Europe (Ac.16:6); tells Paul what awaits him in Jerusalem (Ac.20:23). The early Church was a Spirit-guided community.

For another thing, all the leaders of the Church were men of the Spirit. The Seven are men of the Spirit (Ac.6:3); Stephen and Barnabas are full of the Spirit (Ac.7:55; Ac.11:24). Paul tells the elders at Ephesus that it was the Spirit who made them overseers over the Church of God (Ac.20:28).

For still another thing, the Spirit was the source of day, to day courage and power. The disciples are to receive power when the Spirit comes (Ac.1:8); Peter's courage and eloquence before the Sanhedrin are the result of the activity of the Spirit (Ac.4:31); Paul's conquest of Elymas is the work of the Spirit (Ac.13:9). The Christian courage to meet the dangerous situation, the Christian power to cope with life more than adequately, the Christian eloquence when eloquence is needed, the Christian joy which is independent of circumstances are all ascribed to the work of the Spirit.

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Acts 2

For a last thing, Ac.5:32 speaks of the Spirit "whom God has given to those who obey him." This has in it the great truth that the measure of the Spirit which a man can possess is conditioned by the kind of man he is. It means that the man who is honestly trying to do the will of God will experience more and more of the wonder of the Spirit.

In Ac.1-13 there are more than forty references to the Holy Spirit; the early Church was a Spirit-filled Church and that was the source of its power.

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Acts 2:1-13

THE BREATH OF GOD

Acts 2:1-13

So when the day of Pentecost came round, they were all together in one place; and all of a sudden there came from heaven a sound like that of a violent, rushing wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And tongues, like tongues of fire, appeared to them, which distributed themselves among them and settled on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them the power of utterance.

There were staying in Jerusalem, Jews, devout men from all the races under heaven. When the news of this got abroad the crowd assembled and came pouring together; for each one of them heard them speaking in his own language. They were all astonished and kept saying in amazement, "Look now! Are all these men who are speaking not Galileans? And how is it that each one of us hears them speaking in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes. Elamites, those who stay in Mesopotamia, in Judaea and Cappadocia, in Pontus. in Asia, in Phrygia and Pamphylia. in Egypt and the parts of Libya round about Cyrene, Romans, who are staying here, Jews and proselytes. people from Crete and Arabia--we hear these men telling the wonders of God in our own tongues." They were all astonished and did not know what to make of it, and they kept on saying to each other, "What can this mean?" But others kept on saying in mockery, "They are filled with new wine."

There were three great Jewish festivals to which every male Jew living within twenty miles of Jerusalem was legally bound to come--the Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. Pentecost means "The Fiftieth," and another name for Pentecost was "The Feast of Weeks." It was so called because it fell on the fiftieth day, a week of weeks, after the Passover. The Passover fell in the middle of April; therefore Pentecost fell at the beginning of June. By that time travelling conditions were at their best. At least as many came to the Feast of Pentecost as came to the Passover. That explains the roll of countries mentioned in this chapter; never was there a more international crowd in Jerusalem than at the time of Pentecost.

The Feast itself had two main significances. (i) It had an historical significance. It commemorated the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. (ii) It had an agricultural significance. At the Passover the crop's first omer of barley was offered to God; and at Pentecost two loaves were offered in gratitude for the ingathered harvest. It had one other unique characteristic. The law laid it down that on that day no servile work should be done (Lev.23:21; Num.28:26). So it was a holiday for all and the crowds on the streets would be greater than ever.

What happened at Pentecost we really do not know except that the disciples had an experience of the power of the Spirit flooding their beings such as they never had before. We must remember that for this part of Acts Luke was not an eye-witness. He tells the story as if the disciples suddenly acquired the gift of speaking in foreign languages. For two reasons that is not likely.

(i) There was in the early Church a phenomenon which has never completely passed away. It was called speaking with tongues (compare Ac.10:46; Ac.19:6). The main passage which describes it is

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Acts 2:1-13

1Cor.14. What happened was that someone, in an ecstasy, began to pour out a flood of unintelligible sounds in no known language. That was supposed to be directly inspired by the Spirit of God and was a gift greatly coveted. Paul did not greatly approve of it because he greatly preferred that a message should be given in a language that could be understood. He in fact said that if a stranger came in he might well think he had arrived in a congregation of madmen (1Cor.14:23). That precisely fits Ac.2:13. Men speaking in tongues might well appear to be drunk to someone who did not know the phenomenon.

(ii) To speak in foreign languages was unnecessary. The crowd was made up of Jews (Ac.2:5) and proselytes (Ac.2:10). Proselytes were Gentiles who had accepted the Jewish religion and the Jewish way of life. For a crowd like that at most two languages were necessary. Almost all Jews spoke Aramaic; and, even if they were Jews of the Dispersion from a foreign land, they would speak that language which almost everyone in the world spoke at that time--Greek.

It seems most likely that Luke, a Gentile, had confused speaking with tongues with speaking with foreign tongues. What happened was that for the first time in their lives this motley mob was hearing the word of God in a way that struck straight home to their hearts and that they could understand. The power of the Spirit was such that it had given these simple disciples a message that could reach every heart.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN PREACHING

Ac.2:14-42 is one of the most interesting passages in the New Testament, because it is an account of the first Christian sermon ever preached. In the early Church there were four different kinds of preaching.

(i) There was kerugma (GSN2782). Kerugma (GSN2782) literally means a herald's announcement and is the plain statement of the facts of the Christian message, about which, as the early preachers saw it, there can be no argument or doubt.

(ii) There was didache (GSN1322). Didache (GSN1322) literally means teaching and elucidated the meaning of the facts which had been proclaimed.

(iii) There was paraklesis (GSN3874) which literally means exhortation. This kind of preaching urged upon men the duty of fitting their lives to match the kerugma (GSN2782) and the didache (GSN1322) which had been given.

(iv) There was homilia (GSN3657) which means the treatment of any subject or department of life in light of the Christian message.

Fully rounded preaching has something of all four elements. There is the plain proclamation of the facts of the Christian gospel; the explanation of the meaning and the relevance of these facts; the exhortation to fit life to them; and the treatment of all the activities of life in the light of the Christian message.

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Acts 2:1-13

In Acts we shall meet mainly with kerugma (GSN2782) because Acts tells of the proclamation of the facts of the gospel to those who had never heard them before. This kerugma (GSN2782) follows a pattern which repeats itself over and over again all over the New Testament.

(i) There is the proof that Jesus and all that happened to him is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. In modern times less and less stress has been laid on the fulfilment of prophecy. We have come to see that the prophets were not nearly so much fore-tellers of events to come as forth-tellers of God's truth to men. But this stress of early preaching on prophecy conserved the great truth that history is not haphazard and that there is meaning to it. To believe in the possibility of prophecy is to believe that God is in control and that he is working out his purposes.

(ii) In Jesus the Messiah has come, the Messianic prophecies are fulfilled and the New Age has dawned. The early Church had a tremendous sense that Jesus was the hinge of all history; that with his coming, eternity had invaded time; and that, therefore, life and the world could never be the same again.

(iii) The kerugma (GSN2782) went on to state that Jesus had been born of the line of David, that he had taught, that he had worked miracles, that he had been crucified, that he had been raised from the dead and that he was now at the right hand of God. The early Church was sure that the Christian religion was based on the earthly life of Christ. But it was also certain that that earthly life and death were not the end and that after them came the resurrection. Jesus was not merely someone about whom they read or heard; he was someone whom they met and knew, a living presence.

(iv) The early preachers went on to insist that Jesus would return in glory to establish his kingdom upon earth. In other words, the early Church believed intensely in the Second Coming. This doctrine has to some extent passed out of modern preaching but it does conserve the truth that history is going somewhere and that some day there will be a consummation; and that a man is therefore in the way or on the way.

(v) The preaching finished with the statement that in Jesus alone was salvation, that he who believed on him would receive the Holy Spirit and that he who would not believe was destined for terrible things. That is to say, it finished with both a promise and a threat. It is exactly like that voice which Bunyan heard as if at his very shoulder demanding, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or wilt thou have thy sins and go to hell?"

If we read through Peter's sermon as a whole we will see how these five strands are woven into it.

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Acts 2:14-21

GOD'S DAY HAS COME

Acts 2:14-21

But Peter stood up with the eleven and raised his voice and said to them, "You who are Jews and you who are staying in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to my words. These men are not, as you suppose, drunk; for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel, 'It will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out from my Spirit upon all men, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy and your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams, And I will pour out from my Spirit upon my men servants and my maid servants in these days and they will prophesy. I will send wonders in the heaven above and signs upon the earth below, blood and fire and vapour of smoke. The sun will be changed into darkness and the moon into blood before there comes the great and famous day of the Lord. And it shall be that all whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

This passage brings us face to face with one of the basic conceptions of both the Old and the New Testaments--that of The Day of the Lord. Much in both the Old and in the New Testaments is not fully intelligible unless we know the basic principles underlying that conception.

The Jews never lost the conviction that they were God's chosen people. They interpreted that status to mean that they were chosen for special privilege among the nations. They were always a small nation. History had been for them one long disaster. It was clear to them that by human means they would never reach the status they deserved as the chosen people. So, bit by bit, they reached the conclusion that what man could not do God must do; and began to look forward to a day when God would intervene directly in history and exalt them to the honour they dreamed of. The day of that intervention was The Day of the Lord.

They divided all time into two ages. There was The Present Age which was utterly evil and doomed to destruction; there was The Age to Come which would be the golden age of God. Between the two there was to be The Day of the Lord which was to be the terrible birth pangs of the new age. It would come suddenly like a thief in the night; it would be a day when the world would be shaken to its very foundations; it would be a day of judgment and of terror. All over the prophetic books of the Old Testament and in much of the New Testament, are descriptions of that Day. Typical passages are Isa.2:12; Isa.13:6ff.; Am.5:18; Zeph.1:7; Jl.2; 1Th.5:2ff.; 2Pet.3:10.

Here Peter is saying to the Jews--"For generations you have dreamed of the Day of God, the Day when God would break into history. Now, in Jesus, that Day has come." Behind all the outworn imagery stands the great truth that in Jesus, God arrived in person on the scene of human history.

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Acts 2:22-36

LORD AND CHRIST

Acts 2:22-36

"Men of Israel, listen to these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved by God to you by deeds of power and wonders and signs, which God, among you, did through him, as you yourselves know this man, delivered up by the fore-ordained knowledge and counsel of God, you took and crucified by the hand of wicked men. But God raised him up and loosed the pains of death because it was impossible that he should be held subject by it. For David says in regard to him, 'Always I foresaw the Lord before me, because he is at my right hand so that I should not be shaken. Because of this my heart has rejoiced and my tongue has exulted, and, furthermore, my flesh shall dwell in hope, because thou wilt not leave my soul in the land of the dead nor wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life.

Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.' Brethren, I can speak to you freely about the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried and his memorial is amongst us to this day. Thus he was a prophet; and because he knew that God had sworn an oath to him, that one of his descendants should sit upon his throne. he spoke with foresight about the resurrection of the Christ, that he would neither be left in the world of the dead nor would his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up and all of us are his witnesses. So then when he had been exalted to the right hand of God he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured out this which you see and hear. For David did not ascend up into heaven. and yet he says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit upon my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool for thy feet.' So then let all the house of Israel certainly know that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified Lord and Christ."

Here is a passage full of the essence of the thought of the early preachers.

(1) It insists that the Cross was no accident. It belonged to the eternal plan of God (Ac.2:23). Over and over again Acts states this same thing (compare Ac.3:18; Ac.4:28; Ac.13:29). The thought of Acts safeguards us from two serious errors in our thinking about the death of Jesus. (a) The Cross is not a kind of emergency measure flung out by God when everything else had failed. it is part of God's very life. (b) We must never think that anything Jesus did changed the attitude of God to men. It was by God Jesus was sent. We may put it this way--the Cross was a window in time allowing us to see the suffering love which is eternally in the heart of God.

(ii) Acts insists that this in no way lessens the crime of those who crucified Jesus. Every mention of the crucifixion in Acts is instinct with a feeling of shuddering horror at the crime it was (compare Ac.2:23; Ac.3:13; Ac.4:10; Ac.5:30). Apart from anything else, the crucifixion shows supremely how horrifyingly sin can behave.

(iii) Acts is out to prove that the sufferings and death of Christ were the fulfilment of prophecy. The earliest preachers had to do that. To the Jew the idea of a crucified Messiah was incredible. Their law said, "A hanged man is accursed by God" (Deut.21:23). To the orthodox Jew the Cross made it completely impossible that Jesus could be the Messiah. The early preachers answered, "If you would only read your scriptures rightly you would see that all was foretold."

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 2:22-36

(iv) Acts stresses the resurrection as the final proof that Jesus was indeed God's Chosen One. Acts has been called The Gospel of the Resurrection. To the early Church the resurrection was all-important. We must remember this--without the resurrection there would have been no Christian Church at all. When the disciples preached the centrality of the resurrection they were arguing from experience. After the Cross they were bewildered, broken men, with their dream gone and their lives shattered. It was the resurrection which changed all that and turned them from cowards into heroes. It is one of the tragedies of the Church that so often the preaching of the resurrection is confined to Easter time. Every Sunday is the Lord's Day and every Lord's Day should be kept as resurrection day. In the Eastern Church on Easter day, when two people meet, one says, "The Lord is risen"; and the other answers, "He is risen indeed!" A Christian should never forget that he lives and walks with a Risen Lord.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 2:37-41

SAVE YOURSELVES

Acts 2:37-41

When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and they said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brethren, what are we to do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for this promise is to you and to your children and to all who are afar off, to all those whom the Lord your God invites." With many other words he gave his witness and he urged them, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." So they accented his word and were baptized and on that day there were added to them about three thousand people.

(i) This passage shows with crystal clarity the effect of the Cross. When men realised just what they had done in crucifying Jesus their hearts were broken. "I," said Jesus, "when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself" (Jn.12:32). Every man has had a hand in that crime. Once a missionary told the story of Jesus in an Indian village. Afterwards he showed the life of Christ in lantern slides thrown against the white-washed wall of a house. When the Cross appeared on the wall, one man rose from the audience and ran forward. "Come down from that Cross, Son of God," he cried. "I, not you, should be hanging there." The Cross, when we understand what happened there, must pierce the heart.

(ii) That experience demands a reaction from men. "Repent," said Peter, "first and foremost." What does repentance mean? The word originally meant an afterthought. Often a second thought shows that the first thought was wrong; and so the word came to mean a Change of mind. But, if a man is honest, a change of mind demands a change of action. Repentance must involve both change of mind and change of action. A man may change his mind and come to see that his actions were wrong but be so much in love with his old ways that he will not change them. A man may change his ways but his mind remains the same, changing only because of fear or prudence. True repentance involves a change of mind and a change of action.

(iii) When repentance comes something happens to the past. There is God's forgiveness for what lies behind. Let us be quite clear that the consequences of sins are not wiped out. Not even God can do that. When we sin we may well do something to ourselves and to others which cannot be undone. Let us look at it this way. When we were young and had done something bad there was an invisible barrier between us and our mother. But when we went and said we were sorry, the old relationship was restored and we were right with her again. Forgiveness does not abolish the consequences of what we have done but it puts us right with God.

(iv) When repentance comes something happens for the future. We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and in that power we can win battles we never thought to win and resist things which by ourselves we would have been powerless to resist.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 2:42-47

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH

Acts 2:42-47

They persevered in listening to the apostles' teaching, in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers. Awe was in every soul; and many signs and wonders were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and they were in the habit of selling their goods and possessions and of distributing them amongst all as each had need. Daily they continued with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house they received their food with joy and in sincerity of heart; and they kept praising God and everyone liked them. Daily the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

In this passage we have a kind of lightning summary of the characteristics of the early Church.

(1) It was a learning Church; it persisted in listening to the apostles as they taught. One of the great perils of the Church is to look back instead of forward. Because the riches of Christ are inexhaustible we should ever be going forward. We should count it a wasted day when we do not learn something new and when we have not penetrated more deeply into the wisdom and the grace of God.

(ii) It was a Church of fellowship; it had what someone has called the great quality of togetherness. Nelson explained one of his victories by saying, "I had the happiness to command a band of brothers." The Church is a real Church only when it is a band of brothers.

(iii) It was a praying Church--these early Christians knew that they could not meet life in their own strength and that they did not need to. They always went in to God before they went out to the world; they were able to meet the problems of life because they had first met him.

(iv) It was a reverent Church--in Ac.2:43 the word which the King James Version correctly translates fear has the idea of awe in it. It was said of a great Greek that he moved through this world as if it were a temple. The Christian lives in reverence because he knows that the whole earth is the temple of the living God.

(v) It was a Church where things happened--signs and wonders were there (Ac.2:43). If we expect great things from God and attempt great things for God things happen. More things would happen if we believed that God and we together could make them happen.

(vi) It was a sharing Church (Ac.2:44-45); these early Christians had an intense feeling of responsibility for each other. It was said of William Morris that he never saw a drunken man but he had a feeling of personal responsibility for him. A real Christian cannot bear to have too much when others have too little.

(vii) It was a worshipping Church (Ac.2:46); they never forgot to visit God's house. We must remember that "God knows nothing of solitary religion." Things can happen when we come together. God's Spirit moves upon his worshipping people.

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Acts 2:42-47

(viii) It was a happy Church (Ac.2:46); gladness was there. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms.

(ix) It was a Church whose people others could not help liking. There are two Greek words for good. Agathos (GSN0018) simply describes a thing as good. Kalos (GSN2570) means that a thing is not only good but looks good; it has a winsome attractiveness about it. Real Christianity is a lovely thing. There are so many people who are good but with their goodness possess a streak of unlovely hardness. Struthers of Greenock used to say that it would help the Church more than anything else if Christians ever and again would do a bonnie thing. In the early Church there was a winsomeness in God's people.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 3:1-10

A NOTABLE DEED IS DONE

Acts 3:1-10

Peter and John used to go up to the Temple at the hour of prayer at three o'clock in the afternoon, and a man who had been lame from the day of his birth was in the habit of being carried there. Every day they used to put him at the gate of the Temple which is called the Beautiful Gate, so that he could beg for alms from the people who were going into the Temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the Temple he asked to be given alms. Peter fixed his eyes on him with John and said, "Look at us." He paid attention to them because he was expecting to get something from them. Peter said to him, "Silver and gold I do not possess, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk!" And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up. Immediately his feet and ankle bones were strengthened, and he leaped up and stood and walked about; and he went into the Temple with them, walking about and leaping and praising God. Everyone saw him walking about and praising God; and they recognized him as the man who had sat at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple to receive alms. They were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him.

The Jewish day began at 6 o'clock in the morning and ended at 6 o'clock in the evening. For the devout Jew there were three special hours of prayer -- 9 a.m., 12 midday and 3 p.m. They agreed that prayer was efficacious wherever it was offered; but they felt that it was doubly precious when offered in the Temple courts. It is very interesting that the apostles kept up the customs in which they had been trained. It was the hour of prayer and Peter and John were going into the Temple to observe it. A new faith had come to them but they did not use that as an excuse for a licence which broke all law. They were aware that the new faith and the old discipline could walk hand in hand.

In the East it was the custom for beggars to sit at the entrance to a temple or a shrine. Such a place was considered the best of all stances because when people are on their way to worship God they are disposed to be generous to their fellow men. W. H. Davies, the tramp poet, tells how one of his vagrant friends told him that, whenever he came into a new town, he looked for a church spire with a cross on the top and began to beg in that area. Love of man and love of God must ever go hand in hand.

This incident brings us face to face with the question of miracles in the apostolic times. There are certain definite things to be said.

(1) Such miracles did happen. In Ac.4:16 we read how the Sanhedrin knew that they must accept the miracle. The enemies of Christianity would have been the first to deny miracles if they could; but they never even try.

(ii) Why did they stop? Certain suggestions have been made. (a) There was a time when miracles were necessary. In that age they were needed as a guarantee of the truth and the power of the Christian message in its initial attack on the world. (b) At that time two special circumstances met. First, there were living apostolic men who had had an unrepeatable personal intimacy with Jesus

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Acts 3:1-10

Christ. Second, there was an atmosphere of expectancy when faith was in its floodtide. These two things combined to produce effects which were unique.

(iii) The real question is not, "Why have miracles stopped?" but, "Have they stopped?" It is the simple fact that any doctor or surgeon can now do things which in apostolic times would have been regarded as miracles. God has revealed new truth and new knowledge to men, and through that revelation they are still performing miracles. As a great doctor said, "I bandage the wounds; but God heals them." For the Christian there are still miracles on every hand if he has eyes to see.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 3:11-16

THE CRIME OF THE CROSS

Acts 3:11-16

As he clung to Peter and John everyone came running to them in the colonnade which is called Solomon's, in a state of complete astonishment. When Peter saw them he said to them, "Men of Israel, why are you surprised at this? Or why do you keep staring at us, as if we had made him walk by our own power or goodness? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, your fathers' God, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned before Pilate, when he had given judgment for his release. You disowned the holy and the just one and you asked for a man who was a murderer to be given to you as a favour. You killed the pioneer of life but God raised him from the dead; and we are his witnesses. And his name, through faith in his name, has given strength to this man whom you see and know. It is the faith which is through him, which has thus given him back his health in presence of you all."

Here sound three of the dominant notes of early Christian preaching.

(i) The early preachers always stressed the basic fact that the crucifixion was the greatest crime in human history. Whenever they speak of it there is a kind of shocked horror in their voices. They tried to stab men's minds with the realization of the sheer crime of the Cross. It is as if they said, "Look what sin can do."

(ii) The early preachers always stressed the vindication of the resurrection. It is simple fact that without the resurrection the Church would never have come into being. The resurrection was proof that he was indestructible and was Lord of life and of death. It was the final proof that behind him there was God and therefore a power which nothing could stop.

(iii) The early preachers always stressed the power of the Risen Lord. They never regarded themselves as the sources of power but only as channels of power. They were well aware of their limitations but were also well aware that there was no limitation to what the Risen Christ could do through them and with them. Therein lies the secret of the Christian life. So long as the Christian thinks only of what he can do and be, there can be nothing but failure and frustration and fear. But when he thinks of "not I, but Christ in me" there can be nothing but peace and power.

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Acts 3:17-26

THE NOTES OF PREACHING

Acts 3:17-26

"Now, brothers, I know that it was through ignorance that you did it, just as your rulers did. But God has thus fulfilled those things which he foretold by the mouths of all the prophets that his anointed one should suffer. Repent, then, and turn so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come to you from God, and so that he may send Jesus Christ who has already been preached to you. It is necessary that heaven should receive him until the times when all things shall be restored, times of which God spoke through the mouths of his holy prophets since the world began. Moses said, 'The Lord, your God, will raise up from your brethren a prophet like me. You must listen to him in everything that he will say to you; and it will be that everyone who will not listen to that prophet will be utterly destroyed from the people.' And all the prophets who spoke from Samuel and those who succeeded him, also announced the tidings of these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers when he said, 'In your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed.' It is to you first that God, when he raised up his son, sent him to bless you by making each one of you turn away from your evil deeds."

Almost all the notes of early Christian preaching are sounded in this short passage.

(1) It begins with a note of mercy and warning combined. It was in ignorance that the Jews perpetrated the terrible deed of the crucifixion; but that ignorance is no longer possible, and, therefore, there can be no excuse for their further rejection of Jesus Christ. This note of the terrifying responsibility of knowledge sounds all through the New Testament. "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say 'We see,' your guilt remains" (Jn.9:41). "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin" (Jn.15:22). "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (Jas.4:17). To have seen the full light of the revelation of God is the greatest of privileges, but it is also the most terrible of responsibilities.

(ii) The obligation this knowledge brings is the obligation to repent and to turn. The two words go closely together. Repent might simply mean to change one's mind; and it is an easier thing to change one's mind than to change one's life. But this change of mind is to issue in a turning away from the old way and a faring forth upon a new.

(iii) This repentance will have certain consequences. It will affect the past--sins will be wiped out. This is a vivid word. Ancient writing was upon papyrus and the ink had no acid in it. It therefore did not bite into the papyrus like modern ink, but simply lay on top of it. To erase the writing a man simply wiped it away with a wet sponge; so God wipes out the sin of the forgiven man. It will affect the future; it will bring times of refreshing. Into life will come something which will be a strength in weakness and a rest in weariness.

(iv) Peter goes on to speak of the coming again of Christ. Whatever else that doctrine means, it means that history is going somewhere.

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Acts 3:17-26

(v) Peter insists that all that has happened has been foretold. The Jews refused to assimilate the idea of a Chosen One of God who must suffer; but Peter insists that if they search their own scriptures they will find it all there.

(vi) Peter reminds them of their national privilege. In a very special sense the Jews were God's chosen people.

(vii) Finally, he lays down the inescapable truth that that very special privilege brings very special duty. It is the privilege not of special honour but of special service.

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Acts 4:1-4

ARREST

Acts 4:1-4

While they were speaking to the people, the priests, the superintendent of the Temple and the Sadducees came upon them. They were annoyed because they were teaching the people, and proclaiming, through Jesus, the resurrection from the dead. So they laid hands upon them and put them under arrest until the next day, for by this time it was evening. But many who heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

The healing of the lame man had taken place within a part of the Temple area which was continually thronged with people. The spotlight of publicity was inevitably focused upon the incident.

The Gate Beautiful was the gate which led from the Court of the Gentiles into the Court of the Women. The Court of the Gentiles was at once the largest and the busiest of all the Temple Courts, for into it anyone of any nation could come so long as he observed the ordinary laws of decency and decorum. It was there that the money-changers had their booths and the sellers of sacrificial victims their stalls. Round the outer boundary of the Temple area ran two great colonnades meeting at a right angle in the corner of the Court of the Gentiles. The one was the Royal Porch, the other Solomon's Porch. They, too, were crowded with people who had come to worship, to learn and to sightsee. Clearly the whole series of events would gain the widest publicity.

Into this crowded scene came the priests, the superintendent of the Temple and the Sadducees. The man whom the King James Version calls the captain of the Temple was an official called the Sagan. He was the High Priest's right-hand man. In particular he had the oversight of the good order of the Temple. When the crowd had gathered it was inevitable that he and his Temple police should arrive on the scene. With him came the Sadducees who were the wealthy, aristocratic class. There were not many of them but they were rich and of great influence. The whole matter annoyed them very greatly for two reasons. First, they did not believe in resurrection from the dead; and it was this very truth that the apostles were proclaiming. Second, just because they were wealthy aristocrats, the Sadducean party was collaborationist. They tried to keep on friendly terms with the Romans in order that they might retain their wealth and comfort and prestige and power. The Roman government was very tolerant; but on public disorder it was merciless. The Sadducees were sure that, if the apostles were allowed to go on unchecked, riots and civil disorder might follow, with disastrous consequences to their status. Therefore they proposed to nip this movement in the bud; and that is why Peter and John were so promptly arrested. It is a terrible example of a party of men who, in order to retain their vested interests, would not themselves listen to the truth or give anyone else a chance to hear it.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 4:13-22

BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 4:5-12

So on the next day it happened that the rulers and the elders and the scribes were assembled in Jerusalem, together with Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander and all those who belonged to the priestly families. So they set them in the midst and asked them, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if today we are being examined about the good deed done to the infirm man, if you are asking us by what means he has been restored to health, let it be known to all of you and to all the peoples of Israel that it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead--it is by this name that this man stands before you in sound health. This is the stone which was set at naught by you builders, which has now become the head of the corner; and in no other is there salvation; for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved."

The court before which Peter and John were brought was the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of, the Jews. Even in Roman times it had the right of arrest. The one thing it could not do was to pass the death sentence, except in the single case of a Gentile who trespassed on the inner courts of the Temple.

The Sanhedrin had seventy-one members. The high priest was ex officio president. In the Sanhedrin there were priests, practically all of whom were Sadducees. Their one desire was to preserve the status quo that their own emoluments might not be lessened. There were scribes, who were the experts in the traditional law. There were Pharisees, who were fanatics for the law. There were elders, who were respected men in the community.

There were also those described as being of "the priestly families"; these are the same people who are sometimes called chief priests. They consisted of two classes. First, there were ex-high priests. In the great days the high priesthood had been hereditary and for life; but in the Roman times the office was the subject of intrigue, bribery and corruption and high priests rose and fell so that between 37 B.C. and A.D. 67 there were no fewer than 28. But even after a high priest had been deposed, he often remained the power behind the throne. Second, although the high priesthood had ceased to be hereditary, it was still the prerogative of a very few families. Of the 28 high priests already mentioned all but 6 came from 4 priestly families. The members of these families had a special prestige and it is they who were known as the chief priests.

When we read Peter's speech, and remember to whom it was spoken, we recognize one of the world's great demonstrations of courage. It was spoken to an audience of the wealthiest, the most intellectual and the most powerful in the land, and yet Peter, the Galilaeen fisherman, stands before them rather as their judge than as their victim. Further, this was the very court which had condemned Jesus to death. Peter knew that he was taking his life in his hands.

There are two kinds of courage. There is the reckless courage which is scarce aware of the dangers it is facing. There is the far higher, cool courage which knows the peril in which it stands

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Acts 4:13-22

and refuses to be daunted. It was that second courage that Peter demonstrated. When Achilles, the great warrior of the Greeks, was told that if he went out to battle he would surely die, he answered in the immortal sentence, "Nevertheless, I am for going on." Peter, in that moment, knew the peril in which he stood; nevertheless, he, too, was for going on.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 4:13-22

NO LOYALTY SAVE TO GOD

Acts 4:13-22

When they saw how boldly Peter and John spoke, and when they had grasped the fact that they were men with no special knowledge and no special qualifications, they were amazed; and they recognized them for men who had been in the company of Jesus. So, as they looked at the man who was cured and who was standing with them, they could find no charge to make. They ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, and they discussed with each other, "What are we to do with these men? For, that, through them, a notable sign has happened is plain to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But, in order that this may not spread any further throughout the people, let us forbid them with threats to speak any more in this name to any man." So they summoned them in and ordered them absolutely to abstain from teaching in the name of Jesus.

But Peter and John said to them, "You must judge whether, in the sight of God, it is right to listen to you rather than to God; for we are unable not to speak the things that we have seen and heard." But they added still further threats and let them go because they could find no means of punishing them because of the people, for everyone glorified God at what had happened, for the man on whom the sign of healing had taken place was more than forty years old.

Here we see very vividly both the enemy's attack and the Christian defence. In the enemy's attack there are two characteristics. First, there is contempt. The King James Version says that the Sanhedrin regarded Peter and John as unlearned and ignorant men. The word translated unlearned means that they had no kind of technical education, especially in the intricate regulations of the law. The word translated ignorant means that they were laymen with no special professional qualifications. The Sanhedrin, as it were, regarded them as men without a college education and with no professional status. It is often difficult for the simple man to meet what might be called academic and professional snobbery. But the man in whose heart is Christ possesses a real dignity which neither academic attainment nor professional status can give. Second, there are threats. But the Christian knows that anything man does to him is but for a moment whereas the things of God last forever.

In face of this attack Peter and John had certain defences. First, they had the defence of an unanswerable fact. That the man had been cured it was impossible to deny. The most unanswerable defence of Christianity is a Christian man. Second, they had the defence of an utter loyalty to God. If it was a question of choosing between obeying man and obeying God, Peter and John were in no doubt as to what course to take. As H. G. Wells said, "The trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbours sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God." The real secret of Christianity lies in that great tribute once paid to John Knox--"He feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man." But the third defence was greatest of all, the defence of a personal experience of Jesus Christ. Their message was no carried tale. They knew at first-hand that it was true; and they were so sure of it that they were willing to stake their life upon it.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 4:23-31

THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN

Acts 4:23-31

When they had been released, they came to their own people and they told them all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they had heard the story, with one accord, they lifted up their voice to God and said, "O Sovereign Lord, thou who hast made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, thou who didst say, through the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David, our father, thy servant, 'Why did the nations rage and the people set their thoughts on empty things?' The kings of the earth stood around and the rulers assembled together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. For in truth in this city they were assembled against thy holy servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint--Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel--to do all the things which thy hand and thy purpose foreordained should be done. So now, O Lord, look upon their threats and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with boldness, whilst thou dost stretch out thy hand to heal and whilst signs and wonders happen through the name of thy holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and kept on speaking the word with boldness.

In this passage we have the reaction of the Christian Church in the hour of danger. It might have been thought that when Peter and John returned with their story a deep depression would have fallen on the Church, as they looked ahead to the troubles which were now bound to descend upon them. The one thing that never even struck them was to obey the Sanhedrin's command to speak no more. Into their minds at that moment came certain great convictions and into their lives came a tide of strength.

(i) They had the conviction of the power of God. With them was he who was creator and sustainer of all things. Once the papal envoy threatened Martin Luther with what would follow if he persisted in his course and warned him that in the end he would be deserted by all his supporters. "Where will you be then?" demanded the envoy. "Then as now," Luther answered, "in the hands of God." For the Christian, they that are for us are always more than they that are against us.

(ii) They had the conviction of the futility of man's rebellion. The word translated rage is used of the neighing of spirited horses. They may trample and toss their heads; in the end they will have to accept the discipline of the reins. Men may make their defiant gestures against God; in the end God must prevail.

(iii) They set before themselves the remembrance of Jesus. They remembered how he suffered and how he triumphed; and in that memory they found their confidence, for it is enough for the disciple that he be as his Lord.

(iv) They prayed for courage. They did not pretend that they could face this in their own strength; they turned to a power that was not their own.

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Acts 4:23-31

(v) The result was the gift of the Spirit. The promise was fulfilled; they were not left comfortless. So they found the courage and the strength they needed to witness when their witness might well mean their death.

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Acts 4:32-37

ALL THINGS IN COMMON

Acts 4:32-37

The heart and soul of the crowd who had believed was one; and no one used to say that any of his possessions was his own, but they had all things in common. And the apostles kept on bearing witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, and great grace was on them all. Nor was anyone in need amongst them, for all who were owners of lands and houses made a habit of selling them and of bringing the proceeds of what they sold and of placing them at the apostles' feet, It was distributed to each, just as a man needed.

Joseph, whose surname was Barnabas, one of the apostles (the translation of the name is Son of Consolation), who was a Levite and a native of Cyprus, possessed a field, and he sold it and brought the price and laid it at the apostles' feet.

In this new paragraph there is a sudden change which is typical of Christianity. Immediately before this all things were moving in the most exalted atmosphere. There were great thoughts of God; there were prayers for the Holy Spirit; there were exultant quotations from the Old Testament. Now without warning the narrative changes to the most practical things. However much these early Christians had their moments on the heights, they never forgot that someone had not enough and that all must help. Prayer was supremely important, the witness of words was supremely important, but the culmination was love of the brotherhood.

Two things are to be noted about them. (i) They had an intense sense of responsibility for each other. (ii) This awoke in them a real desire to share all they had. We must note one thing above all-- this sharing was not the result of legislation; it was utterly spontaneous. It is not when the law compels us to share but when the heart moves us to share that society is really Christian.

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Acts 5:1-11

TROUBLE IN THE CHURCH

Acts 5:1-11

A man called Ananias, together with his wife Sapphore, sold a bit of ground he had, and surreptitiously kept back part of the price, and his wife knew about it. He brought some part of the price and laid it at the feet of the apostles. Peter said to him, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart so that you have deceived the Holy Spirit and kept back part of the price of your ground? While it remained yours did it not remain your own, and after it had been sold was it not entirely at your disposal? Why did you put this business into your heart? It is not to men you have lied but to God." As Ananias listened to these words, he collapsed and breathed his life out. Great awe came upon all who heard it. The young men rose and bound him up and carried him out and buried him.

After an interval of about three hours his wife came in and she was not aware of what had happened. Peter said to her, "Tell me, did you sell the piece of ground for so much?" "Yes," she said, "for so much." Peter said to her, "Why is it that you agreed to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Look now, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out." Immediately she collapsed at his feet and breathed her life out. When the young men came in they found her dead and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great awe came upon the whole Church and upon all who heard these things.

There is no more vivid story in the book of Acts. There is no need to make a miracle of it. But it does show us something of the atmosphere which prevailed in the early Church. It is on record that once Edward the First blazed with anger at one of his courtiers and the man dropped dead in sheer fear. This story shows two things about the early Church, the expectancy of men's minds and the extraordinary respect in which the apostles were held. It was in that atmosphere that the rebuke of Peter acted as it did.

This is one of the stories which demonstrate the almost stubborn honesty of the Bible. It might well have been left out because it shows that even in the early Church there were very imperfect Christians; but the Bible refuses to present an idealised picture of anything. Once a court painter painted the portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was disfigured by warts upon his face. The painter, thinking to please the great man, omitted the disfiguring warts. When Cromwell saw the picture, he said, "Take it away, and paint me warts and all." It is one of the great virtues of the Bible that it shows us its heroes, warts and all.

There is a certain encouragement in this story, for it shows us that even in its greatest days the Church was a mixture of good and bad.

Peter insists that sin is sin against God. We do well to remember that, very specially in certain directions. (i) Failure in diligence is sin against God. Everything, however humble it may be, that contributes to the health, the happiness and the welfare of mankind is work done for God. Antonio Stradivari, the great maker of violins, said, "If my hand slacked, I should rob God." That is a motto for every man to take. (ii) Failure to use our talents is sin against God. God gave us such talents as we have; we hold them in stewardship for him; and we are responsible to him for the use we make

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Acts 5:1-11

of them. (iii) Failure in truth is sin against God. When we slip into falsehood it is sin against the guidance of the Spirit in our hearts.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 5:12-16

THE ATTRACTION OF CHRISTIANITY

Acts 5:12-16

Many signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles; and they were all together in Solomon's colonnade. Of the others no one dared to meddle with them. But the people held them in the highest esteem; nay more, crowds of men and women believed in the Lord and attached themselves to them. The result was that they brought the sick to the streets and laid them on beds and pallets, so that, when Peter came, even his shadow might fall on some of them; and a crowd assembled from the cities round about Jerusalem carrying the sick and those who were troubled by unclean spirits; and all of them were healed.

Here is a cameo-like picture of what went on in the early Church. (i) It tells us where the Church met. Their meeting-place was Solomon's colonnade, one of the two great colonnades which surrounded the Temple area. The early Christians were constant in their attendance at the House of God, desiring ever to know God better and to draw upon his strength for life and living. (ii) It tells us how the Church met. The early Christians assembled where everyone could see them. They knew what had happened to the apostles and what might well happen to them; but they were determined to show all men whose they were and where they stood. (iii) It tells us that the early Church was a supremely effective Church. Things happened. The days when the healing ministry of the Church was in the forefront of its work are past, although they may well return. But the Church still exists to make bad men good; and men will always throng to a Church where lives are changed.

This passage closes with a reference to those troubled by unclean spirits. The ancient people attributed all disease to the agency of such spirits. The Egyptians, for instance, believed that the body could be divided into separate parts and that every part could be inhabited by an evil spirit. Often they believed that these evil spirits were the spirits of wicked people who had departed this life but were still carrying on their malignant work.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 5:17-32

ARREST AND TRIAL ONCE AGAIN

Acts 5:17-32

But the high priest and his party (the local sect of the Sadducees) were filled with envy, and they laid hands on the apostles and put them under public arrest. But through the night the angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison and led them out and said, "Go, stand in the Temple and tell the people all the words of this life." When they heard this they came into the Temple very early and began to teach. When the high priest and those with him arrived, they summoned the Sanhedrin and all the council of the sons of Israel; and they despatched messengers to the prison that they should be brought. When the officers arrived they did not find them in the prison. When they returned, they brought news saying, "We found the prison shut with all security, and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened the doors we found no one inside." When the superintendent of the Temple and the chief priests heard these words, they did not know what to make of them and could not understand what could have happened.

But someone arrived and told them, "Look now, the men you put in prison are standing in the Temple and teaching the people." Then the superintendent of the Temple went away with his officers and fetched them, but he used no force, for they were afraid of the people in case they might be stoned. When they had fetched them they stood them amidst the Sanhedrin. The high priest questioned them, "We laid the strongest injunctions on you not to teach in this name; and, look now, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are aiming at bringing on us guilt for the blood of this man." Peter and the apostles answered, "It is necessary to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you got into your hands and hanged on a tree. God has exalted him as Prince and Saviour at his right hand, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins, and we are witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Spirit, whom God gave to those who obey him."

The second arrest of the apostles was inevitable. The Sanhedrin had strictly ordered them to abstain from teaching in the name of Jesus and they had publicly disregarded that injunction. That to the Sanhedrin was a doubly serious matter. These apostles were not only heretics, they were also potential disturbers of the peace. Palestine was always an inflammable country; if this were not checked it might well result in some kind of popular rising; and that was the last thing the priests and Sadducees wanted, because then Rome would intervene.

There is not necessarily a miracle in the release of Peter and John. The word angelos (GSN0032) has two meanings. It means an angel; but it is also the normal word for a messenger. Even if the release of the apostles had been brought about by human means, the agent of the release would still be the angelos of the Lord.

In the narrative of the events after the release we see vividly displayed the great characteristics of these early men of God.

(i) They were men of courage. The command to go straight back and preach in the Temple sounds to a prudent mind almost incredible. To obey that command was an act of almost reckless audacity. And yet they went. (ii) They were men of principle. And their ruling principle was that in

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Acts 5:17-32

all circumstances obedience to God must come first. They never asked, "Is this course of action safe?" They asked, "Is this what God wants me to do?" (iii) They had a clear idea of their function. They knew that they were witnesses for Christ. A witness is essentially a man who speaks from first-hand knowledge. He knows from personal experience that what he says is true; and it is impossible to stop a man like that because it is impossible to stop the truth.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 5:33-42

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY

Acts 5:33-42

When they heard this they were torn with vexation and planned to destroy them. But a certain Pharisee called Gamaliel stood up in the Sanhedrin, a teacher of the law held in honour by all the people, and ordered that the men should be put out of the meeting for a short time. He said to them, "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves regarding these men and think what you are going to do with them. Before these days Theudas arose, saying that he was someone. Men to the number of about four hundred attached themselves to him. He was destroyed and all who were persuaded by him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilaeen arose, in the days when the census was taken, and he persuaded the people to follow him. He too perished and all the people who were persuaded by him were scattered abroad. And in the present circumstances I say to you keep off these men and let them go, because if this purpose and this affair is of men it will come to nothing; but if it is of God you cannot stop them.

So take care that you do not turn out to be men who are fighting against God." They were persuaded by him. So they called in the apostles, and, when they had threatened them, they enjoined them not to speak in the name of Jesus and sent them away. So they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they were deemed worthy to suffer dishonour for the name. Every day in the Temple and from house to house they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus was God's Anointed One.

On their second appearance before the Sanhedrin the apostles found an unexpected helper. Gamaliel was a Pharisee. The Sadducees were the wealthy collaborationists, who were ever seeking to preserve their own prestige; but the Pharisees had no political ambitions. Their name literally means "The Separated Ones," and they had separated themselves from ordinary life in order to devote themselves to the keeping of the law in its every small detail. There were never more than about six thousand of them all told, and the austerity of their lives made them highly respected.

Gamaliel was more than respected; he was loved. He was a kindly man with a far wider tolerance than his fellows. He was, for instance, one of the very few Pharisees who did not regard Greek culture as sinful. He was one of the very few to whom the title "Rabban" had been given. Men called him "The Beauty of the Law." When he died it was said, "Since Rabban Gamaliel died there has been no more reverence for the Law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time."

When the Sanhedrin seemed likely to resort to violent measures against the apostles Gamaliel intervened. The Pharisees had a belief which combined fate and free-will. They believed that all things were in the hand of God and yet that man was responsible for his actions. "Everything is foreseen," they said, "yet freedom of choice is given." So Gamaliel's point was that they must have a care in case they were exercising their free-will to go against God. He pleaded that if this matter was not of God, it would come to nothing anyway. He quoted two examples.

First he cited Theudas. In those days Palestine had a quick succession of fire-brand leaders who set themselves up as the deliverers of their country and sometimes even as the Messiah. Who this Theudas was we do not know. There was a Theudas some years later who led a band of people out

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Acts 5:33-42

to the Jordan with the promise that he could divide the waters and that they would walk over dryshod, and whose rising was swiftly dealt with. Theudas was a common name and no doubt this was just such another fire-brand.

His second example was Judas. He had rebelled at the time of the census, taken by the governor Quirinius in A.D. 6 in order to arrange taxation. Judas took up the position that God was the King of Israel; to him alone tribute was due, all other taxation was impious and to pay it was a blasphemy. He attempted to raise a revolution but failed. The Sanhedrin listened to Gamaliel and once again, after threatening the apostles, they let them go.

They went rejoicing in their tribulations. They rejoiced in persecution for two reasons. (i) It was an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to Christ. In Russia in the early days of communism the man who could show the marks of the fetters on his hands and the mark of the lash on his back was held in honour because he had suffered for the cause. It was Mr. Valiant-for-Truth's proud boast, "My marks and scars I carry with me." (ii) It was a real opportunity to share in the experience of Christ. Those who shared in the cross-bearing would share in the crown-wearing.

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Acts 6:1-7

THE FIRST OFFICE-BEARERS

Acts 6:1-7

In those days, when the number of the disciples was growing, there arose a complaint of the Greek-speaking Jews against the Hebrew-speaking Jews, in which they alleged that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. The Twelve sent for the main body of the disciples and said, "It is not fitting that we should abandon the word of God to serve tables. So, brethren, look about for seven attested men from your number, men full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, and we will put them in charge of this business. As for us, we will give our undivided attention to prayer and to the service of the word." This seemed a good idea to the body of the disciples. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochoros and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenos and Nicolaos, who was a Gentile from Antioch who had embraced the Jewish faith. They brought these men into the presence of the apostles; and they prayed and laid their hands upon them.

So the word of God progressed and the number of disciples in Jerusalem was very greatly increased; and a large number of the priests accepted the faith.

As the Church grew it began to encounter the problems of an institution. No nation has ever had a greater sense of responsibility for the less fortunate brethren than the Jews.

In the synagogue there was a routine custom. Two collectors went round the market and the private houses every Friday morning and made a collection for the needy partly in money and partly in goods. Later in the day this was distributed. Those who were temporarily in need received enough to enable them to carry on; and those who were permanently unable to support themselves received enough for fourteen meals, that is, enough for two meals a day for the ensuing week. The fund from which this distribution was made was called the Kuppah or Basket. In addition to this a house-to-house collection was made daily for those in pressing need. This was called the Tamhui, or Tray.

It is clear that the Christian Church had taken over this custom. But amidst the Jews themselves there was a cleavage. In the Christian Church there were two kinds of Jews. There were the Jerusalem and the Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic, the descendant of the ancestral language, and prided themselves that there was no foreign admixture in their lives. There were also Jews from foreign countries who had come up for Pentecost and made the great discovery of Christ. Many of these had been away from Palestine for generations; they had forgotten their Hebrew and spoke only Greek. The natural consequence was that the spiritually snobbish Aramaic-speaking Jews looked down on the foreign Jews. This contempt affected the daily distribution of alms and there was a complaint that the widows of the Greek-speaking Jews were being--possibly deliberately--neglected. The apostles felt they ought not to get themselves mixed up in a matter like this; so the Seven were chosen to straighten out the situation.

It is extremely interesting to note that the first office-bearers to be appointed were chosen not to talk but for practical service.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 6:8-15

A CHAMPION OF FREEDOM ARISES

Acts 6:8-15

Stephen, full of grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. There arose in debate with Stephen certain members of the synagogue of the Libertines and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia; and they could find no answer to his wisdom and to the Spirit with whose help he spoke. So they formed a plot to introduce certain men who alleged, "We heard this man speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." So they agitated the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon Stephen and seized him and brought him to the Sanhedrin. Then they introduced false witnesses who alleged, "This man never stops saying things against the holy place and against the law; for we have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." And when all those who sat in the Sanhedrin gazed intently at him, they saw his face looking as if it were the face of an angel,

The Church's appointment of these seven men had far-reaching consequences. In essence the great struggle had begun. The Jews always looked on themselves as the chosen people; but they had interpreted chosen in the wrong way, regarding themselves as chosen for special privilege and believing that God had no use for any other nation. At their worst they declared that God had created the Gentiles to be fuel for the fires of hell; at their mildest they believed that some day the Gentiles would become their servants. They never dreamed that they were chosen for service to bring all men into the same relationship with God as they themselves enjoyed.

Here was the thin end of the wedge. This is not yet a question of bringing in the Gentiles. It is Greek-speaking Jews who are involved. But not one of the seven has a Jewish name; and one of them, Nicolaos, was a Gentile who had accepted the Jewish faith. And Stephen had a vision of a world for Christ. To the Jews two things were specially precious--the Temple, where alone sacrifice could be offered and God could be truly worshipped and the Law which could never be changed. Stephen, however, said that the Temple must pass away, that the Law was but a stage towards the gospel and that Christianity must go out to the whole wide world. None could withstand his arguments and so the Jews resorted to force and Stephen was arrested. His career was to be short; but he was the first to see that Christianity was not the perquisite of the Jews but God's offer to all the world.

STEPHEN'S DEFENCE

When Oliver Cromwell was outlining the education he thought necessary for his son Richard, he said, "I would have him know a little history." It was to the lesson of history that Stephen appealed. Clearly believing that the best form of defence was attack, he took a bird's eye view of the history of the Jewish people and cited certain truths as condemnation of his own nation.

(i) He saw that the men who played a really great part in the history of Israel were the men who heard God's command, "Get thee out," and were not afraid to obey it. With that adventurous spirit

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Acts 6:8-15

Stephen implicitly contrasted the spirit of the Jews of his own day, whose one desire was to keep things as they were and who regarded Jesus and his followers as dangerous innovators.

(ii) He insisted that men had worshipped God long before there ever was a Temple. To the Jews the Temple was the most sacred of all places. Stephen's insistence on the fact that God does not dwell exclusively in any temple made with hands was not to their liking.

(iii) Stephen insisted that when the Jews crucified Jesus they were only setting the coping stone on a policy they had always followed; for all through the ages they had persecuted the prophets and abandoned the leaders whom God had raised up.

These were hard truths for men who believed themselves to be the chosen people, and it is little wonder that they were infuriated when they heard them. We must watch for these ever-recurring notes as we study Stephen's defence.

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Acts 7

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Barclay's Commentary

Acts 7:1-7

THE MAN WHO CAME OUT

Acts 7:1-7

The high priest said, "Is this so?" And Stephen said, "Men, brothers and fathers, listen to what I have to say. The God of glory appeared to Abraham our father when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Charran. He said to him, 'Get out from your country and from your kindred and come here to a land which I will show you.' Then he came out from the land of the Chaldaeans and took up his residence in Charran. After the death of his father he removed from there and took up his residence in this land where you now live. God did not give him an inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot upon. But he did promise him that he would some day give it to him for a possession and to his descendants after him, although at that time he had no child. God spoke thus--that his descendants would be sojourners in an alien land, that they would make slaves of them and treat them badly for four hundred years.

As for the nations to which they will be slaves--God said-- 'I will judge them, and after these years have passed, they will come out and they will serve me in this place.'"

As we have already seen, it was Stephen's method of defence to take a panoramic view of Jewish history. It was not the mere sequence of events which was in Stephen's mind. To him every person and event symbolized something. He began with Abraham, for in the most literal way it was with him that, for the Jew, history began. In him Stephen sees three things.

(i) Abraham was a man who answered God's summons. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, Abraham left home without knowing where he was to go (Heb. 11:8). He was a man of adventurous spirit. Lesslie Newbigin of the Church of South India tells us that negotiations towards that union were often held up by people demanding to know just where such and such a step might lead. In the end someone had to say to these careful souls, "A Christian has no right to demand to know where he is going." For Stephen the man of God was he who obeyed God's command even when he had no idea what the consequences might be.

(ii) Abraham was a man of faith. He did not know where he was going but he believed that, under God's guidance, the best was yet to be. Even when he had no children and when, humanly speaking, it seemed impossible that he ever should have any, he believed that some day his descendants would inherit the land God had promised to them.

(iii) Abraham was a man of hope. To the end of the day he never saw the promise fully fulfilled but he never doubted that it would be.

So Stephen presents the Jews with the picture of an adventurous life, ever ready to answer God's summons in contrast to their desire to cling to the past.

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Acts 7:8-16

DOWN INTO EGYPT

Acts 7:8-16

"So he gave him the covenant of which circumcision was the sign. So he begat Isaac and he circumcised him on the eighth day. And Isaac begat Jacob and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. The patriarchs were jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles and gave him grace and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt. So he made Joseph the ruler of Egypt and of his whole house. There came a famine upon the whole of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers could not find food. But Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, and he despatched our fathers there on their first visit. On the second visit Joseph's brothers discovered who he was, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. So Joseph sent and invited Jacob his father to come together with all his relations, in all seventy-five persons. So Jacob came down to Egypt; and he himself died there and so did our fathers. They were brought over to Sychem and they were laid in the tombs which Abraham had bought at the price of silver from the sons of Emmor in Sychem."

The picture of Abraham is succeeded by the picture of Joseph. The key to Joseph's life is summed up in his own saying in Gen.50:20. At that time his brothers were afraid that, after the death of Jacob, Joseph would take vengeance on them for what they had done to him. Joseph's answer was, "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good." Joseph was the man for whom seeming disaster turned to triumph. Sold into Egypt as a slave, wrongfully imprisoned, forgotten by the men he had helped, the day yet came when he became prime minister of Egypt. Stephen sums up the characteristics of Joseph in two words--grace and wisdom.

(i) Grace is a lovely word. At its simplest it means beauty in the physical sense; then it comes to mean that beauty of character which all men love. Its nearest English equivalent is charm. There was about Joseph that charm which is always on the really good man. It would have been extremely easy for him to become embittered. But he dealt faithfully with each duty as it emerged, serving with equal devotion as slave or as prime minister.

(ii) There is no word more difficult to define than wisdom. It means so much more than mere cleverness. But the life of Joseph gives us the clue to its meaning. In essence, wisdom is the ability to see things as God sees them.

Once again the contrast is there. The Jews were lost in the contemplation of their own past and imprisoned in the mazes of their own Law. But Joseph welcomed each new task, even if it was a rebuff, and adopted God's view of life.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 7:17-36

THE MAN WHO NEVER FORGOT HIS FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN

Acts 7:17-36

"When the time for the fulfilment of the promise which God had told to Abraham drew near, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until there arose another king in Egypt who had no knowledge of Joseph. He schemed against our race and treated our fathers badly by making them cast out their children so that they would not survive. At this point Moses was born and he was very comely in God's sight. For three months he was nurtured in his father's house. When he was put out Pharaoh's daughter took him up and she brought him up as her own son; and Moses was educated in all the lore of the Egyptians. He was mighty in his words and in his deeds. When he was forty years of age the desire came into his heart to visit his brothers, the sons of Israel. He saw one of them being maltreated and went to his help; and he struck the Egyptian and exacted vengeance for the man who was being ill-treated. He thought that his brothers would understand that God was going to rescue them through him but they did not understand.

The next day he came upon the scene as two of them were fighting. He tried to reconcile them and to make peace between them. 'Men,' he said, 'you are brothers. Why do you injure each other?' But the one who was injuring his neighbour pushed him away and said, 'Who made you a ruler or a judge over us? Do you intend to murder me in the way you murdered the Egyptian yesterday?' When Moses heard this he fled and he became a sojourner in the land of Midian. There he begat two sons. When forty years had passed, when he was in the desert in the neighbourhood of Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it he was astonished at the sight. When he approached to see what it was the voice of the Lord came to him, 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' Moses was afraid and dared not look. But God said to him.. 'Take your shoes off your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

In truth I have seen the evil that is being done to my people in Egypt and I have heard their groaning. I have come down to rescue them. Come now--I will send you to Egypt.' This Moses whom they rejected saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' this very man God despatched as ruler and rescuer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out after he had performed wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years."

Next upon the scene comes the figure of Moses. For the Jew, Moses was above all the man who answered God's command to go out. He was quite literally the man who gave up a kingdom to answer God's summons to be the leader of his people. Our Bible story has little to tell us of the early days of Moses; but the Jewish historians had much more to say. According to Josephus, Moses was so beautiful a child that, when he was being carried down the street in his nurse's arms, people stopped to look at him. He was so brilliant a lad that he surpassed all others in the speed and the eagerness with which he learned. One day Pharaoh's daughter took him to her father and asked him to make him his successor on the throne of Egypt. Pharaoh agreed. Then, the tale goes on, Pharaoh took his crown and jestingly placed it on the infant Moses' head; but the child snatched it off and threw it on the ground.

One of the Egyptian wise men standing by said that this was a sign that if he was not killed at once this child was destined to bring disaster on the crown of Egypt. But Pharaoh's daughter snatched

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Acts 7:17-36

Moses into her arms and persuaded her father not to heed the warning. When Moses grew up he became the greatest of Egyptian generals and led a victorious campaign in far-off Ethiopia where he married the princess of the land.

In face of that we can see what Moses gave up. He actually gave up a kingdom in order to lead his people out into the desert on a great adventure for God. So once again Stephen is making the same point. The great man is not the man who, like the Jews, is thirled to the past and jealous of his privileges; he is the man who is ready to answer God's summons and leave the comfort and the ease he might have had.

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Acts 7:37-53

A DISOBEDIENT PEOPLE

Acts 7:37-53

"It was this man who said to the sons of Israel, 'God will raise up a prophet from among your brothers, like me.' It was this Moses who was in the gathering of the people in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him in Mount Sinai, and with your fathers. It was he who received the living oracles to give to you. But your fathers refused to be obedient to him. They rejected him. In their hearts they turned back to Egypt. They said to Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us, as for this man Moses we do not know what has happened to him.' So in those days they made a calf and they sacrificed to the idol they had made and they found their joy in the works of their hands. And God turned and gave them over to the worship of the host of heaven; as it stands written in the Book of the Prophets, 'Did you not bring me slain victims and sacrifices for forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? But now you have accepted the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Remphan, the images you have made in order to worship them. I will take you away to live in the lands beyond Babylon.' Our fathers possessed the tent of witness in the wilderness, as he who spoke instructed Moses to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. Your fathers received it from one generation to another, and brought it in with Joshua at the time when they were gaining possession of the lands of the nations whom God drove back from before your fathers, right up to the time of David. He found favour with God and he asked to be allowed to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. But the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands. As the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, earth is a footstool for my feet.' 'What kind of house will you build for me?' says the Lord, 'or where is the place where I will rest? Has not my hand made all these things?' Stiff-necked, uncircumcised in hearts and ears, you have always opposed the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who told beforehand the tidings of the coming of the Just One, whom you betrayed and whose murderers you became--you who received the Law by the disposition of angels and who did not keep it."

The speech of Stephen begins to accelerate. All the time by implication it has been condemning the attitude of the Jews; now that implicit condemnation becomes explicit. In this closing section of his defence Stephen has woven together several strands of thought.

(i) He insists on the continued disobedience of the people. In the days of Moses they rebelled by making the golden calf. In the time of Amos their hearts went after Moloch and the star gods. What is referred to as the Book of the Prophets is what we call the Minor Prophets. The quotation is actually from Am.5:27 but Stephen quotes not from the Hebrew version but the Greek.

(ii) He insists that they have had the most amazing privileges. They have had the succession of the prophets; the tent of witness, so called because the tables of the Law were laid up and kept in it; the Law which was given by angels.

These two things are to be put side by side--continuous disobedience and continuous privilege. The more privileges a man has the greater his condemnation if he takes the wrong way. Stephen is

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Acts 7:37-53

insisting that the condemnation of the Jewish nation is complete because in spite of the fact that they had every chance to know better they continuously rebelled against God.

(iii) He insists that they have wrongly limited God. The Temple which should have become their greatest blessing was in fact their greatest curse; they had come to worship it instead of worshipping God. They had finished up with a Jewish God who lived in Jerusalem rather than a God of all men whose dwelling was the whole universe.

(iv) He insists that they have consistently persecuted the prophets; and--the crowning charge--that they have murdered the Son of God. And Stephen does not excuse them on the plea of ignorance as Peter did. It is not ignorance but rebellious disobedience which made them commit that crime. There is anger in Stephen's closing words, but there is sorrow too. There is the anger that sees a people commit the most terrible of crimes; and there is the sorrow that sees a people who have refused the destiny that God offered them.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 7:54-8:1

THE FIRST OF THE MARTYRS

Acts 7:54-8:1

As they listened to this their very hearts were torn with vexation and they gnashed their teeth at him. But he was full of the Holy Spirit and he gazed steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand. So he said, "Look now, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand." They shouted with a great shout and held their ears and launched themselves at him in a body. They flung him outside the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses placed their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul. So they stoned Stephen as he called upon God and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Kneeling down he cried with a loud voice, "Lord, set not this sin to their charge." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul fully agreed with his death.

A speech like this could only have one end; Stephen had courted death and death came. But Stephen did not see the faces distorted with rage. His gaze had gone beyond time and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. When he said this it seemed to them only the greatest of blasphemies; and the penalty for blasphemy was stoning to death (Deut.13:6ff.). It is to be noted that this was no judicial trial. It was a lynching, because the Sanhedrin had no right to put anyone to death.

The method of stoning was as follows. The criminal was taken to a height and thrown down. The witnesses had to do the actual throwing down. If the fall killed the man good and well; if not, great boulders were hurled down upon him until he died.

There are in this scene certain notable things about Stephen. (i) We see the secret of his courage. Beyond all that men could do to him he saw awaiting him the welcome of his Lord. (ii) We see Stephen following his Lord's example. As Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of his executioners (Lk.23:34) so did Stephen. When George Wishart was to be executed, the executioner hesitated. Wishart came to him and kissed him. "Lo," he said, "here is a token that I forgive thee." The man who follows Christ the whole way will find strength to do things which it seems humanly impossible to do. (iii) The dreadful turmoil finished in a strange peace. To Stephen came the peace which comes to the man who has done the right thing even if the right thing kills him.

The first half of the first verse of chapter 8 goes with this section. Saul has entered on the scene. The man who was to become the apostle to the Gentiles thoroughly agreed with the execution of Stephen. But as Augustine said, "The Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen." However hard he tried Saul could never forget the way in which Stephen had died. The blood of the martyrs even thus early had begun to be the seed of the Church.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 8

THE CHURCH REACHES OUT

Ac.8 is an important chapter in the history of the Church. The Church began by being a purely Jewish institution. Ac.6 shows the first murmurings of the great debate about the acceptance of the Gentiles. Stephen had had a mind far above national delimitations. Ac.8 shows the Church reaching out. Persecution scattered the Church abroad and where they went they took their gospel. Into Ac.8 comes Philip who, like Stephen, was one of the Seven and who is to be distinguished from the Philip who was one of the Twelve. First, Philip preached to the Samaritans. The Samaritans formed a natural bridge between Jew and Gentile for they were half Jew and half Gentile in their racial descent. Then comes the incident of the Ethiopian eunuch in which the gospel takes a step out to a still wider circle. As yet the Church had no conception of a world mission; but when we read this chapter in the light of what was soon to happen, we see her unconsciously but irresistibly being moved towards her destiny.

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Acts 8:1-4

HAVOC OF THE CHURCH

Acts 8:1-4

At that time a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. They were all scattered abroad throughout the districts of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. Pious men carried Stephen away to bury him, and they mourned greatly over him. As for Saul, he ravaged the church. He went into house after house and dragged out both men and women and put them under arrest.

The death of Stephen was the signal for an outbreak of persecution which compelled the Christians to scatter and to seek safety in the remoter districts of the country. There are two specially interesting points in this short section.

(i) The apostles stood fast. Others might flee but they braved whatever perils might come; and this for two reasons. (a) They were men of courage. Conrad tells that, when he was a young sailor learning to steer a sailing-ship, a gale blew up. The older man who was teaching him gave him but one piece of advice. "Keep her facing it," he said. "Always keep her facing it." The apostles were determined to face whatever dangers threatened. (b) They were good men. Christians they might be, but there was something about them that won the respect of all. It is told that once a slanderous accusation was levelled against Plato. His answer was, "I will live in such a way that all men will know that it is a lie." The beauty and the power of the lies of the apostles were so impressive that even in a day of persecution men hesitated to lay their hands upon them.

(ii) Saul, as the King James Version says, "made havoc" of the church. The word used in the Greek denotes a brutal cruelty. It is used of a wild boar ravaging a vineyard and of a wild animal savaging a body. The contrast between the man who was savaging the church in this chapter and the man who surrendered to Christ in the next is intensely dramatic.

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Acts 8:5-13

IN SAMARIA

Acts 8:5-13

Those who were scattered abroad went throughout the country telling the message of the good news. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. The crowds listened attentively to what Philip had to say, as they heard his story and saw the signs which he performed. Many of them had unclean spirits, and the spirits, shouting loudly, came out of them; and many who were paralysed and lame were cured; and there was much rejoicing in that city.

A man called Simon was in the habit of practising magic in the city and of bewildering the people of Samaria. He alleged that he was someone great. Everyone, small and great alike, was greatly impressed by him, for they said, "This man is the power of God called Great." They were impressed by him because they had been bewildered by his magical deeds for some considerable time. Both men and women were baptized when they believed Philip, as he told them the good news of the kingdom of God and of the name of Jesus Christ. Even Simon himself believed, and, after he had been baptized, he was constantly in Philip's company; and he was amazed when he saw the signs and great deeds of power which were happening.

When the Christians were scattered abroad, Philip, who had emerged into prominence as one of the Seven, arrived in Samaria; and there he preached. This incident of the work in Samaria is an astonishing thing because it was proverbial that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans (Jn.4:9).

The quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans was centuries old. Back in the eighth century B.C. the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom whose capital was Samaria. As conquerors did in those days, they transported the greater part of the population and settled strangers in the land. In the sixth century the Babylonians conquered the Southern Kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem and its inhabitants were carried away to Babylon; but they completely refused to lose their identity and remained stubbornly Jews. In the fifth century B.C. they were allowed to return and to rebuild their shattered city under Ezra and Nehemiah. In the meantime, those of the Northern Kingdom who had been left in Palestine had intermarried with the stranger races who had been brought in. When the people of the Southern Kingdom returned and set to build their city, these people round Samaria offered their help. It was contemptuously refused because they were no longer pure Jews.

From that day onwards there was an unhealed breach and a bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans.

The fact that Philip preached there and that the message of Jesus was given to these people shows the Church all unconsciously taking one of the most important steps in history and discovering that Christ is for all the world. We know very little about Philip but he was one of the architects of the Christian Church.

We must note what Christianity brought to these people. (i) It brought the story of Jesus, the message of the love of God in Jesus Christ. (ii) It brought healing. Christianity has never been a

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Acts 8:5-13

thing of words only. (iii) It brought, as a natural consequence, a joy that the Samaritans had never known before. It is a counterfeit Christianity which brings an atmosphere of gloom; the real thing radiates joy.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 8:14-25

THINGS WHICH CANNOT BE BOUGHT AND SOLD

Acts 8:14-25

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they despatched Peter and John to them. They came down and prayed for them, so that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for as yet the Holy Spirit had fallen on no one. It was in the name of the Lord Jesus that they had been baptized. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he brought money to them and said, "Give me too this power so that he on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you because you thought to obtain the gift of God for money; you have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness of yours and pray God if it may be that the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.

For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of wickedness." Simon answered, "Do you pray to the Lord for me, so that none of the things you spoke of may come upon me."

So after they had borne their witness and spoken the word of God, they returned to Jerusalem, telling the good news to many villages of the Samaritans on the way.

Simon was by no means an unusual type in the ancient world. There were many astrologers and soothsayers and magicians, and in a credulous age they had a great influence and made a comfortable living. There is little to be surprised at in that when even the twentieth century has not risen above fortune-telling and astrology, as almost any popular newspaper or magazine can witness. It is not to be thought that Simon and his fellow-practitioners were all conscious frauds. Many of them had deluded themselves before they deluded others and believed in their own powers.

To understand what Simon was getting at we have to understand something of the atmosphere and practice of the early Church. The coming of the Spirit upon a man was connected with certain visible phenomena, in particular with the gift of speaking with tongues (compare Ac.10:44-46). He experienced an ecstasy which manifested itself in this strange phenomenon of uttering meaningless sounds. In Jewish practice the laying on of hands was very common. With it there was held to be a transference of certain qualities from one person to another. It is not to be thought that this represents an entirely materialistic view of the transference of the Spirit, the dominating factor was the character of the man who laid on the hands. The apostles were men held in such respect and even veneration that simply to feel the touch of their hands was a deeply spiritual experience. If a personal reminiscence may be allowed, I myself remember being taken to see a man who had been one of the Church's great scholars and saints.

I was very young and he was very old. I was left with him for a moment or two and in that time he laid his hands upon my head and blessed me. And to this day, more than fifty years afterwards, I can still feel the thrill of that moment. In the early Church the laying on of hands was like that.

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Acts 8:14-25

Simon was impressed with the visible effects of the laying on of hands and he tried to buy the ability to do what the apostles could do. Simon has left his name on the language for simony still means the unworthy buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices. Simon had two faults.

(i) He was not interested in bringing the Holy Spirit to others so much as in the power and prestige it would bring to himself. This exaltation of self is ever the danger of the preacher and the teacher. It is true that they must kindle at the sight of men; but it is also true as Denney said--that we cannot at one and the same time show that we are clever and that Christ is wonderful.

(ii) Simon forgot that certain gifts are dependent on character; money cannot buy them. Again, the preacher and the teacher must take warning. "Preaching is truth through personality." To bring the Spirit to others a man must be not a man of wealth but one who himself possesses the Spirit.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 8:26-40

CHRIST COMES TO AN ETHIOPIAN

Acts 8:26-40

The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip and said, "Rise and go to the south by the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza; that is Gaza in the desert." So he arose and went. Now, look you, an Ethiopian eunuch, an influential official of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasury and who had gone to worship in Jerusalem, was on his way home. As he sat in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, "Go and join yourself to this chariot." So Philip ran up and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He said, "How could I do that unless someone were to guide me?" He invited Philip to get up and to sit with him. The passage of scripture which he was reading was this--He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he received no justice.

Who will recount his lineage because his life is taken from the earth? The eunuch said to Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet speaking about? Is it about himself? Or about someone else?" Philip opened his mouth, and, taking his start from this passage of scripture, told him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road they came to some water, "Look," said the eunuch, "here is water. What is to stop me being baptized?" And he ordered the chariot to stand still. So both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away and the eunuch no longer saw him, but he travelled along his road rejoicing. Philip was found at Azotus. He went through all the cities and preached the good news to them until he came to Caesarea.

There was a road from Jerusalem which led via Bethlehem and Hebron and joined the main road to Egypt just south of Gaza. There were two Gazas. Gaza had been destroyed in war in 93 B.C. and a new Gaza had been built to the south in 57 B.C. The first was called Old or Desert Gaza to distinguish it from the other. This road which led by Gaza would be one where the traffic of half the world went by. Along in his chariot came the Ethiopian eunuch. He was the chancellor of the exchequer of Candace. Candace is not so much a proper name as a title, the title which all the queens of Ethiopia bore. This eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship. In those days the world was full of people who were weary of the many gods and the loose morals of the nations. They came to Judaism and there found the one God and the austere moral standards which gave life meaning.

If they accepted Judaism and were circumcised they were called proselytes; if they did not go that length but continued to attend the Jewish synagogues and to read the Jewish scriptures they were called God-fearers. This Ethiopian must have been one of these searchers who came to rest in Judaism either as a proselyte or a God-fearer. He was reading Isa.53; and beginning from it Philip showed him who Jesus was.

When he became a believer he was baptized. It was by baptism and circumcision that the Gentile entered the Jewish faith. In New Testament times baptism was largely adult baptism. It was not that there was anything against infant baptism, but in those early days men and women were coming in from other faiths and the Christian family had not had time to develop. To the early Christians baptism was, whenever possible, by immersion and in running water. It symbolized three things. (i)

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It symbolized cleansing. As a man's body was cleansed by the water, so his soul was bathed in the grace of Christ. (ii) It marked a clean break. We are told how one missionary when he baptized his converts made them enter the river by one bank and sent them out on the other, as if at the moment of baptism a line was drawn in their lives which sent them out to a new world. (iii) Baptism was a real union with Christ.

As the waters closed over a man's head he seemed to die with Christ and as he emerged he rose with Christ (compare Rom.6:1-4).

Tradition has it that this eunuch went home and evangelized Ethiopia. We can at least be sure that he who went on his way rejoicing would not be able to keep his newfound joy to himself.

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Acts 9:1-9

SURRENDER

Acts 9:1-9

But Saul, still breathing out threat and murder to the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters of credit to Damascus, to the synagogues there, so that if he found any of The Way there, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus. Suddenly a light from heaven flashed round about him. He fell on the ground and he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He said, "Who, are you, sir?" He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise; go into the city, and you will be told what to do." His fellow-travellers stood speechless in amazement, because they heard the voice but saw no one. So Saul rose from the ground but when his eyes were opened he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. And for three days he could not see, nor did he eat or drink anything.

In this passage we have the most famous conversion story in history. We must try as far as we can to enter into Paul's mind. When we do, we will see that this is not a sudden conversion but a sudden surrender. Something about Stephen lingered in Paul's mind and would not be banished. How could a bad man die like that? In order to still his insistent doubt Paul plunged into the most violent action possible. First he persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem. This only made matters worse because once again he had to ask himself what secret these simple people had which made them face peril and suffering and loss serene and unafraid. So then, still driving himself on, he went to the Sanhedrin.

The writ of the Sanhedrin ran wherever there were Jews. Paul had heard that certain of the Christians had escaped to Damascus and he asked for letters of credit that he might go to Damascus and extradite them. The journey only made matters worse. It was about 140 miles from Jerusalem to Damascus. The journey would be made on foot and would take about a week. Paul's only companions were the officers of the Sanhedrin, a kind of police force. Because he was a Pharisee, he could have nothing to do with them; so he walked alone; and as he walked he thought, because there was nothing else to do.

The way went through Galilee, and Galilee brought Jesus even more vividly to Paul's mind. The tension in his inner being tightened. So he came near Damascus, one of the oldest cities in the world. Just before Damascus the road climbed Mount Hermon and below lay Damascus, a lovely white city in a green plain, "a handful of pearls in a goblet of emerald." That region had this characteristic phenomenon that when the hot air of the plain met the cold air of the mountain range, violent electrical storms resulted. Just at that moment came such a lightning storm and out of the storm Christ spoke to Paul. In that moment the long battle was over and Paul surrendered to Christ.

So into Damascus he went a changed man. And how changed! He who had intended to enter Damascus like an avenging fury was led by the hand, blind and helpless.

There is all of Christianity in what the Risen Christ said to Paul, "Go into the city, and you will be told what to do." Up to this moment Paul had been doing what he liked, what he thought best, what

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his will dictated. From this time forward he would be told what to do. The Christian is a man who has ceased to do what he wants to do and who has begun to do what Christ wants him to do.

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Acts 9:10-18

A CHRISTIAN WELCOME

Acts 9:10-18

There was a disciple in Damascus called Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He said, "Here am I Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called 'Straight'; inquire in Judas' house for a man called Saul, a man from Tarsus. For, look you, he is praying; and he has seen a man called Ananias coming and putting his hands on him so that he may get back his sight." Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man. They have told me all the hurt he has done to the saints at Jerusalem. They have told me too how he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon your name." The Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument for my work. He is chosen to carry my name before peoples and kings and before the sons of Israel. I will tell him all he must suffer for my name's sake." So Ananias went away and came to the house.

He put his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus who appeared to you in the way on which you were going--has sent me that you may get your sight back and so that you may be filled with the Holy Spirit." Thereupon things like scales fell from his eyes and he got his sight back again. He rose and was baptized; and he took food and his strength increased.

Beyond doubt Ananias is one of the forgotten heroes of the Christian Church. If it be true that the Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen, it is also true that the Church owes Paul to the brotherliness of Ananias.

To Ananias came a message from God that he must go and help Paul; and he is directed to the street called "Straight." This was a great street that ran straight from the east to the west of Damascus. It was divided into three parts, a centre part where the traffic ran, and two side-walks where the pedestrians thronged and the merchant-men sat in their little booths and plied their trade. When that message came to Ananias it must have sounded mad to him. He might well have approached Paul with suspicion, as one doing an unpleasant task; he might well have begun with recriminations; but no; his first words were, "Brother Saul."

What a welcome was there! It is one of the sublimest examples of Christian love. That is what Christ can produce. Bryan Green tells that after one of his campaigns in America he asked at the last meeting that people should stand up and in a few words say just what the campaign had done for them. A negro girl rose. Not a good speaker, she could only put a few sentences together and this is what she said, "Through this campaign I have found Christ and he made me able to forgive the man who murdered my father." He made me able to forgive...that is the very essence of Christianity. In Christ, Paul and Ananias, the men who had been the bitterest enemies, came together as brothers.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 9:19-22

WITNESSING FOR CHRIST

Acts 9:19-22

Paul remained with the disciples in Damascus for some time. And immediately he began to preach Jesus in the synagogues, and the burden of his preaching was, "This is the Son of God." Everyone who heard him was astonished and kept saying, "Is not this the man who at Jerusalem sacked those who call on this name? He came here too to bring them bound to the chief priests." But Saul's power grew ever greater, and he confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus, by proving that this is God's Anointed One.

This is Luke's account of what happened to Paul after his conversion. If we want to have the chronology of the whole period in our minds we must also read Paul's own account of the matter in Gal. 1:15-24. When we put the two accounts together we find that the chain of events runs like this. (i) Saul is converted on the Damascus Road. (ii) He preaches in Damascus. (iii) He goes away to Arabia (Gal. 1:17). (iv) He returns and preaches in Damascus for a period of three years (Gal. 1:18). (v) He goes to Jerusalem. (vi) He escapes from Jerusalem to Caesarea. (vii) He returns to the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21). So we see that Paul began by doing two things.

(i) He immediately bore his witness in Damascus. In Damascus there were many Jews and consequently there would be many synagogues. It was in these Damascus synagogues that Paul first lifted up his voice for Christ. That was an act of the greatest moral courage. It was to these very synagogues that Paul had received his letters of credit as an official agent of the Jewish faith and of the Sanhedrin. It would have been very much easier to begin his Christian witness somewhere where he was not known and where his past did not stand against him. Paul is saying, "I am a changed man and I am determined that those who know me best should know it." Already he is proclaiming, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

(ii) The second thing he did is not mentioned by Luke at all--he went to Arabia (Gal. 1:17). Into Paul's life had come a shattering change and for a time he had to be alone with God. Before him stretched a different life and he needed two things: guidance for a way that was totally strange and strength for an almost overwhelming task that had been given to him. He went to God for both.

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Acts 9:23-25

ESCAPING BY THE SKIN OF HIS TEETH

Acts 9:23-25

After some time the Jews formed a plot to murder him; but Saul was informed of their plot. Night and day they kept continuous watch on the gates to murder him. But the disciples took him by night and, by way of the wall, let him down in a basket.

This is a vivid example of how much a few words in the biblical narrative may imply. Luke says that after some time in Damascus these things happened. The period dismissed in that passing phrase was no less than three years (Gal. 1:18). For three years Paul worked and preached in Damascus and the Jews were so determined to kill him that they even set a guard on the gates lest he should escape them. But the ancient cities were walled cities and the walls were often wide enough for a chariot to be driven round the top of them. On these walls there were houses whose windows often projected over the walls. In the dead of night Paul was taken into one of these houses, let down with ropes in a basket and so smuggled out of Damascus and set on his way to Jerusalem. Paul is only at the gateway of his adventures for Christ but even here he is escaping with his life by the skin of his teeth.

(i) This incident is a witness to Paul's courage. He must have seen the great gathering against him in the synagogues. He knew what had happened to Stephen, he knew what he had intended to do to the Christians and he knew what could happen to him. Clearly Christianity for him was not going to be easy but the whole tone of the incident shows to him who can read between the lines that Paul revelled in these dangers. They gave him a chance to demonstrate his new-found loyalty to that Master whom he had persecuted and whom now he loved.

(ii) It is also a witness to the effectiveness of Paul's preaching. He was so unanswerable that the Jews, helpless in debate, resorted to violence. No one persecutes a man who is ineffective. George Bernard Shaw once said that the biggest compliment you can pay an author is to burn his books. Someone else has said, "A wolf will never attack a painted sheep." Counterfeit Christianity is always safe; real Christianity is always in peril. To suffer persecution is to be paid the greatest of compliments because it is the certain proof that men think we really matter.

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Acts 9:26-31

REJECTED IN JERUSALEM

Acts 9:26-31

When he arrived in Jerusalem he tried to make contact with the disciples. They were all afraid of him because they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and told them the story of how, upon the road, he had seen the Lord and that he had spoken with him, and that in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. He went in and out with them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Greek-speaking Jews but they tried to murder him. When the brethren got news of this they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

So the Church all over Judaea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace as it was being built up; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was constantly increased.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem he found himself regarded with the gravest suspicion. How could it be otherwise? It was in that very city that he had made havoc of the Church and had dragged men and women to prison. We have seen how at crucial moments in his career certain people were instrumental in winning Paul for the Church. First, the Church owed Paul to the prayer of Stephen. Then the Church owed Paul to the forgiving spirit of Ananias. Now we see the Church owing Paul to the large-hearted charity of Barnabas. When everyone else was steering clear of him, Barnabas took him by the hand and stood sponsor for him.

By this action Barnabas showed himself to be a really Christian man.

(i) He was a man who insisted on believing the best of others. When others suspected Paul of being a spy, Barnabas insisted on believing that he was genuine. The world is largely divided into those who think the best of others and those who think the worst; and it is one of the curious facts of life that ordinarily we see our own reflection in others and make them what we believe them to be. If we insist on regarding a man with suspicion, we will end by making him do suspicious things. If we insist on believing in a man, we will end by compelling him to justify that belief. As Paul himself said, "Love thinks no evil." No one believed in men as Jesus did and it should be enough for the disciple that he be as his Lord.

(ii) He was a man who never held anyone's past against him. It is so often the case that because a man once made a mistake, he is forever condemned. It is the great characteristic of the heart of God that he has not held our past sins against us; and we should never condemn a man because once he failed.

In this passage we see Paul taking characteristic action; he disputed with the Greek-speaking Jews. Stephen had been one of these Hellenists; and in all probability Paul went to the very synagogues where once he had opposed Stephen in order to witness to the fact that his life was changed.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 9:26-31

Here again we see Paul in peril of his life. For him life had become a thing of hairbreadth escapes. Out of Jerusalem he was smuggled to Caesarea and thence to Tarsus. Once again he is following the consistent policy of his life, for he goes back to his native city to tell them that he is a changed man and that the one who changed him is Jesus Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 9:32-43

THE ACTS OF PETER

Acts 9:32-43

In the course of a tour of the whole area, Peter came down to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man called Aeneas who had been bed-ridden for eight years. He was paralysed. So Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed." At once he stood up and all who lived at Lydda and at Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

In Joppa there was a disciple called Tabitha--Dorcas is the translation of her name. She was full of good works and of deeds of charity which she never stopped doing. It happened that at that time she fell ill and died. They bathed her body and placed her in an upper room. Now Lydda is near Joppa and the disciples heard that Peter was there. So they sent two men to him to invite him, "Do not fail to come to us." Peter rose and went with them. When he had arrived they took him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by in tears, showing him the coats and tunics that Dorcas used to make when she was with them. Peter put them all out and knelt down and prayed. He turned to her body and said, "Tabitha, rise." She opened her eyes and she saw Peter and sat up. He gave her his hand and raised her to her feet. He called the saints and the widows and set her before them alive.

This event became known throughout the whole of Joppa and many believed on the Lord; and Peter remained some time in Joppa, staying with a man Simon, a tanner.

For a time Paul has held the centre of the stage; but once again Peter commands the limelight. This passage really follows on from Ac.8:25. It shows Peter in action. But it shows more than that. In the most definite way it shows us the source of Peter's power. When Peter healed Aeneas, he did not say, "I heal you"; he said, "Jesus Christ heals you." Before he spoke to Tabitha--Tabitha (GSN5000) is the Hebrew for a gazelle (see tsebiyah, HSN6646) and Dorcas (HSN0000) is the Greek for the same word--Peter prayed. It was not his own power on which Peter called; it was the power of Jesus Christ. We think too much of what we can do and too little of what Christ can do through us.

There is one very interesting word in this passage. Twice the Christians at Lydda are called saints (Ac.9:32,41). The same word is used earlier in the chapter by Ananias to describe the Christians at Jerusalem (Ac.9:13). This is the word that Paul always uses to describe the church member, for he always writes his letters to the saints that are at such and such a place.

The Greek word is hagios (GSN0040) and it has far-reaching associations. It is sometimes translated holy but the root meaning of it is different. Basically the Christian is a man who is different from those who are merely people of the world. But wherein does that difference lie? Hagios (GSN0040) was specially used of the people Israel. They are specifically a holy people, a different people. Their difference lay in the fact that of all nations God had chosen them to do his work. Israel failed in her destiny. She was disobedient and by her actions she lost her privileges. The Church became the true Israel; and the Christians became the people who are different, their difference lying in the fact that they were chosen for the special purposes of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 9:32-43

So then we who are Christians are not different from others in that we are chosen for greater honour on this earth; we are different in that we are chosen for a greater service. We are saved to serve.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 10:1-8

A DEVOUT SOLDIER

Acts 10:1-8

There was a man in Caesarea called Cornelius. He was a centurion in the battalion called the Italian battalion. He was a devout man and a God-fearer with all his household. He did many an act of charity to the people and he was constant in prayer to God. About three o'clock in the afternoon in a vision he clearly saw the angel of God coming to him and saying, "Cornelius." He gazed at him and he was awe-stricken. He said, "What is it, sir?" He said to him, "Your prayers and your works of mercy have gone up to God for a memorial; so now, send men to Joppa, and send for a man called Simon who is also called Peter. He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is on the sea-shore." When the angel who was speaking to him went away, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his orderlies. He told them everything and despatched them to Joppa.

Ac.10 tells a story that is one of the great turning points in the history of the Church. For the first time a Gentile is to be admitted into its fellowship. Since Cornelius is so important in church history let us gather together what we can learn about him.

(i) Cornelius was a Roman centurion stationed at Caesarea, the headquarters of the government of Palestine. The word which we have translated battalion is the Greek word for a cohort. In the Roman military set-up there was first of all the legion (see legeon, GSN3003). It was a force of six thousand men and therefore was roughly equal to a division. In every legion there were ten cohorts. A cohort therefore had six hundred men and comes near to being the equivalent of a battalion. The cohort was divided into centuries and over each century there was a centurion. The century is therefore roughly the equivalent of a company. The parallel to the centurion in our military organization is a company sergeant-major. These centurions were the backbone of the Roman army.

An ancient historian describes the qualifications of the centurion like this, "Centurions are desired not to be overbold and reckless so much as good leaders, of steady and prudent mind, not prone to take the offensive to start fighting wantonly, but able when overwhelmed and hard-pressed to stand fast and die at their posts." Cornelius therefore was a man who first and foremost knew what courage and loyalty were.

(ii) Cornelius was a God-fearer. In New Testament times this had become almost a technical term for Gentiles who, weary of the gods and the immoralities and the frustration of their ancestral faiths, had attached themselves to the Jewish religion. They did not accept circumcision and the Law; but they attended the synagogue and they believed in one God and in the pure ethic of Jewish religion. Cornelius then was a man who was seeking after God, and as he sought God, God found him.

(iii) Cornelius was a man given to charity; he was characteristically kind. His search for God had made him love men, and he who loves his fellow men is not far from the kingdom.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 10:1-8

(iv) Cornelius was a man of prayer. Perhaps as yet he did not clearly know the God to whom he prayed; but, according to the light that he had, he lived close to God.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 10:9-16

PETER LEARNS A LESSON

Acts 10:9-16

On the next day, when they were on the way and when they were getting near the city, about midday Peter went up to the housetop to pray. He became hungry and he wanted something to eat. When they were preparing the meal a trance came upon him. He saw the heavens opened and he saw a kind of vessel coming down. It was like a great sheet and it was let down by the four corners to the earth. On it there were all four-footed animals, all animals that creep on the earth and all that fly in the air. A voice came to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, because I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And the voice spoke again the second time, "What God has cleansed, do not you reckon common or unclean." This happened three times; and thereupon the sheet was taken up into heaven.

Before Cornelius could be welcomed into the Church, Peter had to learn a lesson. Strict Jews believed that God had no use for the Gentiles. Sometimes they even went the length of saying that help must not be given to a Gentile woman in childbirth, because that would only be to bring another Gentile into the world. Peter had to unlearn that before Cornelius could get in.

There is one point which shows that Peter was already on the way to unlearning some of the rigidity in which he had been brought up. He was staying with a man called Simon who was a tanner (Ac.9:43; Ac.10:5). A tanner worked with the dead bodies of animals and therefore he was permanently unclean (Num.19:11-13). No rigid Jew would have dreamed of accepting hospitality from a tanner. It was his uncleanness that made it necessary for Simon to dwell on the sea-shore outside the city. No doubt this tanner was a Christian and Peter had begun to see that Christianity abolished these petty laws and tabus.

At midday Peter went to the roof to pray. The house-roofs were flat and, since the houses were small and crowded, people often went up to the roof for privacy. There he had a vision of a great sheet being let down. Perhaps above the flat roof there stretched an awning to ward off the heat of the sun; and maybe the awning became in Peter's trance the great sheet. The word for sheet is the same as for a ship's sail. Maybe on the roof Peter was looking out on the blue waters of the Mediterranean and saw the ships' sails in the distance and they wove themselves into his vision.

In any event the sheet with the animals on it appeared to him and the voice told him to kill and eat. Now the Jews had strict food laws, recorded in Lev.11. Generally speaking the Jew might eat only animals which chewed the cud and whose hoofs were cloven. All others were unclean and forbidden. Peter was shocked and protested that he had never eaten anything that was unclean. The voice told him not to call what God had cleansed unclean. This happened three times so that there could be no possible mistake or dodging of the lesson. Once Peter would have called a Gentile unclean; but now God has prepared him for the visitors who would come.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 10:17-33

THE MEETING OF PETER AND CORNELIUS

Acts 10:17-33

When Peter was at a loss in his own mind to know what this vision could mean, look you, the men who had been sent by Cornelius had asked their way to Simon's house and stood at the door. They spoke and asked if Simon who was also called Peter was lodging there. When Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look you, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down and go with them without any hesitation, because it is I who sent them." So Peter came down to the men and said, "Look you, I am the man you are looking for. Why have you come?" They said, "Cornelius, the centurion, a good man and a God-fearer, one to whose worth the whole nation of the Jews bears witness, was instructed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to listen to the words you would give him." So he asked them in and gave them hospitality.

On the next day he rose and went with them and some of the brethren from Joppa came with him. On the next day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had invited along his kinsmen and his closest friends. When Peter was going to come in Cornelius met him and fell at his feet and worshipped him. Peter raised him up and said, "Rise; I, too, am a man." So he went in, talking with him as he went. He found many who had assembled there and he said, "You know that it is against the law for a man who is a Jew to have contact with or to visit one of another race. But God has shown me not to call any man common or unclean. So I came without any objection when you sent for me." So Cornelius said, "Four days ago from this time, I was praying in my house at three o'clock in the afternoon, and, look you, a man stood before me in shining clothes and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your deeds of charity have been remembered before God.

Send therefore to Joppa and send for Simon who is also called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, on the sea-shore.' Immediately I sent to you; and I am most grateful that you have come. Now then we are all present before God to hear all that God has enjoined you to tell."

In this passage the most surprising things are happening. Once again let us remember that the Jews believed that other nations were quite outside the mercy of God. The really strict Jew would have no contact with a Gentile or even with a Jew who did not observe the Law. In particular he would never have as a guest nor ever be the guest of a man who did not observe the Law. Remembering that, see what Peter did. When the emissaries of Cornelius were at the door--and knowing the Jewish outlook, they came no farther than the door--Peter asked them in and gave them hospitality (Ac.10:23). When Peter arrived at Caesarea, Cornelius met him at the door, no doubt wondering if Peter would cross his threshold at all, and Peter came in (Ac.10:27). In the most amazing way the barriers are beginning to go down.

That is typical of the work of Christ. A missionary tells how once he officiated at a communion service in Africa. Beside him as an elder sat an old chief of the Ngoni called Manly-heart. The old chief could remember the days when the young warriors of the Ngoni had left behind them a trail of burned and devastated towns and come home with their spears red with blood and with the women of their enemies as booty. And what were the tribes which in those days they had ravaged? They

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 10:17-33

were the Senga and the Tumbuka. And who were sitting at that communion service now? Ngoni, Senga and Tumbuka were sitting side by side, their enmities forgotten in the love of Jesus Christ. In the first days it was characteristic of Christianity that it broke the barriers down; and it can still do that when given the chance.

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Acts 10:34-43

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Acts 10:34-43

So Peter opened his mouth and said, "In truth I have come to understand that God has no favourites; but that in every nation he who fears him and acts righteously is acceptable to him. As for, the word which God sent to the sons of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ--this is he who is Lord of all you all know the affair that happened all over Judaea, after the baptism which John preached--you know about Jesus of Nazareth, about how God anointed him with the Spirit and with power, about how he went about healing all who were under the sway of the devil because God was with him; we are witnesses of all he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they took him and hanged him on a tree. It was he whom God raised up on the third day and made him evident, not to all the people but to the witnesses elected beforehand by God, to us who were with him and who ate with him and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

And he gave us orders to preach to the people and to testify that this is he who was set apart by God, to be the judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets testify that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

It is clear that we have here but the barest summary of what Peter said to Cornelius which makes it all the more important because it gives us the very essence of the first preaching about Jesus.

(i) Jesus was sent by God and equipped by him with the Spirit and with power. Jesus therefore is God's gift to men. Often we make the mistake of thinking in terms of an angry God who had to be pacified by something a gentle Jesus did. The early preachers never preached that. To them the very coming of Jesus was due to the love of God.

(ii) Jesus exercised a ministry of healing. It was his great desire to banish pain and sorrow from the world.

(iii) They crucified him. Once again there is stressed for him who can read between the lines the sheer horror in the crucifixion. That is what human sin can do.

(iv) He rose again. The power which was in Jesus was not to be defeated. It could conquer the worst that men could do and in the end it could conquer death.

(v) The Christian preacher and teacher is a witness of the resurrection. To him Jesus is not a figure in a book or about whom he has heard. He is a living presence whom he has met.

(vi) The result of all this is forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with God. Through Jesus the friendship which should always have existed between man and God, but which sin interrupted, has dawned upon mankind.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 10:44-48

THE ENTRY OF THE GENTILES

Acts 10:44-48

When Peter was still saying these things the Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening to his word. All the Jewish believers who had come with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles too, for they heard them speaking with tongues and magnifying God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone stop water being brought? Can anyone stop those who have received the Holy Spirit, as we too received him, from being baptized?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus. Then they asked him to wait with them for some days.

Even as Peter was speaking things began to happen against which even the Jewish Christians could not argue; the Spirit came upon Cornelius and his friends. They were lifted out of themselves in an ecstasy and began to speak with tongues. This to the Jews was the final proof of the astonishing fact that God had given his Spirit to the Gentiles too.

There are two interesting sidelights in this passage.

(i) These Gentile converts, as always in Acts, were baptized there and then. In Acts there is no trace of one set of people only being able to administer baptism. The great truth was that it was the Christian Church which was receiving these converts. We would do well to remember that in baptism today it is not the minister who is receiving a child; it is the Church which is receiving the child on behalf of Jesus Christ and accepting responsibility for him.

(ii) The very last phrase is significant. They asked Peter to wait with them for some days. Why? Surely in order that he might teach them more. The taking upon ourselves of church membership is not so much the end of the road as the beginning.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 11:1-10

PETER ON HIS DEFENCE

Acts 11:1-10

The apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judaea heard that the Gentiles too had received the word of God. So when Peter came up to Jerusalem those of the circumcision criticized him because, they said, "You went in to men who had never been circumcised and you ate with them." So Peter began at the beginning and told them the whole story. He said, "I was praying in the city of Joppa; in a trance I saw a vision. I saw a kind of vessel coming down like a great sheet let down by the four corners from heaven; and it came right down to me. I was gazing at it and trying to make out what it was and I saw on it the four-footed beasts of the earth and the wild beasts and the creeping animals and the animals that fly in the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter, kill and eat.' I said, 'By no means, Lord, because food which is common or unclean has never entered my mouth.' Again the voice spoke from heaven, 'What God has cleansed do not you reckon as common.' This happened three times; and they were all drawn up into heaven again."

The importance that Luke attached to this incident is shown by the amount of space he devoted to it. In ancient times a writer had by no means unlimited space. The book form had not come into use. Writers used rolls of a material called papyrus, which was the forerunner of paper and was made of the pith of the papyrus plant, a kind of bulrush. Now a roll is an unwieldy thing and the longest roll that was used was about thirty-five feet long which would be almost precisely the length required to hold the book of Acts. Into that space Luke had almost endless material to fit. He must have selected with the greatest care what he was going to set down; and yet he finds the story of Peter and Cornelius of such importance that he twice relates it in full.

Luke was right. We usually do not realize how near Christianity was to becoming only another kind of Judaism. All the first Christians were Jews and the whole tradition and outlook of Judaism would have moved them to keep this new wonder to themselves and to believe that God could not possibly have meant it for the Gentiles. Luke sees this incident as a notable mile-stone on the road along which the Church was groping its way to the conception of a world for Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 11:11-18

A CONVINCING STORY

Acts 11:11-18

"And, look you, thereupon, three men, who had been sent to me from Caesarea, stood at the house where we were. The Spirit told me to go with them and to make no distinctions. These six brethren also came with me and we came to the man's house. He told us how in the house he had seen the angel standing and saying, 'Send to Joppa and send for Simon, who is also called Peter, who will speak words to you by which you and all your house will be saved.' As I was beginning to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as in the beginning he did upon you. And I remembered the Lord's word and how he said, 'John baptized you with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' if God gave the same gift to them as to us who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to be able to hinder God?" When they heard this they had no protests to make and they glorified God saying, "So God has given life-giving repentance to the Gentiles too."

The fault for which Peter was initially on trial was that he had eaten with Gentiles (Ac.11:3). By so doing Peter had outraged the ancestral Law and traditions of his people. Peter's defence was not an argument; it was a statement of the facts. Whatever his critics might say the Holy Spirit had come upon these Gentiles in the most notable way. In Ac.11:12 there is a significant sidelight. Peter says that he took six brethren with him. Together with himself that made seven persons present. In Egyptian law, which the Jews would know well, seven witnesses were necessary completely to prove a case. In Roman law, which they would also know well, seven seals were necessary to authenticate a really important document. So Peter is in effect saying, "I am not arguing with you. I am telling you the facts and of these facts there are seven witnesses. The case is proved."

The proof of Christianity always lies in facts. It is doubtful if anyone has ever been argued into Christianity by verbal proofs and logical demonstrations. The proof of Christianity is that it works. that it does change men, that it does make bad men good, that it does bring to men the Spirit of God. It is when a man's deeds give the lie to his words that the gravest discredit is brought on Christianity; it is when a man's words are guaranteed by his deeds that the world is presented with an argument for Christianity which will brook no denial.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 11:19-21

GREAT THINGS IN ANTIOCH

Acts 11:19-21

Those who had been dispersed by the persecution following upon the death of Stephen went through the country as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they spoke the word to no one except to Jews. But some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, came to Antioch and spoke to the Greeks too and told them the good news of the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them; and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

In restrained sentences these few words tell of one of the greatest events in history. Now, for the first time, the gospel is deliberately preached to the Gentiles. Everything has been working up to this. There have been three steps on the ladder. First, Philip preached to the Samaritans; but the Samaritans after all were half Jewish and formed, as it were, a bridge, between the Jewish and the Gentile world. Second, Peter accepted Cornelius; but it was Cornelius who took the initiative. It was not the Christian Church who sought Cornelius; it was Cornelius who sought the Christian Church. Further, it is stressed that Cornelius was a God-fearer and, therefore, on the fringes of the Jewish faith. Third, in Antioch the Church did not go to people who were Jews or half Jews, nor wait to be approached by Gentiles seeking admission; of set purpose and without waiting for the invitation, it preached the gospel to the Gentiles. Christianity is finally launched on its world-wide mission.

Here we have a truly amazing thing. The Church has taken the most epoch-making of all steps; and we do not even know the names of the people who took that step. All we know is that they came from Cyprus and Cyrene. They go down to history as nameless pioneers of Christ. It has always been one of the tragedies of the Church that men have wished to be noticed and named when they did something worth while. What the Church has always needed, perhaps more than anything else, is people who never care who gains the credit for it so long as the work is done. These men may not have written their names in men's books of history; but they have written them forever in God's Book of Life.

Another striking feature is that this incident begins a section of Acts where Antioch occupies the centre of the stage. Antioch was the third greatest city in the world next to Rome and Alexandria. She stood near the mouth of the river Orontes, fifteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea. She was lovely and cosmopolitan; but she was a byword for luxurious immorality. She was famous for her chariot-racing and for a kind of deliberate pursuit of pleasure which went on literally night and day; but most of all she was famous for the worship of Daphne whose temple stood five miles out of the town amidst its laurel groves. The legend was that Daphne was a mortal maid with whom Apollo fell in love. He pursued her and for her safety Daphne was changed into a laurel bush. The priestesses of the Temple of Daphne were sacred prostitutes and nightly in the laurel groves the pursuit was re-enacted by the worshippers and the priestesses. "The morals of Daphne" was a phrase that all the world knew for loose living.

It seems incredible but nonetheless it is true that it was in a city like this that Christianity took the great stride forward to becoming the religion of the world. We need only think of that to be reminded that no situation is hopeless.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 11:22-26

THE WISDOM OF BARNABAS

Acts 11:22-26

News of this and of what they were doing came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem. So they sent Barnabas out as far as Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God he was glad and he exhorted them all to make it the set purpose of their hearts to cleave to the Lord, for he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. He went away to Tarsus to look for Saul and when he had found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they were guests of the Church there and they instructed a very considerable number of people. And it was at Antioch that the disciples first received the name of Christians.

When the leaders of the church at Jerusalem got word of what was going on at Antioch they naturally sent down to investigate the situation.

It was by the grace of God they sent the man they did. They might have sent someone of a rigid mind who made a god of the Law and was shackled by its rules and regulations; but they sent the man with the biggest heart in the Church. Barnabas had already stood by Paul and sponsored him when all men suspected him (Ac.9:27). Barnabas had already given proof of his Christian love by his generosity to his needy brethren (Ac.4:36-37). When Barnabas saw the Gentiles being swept into the fellowship of the Church he was glad; but he recognized that someone must be put in charge of this work. That someone must be a man with a double background, a Jew brought up in the Jewish tradition but one who could meet the Gentiles on equal terms. He must be a man of courage, for Antioch was no easy place to be a Christian leader; and he must be skilled in argument in order to meet the double attack of Jews and Gentiles.

Barnabas knew the very man. For nine years or so we have heard nothing of Paul. The last glimpse we had of him he was escaping by way of Caesarea to Tarsus (Ac.9:30). No doubt for these nine years he had been witnessing for Christ in his native town; but now the task for which he had been destined was ready for him, Barnabas with profound wisdom put him in charge of it.

It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians. The title began as a nickname. The people of Antioch were famous for their facility in finding nicknames. Later the bearded Emperor Julian came to visit them and they christened him "The Goat." The termination - iani means belonging to the party of; for instance Caesariani means belonging to Caesar's party. Christian means: "These Christ-folk". It was a contemptuous nickname; but the Christians took it and made it known to all the world. By their lives they made it a name not of contempt but of respect and admiration and even wonder.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 11:27-30

HELPING IN TROUBLE

Acts 11:27-30

In these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them called Agabus stood up and, through the Holy Spirit, gave a sign that a great famine was to come upon the whole land. This happened in the reign of Claudius. But each of the disciples, in proportion to his resources, fixed upon an amount for a relief fund to send to the brethren who lived in Judaea. This they did and despatched it to the elders through the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Here the prophets come upon the scene. In the early Church they were very important. They are mentioned again in Ac.13:1; Ac.15:32; Ac.21:9-10. In the early Church, broadly speaking, there were three sets of leaders. (i) There were the Apostles. Their authority was not confined to one place; their writ ran through the whole Church; and they were looked upon as being in a very real sense the successors of Jesus. (ii) There were the Elders. They were the local officials and their authority was confined to the place where they were set apart. (iii) There were the Prophets.

Their function is to be seen in their name. Prophet means both a fore-teller and a forth-teller (see prophetes, GSN4396). They foretold the future; but even more they foretold the will of God. They had no settled sphere; they were not attached to any one church. They were held in the highest honour. The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles which dates to about A.D. 100, contains the first service order book of the Church. The order for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is laid down, but then it is said that the prophets are to be allowed to conduct the service as they will. Men knew that they had special gifts. But they had special dangers too. The career of prophet was one which a man might undertake not from the highest but from the lowest of motives. The false prophet existed, the man who simply battered on the charity of the Church.

The same Teaching of the Twelve Apostles warns against the prophet who in a vision asks for money or for a meal; it instructs that prophets should always be given hospitality for one night but says that if they desire to stay longer without working they are false prophets.

This incident is very significant for it shows that thus early men had realized the unity of the Church. When there was famine in Palestine the first instinct of the Church at Antioch was to help. It was unthinkable that one part of the Church should be in trouble and that another should do nothing about it. They were far away from the congregational outlook; they had that width of vision which saw the Church as a whole.

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Acts 12:1-11

IMPRISONMENT AND DELIVERANCE

Acts 12:1-11

About this time Herod the king began to take hostile action to inflict injury on certain men of the Church. He killed James, John's brother, with the sword. When he saw that this gave pleasure to the Jews he went to arrest Peter too. (These were the days of unleavened bread). When he had seized Peter, he put him under arrest. He handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard, for he wished to bring him before the people after the Passover Feast. So Peter was continuously guarded in prison. Prayer to God for him was earnestly offered by the Church. On the night before Herod was going to bring him before the people, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound by two chains; and guards kept continuous watch before the door. Now, look you, the Angel of the Lord stood by and a light shone in the house. He struck Peter's side and wakened him and said, "Rise quickly." The chains fell from his hands. The angel said to him, "Gird yourself and put on your sandals." He did so.

He said to him, "Wrap your cloak round about you and follow me." So he went out and followed him. And he did not know that what was happening through the angel was real but thought that he was seeing a vision, They went through the first and the second guard and they came to the iron door that led into the city and it opened to them of its own accord. They went out and proceeded along one street; and thereupon the angel left him. When Peter had recovered his faculties he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord sent his angel and delivered me from the hand of Herod and rescued me from the fate that the people of the Jews looked forward to for me."

There now broke out upon the Church, and especially upon its leaders, a new wave of persecution instigated by King Herod. Let us see briefly the various ramifications of the family of the Herods in their New Testament connections.

The first of the New Testament Herods (see Herodes GSN2264) is Herod the Great who reigned from about 41 B.C. to 1 B.C. He is the Herod of Matt.2, who was in power when Jesus was born, who received the Wise Men from the East and who massacred the children. Herod the Great was married ten times. Those of his family who cross the pages of the New Testament are as follows.

(i) Herod Philip the First. He was the first husband of the Herodias (GSN2266) who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. He is mentioned, under the name of Philip (GSN5376), in Matt.14:3; Mk.6:17; Lk.3:19. He had no official office. He was the father of Salome (see GSN4539).

(ii) Herod Antipas (see GSN0493). He was the ruler of Galilee and Peraea. He was the second husband of Herodias (see GSN2266) and consented to the death of John the Baptist. He was also the Herod to whom Pilate sent Jesus for trial (Lk.23:7ff.).

(iii) Archelaus (GSN0745). He was ruler of Judaea, Samaria and Idumaea. He was a thoroughly bad ruler and was deposed and banished. He is mentioned in Matt.2:22.

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Acts 12:1-11

(iv) Herod Philip the Second. He was ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis. He was the founder of Caesarea Philippi which was called after him. In the New Testament he is called Philip and is mentioned in Lk.3:1.

(v) Herod the Great had another son called Aristobulus (see Aristoboulos GSN0711); his mother was Mariamne, a princess who was descended from the great Maccabaeen heroes. He was murdered by his own father but he had a son called Herod Agrippa. This is the Herod of our present passage in Ac.12.

(vi) To complete the list we may note that Herod Agrippa (GSN0067), was the father of (a) Agrippa the Second, before whom Paul was examined and before whom he made his famous speech (Ac.25-26). (b) Bernice (see Bernike GSN0959), who appeared with him when Paul was under examination. (c) Drusilla (see Drousilla GSN1409), who was the wife of Felix, the governor before whom Paul was tried (Ac.24:24).

From this family history it may be seen that Herod Agrippa of this chapter was a direct descendant of the Maccabees through his mother Mariamne. He had been educated at Rome, but he sedulously cultivated the good graces of the Jewish people by meticulously keeping the Law and all Jewish observances. For these reasons he was popular with the people; and it was no doubt in order to achieve further popularity with the orthodox Jews that he decided to attack the Christian Church and its leaders. Even his conduct in the arrest of Peter shows his desire to conciliate the Jews. The Passover Feast was on 14th Nisan; for that day and the seven following no leaven must be used and the week was called the days of unleavened bread. During that time no trial or execution could be carried out and that is why Herod purposed to defer Peter's execution until the week was finished. The great tragedy of this particular wave of persecution was that it was not due to any man's principles, however misguided; it was due simply to Herod's bid to gain popular favour with the people.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 12:12-19

THE JOY OF RESTORATION

Acts 12:12-19

When Peter had grasped what had happened, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was surnamed Mark. There a large number had assembled together and were praying. When Peter had knocked at the door of the entrance a maidservant called Rhoda came to answer the door. She recognized Peter's voice and, in her joy, she did not open the door but ran and told them that Peter stood before the entrance. They said to her, "You are mad." She strenuously insisted that it was so; but they kept saying, "It is his angel." But Peter waited there knocking. When they opened the door and saw him they were amazed. With a gesture of his hand he bade them be silent and he told them the whole story of how the Lord had brought him out of prison. He said, "Tell these tidings to James and to the brethren." So he went away to another place. When day came there was no small disturbance among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. When Herod had sought for him and did not find him, he examined the guards and ordered them to be led away to execution. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea and stayed there.

The greatest precautions had been taken to see that Peter did not escape. He was guarded by four quaternions of soldiers. A quaternion was a squad of four. There were four such squads because the day and the night were divided into four watches each of three hours duration; and each squad was on duty for three hours at a time. Normally a prisoner was chained by his right hand to his guard's left hand; but Peter was chained by both hands to a guard on each side of him, while the two remaining soldiers of the quaternion kept watch at the door. Precautions could go no further. When Peter escaped the soldiers were led away to execution because it was the law that, if a criminal escaped, his guard should suffer the penalty the prisoner would have suffered.

In this story we do not necessarily see a miracle. It may well be the story of a thrilling rescue; but, however it happened, the hand of God was most definitely in it.

When Peter escaped he took his way straight to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. From that we learn that this was the headquarters of the Christian Church. It has indeed been suggested that it was in this very house that the Last Supper was eaten and that it continued to be the meeting place of the disciples in Jerusalem. Note what the Christians were doing. They were praying. When they were up against it, they turned to God.

In this passage we come on the first mention of the man who was the real leader of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. Peter instructs them to go and tell the news to James. This is the brother of our Lord. There is a certain mystery about him. In the East it would have been the natural thing for the next brother to take on the work of an elder brother who had been killed; but from the gospels we learn that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him (Jn.7:5) and that they actually thought him mad (Mk.3:21). During his lifetime James was not a supporter of Jesus. But the Risen Christ made a special appearance to James (1Cor.15:7). The apocryphal Gospel according to the Hebrews tells that after the death of Jesus, James made a vow that he would neither eat nor drink until he saw Jesus again; and that Jesus did appear to him. It may well be that what the life of Jesus could not do

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Acts 12:12-19

his death did, and that when James saw his brother die he discovered who he really was and dedicated all his life to serve him.

The change in James may well be another great example of the power of the Cross to change the lives of men.

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Acts 12:20-25

A TERRIBLE END

Acts 12:20-25

Herod was furious with the people of Tyre and Sidon. But they came to him with a common purpose. They gained the ear of Blastus the king's chamberlain and sued for peace because their country was dependent for its sustenance on the king's territory. Upon an agreed day Herod put on his royal robes and seated himself on a throne and made a speech to them. The people cried out, "It is the voice of a God and not of a man." Immediately the angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give the glory to God. And he was eaten with worms and died.

The word of God increased and was multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had completed their errand of mercy. and they took with them John who was surnamed Mark.

There was at this time some quarrel between Herod and the people of Tyre and Sidon, for whom the quarrel was a serious matter. Their lands lay to the north of Palestine and in two ways Herod could make things very difficult for them. If he deflected the trade of Palestine from their ports their revenues would be seriously impaired. Worse, Tyre and Sidon were dependent for their food supplies on Palestine and if these supplies were cut off their case would be serious indeed. So then these people succeeded in gaining the ear of Blastus, the king's chamberlain, and in due course a public session was arranged. Josephus, the Jewish historian, describes how, on the second day of the festival, he entered the theatre clad in a robe of silver cloth. The sun glinted on the silver and the people cried out that this was a god come to them. At once a sudden and terrible illness fell upon him from which he never recovered.

Ac.12:24-25 take us back to Ac.11:27-30. Paul and Barnabas had fulfilled their errand of mercy to the Church at Jerusalem and so returned to Antioch, taking with them John Mark.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 13

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Ac.13-14 tell the story of the first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas set out from Antioch. Antioch was 15 miles up the River Orontes so that they actually sailed from Seleucia, its port. From there they went across the sea to Cyprus where they preached at Salamis and Paphos. From Paphos they sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. Pamphylia was a low-lying coastal province and they did not preach there because it did not suit Paul's health. They struck inland and came to Antioch in Pisidia. When things grew too dangerous there they went 90 miles further on to Iconium. Once again their lives were threatened and they moved on to Lystra, about 20 miles away. After suffering a very serious and dangerous attack there they passed on to Derbe, the site of which has not yet been definitely identified. From Derbe they set out home, going back to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia on the way.

Having this time preached in Perga in Pamphylia, they took ship from Attalia, the principal port of Pamphylia, and sailed via Seleucia to Antioch. The whole journey occupied about three years.

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Acts 13:1-3

SENT OUT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 13:1-3

In the local church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers. There were Barnabas, and Simeon who is called Niger, and Lucius from Cyrene, and Manaen, who was brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. When they were engaged in worshipping God and in fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Come now, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them in my service." So after they had fasted and prayed they laid their hands on them and let them go.

The Christian Church was now poised to take the greatest of all steps. They had decided, quite deliberately, to take the gospel out to all the world. It was a decision taken under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. The men of the Early Church never did what they wanted to do but always what God wanted them to do.

Prophets and teachers had different functions. The prophets were wandering preachers who had given their whole lives to listening for the word of God then taking that word to their fellow men. The teachers were the men in the local churches whose duty it was to instruct converts in the faith.

It has been pointed out that this very list of prophets is symbolic of the universal appeal of the Gospel. Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus; Lucius came from Cyrene in North Africa; Simeon was also a Jew but his other name Niger is given and, since this is a Roman name, it shows that he must have moved in Roman circles; Manaen was a man with aristocratic connections; and Paul himself was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and a trained rabbi. In that little band there is exemplified the unifying influence of Christianity. Men from many lands and many backgrounds had discovered the secret of "togetherness" because they had discovered the secret of Christ.

One extremely interesting speculation has been made. Simeon not improbably came from Africa, for Niger is an African name. It has been suggested that he is the Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' Cross (Lk.23:26). It would be a thing most wonderful if the man whose first contact with Jesus was the carrying of the Cross--a task which he must have bitterly resented--was one of those directly responsible for sending out the story of the Cross to all the world.

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Acts 13:4-12

SUCCESS IN CYPRUS

Acts 13:4-12

So when they had been sent out by the Holy Spirit they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed away to Cyprus. When they were in Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogue of the Jews; and they had John as their helper. They went through the whole island as far as Paphos, and there they found a man who was a dealer in magic, a false prophet and a Jew. His name was Bar-Jesus and he was with the pro-consul Sergius Paulus who was an intelligent man. The pro-consul summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. Elymas (for such is the translation of his name), the man of magic, opposed them and tried to turn the pro-consul away from the faith.

But Saul--who is also Paul--filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him and said, "You who are full of all deceit and all villainy, you son of the devil, you enemy of righteousness, will you not stop twisting the straight ways of God? And now, look you, the Lord's hand is on you and you will be blind and you will not see the sun for a season." And thereupon a mist and a darkness fell upon him; and as he groped about he looked for people to lead him by the hand. When the pro-consul in astonishment saw what had happened he believed in the teaching of the Lord.

It was to Cyprus that Paul and Barnabas first went. Barnabas was a native of Cyprus (Ac.4:36), and it would be typical of his gracious heart that he should desire to share the treasures of Jesus first of all with his own people. Cyprus was a Roman province, famous for its copper mines and its shipbuilding industry. It was sometimes called Makaria, which means the Happy Isle, because it was held that its climate was so perfect and its resources so varied that a man might find everything necessary for a happy life within its bounds. Paul never chose an easy way. He and Barnabas preached in Paphos, the capital of the island. Paphos was infamous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of love.

The governor of Cyprus was Sergius Paulus. These were intensely superstitious times and most great men, even an intelligent man like Sergius Paulus, kept private wizards, fortune tellers who dealt in magic and spells. Bar-Jesus, or Elymas--an Arabic word which means the skilful one--saw that if the governor was won for Christianity his day was done; Paul dealt effectively with him.

From this point on Saul is called Paul. In those days nearly all Jews had two names. One was a Jewish name, by which they were known in their own circle; the other was a Greek name, by which they were known in the wider world. Sometimes the Greek name translated the Hebrew. So Cephas is the Hebrew and Peter the Greek for a rock; Thomas is the Hebrew and Didymus the Greek for a twin. Sometimes it echoed the sound. So Eliakim in Hebrew becomes Alcimus in Greek and Joshua becomes Jesus.

So Saul was also Paul. It may well be that from this time he so fully accepted his mission as the apostle to the Gentiles that he determined to use only his Gentile name. If so, it was the mark that from this time he was launched on the career for which the Holy Spirit had marked him out and that there was to be no turning back.

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Acts 13:13

THE DESERTER

Acts 13:13

Paul and his friends put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and went back to Jerusalem.

Without his name even being mentioned this verse pays the been Barnabas and Saul (Ac.13:2). It was Barnabas who had set out as the leader of this expedition. But now it is Paul and Barnabas. Paul has assumed the leadership of the expedition; and the lovely thing about Barnabas is that there is from him no word of complaint. He was a man prepared to take the second place so long as God's work was done.

The main interest of this verse is that it is a strand in the biography of John Mark--for the John mentioned here is the man we know better as Mark--who was a deserter who redeemed himself.

Mark was very young. His mother's house seems to have been the centre of the church at Jerusalem (Ac.12:12) and he must always have been close to the centre of the faith. Paul and Barnabas took him with them as their helper, for he was kinsman to Barnabas; but he turned and went home. We will never know why. Perhaps he resented the deposition of Barnabas from the leadership; perhaps he was afraid of the proposed journey up into the plateau where Antioch in Pisidia stood, for it was one of the hardest and most dangerous roads in the world; perhaps, because he came from Jerusalem, he had his doubts about this preaching to the Gentiles; perhaps at this stage he was one of those many who are better at beginning things than finishing them; perhaps--as Chrysostom said long ago--the lad wanted his mother. At any rate he went.

For a time Paul found it hard to forgive. When he set out on the second missionary journey Barnabas wanted to take Mark again but Paul refused to take the one who had proved a quitter (Ac.15:38) and he and Barnabas split company for good over it. Then Mark vanishes from history, although tradition says he went to Alexandria and Egypt and founded the church there. When he re-emerges almost 20 years later he is the man who has redeemed himself. Paul, writing to the Colossians from prison in Rome, tells them to receive Mark if he comes to them. And when he writes to Timothy just before his death, he says, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful in serving me" (2Tim.4:11). As Fosdick put it, "No man need stay the way he is." By the grace of God the man who was once a deserter became the writer of a gospel and the man whom, at the end, Paul wanted beside him.

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Acts 13:14-15

AN ADVENTUROUS JOURNEY FOR A SICK MAN

Acts 13:14-15

From Perga they went through the country and arrived at Pisidian Antioch. They went into the synagogue on the first day of the week and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent to them with this message, "Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation to say to the people say on."

One of the amazing things about Acts is the heroism that is passed over in a sentence. Pisidian Antioch stood on a plateau 3,600 feet above sea-level. To get to it Paul and Barnabas would have to cross the Taurus range of mountains by one of the hardest roads in Asia Minor, a road which was also notorious for robbers and brigands.

But we are bound to ask, why did they not preach in Pamphylia? Why did they leave the coast with the word unproclaimed and set out on that difficult and dangerous way? Not so very long afterwards Paul wrote a letter to the people of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. It is the letter called the Letter to the Galatians for all these towns were in the Roman province of Galatia. In it he says, "You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first" (Gal.4:13). So when he came to Galatia he was a sick man. Now Paul had a thorn in the flesh which in spite of much prayer remained with him (2Cor.12:7-8). Many guesses have been made as to what that thorn was--or stake as it probably should be translated. The oldest tradition is that Paul suffered from prostrating headaches. And the most likely explanation is that he was the victim of a virulent recurring malaria fever which haunted the low coastal strip of Asia Minor. A traveller says that the headache characteristic of this malaria was like a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead; and another likens it to a dentist's drill boring through a man's temple. It is most likely that this malaria attacked Paul in low-lying Pamphylia and that he had to make for the plateau country to shake it off.

Note that it never struck him to turn back. Even when his body was aching Paul never ceased to drive on and to be an adventurer for Christ.

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Acts 13:16-41

THE PREACHING OF PAUL

Acts 13:16-41

Then Paul stood up and made a gesture with his hand and said, "You Israelites, and you who are God-fearers, listen to this. The God of this people Israel chose out our fathers and he exalted the people when they lived as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with a lofty arm he brought them forth from it. For forty years he bore with their ways in the wilderness. He destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan and gave them possession of their land, for about four hundred and fifty years. After that he gave them judges up to the time of Samuel the prophet. Thereafter they asked for a king. And God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin for forty years. God removed him and raised up David as king for them.

In testimony to him he said, 'I found in David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will do all things that I wish.' It was from the seed of this man, according to his promise, that God brought Jesus, a Saviour for Israel, after John had previously preached, before his coming, a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. When John was fulfilling his course, he said, 'What do you suppose me to be? No. I am not he. But, look you, there is coming after me one the shoe of whose feet I am not fit to unloose.' Brethren, you who are sons of the race of Abraham, you God-fearers among us, it was for us that the word of this salvation was sent out. Those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize this man and they fulfilled the words of the prophets which are read every Sabbath when they condemned him in judgment. Though they found in him no charge which merited the death penalty, they asked Pilate that he should be put to death.

When they had completed all that had been written about him they took him down from the tree and put him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead and he was seen for many days by those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now witnesses of him to the people; and we bring you the good news of that promise, that was made to the fathers; we tell you that God has fulfilled this to our children by raising up Jesus, even as it stands written in the second psalm, 'Thou art My son; this day have I begotten thee.' And when he raised him from the dead no longer to return to destruction he spoke thus, 'I will give to you the holy things of David which are faithful,' because he says in another passage, 'Thou wilt not allow thy holy one to see corruption.' For David in his own generation served the will of God and fell asleep, and he was added to his fathers and he did see corruption. But the one whom God raised up did not see corruption.

Let this be known to you, brethren, that through this man the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to us. And from all the things from which you could not be acquitted by the Law of Moses, everyone who believes in this man is acquitted. So then, take heed lest there come upon you that which was spoken in the prophets-- 'See, you despisers, and wonder, and be wiped out from sight, because I work a work in your days, a work in which you will not believe, even if someone tell it to you.'"

This is an extremely important passage because it is the only full-length report of a sermon by Paul that we possess. When carefully compared with the sermon of Peter in Ac.2 the main elements in it are seen to be precisely the same.

(i) Paul insists that the coming of Jesus is the consummation of history. He outlines the national history of the Jews to show that it culminates in Christ. The Stoics believed that history simply kept on repeating itself. A modern cynical verdict is that history is the record of the sins, the mistakes

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Acts 13:16-41

and the follies of men. But the Christian view of history is optimistic. It is certain that always history is going somewhere according to the purpose of God.

(ii) Paul states the fact that men did not recognize God's consummation when it came in Jesus Christ. Browning said, "We needs must love the highest when we see it." But a man, by taking his own way and refusing God's way, can in the end afflict himself with a blindness which is unable to see. The misuse of freewill ends not in liberty but in ruin.

(iii) Although men, in their blind folly, rejected and crucified Jesus, God could not be defeated and the resurrection is the proof of the undefeatable purpose and power of God. It is told that once on a night of gale, a child said in awe to his father, "God must have lost grip of his winds tonight." The resurrection is the proof that God never loses grip.

(iv) Paul goes on to use a purely Jewish argument. The resurrection is the fulfilment of prophecy because promises were made to David which were obviously not fulfilled in him but which are fulfilled in Christ. Once again, whatever we make of this argument from prophecy, the fact remains that history is neither circular nor aimless; it looks to that which in the purpose of God must come.

(v) The coming of Christ is to one kind of people good news. Hitherto they had tried to live life according to the Law but no man could ever fulfil that Law completely and therefore any thinking man was always conscious of failure and guilt. But in Jesus Christ men find that forgiving power which sets them free from the condemnation that should have been theirs and therefore restores real friendship with God.

(vi) But what is meant for good news is in fact bad news for another kind of people. It simply makes worse the condemnation of those who have seen it and have disobeyed its summons to belief in Jesus Christ. There is excuse for the man who has never had a chance; but there is none for the man who has seen the splendour of the offer of God and has rejected it.

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Acts 13:42-52

TROUBLE AT ANTIOCH

Acts 13:42-52

As they were going out, they kept asking that these things should be spoken to them on the next Sabbath. When the synagogue service had broken up many of the Jews and worshipping proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas. They talked with them and tried to persuade them to abide in the grace of God.

On the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. When the Jews saw the crowds they were filled with envy and they argued against what Paul said, making blasphemous statements. Paul and Barnabas, using the boldest language, said, "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you, but since you reject it and since you have proved that you are unfit for eternal life, look you, we turn to the Gentiles; for thus has the Lord enjoined us, 'I have appointed you for a light to the Gentiles so that you may be for salvation even to the utmost bound of the world.'" When the Gentiles heard this they were glad and they glorified the word of God; and all who were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was carried throughout the whole district. But the Jews incited the devout women who were women of position and the chief men of the city and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas; and they ejected them from their bounds.

But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Antioch in Pisidia was an inflammable city. It was a very mixed place. It had been founded by one of Alexander the Great's successors about 300 B.C. Jews very often flooded into new cities in order to get in on the ground floor, to use a modern phrase. Since Antioch was a road centre it had become a Roman colony in 6 B.C. In the population there were therefore Greeks, Jews, Romans and not a few of the native Phrygians who were an emotional and unstable people. It was the kind of population where a spark could cause a conflagration.

The one thing that infuriated the Jews was that any of God's privileges could be for the uncircumcised Gentiles. So they took action. At this time the Jewish religion had a special attraction for women. In nothing was the ancient world more lax than in sexual morality. Family life was rapidly breaking down. The worst sufferers were women. The Jewish religion preached a purity of ethic and cleanness of life. Round the synagogues gathered many women, often of high social position, who found in this teaching just what they longed for. Many of these women became proselytes; still more were God-fearers. The Jews persuaded them to incite their husbands, who were often men in influential positions, to take steps against the Christian preachers. The inevitable result was persecution, Antioch became unsafe for Paul and Barnabas and they had to go.

The Jews were intent on keeping their privileges to themselves. From the beginning the Christians saw their privileges as something to be shared. As has been said, "The Jews saw the heathen as chaff to be burned; Jesus saw them as a harvest to be reaped for God." And his Church must have a like vision of a world for Christ.

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Acts 14:1-7

ON TO ICONIUM

Acts 14:1-7

It happened in Iconium that they went in the same way into the synagogue of the Jews and spoke to such effect that a great crowd of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. But the Jews who did not believe inflamed the minds of the Gentiles against the brethren. So then, they spent some considerable time boldly speaking in the name of the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace by causing signs and wonders to happen through their hands. The population of the city was torn in two. Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When the Gentiles and the Jews with their leaders combined in a movement to assault and stone them, they discovered what was afoot and fled for safety to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding district. And there they continued to preach the good news.

Paul and Barnabas went on to Iconium, about 90 miles from Antioch. It was a city so ancient that it claimed to be older than Damascus. In the dim past it had had a king called Nannacus and the phrase "since the days of Nannacus" was proverbial for "from the beginning of time." As usual they began in the synagogue and as usual they had good success; but the jealous Jews stirred up the mob and once again Paul and Barnabas had to move on.

It has to be noted that Paul and Barnabas were more and more taking their lives in their hands. What was proposed in Iconium was nothing other than a lynching. The further Paul and Barnabas went the further they moved from civilization. In the more civilized cities their lives at least were safe because Rome kept order; but out in the wilds Paul and Barnabas were ever under the threat of mob violence from the excitable Phrygian crowds stirred up by the Jews. These two were brave men; and it always takes courage to be a Christian.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 14:8-18

MISTAKEN FOR GODS AT LYSTRA

Acts 14:8-18

There was a man who sat in Lystra who had no power in his feet. He had been a cripple from his birth and he had never walked. He was in the habit of listening to Paul speaking. Paul fixed his gaze on him. He saw that he had faith that he could be cured and he said to him in a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet." He leaped up and kept walking about. When the crowds saw what Paul had done they exclaimed in the Lycaonian dialect, "The gods have taken the form of men and have come down to us." They called Barnabas, Zeus; and Paul, Hermes, because he was the leader in speaking. The priest of Zeus whose shrine is in front of the city brought oxen and wreaths to the gates and he and the crowd wished to offer sacrifice to them. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they rent their clothes and rushed in among the people shouting, "Men, what is this you are doing? We too are men of like passions with you.

We are bringing you the good news which tells you to turn from these empty things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all nations to go their own way. And yet he never left himself without a witness, for he was kind to men, and he gave you rain from heaven and the fruitful seasons and he filled your hearts with food and gladness." As they said these things they could hardly stop the crowds sacrificing to them.

At Lystra Paul and Barnabas were involved in a strange incident. The explanation of their being taken for gods lies in the legendary history of Lycaonia. The people round Lystra told a story that once Zeus and Hermes had come to this earth in disguise. None in all the land would give them hospitality until at last two old peasants, Philemon and his wife Baucis, took them in. As a result the whole population was wiped out by the gods except Philemon and Baucis, who were made the guardians of a splendid temple and were turned into two great trees when they died. So when Paul healed the crippled man the people of Lystra were determined not to make the same mistake again. Barnabas must have been a man of noble presence so they took him for Zeus the king of the gods. Hermes was the messenger of the gods and, since Paul was the speaker, they called him Hermes.

This passage is specially interesting because it gives us Paul's approach to those who were completely heathen and without any Jewish background to which he could appeal. With such people he started from nature to get to the God who was behind it all. He started from the here and now to get to the there and then. We do well to remember that the world is the garment of the living God. It is told that once, as they sailed in the Mediterranean, Napoleon's suite were discussing God. In the talk they eliminated him altogether. Napoleon had been silent but now he lifted his hand and pointed to the sea and the sky, "Gentlemen," he said, "who made all this?"

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 14:19-20

THE COURAGE OF PAUL

Acts 14:19-20

There came certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium. They won over the crowds and they stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, for they thought he was dead. While the disciples stood in a circle round him he got up and he went into the city; and on the next day with Barnabas he went away to Derbe.

In the midst of all the excitement at Lystra certain Jews arrived. They may have been there for one of two reasons. They may have been deliberately following Paul and Barnabas in a set attempt to undo the work that they were doing. Or they may have been corn merchants. The region round Lystra was a great corn growing area and they may have come to buy corn for the cities of Iconium and Antioch. If so, they would be shocked and angry to find Paul still preaching and would very naturally stir up the people against him.

Lystra was a Roman colony; but it was an outpost. Nevertheless, when the people saw what they had done they were afraid. That is why they dragged what they thought was Paul's dead body out of the city. They were afraid of the strong hand of Roman justice and they were trying to get rid of Paul's body in order to escape the consequences of their riot.

The outstanding feature of this story is the sheer courage of Paul. When he came to his senses, his first act was to go right back into the city where he had been stoned. It was John Wesley's advice, "Always look a mob in the face." There could be no braver thing than Paul's going straight back amongst those who had tried to murder him. A deed like that would have more effect than a hundred sermons. Men were bound to ask themselves where a man got the courage to act in such a way.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 14:21-28

CONFIRMING THE CHURCH

Acts 14:21-28

When they had preached the good news to that city and had made a considerable number of disciples they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. As they went they strengthened the souls of the disciples and urged them to abide in the faith, saying, "It is through many an affliction that we must enter into the kingdom of God." In each church they chose elders, and, when they had prayed with fasting, they offered them to the Lord in whom they had believed. When they had gone through Pisidia they came to Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga they went down to Attaleia. From there they sailed away to Antioch, from which they had been handed over to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. On their arrival there, when they had called a meeting of the church, they told them the story of all that God had done with them and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They spent a long time with the disciples.

In this passage there are three notable lights on the mind of Paul.

(i) There is his utter honesty to the people who had chosen to become Christians. He frankly told them that it was through many an affliction they would have to enter into the kingdom of God. He offered them no easy way. He acted on the principle that Jesus had come "not to make life easy but to make men great."

(ii) On the return journey Paul set apart elders in all the little groups of newly-made Christians. He showed that it was his conviction that Christianity must be lived in a fellowship. As one of the great fathers put it, "No man can have God for his father unless he has the Church for his mother." As John Wesley put it, "No man ever went to heaven alone; he must either find friends or make them." From the very beginning it was Paul's aim not only to make individual Christians but to build these individuals into a Christian fellowship.

(iii) Paul and Barnabas never thought that it was their strength which had achieved anything. They spoke of what God had done with them. They regarded themselves only as fellow-labourers with God. After the great victory of Agincourt, Henry the king forbade any songs to be made and ordered that all the glory should be given to God. We begin to have the right idea of Christian service when we work, not for our own honour, but from the conviction that we are tools in the hand of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 15

THE CRUCIAL PROBLEM

The influx of Gentiles into the Church produced a problem which had to be solved. The mental background of the Jew was founded on the fact that he belonged to the chosen people. In effect they believed that not only were the Jews the peculiar possession of God but also that God was the peculiar possession of the Jews. The problem was this. Before a Gentile became a member of the Christian Church was it necessary that he should be circumcised and take upon himself the Law of Moses? In other words--must the Gentile, before he became a Christian, first become a Jew? Or, could a Gentile be received into the Church as such?

Even were that question settled there arose another problem. The strict Jew could have no intercourse with a Gentile. He could not have him as guest nor be his guest. He would not, as far as possible, even do business with him. So then, even if Gentiles were allowed into the Church, how far could Jews and Gentiles associate in the ordinary social life of the Church.,

These were the problems which had to be solved. The solution was not easy. But in the end the Church took the decision that there should be no difference between Jew and Gentile at all. Ac.15 tells of the Council of Jerusalem whose decisions were the charter of freedom for the Gentiles.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 15:1-5

A PROBLEM BECOMES ACUTE

Acts 15:1-5

Some men came down from Judaea and tried to teach the brethren, "If you are not circumcised according to the practice of Moses you cannot be saved." When Paul and Barnabas had a great dispute and argument with them, they arranged for Paul and Barnabas and some others to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders to get this question settled. So they were sent on their way by the Church, and they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria telling the story of the conversion of the Gentiles; and they brought great joy to all the brethren. When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the Church and the apostles and the elders and they told the story of all that God had done with them. But some men of the school of the Pharisees, who were converts, rose and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to enjoin them to keep the Law of Moses."

It was almost by accident that the most epoch-making things were happening in Antioch so that the gospel was being preached to Jew and Gentile alike and they were living together as brethren. There were certain Jews to whom all this was quite unthinkable. They could never forget the position of the Jews as the chosen people. They were quite willing that the Gentiles should come into the Church but on the condition that first they became Jews. If this attitude had prevailed, Christianity would have become nothing other than a sect of Judaism. Some of these narrower Jews came down to Antioch and tried to persuade the converts that they would lose everything unless they first accepted Judaism. Paul and Barnabas argued strongly against this and matters were at a deadlock.

There was only one way out. An appeal must be made to Jerusalem, the headquarters of the Church, for a ruling. The case which Paul and Barnabas put forward was simply the story of what had happened. They were prepared to let the facts speak for themselves. But certain of the Pharisees who had become Christians insisted that all converts must be circumcised and keep the Law.

The principle at stake was quite simple and completely fundamental. Was the gift of God for the select few or for all the world? If we possess it ourselves are we to look on it as a privilege or as a responsibility? The problem may not meet us nowadays in precisely the same way; but there still exist divisions between class and class, between nation and nation, between colour and colour. We fully realize the true meaning of Christianity only when all middle walls of partition are broken down.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 15:6-12

PETER STATES THE CASE

Acts 15:6-12

The apostles and elders met together to investigate this question. After a great deal of discussion Peter stood up and said, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made his choice among us, so that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the good news and believe. And God, who knows men's hearts, bore his own witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he had done to us too. He made no distinction between us and them for he purified their hearts by faith. So why do you now tempt God by placing on the necks of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we had the strength to bear? But it is through the grace of Jesus Christ that we believe that we have been saved in exactly the same way as they too have been." The whole assembly was silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told the story of all the signs and wonders God had done amongst the heathen through them.

In answer to the stricter Jews Peter reminded them how he himself had been responsible for the reception of Cornelius into the Church ten years before this. The proof that he had acted rightly was that God had granted his Holy Spirit to these very Gentiles who had been received. As far as the Law's claims went they might have been ceremonially unclean; but God had by his Spirit cleansed their hearts. The attempt to obey the Law's multifarious commands and so to earn salvation was a losing battle which left every man in default. There was only one way--the acceptance of the free gift of the grace of God in an act of self-surrendering faith.

Peter went right to the heart of the question. In this whole dispute the deepest of principles was involved. Can a man earn the favour of God? Or must he admit his own helplessness and be ready in humble faith to accept what the grace of God gives? In effect, the Jewish party said, "Religion means earning God's favour by keeping the Law." Peter said, "Religion consists in casting ourselves on the grace of God." Here is implicit the difference between a religion of works and a religion of grace. Peace will never come to a man until he realizes that he can never put God in his debt; and that all he can do is take what God in his grace gives. The paradox of Christianity is that the way to victory is through surrender; and the way to power is through admitting one's own helplessness.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 15:13-21

THE LEADERSHIP OF JAMES

Acts 15:13-21

After they had been silent James replied, "Brothers, listen to me. Symeon has told you how God first made provision for the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name, With this the words of the prophets agree, as it stands written, 'After these things I will return and I will build again the tabernacle of David which has fallen. I will build its ruins again, and again I will set it upright, so that the rest of mankind will seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name'--this is what the Lord says, making these things known from the beginning of the world. Therefore for my part, it is my judgment that we stop making things difficult for the Gentiles who turn to God, but that we send them a letter to keep themselves from the contaminations offered to idols, from fornication, from things strangled and from blood. For Moses from of old has those who proclaim his teaching in every city, for his works are read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

We may well believe that the matter of the reception of the Gentiles hung in the balance; then James spoke. He was the leader of the Jerusalem church. His leadership was not a formal office; it was a moral leadership conceded to him because he was an outstanding man. He was the brother of Jesus. He had had a special resurrection appearance all to himself (1Cor.15:7). He was a pillar of the Church (Gal.1:19). His knees were said to be as hard as a camel's because he knelt in prayer so often and so long. He was so good a man that he was called James the Just. Further--and this was all-important--he himself was a rigorous observer of the Law. If such a man should come down on the side of the Gentiles then all was well; and he did, declaring that the disciples should be allowed into the Church without let or hindrance.

Even then the matter of ordinary social intercourse came in. How could a strict Jew consort with a Gentile? To make things easier James suggested certain regulations that Gentiles ought to keep.

They must abstain from the contamination of idols. One of the great problems of the early Church was that of meat offered to idols. Paul deals with it at length in 1Cor.8-9. When a heathen sacrificed in a temple, often only a small part of the meat was sacrificed. Most of the rest was given back to him to make a feast for his friends, often in the temple precincts, sometimes in his own house. The priests received the remainder which was then sold for ordinary purposes. No Christian must risk pollution by eating such meat for it had been offered to an idol.

They must abstain from fornication. It has been said that chastity was the only completely new virtue that Christianity brought into the world. In an impure world the Christian had to be pure.

They must abstain from things strangled and from blood. To the Jew the blood was the life and the life belonged to God alone. They so argued because when the blood flowed away life ebbed away too. Therefore all Jewish meat was killed and treated in such a way that the blood was drained off. The heathen practice of not draining the blood from a slaughtered animal was obnoxious to the strict Jew. So was the method of killing by strangulation. So the Gentile is ordered to eat only meat prepared in the Jewish way.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 15:13-21

Had these simple regulations not been observed there could have been no intercourse between Jew and Gentile; but their observance destroyed the last barrier. Within the Church the principle was established that Jew and Gentile were one.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 15:22-35

THE DECREE GOES OUT

Acts 15:22-35

Then the apostles and the elders together with the whole Church took a decision to choose men from their number and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas who is called Barsabas and Silas, men who were leaders among the brethren, and they sent a written message by their hand. "The apostles and the elders, brethren, to the brethren from the Gentiles who are throughout Antioch and Syria and Cilicia--greetings. We have heard that some who came from us have disturbed you with their words in an attempt to upset your souls. They were not acting under our instructions. We have therefore decided, when we were met together, to choose men and to send them to you, with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who are men who have devoted their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore despatched Judas and Silas to you to tell you the same things by word of mouth.

It was the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us to place no further burden on you other than the rules which are necessary--that you should keep yourselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these things you will be doing well. Farewell." So these were sent away and came down to Antioch. They called the congregation together and delivered the letter to them. When they had read it they rejoiced at the message of comfort. Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, exhorted the brethren with many an address and strengthened them. After spending some time there, they were sent away with every good wish for their welfare from the brethren to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas with certain others, too, stayed in Antioch teaching and telling the good news of the word of the Lord.

Once the Church had come to its decision, it acted with both efficiency and courtesy. The terms of the decision were embodied in a letter. But the letter was sent by no common messenger; it was entrusted to Judas and to Silas who went to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Had Paul and Barnabas come back alone their enemies might have doubted that they brought back a correct message; Judas and Silas were official emissaries and guarantors of the reality of the decision. The Church was wise in sending a person as well as a letter. One of the earliest Christian writers declared that he had learned more from the living and abiding voice than from any amount of reading. A letter could have sounded coldly official; but the words of Judas and Silas added a friendly warmth that the bare reception of a letter could never have achieved. Any amount of trouble might be avoided many a time if only a personal visit is paid instead of someone being content with sending a letter.

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

The narrative of Paul's second missionary journey, which occupied him for about three years, is given in the section of Acts which extends from Ac.15:36 to Ac.18:23. It began from Antioch. Paul first made a tour of the churches of Syria and Cilicia. Then he re-visited the churches in the regions of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. There followed a period when he could not see his way clear before him. That time of uncertainty ended with the vision at Troas. From Troas, Paul crossed to Neapolis and thence to Philippi. From Philippi he moved on to Thessalonica and Beroea.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 15:22-35

From there he went to Athens and then on to Corinth where he spent about eighteen months. From Corinth he travelled to Jerusalem by way of Ephesus and finally back to Antioch, his starting point. The great step forward is that with this journey Paul's activity passed beyond Asia Minor and entered Europe.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 15:36-41

PAUL TAKES THE ROAD AGAIN

Acts 15:36-41

Some time after, Paul said to Barnabas, "Come now, let us go back and visit the brethren in every city in which we preached the word of the Lord, so that we may see how things are going with them." Barnabas wished to take John who was called Mark along with them; but Paul did not think it right to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. There was so sharp a difference of opinion that they were separated from each other and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and went off when he had been commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches.

Paul was a born adventurer and could never stay long in the one place. He decided to take the road again; but the preparations for the journey ended in a tragic breach. Barnabas wished to take John Mark but Paul would have nothing to do with the man who had played the deserter in Pamphylia. The difference between them was so sharp that they split company never to work with each other again. It is impossible to say whether Barnabas or Paul was right. But this much is certain, Mark was supremely fortunate that he had a friend like Barnabas. In the end, as we know, Mark became the man who redeemed himself. It may well have been the friendship of Barnabas which gave Mark back his self-respect and made him determined to make good. It is a great thing for a man to have someone who believes in him. Barnabas believed in Mark and in the end Mark justified that belief.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 16

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

The narrative of Paul's second missionary journey, which occupied him for about three years, is given in the section of Acts which extends from Ac.15:36 to Ac.18:23. It began from Antioch. Paul first made a tour of the churches of Syria and Cilicia. Then he re-visited the churches in the regions of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch. There followed a period when he could not see his way clear before him. That time of uncertainty ended with the vision at Troas. From Troas, Paul crossed to Neapolis and thence to Philippi. From Philippi he moved on to Thessalonica and Beroea. From there he went to Athens and then on to Corinth where he spent about eighteen months. From Corinth he travelled to Jerusalem by way of Ephesus and finally back to Antioch, his starting point. The great step forward is that with this journey Paul's activity passed beyond Asia Minor and entered Europe.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 16:1-5

A SON IN THE FAITH

Acts 16:1-5

Paul arrived at Derbe and Lystra and, look you, there was a disciple there called Timothy. He was the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was Greek. The brethren in Lystra and Iconium were witnesses to his worth. Paul wished him to go out with him and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in these places, for they all knew that his father was Greek. As they made their way through the cities they handed over to them the decisions which had been arrived at by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, that they should observe them. The churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in number every day.

It was five years since Paul had preached in Derbe and Lystra but when he returned his heart must have been gladdened for there had emerged a young man who was to be very dear to him. It was only natural that Paul should be looking for someone to take Mark's place. He was always well aware of the necessity of training a new generation for the work that lay ahead. He found just the kind of man he wanted in young Timothy. On the face of it, it is something of a problem that Paul circumcised Timothy for he had just won a battle in which circumcision had been declared unnecessary. The reason was that Timothy was a Jew and Paul had never said that circumcision was not necessary for Jews. It was the Gentiles who were freed from the ceremonies of the Jewish way of life.

In fact by accepting Timothy as a Jew, Paul showed just how emancipated he was from Jewish thought. Timothy was the son of a mixed marriage. The strict Jew would refuse to accept that as a marriage at all; in fact, if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy or a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, he would regard that Jewish boy or girl as dead. So much so, that sometimes a funeral was actually carried out. By accepting the child of such a marriage as a brother Jew, Paul showed how definitely he had broken down all national barriers.

Timothy was a lad with a great heritage. He had had a good mother and a good grandmother (2Tim.1:5). Often in the days to come he was to be Paul's messenger (1Cor.4:17; 1Th.3:2-6). He was at Rome with Paul when the apostle was in prison (Php.1:1; Php.2:19; Col.1:1; Phm.1). Timothy was in a very special relationship to Paul. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1Cor.4:17) he called him his beloved son. When he wrote to the Philippians he said that there was no one whose mind was so much at one with his own (Php.2:19-20). It seems very likely that Paul saw in Timothy his successor when he had to lay down his work. Happy indeed is the man to whom it is given to see the result of his training in one who can take up the burden when he lays it down.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 16:6-10

THE GOSPEL COMES TO EUROPE

Acts 16:6-10

They went through the Phrygian and Galatian territory, but they were prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in Asia. When they had gone through Mysia they tried to go into Bithynia.; and the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do so. So they passed by Mysia and came down to Troas. During the night a vision appeared to Paul. A man from Macedonia stood and urged him, "Cross over into Macedonia and help us." When he saw the vision he immediately sought to go forth into Macedonia for we reckoned that God had called us to tell the good news to them.

For a time all doors seemed shut to Paul. It must have seemed strange to him that he was barred from the Roman province of Asia by the Holy Spirit; it contained Ephesus and all the recipients of the letters to the seven churches in the book of the Revelation. Bithynia, too, was shut to him. How did the Holy Spirit send his message to Paul? It may have been by the word of a prophet; it may have been by a vision; it may have been by some inner and inescapable conviction. But there is the possibility that what kept Paul from journeying into these provinces was ill-health, the consequence of that thorn in his flesh.

What makes that quite likely is that in Ac.16:10, suddenly and without warning, there emerges a "we" passage. The story begins to be told not in the third person but in the first person. That tells us that Luke was there, an eye-witness and a companion of Paul. Why should he so suddenly emerge on the scene? Luke was a doctor. What is more likely than that he met Paul then because Paul needed his professional services, having fallen ill and so being barred from making the journeys he would like to make? If this is so, it is suggestive to reflect that Paul took even his weakness and his pain as a messenger from God.

It was the sight of a man from Macedonia which finally gave Paul his guidance. Who was this man Paul saw in the vision? Some think it was Luke himself, for Luke may have been a Macedonian. Some think the question should not be asked since dreams need no explanations like that. But there is a most attractive theory. There was one man who had succeeded in conquering the world. That was Alexander the Great. Now it would seem that the whole situation was designed to make Paul remember Alexander. The full name of Troas was Alexandrian Troas after Alexander. Just across the sea was Philippi, called after Alexander's father. Farther on was Thessalonica called after Alexander's half-sister. The district was permeated with memories of Alexander; and Alexander was the man who had said that his aim was "to marry the east to the west" and so make one world.

It may well be that there came to Paul the vision of Alexander, the man who had conquered the world, and that this vision gave Paul a new impulse towards making one world for Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 16:11-15

EUROPE'S FIRST CONVERT

Acts 16:11-15

When we had set sail from Troas we had a straight run to Samothrace. On the next day we reached Neapolis and from there we came to Philippi which is the chief city of that section of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We spent some days in this city. On the Sabbath day we went outside the gates along the riverside where we believed there was a place of prayer. We sat down and were talking with the women who met together there. A woman whose name was Lydia, who was a purple seller from the city of Thyatira, who revered God, listened to us. God opened her heart so that she gave heed to the things said by Paul. When she and her household had been baptized she urged us, "If you judge me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay there." And she pressed us to do so.

Neapolis--the modern Kavalla was the seaport of Philippi. Philippi had a long history. Once it had been called Crenides which means "The Springs." But Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander, had fortified it as a barrier against the Thracians and had given it his own name. At one time it had possessed famous gold mines, but by Paul's time these were worked out. Later it had been the scene of one of the most famous battles in the world, when Augustus won for himself the Roman Empire.

Philippi was a Roman colony. Roman colonies were usually strategic centres. In them Rome planted little groups of army veterans who had completed their military service. They wore the Roman dress, spoke the Roman language and used the Roman laws no matter where they were. Nowhere was there greater pride in Roman citizenship than in these outposts of Rome.

In Philippi there was no synagogue from which to start. But where the Jews were unable to have a synagogue they had a place of prayer and these places of prayer were usually by the riverside. On the Sabbath Paul and his friends took their way there and talked with the women who met in that place.

The extraordinary thing about Paul's work in Philippi is the amazing cross-section of the population that was won for Christ. Lydia came from the very top end of the social scale; she was a purple merchant. The purple dye had to be gathered drop by drop from a certain shell-fish and was so costly that to dye a pound of wool with it would take the equivalent of 150 British pounds. Lydia, wealthy woman and merchant prince that she was, was won for Christ.

Her immediate reaction was to offer the hospitality of her house to Paul and his friends. When Paul is describing the Christian character he says that the Christian should be "given to hospitality" (Rom.12:13). When Peter is urging Christian duty upon his converts he tells them, "Practise hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1Pet.4:9). A Christian home is one with an ever-open door.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 16:16-24

THE DEMENTED SLAVE-GIRL

Acts 16:16-24

When we were on our way to the place of prayer.. it happened that a certain slave-girl who had a spirit which made her able to give oracles met us. By her soothsaying she provided much gain for her owners. As she followed Paul and us she kept shouting, "These men are the slaves of the most high God and they are proclaiming the way of salvation to you." She kept doing this for many days. Paul was vexed at this and he turned and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I order you to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

When her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone they laid hands on Paul and Silas and dragged them to the city square to the magistrates. So they brought them to the chief magistrates and said, "These men, who are Jews, are disturbing the whole city and are proclaiming customs which it is not right for us who are Romans to receive." The crowd came together against them. The chief magistrates tore off their clothes and ordered them to be scourged with rods. When they had laid many blows upon them they threw them into prison with instructions to the jailor to guard them securely. When he received such an order he flung them into the inner prison and secured their feet in the stocks.

If Lydia came from the top end of the social scale, this slave-girl came from the bottom. She was what was called a Pytho, that is, a person who could give oracles to guide men about the future. She was mad and the ancient world had a strange respect for mad people because, they said, the gods had taken away their wits in order to put the mind of the gods into them. She was probably also gifted with a natural turn for ventriloquism. She had fallen into the hands of unscrupulous men who used her misfortune for their gain. When Paul cured her of her madness, these men felt not joy at a fellow-creature's restoration to health but fury that their source of revenue was gone. They were astute men. They played on the natural anti-semitism of the mob; and they appealed to the pride in things Roman which was characteristic of a Roman colony and they succeeded in having Paul and Silas arrested. Not only were they arrested; they were put in the inner prison in the stocks. It may be that not only their feet but their hands and their necks also were held in the stocks.

The tragic thing is that Paul and Silas were arrested and maltreated for doing good. Whenever Christianity attacks vested interest trouble follows. It is characteristic of men that if their pockets are touched they are up in arms. It is every man's duty to ask himself, "Is the money I am earning worth the price? Do I earn it by serving or by exploiting my fellow men?" Often, the greatest obstacle to the crusade of Christ is the selfishness of men.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 16:25-40

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR

Acts 16:25-40

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were loosed. When the jailor woke up and saw the doors of the prison standing open he drew his sword and he was going to kill himself, for he thought that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted to him, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." He called for a light and rushed in. He fell in terror before Paul and Silas and brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you and your house will be saved." And they spoke the Lord's word to him together with all in his house. And that very hour he took them and washed their wounds and he and his household were immediately baptized. He brought them into his house and set a meal before them and he rejoiced with all his house when he had believed in God.

When day came the chief magistrates sent their officers saying, "Let these men go." The jailor brought the message to Paul, "The chief magistrates have sent word that you are to be released. So now, go out and go your way in peace." But Paul said to them, "They beat us and they put us into prison although we never had a trial and we are Romans. And now are they going to put us out secretly? Certainly not! Let them come themselves and bring us out." The officers told the chief magistrates what Paul had said. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. So they came and requested them and brought them out and asked them to leave the city. When they had come out of prison they visited Lydia. They saw the brethren and exhorted them and went away.

If Lydia came from the top end of the social scale and the slave-girl from the bottom, the Roman jailor was one of the sturdy middle class who made up the Roman civil service; and so in these three the whole gamut of society was complete.

Let us look first at the scene of this passage. This was a district where earthquakes were by no means uncommon. The door was locked by a wooden bar falling into two slots and the stocks were similarly fastened. The earthquake shook the bar free and the prisoners were unfettered and the door was open. The jailor was about to kill himself because Roman law said that if a prisoner escaped the jailor must suffer the penalty the prisoner would have suffered.

Let us look at the characters.

First, there is Paul. We note three things about Paul. (i) He could sing hymns when he was fast in the stocks in the inner prison at midnight. The one thing you can never take away from a Christian is God and the presence of Jesus Christ. With God there is freedom even in a prison and even at midnight there is light. (ii) He was quite willing to open the door of salvation to the jailor who had shut the door of the prison on him. There was never a grudge in Paul's nature. He could preach to the very man who had fastened him in the stocks. (iii) He could stand on his dignity. He claimed his rights as a Roman citizen. To scourge a Roman citizen was a crime punishable by death. But

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 16:25-40

Paul was not standing on his dignity for his own sake but for the sake of the Christians he was leaving behind in Philippi. He wanted it to be seen that they were not without influential friends.

Second, there is the jailor. The interesting thing about the jailor is that he immediately proved his conversion by his deeds. No sooner had he turned to Christ than he washed the weals upon the prisoners' backs and set a meal before them. Unless a man's Christianity makes him kind it is not real. Unless a man's professed change of heart is guaranteed by his change of deeds it is a spurious thing.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 17:1-9

IN THESSALONICA

Acts 17:1-9

When they had taken the road through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Paul, as his custom was, went in to them and, for three Sabbaths, he debated with them from the scriptures, opening the scriptures to them and presenting the evidence that Christ had to suffer and to rise from the dead, "and this man," he said, "is the Christ, Jesus whom I proclaim to you." Some of them believed and threw in their lot with Paul and Silas. Thus it was with many of the worshipping Greeks and with a considerable number of women who belonged to the most influential ranks of society. The Jews resented this. They got hold of some of the low characters who haunted the market place and they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They surged up to Jason's house and kept demanding that they should bring them before the people.

When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren to the city magistrates, shouting, "These men who have upset the civilized world have arrived here too; and Jason has received them as his guests. These are all teaching against the decrees of Caesar for they say that there is another emperor Jesus." They disturbed the mob and the chief magistrates as they heard this. So they took surety from Jason and the others and let them go.

The coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was an event of the first importance. The great Roman road from the Adriatic Sea to the Middle East was called the Egnatian Way; and the main street of Thessalonica was actually part of that road. If Christianity was firmly founded in Thessalonica it could spread both east and west along that road until it became a very highway of the progress of the kingdom of God.

The first verse of this chapter is an extraordinary example of economy of writing. It sounds like a pleasant stroll; but in point of fact Philippi was 33 Roman miles from Amphipolis; Amphipolis was 30 miles from Apollonia; and Apollonia was 37 miles from Thessalonica. A journey of over 100 miles is dismissed in a sentence.

As usual Paul began his work in the synagogue. His great success was not so much among the Jews as among the Gentiles attached to the synagogue. This infuriated the Jews for they looked on these Gentiles as their natural preserves and here was Paul stealing them before their very eyes. The Jews stooped to the lowest methods to hinder Paul. First they stirred up the rabble. Then, when they had dragged Jason and his friends before the magistrates, they charged the Christian missionaries with preaching political insurrection. They knew their charge to be a lie and yet it is couched in very suggestive terms. "Those," they said, "who are upsetting the civilized world have arrived here." (King James Version: "these men who have turned the world upside down"). The Jews had not the slightest doubt that Christianity was a supremely effective thing. T. R. Glover quoted with delight the saying of the child who remarked that the New Testament ended with Revolutions. When Christianity really goes into action it must cause a revolution both in the life of the individual and in the life of society.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 17:10-15

ON TO BEROEA

Acts 17:10-15

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away to Beroea by night. When they arrived there they came into the synagogue of the Jews. These were men of finer character than those in Thessalonica and they received the word with all eagerness. They daily examined the scriptures to see if these things were so. Many of them believed, as did a considerable number of well-to-do Greek women and men. When the Jews of Thessalonica knew that the word of God was preached by Paul in Beroea they came there too in an attempt to stir up and disturb the people. The brethren then immediately sent Paul away as far as the sea coast, while Silas and Timothy remained there. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and, when they had received an order to tell Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they went away,

Beroea was 60 miles west of Thessalonica. Three things stand out in this short section. (i) There is the scriptural basis of Paul's preaching. He set the people of Beroea searching the scriptures. The Jews were certain that Jesus was not the Messiah because he had been crucified. To them a man who had been crucified was a man accursed. It was no doubt in passages like Isa.53 that Paul set the people of Beroea to find a forecast of the work of Jesus. (ii) There is the envenomed bitterness of Jews. They not only opposed Paul in Thessalonica; they pursued him to Beroea. The tragedy is that undoubtedly they thought that they were doing God's work by seeking to silence Paul. It can be a terrible thing when a man identifies his aims with the will of God instead of submitting his aims to that will. (iii) There is the courage of Paul. He had been imprisoned in Philippi; he had left Thessalonica in peril of his life, under cover of darkness; and once again in Beroea he had had to flee for his life.

Most men would have abandoned a struggle which seemed bound to end in arrest and death. When David Livingstone was asked where he was prepared to go, he answered, "I am prepared to go anywhere, so long as it is forward." The idea of turning back never occurred to Paul either.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 17:16-21

ALONE IN ATHENS

Acts 17:16-21

When Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was deeply vexed as he saw the whole city full of idols. He debated with the Jews and the worshippers in the synagogue and every day he talked in the city square with everyone he met. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers took issue with him. Some of them said, "What would this gutter-sparrow of a man be saying?" Others said, "He seems to be the herald of strange divinities." This they said because he told the good news of Jesus and the resurrection. So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, "May we know what is this strange new teaching you are talking about? For you are introducing things which sound strange to us. We want therefore to know what these things mean." (All the Athenians and the strangers who stay there have no time for anything other than to talk about and to listen to the latest idea).

When he fled from Beroea, Paul found himself alone in Athens. But, with comrades or alone, Paul never stopped preaching Christ. Athens had long since left behind her great days of action but she was still the greatest university town in the world, to which men seeking learning came from all over. She was a city of many gods. It was said that there were more statues of the gods in Athens than in all the rest of Greece put together and that in Athens it was easier to meet a god than a man. In the great city square people met to talk, for in Athens they did little else. Paul would have no difficulty in getting someone to talk to and the philosophers soon discovered him.

There were the Epicureans (see Epikoureios GSN1946). (i) They believed that everything happened by chance. (ii) They believed that death was the end of all. (iii) They believed that the gods were remote from the world and did not care. (iv) They believed that pleasure was the chief end of man. They did not mean fleshly and material pleasure; for the highest pleasure was that which brought no pain in its train.

There were the Stoics. (i) They believed that everything was God. God was fiery spirit. That spirit grew dull in matter but it was in everything. What gave men life was that a little spark of that spirit dwelt in them and when they died it returned to God. (ii) They believed that everything that happened was the will of God and therefore must be accepted without resentment. (iii) They believed that every so often the world disintegrated in a conflagration and started all over again on the same cycle of events.

They took Paul to the Areopagus (GSN0697 -- the Greek for Mars' Hill). It was the name both of the hill and the court that met on it. The court was very select, perhaps only thirty members. It dealt with cases of homicide and had the oversight of public morals. There, in the most learned city in the world and before the most exclusive of courts, Paul had to state his faith. It might have daunted anyone else; but Paul was never ashamed of the gospel of Christ. To him this was another God-given opportunity to witness for Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 17:22-31

A SERMON TO THE PHILOSOPHERS

Acts 17:22-31

Paul stood up in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that in all things you are as superstitious as possible. As I came through your city and as I saw the objects of your worship. I found amongst them an altar with the inscription, 'To the Unknown God.' So then, what you worship and do not know, this I preach to you. God, who made the universe and everything in it, this God is Lord of heaven and earth and does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is he served by the hands of men, as if he needed anything, but he himself gives to all life and breath and all things. He made of one every race of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and he fixed the appointed times and boundaries of their habitations. He made men so that they might search for God, if they might perchance feel after him and find him; and indeed he is not far from any one of us. For by him we live and move and are.

As some of your own poets have said, 'We too are his offspring.' Since then we are the offspring of God we should not think that the Divine is like gold or silver or stone, engraved by the art and design of man. So then God overlooked the times of ignorance but now he gives orders to men that all men everywhere should repent. Thus he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he ordained for that task, and he has given proof of this by raising him from the dead."

There were many altars to unknown gods in Athens. Six hundred years before this a terrible pestilence had fallen on the city which nothing could halt. A Cretan poet, Epimenides, had come forward with a plan. A flock of black and white sheep were let loose throughout the city from the Areopagus. Wherever each lay down it was sacrificed to the nearest god; and if a sheep lay down near the shrine of no known god it was sacrificed to "The Unknown God." From this situation Paul takes his starting point. There are a series of steps in his sermon.

(i) God is not the made but the maker; and he who made all things cannot be worshipped by anything made by the hands of man. It is all too true that men often worship what their hands have made. If a man's God be that to which he gives all his time, thought and energy, many are clearly engaged in worshipping man-made things.

(ii) God has guided history. He was behind the rise and fall of nations in the days gone by; his hand is on the helm of things now.

(iii) God has made man in such a way that instinctively he longs for God and gropes after him in the darkness.

(iv) The days of groping and ignorance are past. So long as men had to search in the shadows they could not know God and he excused their follies and their mistakes; but now in Christ the full blaze of the knowledge of God has come and the day of excuses is past.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 17:22-31

(v) The day of judgment is coming. Life is neither a progress to extinction, as it was to the Epicureans, nor a pathway to absorption to God, as it was to the Stoics; it is a journey to the judgment seat of God where Jesus Christ is Judge.

(vi) The proof of the preeminence of Christ is the resurrection. It is no unknown God but a Risen Christ with whom we have to deal.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 17:32-34

THE REACTIONS OF THE ATHENIANS

Acts 17:32-34

When they heard of a resurrection of dead men, some mocked and some said, "We will hear about this again"; but some attached themselves to him and believed. Amongst these were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman called Damaris. together with others.

It would seem on the whole that Paul had less success in Athens than anywhere else. It was typical of the Athenians that all they wanted was to talk. They did not want action; they did not even particularly want conclusions. They wanted simply mental acrobatics and the stimulus of a mental hike.

There were three main reactions. (i) Some mocked. They were amused by the passionate earnestness of this strange Jew. It is possible to make a jest of life; but those who do so will find that what began as comedy must end in tragedy. (ii) Some put off their decision. The most dangerous of all days is when a man discovers how easy it is to talk about tomorrow. (iii) Some believed. The wise man knows that only the fool will reject God's offer.

Two converts are named. There is Dionysius the Areopagite. As already said, the Areopagus was composed of perhaps not more than thirty people; so that Dionysius must have been one of the intellectual aristocracy of Athens. There was Damaris. The position of women in Athens was very restricted. It is unlikely that any respectable woman would have been in the market square at all. The likelihood is that she turned from a way of shame to a way of life. Once again we see the gospel making its appeal to all classes and conditions of men and women.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 18

PREACHING IN CORINTH

Its very position made Corinth (GSN2882) a key city of Greece. Greece is almost cut in two by the sea. On one side is the Saronic Gulf with its port of Cenchrea and on the other is the Corinthian Gulf with its port of Lechaem. Between the two there is a neck of land less than five miles across and on that isthmus stood Corinth. All north and south traffic in Greece had to pass through Corinth because there was no other way, Men called her "The Bridge of Greece." But the voyage round the southern extremity of Greece was a voyage of great peril. The southernmost cape was Cape Malea and to round it was the equivalent of rounding Cape Horn. The Greeks had a proverb, "Let him who thinks of sailing round Malea make his will." Consequently the east to west trade of the Mediterranean also passed through Corinth, for men chose that way rather than the perilous voyage round Malea. Corinth was "the market place of Greece."

Corinth was more than a great commercial centre. She was the home of the Isthmian Games which were second only to the Olympic Games.

Corinth was also a wicked city. The Greeks had a verb, "to play the Corinthian," which meant to live a life of lustful debauchery. The word "Corinthian" came into the English language to describe in regency times a reckless, roistering buck. In Greece if ever a Corinthian was shown on the stage he was shown drunk. Dominating Corinth stood the hill of the Acropolis. The hill was not only a fortress; it was a temple of Aphrodite. In its great days the temple had one thousand priestesses of Aphrodite who were sacred prostitutes and who, at evening, came down to the city streets to ply their trade. It had become a proverb, "Not every man can afford a journey to Corinth."

This was the city in which Paul lived and worked and had some of his greatest triumphs. When he was writing to the Corinthians he made a list of all kinds of wickedness. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God." And then comes the triumphant phrase, "and such were some of you" (1Cor.6:9-11). The very iniquity of Corinth was the opportunity of Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 18:1-11

IN THE WORST OF CITIES

Acts 18:1-11

After this Paul left Athens and came to Corinth. There he found a Jew called Aquila, who was a native of Pontus, but who had newly arrived from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had decreed that all Jews must leave Rome. Paul went in to these people, and, because they had the same craft as he had. he worked with them; for they were leather workers to trade. Every Sabbath he debated in the synagogue and he won over both Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul proceeded to devote himself entirely to preaching and he kept testifying to the Jews that Jesus was God's Anointed One. When they opposed him and spoke blasphemous words he shook out his raiment against them and said, "Your blood be on your own head; I am clean; from now on I will go to the Gentiles." So he removed from there and went to the house of a man called Titus Justus, who was a worshipper of God, and whose house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the president of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians listened and believed and were baptized. The Lord said to Paul in a vision by night, "Stop being afraid; go on speaking and do not be silent, because I am with you and no one will lay hands on you to hurt you, for many people are mine in this city." He settled there for a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Here we have a vivid light on the kind of life that Paul lived. He was a rabbi and according to Jewish practice every rabbi must have a trade. He must take no money for preaching and teaching and must make his own living. The Jew glorified work. "Love work," they said. "He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery." "Excellent," they said.. "is the study of the law along with a worldly trade; for the practice of them both makes a man forget iniquity; but all law without work must in the end fail and causes iniquity." So we find rabbis following every respectable trade. It meant that they never became detached scholars and always knew what the life of the working-man was like.

Paul is described as a tent-maker. Tarsus (GSN5019), was in Cilicia (GSN2791); in that province there were herds of a certain kind of goat with a special kind of fleece. Out of that fleece a cloth called cilicium was made which was much used for making tents and curtains and hangings. Doubtless Paul worked at that trade, although the Greek word used means more than a tent-maker; it means a leather-worker and Paul must have been a skilled craftsman. Always he gloried in the fact that he was a burden to no man (1Th.2:9; 2Th.3:8; 2Cor.11:9). But very likely when Silas and Timothy arrived they brought a present, perhaps from the church at Philippi, which loved Paul so much; and that present made it possible for him to devote his whole time to preaching. It was in A.D. 49 that Claudius banished all the Jews from Rome and it must have been then that Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth.

Just when Paul needed it God spoke to him. Often he must have been daunted by the task that faced him in Corinth. He was a man of intense emotions and often he must have had his hours of reaction. But when God gives a man a task to do, he also gives him the power to do it. In the presence of God Paul found his courage and his strength.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 18:12-17

IMPARTIAL ROMAN JUSTICE

Acts 18:12-17

When Gallio was proconsul of Asia, the Jews got together to make an attack on Paul. They brought him to the judgment seat and said, "This man seduces men to worship God contrary to the Law." When Paul was going to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, "You Jews, if this were a matter of crime or of wicked misbehaviour I would of course listen with patience to you; but if this is a question of talk and words and a law observed by you, see to it yourselves. I have no wish to be judge of these things." So he drove them from his judgment seat. And they all took Sosthenes, the president of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio took no account of these things.

As usual the Jews sought to make trouble for Paul. It was very likely that it was when Gallio first entered into his proconsulship that the Jews attempted to get him to act against the Christians, trying to influence him before he was settled in. Gallio was famous for his kindness. Seneca, his brother, said of him, "Even those who love my brother Gallio to the utmost of their power do not love him enough." and also, "No man was ever as sweet to one as Gallio is to all." The Jews sought to take advantage of Gallio but he was an impartial Roman. He was well aware that Paul and his friends were not guilty of any crime and that the Jews were trying to use him for their own purposes. At the side of the judgment seat were his lictors armed with their official rods and he ordered them to drive the Jews from his Judgment seat.

The King James Version translates the latter part of Ac.18:17, "Gallio cared for none of those things." That has often been taken to mean that Gallio was uninterested, but its real meaning is that he was absolutely impartial and refused to allow himself to be influenced.

In this passage we see the indisputable value of a Christian life. Gallio knew that there was no fault which could be found with Paul and his friends.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 18:18-23

THE RETURN TO ANTIOCH

Acts 18:18-23

After Paul had remained there many days longer he took leave of the brethren and sailed away to Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila went with him. At Cenchrea he had his head shorn for he had a vow. They arrived at Ephesus and he left them there. He himself went into the synagogue and debated with the Jews. They asked him to stay a longer time but he would not consent to do so, but he took leave of them saying, "God willing, I will come back to you again." and he set out from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea he went up and greeted the church and then came down to Antioch. When he had spent some time there he went away and he went successively through the Galatian country and Phrygia, establishing all the disciples.

Paul was on the way home. His route was by Cenchrea, the port of Corinth, and thence to Ephesus. Then he went to Caesarea; from there he went up and greeted the church which means that he went up to see the leaders at Jerusalem; after that he went back to Antioch from which he had started.

At Cenchrea he had his head shorn because of a vow. When a Jew specially wished to thank God for some blessing he took the Nazirite vow (Num.6:1-21). If that vow was carried out in full it meant that for thirty days he neither ate meat nor drank wine; and he allowed his hair to grow. At the end of the thirty days he made certain offerings in the Temple; his head was shorn and the hair was burned on the altar as an offering to God. No doubt Paul was thinking of all God's goodness to him in Corinth and took this vow to show his gratitude.

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

The story of the Third Missionary Journey begins at Ac.18:23. It began with a tour of Galatia and Phrygia to confirm the brethren there. Paul then moved on to Ephesus where he remained for nearly three years. From there he went to Macedonia; he then crossed over to Troas and proceeded by way of Miletus, Tyre and Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 18:24-28

THE ENTRY OF APOLLOS

Acts 18:24-28

A Jew called Apollos, who was a native of Alexandria and a man of culture, arrived in Ephesus. He was able to use the scriptures to great effect. This man had been instructed in The Way of the Lord. He was full of enthusiasm and he told and taught the story of Jesus with accuracy, but he knew only the baptism of John. This man began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him they took him and more accurately explained the way of God to him. When he wished to go over to Achaia the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to make him welcome. When he had arrived he was of great help to those who had believed through grace, for he vigorously confuted the Jews in public debate. demonstrating through the scriptures that Jesus was the Anointed One.

Christianity is here described as The Way of the Lord. One of the commonest titles in Acts is: "The Way" (Ac.9:2; Ac.19:9; Ac.19:23; Ac.22:4; Ac.24:14,22), and that title shows us at once that Christianity means not only believing certain things but putting them into practice.

Apollos came from Alexandria where there were about one million Jews. So strong were they that two out of the five wards into which Alexandria was divided were Jewish. Alexandria was the city of scholars. It was specially the place where scholars believed in the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. They believed that not only did the Old Testament record history but that every recorded event had an inner meaning. Because of this Apollos would be exceedingly useful in convincing the Jews, for he would be able to find Christ all over the Old Testament and to prove to them that the Old Testament looked forward all the time to his coming.

For all that there was a lack in his training. He knew only the baptism of John. When we come to deal with the next passage we shall see more clearly what that means. But we can say now that Apollos must have seen the need for repentance and have recognized Jesus as the Messiah; but as yet he did not know the good news of Jesus as the Saviour of men and of the coming of the Holy Spirit in power. He knew of the task Jesus gave men to do but he did not yet fully know of the help Jesus gave men to do it. By the words of Aquila and Priscilla he was more fully instructed. The result was that Apollos, who already knew Jesus as a figure in history, came also to know him as a living presence; and his power as a preacher must have been increased a hundredfold.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 19

IN EPHEBUS

Ac.19 is mainly concerned with Paul's work in Ephesus. He stayed longer there than anywhere else, almost three years.

(i) Ephesus (GSN2181) was the market of Asia Minor. In those days trade followed the river valleys. Ephesus stood at the mouth of the Cayster and therefore commanded the richest hinterland in Asia Minor. Rev.18:12-13 gives a description of the trade of Ephesus. She was known as "The Treasure House of Asia" and someone has called her, "The Vanity Fair of Asia Minor."

(ii) She was an Assize Town. That is to say, at specified times the Roman governor came there and great cases of justice were tried. She knew the pomp and pageantry of Roman power and Roman justice.

(iii) She was the seat of the Pan-Ionian Games which the whole country came to see. To be president of these games and to be responsible for their organization was a greatly coveted honour. The men who held this high office were called Asiarchs and are referred to in Ac.19:31.

(iv) She was the home of criminals. The Temple of Diana possessed the right of asylum. That is to say, any criminal reaching the area round the temple was safe. Inevitably, therefore, Ephesus had become the home of the criminals of the ancient world.

(v) She was a centre of pagan superstition. She was famous for charms and spells called "Ephesian Letters." They were guaranteed to bring safety on a journey, to bring children to the childless, to bring success in love or business enterprise. From all over the world people came to buy these magic parchments which they wore as amulets.

(vi) The greatest glory of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis. Artemis and Diana were one and the same, Artemis (GSN0735) being the Greek name, Diana the Latin. This Temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high. There were 127 pillars, each the gift of a king. They were all of glittering Parian marble and 36 were marvellously gilt and inlaid. The great altar had been carved by Praxiteles, the greatest of all Greek sculptors. The image of Artemis was not beautiful. It was a black, squat, many-breasted figure, signifying fertility; it was so old that no one knew where it had come from or even of what material it was made. The story was that it had fallen from heaven.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 19:1-7

INCOMPLETE CHRISTIANITY

Acts 19:1-7

It happened that when Apollos was in Corinth Paul went through the upper districts and came to Ephesus and found certain disciples there. He said to them, "When you believed, did you receive the Holy Spirit?" They said to him, "No, we never even heard that the Holy Spirit exists." He said to them, "With what, then, were you baptized?" They said, "With the baptism of John." Paul said, "It was the baptism of repentance that John administered and he told the people that it was on him who was to come after him that they must believe and this is Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands on them the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. In all there were about twelve of these men.

In Ephesus Paul met some men who were incomplete Christians. They had received the baptism of John but they did not even know of the Holy Spirit in the Christian sense of the term. What was the difference between the baptism of John and baptism in the name of Jesus? The accounts of the preaching of John (Matt.3:7-12; Lk.3:3-11) reveal one radical difference between it and the preaching of Jesus. The preaching of John was a threat; the preaching of Jesus was good news, John's preaching was a stage on the way. He himself knew that he only pointed to one still to come (Matt.3:11; Lk.3:16).

John's preaching was a necessary stage because there are two stages in the religious life. First, there is the stage in which we awaken to our own inadequacy and our deserving of condemnation at the hand of God. That stage is closely allied to an endeavour to do better that inevitably fails because we try in our own strength. Second, there is the stage when we come to see that through the grace of Jesus Christ our condemnation may be taken away. Closely allied with that stage is the time when we find that all our efforts to do better are strengthened by the work of the Holy Spirit, through whom we can do what we could never do ourselves.

These incomplete Christians knew the condemnation and the moral duty of being better; but the grace of Christ and the help of the Holy Spirit they did not know. Their religion was inevitably a thing of struggle and had not reached the stage of being a thing of peace. The incident shows us one great truth--that without the Holy Spirit there can be no such thing as complete Christianity. Even when we see the error of our ways and repent and determine to change them we can never make the change without the help which the Spirit alone can give.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 19:8-12

THE WORKS OF GOD

Acts 19:8-12

He came into the synagogue and for three months he spoke with boldness, debating and persuading people about the things connected with the kingdom of God. When some made themselves difficult and would not believe, and when they spoke ill of The Way before the congregation he left them and withdrew the disciples from them and debated daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all who lived in Asia, Jews and Greek alike, heard the word of God; and God kept on doing extraordinary works of power through Paul's hands, so that sweat-bands and aprons which had touched his body were taken away to the sick and their diseases left them and the evil spirits departed.

When work in the synagogue became impossible because of the embittered opposition, Paul changed his quarters to the hall of a philosopher called Tyrannus. One Greek manuscript adds a touch which sounds like the additional detail an eye-witness might bring. It says that Paul taught in that hall from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Almost certainly that is when Paul would teach. Until 11 a.m. and after 4 p.m. Tyrannus would need the hall himself. In the Ionian cities all work stopped at 11 a.m. and did not begin again until the late afternoon because of the heat. We are told that there would actually be more people sound asleep in Ephesus at 1 p.m. than at 1 a.m. What Paul must have done was to work all morning and all evening at his trade and teach in the midday hours. It shows us two things--the eagerness of Paul to teach and the eagerness of the Christians to learn. The only time they had was when others rested in the heat of the day and they seized that time. It may well shame many of us for our talk of inconvenient times.

Throughout this time wonderful deeds were being done. The sweat-band was what a workman wore round his head to absorb the sweat as he worked. The apron was the girdle with which a workman or servant girded himself. It is very significant that the narrative does not say that Paul did these extraordinary deeds; it says that God did them through Paul's hands. God, said someone, is everywhere looking for hands to use. We may not be able to work miracles with our hands but without doubt we can give them to God so that he may work through them.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 19:13-20

THE DEATH-BLOW TO SUPERSTITION

Acts 19:13-20

Some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists tried naming the name of Jesus over those who had evil spirits. They said, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." There were seven sons of a certain Scaeva, a Jewish chief priest, who did this. The evil spirit answered them. "Jesus I know and Paul I understand, but who are you?" And the man, in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them and mastered them all and overpowered them so that they fled naked and battered from that house. This became known to all the Jews and Greeks who lived in Ephesus; and awe fell upon all of them; and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many of those who had believed came and confessed their faith and revealed the spells which they had used. Many of those who had practised magic brought then books and burned them in the presence of all. They calculated the value of them and found that it amounted to about L2,500. So the word of the Lord increased mightily and prevailed.

This is a vivid bit of local colour from the Ephesian scene. In those days everyone believed that illness and disease, and especially mental illness, were due to evil spirits who settled in a man. Exorcism was a regular trade. If the exorcist knew the name of a more powerful spirit than that which had taken up residence in the afflicted person, by speaking that name he could overpower the evil spirit and make him depart. There is no reason to disbelieve that these things happened. The human mind is a strange thing and even misguided and superstitious faith has its results in the mercy of God.

When some charlatans tried to use the name of Jesus the most alarming things happened. The result was that many of the quacks, and also many of those who were sincere, saw the error of their ways. Nothing can more definitely show the reality of the change than that in superstition-ridden Ephesus they were willing to burn the books and the charms which were so profitable to them. They are an example to us. They made the cleanest of clean cuts, even though it meant abandoning the things that were their livelihood. It is all too true that many of us hate our sins but either we cannot leave them at all or we do so with a lingering and backward look. There are times when only the clean and final break will suffice.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 19:21-22

THE PURPOSE OF PAUL

Acts 19:21-22

When everything was completed, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and go to Jerusalem. He said, "After I have been there I must see Rome too." He sent Timothy and Erastus, two of his helpers, into Macedonia and he himself extended his stay in Asia.

It is only by the merest hint that Luke gives us an indication here of something which is filled out in Paul's letters. He tells us that Paul purposed to go to Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was poor; and Paul aimed to take a collection from all his Gentile churches as a contribution to it. We find references to this collection in 1Cor.16:1ff.; 2Cor.9:1ff.; Rom.15:25-26. Paul pressed on with this scheme for two reasons. First, he wished in the most practical way to emphasize the unity of the Church. He wished to demonstrate that they belonged to the body of Christ and that when one part of the body suffered all must help. In other words, he wished to take them away from a merely congregational outlook and to give them a vision of the one universal Church of which they were part. Second, he wished to teach them practical Christian charity. Doubtless when they heard of the privations of Jerusalem they felt sorry. He wished to teach them that sympathy must be translated into action.

These two lessons are as valid today as ever they were.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 19:23-41

RIOT IN EPHESUS

Acts 19:23-41

It happened that at this time there was a great disturbance about The Way. A certain man called Demetrius, who was a silversmith and who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought very considerable profit to the craftsmen. He called them together, with the workers who were engaged in like crafts, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends on this craft; and you see and hear how not only in Ephesus but throughout nearly the whole of Asia this fellow Paul has won over and led away a great number of people telling them that gods made with hands are not gods at all. There is risk for us that not only our business may come into disrepute but also that the shrine of the great goddess Artemis may come to be held of no importance, and that she whom the whole of Asia and the civilized world worships should be robbed of her greatness." When they heard this they were filled with anger and they kept shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." So the whole city was filled with confusion.

By common consent they rushed to the theatre; and they seized Gaius and Aristarchus who were fellow-travellers of Paul's. Paul wished to go in to the people but the disciples would not let him. Some of the Asiarchs, who were friendly to him, sent to him and urged him not to venture into the theatre. Some kept shouting one thing and some another. The meeting was confused and the majority had no idea why it had met. At the proposal of the Jews, some of the crowd put forward Alexander. Alexander made a gesture with his hand and wished to make a defence to the people. When they realized that he was a Jew one shout arose from them all as for about two hours they kept crying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." But the town secretary quietened the crowd. He said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of Ephesus is the temple-guardian of the great Artemis and of the image which fell from heaven? Since these things are beyond dispute we must remain quiet and do nothing reckless.

You have brought in these men who are neither temple-robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, sessions are held and there are proconsuls. Let them bring a case against each other. If you are anxious for further steps to be taken, the matter can be settled in a properly constituted assembly. For we are running the risk of being charged with a riot for this day's events since there is no cause which we could advance as a reason for this uproar." And with these words he dismissed the assembly.

This thrilling story sheds a great deal of light on the characters in it. First, there are Demetrius and the silversmiths. Their trouble was that their pockets were being touched. True, they declared that they were jealous for the honour of Artemis; but they were more worried about their incomes. When pilgrims came to Ephesus, they liked to take souvenirs home, such as the little model shrines which the silversmiths made. Christianity was making such strides that their trade was threatened.

Second, there is the man whom the King James and Revised Standard Versions call the "town clerk". He was more than that. He kept the public records, he introduced business in the assembly; correspondence to Ephesus was addressed to him. He was worried at the possibility of a riot. Rome was kindly but the one thing she would not stand was civil disorder. If there were riots in any town Rome would know the reason why and the magistrates responsible might lose their positions. He saved Paul and his companions but he saved them because he was saving his own skin.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 19:23-41

Third, there is Paul. Paul wished to face that mob but they would not let him. Paul was a man without fear. For the silversmiths and the town clerk it was safety first; for Paul it was always safety last.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 20:1-6

SETTING OUT FOR JERUSALEM

Acts 20:1-6

After the disturbance had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples. He spoke words of encouragement to them and bade them farewell and departed to go to Macedonia. When he had gone through those parts and when he had spoken many a word of encouragement to them, he went into Greece. When he had spent three months there, and when he was about to set sail for Syria, a plot was made against him by the Jews. So he made up his mind to make the return journey through Macedonia. As far as Asia there accompanied him Sopatros, the son of Pyrrhus, who belonged to Beroea; and, of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius from Derbe and Timothy; and the men from Asia, Tychichus and Trophimus. They went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. After the days of unleavened bread we sailed away from Philippi; and in five days time we came to them at Troas; and there we spent seven days.

We have already seen how Paul had set his heart on making a collection from all his churches for the church of Jerusalem. It was to receive contributions to that fund that he went into Macedonia. Here again we have an instance of how much we do not know and will never know about the story of Paul. Ac.20:2 says that when he had gone through those parts he came to Greece. It must have been on this occasion that he visited Illyricum (Rom.15:19). These few words summarize what must have been about a whole year of journey and adventure.

Ac.20:3 tells us that when Paul was about to set sail from Greece to Syria a Jewish plot was unmasked and he changed his route to an overland way. Very likely what happened was this. Often from foreign ports Jewish pilgrim ships left for Syria to take pilgrims to the Passover and Paul must have intended to sail on one. On such a ship it would have been the easiest thing in the world for the fanatical Jews to arrange that Paul should disappear overboard and never be heard of again. Paul was a man who always walked with his life in his hands.

In Ac.20:4 we have a list of Paul's companions on his voyage. These men must have been delegated from the various churches charged with the duty of taking their contributions to Jerusalem. They were demonstrating thus early that the Church was a unity and the need of one part was the opportunity of the rest.

In Ac.20:5 the narrative turns from the third to the first person again. This is the sign that once again Luke is there and that we are getting an eye-witness account. Luke tells us that they left Philippi after the days of unleavened bread. The days of unleavened bread began with the day of the Passover and lasted for one week, during which the Jews ate unleavened bread in memory of their deliverance from Egypt. The time of the Passover was the middle of April.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 20:7-12

A YOUNG MAN FALLS ASLEEP

Acts 20:7-12

On the first day of the week, when we had gathered together to break bread, Paul, who was about to leave on the next day, spoke to them, and he prolonged his talk until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were assembled. A young man called Eutychus was sitting by the window. He began to be overcome by a deep sleep. While Paul was talking he was still more overcome by sleep and he fell right down from the third floor and was taken up dead. Paul went down and threw himself on him. He put his arms round him and said, "Stop making a fuss, for his life is still in him." So he went back upstairs and broke bread and ate; and he talked with them a long time until dawn came and so he departed. And they brought in the boy alive and were greatly comforted.

This vivid story is clearly an eye-witness account; and it is one of the first accounts we have of what a Christian service was like.

It talks twice about breaking of bread. In the early Church there were two closely related things. One was what was called the Love Feast. To it all contributed and it was a real meal, often the only proper meal that poor slaves got all week. Here Christians ate in loving fellowship with each other. The other was the Lord's Supper which was observed during or immediately after the Love Feast. It may well be that we have lost something of great value in the happy togetherness of the common meal. It marked as nothing else could the family spirit of the Church.

All this happened at night. That is probably because it was only at night, when the day's work was done, that slaves could come to the Christian fellowship. That also explains the case of Eutychus. It was dark. In the low upper room it was hot. The many lamps made the air oppressive. Eutychus, no doubt, had done a hard day's work before ever he came and his body was tired. He was sitting by a window to get the cool night air. The windows were not made of glass. They were either lattice or solid wood and opened like doors, coming right down almost to the floor and projecting over the courtyard below. The tired Eutychus, overpowered by the stuffy atmosphere, succumbed to sleep and fell to the courtyard below. We must not take it that Paul spoke on and on; there would be talk and discussion. When the crowd poured down the outside stair and found the lad lying senseless below, they began to scream in an uncontrolled eastern way; but Paul told them to stop the fuss, for the life was still in the lad.

From the next verses we learn that Paul did not go with the main company; no doubt he stayed behind to make sure that Eutychus was completely recovered from his fall.

There's something very lovely about this simple picture. The impression is that of a family meeting together rather than of a modern church service. Is it possible that we have gained in dignity in our Church services at the expense of family atmosphere?

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 20:13-16

STAGES ON THE WAY

Acts 20:13-16

But we went to the ship and set sail for Assos, for there we intended to take Paul on board for he had arranged things in this way, since he himself intended to do that stage on foot. When we met him at Assos we took him on board and went to Mitylene. On the next day we sailed away from there and arrived opposite Chios. On the second day we crossed over to Samos and on the next day we came to Miletus.. for Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so as not to have to spend time in Asia. For he was in a hurry to be, if it were possible for him, in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

Because Luke was with Paul we can follow the journey almost day by day and stage by stage. From Troas, Assos was 20 miles by road whereas it was 30 miles by sea; and the sea journey involved the rounding of Cape Lectum against the strong prevailing north-easterly winds. Paul had ample time to make the journey on foot and be picked up at Assos. It may be that he wanted the time alone in order to nerve his spirit for the days ahead. Mitylene was on the island of Lesbos, Chios was on Samos and Miletus was 28 miles south of Ephesus at the mouth of the Maeander River.

We have seen how Paul would have liked to have been in Jerusalem for the Passover and how the plot of the Jews hindered that. Pentecost came seven weeks later and he was eager to be there for that great feast. Although Paul had broken away from the Jews, the ancestral feasts were still dear to him. He was the apostle to the Gentiles and his own people might hate him; but in his heart there was nothing but love for them.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 20:17-38

A SAD FAREWELL

Acts 20:17-38

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and summoned the elders of the church. When they were with him he said to them, "You yourselves know how, from the first day I came into Asia, I spent all the time, during which I was with you, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and amidst the trials that happened to me because of the machinations of the Jews. You know how I kept back nothing that was to your profit, how I did not fail to announce my tidings to you and to teach you both publicly and from house to house, testifying to both Jews and Greeks repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, look you, I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem, although I do not know what will happen to me there, except that from city to city the Holy Spirit testifies to me that bonds and afflictions await me.

But I reckon my life worth nothing and I do not count it precious to myself, so be it that I may finish my course and complete the task I received from the Lord Jesus--the task of bearing witness of the good news of God. And now, look you, I know that all of you, amongst whom I went about preaching the Kingdom, will see my face no more. Therefore I affirm to you this day that I am clean from the blood of all men; for I kept back nothing in my proclaiming to you of the whole will of God. Take heed for yourselves and take heed for all the flock in which the Spirit of God has appointed you overseers, so that you may be shepherds to the Church of God which he has rescued through the blood of his own One. I know that after I have gone away fierce wolves will enter in to you and will not spare the flock; and from your own number there will arise men who will speak perverse things to draw the disciples away after them.

Therefore be watchful and remember that for three years, day and night, I never stopped instructing each one of you with tears. And now I hand you over to God and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance amongst all those who have been sanctified. I coveted no man's silver or gold or raiment. You yourselves know that these very hands served my own needs and the needs of those who were with me. Always I showed you that working like this a man must help those who are in trouble and that you must remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that it was he who said, 'It is happier rather to give than to get.'"

When he had said this he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was great lamentation among them all. They fell upon Paul's neck and kissed him repeatedly, for they were grieved most of all at the word that he had said, that they would see his face no more. And they escorted him to the ship.

It is not possible to make a neat analysis of a farewell speech so charged with emotion as this. But certain notes sound out.

First of all Paul makes certain claims for himself. (i) He had spoken fearlessly. He had told them all God's will and pandered neither to the fear nor the favour of men (ii) He had lived independently. His own hands had supplied his needs; and his work had been not only for his own sake but for the sake of others who were less fortunate than himself. (iii) He had faced the future gallantly. He was the captive of the Holy Spirit; and in that confidence he was able to brave everything the future might hold.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 20:17-38

Paul also urges certain claims upon his friends. (i) He reminded them of their duty. They were overseers of the flock of God. That was not a duty they had chosen but a duty for which they had been chosen. The servants of the Good Shepherd must also be shepherds of the sheep. (ii) He reminded them of their danger. The infection of the world is never far away. Where truth is, falsehood ever attacks. There was a constant warfare ahead to keep the faith intact and the Church pure.

Through all this scene runs the dominant feeling of an affection as deep as the heart itself. That feeling should be in every church; for when love dies in any church the work of Christ cannot do other than wither.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 21:1-16

NO RETREAT

Acts 21:1-16

When we had torn ourselves away from them and had set sail, we sailed a straight course and came to Cos; on the next day we reached Rhodes; and from there we came to Patara. There we found a ship which was sailing across to Phoenicia and we embarked on her and set sail. After we had sighted Cyprus and had left it behind on the left hand side we sailed on to Syria and came down to Tyre, for there the ship was to discharge her cargo. We sought out the disciples and we stayed there for seven days. They told Paul through the Holy Spirit to give up his journey to Jerusalem. When we had completed the days we left and proceeded on our journey, while they all, with their wives and children, escorted us outside the city. We knelt down on the shore and prayed and bade each other farewell. Then we embarked on the ship and they returned home. We continued our voyage and arrived at Ptolemais from Tyre, and when we had greeted the brethren we stayed among them for one day. On the next day we left and came to Caesarea.

We went into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the Seven, and stayed with him. He had four daughters who were virgins and who prophesied. While we stayed there longer a prophet called Agabus came down from Judaea. He visited us and he took Paul's girdle and he bound his own hands and feet and said, "Thus speaks the Holy Spirit. The Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man to whom this girdle belongs like this and they will hand him over to the Gentiles." When we heard this both we and the people of the place kept pleading with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but to die in Jerusalem for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus." Since he would not be persuaded, we held our peace and said, "Let the Lord's will be done." After these days, when we had packed up, we set out on the journey to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us.

They were to bring us to Mnason, a man of Cyprus, an original disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

The narrative is speeding up and there is an atmosphere of approaching storm as Paul comes nearer Jerusalem. Two things stand out here. (i) There is the sheer determination of Paul to go on no matter what lay ahead. Nothing could have been more definite than the warning of the disciples at Tyre and of Agabus at Caesarea, but nothing could deter Paul from the course that he had chosen. During one of the sieges in the Spanish Civil War, some in the garrison wished to surrender but one of their comrades said, "I would rather die on my feet than live on my knees." Paul was like that. (ii) There is the wonderful fact that wherever Paul went he found a Christian community waiting to welcome him. If that was true in Paul's time, it is still more true today. One of the great privileges of belonging to the Church is the fact that no matter where a man goes, he is sure to find a community of like-minded people into which he may enter. The man who is in the family of the Church has friends all over the world.

Agabus is an interesting figure. Jewish prophets had a certain custom. When words were inadequate, they dramatized their message. There are many instances of this in the Old Testament, for example, Isa.20:3-4; Jer.13:1-11; Jer.27:2; Eze.4; Eze.5:1-4; 1Kgs.11:29-31.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 21:1-16

In the King James Version the antiquity of the language may be misleading. Ac.21:15 says, "We took up our carriages and went up to Jerusalem." That may sound as if Paul and his friends travelled by carriage. But in the sixteenth century, used like this, carriage meant not something which carried a man but something which a man had to carry; it meant baggage.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 21:17-26

COMPROMISE IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21:17-26

When we arrived in Jerusalem the brethren received us gladly. On the next day Paul along with us went to visit James; and all the elders were present. He greeted them and recounted one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard the story they glorified God. They said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have accepted the faith. Now they are all devotees of the Law. They have heard rumours about you which allege that you teach all the Jews who live in Gentile territory to abandon the Law of Moses and to stop circumcising their children and to stop living according to their ancestral customs. What then is to be done? They will be bound to hear that you have arrived. So you must do what we tell you. We have four men who have taken a vow upon themselves.

Take these men and be purified along with them; and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads, and then everyone will know that the rumours they have heard about you have no truth in them but that you yourself also walk in observance of the Law. As for the Gentiles who have accepted the faith, we wrote decreeing that they should abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from anything that has been strangled and from fornication." Then on the next day Paul took the men and was purified along with them; he went into the Temple, and announced his intention of completing the days of purification until the offering was made for each one of them.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he presented the church with a problem. The leaders accepted him and saw God's hand in his work; but rumours had been spread that he had encouraged Jews to forsake their ancestral faith. This Paul had never done. True, he had insisted that the Jewish Law was irrelevant for the Gentile; but he had never sought to draw the Jew away from the customs of his fathers.

The leaders saw a way in which Paul could guarantee the orthodoxy of his own conduct. Four men were in the middle of observing the Nazarite vow. This was a vow taken in gratitude for some special blessing from the hand of God. It involved abstention from meat and wine for thirty days, during which the hair had to be allowed to grow. It seems that sometimes at least the last seven days had to be spent entirely in the Temple courts. At the end certain offerings had to be brought--a year old lamb for a sin-offering, a ram for a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil and a meat offering and a drink offering. Finally, the hair had to be shorn and burned on the altar with the sacrifice. It is obvious that this was a costly business. Work had to be given up and all the elements of the sacrifice had to be bought. It was quite beyond the resources of many who would have wished to undertake it.

So it was considered an act of piety for some wealthier person to defray the expenses of someone taking the vow. That was what Paul was asked to do in the case of these four men and he consented. By so doing he could demonstrate so that all could see it that he was himself an observer of the Law.

There can be no doubt that the matter was distasteful to Paul. For him the relevancy of things like that was gone. But it is the sign of a truly great man that he can subordinate his own wishes and

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 21:17-26

views for the sake of the Church. There is a time when compromise is not a sign of weakness but of strength.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 21:27-36

A SLANDEROUS CHARGE

Acts 21:27-36

When the seven days were nearly completed and when the Jews from Asia had seen Paul in the temple, they stirred up the whole mob and they attacked him shouting, "Help, men of Israel! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, against the Law and against this place. Furthermore he has brought Greeks into the Temple and defiled this holy place." For they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city and they thought that Paul had taken him into the Temple. The whole city was disturbed and the people rushed together. They laid hands on Paul and dragged him outside the Temple and immediately the doors were shut. While they were trying to kill him, the report reached the commander of the battalion that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. When they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came up to him and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains.

He asked who he was and what he had done. In the crowd some shouted one thing and some another. When the commander was unable to discover the truth of the matter because of the disturbance, he ordered him to be taken into the barracks. When Paul came to the steps he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the mass of the people were following, shouting, "Kill him!"

It so happened that Paul's compromise led to disaster. It was the time of Pentecost. Jews were present in Jerusalem from all over the world and certain Jews from Asia were there, who no doubt knew how effective Paul's work in Asia had been. They had seen Paul in the city with Trophimus, whom they very likely knew. The business of the vow had taken Paul frequently into the Temple courts and these Asian Jews assumed that Paul had taken Trophimus into the Temple along with him.

Trophimus was a Gentile and for a Gentile to enter the Temple was a terrible thing. Gentiles could enter the Court of the Gentiles but between that court and the Court of the Women there was a barrier and into that barrier there were inset tablets with this inscription--"No man of alien race is to enter within the balustrade and fence that goes round the Temple, and if anyone is taken in the act, let him know that he has himself to blame for the penalty of death that follows." Even the Romans took this so seriously that they allowed the Jews to carry out the death penalty for this crime.

The Asian Jews then accused Paul of destroying the Law, insulting the chosen people and defiling the Temple. They initiated a movement to lynch him. In the north-west corner of the Temple area stood the Castle of Antonia, built by Herod the Great. At the great festivals, when the atmosphere was electric, it was garrisoned by a cohort of one thousand men. Rome insisted on civil order and a riot was unforgivable sin both for the populace who staged it and the commander who allowed it. The commander heard what was going on and came down with his troops. For Paul's own sake he was arrested and chained by each arm to two soldiers. In the confusion the commander was able to extract no coherent charge from the excited mob and Paul was actually carried through

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Acts 21:27-36

the seething mob into the barracks. There was never a time when Paul was nearer death than this and it was the impartial justice of Rome which saved his life.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 21:37-40

FACING THE FURY OF THE MOB

Acts 21:37-40

When Paul was about to be brought into the barracks he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" He said, "Can you speak Greek? Are you not then the Egyptian who some time ago started a revolution and led four thousand men of the Dagger-bearers out into the desert?" Paul said, "I am a man who is a Jew, a native of Tarsus, a citizen of no mean city. I ask you, let me speak to the people." When he had given his permission to do so, Paul stood on the steps and made a gesture with his hand to the people. When a great silence had fallen, he spoke to them in the Hebrew tongue.

The Castle of Antonia was connected to the outer courts of the Temple by two flights of stairs on the northern and the western sides. As the soldiers were struggling towards the steps to reach the sanctuary of their own barracks, Paul made an amazing request. He asked the captain to be allowed to address the furious mob. Here is Paul exercising his consistent policy of looking the mob in the face.

The captain was amazed to hear the accents of cultured Greek coming from this man whom the crowd were out to lynch. Somewhere about A.D. 54 an Egyptian had led a band of desperate men out to the Mount of Olives with a promise that he could make the walls of the city fall down before him. The Romans had dealt swiftly and efficiently with his followers but he himself had escaped and the captain had thought that Paul was this revolutionary Egyptian come back.

His followers had been Dagger-bearers, violent nationalists who were deliberate assassins. They concealed daggers in their cloaks, mixed with the mob and struck as they could. But when Paul stated his credentials, the captain knew that, whatever else he was, he was no revolutionary thug; and so he allowed him to speak. When Paul turned to speak he made a gesture for silence, and, almost miraculously, complete silence fell on that roaring mob. Nothing in all the New Testament so shows the force of Paul's personality as this silence that he commanded from the mob who would have lynched him. At that moment the very power of God flowed through him.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 22:1-10

THE DEFENCE OF EXPERIENCE

Acts 22:1-10

"Men, brethren and fathers, listen to the defence which I now make to you." When they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they gave him still more quietness. So he said, "I am a Jew; I was born in Tarsus; I was brought up in this city; I was thoroughly trained at the feet of Gamaliel in the Law of our fathers; I was zealous for God, just as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to death, fettering both men and women and delivering them to prison, as the high priest and the body of the elders bear me witness. I received letters from them and I went to the brethren at Damascus. to bring those who were there in chains to Jerusalem that they might be punished. As I was on my way, when I was coming near Damascus, about midday, suddenly it happened to me that a great light from heaven shone around me.

I fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I answered, 'Who are you, sir?' And the voice said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' Those who were with me saw the light but they did not hear the voice of the person who was speaking to me. I said, 'What am I to do, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Stand up and go to Damascus, and there you will be told about all the things that have been assigned to you to do.'"

Paul's defence to the mob who are out for his blood is not to argue but to relate a personal experience; and a personal experience is the most unanswerable argument on earth. This defence is in essence a paradox. It stresses two things.

(i) It stresses Paul's identity with the people to whom he is speaking. He was a Jew and that he never forgot (compare 2Cor.11:22; Php.3:4-5). He was a man of Tarsus and Tarsus was no mean city. It was one of the great ports of the Mediterranean, standing at the mouth of the River Cydnus and being the terminus of a road which came all across Asia Minor from the far-off Euphrates. It was one of the greatest university cities of the ancient world. He was a rabbi, trained at the feet of Gamaliel who had been "the glory of the Law," and who had died only about five years before. He had been a persecutor in his zeal for the ancestral ways. On all these points Paul was entirely at one with the audience to which he was speaking.

(ii) It stresses the difference between Paul and his audience. The root difference was that he saw Christ as the Saviour of all men and God as the lover of all men. His audience saw God as the lover only of the Jews. They sought to hug the privileges of God to themselves and regarded the man who would spread them abroad as a blasphemer. The difference was that Paul had met Christ face to face.

In one sense Paul was identified with the men to whom he spoke; in another he was separated from them. It is like that with the Christian. He lives in the world but God has separated him and consecrated him to a special task.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 22:11-21

PAUL CONTINUES HIS LIFE STORY

Acts 22:11-21

"Because I was not able to see because of the glory of that light, I came into Damascus led by the hand by those who were with me. And Ananias, a pious man as regards the Law, a man to whose character all the Jews who live there bear witness, came to me and stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight again'; and I, in that same hour, recovered my sight, and looked up at him. He said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear the voice of his mouth, because you will be a witness for him to all men of the things you have seen and heard.

And now why do you wait? Rise; be baptized; and wash away your sins, calling upon his name.' When I had returned to Jerusalem, and when I was praying in the Temple, it so happened that I was in a trance and I heard him saying to me, 'Hurry; depart speedily from Jerusalem because they will not receive your testimony about me.' And I said, 'Lord, they know that it was I who, throughout the synagogues, used to throw into prison and scourge those who believe in you; and when the blood of Stephen, your witness, was shed, I too was standing by and I was agreeing to it all; and I was guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' And he said to me, 'Get on your way for I will send you far off to the Gentiles.'"

Once again Paul is stressing, to begin with, his identity with his audience. When he reached Damascus, the man who instructed him was Ananias, a devotee of the Law whom the Jews knew to be a good man. Paul is stressing the fact that he had not come to destroy the ancestral faith but to fulfil it. Here we have one of Luke's telescoped narratives. When we read along with this Ac.9 and Gal.1, we find that it was really three years afterwards that Paul went up to Jerusalem, after his visit to Arabia and his witnessing in Damascus.

In Ac.9 we were told that he left Jerusalem because he was in danger of his life from the enraged Jews; here we are told he left because of a vision. There is no real contradiction; it is the same story told from different points of view. The point Paul makes is that he did not want to leave the Jews. When God told him to do so, Paul argued. He said that his previous record would be bound to make his change all the more impressive to the Jews; but God said that the Jews would never listen to him and to the Gentiles he must go.

There is a certain wistfulness here. As with his Master, Paul's own would not receive him (Jn.1:11). He is literally saying, "I had a priceless gift for you but you would not take it; so it was offered to the Gentiles."

Ac.22:14 is a summary not only of the life of Paul but also of the Christian life. There are three items in it. (i) To know the will of God. It is the first aim of the Christian to know God's will and to obey it. (ii) To see the Just One. It is the aim of the Christian daily to walk in the presence of the Risen Lord. (iii) To hear God's voice. It was said of a great preacher that in his preaching he paused ever and again as if listening for a voice. The Christian is ever listening for the voice of God above the voices of the world to tell him where to go and what to do.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 22:22-30

THE EMBITTERED OPPOSITION

Acts 22:22-30

Up to this statement they listened to him, and then they cried, "Destroy such a fellow from the earth, for it is not proper for him to live." While they were shouting and waving their garments and throwing dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks. He ordered him to be examined by scourging to find out why they shouted like this against him. And when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it right for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?" When the centurion heard this he went to the commander and reported it.

He said, "What are you going to do? This man is a Roman citizen." The commander came to him and said, "Are you a Roman citizen?" He said, "Yes." The commander answered "I obtained this citizenship at a great price." But Paul said, "I was born a citizen," So at once the men who had been about to examine him stood away from him; and the commander was afraid when he realized that he was a Roman citizen and that he had fettered him. On the next day, wishing to know the truth about the accusation made by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin to assemble; and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

It was the mention of Gentiles which set the mob ablaze again. It was not that the Jews objected to the preaching to the Gentiles; what they objected to was that the Gentiles were being offered privileges before they first accepted circumcision and the Law. If Paul had preached the yoke of Judaism to the Gentiles all would have been well; it was because he preached the grace of Christianity to them that the Jews were enraged. They took the common way of showing their disapproval; they shouted and waved their garments and threw dust in the air, in the fashion of the east.

The commander did not understand Aramaic and did not know what Paul had said; but one thing he did understand--he must not allow a riot and must deal at once with any man likely to cause a riot. So he determined to examine Paul under scourging. This was not a punishment; it was simply the most effective way of extracting either the truth or a confession. The scourge was a leather whip studded at intervals with sharp pieces of bone and lead. Few men survived it in their right senses and many died under it.

Then Paul spoke. Cicero had said, "It is a misdeed for a Roman citizen to be bound; it is a crime for him to be beaten; it is almost as bad as to murder a father to kill him." So Paul stated that he was a citizen. The commander was terrified. Not only was Paul a citizen; he was born free, whereas the commander had had to purchase his freedom. The commander knew that he had been on the verge of doing something which would have involved certainly his dismissal and not improbably his execution. So he loosed Paul and determined to confront him with the Sanhedrin in order to get to the bottom of this trouble.

There were times when Paul was ready to stand on his dignity; but it was never for his own sake. He knew his task was not yet done; gladly he would one day die for Christ but he was too wise a man to throw his life away just yet.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 23:1-10

THE STRATEGY OF PAUL

Acts 23:1-10

Paul fixed his gaze on the Sanhedrin and said, "Brethren, I have lived before God with a completely pure conscience up to this day." The high priest Ananias ordered those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you white-washed wall! Do you sit judging me according to the Law and do you order me to be struck and so break the Law?" Those who were standing beside him said, "Are you insulting God's high priest?" Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest. If I had known I would not have spoken so, for it stands written, 'You must not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" Now Paul knew that one section of them were Sadducees and the other section were Pharisees, so he shouted out in the Sanhedrin, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee and the son of Pharisees, and I am on trial for the hope of the resurrection of the dead." When he said this a disturbance arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the meeting was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection nor angel nor spirit, while the Pharisees acknowledge both. There was a great uproar; and some of the scribes who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and argued and said, "We find no fault in this man. What if a spirit or angel has spoken to him?" When a great disturbance was going on the commander was so afraid that Paul might be torn apart by them so he ordered the guard to go down and to snatch him out of their midst and to bring him into the barracks.

There was a certain audacious recklessness about Paul's conduct before the Sanhedrin; he acted like a man who knew that he was burning his boats. Even his very beginning was a challenge. To say Brethren was to put himself on an equal footing with the court; for the normal beginning when addressing the Sanhedrin was, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel." When the high priest ordered Paul to be struck, he himself was transgressing the Law, which said, "He who strikes the cheek of an Israelite, strikes, as it were, the glory of God." So Paul rounds upon him, calling him a white-washed wall. To touch a dead body was for an Israelite to incur ceremonial defilement; it was therefore the custom to white-wash tombs so that none might be touched by mistake. So Paul is in effect calling the high priest a white-washed tomb.

It was indeed a crime to speak evil of a ruler of the people (Exo.22:28). Paul knew perfectly well that Ananias was high priest. But Ananias was notorious as a glutton, a thief, a rapacious robber and a quisling in the Roman service. Paul's answer really means, "This man sitting there--I never knew a man like that could be high priest of Israel." Then Paul made a claim that he knew would set the Sanhedrin by the ears. In the Sanhedrin there were Pharisees and Sadducees whose beliefs were often opposed. The Pharisees believed in the minutiae of the oral Law; the Sadducees accepted only the written Law. The Pharisees believed in predestination; the Sadducees believed in free-will. The Pharisees believed in angels and spirits; the Sadducees did not. Above all, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead; the Sadducees did not.

So Paul claimed to be a Pharisee and that it was for the hope of resurrection from the dead he was on trial. As a result the Sanhedrin was split in two; and in the violent argument that followed Paul

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Acts 23:1-10

was nearly torn in pieces. To save him from violence the commander had to take him back to the barracks again.

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Acts 23:11-24

A PLOT UNMASKED

Acts 23:11-24

On the next night the Lord stood by Paul and said, "Courage! As you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness in Rome also." When it was day the Jews formed a plot and laid themselves selves under a vow neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who formed this conspiracy. They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have laid ourselves under a vow to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. Now, therefore, do you lay information with the commander, so that he may bring him down to us, as if you were going to investigate his case more thoroughly; and we are ready to kill him before he gets your length." But Paul's sister's son was there and heard the plot. So he went into the barracks and reported it to Paul.

Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander for he has something to report to him." He took him and brought him to the commander and said, "The prisoner Paul called me and asked me to take this young man to you because he has something to say to you." The commander took him by the hand and took him aside privately and asked him, "What is it that you have to report to me?" He said, "The Jews have got together to ask you to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin tomorrow, as if they were going to make a more thorough investigation into his case.

Do not you therefore agree to them for more than forty, who have taken a vow upon themselves neither to eat or drink till they have killed him, are lying in wait for him; and they are now ready, expecting your assent." The commander dismissed the young man with instructions to tell no one that--as he said--"you have brought this information to me." He called two of his centurions and said to them, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, seventy cavalry and two hundred spearsmen to go to Caesarea at about nine o'clock in the morning. Provide baggage animals that they may mount Paul and get him through to Felix, the governor, in safety."

Here we see two things. First, we see the lengths to which the Jews would go to eliminate Paul. Under certain circumstances the Jews regarded murder as justifiable. If a man was a public danger to morals and to life they regarded it as legitimate to eliminate him. So forty men put themselves under a vow. The vow was called a cherem. When a man took such a vow he said, "May God curse me if I fail to do this." These men vowed neither to eat nor drink, and put themselves under the ban of God, until they had assassinated Paul. Fortunately their plan was laid bare by Paul's nephew. Second, we see the lengths to which the Roman government would go in order to administer impartial justice. Paul was a prisoner; but he was a Roman citizen and therefore the commander mobilized a small army to see him taken in safety to Caesarea to be tried before Felix. It is strange how the fanatical hatred of the Jews--God's chosen people--contrasts with the impartial justice of the commander--a heathen in Jewish eyes.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 23:25-35

THE CAPTAIN'S LETTER

Acts 23:25-35

The commander wrote a letter to the following effect, "Claudius Lysias to his excellency Felix, the governor--greetings! When this man was seized by the Jews and when he was going to be murdered by them, I stepped in with the guard and rescued him, for I learned that he was a Roman citizen. As I wished to discover the charges on which they accused him, I brought him down to their Sanhedrin. I found that he was accused of some questions of their Law and was under no charge deserving of death or bonds. When it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I immediately sent him to you and I ordered his accusers to make their statement against him before you."

The soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul up and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the next day they returned to barracks, leaving the cavalry to proceed with him. They came into Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor and set Paul before him. When he had read the letter and had asked from what province he came, and when he had found out that he was from Cilicia, he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers are here also"; and he ordered him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

The seat of Roman government was not in Jerusalem but in Caesarea. The praetorium (GSN4232) is the residence of a governor; and the praetorium in Caesarea was a palace which had been built by Herod the Great. Claudius (GSN2804) Lysias (GSN3079) wrote his letter, absolutely fair and completely impartial, and the cavalcade set out. It was 60 miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea and Antipatris was 25 miles from Caesarea. Up to Antipatris the country was dangerous and inhabited by Jews; after that the country was open and flat, quite unsuited for any ambush and largely inhabited by Gentiles. So at Antipatris the main body of the troops went back and left the cavalry alone as a sufficient escort.

The governor to whom Paul was taken was Felix and his name was a byword. For five years he had governed Judaea and for two years before that he had been stationed in Samaria; he had still two years to go before being dismissed from his post. He had begun life as a slave. His brother, Pallas, was the favourite of Nero. Through the influence of Pallas, Felix had risen first to be a freedman and then to be a governor. He was the first slave in history ever to become the governor of a Roman province. Tacitus, the Roman historian, said of him, "He exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave." He had actually been married to three princesses one after another. The name of the first is not known; the second was a grand-daughter of Antony and Cleopatra; the third was Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa the First. He was completely unscrupulous and was capable of hiring thugs to murder his own closest supporters. It was to face a man like that that Paul went to Caesarea.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 24:1-9

A FLATTERING SPEECH AND A FALSE CHARGE

Acts 24:1-9

Five days afterwards Ananias the high priest came down with some of the elders and with a pleader called Tertullus. They laid information against Paul before the governor. When Paul was called, Tertullus began to accuse him in these terms, "Since through you we enjoy much tranquillity and since through your foresight many reforms have been brought about for this nation in every place and in every way, Felix, your excellency, we welcome it all with gratitude. But not to trouble you any longer, I ask you in your kindness briefly to hear us. When we had found this fellow a pest, a man who fomented disturbances among all the Jews throughout the civilized world, a man who is the ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes--and he tried to defile the Temple, too--we arrested him. By examining him yourself, you can learn from him the charges of which we accuse him"; and the Jews agreed with him, alleging that the facts were as stated.

Tertullus (GSN5061) began his speech with a passage of almost nauseating flattery, every word of which he and Felix knew was quite untrue. He went on to state things which were equally untrue. He claimed that the Jews had arrested Paul. The scene in the Temple court was far closer to being a lynching than an arrest. The charge he levelled against Paul was subtly inaccurate; it fell under three heads.

(i) Paul was a fomenter of troubles and a pest. That classed Paul with those insurrectionaries who continually inflamed the inflammable populace into rebellion. Tertullus well knew that the one thing that tolerant Rome would not stand was civil disorder, for any spark might become a flame. Tertullus knew it was a lie but it was an effective charge.

(ii) Paul was a leader of the sect of the Nazarenes. That coupled Paul with Messianic movements; and the Romans knew what havoc false Messiahs could cause and how they could whip the people into hysterical risings which were only settled at the cost of blood. Rome could not afford to disregard a charge like that. Again Tertullus knew it was a lie but it was an effective charge.

(iii) Paul was a defiler of the Temple. The priests were Sadducees, the collaborationist party; to defile the Temple was to infringe the rights and laws of the priests; and the Romans, Tertullus hoped, would take the side of the pro-Roman party. The charge was that most dangerous of things--a series of half-truths and of twisted facts.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 24:10-21

PAUL'S DEFENCE

Acts 24:10-21

When the governor had given him the sign to speak, Paul answered, "In the knowledge that you for many years have been a judge of this people, I confidently offer my defence of my case, for you can ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I came up to Jerusalem to worship. Neither in the Temple nor in the synagogues nor throughout the city did they find me arguing with anyone or collecting a crowd; nor can they provide any truth of the accusations which they make against me. This I do admit to you--that, according to The Way, which they call a sect, I worship my ancestral God. At the same time I believe in all things that are written throughout the Law and in the prophets, and I have the same hope towards God as they themselves accept--I mean that there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust. Because of this, I too train myself that I may always have an unharmed conscience towards God and towards men. After many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my people.

In the course of these offerings they found me purified in the Temple, not with a crowd and not the centre of any disturbance. But some Jews from Asia--who ought to be present before you and who ought to be bringing whatever accusation they had against me--or let they themselves say what offence they found in me as I stood before the Sanhedrin, other than in regard to this one expression I used as I stood amongst them--'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am on trial today before you.'"

Beginning at the passage, "But some Jews from Asia Paul's grammar went wrong. He began to say one thing and in mid-career changed over to another so that the sentence became quite disconnected. But its very disconnection shows vividly the excitement and tension of the scene. Paul's defence is that of a man whose conscience is clear--it is simply to state the facts. The tragedy was that it was when he was bringing the contributions from his churches for the poor of Jerusalem and when he was meticulously observing the Jewish Law that arrest came. One of the greatest things about Paul is that he speaks in his own defence with force and sometimes with a flash of indignation, but never with the self-pity or bitterness that would have been so natural in a man whose finest actions had been so cruelly and deliberately misinterpreted.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 24:22-27

PLAIN SPEAKING TO A GUILTY GOVERNOR

Acts 24:22-27

But Felix, who had a very good knowledge of the facts about The Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will go into your case." He instructed the centurion that Paul was to be held under guard, that he was to be allowed some freedom, and he instructed him not to hinder any of his friends from rendering him service. Some days after, Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and listened to him about the faith in Christ Jesus. While Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and judgment to come Felix was afraid and said, "For the present, go your way. When I have time I will send for you." At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul so he sent for him quite often and used to have conversation with him. At the end of two years Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; but Felix, wishing to ingratiate himself with the Jews, left Paul a prisoner.

Felix (GSN5344) was not unkind to Paul but some of Paul's admonitions struck terror into his heart. His wife Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa the First. She had been married to Azizus, King of Emesa. But Felix, with the help of a magician called Atomos, had seduced her from Azizus and persuaded her to marry him. It is little wonder that when Paul presented him with the high moral demands of God he was afraid.

For two years Paul was in prison and then Felix went too far once too often and was recalled. There was a longstanding argument as to whether Caesarea was a Jewish or a Greek city and Jews and Greeks were at daggers drawn. There was an outbreak of mob violence in which the Jews came off best. Felix despatched his troops to aid the Gentiles. Thousands of Jews were killed and the troops, with Felix's consent and encouragement, sacked and looted the houses of the wealthiest Jews in the city.

The Jews did what all Roman provincials had a right to do--they reported their governor to Rome. That was why Felix left Paul in prison, even though he was well aware that he should be liberated. He was trying to curry favour with the Jews. It was all to no purpose. He was dismissed from his governorship and only the influence of his brother Pallas saved him from execution.

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Acts 25:1-12

I APPEAL TO CAESAR

Acts 25:1-12

Three days after he had entered into his province, Festus went up to Jerusalem. The chief priests and the chief men of the Jews laid information before him against Paul. They urged him, asking a favour against Paul, to send for him to be brought to Jerusalem, for they were hatching a plot to murder him on the way. But Festus replied that Paul was under guard at Caesarea and that he himself would soon be leaving. "So," he said, "let your men of power come down with me, and, if there is anything amiss with the man, let them make their accusations." After spending no more than eight or ten days amongst them, when he had gone down to Caesarea, he took his place on his judgment seat and ordered Paul to be brought in.

When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem surrounded him; they levelled many serious accusations against him which they were unable to prove, while Paul said in his defence, "I have committed no crime either against the Laws of the Jews, or against the Temple, or against Caesar." But Festus, with the desire to ingratiate himself with the Jews, replied to Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and in my presence to be tried on these charges?" But Paul said, "I am standing at Caesar's judgment seat where I ought to be tried. I have committed no crime against the Jews as you very well know; but if I have committed some crime and if I have done something which merits death, I am not trying to beg myself off dying. But if there is nothing in the charges of which they accuse me, no one can hand me over as a favour to them. I appeal to Caesar." After Festus had conferred with his assessors, he said, "You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you will go."

Festus (GSN5347) was a different type from Felix; we know very little about him but what we do know proves that he was a just and upright man. He died after only two years in office but he died with an untainted name. The Jews tried to take advantage of him; they tried to persuade him to send for Paul to come to Jerusalem; for once again they had formed a plot to assassinate Paul on the way. But Festus was a Roman, with the Roman instinct for justice; and he told them to come to Caesarea and plead their case there. From Paul's answer we can deduce the malicious charges which they levelled against him. They accused him of heresy, of sacrilege and of sedition. No doubt from their point of view the first charge was true, irrelevant as it was to Roman law; but the second two were deliberate lies.

Festus had no desire to get up against the Jews in the first days of his governorship and he offered a compromise. Was Paul, he asked, prepared to go to Jerusalem and stand his trial there while he stood by to see fair play? But Paul knew that for him there could be no such thing as fair play at Jerusalem and he took his great decision. If a Roman citizen felt he was not getting justice in a provincial court, he could appeal direct to the Emperor. Only if the man was a murderer, a pirate, or a bandit caught in the act, was the appeal invalid. In all other cases the local procedure had to be insisted and the claimant had to be despatched to Rome for the personal decision of the Emperor. When Paul uttered the fateful words, "I appeal to Caesar," Festus had no choice; and so Paul, in very different circumstances from those of which he had dreamed, had set his foot upon the first step of the road that led to Rome.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 25:13-21

FESTUS AND AGRIPPA

Acts 25:13-21

When some days had elapsed, Agrippa, the king, and Bernice came to Caesarea to welcome Festus. As they were staying there for some time, Festus referred Paul's case to the king. "There is a man," he said, "who was left behind by Felix, a prisoner. When I was in Jerusalem the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid information before me concerning him and asked for his condemnation. I replied to them that it is not the custom of the Romans to grant any man's life as a favour before the accused meets his accusers face to face and receives an opportunity to make his defence against their charge. So when they came down here I made no delay, but on the next day I took my seat on my judgment seat and ordered the man to be brought in. The accusers rose and brought against him none of the accusations of crime which I was expecting; but they had an argument with him about their own religion and about someone called Jesus who was dead and whom Paul insists to be alive.

I did not know what to make of the dispute about these matters so I asked him if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and to be tried there on these charges; but Paul appealed and demanded to be held for His Majesty's investigation and decision; so I ordered him to be held until I should remand him to Caesar."

Agrippa (GSN0067) was still king of a quite small part of Palestine, which included Galilee and Peraea; but he knew quite well that he held even that limited realm by grace of the Romans. They had put him there and they could just as easily remove him. It was therefore his custom to pay a courtesy visit to the Roman governor when he entered his province. Bernice was a sister of Drusilla, the wife of Felix, and she was also a sister of Agrippa himself. Festus, knowing that Agrippa had the most intimate knowledge of Jewish faith and practice, proposed to discuss Paul's case with him. He gave Agrippa a characteristically impartial review of the situation as it existed at that moment; and now the stage was set for Paul to plead his case and bear his witness before a king. Jesus had said, "You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake" (Matt.10:18). The hard prophecy had come true; but the promise of help (Matt.10:19) was also to come abundantly true.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 25:22-27

FESTUS SEEKS MATERIAL FOR HIS REPORT

Acts 25:22-27

Agrippa said to Festus, "I, too, would like to hear the man." "Tomorrow," he said, "you will hear him." So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with much pomp; and when they had come into the audience-chamber with the captains and the leading men of the city Paul was brought in. So Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are here present with us, you see this man, concerning whom the whole community of the Jews kept petitioning me both in Jerusalem and here, crying out that he ought not to be allowed to live any longer. I understood that he had done nothing to merit death. But when this man himself appealed to His Majesty, I gave judgment to send him. I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. So I have brought him in before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, when investigation has been made, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to send the charges against him."

Festus had got himself into a difficulty. It was Roman law that if a man appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome there must be sent with him a written account of the case and of the charges against him. Festus' problem was that, as far as he could see, there was no charge to send. That is why this meeting had been convened.

There is no more dramatic scene in all the New Testament. It was with pomp that Agrippa and Bernice had come. They would have on their purple robes of royalty and the gold circlet of the crown on their brows. Doubtless Festus had donned the scarlet robe which a governor wore on state occasions. Close at hand there must have stood Agrippa's suite and also in attendance were the most influential figures of the Jews. Close by Festus there would stand the captains in command of the five cohorts which were stationed at Caesarea; and in the background there would be a solid phalanx of the tall Roman legionaries on ceremonial guard.

Into such a scene came Paul, the little Jewish tent-maker, with his hands in chains; and yet from the moment he speaks, it is Paul who holds the stage. There are some men who have an element of power. Julian Duguid tells how he once crossed the Atlantic in the same ship as Sir Wilfred Grenfell. Grenfell was not a particularly imposing figure to look at; but Duguid tells that, whenever Grenfell entered one of the ship's rooms, he could tell he was there without looking round, because a wave of power emanated from the man. When a man has Christ in his heart and God at his right hand he has the secret of power. Of whom then shall he be afraid?

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 26:1-11

THE DEFENCE OF A CHANGED MAN

Acts 26:1-11

Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak on your own behalf." Then Paul stretched out his hand and began his defence. "With regard to the charges made against me by the Jews, King Agrippa, I count myself fortunate to be about to state my defence before you, especially because you are an expert in all Jewish customs and questions. Therefore I ask you to give me a patient hearing. All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, which from the beginning I lived amongst my people in Jerusalem. They already know from of old, if they are willing to testify to it, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion; and now it is for the hope of the promise that was made to our fathers that I stand on trial, that hope to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, earnestly worshipping God day and night. It is for that hope, your Majesty, that I am accused.

Why should you judge it to be incredible if God raises the dead? It is true that I myself thought it right to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; and this I did in Jerusalem. When I had received authority from the chief priests, I shut up many of the saints in prison; and, when they were executed, I gave my vote against them. Often throughout all the synagogues I took vengeance on them and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my insane fury against them I even extended this persecution of them to cities abroad."

One of the extraordinary things about the great characters in the New Testament story is that they were never afraid to confess what once they had been. Here in the presence of the king, Paul frankly confesses that there was a day when he had tried to blast the Christians out of existence.

There was a famous evangelist called Brownlow North. In his early days he had lived a life that was anything but Christian. Once, just before he was to enter the pulpit in a church in Aberdeen, he received a letter. This letter informed him that its writer had evidence of some disgraceful thing which Brownlow North had done before he became a Christian; and it went on to say that the writer proposed to interrupt the service and to tell the whole congregation of that sin if he preached. Brownlow North took the letter into the pulpit; he read it to the congregation; he told of the thing that once he had done; and then he told them that Christ had changed him and that Christ could do the same for them. He used the very evidence of his shame to turn it to the glory of Christ.

Denney used to say that the great function of Christianity was in the last analysis to make bad men good. The great Christians have never been afraid to point to themselves as living examples of the power of Christ. It is true that a man can never change himself; but it is also gloriously true that what he cannot do, Jesus Christ can do for him.

In this passage Paul insists that the centre of his whole message is the resurrection. His witness is not of someone who has lived and died but of One who is gloriously present and alive for evermore. For Paul every day is Easter Day.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 26:12-18

SURRENDER FOR SERVICE

Acts 26:12-18

"When, in these circumstances, I was on my way to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, as I was on the road at midday, I saw, your Majesty, a light from heaven, more brilliant than the sun, shining round about me and my fellow-travellers. When we had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the spikes.' I said, 'Who are you, sir' The Lord replied, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But up! and stand upon your feet! For this is why I have appeared to you--to appoint you a servant and a witness of how you have seen me and of further visions you will have; for I am choosing you from the People and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share amongst those who have been sanctified by faith in me.'"

This passage is full of interest.

(i) The Greek word apostolos (GSN0652) literally means, one who is sent forth. For instance, an ambassador is an apostolos (GSN0652) or apostle. The interesting thing is that an emissary of the Sanhedrin was technically known as an apostolos (GSN0652) of the Sanhedrin. That means that Paul began this journey as the apostle of the Sanhedrin and ended it as the apostle of Christ.

(ii) Paul was pressing on with his journey at midday. Unless a traveller was in a really desperate hurry he rested during the midday heat. So we see how Paul was driving himself on this mission of persecution. Beyond doubt he was trying by violent action to still the doubts that were in his heart.

(iii) The Risen Christ told Paul that it was hard for him to kick against the spikes. When a young ox was first yoked it tried to kick its way out. If it was yoked to a one handed plough, the ploughman held in his hand a long staff with a sharpened end which he held close to the ox's heels so that every time it kicked it was jagged with the spike. If it was yoked to a wagon, the front of the wagon had a bar studded with wooden spikes which jagged the ox if it kicked. The young ox had to learn submission the hard way and so had Paul.

Ac.26:17-18 give a perfect summary of what Christ does for men. (a) He opens their eyes. When Christ comes into a man's life he enables him to see things he never saw before. (b) He turns them from the darkness to the light. Before a man meets Christ it is as if he were facing the wrong way; after meeting Christ he is walking towards the light and his way is clear before him. (c) He transfers him from the power of Satan to the power of God. Once evil had him in thrall but now God's triumphant power enables him to live in victorious goodness. (d) He gives him forgiveness of sins and a share with the sanctified. For the past, the penalty of sin is broken; for the future, life is recreated and purified.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 26:19-23

A TASK ACCEPTED

Acts 26:19-23

"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. But first of all to those in Damascus, and to Jerusalem, and throughout the whole land of Judaea and to the Gentiles, I brought the message to repent and turn to God and do deeds to match their repentance. Because of this the Jews seized me in the Temple and tried to do away with me. So then because I have received the help of God up to this day, I stand bearing witness to great and small, saying nothing beyond those things which both the prophets and Moses said would happen, that the Anointed One must suffer, that as a consequence of his resurrection from the dead he must be the first to bring the tidings of light to the People and to the Gentiles."

Here we have a vivid summary of the substance of the message which Paul preached.

(i) He called on men to repent. The Greek word for repent literally means change one's mind. To repent means to realize that the kind of life we are living is wrong and that we must adopt a completely new set of values. To that end, it involves two things. It involves sorrow for what we have been and it involves the resolve that by the grace of God we will be changed.

(ii) He called on men to turn to God. So often we have our backs to God. It may be in thoughtless disregard; it may be because we have deliberately gone to the far countries of the soul. But, however that may be, Paul calls on us to let the God who was nothing to us become the God who is everything to us.

(iii) He called on men to do deeds to match their repentance. The proof of genuine repentance and turning to God is a certain kind of life. But these deeds are not merely the reaction of someone whose life is governed by a new series of laws; they are the result of a new love. The man who has come to know the love of God in Jesus Christ knows now that if he sins he does not only break God's law; he breaks God's heart.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 26:24-32

A KING IMPRESSED

Acts 26:24-32

As Paul was making his defence, Festus cried out, "Paul, you are mad. Much learning has turned you to madness." But Paul said, "I am not mad, Festus, your Excellency, but I am uttering words of truth and sense. The king has knowledge of these things and it is to him that I boldly talk; for I do not think that any of these things are escaping him; for this was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do." Agrippa said, "You surely think that you are not going to take long to persuade me to be a Christian." Paul answered, "I could pray that, whether it takes short or long, not only you but also all who are listening to me today were such as I am, apart from these fetters." The king and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them rose up; and when they had withdrawn they kept saying to each other, "This man does nothing which merits death or fetters." And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar."

It is not so much what is actually said in this passage which is interesting as the atmosphere which the reader can feel behind it. Paul was a prisoner. At that very moment he was wearing his fetters, as he himself makes clear. And yet the impression given unmistakably is that he is the dominating personality in the scene. Festus does not speak to him as a criminal. No doubt he knew Paul's record as a trained rabbi; no doubt he had seen Paul's room scattered with the scrolls and the parchments which were the earliest Christian books. Agrippa, listening to Paul, is more on trial than Paul is. And the end of the matter is that a rather bewildered company cannot see any real reason why Paul should be tried in Rome or anywhere else. Paul has in him a power which raises him head and shoulders above all others in any company. The word used for the power of God in Greek is *dunamis* (GSN1411); it is the word from which dynamite comes. The man who has the Risen Christ at his side need fear no one.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 27:1-8

THE LAST JOURNEY BEGINS

Acts 27:1-8

When it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they handed over Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Cohort Augusta called Julius. When we had embarked upon a ship of Adramyttium, which was bound for the ports along the coast of Asia Minor, we set sail, and Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us. The next day we put in at Sidon. Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to visit his friends and to receive their attention. We put out from there and sailed under the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. When we had crossed the sea, coasting along the shores of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we reached Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian vessel bound for Italy and embarked us on her. When we were making slow progress for many days and had with difficulty arrived off Cnidus, because the wind was unfavourable, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. With difficulty we sailed along the coast and reached a place called Fair Havens, to which the town of Lasea is near.

Paul has embarked upon his last journey. Two things must have lifted up his heart. One was the kindness of a stranger, for all through the voyage Julius, the Roman centurion, treated Paul with kindness and consideration which were more than mere courtesy. He is said to have belonged to the Augustan Cohort. That may have been a special corps acting as liaison officers between the Emperor and the provinces. If so, Julius must have been a man of long experience and with an excellent military record. It may well be that when Paul and Julius stood face to face one brave man recognized another. The other uplifting thing was the devotion of Aristarchus. It has been suggested that there was only one way in which Aristarchus could have accompanied Paul on this last journey and that was by enrolling himself as Paul's slave. It is probable that Aristarchus chose to act as the slave of Paul rather than be separated from him--and loyalty can go no further than that.

The voyage began by coasting up to Sidon (GSN4605). The next port of call was Myra but things were difficult. The prevailing wind at that time of year was the west wind and they could make Myra only by slipping under Cyprus and then following a zigzag course up the coast. At Myra they found a ship from Alexandria bound for Rome. She would be a corn ship, for Egypt was the granary of Italy. If we look at the map we can see what a long way round she had to take; but the strong west winds made the direct journey impossible. After many days of beating against the wind she slipped under the lee of Crete and came to a little port called Fair Havens.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 27:9-20

IN PERIL ON THE SEA

Acts 27:9-20

Since a considerable time had elapsed and since it was now no longer safe for sailing because the Fast was already past, Paul offered his advice. "Gentlemen," he said, "I see that this voyage is going to be fraught with injury and much loss not only to the cargo and to the ship but also to our own lives." But the centurion was persuaded by the master and the owner rather than by what Paul said. Since the harbour was not suitable to winter in, the majority proposed the plan of sailing from there, to see if they were able to reach Phoenixe and to winter there. Phoenixe is a harbour in Crete which faces south-west and north-west. When a light southerly wind blew they thought that their purpose was as good as achieved; so they weighed anchor and coasted close in along the shores of Crete. But soon a tempestuous wind called Euraquilo rushed down from it upon them. When the ship was caught by it and could not keep her head to the wind, we yielded to the wind and scudded before it.

When we had run under the lee of a little island called Cauda we had great difficulty in getting the dinghy under control. They used their lifting tackle to get it on board and they trapped the ship. Because they were afraid that they would be cast on to the Syrtis Sands they loosed the gear and away they were driven. When they were making very heavy weather on the next day, they began to throw equipment overboard; and on the third day with their own hands they jettisoned the ship's spare gear. When neither sun nor stars were seen for many days and a great storm was raging, at last all hope that we should be saved was taken away.

It is quite certain that Paul was the most experienced traveller on board that ship. The Fast referred to is the Jewish Day of Atonement and on that year it fell in the first half of October. According to the navigational practice of the time, sailing was considered doubtful after September and impossible by November. It has always to be remembered that the ancient ships had neither sextant nor compass and in cloudy and dark weather they had no means of finding their way. It was Paul's advice that they should winter in Fair Havens where they were. As we have seen, the ship was an Alexandrian corn ship. The owner would be rather the contractor who was bringing the cargo of corn to Rome. The centurion, being the senior officer on board, had the last word. It is significant that Paul, the prisoner under arrest, was allowed his say when counsel was being taken. But Fair Havens was not a very good harbour nor was it near any sizeable town where the winter days might be passed by the crew; so the centurion rejected Paul's advice and took the advice of the master and the contractor to sail farther along the coast to Phoenixe where there was a more commodious harbour and a bigger town.

A very unexpected south wind made the plan seem easy; and then struck the terrible wind from the north-east. It was a gale and the peril was that if they could not control the ship they would inevitably be blown on the Syrtis Sands off North Africa which were the graveyard of many a ship. (They have been called "The Goodwin Sands of the Mediterranean.") By this time they had managed to get the dinghy, which had been towed behind, on board, in case it should either become water-logged or dashed to pieces against the ship. They began to throw out all spare gear to lighten the ship. With the stars and the sun shut out, they did not know where they were and the terror of the Syrtis Sands gripped them so that they abandoned hope.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 27:21-26

BE OF GOOD CHEER

Acts 27:21-26

Since they had been without food for a long time Paul stood up in the midst of them and said, "Gentlemen, you should have obeyed me and you should not have sailed from Crete and so you would have avoided this injury and loss. So now I advise you to keep your hearts up. There will be no loss of life among you, but only the ship. For this night there stood beside me the Angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, saying, 'Have no fear, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and lo, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' So, gentlemen, be in good heart! For I trust God that things will turn out as it has been told to me; but we must be cast upon an island."

The peril of the ship was by this time desperate. These corn ships were not small. They could be as large as 140 feet long and 36 feet wide and of 33 feet draught. But in a storm they had certain grave disadvantages. They were the same at the bow as at the stern, except that the stern was swept up like a goose's neck. They had no rudder like a modern ship, but were steered with two great paddles coming out from the stern on each side. They were, therefore, hard to manage. Further, they had only one mast and on that mast one great square sail, made sometimes of linen and sometimes of stitched hides. With a sail like that they could not sail into the wind. Worst of all, the single mast and the great sail put such a strain on the ship's timbers in a gale that often they started so that the ship foundered. It was to avoid this that they trapped the ship. That means that they passed hawsers under the ship and drew them tight with their winches so that they held the ship together like a tied up parcel.

It can easily be seen what peril they were in. Then an amazing thing happened. Paul took command; the prisoner became the captain, for he was the only man with any courage left.

It is told that on one of his voyages the crew of Sir Humphrey Gilbert's ship were terrified; they felt that they were sailing right out of the world in the mists and the storms and the unknown seas. They asked him to turn back. He would not do it. "I am as near to God by sea," he said, "as ever I was by land." The man of God is the man whose courage stands when terror invades the hearts of others.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 27:27-38

HOPING FOR THE DAY

Acts 27:27-38

When the fourteenth night came and we were drifting across in the Adriatic, in the middle of the night the sailors suspected that some land was approaching them. They took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. Since they were afraid that they would be cast up on rough places they cast four anchors out of the stern and hoped for the day. When the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and were lowering the dinghy into the sea on the pretext of being about to send out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion, "If these do not stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut the dinghy's ropes and let her fall away. When it was nearly day, Paul urged all of them to take some food. "Today," he said, "is the fourteenth day you have spent waiting without food and have taken nothing.

So I urge you to take some food for this is for your health; for not a hair of the head of anyone of you will be lost." When he had said this and then had taken bread, he gave thanks to God before them all and broke it and began to eat. All of them were in good heart and took food. And we who were in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six souls in all; and, when they were satisfied with food, they lightened the ship by casting the corn into the sea.

By this time they had lost all control of the ship. She was drifting, broadside on, across the Adriatic; and they could not tell where they were. In the darkness they heard the crash of breakers on some distant shore; they cast out sea anchors from the stern to slacken the drifting speed of the ship in order to prevent being cast on the rocks that they could not see. It was then that Paul took the action of a commander. The sailors planned to sail away in the dinghy, which would have been quite useless for two hundred and seventy-six people; but Paul frustrated their plan. The ship's company must sink or swim together. Next comes a most human and suggestive episode. Paul insisted that they should eat. He was a visionary man of God; but he was also an intensely practical man. He had not the slightest doubt that God would do his part but he also knew that they must do theirs.

Paul was not one of those people who "were so heavenly minded that they were of no earthly use." He knew that hungry men are not efficient men; and so he gathered the ship's company around him and made them eat.

As we read the narrative, into the tempest there seems to come a strange calm. The man of God has somehow made others sure that God is in charge of things. The most useful people in the world are those who, being themselves calm, bring to others the secret of confidence. Paul was like that; and every follower of Jesus ought to be steadfast when others are in turmoil.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 27:39-44

ESCAPE FROM THE DEEP

Acts 27:39-44

When day came they did not recognize the land; but they saw a bay with a beach, on which they purposed, if it was possible, to run the ship ashore. They loosed the anchors and let them go into the sea and at the same time they loosed the lashings of the rudder paddles, and they set the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. When they were cast into a place where two seas met, they beached the ship; and the bow remained fast and immovable but the stern was being broken up by the surf. The soldiers had a plan to kill the prisoners for fear any should swim away and escape; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, stopped them from their purpose. He ordered those who could swim to throw themselves overboard first and to get to land; as for the rest, he ordered some to go on planks and some on pieces of the ship. So it happened that all came safely to land.

Once again the fine character of this Roman centurion stands out. The soldiers wished to kill the prisoners to prevent possible escape. It is difficult to blame them, because it was Roman law that if a man escaped, his guard must undergo the penalty intended for the escaped prisoner. But the centurion stepped in and saved Paul's life and the other prisoners with him. So this tremendous story comes to an end with a sentence which is like a sigh of relief. The ship's company was saved; and they owed their lives to Paul.

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 28:1-6

WELCOME AT MALTA

Acts 28:1-6

When we had been brought safely to shore, we recognized that the island was Malta. The natives showed us quite extraordinary kindness for they lit a bonfire and brought us all to it because of the rain which had come on and the cold. When Paul had twisted up a faggot of sticks and placed it on the fire, a viper came out of it because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the natives saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer and, although he has been rescued from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and took no harm. They stood waiting for him to swell up or suddenly to fall down dead; and when they had waited expectantly for a long time and saw that nothing untoward was happening to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

It was upon the island of Malta that Paul and the ship's company were cast. The King James Version is a little unkind to the Maltese. It calls them the barbarous people. It is true that the Greek calls them barbaroi (GSN0915); but to the Greek the barbarian was a man who said bar-bar, that is, a man who spoke an unintelligible foreign language and not the beautiful Greek tongue. We come nearer to the meaning when we simply call them the natives.

This passage sheds vivid little side-lights on the character of Paul. For one thing, there is the lovely and homely touch that he was a man who could not bear to be doing nothing; there was a bonfire to be kept alight and Paul was gathering brushwood for it. Once again we see that for all Paul's visions he was an intensely practical man; and more, that great man though he was, he was not ashamed to be useful in the smallest thing.

It is told that Booker Washington in his youth walked hundreds of miles to one of the few universities which took in negro students. When he got there he was told that the classes were full. He was offered a job at making beds and sweeping floors. He took it; and he swept those floors and made those beds so well that before very long they took him as a student and he went on to become the greatest scholar and administrator of his people. It is only the little man who refuses the little task.

Further, we see Paul as a man cool and unexcited. In one of his bundles of brushwood was a torpid viper which was wakened by the heat and fastened itself to his hand. It is difficult to tell whether this was a miraculous happening or not. Nowadays at least there is no such thing as a poisonous snake in Malta; and in Paul's time there was a snake very like a viper but quite harmless. It is far more likely that Paul shook off the snake before it had time to pierce his skin. In any event he seems to have handled the whole affair as if it was of little account. It certainly looked to the Maltese like a miracle but clearly Paul was a man who did not fuss!

Barclay's Commentary

Acts 28:7-10

HELP AND HEALING

Acts 28:7-10

In the neighbourhood of that place there were estates which belonged to the Chief of the island, who was called Publius. He welcomed us and hospitably entertained us for three days. It so happened that Publius' father was lying ill, in the grip of intermittent attacks of fever and of dysentery. Paul went to visit him. He prayed and laid his hands on him and cured him. When this happened, the rest of the people in the island who had ailments kept coming and being cured. So they heaped honours upon us and when we left they gave us supplies for our needs.

It seems that in Malta the Chief of the island was a title; and Publius may well have been the chief Roman representative for that part of the island. His father was ill and Paul was able to exercise his healing gift and bring him relief. But in Ac.28:9 there is a very interesting possibility. That verse says that the rest of the people who had ailments came and were healed. The word used is the word for receiving medical attention; and there are scholars who think that this can well mean, not only that they came to Paul, but that they came to Luke who gave them of his medical skill. If that be so, this passage gives us the earliest picture we possess of the work of a medical missionary. There is a poignant thing here. Paul could exercise the gift of healing; and yet he himself had always to bear about with him the thorn in the flesh. Many a man has brought to others a gift which was denied to him. Beethoven, for instance, gave to the world immortal music which he himself, being stone-deaf, never heard.

It is one of the wonders of grace that such men did not grow bitter but were content to be the channels of blessings which they themselves could never enjoy.

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Acts 28:11-15

SO WE CAME TO ROME

Acts 28:11-15

After three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered in the island, the figure-head of which was The Heavenly Twins. We landed at Syracuse and stayed there for three days. From there we sailed round and arrived at Rhegium; and, after one day, when the south wind had sprung up, we made Puteoli in two days. There we found brethren and were invited to stay amongst them for seven days; and so we came to Rome. When the brethren had received news about us, they came from there to meet us, as far as Apii Forum and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw them he thanked God and took courage.

After three months, Paul and the ship's company managed to get passages for Italy on another corn ship which had wintered in Malta. In those days ships had figure-heads. Two of the favourite gods of sea-faring folk were The Heavenly Twins, Castor and Pollux; and this ship had carved images of them as its figure-head. This time the voyage was as prosperous as the previous one had been disastrous.

Puteoli (GSN4223) was the port of Rome. There must have been tremors in Paul's heart for now he was on the very threshold of the capital of the world. How would a little Jewish tentmaker fare in the greatest city in the world? To the north lay the port of Misenum where the Roman fleets were stationed; and as he saw the warships in the distance Paul must have thought of the might of Rome. Nearby were the beaches of Baiae which was the "Brighton of Italy," with its crowded beaches and the coloured sails of the yachts of the wealthy Romans. Puteoli, with its wharves and its store-houses and its ships, has been called the "Liverpool of the ancient world."

For once there must have been a catch at Paul's heart as he faced Rome almost alone. Then something wonderful happened. Apii Forum is 43 miles from Rome and the Three Taverns, 33. They were on the great Appian Way which led from Rome to the coast. And a deputation of Roman Christians came to meet him. The Greek word used is that used for a city deputation going to meet a general or a king or a conqueror. They came to meet Paul as one of the great ones of the earth; and he thanked God and took courage. What was it that so specially lifted up his heart? Surely it was the sudden realization that he was far from being alone.

The Christian is never alone. (i) He has the consciousness of the unseen cloud of witnesses around him and about him. (ii) He has the consciousness of belonging to a world-wide fellowship. (iii) He has the consciousness that wherever he goes there is God. (iv) He has the certainty that his Risen Lord is with him.

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Acts 28:16-29

UNSYMPATHETIC JEWS

Acts 28:16-29

When we arrived in Rome, permission was given to Paul to stay in his own house with the soldier who was his guard. After three days he invited the leaders of the Jews to come to see him. When they had assembled, he proceeded to say, "Brethren, although I have done nothing against the People or against our ancestral customs, I was given over as a prisoner into the hands of the Romans from Jerusalem. When the Romans had investigated my case, they wished to release me because there were no grounds which could be made a capital charge against me. When the Jews objected to my release, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation to make against my nation. It is for this reason that I have invited you to come to see me and talk things over with me, for it is for the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." They said to him, "We have received no letter about you from Judaea and none of the brethren has arrived to report or say anything evil about you.

We think it right to hear from you what opinions you hold, for, regarding this party of yours, it is a known fact to us that everywhere it is objected to." They fixed a day for him and a considerable number of them came to accept his hospitality. He expounded the matter to them, testifying concerning the kingdom of God and trying, from early morning until evening, to persuade them about Jesus with arguments based on the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said and some refused to believe.

When they could not agree with one another, they began to break up, after Paul had made one last statement, "It was rightly," he said, "that the Holy Spirit spoke to your fathers through the prophet Isaiah saying, 'Go to this people and say, "You will certainly hear and you will surely not understand; you will certainly look and you will surely not see; for the heart of this people has grown heavily insensitive and they hear dully with their ears and they have closed their eyes, so that they cannot see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn that I should heal them."'" Let it be known to you, this salvation of God has been sent out to the Gentiles; and it is they who will hear."

There is something infinitely wonderful in the fact that to the end of the day, wherever he went, Paul began with the Jews. For rather more than thirty years now they had been doing everything they could to hinder him, to undo his work, and even to kill him: and even yet it is to them first he offers his message. Is there any example of undefeatable hope and unconquerable love like this act of Paul when, in Rome too, he preached first to the Jews?

In the end he comes to a conclusion, implied in his quotation from Isaiah. It is that this too is the work of God; this rejection of Jesus by the Jews is the very thing which has opened the door to the Gentiles. There is a purpose in everything; on the helm of things is the hand of the unseen steersman--God. The door which the Jews shut was the door that opened to the Gentiles; and even that is not the end, because some time, at the end of the day, there will be one flock and one shepherd.

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Acts 28:30-31

WITHOUT LET OR HINDRANCE

Acts 28:30-31

For the space of two whole years, Paul remained there, earning his own living; and it was his custom to receive all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching them the facts about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete freedom of speech and without let or hindrance.

To the end of the day Paul is Paul. The King James Version obscures a point. It says that for two years he lived in his own hired house. The real meaning is that he lived at his own expense, that he earned his own living. Even in prison his own two hands supplied his need; and he was not idle otherwise. It was there in prison that he wrote the letters to the Philippians, to the Ephesians, to the Colossians and to Philemon. Nor was he ever altogether alone. Luke and Aristarchus had come with him and to the end Luke remained (2Tim.4:11). Timothy was often with him (Php.1:1; Col.1:1; Phm.1). Sometimes Tychicus was with him (Eph.6:21). For a while he had the company of Epaphroditus (Php.4:18). And sometimes Mark was with him (Col.4:10).

Nor was it wasted time. He tells the Philippians that all this has fallen out to the furtherance of the gospel (Php.1:12). That was particularly so because his bonds were known throughout all the Praetorian Guard (Php.1:13). He was in his own private lodging but night and day a soldier was with him (Ac.28:16). These headquarters soldiers were members of the picked troops of the Emperor, the Praetorian Guard. In two years many of them must have spent long days and nights with Paul; and many a man must have gone from his guard duty with Christ in his heart.

And so the Book of Acts comes to an end with a shout of triumph. In the Greek without let or hindrance are one word and that one word falls like a victor's cry. It is the peak of Luke's story. We wonder why Luke never told us what happened to Paul, whether he was executed or released. The reason is that this was not Luke's purpose. At the beginning Luke gave us his scheme of Acts when he told how Jesus commanded his followers to bear witness for him in Jerusalem and all over Judaea and Samaria and away to the ends of the earth (Ac.1:8). Now the tale is finished; the story that began in Jerusalem rather more than thirty years ago has finished in Rome. It is nothing less than a miracle of God. The Church which at the beginning of Acts could be numbered in scores cannot now be numbered in tens of thousands. The story of the crucified man of Nazareth has swept across the world in its conquering course until now without interference it is being preached in Rome, the capital of the world.

The gospel has reached the centre of the world and is being freely proclaimed--and Luke's task is at an end.

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Introduction to Romans

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

THE EPISTLE THAT IS DIFFERENT

There is an obvious difference between Paul's Letter to the Romans and any other of his letters. Anyone coming from, say, a reading of the Letters to the Corinthians, will immediately feel that difference, both of atmosphere and of method. A very great part of it is due to one basic fact--when Paul wrote to the Church at Rome he was writing to a Church with whose founding he had had nothing whatever to do and with which he had had no personal contact at all. That explains why in Romans there are so few of the details of practical problems which fill the other letters. That is why Romans, at first sight, seems so much more impersonal. As Dibelius put it, "It is of all Paul's letters the least conditioned by the momentary situation."

We may put that in another way. Romans, of all Paul's letters, comes nearest to being a theological treatise. In almost all his other letters he is dealing with some immediate trouble, some pressing situation, some current error, some threatening danger, which was menacing the Church to which he was writing. Romans is the nearest approach to a systematic exposition of Paul's own theological position, independent of any immediate set of circumstances.

TESTAMENTARY AND PROPHYLACTIC

Because of that, two great scholars have applied two very illuminating adjectives to Romans. Sanday called Romans "testamentary." It is as if Paul was writing his theological last will and testament, as if into Romans he was distilling the very essence of his faith and belief. Rome was the greatest city in the world, the capital of the greatest Empire the world had ever seen. Paul had never been there, and he did not know if he ever would be there. But, in writing to such a Church in such a city, it was fitting that he should set down the very centre and core of his belief. Burton called Romans "prophylactic." A prophylactic is something which guards against infection. Paul had seen too often what harm and trouble could be caused by wrong ideas, twisted notions, misguided conceptions of Christian faith and belief.

He therefore wished to send to the Church in the city which was the centre of the world a letter which would so build up the structure of their faith that, if infections should ever come to them, they might have in the true word of Christian doctrine a powerful and effective defence. He felt that the best protection against the infection of false teaching was the antiseptic of the truth.

THE OCCASION OF PAUL'S WRITING TO ROME

All his life Paul had been haunted by the thought of Rome. It had always been one of his dreams to preach there. When he is in Ephesus, he is planning to go through Achaëa and Macedonia again, and then comes a sentence obviously dropped straight from the heart, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Ac.19:21). When he was up against things in Jerusalem, and the situation looked threatening and the end seemed near, he had one of those visions which always lifted up his heart. In that vision the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, Paul. For as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome" (Ac.23:11). In the very first chapter of this letter Paul's desire to see Rome breathes out. "I long to see you that I may impart to you

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some spiritual gift to strengthen you" (Rom.1:11). "So, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (Rom.1:15). It might well be said that the name Rome was written on Paul's heart.

When he actually wrote the Letter to the Romans, the date was sometime in the year A.D. 58, and he was in Corinth. He was just about to bring to its completion a scheme that was very dear to his heart. The Church at Jerusalem was the mother Church of them all, but it was poor, and Paul had organized a collection throughout the younger churches for it (1Cor.16:1ff; 2Cor.9:1ff). That collection was two things. It was an opportunity for his younger converts to put Christian charity into Christian action, and it was a most practical way of impressing on all Christians the unity of the Christian Church, of teaching them that they were not members of isolated and independent congregations, but of one great Church, each part of which had a responsibility to all the rest. When Paul wrote Romans he was just about to set out with that gift for the Jerusalem Church. "At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints" (Rom.15:25).

THE OBJECT OF PAUL'S WRITING

Why, then, at such a moment should he write?

(a) Paul knew that the journey to Jerusalem was not without its peril. He knew that he had enemies there, and that to go to Jerusalem was to take his life and liberty in his hands. He desired the prayers of the Roman Church before he set out on this expedition. "Now I appeal to you brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judaea" (Rom.15:30-31). He was mobilizing the prayers of the Church before he embarked on this perilous undertaking.

(b) Paul had great schemes simmering in his mind. It has been said of him that he was "always haunted by the regions beyond." He never saw a ship at anchor but he wished to board her and to carry the good news to men across the sea. He never saw a range of mountains, blue in the distance, but he wished to cross them, and to bring the story of the Cross to men who had never heard it. At this time Paul was haunted by the thought of Spain. "I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain" (Rom.15:24). "When I have completed this [that is, when he had delivered the collection to the Church in Jerusalem] I shall go on by way of you to Spain" (Rom.15:28).

Why this great desire to go to Spain? Rome had opened up that land. Some of the great Roman roads and buildings still stand there to this day. And it so happened that, just at this time, there was a blaze of greatness in Spain. Many of the great figures who were writing their names on Roman history and literature were Spaniards. There was Martial, the master of the epigram. There was Lucan, the epic poet. There were Columella and Pomponius Mela, great figures in Roman literature. There was Quintilian, the master of Roman oratory. And, above all, there was Seneca, the greatest of the Roman Stoic philosophers, the tutor of the Emperor Nero, and the Prime Minister of the Roman Empire. It was most natural that Paul's thoughts should go out to this land which was producing such a scintillating galaxy of greatness. What might happen if men like that could be touched for Christ? As far as we know Paul never got to Spain. On that visit to Jerusalem he was arrested and he was never freed again.

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But, when he was writing Romans, that was his dream.

Paul was a master strategist. He had an eye for the layout of territory like a great commander. He felt that by this time he could move on from Asia Minor and for the time being leave Greece behind. He saw the whole west lying in front of him, virgin territory to be won for Christ. But, if he was to launch a campaign in the west, he needed a base of operations. There was only one such base possible--and that was Rome.

That was why Paul wrote this letter to Rome. He had this great dream in his heart and this great plan in his mind. He needed Rome for a base for this new campaign. He was aware that the Church in Rome must know his name. But he was also aware, for he was a realist, that the reports which reached Rome would be mixed. His opponents were not above spreading slanders and false accusation against him. So he wrote this letter to set out for the Church at Rome an account of the very essence of his belief, in order that, when the time came for action, he might find in Rome a sympathetic Church from which the lines of communication might go out to Spain and the west. It was with such a plan and such an intention, that in A.D. 58 Paul sat down in Corinth to write his letter to the Church at Rome.

THE LAYOUT OF THE LETTER

Romans is at once a very complicated and a very carefully constructed letter. It will therefore help us to find our way through it, if we have in our minds an idea of its framework. It falls into four definite divisions.

(i) Rom.1-8, which deal with the problem of righteousness.

(ii) Rom.9-11, which deal with problem of the Jews, the chosen people.

(iii) Rom.12-15, which deal with practical questions of life and living.

(iv) Rom.16, which is a letter of introduction for Phoebe, and a list of final personal greetings.

(i) When Paul uses the word "righteousness," he means a right relationship with God. The man who is righteous is the man who is in a right relationship with God, and whose life shows it.

Paul begins with a survey of the Gentile world. We have only to look at its decadence and corruption to know that it had not solved the problem of righteousness. He looks at the Jewish world. The Jews had sought to solve the problem of righteousness by meticulous obedience to the law. Paul had tried that way himself, and it had issued in frustration and defeat, because no man on earth can ever fully obey the law, and, therefore, every man must have the continual consciousness of being in debt to God and under his condemnation.

So Paul finds the way to righteousness in the way of utter trust and utter yieldedness. The only way to a right relationship with God is to take him at his word, and to cast oneself, just as one is, on

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his mercy and love. It is the way of faith. It is to know that the important thing is, not what we can do for God, but what he has done for us. For Paul the centre of the Christian faith was that we can never earn or deserve the favour of God, nor do we need to. The whole matter is one of grace, and all that we can do is to accept in wondering love and gratitude and trust what God has done for us.

That does not free us, however, from obligations or entitle us to do as we like; it means that for ever and for ever we must try to be worthy of the love which does so much for us. But we are no longer trying to fulfil the demands of stern and austere and condemnatory law; we are no longer like criminals before a judge; we are lovers who have given all life in love to the one who first loved us.

(ii) The problem of the Jews was a torturing one. In a real sense they were God's chosen people, and yet, when his Son had come into the world, they had rejected him. What possible explanation could there be for this heart-breaking fact?

The only one Paul could find was that, in the end, it was all God's doing. Somehow the hearts of the Jews had been hardened; but it was not all failure, for there had always been a faithful remnant. Nor was it for nothing, for the very fact that the Jews had rejected Christ opened the door so the Gentiles would bring in the Jews and all men would be saved.

Paul goes further. The Jew had always claimed that he was a member of the chosen people in virtue of the fact that he was a Jew. It was solely a matter of pure racial descent from Abraham. But Paul insists that the real Jew is not the man whose flesh and blood descent can be traced to Abraham. He is the man who has made the same decision of utter yieldedness to God in loving faith which Abraham made. Therefore, Paul argues, there are many pure-blooded Jews who are not Jews in the real sense of the term at all; and there are many people of other nations who are really Jews in the true meaning of that word. The new Israel was not a racial thing at all; it was composed of those who had the same faith as Abraham had had.

(iii) Rom. 12 is so great an ethical statement that it must always be set alongside the Sermon on the Mount. In it Paul lays down the ethical character of the Christian faith. The fourteenth and fifteenth chapters deal with an ever-recurring problem. In the Church there was a narrower party who believed that they must abstain from certain foods and drinks, and who counted special days and ceremonies as of great importance. Paul thinks of them as the weaker brethren because their faith was dependent on these external things. There was a more liberal party, who had liberated themselves from these external rules and observances. He thinks of them as the brethren who are stronger in the faith. He makes it quite clear that his sympathies are with the more liberal party; but he lays down the great principle that no man must ever do anything to hurt the conscience of a weaker brother or to put a stumbling block in his way.

His whole point of view is that we must never do anything which makes it harder for someone else to be a Christian; and that that may well mean the giving up of something, which is right and safe for us, for the sake of the weaker brother. Christian liberty must never be used in such a way that it injures another's life or conscience.

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(iv) The fourth section is a recommendation on behalf of Phoebe, a member of the Church at Cenchreae, who is coming to Rome. The letter ends with a list of greetings and a final benediction.

TWO PROBLEMS

Rom.16 has always presented scholars with a problem. Many have felt that it does not really form part of the Letter to the Romans at all; and that it is really a letter to some other Church which became attached to Romans when Paul's letters were collected. What are their grounds? First and foremost, in this chapter Paul sends greetings to twenty-six different people, twenty-four of whom he mentions by name and all of whom he seems to know very intimately. He can, for instance, say that the mother of Rufus has also been a mother to him. Is it likely that Paul knew intimately twenty-six people in a Church which he had never visited? He, in fact, greets far more people in this chapter than he does in any other letter, and yet he had never set foot in Rome. Here is something that needs explanation.

If Rom.16 was not written to Rome, what was its original destination? It is here that Prisca and Aquila come into the argument. We know that they left Rome in A.D. 52 when Claudius issued his edict banishing the Jews (Ac.18:2). We know that they went with Paul to Ephesus (Ac.18:18). We know that they were in Ephesus when Paul wrote his letter to Corinth, less than two years before he wrote Romans (1Cor.16:19). And we know that they were still in Ephesus when the Pastoral Epistles were written (2Tim.4:19). It is certain that if we had come across a letter sending greeting to Prisca and Aquila we should have assumed that it was sent to Ephesus, if no other address was given.

Is there any other evidence to make us think that chapter sixteen may have been sent to Ephesus in the first place? There is the perfectly general reason that Paul spent longer in Ephesus than anywhere else, and it would be very natural for him to send greetings to many people there. Paul speaks of Epaenetus, the first-fruits of Asia. Ephesus is in Asia, and such a reference, too, would be very natural in a letter to Ephesus, but not so natural in a letter to Rome. Rom.16:17 speaks about difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught, which sounds as if Paul was speaking about possible disobedience to his own teaching, and he had never taught in Rome.

It can be argued that the sixteenth chapter was originally addressed to Ephesus, but the argument is not so strong as it looks. For one thing, there is no evidence that the chapter was ever attached anywhere except to the Letter to the Romans. For another thing, the odd fact is that Paul does not send personal greetings to churches which he knew well. There are no personal greetings in Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians, all of them letters to churches he knew well; whereas there are personal greetings in Colossians, although Paul had never set foot in Colosse.

The reason is really quite simple. If Paul had sent personal greetings to churches he knew well, jealousies might well have arisen; on the other hand, when he was writing to churches he had never visited, he liked to establish as many personal links as possible. The very fact that Paul had never been in Rome makes it likely that he would try to establish as many personal connections as possible. Again, it is to be remembered that Prisca and Aquila were banished by edict from Rome.

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What is more likely than that, after the trouble was over, six or seven years later, they would return to Rome and pick up the threads of their business after their stay in other towns? And is it not most likely that many of the other names are names of people who shared in this banishment, who took up temporary residence in other cities, who met Paul there, and who, when the coast was clear, returned to Rome and their old homes? Paul would be delighted to have so many personal contacts in Rome and to seize hold of them.

Further, as we shall see, when we come to study chapter 16 in detail, many of the names--the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus, Amplias, Nereus and others--well suit Rome. In spite of the arguments for Ephesus, we may take it that there is no necessity to detach chapter sixteen from the Letter to the Romans.

But there is a more interesting, and a much more important, problem. The early manuscripts show some very curious things with regard to Rom.14-16. The only natural place for a doxology is at the very end. Rom.16:25-27 is a doxology, and in most good manuscripts it comes at the end. But in a number of manuscripts it comes at the end of Rom.14; two good manuscripts have it in both places; one ancient manuscript has it at the end of Rom.15; two manuscripts have it in neither place, but leave an empty space for it. One ancient Latin manuscript has a series of section summaries. The last two are as follows:

50: On the peril of him who grieves his brother by meat.

That is obviously Rom.14:15-23.

51: On the mystery of the Lord, kept secret before his passion but after his passion revealed.

That is equally clearly Rom.16:25-27, the doxology. Clearly, these summaries were made from a manuscript which did not contain chapters fifteen and sixteen. Now there is one thing which sheds a flood of light on this. In one manuscript the mention of Rome in Rom.1:7 and Rom.1:15 is entirely omitted. There is no mention of any destination.

All this goes to show that Romans circulated in two forms--one form as we have it with sixteen chapters, and one with fourteen chapters; and perhaps also one with fifteen chapters. The explanation must be this. As Paul wrote it to Rome, it had sixteen chapters; but Rom.15-16 are private and personal to Rome. Now no other letter gives such a compendium of Paul's doctrine. What must have happened was that Romans began to circulate among all the churches, with the last two local chapters omitted, except for the doxology. It must have been felt that Romans was too fundamental to stop at Rome and so the purely local references were removed and it was sent out to the Church at large. From very early times the Church felt that Romans was so great an expression of the mind of Paul that it must become the possession not of one congregation, but of the whole Church. We must remember, as we study it, that men have always looked on Romans as the quintessence of Paul's gospel.

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Romans 1:1-7

A CALL, A GOSPEL AND A TASK

Romans 1:1-7

This is a letter from Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart to serve the good news of God. This good news God promised long ago, through his prophets, in the sacred writings. It is good news about his Son, who in his manhood was born of David's lineage, who, as a result of his Resurrection from the dead, has been proved by the Holy Spirit to be the mighty Son of God. It is of Jesus Christ, our Lord, of whom I am speaking, through whom we have received grace, and an apostleship to awaken a faithful obedience for his sake amongst all the Gentiles. You are included amongst these Gentiles, you who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. This is a letter to all the beloved in Rome who belong to God, those who have been called to be dedicated to him. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans he was writing to a church which he did not know personally and in which he had never been. He was writing to a church which was situated in the greatest city in the greatest empire in the world. Because of that he chose his words and thoughts with the greatest care.

He begins by giving his own credentials.

(i) He calls himself the slave (doulos, GSN1401) of Jesus Christ. In this word slave there are two backgrounds of thought.

(a) Paul's favourite title for Jesus is Lord (kurios, GSN2962). In Greek the word kurios (GSN2962) describes someone who has undisputed possession of a person or a thing. It means master or owner in the most absolute sense. The opposite of Lord (kurios, GSN2962) is slave (doulos, GSN1401). Paul thought of himself as the slave of Jesus Christ, his Master and his Lord. Jesus had loved him and given himself for him, and therefore Paul was sure that he no longer belonged to himself, but entirely to Jesus. On the one side slave describes the utter obligation of love.

(b) But slave (doulos, GSN1401) has another side to it. In the Old Testament it is the regular word to describe the great men of God. Moses was the doulos (GSN1401) of the Lord (Josh.1:2). Joshua was the doulos (GSN1401) of God (Josh.24:29). The proudest title of the prophets, the title which distinguished them from other men, was that they were the slaves of God (Am.3:7; Jer.7:25). When Paul calls himself the slave of Jesus Christ he is setting himself in the succession of the prophets. Their greatness and their glory lay in the fact that they were slaves of God, and so did his.

So then, the slave of Jesus Christ describes at one and the same time the obligation of a great love and the honour of a great office.

(ii) Paul describes himself as called to be an apostle. In the Old Testament the great men were men who heard and answered the call of God. Abraham heard the call of God (Gen.12:1-3). Moses answered God's call (Exo.3:10). Jeremiah and Isaiah were prophets because, almost against their

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will, they were compelled to listen to and to answer the call of God (Jer.1:4-5; Isa.6:8-9). Paul never thought of himself as a man who had aspired to an honour; he thought of himself as a man who had been given a task. Jesus said to his men, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn.15:16). Paul did not think of life in terms of what he wanted to do, but in terms of what God meant him to do.

(iii) Paul describes himself as set apart to serve the good news of God. He was conscious of a double setting apart in his life. Twice in his life this very same word (aphorizein, GSN0873) is used of him.

(a) He was set apart by God. He thought of God as separating him for the task he was to do even before he was born (Gal.1:15). For every man God has a plan; no man's life is purposeless. God sent him into the world to do some definite thing.

(b) He was set apart by men, when the Holy Spirit told the leaders of the Church at Antioch to separate him and Barnabas for the special mission to the Gentiles (Ac.13:2). Paul was conscious of having a task to do for God and for the Church of God.

(iv) In this setting apart Paul was aware of having received two things. In Rom.1:5 he tells us what these two things were.

(a) He had received grace. Grace always describes some gift which is absolutely free and absolutely unearned. In his pre-Christian days Paul had sought to earn glory in the eyes of men and merit in the sight of God by meticulous observance of the works of the law, and he had found no peace that way. Now he knew that what mattered was not what he could do, but what God had done. It has been put this way, "The law lays down what a man must do; the gospel lays down what God has done." Paul now saw that salvation depended not on what man's effort could do, but on what God's love had done. All was of grace, free and undeserved.

(b) He had received a task. He was set apart to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul knew himself to be chosen not for special honour, but for special responsibility. He knew that God had set him apart, not for glory, but for toil. It may well be that there is a play on words here. Once Paul had been a Pharisee (Php.3:5). Pharisee may very well mean The Separated One. It may be that the Pharisees were so called because they had deliberately separated themselves from all ordinary people and would not even let the skirt of their robe brush against an ordinary man. They would have shuddered at the very thought of the offer of God being made to the Gentiles, who to them were "fuel for the fires of hell." Once Paul had been like that. He had felt himself separated in such a way as to have nothing but contempt for all ordinary men. Now he knew himself to be separated in such a way that he must spend all his life to bring the news of God's love to every man of every race.

Christianity always separates us, but it separates us not for privilege and self-glory and pride, but for service and humility and love for all men.

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Romans 1:1-7

Besides giving his own credentials Paul, in this passage, sets out in its most essential outline the gospel which he preached. It was a gospel which centred in Jesus Christ (Rom.1:3-4). In particular it was a gospel of two things.

(a) It was a gospel of the Incarnation. He told of a Jesus who was really and truly a man. One of the great early thinkers of the Church summed it up when he said of Jesus, "He became what we are, to make us what he is." Paul preached of someone who was not a legendary figure in an imaginary story, not a demigod, half god and half man. He preached of one who was really and truly one with the men he came to save.

(b) It was a gospel of the Resurrection. If Jesus had lived a lovely life and died an heroic death, and if that had been the end of him, he might have been numbered with the great and the heroic, but he would simply have been one among many. His uniqueness is guaranteed forever by the fact of the Resurrection. The others are dead and gone, and have left a memory. Jesus lives on and gives us a presence, still mighty with power.

Barclay's Commentary

Romans 1:8-15

THE COURTESY OF GREATNESS

Romans 1:8-15

To begin with, I thank my God for you all through Jesus Christ. I thank him that the story of your faith is told throughout the whole world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in the work of spreading the good news of his Son, is my witness that I continually talk to him about you. In my prayers I am always asking that somehow, soon, at last, I may by God's will succeed in finding a way to come to you. For I yearn to see you, that I may give you a share of some gift which the Spirit gives, so that you may be firmly founded in the faith--what I mean is, that you and I may find encouragement together, I through your faith and you through mine. I want you to know, brothers, that I have often planned to come to you--and up until now I have been prevented from doing so--that I might have some fruit among you too, as I have amongst the rest of the Gentiles. I am under a duty to Greeks and to barbarians, to wise and to foolish. So, then, it is my eager wish to preach the good news to you too in Rome.

After almost nineteen hundred years the warm affection of this passage still breathes through it, and we can feel Paul's great heart throbbing with love for the Church which he had never seen. Paul's problem in writing this letter was that he had never been in Rome and had had no share in founding the Roman Church. He had to make them feel that he was not a trespasser on their preserves, interfering where he had no right to intervene. Before he could do anything else, he had to get alongside them so that the barriers of strangeness and suspicion might be broken down.

(i) Paul, in wisdom and love combined, began with a compliment. He told them that he thanked God for that Christian faith of theirs which all the world knew. There are some people whose tongues are tuned to praise, and others whose tongues are tuned to criticize. There are some people whose eyes are focused to find faults, and others whose eyes are focused to discover virtues. It was said of Thomas Hardy that, if he went into a country field, he would always see, not the wild flowers, but the dung-heap in the corner. But the fact remains that we will always get far more out of people by praising them than by criticizing them. The men who get the best out of others are the men who insist on seeing them at their best.

There never was, and never has been, anything quite so beautiful as the civilization of the Greeks at its highest and its best, and T. R. Glover once said that it was founded on "a blind faith in the average man." One of the great figures of the 1914-18 war was Donald Hankey, who wrote *The Student in Arms*. He saw men at their best and at their worst. He once wrote home, "If I survive this war I want to write a book called 'The Living Goodness,' analysing all the goodness and nobility inherent in plain people, and trying to show how it ought to find fulfilment and expression in the Church." He also wrote a great essay entitled *The Beloved Captain*. He describes how the beloved captain picked out the awkward ones and taught them himself. "He looked at them and they looked at him, and the men pulled themselves together and determined to do their best."

No one can ever even begin to save men unless he first believes in them. A man is a hell-deserving sinner, but he has also a sleeping hero in his soul, and often a word of praise will awaken that sleeping heroism when criticism and condemnation will only produce resentment and despair.

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Romans 1:8-15

Aidan was the apostle to the Saxons. Away back in A.D. 630 the Saxon king had sent to Iona a request that a missionary should be sent to his kingdom to preach the gospel. The missionary came back talking of the "stubborn and barbarous disposition of the English." "The English have no manners," he said, "they behave like savages." He reported that the task was hopeless, and then Aidan spoke. "I think, brother," he said, "that you may have been too severe for such ignorant hearers, and that you should have led them on gently, giving them first the milk of religion before the meat." So Aidan was sent to Northumbria, and his gentleness won for Christ that very people whom the critical severity of his brother monk had repelled.

(ii) Although Paul did not know the people at Rome personally he nevertheless constantly prayed to God for them. It is ever a Christian privilege and duty to bear our loved ones and all our fellow-Christians to the throne of grace. In one of his sermons on the Lord's Prayer, Gregory of Nyssa has a lyrical passage on prayer:

"The effect of prayer is union with God, and, if someone is with God, he is separated from the enemy. Through prayer we guard our chastity, control our temper and rid ourselves of vanity. It makes us forget injuries, overcomes envy, defeats injustice and makes amends for sin. Through prayer we obtain physical well-being, a happy home, and a strong, well-ordered society. Prayer is the seal of virginity and a pledge of faithfulness in marriage. It shields the wayfarer, protects the sleeper, and gives courage to those who keep vigil. It will refresh you when you are weary and comfort you when you are sorrowful. Prayer is the delight of the joyful as well as the solace of the afflicted. Prayer is intimacy with God and contemplation of the invisible. Prayer is the enjoyment of things present and the substance of the things to come."

Even if we are separated from people, and even if there is no other gift which we can give to them, we can surround them with the strength and the defence of our prayers.

(iii) Paul, in his humility, was always ready to receive as well as to give. He began by saying that he wished to come to Rome that he might impart to the Roman Church some gift which would confirm them in the faith. And then he changed it. He wished to come to Rome that he and the Roman Church might comfort and strengthen each other, and that each might find precious things in the faith of the other. There are two kinds of teachers. There are those whose attitude is that they are standing above their scholars and telling them what they should and must accept. And there are those who, in effect, say, "Come now, let's learn about this together." Paul was the greatest thinker the Early Church ever produced, and yet, when he thought of the people to whom he longed to preach, he thought of himself not only as giving to them but also as receiving from them. It takes humility to teach as it takes humility to learn.

(iv) Rom.8:14 has in Greek a double meaning that is almost untranslatable. The Revised Standard Version has it, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians." Paul was thinking of two

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Romans 1:8-15

things when he wrote that. He was under obligation because of all the kindness that he had received, and he was under obligation to preach to them. This highly compressed sentence means, "Because of all that I have received from them and because of all it is my duty to give to them, I am under an obligation to all sorts of men."

It may seem strange that Paul speaks of Greeks when he is writing to Romans. At this time the word Greek had lost its racial sense altogether. It did not mean a native of the country of Greece. The conquests of Alexander the Great had taken the Greek language and Greek thought all over the world. And a Greek was no longer only one who was a Greek by race and birth; he was one who knew the culture and the mind of Greece. A barbarian is literally a man who says bar-bar, that is to say a man who speaks an ugly and an unharmonious tongue in contrast with the man who speaks the beautiful, flexible language of Greek. To be a Greek was to be a man of a certain mind and spirit and culture. One of the Greeks said of his own people, "The barbarians may stumble on the truth, but it takes a Greek to understand."

What Paul meant was that his message, his friendship, his obligation was to wise and simple, cultured and uncultured, lettered and unlettered. He had a message for the world, and it was his ambition some day to deliver that message in Rome too.

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Romans 1:16-17

GOOD NEWS OF WHICH TO BE PROUD

Romans 1:16-17

I am proud of the good news, for it is the power of God which produces salvation for every one who believes, to the Jew first and to the Greek. The way to a right relationship with God is revealed in it when man's faith responds to God's fidelity, just as it stands written, "It is the man who is in a right relationship with God as a result of his faith who will live."

When we come to these two verses, the preliminaries are over and the trumpet call of Paul's gospel sounds out. Many of the great piano concertos begin with a crashing chord and then state the theme which they are going to develop. The reason is that they were often first performed at private gatherings in great houses. When the pianist first seated himself at the piano, there was still a buzz of conversation. He played the crashing chord to attract the attention of the company, and then, when attention was obtained, the theme was stated. Up to these two verses, Paul has been making contact with the people to whom he was writing; he has been attracting their attention. Now the introduction is over, and the theme is stated.

There are only two verses here, but they contain so much of the quintessence of Paul's gospel that we must spend some considerable time on them.

Paul began by saying that he was proud of the gospel which it was his privilege to preach. It is amazing to think of the background of that statement. Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Beroea, laughed at in Athens and in Corinth his message was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling-block to the Jews. Out of that background he declared that he was proud of the gospel. There was something in the gospel which made Paul triumphantly victorious over all that men could do to him.

In this passage we meet three great Pauline watchwords, the three foundation pillars of his thought and belief.

(i) There is the conception of salvation (soteria, GSN4991). At this time in history salvation was the one thing for which men were searching. There had been a time when Greek philosophy was speculative. Four and five hundred years before this men had spent their time discussing the problem--what is the one basic element of which the world is composed? Philosophy had been speculative philosophy and it had been natural philosophy. But, bit by bit, as the centuries passed, life fell in. The old landmarks were destroyed. Tyrants and conquerors and perils surrounded men; degeneracy and weakness haunted them; and philosophy changed its emphasis. It became, not speculative, but practical. It ceased to be natural philosophy, and became moral philosophy. Its one aim was to build "a ring-wall of defence against the advancing chaos of the world."

Epictetus called his lecture room the hospital for the sick soul. "Epicurus called his teaching the medicine of salvation." Seneca, who was contemporary with Paul, said that all men were looking, ad salutem, towards salvation. What we needed, he said, was "a hand let down to lift us up." Men, he said, were overwhelmingly conscious of "their weakness and their inefficiency in necessary

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things." He himself, he said, was homo non tolerabilis, a man not to be tolerated. Men loved their vices, he said with a sort of despair, and hated them at the same time. In that desperate world, Epictetus said, men were seeking a peace "not of Caesar's proclamation, but of God's."

There can seldom have been a time in history when men were more universally seeking for salvation. It was precisely that salvation, that power, that escape, that Christianity came to offer men.

Let us see just what this Christian soteria (GSN4991), this Christian salvation was.

(a) It was salvation from physical illness. (Matt.9:21; Lk.8:36.) It was not a completely other--worldly thing. It aimed at rescuing a man in body and in soul.

(b) It was salvation from danger. (Matt.8:25; Matt.14:30.) It was not that it gave a man a life free from perils and dangers, but it gave him a security of soul no matter what was happening. As Rupert Brooke wrote in the days of the First World War in his poem Safety:

"Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's endeavour;
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all."

And as Browning had it in Paracelsus:

"If I stoop,
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time; I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day."

The Christian salvation makes a man safe in a way that is independent of any outward circumstance.

(c) It was salvation from life's infection. It is from a crooked and perverse generation that a man is saved (Ac.2:40). The man who has this Christian salvation has a kind of divine antiseptic which keeps him from infection by the evil of the world.

(d) It was salvation from lostness (Matt.18:11; Lk.19:10). It was to seek and to save the lost that Jesus came. The unsaved man is the man who is on the wrong road, a road that leads to death. The saved man is the man who has been put on the right way.

(e) It was salvation from sin (Matt.1:21). Men are like slaves in bondage to a master from whom they cannot escape. The Christian salvation liberates them from the tyranny of sin.

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(f) It was salvation from the wrath of God (Rom.5:9). We shall have occasion in the next passage to discuss the meaning of this phrase. It is sufficient to note at the moment that there is in this world an inexorable moral law and in the Christian faith an inevitable element of judgment. Without the salvation which Jesus Christ brings a man could only stand condemned.

(g) It was a salvation which is eschatological. That is to say it is a salvation which find its full meaning and blessedness in the final triumph of Jesus Christ (Rom.13:11; 1Cor.5:5; 2Tim.4:18; 1Pet.1:5).

The Christian faith came to a desperate world offering a salvation which would keep a man safe in time and in eternity.

(ii) There is the conception of faith. In the thought of Paul this is a rich word.

(a) At its simplest it means loyalty. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he wished to know about their faith. That is, he wished to know how their loyalty was standing the test. In 2Th.1:4 faith and steadfastness are combined. Faith is the enduring fidelity which marks the real soldier of Jesus Christ.

(b) Faith means belief. It means the conviction that something is true. In 1Cor.15:17 Paul tells the Corinthians that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then their faith is vain, all that they have believed is wrecked. Faith is the assent that the Christian message is true.

(c) Faith sometimes means the Christian Religion (The Faith). In 2Cor.13:5 Paul tells his opponents to examine themselves to see if they are holding to their faith, that is, to see if they are still within the Christian Religion.

(d) Faith is sometimes practically equivalent to indestructible hope. "We walk," writes Paul, "by faith and not by sight" (2Cor.5:7).

(e) But, in its most characteristic Pauline use, faith means total acceptance and absolute trust. It means "betting your life that there is a God." It means being utterly sure that what Jesus said is true, and staking all time and eternity on that assurance. "I believe in God," said Stevenson, "and if I woke up in hell I would still believe in him."

Faith begins with receptivity. It begins when a man is at least willing to listen to the message of the truth. It goes on to mental assent. A man first hears and then agrees that this is true. But mental assent need not issue in action. Many a man knows very well that something is true, but does not change his actions to meet that knowledge. The final stage is when this mental assent becomes total surrender. In full-fledged faith, a man hears the Christian message, agrees that it is true, and then casts himself upon it in a life of total yieldedness.

(iii) There is the conception of justification. Now there are no more difficult words to understand than justification, justify, justice and just, in all the New Testament. We shall have much occasion

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Romans 1:16-17

in this letter to meet them. At this point we can only lay down the broad lines on which all Paul's thought proceeds.

The Greek verb that Paul uses for "to justify" is *dikaion* (GSN1344), of which the first person singular of the present indicative--I justify--is *dikaioo* (GSN1344). We must be quite clear that the word justify, used in this sense, has a different meaning from its ordinary English meaning. If we justify ourselves, we produce reasons to prove that we were right; if someone justifies us, he produces reasons to prove that we acted in the right way. But all verbs in Greek which end in "oo" do not mean to prove or to make a person or thing to be something; they always mean to treat, or account or reckon a person as something. If God justifies a sinner, it does not mean that he finds reasons to prove that he was right--far from it. It does not even mean, at this point, that he makes the sinner a good man. It means that God treats the sinner as if he had not been a sinner at all. Instead of treating him as a criminal to be obliterated, God treats him as a child to be loved. That is what justification means.

It means that God reckons us not as his enemies but as his friends, not as bad men deserve, but as good men deserve, not as law-breakers to be punished, but as men and women to be loved. That is the very essence of the gospel.

That means that to be justified is to enter into a new relationship with God, a relationship of love and confidence and friendship, instead of one of distance and enmity and fear. We no longer go to a God radiating just but terrible punishment. We go to a God radiating forgiving and redeeming love. Justification (*dikaiosisune*, GSN1343) is the right relationship between God and man. The man who is just (*dikaios*, GSN1342) is the man who is in this right relationship, and--here is the supreme point--he is in it not because of anything that he has done, but because of what God has done. He is in this right relationship not because he has meticulously performed the works of the law, but because in utter faith he has cast himself on the amazing mercy and love of God.

In the King James Version we have the famous and highly compressed phrase, The just shall live by faith. Now we can see that in Paul's mind this phrase meant--It is the man who is in a right relationship with God, not because of the works of his hands, but because of his utter faith in what the love of God has done, who really knows what life is like in time and in eternity. And to Paul the whole work of Jesus was that he had enabled men to enter into this new and precious relationship with God. Fear was gone and love had come. The God whom men had thought an enemy had become a friend.

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Romans 1:18-23

THE WRATH OF GOD

Romans 1:18-23

For the wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven, directed against all impiety and wickedness of men, who, in their wickedness, wilfully suppress the truth that is struggling in their hearts, for, that which can be known about God is clear within them, for God has made it clear to them, because, from the creation of the world, it has always been possible to understand the invisible things by the created things--I mean his invisible power and divinity--and things have been so ordered in order to leave them without defence, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify God and they did not give him thanks, but they have involved themselves in futile speculations and their senseless mind was darkened. They alleged themselves to be wise, but they have become fools, and they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the image of the likeness of mortal man, and of winged creatures, and of four-footed animals, and of creeping reptiles.

In the previous passage Paul was thinking about the relationship with God into which a man can enter through the faith which is utter yieldedness and trust. In contrast with that he sets the wrath of God which a man must incur, if he is deliberately blind to God and worships his own thoughts and idols instead of him.

This is difficult and must give us seriously to think, for here we meet the conception of the wrath of God, an alarming and a terrifying phrase. What is its meaning? What was in Paul's mind when he used it?

In the early parts of the Old Testament the wrath of God is specially connected with the idea of the covenant people. The people of Israel were in a special relationship with God. He had chosen them and offered them this special relationship, which would obtain so long as they kept his law (Exo.24:3-8). That meant two things.

(a) It meant that within the nation any breach of the law provoked the wrath of God for it broke the relationship. Num.16 tells of the rebelliousness of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and at the end of it Moses bade Aaron make special atonement for the sin of the people "for wrath has gone forth from the Lord" (Num.16:46). When the Israelites were led away into Baal worship, "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" (Num.25:3).

(b) Further, because Israel stood in a unique relationship to God, any other nation which treated her with cruelty and injustice incurred the wrath of God. The Babylonians had ill-treated Israel, and because of the wrath of the Lord she shall not be inhabited (Jer.50:13).

In the prophets, the idea of the wrath of God occurs, but the emphasis has changed. Jewish religious thought from the prophets onwards was dominated by the idea of the two ages. There was this age which was altogether bad, and there was the golden age which was altogether good, the present age and the age to come. These two ages were separated by the Day of the Lord. That was to be a day of terrible retribution and judgment, when the world would be shattered, the sinner

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destroyed and the universe remade before God's Kingdom came. It was then that the wrath of the Lord would go into terrible action. "Behold the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation" (Isa.13:9). "Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts" (Isa.9:19). Eze.7:19 speaks of "the day of the wrath of the Lord." God will pour out upon the nations "his indignation and all the heat of his anger" (Zeph.3:8).

But the prophets did not regard the wrath of God as being postponed until that terrible day of judgment. They saw it continuously in action. When Israel strayed away from God, when she was rebellious and unfaithful, then the wrath of God operated against her and involved her in ruin, disaster, captivity and defeat.

To the prophets the wrath of God was continually operating, and would reach its peak of terror and destruction on the coming Day of the Lord.

A modern scholar has put it this way. Because he is God, because he is characteristically holy, God cannot tolerate sin, and the wrath of God is his "annihilating reaction" against sin.

That is hard for us to grasp and to accept. It is in fact the kind of religion that we associate with the Old Testament rather than with the New. Even Luther found it hard. He spoke of God's love as God's own work, and he spoke of his wrath as God's strange work. It is for the Christian mind a baffling thing.

Let us try to see how Paul understood this conception. Dr C. H. Dodd writes very wisely and profoundly on this matter. Paul speaks frequently of this idea of wrath. But the strange thing is that although he speaks of the wrath of God, he never speaks of God being angry. He speaks of God's love, and he speaks of God loving. He speaks of God's grace, and of God graciously giving. He speaks of God's fidelity, and of God being faithful to his people. But, very strangely, although he speaks of the wrath of God, he never speaks about God being angry. So then there is some difference in the connection with God of love and wrath.

Further, Paul speaks of the wrath of God only three times. He does so here, and in Eph.5:6 and Col.3:6 where, in both passages, he speaks of the wrath of God coming upon the children of disobedience. But quite frequently Paul speaks about the wrath, without saying it is the wrath of God, as if it ought to be spelled with capital letters--The Wrath--and was a kind of impersonal force at work in the world. In Rom.3:5 the literal translation is, "God who brings on men The Wrath." In Rom.5:9 he speaks about being saved from the wrath. In Rom.12:19 he advises men not to take vengeance but to leave evil-doers to the wrath. In Rom.13:5 he speaks about the wrath as being a powerful motive to keep men obedient. In Rom.4:15 he says that the law produces wrath. And in 1Th.1:10 he says that Jesus delivered us from The Wrath to come. Now there is something very strange here. Paul speaks about the wrath, and yet from that very wrath Jesus saves men.

Let us go back to the prophets. Very often their message amounted to this, "If you are not obedient to God, the wrath of God will involve you in ruin and disaster." Ezekiel put this in another vivid way--"The soul that sins shall die" (Eze.18:4). If we were to put this into modern language we would say, "There is a moral order in this world, and the man who transgresses it soon or late is

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bound to suffer." That is exactly what J. A. Froude the great historian said: "One lesson, and one lesson only, history may be said to repeat with distinctness, that the world is butt somehow on moral foundations, that, in the long run, it is well with the good, and, in the long run, it will be ill with the wicked."

The whole message of the Hebrew prophets was that there is a moral order in this world. The conclusion is clear--that moral order is the wrath of God at work. God made this world in such a way that we break his laws at our peril. Now if we were left solely at the mercy of that inexorable moral order, there could be nothing for us but death and destruction. The world is made in such a way that the soul that sins must die--if the moral order is to act alone. But into this dilemma of man there comes the love of God, and that love of God, by an act of unbelievable free grace, lifts man out of the consequences of sin and saves him from the wrath he should have incurred.

Paul goes on to insist that men cannot plead ignorance of God. They could have seen what he is like from his world. It is always possible to tell something of a man from his handiwork; and it is possible to tell something about God from the world he made. The Old Testament writers knew that. Jb.38-41, is based on that very idea. Paul knew it. It is from the world that he starts when he is speaking to the pagans at Lystra (Ac.14:17). Tertullian, the great early Christian Father, has much about this conviction that God can be seen in his world. "It was not the pen of Moses that initiated the knowledge of the Creator.

The vast majority of mankind, though they had never heard the name of Moses--to say nothing of his book--know the God of Moses none the less." "Nature," he said, "is the teacher; the soul is the pupil." "One flower of the hedgerow by itself, I think--I do not say a flower of the meadows; one shell of any sea you like--I do not say a pearl from the Red Sea; one feather of a moor fowl--to say nothing of a peacock--will they speak to you of a mean Creator?" "If I offer you a rose, you will not scorn its Creator."

In the world we can see God. It is Paul's argument--and it is completely valid--that if we look at the world we see that suffering follows sin. Break the laws of agriculture--your harvest fails. Break the laws of architecture--your building collapses. Break the laws of health--your body suffers. Paul was saying "Look at the world! See how it is constructed! From a world like that you know what God is like." The sinner is left without excuse.

Paul goes on another step. What did the sinner do? Instead of looking out to God, he looked into himself. He involved himself in vain speculations and thought he was wise, while all the time he was a fool. Why? He was a fool because he made his ideas, his opinions, his speculations the standard and the law of life, instead of the will of God. The sinner's folly consisted in making "man the master of things." He found his standards in his own opinions and not in the laws of God. He lived in a self-centred instead of a God-centred universe. Instead of walking looking out to God he walked looking into himself, and, like any man who does not look where he is going, he fell.

The result of this was idolatry. The glory of God was exchanged for images of human and animal forms. The root sin of idolatry is that it is selfish. A man makes an idol. He brings it offerings and addresses prayers to it. Why? So that his own schemes and dreams may be furthered. His worship is for his own sake and not for God's.

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In this passage we are face to face with the fact that the essence of sin is to put self in the place of God.

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Romans 1:24-25

MEN WITH WHOM GOD CAN DO NOTHING

Romans 1:24-25

So then God abandoned them to uncleanness in their hearts' passionate desires for pleasure, desires which made them dishonour their bodies among themselves, for they are men who have exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, and who worship and serve the creation more than they do the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

The word translated desires (epithumia, GSN1939) is the key to this passage. Aristotle defined epithumia (GSN1939) as a reaching out after pleasure. The Stoics defined it as a reaching after pleasure which defies all reason. Clement of Alexandria called it an unreasonable reaching for that which will gratify itself. Epithumia (GSN1939) is the passionate desire for forbidden pleasure. It is the desire which makes men do nameless and shameless things. It is the way of life of a man who has become so completely immersed in the world that he has ceased to be aware of God at all.

It is a terrible thing to talk of God abandoning anyone. And yet there are two reasons for that.

(i) God gave man free-will, and he respects that free-will. In the last analysis not even he can interfere with it. In Eph.4:19 Paul speaks of men who have abandoned themselves to lasciviousness; they have surrendered their whole will to it. Hosea (Hos.4:17) has the terrible sentence: "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." Before man there stands an open choice; and it has to be so. Without choice there can be no goodness and without choice there can be no love. A coerced goodness is not real goodness; and a coerced love is not love at all. If men deliberately choose to turn their backs on God after he has sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world, not even he can do anything about it.

When Paul speaks of God abandoning men to uncleanness, the word abandon has no angry irritation in it. Indeed, its main note is not even condemnation and judgment, but wistful, sorrowful regret, as of a lover who has done all that he can and can do no more. It describes exactly the feeling of the father when he saw his son turn his back on his home and go out to the far country.

(ii) And yet in this word abandon there is more than that--there is judgment. It is one of the grim facts of life that the more a man sins the easier it is to sin. He may begin with a kind of shuddering awareness of what he is doing, and end by sinning without a second thought. It is not that God is punishing him; he is bringing punishment upon himself and steadily making himself the slave of sin. The Jews knew this, and they had certain great sayings upon this idea. "Every fulfilment of duty is rewarded by another; and every transgression is punished by another." "Whosoever strives to keep himself pure receives the power to do so; and whosoever is impure, to him is the door of vice thrown open." "He who erects a fence around himself is fenced, and he who gives himself over is given over."

The most terrible thing about sin is just this power to beget sin. It is the awful responsibility of free-will that it can be used in such a way that in the end it is obliterated and a man becomes the slave of sin, self-abandoned to the wrong way. And sin is always a lie, because the sinner thinks

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that it will make him happy, whereas in the end it ruins life, both for himself and for others, in this world and in the world to come.

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Romans 1:26-27

AN AGE OF SHAME

Romans 1:26-27

Because of this God abandoned them to dishonourable passions, for their women exchanged the natural relationship, for the relationship which is against nature; and so did the men, for they gave up the natural relationship with women, and were inflamed with their desire for each other, and men were guilty of shameful conduct with men. So within themselves they received their due and necessary rewards for their error.

Rom.1:26-32 might seem the work of some almost hysterical moralist who was exaggerating the contemporary situation and painting it in colours of rhetorical hyperbole. It describes a situation of degeneracy of morals almost without parallel in human history. But Paul said nothing that the Greek and Roman writers of the age did not themselves say.

(i) It was an age when things seemed, as it were, out of control. Virgil wrote: "Right and wrong are confounded; so many wars the world over, so many forms of wrong; no worthy honour is left to the plough; the husbandmen are marched away and the fields grow dirty; the hook has its curve straightened into the sword-blade. In the East, Euphrates is stirring up the war, in the West, Germany; nay, close-neighbouring cities break their mutual league and draw the sword, and the war god's unnatural fury rages over the whole world; even as when in the circus the chariots burst from their floodgates, they dash into the course, and, pulling desperately at the reins, the driver lets the horses drive him, and the car is deaf to the curb."

It was a world where violence had run amok. When Tacitus came to write the history of this period, he wrote: "I am entering upon the history of a period, rich in disasters, gloomy with wars, rent with seditions, savage in its very hours of peace."

All was one delirium of hate and terror; slaves were bribed to betray their masters, freedmen their patrons. He who had no foe was destroyed by his friend." Suetonius, writing of the reign of Tiberius, said: "No day passed but someone was executed." It was an age of sheer, utter terror. "Rome," said Livy, the historian, "could neither bear its ills nor the remedies that might have cured them." Propertius, the poet, wrote: "I see Rome, proud Rome, perishing, the victim of her own prosperity." It was an age of moral suicide. Juvenal, the satirist, wrote: "The earth no longer brings forth any but bad men and cowards. Hence God, whoever he is, looks down, laughs at them and hates them."

To the thinking man it was an age when things seemed out of control, and when, in the background, a man could hear the mocking laughter of the gods. As Seneca said, it was an age "stricken with the agitation of a soul no longer master of itself."

(ii) It was an age of unparalleled luxury. In the public baths of Rome the hot and cold water ran from silver taps. Caligula had even sprinkled the floor of the circus arena with gold dust instead of sawdust. Juvenal said bitterly: "A luxury more ruthless than war broods over Rome. No guilt or deed of lust is wanting since Roman poverty disappeared." "Money, the nurse of debauchery and

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enervating riches sapped the sinews of the age with foul luxury." Seneca spoke of "money, the ruin of the true honour of things," and said, "we ask not what a thing truly is but what it costs." It was an age so weary of ordinary things that it was avid for new sensations. Lucretius speaks of "that bitterness which flows from the very fountain of pleasure." Crime became the only antidote to boredom, until, as Tacitus said, "the greater the infamy, the wilder the delight."

(iii) It was an age of unparalleled immorality. There had not been one single case of divorce in the first 520 years of the history of the Roman republic. The first Roman recorded as having divorced his wife was Spurius Carvilius Ruga in 234 B.C. But now, as Seneca said, "women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married." Roman high-born matrons dated the years by the names of their husbands, and not by the names of the consuls. Juvenal could not believe that it was possible to have the rare good fortune to find a matron with unsullied chastity. Clement of Alexandria speaks of the typical Roman society lady as "girt like Venus with a golden girdle of vice." Juvenal writes: "Is one husband enough for Iberina? Sooner will you prevail upon her to be content with one eye." He cites the case of a woman who had eight husbands in five years. He cites the incredible case of Agrippina, the empress herself, the wife of Claudius, who at night used to leave the royal palace and go down to serve in a brothel for the sake of sheer lust. "They show a dauntless spirit in those things they basely dare." There is nothing that Paul said about the heathen world that the heathen moralists had not themselves already said. And vice did not stop with the crude and natural vices. Society from top to bottom was riddled with unnatural vice. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors were homosexuals.

So far from exaggerating the picture Paul drew it with restraint--and it was there that he was eager to preach the gospel, and it was there that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. The world needed the power that would work salvation, and Paul knew that nowhere else than in Christ did that power exist.

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Romans 1:28-32

THE LIFE WHICH HAS LEFT GOD OUT OF THE RECKONING

Romans 1:28-32

Just as they have given themselves over to a kind of knowledge that rejects the idea of God, so God has given them over to the kind of mind that all reject. The result is that they do things which it is not fitting for any man to do. They are replete with all evil, villainy, the lust to get, viciousness. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, the spirit which puts the worst construction on everything. They are whisperers, slanderers, haters of God. They are insolent men, arrogant, braggarts, inventors of evil things, disobedient to their parents, senseless breakers of agreements, without natural affections, pitiless. They are the kind of men who are well aware that those who do such things deserve death, and yet they not only do them themselves, but also heartily approve of those who do them.

There is hardly any passage which so clearly shows what happens to a man when he leaves God out of the reckoning. It is not so much that God sends a judgment on a man, as that a man brings a judgment on himself when he gives no place to God in his scheme of things. When a man banishes God from his life he becomes a certain kind of man, and in this passage is one of the most terrible descriptions in literature of the kind of man he becomes. Let us look at the catalogue of dreadful things which enter into the godless life.

Such men do things which are not fitting for any man to do. The Stoics had a phrase. They talked of *ta (GSN3588) kathekonta (GSN2520)*, by which they meant the things it befits a man to do. Certain things are essentially and inherently part of manhood, and certain things are not. As Shakespeare has it in *Macbeth*:

"I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none."

The man who banishes God not only loses godliness; he loses manhood too.

Then comes the long list of terrible things. Let us take them one by one.

Evil (*adikia*, GSN0093). *Adikia* is the precise opposite of *diaiosune* (GSN1343), which means justice; and the Greeks defined justice as giving to God and to men their due. The evil man is the man who robs both man and God of their rights. He has so erected an altar to himself in the centre of things that he worships himself to the exclusion of God and man.

Villainy (*poneria*, GSN4189). In Greek this word means more than badness. There is a kind of badness which, in the main, hurts only the person concerned. It is not essentially an outgoing badness. When it hurts others, as all badness must, the hurt is not deliberate. It may be thoughtlessly cruel, but it is not callously cruel. But the Greeks defined *poneria* (GSN4189) as the desire of doing harm. It is the active, deliberate will to corrupt and to inflict injury. When the Greeks described a woman as *poneria* (GSN4189) they meant that she deliberately seduced the innocent from their innocence. In Greek one of the commonest titles of Satan is *ho poneros*

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(GSN4190), the evil one, the one who deliberately attacks and aims to destroy the goodness of men. Ponerous (GSN4190) describes the man who is not only bad but wants to make everyone as bad as himself. Poneria (GSN4189) is destructive badness.

The lust to get (pleonexia, GSN4124). The Greek word is built up of two words which mean to have more. The Greeks themselves defined pleonexia (GSN4124) as the accursed love of having. It is an aggressive vice. It has been described as the spirit which will pursue its own interests with complete disregard for the rights of others, and even for the considerations of common humanity. Its keynote is rapacity. Theodoret, the Christian writer, describes it as the spirit that aims at more, the spirit which grasps at things which it has no right to take. It may operate in every sphere of life. If it operates in the material sphere, it means grasping at money and goods, regardless of honour and honesty. If it operates in the ethical sphere, it means the ambition which tramples on others to gain something which is not properly meant for it. If it operates in the moral sphere, it means the unbridled lust which takes its pleasure where it has no right to take. Pleonexia (GSN4124) is the desire which knows no law.

Viciousness (kakia, GSN2549). Kakia is the most general Greek word for badness. It describes the case of a man who is destitute of every quality which would make him good. For instance, a kakos (GSN2556) krites (GSN2923) is a judge destitute of the legal knowledge and the moral sense and uprightness of character which are necessary to make a good judge. It is described by Theodoret as "the turn of the soul to the worse." The word he uses for turn is "rope" which means the turn of the balance. A man who is kakos (GSN2556) is a man the swing of whose life is towards the worse. Kakia (GSN2549) has been described as the essential viciousness which includes all vice and as the forerunner of all other sins. It is the degeneracy out of which all sins grow and in which all sins flourish.

Envy (phthonos, GSN5355). There is a good and a bad envy. There is the envy which reveals to a man his own weakness and inadequacy, and which makes him eager to copy some great example. And there is the envy which is essentially a grudging thing. It looks at a fine person, and is not so much moved to aspire to that fineness, as to resent it. It is the most warped and twisted of human emotions.

Murder (phonos, GSN5408). It has always to be remembered that Jesus immeasurably widened the scope of this word. He insisted that not only the deed of violence but the spirit of anger and hatred must be eliminated. He insisted that it is not enough only to keep from angry and savage action. It is enough only when even the desire and the anger are banished from the heart. We may never have struck a man in our lives, but who can say he never wanted to strike anyone? As Aquinas said long ago, "Man regardeth the deed, but God seeth the intention."

Strife (eris, GSN2054). Its meaning is the contention which is born of envy, ambition, the desire for prestige, and place and prominence. It comes from the heart in which there is jealousy. If a man is cleansed of jealousy, he has gone far to being cleansed of all that arouses contention and strife. It is a God-given gift to be able to take as much pleasure in the successes of others as in one's own.

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Deceit (dolos, GSN1388). We best get the meaning of this from the corresponding verb (doloun, GSN1389). Doloun has two characteristic usages. It is used of debasing precious metals and of adulterating wines. Dolos (GSN1388) is deceit; it describes the quality of the man who has a tortuous and a twisted mind, who cannot act in a straightforward way, who stoops to devious and underhand methods to get his own way, who never does anything except with some kind of ulterior motive. It describes the crafty cunning of the plotting intriguer who is found in every community and every society.

The spirit which puts the worst construction on everything (kakoetheia, GSN2550). Kakoetheia (GSN2500) means literally evil-naturedness. At its widest it means malignity. Aristotle defined it in a narrower sense which it has always retained. He said it was "the spirit which always supposes the worst about other people." Pliny called it "malignity of interpretation." Jeremy Taylor said that it is "a baseness of nature by which we take things by the wrong handle, and expound things always in the worst sense." It may well be that this is the commonest of all sins. If there are two possible constructions to be put upon the action of any man, human nature will choose the worse. It is terrifying to think how many reputations have been murdered in gossip over the teacups, with people maliciously putting a wrong interpretation upon a completely innocent action. When we are tempted so to do, we ought to remember that God hears and remembers every word we speak.

Whisperers and slanderers (Psithuristes, GSN5588 and katalalos, GSN2637). These two words describe people with slanderous tongues; but there is a difference between them. Katalalos (GSN2637), slanderer, describes the man who trumpets his slanders abroad; he quite openly makes his accusations and tells his tales--Psithuristes (GSN5588) describes the man who whispers his malicious stories in the listener's ear, who takes a man apart into a corner and whispers a character-destroying story. Both are bad, but the whisperer is the worse. A man can at least defend himself against an open slander, but he is helpless against the secret whisperer who delights in destroying reputations.

Haters of God (theostugeis, GSN2319). This describes the man who hates God because he knows that he is defying him. God is the barrier between him and his pleasures; he is the chain which keeps him from doing exactly as he likes. He would gladly eliminate God if he could, for to him a godless world would be one where he would have, not liberty, but licence.

Insolent men (hubristes, GSN5197). Hubris (GSN5196) was to the Greek the vice which supremely courted destruction at the hand of the gods. It has two main lines of thought in it. (i) It describes the spirit of the man who is so proud that he defies God. It is the insolent pride that goes before a fall. It is the forgetting that man is a creature. It is the spirit of the man who is so confident in his wealth, his power and his strength that he thinks that he can live life alone. (ii) It describes the man who is wantonly and sadistically cruel and insulting. Aristotle describes it as the spirit which harms and grieves someone else, not for the sake of revenge and not for any advantage that may be gained from it, but simply for the sheer pleasure of hurting. There are people who get pleasure from seeing someone wince at a cruel saying. There are people who take a devilish delight in inflicting mental and physical pain on others.

That is hubris (GSN5196); it is the sadism which finds delight in hurting others simply for the sake of hurting them.

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Arrogant men (huperephanos, GSN5244). This is the word which is three times used in scripture when it is said that God resists the proud. (Jas.4:6; 1Pet.5:5; Prov.3:34.) Theophylact called it "the summit of all sins." Theophrastus was a Greek writer who wrote a series of famous character sketches, and he defined huperephania (GSN5244) as "a certain contempt for everyone except oneself." He picks out the things in everyday life which are signs of this arrogance. The arrogant man, when he is asked to accept some office, refuses on the ground that he has not time to spare from his own business; he never looks at people on the street unless it pleases him to do so; he invites a man to a meal and then does not appear himself, but sends his servant to attend to his guest. His whole life is surrounded with an atmosphere of contempt and he delights to make others feel small.

Braggarts (alazon, GSN0213). Alazon is a word with an interesting history. It literally means one who wanders about. It then became the stock word for wandering quacks who boast of cures that they have worked, and for cheapjacks who boast that their wares have an excellence which they are far from possessing. The Greeks defined alazoneia (GSN0212) as the spirit which pretends to have what it has not. Xenophon said that the name belongs to those who pretend to be richer and braver than they are, and who promise to do what they are really unable to do in order to make some profit or gain. Again Theophrastus has a character study of such a man--the pretentious man, the snob. He is the kind of man who boasts of trade deals which exist only in his imagination, of connections with influential people which do not exist at all, of gifts to charities and public services which he never gave or rendered. He says about the house he lives in that it is really too small for him, and that he must buy a bigger one.

The braggart is out to impress others--and the world is still full of his like.

Inventors of evil (epheuretes (GSN2182) kakon, GSN2556). The phrase describes the man who, so to speak, is not content with the usual, ordinary ways of sinning, but who seeks out new and recondite vices because he has grown blase and seeks a new thrill in some new sin.

Disobedient to their parents (goneusin (GSN1118) apeitheis, GSN0545). Both Jews and Romans set obedience to parents very high in the scale of virtues. It was one of the Ten Commandments that parents should be honoured. In the early days of the Roman Republic, the patria potestas, the father's power, was so absolute that he had the power of life and death over his family. The reason for including this sin here is that, once the bonds of the family are loosened, wholesale degeneracy must necessarily follow.

Senseless (asunetos, GSN0801). This word describes the man who is a fool, who cannot learn the lesson of experience, who will not use the mind and brain that God has given to him.

Breakers of agreements (asunthetos, GSN0802). This word would come with particular force to a Roman audience. In the great days of Rome, Roman honesty was a wonderful thing. A man's word was as good as his bond. That was in fact one of the great differences between the Roman and the Greek. The Greek was a born pilferer. The Greeks used to say that if a governor or official was entrusted with one talent--240 British pounds--even if there were ten clerks and accountants to check up on him, he was certain to succeed in embezzling some of it; while the Roman, whether as

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a magistrate in office or a general on a campaign, could deal with thousands of talents on his bare word alone, and never a penny went astray. By using this word, Paul was recalling the Romans not only to the Christian ethic, but to their own standards of honour in their greatest days.

Without natural affections (astorgos, GSN0794). Storge (compare GSN0794) was the special Greek word for family love. It was quite true that this was an age in which family love was dying. Never was the life of the child so precarious as at this time. Children were considered a misfortune. When a child was born, it was taken and laid at the father's feet. If the father lifted it up that meant that he acknowledged it. If he turned away and left it, the child was literally thrown out. There was never a night when there were not thirty or forty abandoned children left in the Roman forum. Even Seneca, great soul as he was, could write: "We kill a mad dog; we slaughter a fierce ox; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown." The natural bonds of human affection had been destroyed.

Pitiless (aneleemon, GSN0415). There never was a time when human life was so cheap. A slave could be killed or tortured by his master, for he was only a thing and the law gave his master unlimited power over him. In a wealthy household a slave was bringing in a tray of crystal glasses. He stumbled and a glass fell and broke. There and then his master had him flung into the fish pond in the middle of the courtyard where the savage lampreys devoured his living flesh. It was an age pitiless in its very pleasures, for it was the great age of the gladiatorial games where people found their delight in seeing men kill each other. It was an age when the quality of mercy was gone.

Paul says one last thing about these people who have banished God from life. It usually happens that, even if a man is a sinner, he knows it, and, even if he allows something in himself, he knows that it is to be condemned in others. But in those days men had reached such a level that they sinned themselves and encouraged others to do so. George Bernard Shaw once said, "No nation has ever survived the loss of its gods." Here Paul has given us a terrible picture of what happens when men deliberately banish God from the reckoning, and, in due time, Rome perished. Disaster and degeneracy went hand in hand.

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Romans 2:1-11

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PRIVILEGE

Romans 2:1-11

So, then, O man, everyone of you who judges others, you yourself have no defence. While you judge others, you condemn yourself, for you who set yourself up as a judge do exactly the same things. We know that God's judgment is directed against all who do such things, and that it is based on reality. Are you counting on this, O man, you who set yourself up as a judge upon people who do such things and who do them yourself--that you will escape the condemnation of God? Or, are you treating with contempt the wealth of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? In your obtuseness, and in your impenitent heart, you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, the day when there will be revealed the righteous judgment of God, who will settle accounts with each man according to his deeds. To those who sought glory and honour and immortality in steadfast good work, he will assign eternal life.

To those who were dominated by ambition, who were disobedient to truth and obedient to evil, there will be wrath and anger, tribulation and affliction. These things will come upon every soul of man who does the bad thing, upon the soul of the Jew first and then of the Greek. But glory and honour and peace will come to everyone who does the good thing, to the Jew first and then to the Greek, for there is no favouritism with God.

In this passage Paul is directly addressing the Jews. The connection of thought is this. In the foregoing passage Paul had painted a grim and terrible picture of the heathen world, a world which was under the condemnation of God. With every word of that condemnation the Jew thoroughly agreed. But he never for a moment dreamed that he was under a like condemnation. He thought that he occupied a privileged position. God might be the judge of the heathen, but he was the special protector of the Jews. Here Paul is pointing out forcibly to the Jew that he is just as much a sinner as the Gentile is and that when he is condemning the Gentile he is condemning himself. He will be judged, not on his racial heritage, but by the kind of life that he lives.

The Jews always considered themselves in a specially privileged position with God. "God," they said, "loves Israel alone of all the nations of the earth." "God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another." "All Israelites will have part in the world to come." "Abraham sits beside the gates of hell and does not permit any wicked Israelite to go through." When Justin Martyr was arguing with the Jew about the position of the Jews in the Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew said, "They who are the seed of Abraham according to the flesh shall in any case, even if they be sinners and unbelieving and disobedient towards God, share in the eternal Kingdom." The writer of the Book of Wisdom comparing God's attitude to Jews and Gentiles said: "These as a father, admonishing them, thou didst prove; but those as a stern king, condemning them, thou didst search out" (Wis.11:9). "While therefore thou dost chasten us, thou scourgest our enemies a thousand times more" (Wis.12:22).

The Jew believed that everyone was destined for judgment except himself. It would not be any special goodness which kept him immune from the wrath of God, but simply the fact that he was a Jew.

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To meet this situation Paul reminded the Jews of four things.

(i) He told them bluntly that they were trading on the mercy of God. In Rom.2:4 he uses three great words. He asks them: "Are you treating with contempt the wealth of his kindness, and forbearance and patience?" Let us look at these three great words.

(a) Kindness (chrestotes, GSN5544). Of this Trench says: "It is a beautiful word, as it is the expression of a beautiful idea." There are two words for good in Greek; there is agathos (GSN0018) and there is chrestos (GSN5543). The difference between them is this. The goodness of a man who is agathos (GSN0018) may well issue in rebuke and discipline and punishment; but the goodness of a man who is chrestos (GSN5543) is always essentially kind. Jesus was agathos (GSN0018) when he drove the moneychangers and the sellers of doves from the Temple in the white heat of his anger. He was chrestos (GSN5543) when he treated with loving gentleness the sinning woman who anointed his feet and the woman taken in adultery. So Paul says, in effect, "You Jews are simply trying to take advantage of the great kindness of God."

(b) Forbearance (anoche, GSN0463). Anoeche is the word for a truce. True, it means a cessation of hostility, but it is a cessation that has a limit. Paul, in effect, is saying to the Jews, "You think that you are safe because God's judgment has not yet descended upon you. But what God is giving you is not carte blanche to sin; he is giving you the opportunity to repent and to amend your ways." A man cannot sin forever with impunity.

(c) Patience (makrothumia, GSN3115). Makrothumia is characteristically a word which expresses patience with people. Chrysostom defined it as the characteristic of the man who has it in his power to avenge himself and deliberately does not use it. Paul is, in effect, saying to the Jews: "Do not think that the fact that God does not punish you is a sign that he cannot punish you. The fact that his punishment does not immediately follow sin is not a proof of his powerlessness; it is a proof of his patience. You owe your lives to the patience of God."

One great commentator has said that almost everyone has "a vague and undefined hope of impunity," a kind of feeling that "this cannot happen to me." The Jews went further than that; "they openly claimed exemption from the judgment of God." They traded on his mercy, and there are many who to this day seek to do the same.

(ii) Paul told the Jews that they were taking the mercy of God as an invitation to sin rather than as an incentive to repentance. It was Heine who made the famous, cynical statement. He was obviously not worrying about the world to come. He was asked why he was so confident, and his answer was, "God will forgive." He was asked why he was so sure of that, and his reply was, "C'est son metier" "It is his trade." Let us think of it in human terms. There are two attitudes to human forgiveness. Suppose a young person does something which is a shame, a sorrow and a heartbreak to his parents, and suppose that in love he is freely forgiven, and the thing is never held against him. He can do one of two things. He can either go and do the same thing again, trading on the fact that he will be forgiven once more; or he can be so moved to wondering gratitude by the free forgiveness that he has received, that he spends his whole life in trying to be worthy of it.

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It is one of the most shameful things in the world to use love's forgiveness as an excuse to go on sinning. That is what the Jews were doing. That is what so many people still do. The mercy and love of God are not meant to make us feel that we can sin and get away with it; they are meant so to break our hearts that we will seek never to sin again.

(iii) Paul insists that in God's economy there is no most favoured nation clause. There may be nations which are picked out for a special task and for a special responsibility, but none which is picked out for special privilege and special consideration. It may be true, as Milton said, that "When God has some great work he gives it to his Englishmen," but it is a great work that is in question, not a great privilege. The whole of Jewish religion was based on the conviction that the Jews held a special position of privilege and favour in the eyes of God. We may feel that that is a position which nowadays we are far past. But is it? Is there no such thing nowadays as a colour bar? Is there no such thing as a conscious feeling of superiority to what Kipling called "lesser breeds without the law"? This is not to say that all nations are the same in talent. But it is to say that those nations who have advanced further ought not to look with contempt on the others, but are, rather, under the responsibility to help them move forward.

(iv) Of all passages of Paul this deserves to be studied most carefully in order to arrive at a correct idea of Paulinism. It is often argued that his position was that all that matters is faith. A religion which stresses the importance of works is often contemptuously waved aside as being quite out of touch with the New Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth. "God," said Paul, "will settle with each man according to his deeds." To Paul a faith which did not issue in deeds was a travesty of faith; in fact it was not faith at all. He would have said that the only way in which you can see a man's faith at all is by his deeds. One of the most dangerous of all religious tendencies is to talk as if faith and works were entirely different and separate things. There can be no such thing as faith which does not issue in works, nor can there be works which are not the product of faith. Works and faith are inextricably bound up together. How, in the last analysis, can God judge a man other than by his deeds? We cannot comfortably say, "I have faith," and leave it at that. Our faith must issue in deeds, for it is by our deeds we are accepted or condemned.

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Romans 2:12-16

THE UNWRITTEN LAW

Romans 2:12-16

As many as sinned without the law shall also perish without the law; and as many as sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; for it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in the sight of God, but it is the doers of the law who will be accounted righteous, in that day when God judges the hidden things of men according to my gospel through Jesus Christ. For whenever the Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do by nature the deeds of the law, they, although they do not possess the law, are a law to them selves. They show the work of the law written on their hearts, while their consciences bear them witness, and while their thoughts within accuse or excuse them.

In the translation we have slightly changed the order of the verses. In the sense of the passage Rom.2:16 follows Rom.2:13, and Rom.2:14-15 are a long parenthesis. It is to be remembered that Paul was not writing this letter sitting at a desk and thinking out every word and every construction. He was striding up and down the room dictating it to his secretary, Tertius (Rom.16:22), who struggled to get it down. That explains the long parenthesis, but it is easier to get the correct meaning in English if we go straight from Rom.2:13 to Rom.2:16, and add Rom.2:14-15 afterwards.

In this passage Paul turns to the Gentiles. He has dealt with the Jews and with their claims to special privilege. But one advantage the Jew did have, and that was the Law. A Gentile might well retaliate by saying, "It is only right that God should condemn the Jews, who had the Law and who ought to have known better; but we will surely escape judgment because we had no opportunity to know the Law and did not know any better." In answer Paul lays down two great principles.

(i) A man will be judged by what he had the opportunity to know. If he knew the Law, he will be judged as one who knew the Law. If he did not know the Law, he will be judged as one who did not know the Law. God is fair. And here is the answer to those who ask what is to happen to the people who lived in the world before Jesus came and who had no opportunity to hear the Christian message. A man will be judged by his fidelity to the highest that it was possible for him to know.

(ii) Paul goes on to say that even those who did not know the written Law had an unwritten law within their hearts. We would call it the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong. The Stoics said that in the universe there were certain laws operative which a man broke at his peril--the laws of health, the moral laws which govern life and living. The Stoics called these laws phusis (GSN5449), which means nature, and urged men to live kata (GSN2596) phusin (GSN5449), according to nature. It is Paul's argument that in the very nature of man there is an instinctive knowledge of what he ought to do. The Greeks would have agreed with that. Aristotle said: "The cultivated and free-minded man will so behave as being a law to himself" Plutarch asks: "Who shall govern the governor?" And he answers: "Law, the king of all mortals and immortals, as Pindar calls it, which is not written on papyrus rolls or wooden tablets, but is his own reason within the soul, which perpetually dwells with him and guards him and never leaves his soul bereft of leadership."

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Romans 2:12-16

Paul saw the world divided into two classes of people. He saw the Jews with their Law given to them direct from God and written down so that all could read it. He saw the other nations, without this written law, but nonetheless with a God-implanted knowledge of right and wrong within their hearts. Neither could claim exemption from the judgment of God. The Jew could not claim exemption on the ground that he had a special place in God's plan. The Gentile could not claim exemption on the ground that he had never received the written Law. The Jew would be judged as one who had known the Law; the Gentile as one who had a God-given conscience. God will judge a man according to what he knows and has the chance to know.

Barclay's Commentary

Romans 2:17-29

THE REAL JEW

Romans 2:17-29

If you are called by the name of Jew, if you take your rest in the Law, if you boast in God and know his will, if you give your approval to the excellent things, if you are instructed in the Law, if you believe yourself to be a leader of the blind, a light in darkness, and educator of the foolish, a teacher of the simple, if you believe yourself to have the very shape of knowledge and of truth in the Law--do you, then, who instruct another, not instruct yourself? Do you, who proclaim to others that stealing is forbidden, steal yourself? Do you, who forbid others to commit adultery, commit adultery yourself? Do you, who shudder at idols, rob temples? Do you, who boast in the Law, dishonour others by transgressing the Law? As it stands written, "Because of your conduct, God's name is ill-spoken of among the Gentiles." Circumcision is indeed an advantage if you do the Law. But if you are a transgressor of the Law your circumcision has become the equivalent of uncircumcision.

For if uncircumcision observes the moral requirements of the Law, shall not uncircumcision be reckoned as the equivalent of circumcision, and will natural uncircumcision which keeps the Law, not become the judge of you who are a transgressor of the Law, although you have the letter and the circumcision? For he is not a real Jew who is externally a Jew; nor is the real circumcision the external circumcision in the flesh; but he is a real Jew who is a Jew in inward things; and real circumcision is the circumcision of the heart, in spirit, and not in letter. The praise of such a man comes not from men but from God.

To a Jew a passage like this must have come as a shattering experience. He was certain that God regarded him with special favour, simply and solely because of his national descent from Abraham and because he bore the badge of circumcision in his flesh. But Paul introduces an idea to which he will return again and again. Jewishness, he insists, is not a matter of race at all; it has nothing to do with circumcision. It is a matter of conduct. If that is so, many a so-called Jew who is a pure descendant of Abraham and who bears the mark of circumcision in his body, is no Jew at all; and equally many a Gentile who never heard of Abraham and who would never dream of being circumcised, is a Jew in the real sense of the term. To a Jew this would sound the wildest heresy and leave him angry and aghast.

Rom.2:29 contains a pun which is completely untranslatable. "The praise of such a man comes not from men but from God." The Greek word for praise is *epainos* (GSN1868). When we turn back to the Old Testament (Gen.29:35; Gen.49:8), we find that the original and traditional meaning of the word Judah is praise (*epainos*, GSN1868). Therefore this phrase means two things. (a) It means the praise of such a man comes not from men but from God. (b) It means the Jewishness of such a man comes not from men but from God. The sense of the passage is that God's promises are not to people of a certain race and to people who bear a certain mark on their bodies. They are to people who live a certain kind of life irrespective of their race. To be a real Jew is not a matter of pedigree but of character; and often the man who is not racially a Jew may be a better Jew than the man who is.

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Romans 2:17-29

In this passage Paul says that there are Jews whose conduct makes the name of God ill-spoken of among the Gentiles. It is a simple fact of history that the Jews were, and often still are, the most unpopular people in the world. Let us see just how the Gentiles did regard the Jews in New Testament times.

They regarded Judaism as a "barbarous superstition" and the Jews as "the most disgusting of races," and as "a most contemptible company of slaves." The origins of Jewish religion were twisted with a malicious ignorance. It was said that Jews had originally been a company of lepers who had been sent by the king of Egypt to work in the sand quarries; and that Moses had rallied this band of leprous slaves and led them through the desert to Palestine. It was said that they worshipped an ass' head, because in the wilderness a herd of wild asses had led them to water when they were perishing with thirst. It was said that they abstained from swine's flesh because the pig is specially liable to a skin disease called the itch, and it was that skin disease that the Jews had suffered from in Egypt.

Certain of the Jewish customs were mocked at by the Gentiles. Their abstinence from swine's flesh provided many a jest. Plutarch thought that the reason for it might well be that the Jews worshipped the pig as a god. Juvenal declares that Jewish clemency has accorded to the pig the privilege of living to a good old age, and that swine's flesh is more valuable to them than the flesh of man. The custom of observing the Sabbath was regarded as pure laziness.

Certain things which the Jews enjoyed infuriated the Gentiles. It was the odd fact that, unpopular as they were, the Jews had nonetheless received extraordinary privileges from the Roman government.

(a) They were allowed to transmit the temple tax every year to Jerusalem. This became so serious in Asia about the year 60 B.C. that the export of currency was forbidden and, according to the historians, no less than twenty tons of contraband gold was seized which the Jews had been about to despatch to Jerusalem.

(b) They were allowed, at least to some extent, to have their own courts and live according to their own laws. There is a decree issued by a governor called Lucius Antonius in Asia about the year 50 B.C. in which he wrote: "Our Jewish citizens came to me and informed me that they had their own private gathering, carried out according to their ancestral laws, and their own private place, where they settle their own affairs and deal with cases between each other. When they asked that this custom should be continued, I gave judgment that they should be allowed to retain this privilege." The Gentiles detested the spectacle of a race of people living as a kind of separate and specially privileged group.

(c) The Roman government respected the Jewish observance of the Sabbath. It was laid down that the Jew could not be called to give evidence in a law court on the Sabbath. It was laid down that if special doles were being distributed to the populace and the distribution fell on the Sabbath, the Jews could claim their share on the following day. And--a specially sore point with the Gentiles--the Jews enjoyed *astrateia*, that is, exemption from conscription to the Roman army. This exemption was directly due to the fact that the Jewish strict observance of the Sabbath obviously

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Romans 2:17-29

made it impossible for him to carry out military duties on the Sabbath. It can easily be imagined with what resentment the rest of the world would look on this special exemption from a burdensome duty.

There were two special things of which the Jews were accused.

(a) They were accused of atheism (atheotes, compare GSN0112). The ancient world had great difficulty in conceiving of the possibility of a religion without any visible images of worship. Pliny called them, "a race distinguished by their contempt for all deities." Tacitus said, "The Jews conceive of their deity as one, by the mind alone.... Hence no images are erected in their cities or even in their temples. This reverence is not paid to kings, nor this honour to the Caesars." Juvenal said, "They venerate nothing but the clouds and the deity of the sky." But the truth is that what really moved the Gentile to such dislike, was not so much the imageless worship of the Jews, as the cold contempt in which they held all other religions. No man whose main attitude to his fellows is contempt can ever be a missionary. This contempt for others was one of the things which Paul was thinking of when he said that the Jews brought the name of God into disrepute.

(b) They were accused of hatred of their fellow-men (misanthropy, compare GSN3404 and GSN0444) and complete unsociability (amixia). Tacitus said of them: "Among themselves their honesty is inflexible, their compassion quick to move, but to all other persons they show the hatred of antagonism." In Alexandria the story was that the Jews had taken an oath never to show kindness to a Gentile, and that they even offered a Greek in sacrifice to their God every year. Tacitus said that the first thing Gentiles converted to Judaism were taught to do was "to despise the gods, to repudiate their nationality, and to disparage parents, children and brothers." Juvenal declared that if a Jew was asked the way to any place, he refused to give any information except to another Jew, and that if anyone was looking for a well from which to drink, he would not lead him to it unless he was circumcised. Here we have the same thing again.

The basic Jewish attitude to other men was contempt and this must ever invite hatred in answer.

It was all too true that the Jews did bring the name of God into disrepute, because they shut themselves into a rigid little community from which all others were shut out and because they showed to the heathen an attitude of contempt for their worship and complete lack of charity for their needs. Real religion is a thing of the open heart and the open door; Judaism was a thing of the shut heart and the shut door.

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Romans 3:1-8

GOD'S FIDELITY AND MAN'S INFIDELITY

Romans 3:1-8

What, then, is the something plus which belongs to a Jew? Or what special advantage belongs to those who have been circumcised? Much in every way. In the first place, there is this advantage--that the Jews have been entrusted with the oracles of God. Yes, you say, but what if some of them were unfaithful to them? Surely you are not going to argue that their infidelity invalidates the fidelity of God? God forbid! Let God be shown to be true, though every man be shown to be a liar, as it stands written: "In order that you may be seen to be in the right in your arguments, and that you may win your case when you enter into judgment." But, you say, if our unrighteousness merely provides proof of God's righteousness, what are we to say? Surely you are not going to try to argue that God is unrighteous to unleash the Wrath upon you? (I am using human arguments:) God forbid! For, if that were so, how shall God judge the world? But, you say, if the fact that I am false merely provides a further opportunity to demonstrate the fact that God is true, to his greater glory, why should I still be condemned as a sinner? Are you going to argue--just as some slanderously allege that we suggest--that we should do evil that good may come of it? Anyone can see that statements like that merit nothing but condemnation.

Here Paul is arguing in the closest and the most difficult way. It will make it easier to understand if we remember that he is carrying on an argument with an imaginary objector. The argument stated in full would run something like this.

The objector: The result of all that you have been saying is that there is no difference between Gentile and Jew and that they are in exactly the same position. Do you really mean that?

Paul: By no means.

The objector: What, then, is the difference?

Paul: For one thing, the Jew possesses what the Gentile never so directly possessed--the commandments of God.

The objector: Granted! But what if some of the Jews disobeyed these commandments and were unfaithful to God and came under his condemnation? You have just said that God gave the Jews a special position and a special promise. Now you go on to say that at least some of them are under the condemnation of God. Does that mean that God has broken his promise and shown himself to be unjust and unreliable?

Paul: Far from it! What it does show is that there is no favouritism with God and that he punishes sin wherever he sees it. The very fact that he condemns the unfaithful Jews is the best possible proof of his absolute justice. He might have been expected to overlook the sins of this special people of his but he does not.

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The objector: Very well then! All you have done is to succeed in showing that my disobedience has given God an opportunity to demonstrate his righteousness. My infidelity has given God a marvellous opportunity to demonstrate his fidelity. My sin is, therefore, an excellent thing! It has given God a chance to show how good he is! I may have done evil, but good has come of it! You can't surely condemn a man for giving God a chance to show his justice!

Paul: An argument like that is beneath contempt! You have only to state it to see how intolerable it is!

When we disentangle this passage in this way, we see that there are in it certain basic thoughts of Paul in regard to the Jews.

(i) To the end of the day he believed the Jews to be in a special position in regard to God. That, in fact, is what they believed themselves. The difference was that Paul believed that their special position was one of special responsibility; the Jew believed it to be one of special privilege. What did Paul say that the Jew had been specially entrusted with? The oracles of God. What does he mean by that? The word he uses is *logia* (GSN3048), the regular word in the Greek Old Testament for a special statement or pronouncement of God. Here it means The Ten Commandments. God entrusted the Jews with commandments, not privileges. He said to them, "You are a special people; therefore you must live a special life." He did not say, "You are a special people; therefore you can do what you like." He did say, "You are a special people; therefore you must do what I like." When Lord Dunsany came in safety through the 1914-18 war he tells us that he said to himself, "In some strange way I am still alive.

I wonder what God means me to do with a life so specially spared?" That thought never struck the Jews. They never could grasp the fact that God's special choice was for special duty.

(ii) All through his writings there are three basic facts in Paul's mind about the Jews. They occur in embryo here; and they are in fact the three thoughts that it takes this whole letter to work out. We must note that he does not place all the Jews under the one condemnation. He puts it in this way: "What if some of them were unfaithful?"

(a) He was quite sure that God was justified in condemning the Jews. They had their special place and their special promises; and that very fact made their condemnation all the greater. Responsibility is always the obverse of privilege. The more opportunity a man has to do right, the greater his condemnation if he does wrong.

(b) But not all of them were unfaithful. Paul never forgot the faithful remnant; and he was quite sure that that faithful remnant--however small it was in numbers--was the true Jewish race. The others had lost their privileges and were under condemnation. They were no longer Jews at all. The remnant was the real nation.

(c) Paul was always sure that God's rejection of Israel was not final. Because of this rejection, a door was opened to the Gentiles; and, in the end, the Gentiles would bring the Jews back within the fold, and Gentile and Jew would be one in Christ. The tragedy of the Jew was that the great task of world evangelization that he might have had, and was designed to have, was refused by him. It was

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therefore given to the Gentiles, and God's plan was, as it were, reversed, and it was not, as it should have been, the Jew who evangelized the Gentile, but the Gentile who evangelized the Jew--a process which is still going on.

Further, this passage contains two great universal human truths.

(i) The root of all sin is disobedience. The root of the Jew's sin was disobedience to the known law of God. As Milton wrote, it was "man's first disobedience" which was responsible for paradise lost. When pride sets tip the will of man against the will of God, there is sin. If there were no disobedience, there would be no sin.

(ii) Once a man has sinned, he displays an amazing ingenuity in justifying his sin. Here we come across an argument that reappears again and again in religious thought, the argument that sin gives God a chance to show at once his justice and his mercy and is therefore a good thing. It is a twisted argument. One might as well argue--it would, in fact, be the same argument--that it is a good thing to break a person's heart, because it gives him a chance to show how much he loves you. When a man sins, the need is not for ingenuity to justify his sin, but for humility to confess it in penitence and in shame.

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Romans 3:9-18

THE CHRISTLESS WORLD

Romans 3:9-18

What then? Are we Jews out ahead? By no means. For we have already charged all Jews and Greeks with being under the power of sin, as it stands written: "There is none righteous, no not one. There is no man of understanding. There is none who seeks the Lord. All have swerved out of the way, and all together have gone bad. There is none whose acts are good, not one single one. Their throat is an open tomb. They practise fraud with their tongues. The poison of asps is under their lips. Their mouths are laden with curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and wretchedness are in their ways, and they have not known the way of peace. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

In the last passage Paul had insisted that, in spite of everything, the Jew had a special position in the economy of God. Not unnaturally the Jewish objector then asks if that means that the Jews are out ahead of other peoples. Paul's answer is that Jew and Gentile alike, so long as they are without Christ, are under the dominion of sin. The Greek phrase that he uses for under sin is very suggestive, hupo (GSN5259) hamartian (GSN0266). In this sense hupo (GSN5259) means in the power of, under the authority of. In Matt.8:9 the centurion says: "I have soldiers hupo (GSN5259) emauton (GSN1683), under me." That is, I have soldiers under my command. A schoolboy is hupo (GSN5259) paidagogen (GSN3807), under the direction of the slave who is in control of him. A slave is hupo (GSN5259) zugon (GSN2218), under the yoke of his master. In the Christless state a man is under the control of sin, and helpless to escape from it.

There is one other interesting word in this passage. It is the word in Rom.3:12 which we have translated. "They have gone bad." The word is achreioo (GSN0889), which literally means to render useless. One of its uses is of milk that has gone sour. Human nature without Christ is a soured and useless thing.

We see Paul doing here what Jewish Rabbis customarily did. In Rom.3:10-18 he has strung together a collection of Old Testament texts. He is not quoting accurately, because he is quoting from memory, but he includes quotations from Ps.14:1-3; Ps.5:9; Ps.140:3; Ps.10:7; Isa.59:7-8; Ps.36:1. It was a very common method of Rabbinic preaching to string texts together like this. It was called charaz (see charuwz, HSN2737), which literally means stringing pearls.

It is a terrible description of human nature in its Christless state. Vaughan has pointed out that these Old Testament quotations describe three things. (i) A character whose characteristics are ignorance, indifference, crookedness and unprofitableness. (ii) A tongue whose notes are destructive, deceitful, malignant. (iii) A conduct whose marks are oppression, injuriousness, implacability. These things are the result of disregard of God.

No one saw so clearly the evil of human nature as Paul did; but it must always be noted that the evil of human nature was to him, not a call to hopelessness, but a challenge to hope. When we say that Paul believed in original sin and the depravity of human nature, we must never take that to mean that he despaired of human nature or looked on it with cynical contempt. Once, when

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Romans 3:9-18

William Jay of Bath was an old man, he said: "My memory is failing, but there are two things that I never forget--that I am a great sinner and that Jesus Christ is a great Saviour."

Paul never underrated the sin of man and he never underrated the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Once, when he was a young man, William Roby, the great Lancashire Independent, was preaching at Malvern. His lack of success drove him to despair, and he wished to leave the work. Then came a seasonable reproof from a certain Mr Moody, who asked him, "Are they, then, too bad to be saved?" The challenge sent William Roby back to his work. Paul believed men without Christ to be bad, but he never believed them too bad to be saved. He was confident that what Christ had done for him Christ could do for any man.

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Romans 3:19-26

THE ONLY WAY TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD

Romans 3:19-26

We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are within the law, and the function of the law is that every mouth should be silenced and that the whole world should be known to be liable to the judgment of God, because no one will ever get into a right relationship with God by doing the works which the law lays down. What does come through the law is a full awareness of sin. But now a way to a right relationship to God lies open before us quite apart from the law, and it is a way attested by the law and the prophets. For a right relationship to God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God, but they are put into a right relationship with God, freely, by his grace, through the deliverance which is wrought by Jesus Christ. God put him forward as one who can win for us forgiveness of our sins through faith in his blood.

He did so in order to demonstrate his righteousness because, in the forbearance of God, there had been a passing over of the sins which happened in previous times; and he did so to demonstrate his righteousness in this present age, so that he himself should be just and that he should accept as just the man who believes in Jesus.

Here again is a passage which is not easy to understand, but which is full of riches when its true meaning is grasped. Let us see if we can penetrate to the basic truth behind it.

The supreme problem of life is, How can a man get into a right relationship with God? How can he feel at peace with God? How can he escape the feeling of estrangement and fear in the presence of God? The religion of Judaism answered: "A man can attain to a right relationship with God by keeping meticulously all that the law lays down." But to say that is simply to say that there is no possibility of any man ever attaining to a right relationship with God, for no man ever can keep every commandment of the law.

"Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands."

What then is the use of the law? It is that it makes a man aware of sin. It is only when a man knows the law and tries to satisfy it that he realizes he can never satisfy it. The law is designed to show a man his own weakness and his own sinfulness. Is a man then shut out from God? Far from it, because the way to God is not the way of law, but the way of grace; not the way of works, but the way of faith.

To show what he means Paul uses three metaphors.

(i) He uses a metaphor from the law courts which we call justification. This metaphor thinks of man on trial before God. The Greek word which is translated to justify is *diakioun* (GSN1344). All Greek verbs which end in "-oun" mean, not to make someone something, but to treat, to reckon, to account him as something. If an innocent man appears before a judge then to treat him as innocent is to acquit him. But the point about a man's relationship to God is that he is utterly guilty, and yet

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God, in his amazing mercy, treats him, reckons him, accounts him as if he were innocent. That is what justification means.

When Paul says that "God justifies the ungodly," he means that God treats the ungodly as if he had been a good man. That is what shocked the Jews to the core of their being. To them to treat the bad man as if he was good was the sign of a wicked judge. "He who justifies the wicked is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov.17:15). "I will not acquit the wicked" (Exo.23:7). But Paul says that is precisely what God does.

How can I know that God is like that? I know because Jesus said so. He came to tell us that God loves us, bad as we are. He came to tell us that, although we are sinners, we are still dear to God. When we discover that and believe it, it changes our whole relationship to God. We are conscious of our sin, but we are no longer in terror and no longer estranged. Penitent and brokenhearted we come to God, like a sorry child coming to his mother, and we know that the God we come to is love.

That is what justification by faith in Jesus Christ means. It means that we are in a right relationship with God because we believe with all our hearts that what Jesus told us about God is true. We are no longer terrorized strangers from an angry God. We are children, erring children, trusting in their Father's love for forgiveness. And we could never have found that right relationship with God, if Jesus had not come to live and to die to tell us how wonderfully he loves us.

(ii) Paul uses a metaphor from sacrifice. He says of Jesus that God put him forward as one who can win forgiveness for our sins.

The Greek word that Paul uses to describe Jesus is hilasterion (GSN2435). This comes from a verb which means to propitiate. It is a verb which has to do with sacrifice. Under the old system, when a man broke the law, he brought to God a sacrifice. His aim was that the sacrifice should turn aside the punishment that should fall upon him. To put it in another way--a man sinned; that sin put him at once in a wrong relationship with God; to get back into the right relationship he offered his sacrifice.

But it was human experience that an animal sacrifice failed entirely to do that. "Thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased" (Ps.51:16). "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mic.6:6-7.) Instinctively men felt that, once they had sinned, the paraphernalia of earthly sacrifice could not put matters right.

So Paul says, "Jesus Christ, by his life of obedience and his death of love, made the one sacrifice to God which really and truly atones for sin." He insists that what happened on the Cross opens the door back to a right relationship with God, a door which every other sacrifice is powerless to open.

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Romans 3:19-26

(iii) Paul uses a metaphor from slavery. He speaks of the deliverance wrought through Jesus Christ. The word is *apolutrosis* (GSN0629). It means a ransoming, a redeeming, a liberating. It means that man was in the power of sin, and that Jesus Christ alone could free him from it.

Finally, Paul says of God that he did all this because he is just, and accepts as just all who believe in Jesus. Paul never said a more startling thing than this. Bengel called it "the supreme paradox of the gospel." Think what it means. It means that God is just and accepts the sinner as a just man. The natural thing to say would be, "God is just, and, therefore, condemns the sinner as a criminal." But here we have the great paradox--God is just, and somehow, in that incredible, miraculous grace that Jesus came to bring to men, he accepts the sinner, not as a criminal, but as a son whom he still loves.

What is the essence of all this? Where is the difference between it and the old way of the law? The basic difference is this--the way of obedience to the law is concerned with what a man can do for himself; the way of grace is concerned with what God can do, and has done, for him. Paul is insisting that nothing we can ever do can win for us the forgiveness of God; only what God has done for us can win that; therefore the way to a right relationship with God lies, not in a frenzied, desperate, doomed attempt to win acquittal by our performance; it lies in the humble, penitent acceptance of the love and the grace which God offers us in Jesus Christ.

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Romans 3:27-31

THE END OF THE WAY OF HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT

Romans 3:27-31

Where, then, is there any ground for boasting? It is completely shut out. Through what kind of law? Through the law of works? No, but through the law of faith. So, then, we reckon that a man enters into a right relationship with God by faith quite apart from works of the law. Or, is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles? Yes, he is the God of the Gentiles too. If, indeed, God is one, he is the God who will bring those who are of the circumcision into a right relationship with himself by faith, and those who never knew the circumcision through faith. Do we then through faith completely cancel out all law? God forbid! Rather, we confirm the law.

Paul deals with three points here.

(i) If the way to God is the way of faith and of acceptance, then all boasting in human achievement is gone. There was a certain kind of Judaism which kept a kind of profit and loss account with God. In the end a man often came to a frame of mind in which he rather held that God was in his debt. Paul's position was that every man is a sinner and God's debtor, that no man could ever put himself back into a right relationship with God through his own efforts and that grounds for self-satisfaction and boasting in one's own achievement no longer exist.

(ii) But, a Jew might answer, that might be well enough for a Gentile who never knew the law, but what about Jews who do know it? Paul's answer was to turn them to the sentence which is the basis of the Jewish creed, the sentence with which every synagogue service always began and still begins. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God" (Deut.6:4). There is not one God for the Gentiles and another for the Jews. God is one. The way to him is the same for Gentile and Jew. It is not the way of human achievement; it is the way of trusting and accepting faith.

(iii) But, says the Jew, does this mean an end of all law? We might have expected Paul to say, "Yes." In point of fact he says, "No." He says that, in fact, it strengthens the law. He means this. Up to this time the Jew had tried to be a good man and keep the commandments because he was afraid of God, and was terrified of the punishment that breaches of the law would bring. That day has for ever gone. But what has taken its place is the love of God. Now a man must try to be good and keep God's law, not because he fears God's punishment, but because he feels that he must strive to deserve that amazing love. He strives for goodness, not because he is afraid of God, but because he loves him. He knows now that sin is not so much breaking God's law as it is breaking God's heart, and, therefore, it is doubly terrible.

Take a human analogy. Many a man is tempted to do a wrong thing, and does not do it. It is not so much that he fears the law. He would not greatly care if he were fined, or even imprisoned. What keeps him right is the simple fact that he could not meet the sorrow that would be seen in the eyes of the one who loves him if he made shipwreck of his life. It is not the law of fear but the law of love which keeps him right. It must be that way with us and God. We are rid forever of the terror of God, but that is no reason for doing as we like. We can never again do as we like for we are now

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for ever constrained to goodness by the law of love; and that law is far stronger than ever the law of fear can be.

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Romans 4:1-8

THE FAITH WHICH TAKES GOD AT HIS WORD

Romans 4:1-8

What, then, shall we say that Abraham, our forefather from whom we take our human descent, found? If Abraham entered into a right relationship with God by means of work, he has some ground for boasting--but not in regard to God. For what does scripture say? "Abraham trusted in God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." The man who works does not receive his pay as a favour; he receives it as a debt due to him. But, as for the man who does not depend on work, but who trusts in the God who treats the ungodly as he would treat a good man, his faith is accounted as righteousness. Just so, David speaks of the counting happy of the man to whom God accounts righteousness apart from works--"Happy they whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered! Happy the man to whom God does not account sin!"

Paul moves on to speak of Abraham for three reasons.

(i) The Jews regarded Abraham as the great founder of the race and the pattern of all that a man should be. Very naturally they ask, "If all that you say is true, what was the special thing that was given to Abraham when God picked him out to be the ancestor of his special people? What makes him different from other people?" That is the question which Paul is going on to answer.

(ii) Paul has just been seeking to prove that what makes a man right with God is not the performance of the works that the law lays down, but the simple trust of complete yieldedness which takes God at his word and believes that he still loves us even when we have done nothing to deserve that love. The immediate reaction of the Jews was, "This is something entirely new and a contradiction of all that we have been taught to believe. This doctrine is completely incredible." Paul's answer is, "So far from being new, this doctrine is as old as the Jewish faith. So far from being an heretical novelty, it is the very basis of Jewish religion." That is what he is going on to prove.

(iii) Paul begins to speak about Abraham because he was a wise teacher who knew the human mind and the way it works. He has been talking about faith. Now faith is an abstract idea. The ordinary human mind finds abstract ideas very hard to grasp. The wise teacher knows that every idea must become a person, for the only way in which an ordinary person can grasp an abstract idea is to see it in action, embodied in a person. So Paul, in effect, says, "I have been talking about faith. If you want to see what faith is, look at Abraham."

When Paul began to speak about Abraham, he was on ground that every Jew knew and understood. In their thoughts Abraham held a unique position. He was the founder of the nation. He was the man to whom God had first spoken. He was the man who had in a unique way had been chosen by God and who had heard and obeyed him. The Rabbis had their own discussions about Abraham. To Paul the essence of his greatness was this. God had come to Abraham and bidden him leave home and friends and kindred and livelihood, and had said to him, "If you make this great venture of faith, you will become the father of a great nation." Thereupon Abraham had taken God at his word. He had not argued; he had not hesitated; he went out not knowing where he was to go

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Romans 4:1-8

(Heb.11:8). It was not the fact that Abraham had meticulously performed the demands of the law that put him into his special relationship with God, it was his complete trust in God and his complete willingness to abandon his life to him.

That for Paul was faith, and it was Abraham's faith which made God regard him as a good man.

Some few, some very few, of the more advanced Rabbis believed that. There was a rabbinic commentary which said, "Abraham, our father, inherited this world and the world to come solely by the merit of faith whereby he believed in the Lord; for it is said, 'And he believed in the Lord, and he accounted it to him for righteousness.'"

But the great majority of the Rabbis turned the Abraham story to suit their own beliefs. They held that because he was the only righteous man of his generation, therefore he was chosen to be the ancestor of God's special people. The immediate answer is, "But how could Abraham keep the law when he lived hundreds of years before it was given?" The Rabbis advanced the odd theory that he kept it by intuition or anticipation. "At that time," says the Apocalypse of Baruch (Bar.57:2), "the unwritten law was named among them, and the works of the commandment were then fulfilled." "He kept the law of the Most High," says Ecclesiasticus (Sir.44:20-21), "and was taken into covenant with God.... Therefore God assured him by an oath that the nations should be blessed in his seed." The Rabbis were so in love with their theory of works that they insisted that it was because of his works that Abraham was chosen, although it meant that they had to argue that he knew the law by anticipation, since it had not yet come.

Here, again, we have the root cleavage between Jewish legalism and Christian faith. The basic thought of the Jews was that a man must earn God's favour. The basic thought of Christianity is that all a man can do is to take God at his word and stake everything on the faith that his promises are true. Paul's argument was--and he was unanswerably right--that Abraham entered into a right relationship with God, not because he did all kinds of legal works, but because he cast himself, just as he was, on God's promise.

"If our love were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be all sunshine,
In the sweetness of our Lord."

It is the supreme discovery of the Christian life that we do not need to torture ourselves with a losing battle to earn God's love but rather need to accept in perfect trust the love which God offers to us. True, after that, any man of honour is under the life-long obligation to show himself worthy of that love. But he is no longer a criminal seeking to obey an impossible law; he is a lover offering his all to one who loved him when he did not deserve it.

Sir James Barrie once told a story about Robert Louis Stevenson. "When Stevenson went to Samoa he built a small hut, and afterwards went into a large house. The first night he went into the large house he was feeling very tired and sorrowful that he had not had the forethought to ask his servant to bring him coffee and, cigarettes. Just as he was thinking that, the door opened, and the native boy came in with a tray carrying cigarettes and coffee. And Mr Stevenson said to him, in the

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native language, 'Great is your forethought'; and the boy corrected him, and said, 'Great is the love.'" The service was rendered, not because of the coercion of servitude, but because of the compulsion of love. That also is the motive of Christian goodness.

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Romans 4:9-12

THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL

Romans 4:9-12

Did, then, this pronouncing of blessedness come to Abraham when he was circumcised? Or when he was uncircumcised? We are just saying, "His faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness." Under what circumstances was it then accounted? Was it while he was circumcised? Or was it while he was uncircumcised? It was not while he was circumcised, but while he was uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of that relationship to God whose source was faith while he was still uncircumcised. This happened that he might be the father of all who believe while they are uncircumcised, so that the accounting of righteousness may come to them too; and that he might also be the father of those who are circumcised, and by that I mean, not those who are circumcised only, but who walk in the steps of that faith which our father Abraham showed when he was still uncircumcised.

To understand this passage we must understand the importance that the Jew attached to circumcision. To the Jew a man who was not circumcised was quite literally not a Jew, no matter what his parentage was. The Jewish circumcision prayer runs: "Blessed is he who sanctified his beloved from the womb, and put his ordinance upon his flesh, and sealed his offspring with the sign of the holy covenant." The rabbinic ordinance lays it down: "Ye shall not eat of the Passover unless the seal of Abraham be in your flesh." If a Gentile accepted the Jewish faith, he could not enter fully into it without three things--baptism, sacrifice and circumcision.

The Jewish objector, whom Paul is answering all the time, is still fighting a rear-guard action. "Suppose I admit," he says, "all that you say about Abraham and about the fact that it was his complete trust that gained him an entry into a right relationship with God, you will still have to agree that he was circumcised." Paul has an unanswerable argument. The story of Abraham's call, and of God's blessing on him, is in Gen.15:6; the story of Abraham's circumcision is in Gen.17:10ff. He was not, in fact, circumcised until fourteen years after he had answered God's call and entered into the unique relationship with God. Circumcision was not the gateway to his right relationship with God; it was only the sign and the seal that he had already entered into it. His being accounted righteous had nothing to do with circumcision and everything to do with his act of faith. From this unanswerable fact Paul makes two great deductions.

(i) Abraham is not the father of those who have been circumcised; he is the father of those who make the same act of faith in God as he made. He is the father of every man in every age who takes God at his word as he did. This means that the real Jew is the man who trusts God as Abraham did, no matter what his race is. All the great promises of God are made not to the Jewish nation, but to the man who is Abraham's descendant because he trusts God as he did. Jew has ceased to be a word which describes a nationality and has come to describe a way of life and a reaction to God. The descendants of Abraham are not the members of any particular nation, but those in every nation who belong to the family of God.

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(ii) The converse is also true. A man may be a Jew of pure lineage and may be circumcised; and yet in the real sense may be no descendant of Abraham. He has no right to call Abraham his father or to claim the promises of God, unless he makes that venture of faith that Abraham made.

In one short paragraph Paul has shattered all Jewish thought. The Jew always believed that just because he was a Jew he automatically enjoyed the privilege of God's blessings and immunity from his punishment. The proof that he was a Jew was circumcision. So literally did some of the Rabbis take this that they actually said that, if a Jew was so bad that he had to be condemned by God, there was an angel whose task it was to make him uncircumcised again before he entered into punishment.

Paul has laid down the great principle that the way to God is not through membership of any nation, not through any ordinance which makes a mark upon a man's body; but by the faith which takes God at his word and makes everything dependent, not on man's achievement, but solely upon God's grace.

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Romans 4:13-17

ALL IS OF GRACE

Romans 4:13-17

It was not through law that there came to Abraham or to his seed the promise that he would inherit the earth, but it came through that right relationship with God which has its origin in faith. If they who are vassals of the law are heirs, then faith is drained of its meaning, and the promise is rendered inoperative; for the law produces wrath, but where law does not exist, neither can transgression exist. So, then, the whole process depends on faith, in order that it may be a matter of grace, so that the promise should be guaranteed to all Abraham's descendants, not only to those who belong to the tradition of the law, but also to those who are of Abraham's family in virtue of faith. Abraham who is the father of us all--as it stands written, "I have appointed you a father of many nations"--in the sight of that God in whom he believed, that God who calls the dead into life, and who calls into being even things which do not exist.

To Abraham God made a very great and wonderful promise. He promised that he would become a great nation, and that in him all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen.12:2-3). In truth, the earth would be given to him as his inheritance. Now that promise came to Abraham because of the faith that he showed towards God. It did not come because he piled up merit by doing works of the law. It was the outgoing of God's generous grace in answer to Abraham's absolute faith. The promise, as Paul saw it, was dependent on two things and two things only--the free grace of God and the perfect faith of Abraham.

The Jews were still asking, "How can a man enter into the right relationship with God so that he too may inherit this great promise?" Their answer was, "He must do so by acquiring merit in the sight of God through doing works which the law prescribes." That is to say, he must do it by his own efforts. Paul saw with absolute clearness that this Jewish attitude had completely destroyed the promise. It had done so for this reason--no man can fully keep the law; therefore, if the promise depends on keeping the law, it can never be fulfilled.

Paul saw things in terms of black and white. He saw two mutually exclusive ways of trying to get into a right relationship with God. On the one hand there was dependence on human effort; on the other, dependence on divine grace. On the one hand there was the constant losing battle to obey an impossible law; on the other, there was the faith which simply takes God at his word.

On each side there were three things.

(i) On the one side there is God's promise. There are two Greek words which mean promise. Huposchesis means a promise which is entered into upon conditions. "I promise to do this if you promise to do that." Epaggelia (GSN1860) means a promise made out of the goodness of someone's heart quite unconditionally. It is epaggelia (GSN1860) that Paul uses of the promise of God. It is as if he is saying, "God is like a human father; he promises to love his children no matter what they do." True, he will love some of us with a love that makes him glad, and he will love some of us with a love that makes him sad; but in either case it is a love which will never let us go. It is dependent not on our merit but only on God's own generous heart.

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Romans 4:13-17

(ii) There is faith. Faith is the certainty that God is indeed like that. It is staking everything on his love.

(iii) There is grace. A gift of grace is always something which is unearned and undeserved. The truth is that man can never earn the love of God. He must always find his glory, not in what he can do for God, but in what God has done for him.

(i) On the other side there is law. The trouble about law has always been that it can diagnose the malady but cannot effect a cure. Law shows a man where he goes wrong, but does not help him to avoid going wrong. There is in fact, as Paul will later stress, a kind of terrible paradox in law. It is human nature that when a thing is forbidden it has a tendency to become desirable. "Stolen fruits are sweetest." Law, therefore, can actually move a man to desire the very thing which it forbids. The essential complement of law is judgment, and, so long as a man lives in a religion whose dominant thought is law, he cannot see himself as anything other than a condemned criminal at the bar of God's justice.

(ii) There is transgression. Whenever law is introduced, transgression follows. No one can break a law which does not exist; and no one can be condemned for breaking a law of whose existence he was ignorant. If we introduce law and stop there, if we make religion solely a matter of obeying law, life consists of one long series of transgressions waiting to be punished.

(iii) There is wrath. Think of law, think of transgression, and inevitably the next thought is wrath. Think of God in terms of law and you cannot do other than think of him in terms of outraged justice. Think of man in terms of law and you cannot do other than think of him as destined for the condemnation of God.

So Paul sets before the Romans two ways. The one is a way in which a man seeks a right relationship with God through his own efforts. It is doomed to failure. The other is a way in which a man enters by faith into a relationship with God, which by God's grace already exists for him to come into in trust.

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Romans 4:18-25

BELIEVING IN THE GOD WHO MAKES THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

Romans 4:18-25

*In hope Abraham believed beyond hope that he would become the father of many nations, as the saying had it, "So will be your seed.?" He did not weaken in his faith, although he was well aware that by this time his body had lost its vitality (for he was a hundred years old), and that the womb of Sarah was without life. He did not in unfaith waver at the promise of God, but he was revitalized by his faith, and he gave glory to God, and he was firmly convinced that he who had made the promise was also able to perform it. So this faith was accounted to him as righteousness. It was not only for his sake this "it was accounted to him for righteousness" was written. It was written also for our sakes; for it will be so reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead, *ho was delivered up for our sin and raised to bring us into a right relationship with God.*

The last passage ended by saying that Abraham believed in the God who calls the dead into life and who brings into being even things which have no existence at all. This passage turns Paul's thoughts to another outstanding example of Abraham's willingness to take God at his word. The promise that all families of the earth would be blessed in his descendants was given to Abraham when he was an old man. His wife, Sarah, had always been childless; and now, when he was one hundred years old and she was ninety (Gen.17:17), there came the promise that a son would be born to them. It seemed, on the face of it, beyond all belief and beyond all hope of fulfilment, for he was long past the age of begetting and she long past the age of bearing a son. Yet, once again, Abraham took God at his word and once again it was this faith that was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.

It was this willingness to take God at his word which put Abraham into a right relationship with him. Now the Jewish Rabbis had a saying to which Paul here refers. They said, "What is written of Abraham is written also of his children." They meant that any promise that God made to Abraham extends to his children also. Therefore, if Abraham's willingness to take God at his word brought him into a right relationship with God, so it will be with us. It is not works of the law, it is this trusting faith which establishes the relationship between God and a man which ought to exist.

The essence of Abraham's faith in this case was that he believed that God could make the impossible possible. So long as we believe that everything depends on our efforts, we are bound to be pessimists, for experience has taught the grim lesson that our own efforts can achieve very little. When we realize that it is not our effort but God's grace and power which matter, then we become optimists, because we are bound to believe that with God nothing is impossible.

It is told that once Saint Theresa set out to build a convent with a sum the equivalent of twelve pence as her complete resources. Someone said to her, "Not even Saint Theresa can accomplish much with twelve pence." "True," she answered, "but Saint Theresa and twelve pence and God can do anything." A man may well hesitate to attempt a great task by himself; there is nothing which he need hesitate to attempt with God. Ann Hunter Small, the great missionary teacher, tells how her father, himself a missionary, used to say: "Oh! the wickedness as well as the stupidity of the

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Romans 4:18-25

croakers!" And she herself had a favourite saying: "A church which is alive dares to do anything." That daring only becomes possible to a man and to a church who take God at his word.

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Romans 5:1-5

AT HOME WITH GOD

Romans 5:1-5

Since, then, we have been put into a right relationship with God in consequence of faith, let us enjoy peace with him through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, by faith, we are in possession of an introduction to this grace in which we stand; and let us glory in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but let us find a cause of glorying in our troubles; for we know that trouble produces fortitude, and fortitude produces character; and character produces hope; and hope does not prove an illusion, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given unto us.

Here is one of Paul's great lyrical passages in which he almost sings the intimate joy of his confidence in God. Trusting faith has done what the labour to produce the works of the law could never do; it has given a man peace with God. Before Jesus came, no man could ever be really close to God.

Some, indeed, have seen him, not as the supreme good, but as the supreme evil. Swinburne wrote:

"His hidden face and iron feet,
Hath not man known and felt them in their way
Threaten and trample all things every day?
Hath he not sent us hunger? Who hath cursed
Spirit and flesh with longing? Filled with thirst
Their lips that cried to him?"

Some have seen him as the complete stranger, the utterly untouchable. In one of H. G. Wells' books there is the story of a man of affairs whose mind was so tensed and strained that he was in serious danger of a complete nervous and mental breakdown. His doctor told him that the only thing that could save him was to find the peace that fellowship with God can give. "What!" he said, "to think of that, up there, having fellowship with me! I would as soon think of cooling my throat with the milky way or shaking hands with the stars!" God, to him, was the completely unfindable. Rosita Forbes, the traveller, tells of finding shelter one night in a Chinese village temple because there was nowhere else to sleep. In the night she woke and the moonlight was slanting in through the window on to the faces of the images of the gods, and on every face there was a snarl and a sneer, as of those who hated men.

It is only when we realize that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that there comes into life that intimacy with him, that new relationship, which Paul calls justification.

Through Jesus, says Paul, we have an introduction to this grace in which we stand. The word he uses for introduction is *prosagoge*, (GSN4318). It is a word with two great pictures in it.

(i) It is the regular word for introducing or ushering someone into the presence of royalty; and it is the regular word for the approach of the worshipper to God. It is as if Paul was saying, "Jesus

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Romans 5:1-5

ushers us into the very presence of God. He opens the door for us to the presence of the King of Kings; and when that door is opened what we find is grace; not condemnation, not judgment, not vengeance, but the sheer, undeserved, incredible kindness of God."

(ii) But prosagoge (GSN4318) has another picture in it. In late Greek it is the word for the place where ships come in, a harbour or a haven. If we take it that way, it means that so long as we tried to depend on our own efforts we were tempest-tossed, like mariners striving with a sea which threatened to overwhelm them completely, but now that we have heard the word of Christ, we have reached at last the haven of God's grace, and we know the calm of depending, not on what we can do for ourselves, but on what God has done for us.

Because of Jesus we have entry to the presence of the King of Kings and entry to the haven of God's grace.

No sooner has Paul said this than the other side of the matter strikes him. All this is true, and it is glory; but the fact remains that in this life the Christians are up against it. It is hard to be a Christian in Rome. Remembering that, Paul produces a great climax. "Trouble," he said, "produces fortitude." The word he uses for trouble is thlipis (GSN2347), which literally means pressure. All kinds of things may press in upon the Christian--want and straitened circumstances, sorrow, persecution, unpopularity and loneliness. All that pressure, says Paul, produces fortitude. The word he uses for fortitude is hupomone (GSN5281) which means more than endurance. It means the spirit which can overcome the world; it means the spirit which does not passively endure but which actively overcomes the trials and tribulations of life.

When Beethoven was threatened with deafness, that most terrible of troubles for a musician, he said: "I will take life by the throat." That is hupomone (GSN5281). When Scott was involved in ruin because of the bankruptcy of his publishers, he said: "No man will say 'Poor fellow!' to me; my own right hand will pay the debt." That is hupomone (GSN5281). Someone once said to a gallant soul who was undergoing a great sorrow: "Sorrow fairly colours life, doesn't it?" Back came the reply: "Yes! And I propose to choose the colour!" That is hupomone (GSN5281). When Henley was lying in Edinburgh Infirmary with one leg amputated, and the prospect that the other must follow, he wrote *Invictus*.

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul."

That is hupomone (GSN5281). Hupomone is not the spirit which lies down and lets the floods go over it; it is the spirit which meets things breastforward and overcomes them.

"Fortitude," Paul goes on, "produces character." The word he uses for character is dokime (GSN1382). Dokime (GSN1382) is used of metal which has been passed through the fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. It is used of coinage as we use the word sterling. When

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affliction is met with fortitude, out of the battle a man emerges stronger, and purer, and better, and nearer God.

"Character," Paul goes on, "produces hope." Two men can meet the same situation. It can drive one of them to despair, and it can spur the other to triumphant action. To the one it can be the end of hope, to the other it can be a challenge to greatness. "I do not like crises," said Lord Reith, "but I do like the opportunities they provide." The difference corresponds to the difference between the men. If a man has let himself become weak and flabby, if he has allowed circumstances to beat him, if he has allowed himself to whine and grovel under affliction, he has made himself such that when the challenge of the crisis comes he cannot do other than despair. If, on the other hand, a man has insisted on meeting life with head up, if he has always faced and, by facing, conquered things, then when the challenge comes, he meets it with eyes aflame with hope. The character which has endured the test always emerges in hope.

Then Paul makes one last great statement: "The Christian hope never proves an illusion for it is founded on the love of God." Omar Khayyam wrote wistfully of human hopes:

"The Worldly Hope men set their hearts upon
Turns Ashes--or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face
Lighting a little Hour or two--is gone."

When a man's hope is in God, it cannot turn to dust and ashes. When a man's hope is in God, it cannot be disappointed. When a man's hope is in the love of God, it can never be an illusion, for God loves us with an everlasting love backed by an everlasting power.

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Romans 5:6-11

THE FINAL PROOF OF LOVE

Romans 5:6-11

While we were still helpless, in God's good time, Christ died for the ungodly. A man will hardly die for a just man. It may be that a man would even dare to die for the good cause. But God proves his love to us by the fact that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Since we have been brought into a right relationship with God at the price of his life's blood, much more through him we shall be saved from the Wrath. For if while we were still at enmity with God, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, now that we have been reconciled, we shall go on being saved by his life. Not only that, but we glory in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received this reconciliation.

The fact that Jesus Christ died for us is the final proof of God's love. It would be difficult enough to get a man to die for a just man; it might be possible for a man to be persuaded to die for some great and good principle; a man might have the greater love that would make him lay down his life for his friend. But the wonder of Jesus Christ is that he died for us when we are sinners and in a state of hostility to God. Love can go no further than that.

Rita Snowden relates an incident from the life of T. E. Lawrence. In 1915 he was journeying across the desert with some Arabs. Things were desperate. Food was almost done, and water was at its last drop. Their hoods were over their heads to shelter them from the wind which was like a flame and full of the stinging sand of the sandstorm. Suddenly someone said, "Where is Jasmin?" Another said, "Who is Jasmin?" A third answered, "That yellow-faced man from Meen. He killed a Turkish tax-collector and fled to the desert." The first said, "Look, Jasmin's camel has no rider. His rifle is strapped to the saddle, but Jasmin is not there." A second said, "Someone has shot him on the march." A third said, "He is not strong in the head, perhaps he is lost in a mirage; he is not strong in the body, perhaps he has fainted and fallen off his camel." Then the first said, "What does it matter? Jasmin was not worth ten pence." And the Arabs hunched themselves up on their camels and rode on.

But Lawrence turned and rode back the way he had come. Alone, in the blazing heat, at the risk of his life, he went back. After an hour and a half's ride he saw something against the sand. It was Jasmin, blind and mad with heat and thirst, being murdered by the desert. Lawrence lifted him up on his camel, gave him some of the last drops of precious water, slowly plodded back to his company. When he came up to them, the Arabs looked in amazement. "Here is Jasmin," they said, "Jasmin, not worth ten pence, saved at his own risk by Lawrence, our lord." That is a parable. It was not good men Christ died to save but sinners; not God's friends but men at enmity with him.

Then Paul goes on a step. Through Jesus our status with God was changed. Sinners though we were, we were put into a right relationship with God. But that is not enough. Not only our status must be changed but our state. The saved sinner cannot go on being a sinner; he must become good. Christ's death changed our status; his risen life changes our state. He is not dead but alive; he is with us always to help us and guide us, to fill us with his strength so as to overcome temptation, to clothe our lives with something of his radiance. Jesus begins by putting sinners into a right relationship with God even when they are still sinners; he goes on, by his grace, to enable them to

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quit their sin and become good men. There are technical names for these things. The change of our status is justification; that is where the whole saving process begins. The change of our state is sanctification; that is where the saving process goes on, and never ends, until we see him face to face and are like him.

There is one thing to note here of quite extraordinary importance. Paul is quite clear that the whole saving process, the coming of Christ and the death of Christ, is the proof of God's love. Sometimes the thing is stated as if on the one side there was a gentle and loving Christ, and on the other an angry and vengeful God; and as if Christ had done something which changed God's attitude to men. Nothing could be further from the truth. The whole matter springs from the love of God. Jesus did not come to change God's attitude to men; he came to show what it is and always was. He came to prove unanswerably that God is love.

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Romans 5:12-21

RUIN AND RESCUE

Romans 5:12-21

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and, through sin, death entered into the world, and so death spread to all men, in that they had sinned; for up to the coming of the law sin was in the world, but sin was not debited against men because the law did not yet exist; but death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses even over those who had not sinned in the way that Adam had, Adam, who was the symbol of the one who was to come. But the gift of free grace was not like the trespass. For if the many died in consequence of the sin of the one, much more the grace of God and his free gift in the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounded to many. The free gift is not like the effect of the one man who sinned. The sentence which followed the one sin was a sentence of condemnation; but the free gift which followed the many trespasses was a sentence of acquittal.

For if, because of the trespass of one, death reigned because of one, much more they who receive the superabundance of grace and of that free gift which establishes a right relationship between man and God, shall reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. So, then, as by one sin it came to all men to fall under sentence, so by one supreme act of righteousness it came to men to enter into that relationship with God which gives them life. Just as through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, so, through the obedience of one man, the many were constituted righteous. But the law slipped in that trespass might abound; but where sin abounded grace superabounded, so that just as sin reigned in death, grace might reign by putting men into a right relationship with God that they might enter into eternal life because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done.

No passage of the New Testament has had such an influence on theology as this; and no passage is more difficult for a modern mind to understand. It is difficult because Paul expresses himself in a difficult way. We can see, for instance, that the first sentence never ends, but breaks off in mid-air, while Paul pursues another idea down a sideline. Still more, it is thinking and speaking in terms which were familiar to Jews and perfectly understandable to them, but which are unfamiliar to us.

If we were to put the thought of this passage into one sentence, which, indeed, was the sentence which Paul set out to write at the very beginning, and which got sidetracked, it would be this: "By the sin of Adam all men became sinners and were alienated from God; by the righteousness of Jesus Christ all men became righteous and are restored to a right relationship with God." Paul, in fact, said this very much more clearly in 1Cor.15:21: "As by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

There are two basic Jewish ideas in the light of which this passage must be read.

(i) There is the idea of solidarity. The Jew never really thought of himself as an individual but always thought as part of a clan, a family, or a nation apart from which he had no real existence. To this day it is said that if an Australian aboriginal is asked his name, he gives the name of his tribe or clan. He does not think of himself as a person, but as a member of a society. One of the clearest instances of this kind of thing in recognizable action is the blood feud amongst primitive people.

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Suppose a man from one tribe murders a man from another tribe. It becomes the duty of the first tribe to take vengeance on the second; it is the tribe that has been hurt, and the tribe which takes vengeance.

In the Old Testament there is one vivid instance of this. It is the case of Achan as related in Josh.7. At the siege of Jericho, Achan kept to himself certain spoils in direct defiance of the commandment of God that all should be destroyed. The next item in the campaign was the siege of Ai, which should have fallen without trouble. The assaults against it, however, failed disastrously. Why? Because Achan had sinned, and, as a result, the whole nation was branded as sinner and punished by God. Achan's sin was not one man's sin but the nation's. The nation was not a collection of individuals; it was a solid mass. What the individual did, the nation did. When Achan's sin was admitted, it was not he alone who was executed but his whole family. Again, Achan was not a solitary, self-responsible individual; he was one of a solid mass of people from whom he could not be separated.

That is how Paul sees Adam. Adam was not an individual. He was one of mankind, and because he was one of mankind, his sin was the sin of all men.

Paul says that all men sinned in Adam. If we are ever to understand Paul's thought here, we must be quite sure what he means, and we must be equally sure that he was serious. All through the history of Christian thinking there have been efforts to interpret in different ways this conception of the connection between Adam's sin and that of mankind.

(a) The passage has been taken to mean that "each man is his own Adam." This really means that, just as Adam sinned, all men have sinned, but that there is no real connection between the sin of Adam and the sin of mankind, other than that it could be said that Adam's sin is typical of the sin of all mankind.

(b) There is what has been called the legal interpretation. This would hold that Adam was the representative of mankind and the human race shares in the deed of its representative. But a representative must be chosen by the people he represents; and in no sense can we say that of Adam.

(c) There is the interpretation that what we inherit from Adam is the tendency to sin. That is true enough, but that is not what Paul meant. It would not, in fact, suit his argument at all.

(d) The passage ought to be given what is called the realistic interpretation, namely that, because of the solidarity of the human race, all mankind actually sinned in Adam. This idea was not strange to a Jew; it was the actual belief of the Jewish thinkers. The writer of 2 Esdras is quite clear about it. "A grain of evil was sown in the heart of Adam from the beginning and how much wickedness has it brought forth unto this time; and how much shall it yet bring forth till the time of the threshing come" (2Esdr.4:30). "For the first Adam, bearing a wicked heart, transgressed and was overcome; and not only he but all they also who are born of him" (2Esdr.3:21).

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(ii) The second basic idea is intimately connected with this in Paul's argument. Death is the direct consequence of sin. It was the Jewish belief that, if Adam had not sinned, man would have been immortal. Sirach (Sir.2:23) writes, "A woman was the beginning of sin and through her all die." The Book of Wisdom has it, "God created man for immortality and made him the image of his own proper nature; but by the envy of the devil death entered into the world." In Jewish thought, sin and death are integrally connected. This is what Paul is getting at in the involved and difficult line of thought in Rom.5:12-14. We may trace his thought there in a series of ideas.

(a) Adam sinned because he broke a direct commandment of God not to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree--and because he sinned, he died, although he was meant to be immortal.

(b) The law did not come until the time of Moses. Now, if there is no law, there can be no breach of the law; that is to say, there can be no sin. Therefore, the men who lived between Adam and Moses did in fact commit sinful actions, but they could not be counted sinners, for the law did not yet exist.

(c) In spite of the fact that sin could not be reckoned to them, they still died. Death reigned over them, although they could not be accused of breaking a non-existent law.

(d) Why, then, did they die? It was because they had sinned in Adam. Their involvement in his sin caused their deaths, although there was no law for them to break. That, in fact, is Paul's proof that all men did sin in Adam.

So, then, we have extracted the essence of one side of Paul's thought. Because of this idea of the complete solidarity of mankind, all men literally sinned in Adam; and because it is the consequence of sin, death reigned over all men.

But this very same conception, which can be used to produce so desperate a view of the human situation, can be used in reverse to fill it with a blaze of glory. Into this situation comes Jesus. To God Jesus offered perfect goodness. And, just as all men were involved in Adam's sin, all men are involved in Jesus' perfect goodness; and, just as Adam's sin was the cause of death, so Jesus' perfect goodness conquers death and gives men life eternal. Paul's triumphant argument is that, as mankind was solid with Adam and was therefore condemned to death, so mankind is solid with Christ and is therefore acquitted to life. Even although the law has come and made sin much more terrible, the grace of Christ overcomes the condemnation which the law must bring.

That is Paul's argument, and on Jewish grounds it is unassailable. But it has one great flaw, as it has one great truth.

(i) The flaw is this. Suppose we assume the literal truth of the Adam story, our connection with Adam is purely physical. We have no choice whatever in the matter, any more than a child chooses his father. On the other hand our connection with Christ is voluntary. Union with Christ is something a man can accept or reject. The connection is in reality quite different. That is a serious flaw in Paul's argument.

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(ii) The great virtue is this. Paul conserves the truth that mankind was involved in a situation from which there was no escape; sin had man in its power and there was no hope. Into this situation came Jesus Christ, and he brought with him something that broke the old deadlock. By what he did, by what he is, by what he gives, he enabled man to escape from a situation in which he was hopelessly dominated by sin. Whatever else we may say about Paul's argument, it is completely true that man was ruined by sin and rescued by Christ.

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Romans 6:1-11

DYING TO LIVE

Romans 6:1-11

What, then, shall we infer? Are we to persist in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we who have died to sin still live in it? Can you be unaware that all who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have been baptized into his death? We have therefore been buried with him through baptism until we died, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, so we, too, may live in newness of life. For, if we have become united to him in the likeness of his death, so also shall we be united to him in the likeness of his resurrection. For this we know, that our old self has been crucified with him, that our sinful body might be rendered inoperative, in order that we should no longer be slaves to sin. For a man who has died stands acquitted from sin. But, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him, for we know that, after Christ was raised from the dead, he dies no more. Death has no more lordship over him.

He who died, died once and for all to sin; and he who lives, lives to God. So you, too, must reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

As he has so often done in this letter, Paul is once again carrying on an argument against a kind of imaginary opponent. The argument springs from the great saying at the end of the last chapter: "Where sin abounded, grace superabounded." It runs something like this.

The Objector: You have just said that God's grace is great enough to find forgiveness for every sin.

Paul: That is so.

The Objector: You are, in fact, saying that God's grace is the most wonderful thing in all this world.

Paul: That is so.

The Objector: Well, if that is so, let us go on sinning. The more we sin, the more grace will abound. Sin does not matter, for God will forgive anyway. In fact we can go further than that and say that sin is an excellent thing, because it gives the grace of God a chance to operate. The conclusion of your argument is that sin produces grace; therefore sin is bound to be a good thing if it produces the greatest thing in the world.

Paul's first reaction is to recoil from that argument in sheer horror. "Do you suggest," he demands, "that we should go on sinning in order to give grace more chance to operate? God forbid that we should pursue so incredible a course as that."

Then, having recoiled like that, he goes on to something else.

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Romans 6:1-11

"Have you never thought," he demands, "what happened to you when you were baptized?" Now, when we try to understand what Paul goes on to say, we must remember that baptism in his time was different from what it commonly is today.

(a) It was adult baptism. That is not to say that the New Testament is opposed to infant baptism, but infant baptism is the result of the Christian family, and the Christian family could hardly be said to have come into being as early as the time of Paul. A man came to Christ as an individual in the early Church, often leaving his family behind.

(b) Baptism in the early Church was intimately connected with confession of faith. A man was baptized when he entered the Church; and he was entering the Church direct from paganism. In baptism a man came to a decision which cut his life in two, a decision which often meant that he had to tear himself up by the roots, a decision which was so definite that it often meant nothing less than beginning life all over again.

(c) Commonly baptism was by total immersion and that practice lent itself to a symbolism to which sprinkling does not so readily lend itself. When a man descended into the water and the water closed over his head, it was like being buried. When he emerged from the water, it was like rising from the grave. Baptism was symbolically like dying and rising again. The man died to one kind of life and rose to another; he died to the old life of sin and rose to the new life of grace.

Again, if we are fully to understand this, we must remember that Paul was using language and pictures that almost anyone of his day and generation would understand, It may seem strange to us, but it was not at all strange to his contemporaries.

The Jews would understand it. When a man entered the Jewish religion from heathenism, it involved three things--sacrifice, circumcision and baptism. The Gentile entered the Jewish faith by baptism. The ritual was as follows. The person to be baptized cut his nails and hair; he undressed completely; the baptismal bath must contain at least forty seahs, that is two hogsheads, of water; every part of his body must be touched by the water. As he was in the water, he made confession of his faith before three fathers of baptism and certain exhortations and benedictions were addressed to him. The effect of this baptism was held to be complete regeneration; he was called a little child just born, the child of one day. All his sins were remitted because God could not punish sins committed before he was born. The completeness of the change was seen in the fact that certain Rabbis held that a man's child born after baptism was his first-born, even if he had older children. Theoretically it was held--although the belief was never put into practice--that a man was so completely new that he might marry his own sister or his own mother. He was not only a changed man, he was a different man. Any Jew would fully understand Paul's words about the necessity of a baptized man being completely new.

The Greek would understand. At this time the only real Greek religion was found in the mystery religions. They were wonderful things. They offered men release from the cares and sorrows and fears of this earth; and the release was by union with some god. All the mysteries were passion plays. They were based on the story of some god who suffered and died and rose again. The story was played out as a drama. Before a man could see the drama he had to be initiated. He had to

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undergo a long course of instruction on the inner meaning of the drama. He had to undergo a course of ascetic discipline. He was carefully prepared. The drama was played out with all the resources of music and lighting, and incense and mystery. As it was played out, the man underwent an emotional experience of identification with the god. Before he entered on this he was initiated. Initiation was always regarded as a death followed by a new birth, by which the man was renatus in aeternum, reborn for eternity.

One who went through the initiation tells us that he underwent "a voluntary death." We know that in one of the mysteries the man to be initiated was called moriturus, the one who is to die, and that he was buried up to the head in a trench. When he had been initiated, he was addressed as a little child and fed with milk, as one newly born. In another of the mysteries the person to be initiated prayed: "Enter thou into my spirit, my thought, my whole life; for thou art I and I am thou." Any Greek who had been through this would have no difficulty in understanding what Paul meant by dying and rising again in baptism, and, in so doing, becoming one with Christ.

We are not for one moment saying that Paul borrowed either his ideas or his words from such Jewish or pagan practices; what we do say is that he was using words and pictures that both Jew and Gentile would recognize and understand.

In this passage lie three great permanent truths.

(i) It is a terrible thing to seek to trade on the mercy of God and to make it an excuse for sinning. Think of it in human terms. How despicable it would be for a son to consider himself free to sin, because he knew that his father would forgive. That would be taking advantage of love to break love's heart.

(ii) The man who enters upon the Christian way is committed to a different kind of life. He has died to one kind of life and been born to another. In modern times we may have tended to stress the fact that acceptance of the Christian way need not make so very much difference in a man's life. Paul would have said that it ought to make all the difference in the world.

(iii) But there is more than a mere ethical change in a man's life when he accepts Christ. There is a real identification with Christ. It is, in fact, the simple truth that the ethical change is not possible without that union. A man is in Christ. A great scholar has suggested this analogy for that phrase. We cannot live our physical life unless we are in the air and the air is in us; unless we are in Christ, and Christ is in us, we cannot live the life of God.

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Romans 6:12-14

THE PRACTICE OF THE FAITH

Romans 6:12-14

Let not sin reign in your mortal body to make you obey the body's desires. Do not go on yielding your members to sin as weapons of evil; but yield yourselves once and for all to God, as those who were dead and are now alive, and yield your members to God as weapons of righteousness. For sin will not lord it over you. You are not under law but under grace.

There is no more typical transition in Paul than that between this passage and the preceding one. The passage which went before was the writing of a mystic. It spoke of the mystical union between the Christian and Christ which came in baptism. It spoke of the way in which a Christian should live so close to Christ that all his life can be said to be lived in him. And now, after the mystical experience, comes the practical demand. Christianity is not an emotional experience; it is a way of life. The Christian is not meant to luxuriate in an experience however wonderful; he is meant to go out and live a certain kind of life in the teeth of the world's attacks and problems. It is common in the world of religious life to sit in church and feel a wave of feeling sweep over us. It is a not uncommon experience, when we sit alone, to feel Christ very near. But the Christianity which has stopped there, has stopped half-way. That emotion must be translated into action. Christianity can never be only an experience of the inner being; it must be a life in the marketplace.

When a man goes out into the world, he is confronted with an awesome situation. As Paul thinks of it, both God and sin are looking for weapons to use. God cannot work without men. If he wants a word spoken, he has to get a man to speak it. If he wants a deed done, he has to get a man to do it. If he wants a person encouraged, he has to get a man to do the lifting up. It is the same with sin; every man has to be given the push into it. Sin is looking for men who will by their words or example seduce others into sinning. It is as if Paul was saying: "In this world there is an eternal battle between sin and God; choose your side." We are faced with the tremendous alternative of making ourselves weapons in the hand of God or weapons in the hand of sin.

A man may well say: "Such a choice is too much for me. I am bound to fail." Paul's answer is: "Don't be discouraged and don't be despairing; sin will not lord it over you." Why? Because we are no longer under law but under grace. Why should that make all the difference? Because we are no longer trying to satisfy the demands of law but are trying to be worthy of the gifts of love. We are no longer regarding God as the stern judge; we are regarding him as the lover of the souls of men. There is no inspiration in all the world like love. Who ever went out from the presence of his loved one without the burning desire to be a better person? The Christian life is no longer a burden to be borne; it is a privilege to be lived up to.

As Denney put it: "It is not restraint but inspiration which liberates from sin; not Mount Sinai but Mount Calvary which makes saints." Many a man has been saved from sin, not because of the regulations of the law, but because he could not bear to hurt or grieve or disappoint someone whom he loved and someone who, he knew, loved him. At best, the law restrains a man through fear; but love redeems him by inspiring him to be better than his best. The inspiration of the Christian comes, not from the fear of what God will do to him, but from the inspiration of what God has done for him.

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Romans 6:15-23

THE EXCLUSIVE POSSESSION

Romans 6:15-23

What then? Are we to go on sinning because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid! Are you not aware that if you yield yourselves to anyone as slaves, in order to obey them, you are the slaves of the person whom you have chosen to obey--in this case, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness. But, thank God, you, who used to be slaves of sin, have come to a spontaneous decision to obey the pattern of teaching to which you were committed, and, since you have been liberated from sin, you have become the slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms, because unaided human nature cannot understand any others. Just as you yielded your members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness which issues in still more lawlessness, so now you have yielded your members as slaves to righteousness and have started on the road that leads to holiness.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free as regards righteousness; but then what fruit did you have? All you had was things of which you are now heartily ashamed, for the end of these things is death. But now, since you have been liberated from sin, and since you have become the slaves of God, the fruit you enjoy is designed to lead you on the road to holiness and its end is eternal life. For sin's pay is death, but God's free gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To a certain type of mind the doctrine of free grace is always a temptation to say, "If forgiveness is as easy and as inevitable as all that, if God's one desire is to forgive men and if his grace is wide enough to cover every spot and stain, why worry about sin? Why not do as we like? It will be all the same in the end."

Paul counters this argument by using a vivid picture. He says: "Once you gave yourselves to sin as its slave; when you did that, righteousness had no claim over you. But now you have given yourselves to God as the slave of righteousness; and so sin has no claim over you."

To understand this, we must understand the status of the slave. When we think of a servant, in our sense of the word, we think of a man who gives a certain agreed part of his time to his master and who receives a certain agreed wage for doing so. Within that agreed time he is at the disposal and in the command of his master. But, when that time ends, he is free to do as he likes. During his working hours he belongs to his master, but in his free time he belongs to himself. But, in Paul's time, the status of the slave was quite different. Literally he had no time which belonged to himself; every single moment belonged to his master. He was his master's absolutely exclusive possession. That is the picture that is in Paul's mind. He says: "At one time you were the slave of sin. Sin had exclusive possession of you. At that time you could not talk of anything else but sinning. But now you have taken God as your master and he has exclusive possession of you. Now you cannot even talk about sinning; you must talk about nothing but holiness."

Paul actually apologizes for using this picture. He says: "I am only using a human analogy so that your human minds can understand it." He apologized because he did not like to compare the Christian life to any kind of slavery. But the one thing that this picture does show is that the Christian can have no master but God. He cannot give a part of his life to God, and another part to

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the world. With God it is all--or nothing. So long as man keeps some part of his life without God, he is not really a Christian. A Christian is a man who has given complete control of his life to Christ, holding nothing back. No man who has done that can ever think of using grace as an excuse for sin.

But Paul has something more to say, "You took a spontaneous decision to obey the pattern of the teaching to which you were committed." In other words, he is saying, "You knew what you were doing, and you did it of your own free will." This is interesting. Remember that this passage has arisen from a discussion of baptism. This therefore means that baptism was, instructed baptism. Now we have already seen that baptism in the early Church was adult baptism and confession of faith. It is, then, quite clear that no man was ever allowed into the Christian Church on a moment of emotion. He was instructed; he had to know what he was doing; he was shown what Christ offered and demanded. Then, and then only, could he take the decision to come in.

When a man wishes to become a member of the great Benedictine order of monks he is accepted for a year on probation. During all that time the clothes which he wore in the world hang in his cell. At any time he can put off his monk's habit, put on his worldly clothes, and walk out, and no one will think any the worse of him. Only at the end of the year are his clothes finally taken away. It is with open eyes and a full appreciation of what he is doing that he must enter the order.

It is so with Christianity. Jesus does not want followers who have not stopped to count the cost. He does not want a man to express an impermanent loyalty on the crest of a wave of emotion. The Church has a duty to present the faith in all the riches of its offer and the heights of its demands to those who wish to become its members.

Paul draws a distinction between the old life and the new. The old life was characterized by uncleanness and lawlessness. The pagan world was an unclean world; it did not know the meaning of chastity. Justin Martyr has a terrible jibe when talking about the exposure of infants. In Rome unwanted children, especially girls, were literally, thrown away. Every night numbers of them were left lying in the forum. Some of them were collected by dreadful characters who ran brothels, and brought up to be prostitutes to stock the brothels. So Justin turns on his heathen opponents and tells them that, in their immorality, they had every chance of going into a city brothel. and, all unknown, having intercourse with their own child.

The pagan world was lawless in the sense that men's lusts were their only flaws; and that lawlessness produced more lawlessness. That, indeed, is the law of sin. Sin begets sin. The first time we do a wrong thing, you may do it with hesitation and a tremor and a shudder. The second time we do it, it is easier; and if we go on doing it, it becomes effortless; sin loses its terror. The first time we allow ourselves some indulgence, we may be satisfied with very little of it; but the time comes when we need more and more of it to produce the same thrill. Sin leads on to sin; lawlessness produces lawlessness. To start on the path of sin is to go on to more and more.

The new life is different; it is life which is righteous. Now the Greeks defined righteousness as giving to man and to God their due. The Christian life is one which gives God his proper place and which respects the rights of human personality. The Christian will never disobey God nor ever use

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a human being to gratify his desire for pleasure. That life leads to what the Revised Standard Version calls sanctification. The word in Greek is *hagiasmos* (GSN0038). All Greek nouns which end in -asmos describe, not a completed state, but a process. Sanctification is the road to holiness. When a man gives his life to Christ, he does not then become a perfect man; the struggle is by no means over. But Christianity has always regarded the direction in which a man is facing as more important than the particular stage he has reached. Once he is Christ's he has started on the process of sanctification, the road to holiness.

"Leaving every day behind
Something which might hinder;
Running swifter every day;
Growing purer, kinder."

Robert Louis Stevenson said: "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive." What is true is that it is a great thing to set out to a great goal, even if we never get the whole way.

Paul finishes with a great saying that contains a double metaphor. "Sin's pay is death," he says, "but God's free gift is eternal life." Paul uses two military words. For pay he uses *opsonia* (GSN3800). *Opsonia* was the soldier's pay, something that he earned with the risk of his body and the sweat of his brow, something that was due to him and could not be taken from him. For gift he uses *charisma* (GSN5486). The *charisma* or, in Latin, the *donativum*, was a totally unearned gift which the army sometimes received. On special occasions, for instance on his birthday, or on his accession to the throne, or the anniversary of it, an emperor handed out a free gift of money to the army. It had not been earned; it was a gift of the emperor's kindness and grace. So Paul says: "If we got the pay we had earned it would be death; but out of his grace God has given us life."

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Romans 7:1-6

THE NEW ALLEGIANCE

Romans 7:1-6

You are bound to know, brothers--for I speak to men who know what law means--that the law has authority over a man only for the duration of his life. Thus, a married woman remains bound by law to her husband as long as he is alive; but, if her husband dies, she is completely discharged from the law concerning her husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she marries another man while her husband is still alive; but, if her husband dies, she is free from the law, and she is no longer an adulteress if she marries another man. Just so, my brothers, you have died to the law, through the body of Jesus Christ (for you shared in his death by baptism) in order that you should enter into union with another, I mean, with him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit to God. In the days of our unaided human nature, the passions of our sins, which were set in motion by the law, worked in our members to bear fruit for death.

But now we are completely discharged from the law, because we have died to that by which we were held captive, so that we serve, not under the old written law, but in the new life of the spirit.

Seldom did Paul write so difficult and so complicated a passage as this. C. H. Dodd has said that when we are studying it we should try to forget what Paul says and to find out what he means.

The basic thought of the passage is founded on the legal maxim that death cancels all contracts. Paul begins with an illustration of this truth and wishes to use this picture as a symbol of what happens to the Christian. So long as a woman's husband is alive, she cannot marry another without becoming an adulteress. But if her husband dies, the contract is, so to speak, cancelled, and she is free to marry anyone she likes.

In view of that, Paul could have said that we were married to sin; that sin was slain by Christ; and that, therefore, we are now free to be married to God. That is undoubtedly what he set out to say. But into this picture came the law. Paul could still have put the thing quite simply. He could have said that we were married to the law; that the law was killed by the work of Christ; and that now we are free to be married to God. But, quite suddenly, he puts it the other way, and, in his suddenly changed picture, it is we who die to the law.

How can that be? By baptism we share in the death of Christ. That means that, having died, we are discharged from all obligations to the law and become free to marry again. This time we marry, not the law, but Christ. When that happens, Christian obedience becomes, not an externally imposed obedience to some written code of laws, but an inner allegiance of the spirit to Jesus Christ.

Paul is drawing a contrast between the two states of man--without Christ and with him. Before we knew Christ we tried to rule life by obedience to the written code of the law. That was when we were in the flesh. By the flesh Paul does not mean simply the body, because a man retains a physical body to the end of the day. In man there is something which answers to the seduction of sin; and it is that part of man which provides a bridgehead for sin that Paul calls the flesh.

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Romans 7:1-6

The flesh is human nature apart from and unaided by God. Paul says that, when our human nature was unaided by God, the law actually moved our passions to sin. What does he mean by that? More than once he has the thought that the law actually produces sin, because the very fact that a thing is forbidden lends it a certain attraction. When we had nothing but the law, we were at the mercy of sin.

Then Paul turns to the state of a man with Christ. When a man rules his life by union with Christ he rules it not by obedience to a written code of law which may actually awaken the desire to sin but by an allegiance to Jesus Christ within his spirit and his heart. Not law, but love, is the motive of his life; and the inspiration of love can make him able to do what the restraint of law was powerless to help him do.

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Romans 7:7-13

THE EXCEEDING SINFULNESS OF SIN

Romans 7:7-13

What then are we to infer? That the law is sin? God forbid! So far from that, I would never have known what sin meant except through the law. I would never have known desire if the law had not said, "You must not covet." For, when sin had, through the commandment, obtained a foothold, it produced every kind of desire in me; for, without law, sin is lifeless. Once I lived without the law; but, when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and in that moment I knew that I had incurred the penalty of death. The commandment that was meant for life--I discovered that that very commandment was in me for death. For, when sin obtained a foothold through the commandment, it seduced me, and, through it, killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just and good.

Did then that which was good become death to me? God forbid! But the reason was that sin might be revealed as sin by producing death in me, through the very thing which was in itself good, so that, through the commandment, sin might become surpassingly sinful.

Here begins one of the greatest of all passages in the New Testament; and one of the most moving; because here Paul is giving us his own spiritual autobiography and laying bare his very heart and soul.

Paul deals with the torturing paradox of the law. In itself it is a fine and a splendid thing. It is holy. That is to say it is the very voice of God. The root meaning of the word holy (hagios, GSN0040) is different. It describes something which comes from a sphere other than this world. The law is divine and has in it the very voice of God. It is just. We have seen that the root Greek idea of justice is that it consists in giving to man, and to God, their due. Therefore the law is that which settles all relationships, human and divine. If a man perfectly kept the law, he would be in a perfect relationship both with God and with his fellow men. The law is good. That is to say, it is designed for nothing other than our highest welfare. It is meant to make a man good.

All that is true. And yet the fact remains that this same law is the very thing through which sin gains entry into a man. How does that happen? There are two ways in which the law may be said to be, in one sense, the source of sin.

(i) It defines sin. Sin without the law, as Paul said, has no existence. Until a thing is defined as sin by the law, a man cannot know that it is sin. We might find a kind of remote analogy in any game, say tennis. A man might allow the ball to bounce more than once before he returned it over the net; so long as there were no rules he could not be accused of any fault. But then the rules are made, and it is laid down that the ball must be struck over the net after only one bounce and that to allow it to bounce twice is a fault. The rules define what a fault is, and that which was allowable before they were made, now becomes a fault. So the law defines sin.

We may take a better analogy. What is pardonable in a child, or in an uncivilized man from a savage country, may not be allowable in a mature person from a civilized land. The mature,

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civilized person is aware of laws of conduct which the child and the savage do not know; therefore, what is pardonable in them is fault in him.

The law creates sin in the sense that it defines it. It may for long enough be legal to drive a motor car in either direction along a street; then that street is declared one-way; after that a new breach of the law exists--that of driving in a forbidden direction. The new regulation actually creates a new fault. The law, by making men aware of what it is, creates sin.

(ii) But there is a much more serious sense in which the law produces sin. One of the strange facts of life is the fascination of the forbidden thing. The Jewish rabbis and thinkers saw that human tendency at work in the Garden of Eden. Adam at first lived in innocence; a commandment was given him not to touch the forbidden tree, and given only his good; but the serpent came and subtly turned that prohibition into a temptation. The fact that the tree was forbidden made it desirable; so Adam was seduced into sin by the forbidden fruit; and death was the result.

Philo allegorized the whole story. The serpent was pleasure; Eve stood for the senses; pleasure, as it always does, wanted the forbidden thing and attacked through the senses. Adam was the reason; and, through the attack of the forbidden thing on the senses, reason was led astray, and death came.

In his Confessions there is a famous passage in which Augustine tells of the fascination of the forbidden thing.

"There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it and carry our spoils away. We took off a huge load of pears--not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply in order to become a thief. The only feast I got was a feast of iniquity, and that I enjoyed to the full. What was it that I loved in that theft? Was it the pleasure of acting against the law, in order that I, a prisoner under rules, might have a maimed counterfeit of freedom by doing what was forbidden, with a dim similitude of impotence? ... The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing."

Set a thing in the category of forbidden things or put a place out of bounds, and immediately they become fascinating. In that sense the law produces sin.

Paul has one revealing word which he uses of sin. "Sin," he says, "seduced me." There is always deception in sin. Vaughan says that sin's delusion works in three directions. (i) We are deluded regarding the satisfaction to be found in sin. No man ever took a forbidden thing without thinking that it would make him happy, and no man ever found that it did. (ii) We are deluded regarding the excuse that can be made for it. Every man thinks that he can put up a defence for doing the wrong

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thing; but no man's defence ever sounded anything else but futile when it was made in the presence of God. (iii) We are deluded regarding the probability of escaping the consequences of it. No man sins without the hope that he can get away with it. But it is true that, soon or late, our sin will find us out.

Is, then, the law a bad thing because it actually produces sin? Paul is certain that there is wisdom in the whole sequence. (i) First he is convinced that, whatever the consequence, sin had to be defined as sin. (ii) The process shows the terrible nature of sin, because sin took a thing--the law--which was holy and just as good, and twisted it into something which served the ends of evil. The awfulness of sin is shown by the fact that it could take a fine thing and make it a weapon of evil. That is what sin does. It can take the loveliness of love and turn it into lust. It can take the honourable desire for independence and turn it into the obsession for money and for power. It can take the beauty of friendship and use it as a seduction to the wrong things. That is what Carlyle called "the infinite damnability of sin." The very fact that it took the law and made it a bridgehead to sin shows the supreme sinfulness of sin.

The whole terrible process is not accidental; it is all designed to show us how awful a thing sin is, because it can take the loveliest things and defile them with a polluting touch.

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Romans 7:14-25

THE HUMAN SITUATION

Romans 7:14-25

We are aware that the law is spiritual; but I am a creature of flesh and blood under the power of sin. I cannot understand what I do. What I want to do, that I do not do; but what I hate, that I do. If what I do not want to do I in point of fact do, then I acquiesce in the law, and I agree that it is fair. As it is, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin which resides in me--I mean in my human nature. To will the fair thing is within my range, but not to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do; but the evil that I do not want to do, that is the very thing I do. And if I do that very thing that I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin which resides in me. My experience of the law, then, is that I wish to do the fine thing and that the evil thing is the only thing that is within my ability.

As far as my inner self is concerned, I fully agree with the law of God; but I see another law in my members, continually carrying on a campaign against the law of my mind, and making me a captive by the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this fatal body? God will! Thanks be to him through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore with my mind I serve the law of God, but with my human nature the law of sin.

Paul is baring his very soul; and he is telling us of an experience which is of the very essence of the human situation. He knew what was right and wanted to do it; and yet, somehow, he never could. He knew what was wrong and the last thing he wanted was to do it; and yet, somehow, he did. He felt himself to be a split personality. It was as if two men were inside the one skin, pulling in different directions. He was haunted by this feeling of frustration, his ability to see what was good and his inability to do it; his ability to recognize what was wrong and his inability to refrain from doing it.

Paul's contemporaries well knew this feeling, as, indeed, we know it ourselves. Seneca talked of "our helplessness in necessary things." He talked about how men hate their sins and love them at the same time. Ovid, the Roman poet, had penned the famous tag: "I see the better things, and I approve them, but I follow the worse."

No one knew this problem better than the Jews. They had solved it by saying that in every man there were two natures, called the Yetser (HSN3336) hatob (HSN2896) and the Yetser (HSN3336) hara' (HSN7451). It was the Jewish conviction that God had made men like that with a good impulse and an evil impulse inside them.

There were Rabbis who believed that that evil impulse was in the very embryo in the womb, there before a man was even born. It was "a malevolent second personality." It was "man's implacable enemy." It was there waiting, if need be for a lifetime, for a chance to ruin man. But the Jew was equally clear, in theory, that no man need ever succumb to that evil impulse. It was all a matter of choice.

Ben Sirach wrote:

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"God himself created man from the beginning.
And he left him in the hand of his own counsel.
If thou so desirest thou shalt keep the commandments,
And to perform faithfulness is of thine own good pleasure.
He hath set fire and water before thee,
Stretch forth thy hand unto whichever thou wilt.
Before man is life and death,
And whichever he liketh shall be given unto him....
He hath commanded no man to do wickedly,
Neither have he given any man licence to sin."
(Sir.15:11-20).

There were certain things which would keep a man from falling to the evil impulse. There was the law. They thought of God as saying:

"I created for you the evil impulse; I created for you the law as an antiseptic."

"If you occupy yourself with the law you will not fall into the power of the evil impulse..."

There was the will and the mind.

"When God created man, he implanted in him his affections and his dispositions; and then, over all, he enthroned the sacred, ruling mind."

When the evil impulse attacked, the Jew held that wisdom and reason could defeat it; to be occupied with the study of the word of the Lord was safety; the law was a prophylactic; at such a time the good impulse could be called up in defence.

Paul knew all that; and knew, too, that, while it was all theoretically true, in practice it was not true. There were things in man's human nature--that is what Paul meant by this fatal body--which answered to the seduction of sin. It is part of the human situation that we know the right and yet do the wrong, that we are never as good as we know we ought to be. At one and the same time we are haunted by goodness and haunted by sin.

From one point of view this passage might be called a demonstration of inadequacies.

(i) It demonstrates the inadequacy of human knowledge. If to know the right thing was to do it, life would be easy. But knowledge by itself does not make a man good. It is the same in every walk of life. We may know exactly how golf should be played but that is very far from being able to play it; we may know how poetry ought to be written but that is very far from being able to write it. We may know how we ought to behave in any given situation but that is very far from being able so to

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behave. That is the difference between religion and morality. Morality is knowledge of a code; religion is knowledge of a person; and it is only when we know Christ that we are able to do what we know we ought.

(ii) It demonstrates the inadequacy of human resolution. To resolve to do a thing is very far from doing it. There is in human nature an essential weakness of the will. The will comes up against the problems, the difficulties, the opposition--and it fails. Once Peter took a great resolution. "Even if I must die with you," he said, "I will not deny you" (Matt.26:35); and yet he failed badly when it came to the point. The human will unstrengthened by Christ is bound to crack.

(iii) It demonstrates the limitations of diagnosis. Paul knew quite clearly what was wrong; but he was unable to put it right. He was like a doctor who could accurately diagnose a disease but was powerless to prescribe a cure. Jesus is the one person who not only knows what is wrong, but who can also put the wrong to rights. It is not criticism he offers but help.

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Romans 8:1-4

THE LIBERATION OF OUR HUMAN NATURE

Romans 8:1-4

There is, therefore, now no condemnation against those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law which comes from the Spirit and leads to life has in Christ Jesus set me free from the law which begets sin and leads to death. As for the impotency of the law, that weakness of the law which resulted from the effects of our sinful human nature--God sent his own Son as a sin offering with that very same human nature which in us had sinned; and thereby, while he existed in the same human nature as we have, he condemned sin, so that as a result the righteous demand of the law might be fulfilled in us, who live our lives not after the principle of sinful human nature, but after the principle of the Spirit.

This is a very difficult passage because it is so highly compressed, and because, all through it, Paul is making allusions to things which he has already said.

Two words keep occurring again and again in this chapter, flesh (sarx, GSN4561) and spirit (pneuma, GSN4151). We will not understand the passage at all unless we understand the way in which Paul is using these words.

(i) Sarx (GSN4561) literally means flesh. The most cursory reading of Paul's letters will show how often he uses the word, and how he uses it in a sense that is all his own. Broadly speaking, he uses it in three different ways.

(a) He uses it quite literally. He speaks of physical circumcision, literally "in the flesh" (Rom.2:28). (b) Over and over again he uses the phrase kata (GSN2596) sarka (GSN4561), literally according to the flesh, which most often means looking at things from the human point of view. For instance, he says that Abraham is our forefather kata (GSN2596) sarka (GSN4561), from the human point of view. He says that Jesus is the son of David kata (GSN2596) sarka (GSN4561) (Rom.1:3), that is to say, on the human side of his descent. He speaks of the Jews being his kinsmen kata (GSN2596) sarka (GSN4561) (Rom.9:3), that is to say, speaking of human relationships. When Paul uses the phrase kata (GSN2596) sarka (GSN4561), it always implies that he is looking at things from the human point of view.

(c) But he has a use of this word sarx (GSN4561) which is all his own. When he is talking of the Christians, he talks of the days when we were in the flesh (en (GSN1722) sarki, GSN4561) (Rom.7:5). He speaks of those who walk according to the flesh in contradistinction to those who live the Christian life (Rom.8:4-5). He says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom.8:8). He says that the mind of the flesh is death, and that it is hostile to God (Rom.8:6,8). He talks about living according to the flesh (Rom.8:12). He says to his Christian friends, "You are not in the flesh" (Rom.8:9).

It is quite clear, especially from the last instance, that Paul is not using flesh simply in the sense of the body, as we say flesh and blood. How, then, is he using it? He really means human nature in all its weakness and he means human in its vulnerability to sin. He means that part of man which

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Romans 8:1-4

gives sin its bridgehead. He means sinful human nature, apart from Christ, everything that attaches a man to the world instead of to God. To live according to the flesh is to live a life dominated by the dictates and desires of sinful human nature instead of a life dominated by the dictates and the love of God. The flesh is the lower side of man's nature.

It is to be carefully noted that when Paul thinks of the kind of life that a man dominated by the sarx (GSN4561) lives he is not by any means thinking exclusively of sexual and bodily sins. When he gives a list of the works of the flesh in Gal.5:19-21, he includes the bodily and the sexual sins; but he also includes idolatry, hatred, wrath, strife, heresies, envy, murder. The flesh to him was not a physical thing but spiritual. It was human nature in all its sin and weakness; it was all that man is without God and without Christ.

(ii) There is the word Spirit; in Rom.8 it occurs no fewer than twenty times. This word has a very definite Old Testament background. In Hebrew it is ruach (HSN7307), and it has two basic thoughts. (a) It is not only the word for Spirit; it is also the word for wind. It has always the idea of power about it, power as of a mighty rushing wind. (b) In the Old Testament, it always has the idea of something that is more than human. Spirit, to Paul, represented a power which was divine.

So Paul says in this passage that there was a time when the Christian was at the mercy of his own sinful human nature. In that state the law simply became something that moved him to sin and he went from bad to worse, a defeated and frustrated man. But, when he became a Christian, into his life there came the surging power of the Spirit of God, and, as a result, he entered into victorious living.

In the second part of the passage Paul speaks of the effect of the work of Jesus on us. It is complicated and difficult, but what Paul is getting at is this. Let us remember that he began all this by saying that every man sinned in Adam. We saw how the Jewish conception of solidarity made it possible for him to argue that, quite literally, all men were involved in Adam's sin and in its consequence--death. But there is another side to this picture. Into this world came Jesus; with a completely human nature; and he brought to God a life of perfect obedience, of perfect fulfilment of God's law. Now, because Jesus was fully a man, just as we were one with Adam, we are now one with him; and, just as we were involved in Adam's sin, we are now involved in Jesus' perfection. In him mankind brought to God the perfect obedience, just as in Adam mankind brought to God the fatal disobedience. Men are saved because they were once involved in Adam's sin but are now involved in Jesus' goodness.

That is Paul's argument, and, to him and to those who heard it, it was completely convincing, however hard it is for us to grasp it. Because of what Jesus did, there opens out to the Christian a life no longer dominated by the flesh but by that Spirit of God, which fills a man with a power not his own. The penalty of the past is removed and strength for his future is assured.

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Romans 8:5-11

THE TWO PRINCIPLES OF LIFE

Romans 8:5-11

Those who live according to the dictates of sinful human nature are absorbed in worldly human things. Those who live according to the dictates of the Spirit are absorbed in the things of the Spirit. To be absorbed in worldly human things is death; but to be absorbed in the things of the Spirit is life and peace, because absorption in the things which fascinate our sinful human nature is hostility to God, for it does not obey the law of God, nor, indeed, can it do so. Those whose life is a purely worldly thing cannot please God; but you are not dominated by the pursuits which fascinate our sinful human nature; you are dominated by the Spirit, if so it be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. If anyone does not possess the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, even if because of sin your body is mortal, your Spirit has life through righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you he will make even your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit indwelling in you.

Paul is drawing a contrast between two kinds of life.

(i) There is the life which is dominated by sinful human nature; whose focus and centre is self; whose only law is its own desires; which takes what it likes where it likes. In different people that life will be differently described. It may be passion-controlled, or lust-controlled, or pride-controlled, or ambition-controlled. Its characteristic is its absorption in the things that human nature without Christ sets its heart upon.

(ii) There is the life that is dominated by the Spirit of God. As a man lives in the air, he lives in Christ, never separated from him. As he breathes in the air and the air fills him, so Christ fills him. He has no mind of his own; Christ is his mind. He has no desires of his own; the will of Christ is his only law. He is Spirit-controlled, Christ-controlled, God-focused.

These two lives are going in diametrically opposite directions. The life that is dominated by the desires and activities of sinful human nature is on the way to death. In the most literal sense, there is no future in it--because it is getting further and further away from God. To allow the things of the world completely to dominate life is self extinction; it is spiritual suicide. By living it, a man is making himself totally unfit ever to stand in the presence of God. He is hostile to him, resentful of his law and his control. God is not his friend but his enemy, and no man ever won the last battle against him.

The Spirit-controlled life, the Christ-centred life, the God-focused life is daily coming nearer heaven even when it is still on earth. It is a life which is such a steady progress to God that the final transition of death is only a natural and inevitable stage on the way. It is like Enoch who walked with God and God took him. As the child said: "Enoch was a man who went walks with God--and one day he didn't come back."

No sooner has Paul said this than an inevitable objection strikes him. Someone may object: "You say that the Spirit-controlled man is on the way to life; but in point of fact every man must die. Just

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what do you mean?" Paul's answer is this. All men die because they are involved in the human situation. Sin came into this world and with sin came death, the consequence of sin. Inevitably, therefore, all men die; but the man who is Spirit-controlled and whose heart is Christ-occupied, dies only to rise again. Paul's basic thought is that the Christian is indissolubly one with Christ. Now Christ died and rose again; and the man who is one with Christ is one with death's conqueror and shares in that victory. The Spirit controlled, Christ-possessed man is on the way to life; death is but an inevitable interlude that has to be passed through on the way.

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Romans 8:12-17

ENTRY INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD

Romans 8:12-17

So then, brothers, a duty is laid upon us--and that duty is not to our own sinful human nature, to live according to the principles of that same nature; for, if you live according to the principles of sinful human nature, you are on the way to death; but if by the spirit you kill the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are guided by the Spirit of God, these, and only these, are the children of God. For you did not receive a state whose dominating condition is slavery so that you might relapse into fear; but you received a state whose dominating characteristic is adoption, in which we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. If we are children then we are also heirs; and if we are the heirs of God then we are joint-heirs with Christ. If we suffer with him we shall also be glorified with him.

Paul is introducing us to another of the great metaphors in which he describes the new relationship of the Christian to God. He speaks of the Christian being adopted into the family of God. It is only when we understand how serious and complicated a step Roman adoption was that we really understand the depth of meaning in this passage.

Roman adoption was always rendered more serious and more difficult by the Roman patria potestas. This was the father's power over his family; it was the power of absolute disposal and control, and in the early days was actually the power of life and death. In regard to his father, a Roman son never came of age. No matter how old he was, he was still under the patria potestas, in the absolute possession and under the absolute control, of his father. Obviously this made adoption into another family a very difficult and serious step. In adoption a person had to pass from one patria potestas to another.

There were two steps. The first was known as mancipatio, and was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were symbolically used. Three times the symbolism of sale was carried out. Twice the father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back; but the third time he did not buy him back and thus the patria potestas was held to be broken. There followed a ceremony called vindictio. The adopting father went to the praetor, one of the Roman magistrates, and presented a legal case for the transference of the person to be adopted into his patria potestas. When all this was completed, the adoption was complete. Clearly this was a serious and an impressive step.

But it is the consequences of adoption which are most significant for the picture that is in Paul's mind. There were four main ones. (i) The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. In the most binding legal way, he got a new father. (ii) It followed that he became heir to his new father's estate. Even if other sons were afterwards born, it did not affect his rights. He was inalienably co-heir with them. (iii) In law, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out; for instance, all debts were cancelled. He was regarded as a new person entering into a new life with which the past had nothing to do. (iv) In the eyes of the law he was absolutely the son of his new father. Roman history provides an outstanding case of how completely this was held to be true. The Emperor Claudius adopted Nero

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in order that he might succeed him on the throne; they were not in any sense blood relations. Claudius already had a daughter, Octavia.

To cement the alliance Nero wished to marry her. Nero and Octavia were in no sense blood relations; yet, in the eyes of the law, they were brother and sister; and before they could marry, the Roman senate had to pass special legislation.

That is what Paul is thinking of. He uses still another picture from Roman adoption. He says that God's spirit witnesses with our spirit that we really are his children. The adoption ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses. Now, suppose the adopting father died and there was some dispute about the right of the adopted son to inherit, one or more of the seven witnesses stepped forward and swore that the adoption was genuine. Thus the right of the adopted person was guaranteed and he entered into his inheritance. So, Paul is saying, it is the Holy Spirit himself who is the witness to our adoption into the family of God.

We see then that every step of Roman adoption was meaningful in the mind of Paul when he transferred the picture to our adoption into the family of God. Once we were in the absolute control of our own sinful human nature; but God, in his mercy, has brought us into his absolute possession. The old life has no more rights over us; God has an absolute right. The past is cancelled and its debts are wiped out; we begin a new life with God and become heirs of all his riches. If that is so, we become joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, God's own Son. That which Christ inherits, we also inherit. If Christ had to suffer, we also inherit that suffering; but if Christ was raised to life and glory, we also inherit that life and glory.

It was Paul's picture that when a man became a Christian he entered into the very family of God. He did nothing to deserve it; God, the great Father, in his amazing love and mercy, has taken the lost, helpless, poverty-stricken, debt-laden sinner and adopted him into his own family, so that the debts are cancelled and the glory inherited.

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Romans 8:18-25

THE GLORIOUS HOPE

Romans 8:18-25

For I am convinced that the sufferings of this present age cannot be compared with the glory which is destined to be disclosed to us. The created world awaits with eager expectation the day when those who are the sons of God will be displayed in all their glory. For the created world has been subjected to chaos, not because of its own choice, but through him who passed the sentence of such subjugation upon it, and yet it still has the hope that the created world also will be liberated from this slavery to decay and will be brought to the freedom of the glory of the children of God; for we know that the whole creation unites together in groans and agonies. Not only does the created world do so, but so do we, even though we have received the first-fruits of the spirit as a foretaste of the coming glory, yes, we too groan within ourselves earnestly awaiting the full realization of our adoption into the family of God. I mean the redemption of our body.

For it is by hope that we are saved; but a hope which is already visible is not a hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then in patience we eagerly wait for it.

Paul has just been speaking of the glory of adoption into the family of God; and then he comes back to the troubled state of this present world. He draws a great picture. He speaks with a poet's vision. He sees all nature waiting for the glory that shall be. At the moment creation is in bondage to decay.

"Change and decay in all around I see."

The world is one where beauty fades and loveliness decays; it is a dying world; but it is waiting for its liberation from all this and the coming of the state of glory.

When Paul was painting this picture, he was working with ideas that any Jew would recognize and understand. He talks of this present age and of the glory that will be disclosed. Jewish thought divided time into two sections--this present age and the age to come. This present age was wholly bad, subject to sin, and death and decay. Some day there would come The Day of the Lord. That would be a day of judgment when the world would be shaken to its foundations; but out of it there would come a new world.

The renovation of the world was one of the great Jewish thoughts. The Old Testament speaks of it without elaboration and without detail. "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth" (Isa.65:17). But in the days between the Testaments, when the Jews were oppressed and enslaved and persecuted, they dreamed their dreams of that new earth and that renovated world.

"The vine shall yield its fruit ten thousand fold, and on each vine there shall be a thousand branches; and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters; and each cluster produce a thousand grapes; and each grape a cor of wine. And those who have hungered shall rejoice; moreover, also, they shall behold marvels

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every day. For winds shall go forth from before me to bring every morning the fragrance of aromatic fruits, and at the close of the day clouds distilling the dews of health" (Bar.29:5).

"And earth, and all the trees, and the innumerable flocks of sheep shall give their true fruit to mankind, of wine and of sweet honey and of white milk and corn, which to men is the most excellent gift of all" (Sibylline Oracles 3: 620-633).

"Earth, the universal mother, shall give to mortals her best fruit in countless store of corn, wine and oil. Yea, from heaven shall come a sweet draught of luscious honey. The trees shall yield their proper fruits, and rich flocks, and kine, and lambs of sheep and kids of goats. He will cause sweet fountains of white milk to burst forth. And the cities shall be full of good things, and the fields rich; neither shall there be any sword throughout the land or battle-din; nor shall the earth be convulsed any more with deep-drawn groans. No war shall be any more, nor shall there be any more drought throughout the land, no famine, or hail to work havoc on the crops" (Sibylline Oracles 3: 744--756).

The dream of the renovated world was dear to the Jews. Paul knew that, and here he, as it were, endows creation with consciousness. He thinks of nature longing for the day when sin's dominion would be broken, death and decay would be gone, and God's glory would come. With a touch of imaginative insight, he says that the state of nature was even worse than the state of men. Man had sinned deliberately; but it was involuntarily that nature was subjected. Unwittingly she was involved in the consequences of the sin of man. "Cursed is the ground because of you," God said to Adam after his sin (Gen.3:17). So here, with a poet's eye, Paul sees nature waiting for liberation from the death and decay that man's sin had brought into the world.

If that is true of nature, it is still truer of man. So Paul goes on to think of human longing. In the experience of the Holy Spirit men had a foretaste, a first instalment, of the glory that shall be; now they long with all their hearts for the full realization of what adoption into the family of God means. That final adoption will be the redemption of their bodies. In the state of glory Paul did not think of man as a disembodied spirit. Man in this world is a body and a spirit; and in the world of glory the total man will be saved. But his body will no longer be the victim of decay and the instrument of sin; it will be a spiritual body fit for the life of a spiritual man.

Then comes a great saying. "We are saved by hope." The blazing truth that lit life for Paul was that the human situation is not hopeless. Paul was no pessimist. H. G. Wells once said: "Man, who began in a cave behind a windbreak, will end in the disease soaked ruins of a slum." Not so Paul. He saw man's sin and the state of the world; but he also saw God's redeeming power; and the end of it all for him was hope. Because of that, to Paul life was not a despairing waiting for an inevitable end in a world encompassed by sin and death and decay; life was an eager anticipation of a liberation, a renovation and a recreation wrought by the glory and the power of God.

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In Rom.8:19 he uses a wonderful word for eager expectation. It is apokaradokia (GSN0603) and it describes the attitude of a man who scans the horizon with head thrust forward, eagerly searching the distance for the first signs of the dawn break of glory. To Paul life was not a weary, defeated waiting; it was a throbbing, vivid expectation. The Christian is involved in the human situation. Within he must battle with his own evil human nature; without he must live in a world of death and decay. Nonetheless, the Christian does not live only in the world; he also lives in Christ. He does not see only the world; he looks beyond it to God. He does not see only the consequences of man's sin; he sees the power of God's mercy and love. Therefore, the keynote of the Christian life is always hope and never despair. The Christian waits, not for death, but for life.

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Romans 8:26-30

ALL IS OF GOD

Romans 8:26-30

Even so, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know what we should pray, if we are to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings which baffle speech to utter; but he who searches the hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because it is by God's will that he intercedes for those whose lives are consecrated to God. We know that God intermingles all things for good for those who love him, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he knew long ago he long ago designed to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brothers. Those whom he long ago designed for this purpose, he also called; and those whom he called he put into a right relationship with himself; and those whom he put into a right relationship with himself he also glorified.

Rom.8:26-27 form one of the most important passages on prayer in the whole New Testament. Paul is saying that, because of our weakness, we do not know what to pray for, but the prayers we ought to offer are offered for us by the Holy Spirit. C. H. Dodd defines prayer in this way--"Prayer is the divine in us appealing to the Divine above us."

There are two very obvious reasons why we cannot pray as we ought. First, we cannot pray aright because we cannot foresee the future. We cannot see a year or even an hour ahead; and we may well pray, therefore, to be saved from things which are for our good and we may well pray for things which would be to our ultimate harm. Second, we cannot pray aright because in any given situation we do not know what is best for us. We are often in the position of a child who wants something which would be bound only to hurt him; and God is often in the position of a parent who has to refuse his child's request or compel him to do something he does not want to do, because he knows what is to the child's good far better than the child himself.

Even the Greeks knew that. Pythagoras forbade his disciples to pray for themselves, because, he said, they could never in their ignorance know what was expedient for them. Xenophon tells us that Socrates taught his disciples simply to pray for good things, and not to attempt to specify them, but to leave God to decide what the good things were. C. H. Dodd puts it in this way. We cannot know our own real need; we cannot with our finite minds grasp God's plan; in the last analysis all that we can bring to God is an inarticulate sigh which the Spirit will translate to God for us.

As Paul saw it, prayer, like everything else, is of God. He knew that by no possible human effort can a man justify himself; and he also knew that by no possible effort of the human intelligence can a man know for what to pray. In the last analysis the perfect prayer is simply, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. Not my will, but Thine be done."

But Paul goes on from there. He says that those who love God, and who are called according to his purpose, know well that God is intermingling all things for good to them. It is the experience of life for the Christian that all things do work together for good. We do not need to be very old to look back and see that things we thought were disasters worked out to our good; things that we thought were disappointments worked out to greater blessings.

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But we have to note that that experience comes only to those who love God. The Stoics had a great idea which may well have been in Paul's mind when he wrote this passage. One of their great conceptions was the logos (GSN3056) of God, which was God's mind or the reason. The Stoic believed that this world was permeated with that logos (GSN3056). It was the logos (GSN3056) which put sense into the world. It was the logos (GSN3056) which kept the stars in their courses and the planets in their appointed tracks. It was the logos (GSN3056) which controlled the ordered succession of night and day, and summer and winter and spring and autumn. The logos (GSN3056) was the reason and the mind of God in the universe, making it an order and not a chaos.

The Stoic went further. He believed that the logos (GSN3056) not only had an order for the universe, but also a plan and a purpose for the life of every individual man. To put it in another way, the Stoic believed that nothing could happen to a man which did not come from God and which was not part of God's plan for him. Epictetus writes: "Have courage to look up to God and to say, 'Deal with me as thou wilt from now on. I am as one with thee; I am thine; I flinch from nothing so long as thou dost think that it is good. Lead me where thou wilt; put on me what raiment thou wilt. Wouldst thou have me hold office or eschew it, stay or flee, be rich or poor? For this I will defend thee before men.'" The Stoic taught that the duty of every man was acceptance. If he accepted the things that God sent him, he knew peace. If he struggled against them, he was uselessly battering his head against the ineluctable purpose of God.

Paul has the very same thought. He says that all things work together for good, but only to them that love God. If a man loves and trusts and accepts God, if he is convinced that God is the all-wise and all-loving Father, then he can humbly accept all that he sends to him. A man may go to a physician, and be prescribed a course of treatment which at the time is unpleasant or even painful; but if he trusts the wisdom of the man of skill, he accepts the thing that is laid upon him. It is so with us if we love God. But if a man does not love and trust God, he may well resent what happens to him and may well fight against God's will. It is only to the man who loves and trusts that all things work together for good, for to him they come from a Father who in perfect wisdom, love and power is working ever for the best.

Paul goes further; he goes on to speak of the spiritual experience of every Christian. The King James Version rendering is famous. "For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called them he also justified; and whom he justified them he also glorified." This is a passage which has been very seriously misused. If we are ever to understand it we must grasp the basic fact that Paul never meant it to be the expression of theology or philosophy; he meant it to be the almost lyrical expression of Christian experience. If we take it as philosophy and theology and apply the standards of cold logic to it, it must mean that God chose some and did not choose others. But that is not what it means.

Think of the Christian experience. The more a Christian thinks of his experience the more he becomes convinced that he had nothing to do with it and all is of God. Jesus Christ came into this world; he lived; he went to the Cross; he rose again. We did nothing to bring that about; that is God's work. We heard the story of this wondrous love. We did not make the story; we only

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received the story. Love woke within our hearts; the conviction of sin came, and with it came the experience of forgiveness and of salvation. We did not achieve that; all is of God. That is what Paul is thinking of here.

The Old Testament has an illuminating use of the word to know. "I knew you in the wilderness," said God to Hosea about the people of Israel (Hos.13:5). "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," said God to Amos (Am.3:2). When the Bible speaks of God knowing a man, it means that he has a purpose and a plan and a task for that man. And when we look back upon our Christian experience, all we can say is, "I did not do this; I could never have done this; God did everything." And we know well that this does not take freewill away. God knew Israel, but the day came when Israel refused the destiny God meant her to have. God's unseen guiding is in our lives, but to the end of the day we can refuse it and take our own way.

It is the deep experience of the Christian that all is of God; that he did nothing and that God did everything. That is what Paul means here. He means that from the beginning of time God marked us out for salvation; that in due time his call came to us; but the pride of man's heart can wreck God's plan and the disobedience of man's will can refuse the call.

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Romans 8:31-39

THE LOVE FROM WHICH NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US

Romans 8:31-39

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? The very God who did not spare his own Son but who delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall impeach the elect of God? It is God who acquits. Who is he who condemns? It is Jesus Christ who died, nay rather, who was raised from the dead, and who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trial, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it stands written, "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are reckoned as sheep for the slaughter." But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor the present age, nor the age to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is one of the most lyrical passages Paul ever wrote. In Rom.8:32 there is a wonderful allusion which would stand out to any Jew who knew his Old Testament well. Paul says in effect: "God for us did not spare his own Son; surely that is the final guarantee that he loves us enough to supply all our needs." The words Paul uses of God are the very words God used of Abraham when Abraham proved his utter loyalty by being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command. God said to Abraham: "You have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen.22:12). Paul seems to say: "Think of the greatest human example in the world of a man's loyalty to God; God's loyalty to you is like that." Just as Abraham was so loyal to God that he was prepared to sacrifice his dearest possession, God is so loyal to men that he is prepared to sacrifice his only Son for them. Surely we can trust a loyalty like that for anything.

It is difficult to know just how to take Rom.8:33-35. There are two ways of taking them and both give excellent sense and precious truth.

(i) We can take them as two statements, followed by two questions which give the inferences to be made from these statements. (a) It is God who acquits men--that is the statement. If that be so who can possibly condemn men? If man is acquitted by God, then he is saved from every other condemnation. (b) Our belief is in a Christ who died and rose again and who is alive for evermore--that is the statement. If that be so, is there anything in this or any other world that can separate us from our Risen Lord?

If we take it that way two great truths are laid down. (a) God has acquitted us; therefore no one can condemn us. (b) Christ is risen; therefore nothing can ever separate us from him.

(ii) But there is another way to take it. God has acquitted us. Who then can condemn us) The answer is that the Judge of all men is Jesus Christ. He is the one who has the right to condemn--but so far from condemning, he is at God's right hand interceding for us, and therefore we are safe.

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It may be that in Rom.8:34 Paul is doing a very wonderful thing. He is saying four things about Jesus. (a) He died. (b) He rose again. (c) He is at the right hand of God. (d) He makes intercession for us there. Now the earliest creed of the Church, which is still the essence of all Christian creeds, ran like this: "He was crucified dead and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead; and sitteth at the right hand of God; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Three items in Paul's statement and in the early creed are the same, that Jesus died, rose again, and is at the right hand of God. But the fourth is different. In the creed the fourth is that Jesus will come to be the judge of the quick and the dead. In Paul the fourth is that Jesus is at God's right hand to plead our case. It is as if Paul said: "You think of Jesus as the Judge who is there to condemn; and well he might for he has won the right.

But you are wrong; he is not there to be our prosecuting counsel but to be the advocate to plead our cause."

I think that the second way of taking this is right. With one tremendous leap of thought Paul has seen Christ, not as the Judge but as the lover of the souls of men.

Paul goes on with a poet's fervour and a lover's rapture to sing of how nothing can separate us from the love of God in our Risen Lord.

(i) No affliction, no hardship, no peril can separate us. (Rom.8:35.) The disasters of the world do not separate a man from Christ; they bring him closer yet.

(ii) In Rom.8:38-39 Paul makes a list of terrible things.

Neither life nor death can separate us from Christ. In life we live with Christ; in death we die with him; and because we die with him, we also rise with him. Death, so far from being a separation, is only a step into his nearer presence; not the end but "the gate on the skyline" leading to the presence of Jesus Christ.

The angelic powers cannot separate us from him. At this particular time the Jews had a highly developed belief in angels. Everything had its angel. There was an angel of the winds, of the clouds, of the snow and hail and hoarfrost. of the thunder and the lightning, of cold and heat, of the seasons. The Rabbis said that there was nothing in the world, not even a blade of grass, that had not got its angel. According to the Rabbis there were three ranks of angels. The first included thrones, cherubim and seraphim. The second included powers, lordships and mights. The third included angels and archangels and principalities. More than once Paul speaks of these angels (Eph.1:21; Eph.3:10; Eph.6:12; Col.2:10,15; 1Cor.15:24). Now the Rabbis--and Paul had once been a Rabbi--believed that they were grudgingly hostile to men. They believed that they had been angry when God created man. It was as if they did not want to share God with anyone and had grudged man his share in him.

The Rabbis had a legend that when God appeared on Sinai to give Moses the law he was attended by his hosts of angels, and the angels grudged Israel the law, and assaulted Moses on his way up the mountain and would have stopped him had not God intervened. So Paul, thinking in terms of his own day, says, "Not even the grudging, jealous angels can separate us from the love of God, much as they would like to do so."

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No age in time can separate us from Christ. Paul speaks of things present and things to come. We know that the Jews divided all time into this present age and the age to come. Paul is saying: "In this present world nothing can separate us from God in Christ; the day will come when this world will be shattered and the new age will dawn. It does not matter; even then, when this world has passed and the new world come, the bond is still the same."

No malign influences (powers) will separate us from Christ. Paul speaks about height and depth. These are astrological terms. The ancient world was haunted by the tyranny of the stars. They believed that a man was born under a certain star and thereby his destiny was settled. There are some who still believe that; but the ancient world was really haunted by this supposed domination of a man's life by the influence of the stars. Height (hupsoma, GSN5313) was the time when a star was at its zenith and its influence was greatest; depth (bathos, GSN0899) was the time when a star was at its lowest, waiting to rise and to put its influence on some man. Paul says to these haunted men of his age: "The stars cannot hurt you. In their rising and their setting they are powerless to separate you from God's love."

No other world can separate us from God. The word that Paul uses for other (heteros, GSN2087) has really the meaning of different. He is saying: "Suppose that by some wild flight of imagination there emerged another and a different world, you would still be safe; you would still be enwrapped in the love of God."

Here is a vision to take away all loneliness and all fear. Paul is saying: "You can think of every terrifying thing that this or any other world can produce. Not one of them is able to separate the Christian from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ, Lord of every terror and Master of every world." Of what then shall we be afraid?

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Romans 9

THE PROBLEM OF THE JEWS

In Rom.9-11 Paul tries to deal with one of the most bewildering problems that the Church has to solve--the problem of the Jews. They were God's chosen people; they had had a unique place in God's purposes; and yet when God's Son had come into the world they had rejected him and crucified him. How is this tragic paradox to be explained? That is the problem with which Paul seeks to deal in these chapters. They are complicated and difficult, and, before we begin to study them in detail, it will be well to set out the broad lines of the solution which Paul presented.

One thing we must note before we begin to disentangle Paul's thought--the chapters were written not in anger but in heartbreak. He could never forget that he was a Jew and he would gladly have laid down his own life if, by so doing, he could have brought his brethren to Jesus Christ.

Paul never denies that the Jews were the chosen people. God adopted them as his own; he gave them the covenants and the service of the Temple and the law; he gave them the presence of his own glory; he gave them the patriarchs. Above all Jesus was a Jew. The special place of the Jews in God's economy of salvation Paul accepts as an axiom and as the starting-point of the whole problem.

The first point which he makes is this--it is true that the Jews as a nation rejected and crucified Jesus, but it is also true, that not all the Jews rejected him; some received him and believed in him, for all the early followers of Jesus were Jews. Paul then looks back on history and insists that racial descent from Abraham does not make a Jew. Over and over again in Jewish history there was in God's ways a process of selection--Paul calls it election--whereby some of those who were racial descendants of Abraham were chosen and some rejected. In the case of Abraham, Isaac, the son born according to the promise of God, was chosen, but Ishmael, the son born of purely natural desire, was not. In the case of Isaac, his son Jacob was chosen, but Esau, Jacob's twin, was not. This selection had nothing to do with merit; it was the work entirely of God's electing wisdom and power.

Further, the real chosen people never lay in the whole nation; it always lay in the righteous remnant, the few who were true to God when all others denied him. It was so in the days of Elijah, when seven thousand remained faithful to God after the rest of the nation had gone after Baal. It was an essential part of the teaching of Isaiah, who said: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant Of them will be saved" (Isa.10:22; Rom.9:27). Paul's first point is that at no time were the whole people the chosen people. There was always selection, election, on the part of God.

Is it fair of God to elect some and to reject others? And, if some men are elected and others are rejected through no virtue or fault of their own, how can you blame them if they reject Christ, and how can you praise them if they accept him? Here Paul uses an argument at which the mind staggers, and from which we quite properly recoil. Bluntly, it is that God can do what he likes and that man has no right whatever to question his decisions, however inscrutable they may be. The clay cannot talk back to the potter. A craftsman may make two vessels, one for an honourable purpose and another for a menial purpose; the vessels have nothing whatever to do with it. That,

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said Paul, is what God has a right to do with men. He quotes the instance of Pharaoh (Rom.9:17) and says that he was brought on to the stage of history simply to be the instrument through which God's avenging power was demonstrated.

In any event, the people of Israel had been forewarned of the election of the Gentiles and of their own rejection, for, did not the prophet Hosea write: "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people', and her who was not beloved I will call 'my beloved'" (Hos.1:10; Rom.9:25).

However, this rejection of Israel was not callous and haphazard. The door was shut to the Jews that it might be opened to the Gentiles. God hardened the hearts of the Jews and blinded their eyes with the ultimate purpose of opening a way for the Gentiles into the faith. Here is a strange and terrible argument. Stripped of all its non-essentials, it is that God can do what he likes with any man or nation. and that he deliberately darkened the minds and shut the eyes of the Jews in order that the Gentiles might come in.

What was the fundamental mistake of the Jews? This may seem a curious question to ask in view of what we have just said. But, paradoxically, Paul holds that though the rejection of the Jews was the work of God, it need never have happened. He cannot get rid of the eternal paradox--nor does he desire to--that at one and the same time all is of God and man has free-will. The fundamental mistake of the Jews was that they tried to get into a right relationship with God through their own efforts. They tried to earn salvation; whereas the Gentiles simply accepted the offer of God in perfect trust. The Jews should have known that the only way to God was the way of faith and that human achievement led nowhere. Did not Isaiah say: "No one who believes in him will be put to shame"? (Isa.28:16; Rom.10:11.) Did not Joel say: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved"? (Jl.2:32; Rom.10:13.) True, no man can have faith until he hears the offer of God; but to the Jews that offer was made.

They clung to the way of human achievement through obedience to the law; they staked everything on works, but they should have known that the way to God was the way of faith, for the prophets had told them so.

Once again it is to be stressed that all this was God's arrangement; and that it was so arranged to allow the Gentiles to come in. Paul therefore turns to the Gentiles. He orders them to have no pride. They are in the position of wild olive shoots which have been grafted into a garden olive tree. They did not achieve their own salvation any more than the Jews did; in point of fact they are dependent on the Jews; they are only engrafted branches; the root and the stem are still the chosen people. The fact of their own election and the fact of the rejection of the Jews are not to produce pride in Gentile hearts. If that happens, rejection can and will happen to them.

Is this the end? Far from it. It is God's purpose that the Jews will be moved to envy at the relationship of the Gentiles to him and that they will ask to be admitted to it themselves. Did not Moses say: "I make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry"? (Deut.32:21; Rom.10:19.) In the end the Gentiles will be the very instrument by which the Jews will be saved. "And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom.11:26).

So Paul comes to the end of the argument. We may summarily set out its steps.

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(i) Israel is the chosen people.

(ii) To be a member of Israel means more than racial descent. There has always been election within the nation; and the best of the nation has always been the remnant who were faithful.

(iii) This selection by God is not unfair, for he has the right to do what he likes.

(iv) God did harden the hearts of the Jews, but only to open the door to the Gentiles.

(v) Israel's mistake was dependence on human achievement founded on the law; the necessary approach to God is that of the totally trusting heart.

(vi) The Gentiles must have no pride for they are only wild olives grafted into the true olive stock. They must remember that.

(vii) This is not the end; the Jews will be so moved to wondering envy at the privilege that the Gentiles have received that in the end they will be brought in by them.

(viii) So in the very end all, Jew and Gentile, will be saved.

The glory is in the end of Paul's argument. He began by saying that some were elected to reception and some to rejection. In the end he comes to say that it is God's will that all men should be saved.

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Romans 9:1-6

THE TRAGIC FAILURE

Romans 9:1-6

I tell you the truth as one who is united to Christ is bound to do. I do not lie. My conscience bears witness with me in the Holy Spirit when I say that my grief is great and there is unceasing anguish in my heart. I could pray that I myself might be accursed so that I was completely separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen as far as human relationship goes. For my kinsmen are the Israelites, and theirs is the special sonship of God, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the worship of the Temple and the promises. To them the fathers belong. And from them, on his human side, came the Anointed One of God. Blessed for ever be the God who is over all! Amen.

Paul begins his attempt to explain the Jewish rejection of Jesus Christ. He begins, not in anger, but in sorrow. Here is no tempest of anger and no outbreak of enraged condemnation; here is the poignant sorrow of the broken heart. Paul was like the God whom he loved and served--he hated the sin, but he loved the sinner. No man will ever even begin to try to save men unless he first loves them. Paul sees the Jews, not as people to be lashed with anger, but as people to be yearned over with longing love.

Willingly Paul would have laid down his life if he could have won the Jews for Christ. It may be that his thoughts were going back to one of the greatest episodes in Jewish history. When Moses went up the mountain to receive the law from the hands of God, the people who had been left below sinned by making the golden calf and worshipping it. God was wroth with them; and then Moses prayed the great prayer: "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exo.32:32).

Paul says that for the sake of his brethren he would consent to be accursed if it would do any good. The word he uses is anathema (GSN0331) and it is a terrible word. A thing which was anathema (GSN0331) was under the ban; it was devoted to God for utter destruction. When a heathen city was taken, everything in it was devoted to utter destruction, for it was polluted (Deut.3:6; Deut.2:34; Josh.6:17; Josh.7:1-26). If a man tried to lure Israel away from the worship of the true God, he was pitilessly condemned to utter destruction (Deut.13:8-11). The dearest thing in all Paul's life was the fact that nothing could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus; but, if it would do anything to save his brethren, he would even accept banishment from God.

Here again is the great truth that the man who would save the sinner must love him. When a son or a daughter has done something wrong and incurred punishment, many a father and a mother would gladly bear that punishment if only they could. As Myers makes Paul say in his poem Saint Paul:

"Then with a thrill the intolerable craving,
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call;
O to save these, to perish for their saving--
Die for their life, be offered for them all."

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That is what God felt; that is what Paul felt; and that is what we must feel.

Paul did not for a moment deny the place of the Jews in the economy of God. He enumerates their privileges.

(i) In a special sense they were children of God, specially chosen, specially adopted into the family of God. "You are the sons of the Lord your God" (Deut.14:1). "Is not he your father, who created you?" (Deut.32:6). "Israel is my firstborn son" (Exo.4:22). "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt called my son" (Hos.11:1). The Bible is full of this idea of the special sonship of Israel and of Israel's refusal to accept it in the fullest sense.

Boreham somewhere tells how he was visiting in a friend's house when he was a boy. There was one room into which it was forbidden to go. One day he was opposite the room when the door opened and inside he saw a boy of his own age, but in a dreadful state of animal idiocy. He saw the boy's mother go to his side. She must have seen young Boreham in all his health and sanity and then looked at her own son; and the comparison must have pierced her heart. He saw her kneel by the idiot boy's bedside and heard her cry out in a kind of anguish: "I've fed you and clothed you and loved you--and you've never known me." That was what God might have said to Israel--only in this case it was worse, for Israel's rejection was deliberate and open-eyed. It is a terrible thing to break the heart of God.

(ii) Israel had the glory. The shekinah or kaboth occurs again and again in Israel's history. It was the divine splendour of light which descended when God was visiting his people (Exo.16:10; Exo.24:16-17; Exo.29:43; Exo.33:18-22). Israel had seen the glory of God and yet had rejected him. To us it has been given to see the glory of God's love and mercy in the face of Jesus Christ; it is a terrible thing if we then choose the ways of earth.

(iii) Israel had the covenants. A covenant is a relationship entered into between two people, a bargain for mutual profit, an engagement for mutual friendship. Again and again God had approached the people of Israel and entered into a special relationship with them. He did so with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob and upon Mount Sinai when he gave the law.

Irenaeus distinguishes four great occasions when God entered into agreement with men. The first was the covenant with Noah after the flood, and the sign was the rainbow in the heavens which stood for God's promise that the floods would not come again. The second was the covenant with Abraham and its sign was the sign of circumcision. The third was the covenant with the nation entered into on Mount Sinai and its basis was the law. The fourth is the new covenant in Jesus Christ.

It is an amazing thing to think of God approaching men and entering into a pledged relationship with them. It is the simple truth that God has never left men alone. He did not make one approach and then abandon them. He has made approach after approach; and he still makes approach after approach to the individual human soul. He stands at the door and knocks; and it is the awful responsibility of human will that man can refuse to open.

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(iv) They had the law. Israel could never plead ignorance of God's will; God had told them what he desired them to do. If they sinned, they sinned in knowledge and not in ignorance, and the sin of knowledge is the sin against the light which is worst of all.

(v) They had the worship of the Temple. Worship is in essence the approach of the soul to God; and God in the Temple worship had given to the Jews a special road of approach to himself. If the door to God was shut, they had shut it on themselves.

(vi) They had the promises. Israel could never say that it did not know its destiny. God had told them of the task and the privilege which were in store for them in his purpose. They knew that they were destined for great things in the economy of God.

(vii) They had the fathers. They had a tradition and a history; and it is a poor man who can dare to be false to his traditions and to shame the heritage into which he has entered.

(viii) Then comes the culmination. From them there came the Anointed One of God. All else had been a preparation for this; and yet when he came they rejected him. The biggest grief a man can have is to give his child every chance of success, to sacrifice and save and toil to give him the opportunity, and then to find that the child, through his disobedience or rebelliousness or self-indulgence, has failed to grasp it. Therein lies tragedy, for therein is the waste of love's labour and the defeat of love's dream. The tragedy of Israel was that God had prepared her for the day of the coming of his Son--and all the preparation was frustrated. It was not that God's law had been broken; it was that God's love had been spurned. It is not the anger, but the broken heart of God, which lies behind Paul's words.

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Romans 9:7-13

THE CHOICE OF GOD

Romans 9:7-13

But it is not as though the word of God had been completely frustrated. For not all who belong to the race of Israel are really Israel; nor are all really children because they can claim physical descent from Abraham. On the contrary, it is written: "In Isaac will your descendants be called." That is to say, it is not the children who can claim merely physical descent who are really the children of God.

No! It is the children of the promise who are reckoned as the true descendants of Abraham, for the word of the promise runs like this: "I will come at this time and Sarah will have a son." Not only this, but when Rebecca, too, was brought to bed with child by one, I mean Isaac, our father--and note that the children were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad, so that God's purpose in choice should stand, not in consequence of any deeds, but simply because he called them--it was said to her: "The elder will be the servant of the younger." As it stands written: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

If the Jews have rejected and crucified Jesus, the Son of God, is that to say that God's purposes were frustrated and his plan defeated? Paul produces a strange argument to prove that it is not so. In point of fact not all the Jews did reject Jesus; some of them accepted him, for, of course, all the early followers were Jews, as was Paul himself. Now, he says, if we go back through the history of Israel, we will see again and again a process of selection at work. Again and again we see that it was not all Jews who were within the design of God. Some were and some were not. The line of the nation through which God worked, and in which he carried out his plan, was not at any time composed of all those who could claim physical descent from Abraham. At the back of the whole plan there is not merely physical descent; there is the selection, the election of God.

To prove his case, Paul cites two instances from Jewish history and buttresses them with proof texts. Abraham had two sons. There was Ishmael, who was the son of the bondwoman Hagar, and there was Isaac, who was the son of his wife Sarah. Both were true blood descendants of Abraham. It was late in life when Sarah had a son, so late that it was, humanly speaking, an impossibility. As he grew up, there came a day when Ishmael mocked at Isaac. Sarah resented it, and demanded that Hagar and Ishmael should be ejected and that Isaac alone should inherit. Abraham was very unwilling to eject them, but God told him to do so, for it was in Isaac that his descendants would preserve his name (Gen.21:12). Now Ishmael had been the son of natural human desire; but Isaac had been the son of God's promise (Gen.18:10-14). It was to the child of the promise that the real descent was given. Here is the first proof that not all physical descendants of Abraham are to be ranked as the chosen ones.

Within the nation, God's selection and election have gone on.

Paul proceeds to cite another instance. When Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, was with child, she was told by God that in her womb there were two children who would be the fathers of two nations; but that in the days to come the elder would serve and be subject to the younger (Gen.25:23). So the twins Esau and Jacob were born. Esau was the elder twin, and yet the choice of God fell on Jacob, and it was through the line of Jacob that God's will was to be done. To clinch the argument Paul

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cites Mal.1:2-3, where God is represented as saying to the prophet: "I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau."

Paul argues that there is more to Jewishness than descent from Abraham, that the chosen people were not simply the entire sum of all the physical descendants of Abraham, that within that family there was a process of election all through history. A Jew would thoroughly understand and accept the argument so far. The Arabs were the descendants of Ishmael who was a flesh and blood son of Abraham, but the Jews would never have dreamed of saying that the Arabs belonged to the chosen people. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau--that in fact is what Malachi means--and Esau was a true son of Isaac, even the twin brother of Jacob, but no Jew would ever have said that the Edomites had any share in the chosen people. From the Jewish point of view Paul has made his point; there was election within the family of Abraham's physical descendants.

He makes the further point that that selection had nothing to do with deeds and merit. The proof is that Jacob was chosen and Esau was rejected, before either of them was born. The choice was made while they were still in their mother's womb.

Our minds stagger at this argument. It presents us with the picture of a God who apparently quite arbitrarily chooses one and rejects the other. To us it is not a valid argument, because it makes God responsible for an action which does not seem to be ethically justified. But the fact remains that it would strike home to a Jew. And even to us, at the heart of this argument one great truth remains. Everything is of God; behind everything is his action; even the things which seem arbitrary and haphazard go back to him. Nothing in this world moves with aimless feet.

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Romans 9:14-18

THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD

Romans 9:14-18

What shall we then say? Are you going to say that there is injustice with God? God forbid! For, he says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whomsoever I will have mercy and I will have pity on whomsoever I will have pity." So then the whole matter depends not on man's will and not on man's effort, but entirely on the mercy of God. For scripture says to Pharaoh: "For this one thing I assigned you a part in the drama of history--that I might demonstrate my power by what happens to you, and that my name might be broadcast throughout all the world." So then he has mercy on whom he will, but he hardens whom he will.

Paul now begins to meet the very arguments and objections which rise in our own minds. He has stated that in all Israel's history the process of selection and election has gone on; he has stressed the fact that this election was based not on any merit of the person elected but on nothing else than the will of God himself. The objector asks: "Is that fair? Is it just of God to pursue a policy of quite arbitrary selection altogether?" Paul's answer is that God can do what he chooses to do. In the terrible days of the Roman Empire, when no man's life was safe and any one might die at the whim of an irresponsible and suspicious Emperor, Galba said, when he became Emperor, that now "he could do what he liked and do it to anyone." To be honest, that is what Paul is saying about God in this passage.

Again he cites two instances to prove his point and buttresses them with scripture quotations. The first is from Exo.33:19. Moses is beseeching some real proof that God is really with the people of Israel. God's answer is that he will have mercy on those on whom he chooses to have mercy. His attitude of loving mercy to the nation depends on himself alone. The other instance is from Israel's battle for release from Egypt and the power of Pharaoh. When Moses first went to ask for that release, he warned Pharaoh that God had simply brought him on to the stage of history to demonstrate the divine power and to serve to all men as an example of what happens to the man who opposes it (Exo.9-16).

Once again our mind staggers at this argument. It is, of course, not true to say that God can do anything. He cannot do anything which contradicts his own nature. He cannot be responsible for any act which is unjust and which, in fact, breaks his own laws. We find it hard, and even impossible, to conceive of a God who irresponsibly gives mercy to one and not to another, and who raises up a king to be a mere puppet or lay figure through which his own avenging power may be demonstrated. But the argument would be valid and convincing to a Jew, because again it, in essence, means that God is behind everything.

When we get to the foot of this argument, it does conserve one great truth. It is impossible to think of the relationship between God and man in terms of justice. Man has no claim on God whatever. The created has no claim on the Creator. Whenever justice enters into it, the answer is that from God man deserves nothing and can claim nothing. In God's dealings with men, the essential things are his will and his mercy.

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Romans 9:19-29

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

Romans 9:19-29

But, then, you may ask, "If this is so how can God go on blaming men if they do not take his way? Who can withstand God's purpose?" Fellow! Who are you to be arguing with God? Surely the thing that is molded into shape cannot say to the man who molds it, "Why did you make me like this?" Has not the potter complete authority over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for an honourable use and another for a menial service? What if God, although it was his will to demonstrate his wrath and to make known his power, did nonetheless treat with long patience the objects of his wrath, although they were ripe and ready for destruction? Yes, and what if he did it because it is his will to make known the wealth of his glory to the objects of his mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory--I mean us whom he called not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles? Just as he says in Hosea: "A people which was not mine I will call my people; and her who was not beloved I will call beloved." And as he says in that same place where it was said to them: "You are not my people; there they shall be called the sons of the living God." And Isaiah cries about Israel: "Even though the number of the sons of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth completely and summarily." And even as Isaiah foretold: "Unless the Lord of Hosts had left us some descendants, we would have become as Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah."

In the previous passage Paul had been showing that all through the history of Israel there had been going on a process of election and selection by God. A very natural objection arises--if at the back of the whole process there is the selection and rejection of God, how can God possibly blame the men who have rejected him? Surely the fault is not theirs at all, but God's. Paul's answer is blunt almost to the point of crudity. He says that no man has any right to argue with God. When a potter makes a vessel, it cannot talk back to him; he has absolute power over it; out of the one lump of clay he can make one vessel for an honourable purpose and another for a menial purpose, and the clay has nothing to do with it and has no right whatever to protest. In point of fact Paul took this picture from Jeremiah (Jer. 18:1-6). There are two things to be said about it.

(i) It is a bad analogy. One great New Testament commentator has said that this is one of the very few passages which we wish Paul had not written. There is a difference between a human being and a lump of clay. A human being is a person and a lump of clay is a thing. Maybe you can do what you like with a thing, but you cannot do what you like with a person. Clay does not desire to answer back; does not desire to question; cannot think and feel; cannot be bewildered and tortured. If someone has inexplicably suffered some tremendous sorrow, it will not help much to tell him that he has no right to complain, because God can do what he likes. That is the mark of a tyrant and not of a loving Father. It is the basic fact of the gospel that God does not treat men as a potter treats a lump of clay; he treats them as a loving father treats his child.

(ii) But when we have said that we must remember one thing--it was out of anguish of heart that Paul wrote this passage. He was faced with the bewildering fact that God's own people, his own kinsmen, had rejected and crucified God's own Son. It was not that Paul wished to say this; he was

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driven to say it. The only possible explanation he could see was that, for his own purposes, God had somehow blinded his people.

In any event, Paul does not leave the argument there. He goes on to say that this rejection by the Jews had happened in order that the door might be opened to the Gentiles. His argument is not good. It is one thing to say that God used an evil situation to bring good out of it; it is quite another thing to say that he created it to produce good in the end. Paul is saying that God deliberately darkened the minds and blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of the mass of the Jewish people in order that the way might open for the Gentiles to come in. We must remember that this is not the argument of a theologian sitting quietly in a study thinking things out; it is the argument of a man whose heart was in despair to find some reason for a completely incomprehensible situation. In the end the only answer Paul can find is that God did it.

Now Paul was arguing with Jews, and he knew that the only way he could buttress his argument was with quotations from their own scriptures. So he goes on to cite texts to prove that this rejection of the Jews and acceptance of the Gentiles had actually been foretold in the prophets. Hosea had said that God would make a people his people who were not his people (Hos.2:23). He said that a people who were not God's people would be called the sons of God (Hos.1:10). He showed how Isaiah had foreseen a situation when Israel would have been obliterated had not a remnant been left (Isa.10:22-23; Isa.37:32). It is his argument that Israel could have foreseen her doom had she only understood.

It is easy in this passage to criticize him, but the one thing that must be remembered is that Paul, in his despairing anguish for his own people, clung to the fact that somehow everything was God's work. For him there was nothing left to say but that.

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Romans 9:30-33

THE JEWISH MISTAKE

Romans 9:30-33

What shall we then say? The Gentiles who were not looking for a right relationship with God received such a relationship, but it was a relationship which was the result of faith, while Israel which was looking for a law which would produce a right relationship with God never succeeded in finding such a law. Why? Because they tried to get into a right relationship with God, not by trusting God, but by depending on their own human achievements. They stumbled over the stone which makes men stumble, even as it stands written: "I have set in Zion a stone which makes men stumble, and a rock which makes them trip. And he who believes in him will not be put to shame."

Here Paul draws a contrast between two ways of feeling towards God. There was the Jewish way. The aim of the Jew was to set himself right with God and he regarded a right relationship with God as something which could be earned. There is another way to put that which will show really what it means. Fundamentally, the Jewish idea was that a man, by strict obedience to the law, could pile up a credit balance. The result would be that God was in his debt and owed him salvation. But it was obviously a losing battle, because man's imperfection could never satisfy God's perfection; nothing that man could do could even begin to repay what God has done for him.

That is precisely what Paul found. As he said, the Jew spent his life searching for a law, obedience to which would put him right with God, and he never found it because there was no such law to be found. The Gentile had never engaged upon this search; but when he suddenly was confronted with the incredible love of God in Jesus Christ, he simply cast himself upon that love in total trust. It was as if the Gentile saw the Cross and said, "If God loves me like that I can trust him with my life and with my soul."

The Jew sought to put God in his debt; the Gentile was content to be in God's debt. The Jew believed he could win salvation by doing things for God; the Gentile was lost in amazement at what God had done for him. The Jew sought to find the way to God by works; the Gentile came by the way of trust.

"Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and thou alone."

Paul would have said "Amen" to that.

The stone is one of the characteristic references of the early Christian writers. In the Old Testament there is a series of rather mysterious references to the stone. In Isa.8:14 it is said that God shall be for a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling to the houses of Israel. In Isa.28:16 God says that he will lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation. In

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Dn.2:34-35, Dn.2:44-45, there is a reference to a mysterious stone. In Ps.118:22 the Psalmist writes: "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner."

When the Christians began to search the Old Testament for forecasts of Christ they came across these references to this wonderful stone; and they identified Jesus with it. Their warrant was that the gospel story shows Jesus himself making that identification and taking the verse in Ps.118:22 and applying it to himself (Matt.21:42). The Christians thought of the stone which was the sure foundation, the stone which was the corner stone binding the whole building together, the stone which had been rejected and had then become the chief of all the stones, as pictures of Christ himself.

The actual quotation which Paul uses here is a combination of Isa.8:14 and Isa.28:16. The Christians, including Paul, took it to mean this--God had intended his Son to be the foundation of every man's life, but when he came the Jews rejected him, and because they rejected him that gift of God which had been meant for their salvation became the reason for their condemnation. This picture of the stone fascinated the Christians. We get it again and again in the New Testament (Ac.4:11; Eph.2:20; 1Pet.2:4-6).

The eternal truth behind this thought is this. Jesus was sent into this world to be the Saviour of men; but he is also the touch-stone by which all men are judged. If a man's heart goes out in love and submission to him, Jesus is for him salvation. If a man's heart is entirely unmoved or angrily rebellious, Jesus is for him condemnation. Jesus came into the world for our salvation, but by his attitude to him a man can either gain salvation or merit condemnation.

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Romans 10:1-13

THE MISTAKEN ZEAL

Romans 10:1-13

Brothers, the desire of my heart for the Jews and my prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I do say this for them--that they do have a zeal for God, but it is not a zeal which is based on a real knowledge. For they do not realize that a man can only achieve the status of righteousness by God's gift, and they seek to establish their own status, and so they have not submitted themselves to that power of God which alone can make them righteous in his sight. For Christ is the end of the whole system of law. for he came to bring everyone who believes and trusts into a right relationship with God. Moses writes that the man who works at the righteousness which comes from the law shall live by it. But the righteousness which stems from faith speaks like this--"Do not say in your heart, 'Who shall go up into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), or, 'Who shall go down into the deep abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ again from among the dead)." But what does it say? "The word is near you.

It is in your mouth and in your heart." And that word is the message of faith which we proclaim. This word of faith is our message, that, if you acknowledge with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For belief with the heart is the way to a right relationship with God, and confession with the mouth is the way to salvation, For scripture says, "Every one who believes in him will not be put to shame," for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord over all, and he has ample resources for all who call upon him. For "every one who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Paul has been saying some hard things about the Jews. He has been telling them truths which were difficult for them to hear and bear. The whole passage Rom.9-11 is a condemnation of the Jewish attitude to religion. Yet from beginning to end there is no anger in it; there is nothing but wistful longing and heartfelt yearning. It is Paul's one desire that the Jews may be saved.

If ever we are to bring men to the Christian faith, our attitude must be the same. Great preachers have known this. "Don't scold," said one. "Always remember to keep your voice down," said another. A great present-day preacher called preaching "pleading with men." Jesus wept over Jerusalem. There is a preaching which blasts the sinner with tempestuously angry words; but always Paul speaks the truth in love.

Paul was entirely ready to admit that the Jews were zealous for God; but he also saw that their zeal was a misdirected thing. Jewish religion was based on meticulous obedience to the law. Now it is clear that that obedience could be given only by a man who was desperately in earnest about his religion. It was not an easy thing; it must often have been made extremely inconvenient; and it must often have made life very uncomfortable.

Take the Sabbath law. It was laid down exactly how far a man could walk on the Sabbath. It was laid down that he must lift no burden which weighed more than two dried figs. It was laid down that no food must be cooked on the Sabbath. It was laid down that, in the event of sickness, measures might be taken to keep the patient from becoming worse, but not to make him better. To

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this day there are strict orthodox Jews in this country who will not poke or mend a fire on the Sabbath or switch on a light. If a fire has to be poked a Gentile is employed to do it. If a Jew is wealthy enough he will sometimes instal a time switch to switch on the lights at dusk on Sabbath without his doing so himself.

This is not something to smile at, but to admire. The way of the law was not easy. No one would undertake it at all unless he was supremely in earnest. Zealous the Jews were and are. Paul had no difficulty in granting that, but the zeal was misdirected and misapplied.

In the Fourth Book of Maccabees there is an amazing incident. Eleazar the priest was brought before Antiochus Epiphanes whose aim was to stamp out Jewish religion. Antiochus ordered him to eat pork. The old man refused. "No, not if you pluck out my eyes, and consume my bowels in the fire. We, O Antiochus," he said, "who live under a divine law, consider no compulsion to be so forcible as obedience to our law." If he had to die, his fathers would receive him "holy and pure." He was ordered to be beaten. "His flesh was torn off by the whips, and he streamed down with blood, and his flanks were laid open by wounds." He fell and a soldier kicked him. In the end the soldiers so pitied him that they brought him dressed meat, which was not pork, and told him to eat it and say that he had eaten pork. He refused. He was in the end killed. "I am dying by fiery torments for thy law's sake," he prayed to God. "He resisted," says the writer, "even to the agonies of death, for the law's sake."

And what was all this about? It was about eating pork. It seems incredible that a man should die like that for a law like that. But the Jews did so die. Truly they had a zeal for the law. No man can say that they were not desperately in earnest about their service to God.

The whole Jewish approach was that by this kind of obedience to the law a man earned credit with God. Nothing shows better the Jewish attitude than the three classes into which they divided mankind. There were those who were good, whose balance was on the right side; there were those who were bad, whose balance was on the debit side; there were those who were in between, who, by doing one more good work, could become good. It was all a matter of law and achievement. To this Paul answers: "Christ is the end of the law." What he meant was: "Christ is the end of legalism." The relationship between God and man is no longer the relationship between a creditor and a debtor, between an earner and an assessor, between a judge and a man standing at the bar of judgment. Because of Jesus Christ, man is no longer faced with the task of satisfying God's justice; he need only accept his love. He has no longer to win God's favour; he need simply take the grace and love and mercy which he freely offers.

To make his point Paul uses two Old Testament quotations. First, he quotes Lev.18:5 where it says that, if a man meticulously obeys the commandments of the law, he will find life. That is true--but no one ever has. Then he quotes Deut.30:12-13. Moses is saying that God's law is not inaccessible and impossible; it is there in a man's mouth and life and heart. Paul allegorizes that passage. It was not our effort which brought Christ into the world or raised him from the dead. It is not our effort which wins us goodness. The thing is done for us, and we have only to accept.

Rom.10:9-10 are of prime importance. They give us the basis of the first Christian creed.

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Romans 10:1-13

(i) A man must say Jesus Christ is Lord. The word for Lord is kurios (GSN2962). This is the key word of early Christianity. It has four stages of meaning. (a) It is the normal title of respect like the English sir, the French monsieur, the German herr. (b) It is the normal title of the Roman Emperors. (c) It is the normal title of the Greek gods, prefaced before the god's name. Kurios Serapis is Lord Serapis. (d) In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures it is the regular translation of the divine name, Jahveh or Jehovah. So, then, if a man called Jesus kurios (GSN2962) he was ranking him with the Emperor and with God; he was giving him the supreme place in his life; he was pledging him implicit obedience and reverent worship. To call Jesus kurios (GSN2962) was to count him unique. First, then, a man to be a Christian must have a sense of the utter uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

(ii) A man must believe that Jesus is risen from the dead. The resurrection was an essential of Christian belief. The Christian must believe not only that Jesus lived, but also that he lives. He must not only know about Christ: he must know him. He is not studying an historical personage, however great; he is living with a real presence. He must know not only Christ the martyr: he must know Christ the victor, too.

(iii) But a man must not only believe in his heart; he must confess with his lips. Christianity is belief plus confession; it involves witness before men. Not only God, but also our fellow men, must know what side we are on.

A Jew would find it hard to believe that the way to God was not through the law; this way of trust and of acceptance was shatteringly and incredibly new to him. Further, he would have real difficulty in believing that the way to God was open to everybody. The Gentiles did not seem to him to be in the same position as the Jews at all. So Paul concludes his argument by citing two Old Testament texts to prove his case. First, he cites Isa.28:16: "Every one who believes in him will not be put to shame." There is nothing about law there; it is all based on faith. Second, he cites Jl.2:32: "All who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered." There is no limitation there; the promise is to everyone; therefore, there is no difference between Jew and Greek.

In essence this passage is an appeal to the Jews to abandon the way of legalism and accept the way of grace. It is an appeal to them to see that their zeal is misplaced. It is an appeal to listen to the prophets who long ago declared that faith is the only way to God, and that that way is open to every man.

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Romans 10:14-21

THE DESTRUCTION OF EXCUSES

Romans 10:14-21

How are they to call on him on whom they have not believed? How are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? How are they to hear without someone to proclaim the good news to them? How are they to proclaim the good news unless they are sent to do so? But this is the very thing that has happened, as it stands written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news of good things."

But all have not obeyed the good news. That is quite true, because Isaiah says: "Lord, who has believed what they heard from us?" So, then, faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the word which comes from Christ and which tells of him. But, suppose I still say: "Can it be that they have not heard?" Indeed they have. "Their voice is gone out to all the earth, and their words to the boundaries of the inhabited world." Well, then, suppose I say: "Did Israel not understand?" First, Moses says: "I will make you jealous of a nation which is no nation. I will make you angry with a nation that has no understanding." Then Isaiah says, greatly daring: "I was found by those who did not seek me. I appeared plainly to those who did not enquire after me." And he says to Israel: "All the day I have stretched out my hands to a people who are disobedient and contrary."

It is agreed by all commentators that this is one of the most difficult and obscure passages in the letter to the Romans. It seems to us that what we have here is not so much a finished passage as summary notes. There is a kind of telegraphic quality about the writing. It may well be that what we have here is the notes of some address which Paul was in the habit of making to the Jews to convince them of their error.

Basically the scheme is this--in the previous passage Paul has been saying that the way to God is not that of works and of legalism, but of faith and trust. The objection is: But what if the Jews never heard of that? It is with that objection Paul deals; and, as he deals with it in its various forms, on each occasion he clinches his answer with a text from scripture.

Let us take the objections and the answering scripture texts one by one.

(i) The first objection is: "You cannot call on God unless you believe in him. You cannot believe in him unless you hear about him. You cannot hear about him unless there is someone to proclaim the good news. There can be no one to proclaim the good news unless God commissions someone to do so." Paul deals with that objection by quoting Isa.52:7. There the prophet points out how welcome those are who bring the good news of good things. So Paul's first answer is: "You cannot say there was no messenger; Isaiah describes these very messengers; and Isaiah lived long ago."

(ii) The second objection is: "But, in point of fact, Israel did not obey the good news, even if your argument is true. What have you to say to that?" Paul's answer is: "Israel's disbelief was only to be expected, for, long ago, Isaiah was moved to say in despair: 'Lord, who has believed what we have heard?'" (Isa.53:1.) It is true that Israel did not accept the good news from God, and in their refusal they were simply running true to form; history was repeating itself.

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(iii) The third objection is a restatement of the first: But, what if I insist that they never got the chance to hear? This time Paul quotes Ps.19:4: "Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." His answer is: "You cannot say that Israel never got the chance to hear; for scripture plainly says that God's message has gone out to all the world."

(iv) The fourth objection is: "But what if Israel did not understand?" Apparently the meaning is: "What if the message was so difficult to grasp that even when Israel did hear it they were unable to grasp its significance?" Here is where the passage becomes really difficult. But Paul's answer is: "Israel may have failed to understand; but the Gentiles did not. They grasped the meaning of this offer all right, when it came to them unexpectedly and unsought." To prove this point Paul quotes two passages. One is from Deut.32:21 where God says that, because of Israel's disobedience and rebellion, he will transfer his favour to another people, and they will be forced to become jealous of a nation which has no nation. The second passage is from Isa.65:1 where God says that, in a strange way, he has been found by a people who were not looking for him at all.

Finally, Paul insists that, all through history, God has been stretching out hands of appeal to Israel, and Israel has always been disobedient and perverse.

A passage like this may seem strange to us and unconvincing; and it may seem that some at least of the texts Paul quotes have been wrenched out of their context and made to mean what they were never intended to mean. Nevertheless there is in this passage something of permanent value. Beneath it there runs the conviction that there are certain kinds of ignorance which are inexcusable.

(i) There is the ignorance which comes from neglect of knowledge. There is a legal maxim which says that genuine ignorance may be a defence, but neglect of knowledge never is. A man cannot be blamed for not knowing what he never had a chance to know; but he can be blamed for neglecting to know that which was always open to him. For instance, if a man signs a contract without having read the conditions, he cannot complain if afterwards he finds out that the conditions are very different from what he thought they were. If we fail to equip ourselves for a task when every chance is given to us to equip ourselves adequately for it, we must stand condemned. A man is responsible for failing to know what he might have known.

(ii) There is the ignorance which comes from wilful blindness. Men have an infinite and fatal capacity for shutting their minds to what they do not wish to see, and stopping their ears to what they do not wish to hear. A man may be well aware that some habit, some indulgence, some way of life, some friendship, some association must have disastrous results; but he may simply refuse to look at the facts. To turn a blind eye may be in some few cases a virtue; in most cases it is folly.

(iii) There is the ignorance which is in essence a lie. The things about which we are in doubt are far fewer than we would like to think. There are in reality very few times when we can honestly say: "I never knew that things would turn out like this." God gave us conscience and the guidance of his Holy Spirit; and often we plead ignorance, when, if we were honest, we would have to admit that in our heart of hearts we knew the truth.

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One thing remains to be said of this passage. In the argument so far as it has gone there is a paradox. All through this section Paul has been driving home the personal responsibility of the Jews. They ought to have known better: they had every chance to know better; but they rejected the appeal of God. Now he began the argument by saying that everything was of God and that men had no more to do with it than the clay had to do with the work of the potter. He has set two things side by side; everything is of God, and everything is of human choice. Paul makes no attempt to resolve this dilemma; and the fact is that there is no resolution of it. It is a dilemma of human experience. We know that God is behind everything; and yet, at the same time, we know that we have free will and can accept or reject God's offer. It is the paradox of the human situation that God is in control and yet the human will is free.

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Romans 11:1-12

THE CALLOUS ON THE HEART

Romans 11:1-12

So then, I ask, "Has God repudiated his people?" God forbid! I, too, am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not repudiated his people whom long ago he marked out for his purposes. Do you not know what scripture says in the passage about Elijah? You remember how he talked to God in complaint against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets; they have torn down your altars; and I alone am left and they are seeking my life." But what was the answer that came to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So, then, at this present time too, there is a remnant chosen by his grace. And if they were chosen by grace, their relationship to God is no longer dependent on works, for, if that were so, grace is no longer grace. What then? Israel has not obtained that for which she is searching; but the chosen remnant has obtained it, while the rest have been made so dull and insensitive in heart that they cannot see.

As it stands written: "God gave them a spirit of lethargy--eyes not to see, ears not to hear--down to this day." And David says: "Let their table become a snare, and a trap, and a thing to trip them up, and a retribution for them. and let their backs be bent for ever." So, I say, "Have they stumbled that their fall might be complete?" God forbid! So far from that, salvation has become a gift for the Gentiles because of their fall, so as to move them to jealousy of the Gentiles. If their fall has brought wealth to the world, if their failure has brought wealth to the Gentiles, how much more shall the whole world be enriched, when they come in, and the whole process of salvation is completed?

There was a question now to be asked which any Jew was bound to ask. Does all this mean that God has repudiated his people? That is a question that Paul's heart cannot bear. After all, he himself is a member of that people. So he falls back on an idea which runs through much of the Old Testament. In the days of Elijah, Elijah was in despair (1Kgs.19:10-18). He had come to the conclusion that he alone was left to be true to God. But God told him that, in fact, there were still seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. So into Jewish thought came the idea of The Remnant.

The prophets began to see that there never was a time, and never would be, when the whole nation was true to God; nevertheless, always within the nation a remnant was left who had never forsaken their loyalty or compromised their faith. Prophet after prophet came to see this. Amos (Am.9:8-10) thought of God sifting men as corn is in a sieve until only the good are left. Micah (Mic.2:12; Mic.5:3) had a vision of God gathering the remnant of Israel. Zephaniah (Zeph.3:12-13) had the same idea. Jeremiah foresaw the remnant being gathered from all the countries throughout which they had been scattered (Jer.23:3). Ezekiel, the individualist, was convinced that a man could not be saved by either a national or an inherited righteousness; the righteous would deliver their own souls by their righteousness (Eze.14:14,20,22). Above all, this idea dominated the thought of Isaiah. He called his son Shear-Jashub, which means The Salvation of the Remnant. Again and again he returns to this idea of the faithful remnant who will be saved by God (Isa.7:3; Isa.8:2; Isa.8:18; Isa.9:12; Isa.6:9-13).

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There is a tremendous truth beginning to dawn here. As one great scholar put it: "No Church or nation is saved en masse." The idea of a Chosen People will not hold water for this basic reason. The relationship with God is an individual relationship. A man must give his own heart and surrender his own life to God. God does not call men in crowds; he has "His own secret stairway into every heart." A man is not saved because he is a member of a nation or of a family, or because he has inherited righteousness and salvation from his ancestors; he is saved because he has made a personal decision for God. It is not now the whole nation who are lumped together as the Chosen People. It is those individual men and women who have given their hearts to God, of whom the remnant is composed.

Paul's argument is that the Jewish nation has not been rejected; but it is not the nation as a whole, but the faithful remnant within it who are the true Jews.

What of the others? It is here that Paul has a terrible thought. He has the idea of God sending a kind of torpor upon them, a drowsy sleep in which they cannot and will not hear. He puts together the thought of a series of Old Testament passages to prove this (Deut.29:4; Isa.6:9-10; Isa.29:10). He quotes Ps.69:22-23. "Let their table become a snare." The idea is that men are sitting feasting comfortably at their banquet; and their very sense of safety has become their ruin. They are so secure in their fancied safety that the enemy can come upon them all unaware. That is what the Jews were like. They were so secure, so self-satisfied, so at ease in their confidence of being the Chosen People, that that very idea had become the thing that ruined them.

The day will come when they cannot see at all, and when they will grope with bent backs like men stumbling blindly in the dark. In Rom.11:7 the King James Version says, "they have been blinded." More correctly, it should be, "they have been hardened." The verb is poroun (GSN4456). The noun porosis (GSN4457) will give us the meaning better. It is a medical word, and it means a callus. It was specially used for the callus which forms round the fracture when a bone is broken, the hard bone formation which helps to mend the break. When a callus grows on any part of the body that part loses feeling. It becomes insensitive. The minds of the mass of the people have become insensitive; they can no longer hear and feel the appeal of God.

It can happen to any man. If a man takes his own way long enough, he will in the end become insensitive to the appeal of God. If he goes on sinning, he will in the end become insensitive to the horror of sin and the fascination of goodness. If a man lives long enough in ugly conditions he will in the end become insensitive to them. As Burns wrote:

"I waive the quantum of the sin,
The hazard of concealing;
But och! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling!"

Just as a callus can grow on the hand, a callus can grow on the heart. That is what had happened to the mass of Israel. God save us from that!

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But Paul has more to say. That is tragedy, but out of it God has brought good, because that very insensitiveness of Israel opened the way to the Gentiles to come in. Because Israel did not want the message of the good news, it went out to people who were ready to welcome it. Israel's refusal has enriched the world.

Then Paul touches on the dream which is behind it all. If the refusal of Israel has enriched the world by opening a door to the Gentiles, what will the riches be like at the end of the day, when God's plan is fully completed and Israel comes in, too?

So, in the end, after tragedy comes the hope. Israel became insensitive, the nation with the callus on her heart; the Gentiles came by faith and trust into the love of God; but a day will come when the love of God will act like a solvent, even on the callus of the heart, and both Gentile and Jew will be gathered in. It is Paul's conviction that nothing in the end can defeat the love of God.

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Romans 11:13-24

THE WILD OLIVE--PRIVILEGE AND WARNING

Romans 11:13-24

Now I speak to you Gentiles. You well know that in so far as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my office, for somehow I want to find a way to move my own flesh and blood to envy of the Gentiles, so that I may save some of them; for, if the fact that they are cast away has resulted in the reconciliation of the world to God, what will their reception mean? It can only be like life from the dead! If the first part of the dough is consecrated to God, so is the whole lump; if the root is consecrated to God, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been cut off, and if you like a wild olive have been grafted in among them, and if you have become a sharer in the rich root of the olive, do not allow yourself to look down boastfully upon the branches. If you are tempted to act like that, remember you do not bear the root but the root bears you.

You will say: "Branches have been broken off that I may be grafted in." Well said! They were broken off because of their lack of faith; and you stand because of faith. Do not become proudly contemptuous, but keep yourself in godly fear; for if God did not spare the branches, which were natural branches, neither will he spare you. See, then, the kindness and the severity of God. On those who fell there comes the severity.. on you there comes the kindness of God, if only you remain in that kindness. If you do not, you, too, will be cut away. But they, if they do not continue in their lack of faith, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. For, if you were cut from the olive, which is by nature a wild olive, and, if, contrary to nature, you were engrafted into the garden olive, how much more will the natural branches be engrafted into the olive to which they really belong?

It is to the Jews that Paul has been talking up to this time, and now he turns to the Gentiles. He is the apostle to the Gentiles, but he cannot ever forget his own people. In fact he goes the length of saying that one of his main objects is to move the Jews to envy when they see what Christianity has done for the Gentiles. One of the surest ways to make a man desire Christianity is to make him see in actual life what it can do.

There was a soldier who was wounded in battle. The padre crept out and did what he could for him. He stayed with him when the remainder of the troops retreated. In the heat of the day he gave him water from his own waterbottle, while he himself remained parched with thirst. In the night, when the chill frost came down, he covered the wounded man with his own coat, and finally wrapped him up in even more of his clothes to save him from the cold. In the end the wounded man looked up at the padre. "Padre," he said, "you're a Christian?" "I try to be," said the padre. "Then," said the wounded man, "if Christianity makes a man do for another man what you have done for me, tell me about it, because I want it." Christianity in action moved him to envy a faith which could produce a life like that.

It was Paul's hope and prayer and ambition that some day the Jews would see what Christianity had done for the Gentiles and be moved to desire it.

To Paul it would be paradise if the Jews came in. If the rejection of the Jews had done so much, if, through it, the Gentile world had been reconciled to God, what superlative glory must come

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when the Jews came in. If the tragedy of rejection has had results so wonderful, what will the happy ending be like, when the tragedy of rejection has changed to the glory of reception? Paul can only say that it will be like life from the dead.

Then Paul uses two pictures to show that the Jews can never be finally rejected. All food, before it was eaten, had to be offered to God. So the law laid it down (Num.15:19-20) that, if dough was being prepared, the first part of it must be offered to God; when that was done, the whole lump of dough became sacred. It was not necessary, as it were, to offer every separate mouthful to God. The offering of the first part sanctified the whole. It was a common thing to plant sacred trees in places sacred to the gods. When the sapling was planted, it was dedicated to God; and thereafter every branch that came from it was sacred to God.

What Paul deduces from that is this--the patriarchs were sacred to God; they had in a special way heard God's voice and obeyed God's word; in a special way they had been chosen and consecrated by God. From them the whole nation sprang; and just as the first consecrated handful of dough made the whole lump sacred and the dedication of the sapling made the whole tree sacred, so the special consecration of its founders made the whole nation sacred in a special way to God. There is truth here. The remnant in Israel did not make themselves what they were; they inherited faith from their forefathers before them. Every one of us lives to some extent on the spiritual capital of the past. None of us is self-made. We are what godly parents and ancestors have made us; and, even if we strayed far away and shamed our heritage, we cannot totally part ourselves from the goodness and fidelity that made us what we are.

Paul goes on to use a long allegory. More than once the prophets had pictured the nation of Israel as the olive tree of God. That was natural, because the olive tree was the common est and most useful tree in the Mediterranean world. "The Lord once called you a green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit" (Jer.11:16). "His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive" (Hos.14:6). So Paul thinks of the Gentiles as branches of wild olive engrafted into the garden olive tree which was Israel. From the point of view of horticulture Paul's picture is impossible. In horticulture it is the good olive that is grafted into the stock of the wild olive so that a fruit-bearing olive may result. The process that Paul pictures was never used in actual practice, because it would have served no useful purpose. But the point Paul wishes to make is quite clear. The Gentiles had been out in the deserts and the wildernesses and among the wild briars; and now, by the act of God's grace, they are engrafted into the richness and fertility of the garden olive tree.

Out of this picture Paul has two words to speak.

(i) The first is a word of warning. It would have been easy for the Gentiles to develop an attitude of contempt. Had not the Jews been rejected that they might enter in? In a world where the Jews were universally hated such an attitude would have been all too easy. Paul's warning is still necessary. In effect, he says there would have been no such thing as Christianity unless there had been Judaism first. It will be a bad day when the Christian Church forgets its debt to the root from which it sprang. It has a debt to Judaism which it can never pay by any other means than by bringing Christianity to the Jews. So Paul warns the Gentiles against contempt. Grimly, he says that

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if the true branches were lopped off because of their unbelief, still more can that happen to the branches which were only grafted on.

(ii) The second is a word of hope. The Gentiles have experienced God's kindness; and the Jews his severity. If the Gentiles remain in faith they will remain in that kindness; but, if the Jews come out of their unbelief and enter into belief, once again they, too, will be engrafted in; for, says Paul, if it was possible for a wild olive to be engrafted into the garden olive tree, how much more is it possible that the olive tree's own natural branches can be grafted in again? Once again Paul is dreaming of the day when the Jews will come in.

Much in this passage is hard to understand. It thinks in pictures which are out of our world altogether; but one thing is crystal clear--the connection between Judaism and Christianity, between the old and the new. Here is the answer to those who wish to discard the Old Testament as merely a Jewish book which is irrelevant for Christianity. He is a foolish man who kicks away the ladder which raised him to the height which he has reached. It would be a foolish branch which cut itself off from its stem. The Jewish faith is the root from which Christianity grew. The consummation will come only when the wild olive and the garden olive are one, and when there are no branches at all left unengrafted on the parent stem.

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Romans 11:25-32

THAT ALL MAY BE OF MERCY

Romans 11:25-32

Brothers, I do want you to grasp this secret which only those who know God can understand, because I do not want you to become conceited about your own wisdom. I want you to understand that it is only a partial hardening which has happened to Israel, and it will last only until the full number of the Gentiles shall have come in. And then, in the end, all Israel will be saved, as it stands written: "A Saviour will come forth from Zion; and he will remove all kinds of wickedness from Jacob. This is the fulfilment of my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As far as the good news goes, they are enemies of God--but it is for your sake. But as far as God's choice goes, they are beloved of God, for their fathers' sakes, for the free gifts and the calling of God can never be gone back upon. Once you disobeyed God, but now you have found his mercy because of their disobedience; just so, they have now disobeyed, so that they now may enter into the same mercy as you have now found.

For God has shut up all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.

Paul is coming to the end of his argument. He has faced a bewildering, and, for a Jew, a heartbreaking situation. Somehow he has had to find an explanation of the fact that God's people rejected his Son when he came into the world. Paul never shut his eyes to that tragic fact, but he found a way in which the whole tragic situation could be fitted into the plan of God. It is true that the Jews rejected Christ; but, as Paul saw it, that rejection happened in order that Christ might be offered to the Gentiles. To maintain the sovereignty of God's purpose, Paul even went the length of saying that it was he himself who hardened the hearts of the Jews in order to open a way to the Gentiles; but, even then, however contradictory it might sound, he still insisted on the personal responsibility of the Jews for their failure to accept God's offer. Paul held fast at one and the same time to divine sovereignty and human responsibility. But now comes the note of hope. His argument is a little complicated, and it will make it easier if we try to separate the various strands in it.

(i) Paul was sure that this hardening of the hearts of the Jews was neither total nor permanent. It was to serve a purpose, and when that purpose had been achieved, it would be taken away.

(ii) Paul sets out the paradox of the Jewish place in the plan of God. In order that the Gentiles might come in and that the universal purpose of the gospel might be fulfilled, the Jews had arrived at a situation where they were the enemies of God. The word that Paul uses is *echthroi* (GSN2190). It is difficult to translate, because it has both an active and a passive meaning. It can mean either hating or hated. It may well be that in this passage it has to be read in the two meanings at the one time. The Jews were hostile to God and had refused his offer, and therefore they were under his displeasure. That was the present fact about the Jews. But there was another fact about them. Nothing could alter the fact that they were God's chosen people and had a special place in his plan. No matter what they did, God could never go back upon his word. His promise had been made to the fathers, and it must be fulfilled.

It was therefore clear to Paul, and he quotes Isa.59:20-21 to prove it, that God's rejection of the Jews could not be permanent; they, too, in the end must come in.

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(iii) Then Paul has a strange thought. "God," he says, "shut up all men to disobedience that he may have mercy upon all." The one thing Paul cannot conceive of is that any man of any nation could merit his own salvation. Now, if the Jews had observed complete obedience to God's will, they might well have reckoned that they had earned the salvation of God as a right. So Paul is saying that God involved the Jews in disobedience in order that when his salvation did come to them it might be unmistakably an act of his mercy and due in no way to their merit. Neither Jew nor Gentile could ever be saved apart from the mercy of God.

In many ways Paul's argument may seem strange to us and the "proofs" he brings forward unconvincing. Our minds and hearts may even shudder at some of the things he says. But the argument is not irrelevant, for the tremendous thing at the back of it is a philosophy of history. To Paul, God was in control. Nothing moved with aimless feet. Not even the most heartbreaking event was outside the purpose of God. Events could never run amok. The purposes of God could never be frustrated.

It is told that once a child stood at the window on a night when the gale was terrifying in its savage velocity. "God," she said, "must have lost grip of his winds tonight." To Paul, that was precisely what never happened. Nothing was ever out of God's control; everything was serving his purpose.

To that Paul would have added another tremendous conviction. He would have insisted that in it and through it all, God's purpose was a purpose of salvation and not of destruction. It may well be that Paul would even have gone the length of saying that God's arranging of things was designed to save men even against their will. In the last analysis it was not the wrath of God which was pursuing men, but the love of God which was tracking them down.

The situation of Israel was exactly that which Francis Thompson so movingly portrayed in The Hound of Heaven.

"I fled him down the nights and down the days;
I fled him down the arches of the years;
I fled him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from him, and under running laughter.

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat--and a Voice beat
More instant than the feet--
'All things betray thee, who betrayest me.'"

Then comes the time when the fugitive is beaten.

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"Naked I wait thy love's uplifted stroke!
My harness piece by piece thou hast hewn from me,
And smitten to my knee,
I am defenceless utterly."

Then comes the end:

"Halts by me that footfall;
Is my gloom. after all,
Shade of his hand, outstretched caressingly?
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am he whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest me!'"

That was exactly Israel's situation. They fought their long battle against God; they are still fighting it. But God's pursuing love is ever after them. Whatever else Rom.9-11 may sometimes read like, it is in the last analysis the story of the still uncompleted pursuit of love.

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Romans 11:33-36

THE CRY OF THE ADORING HEART

Romans 11:33-36

O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How his decisions are beyond the mind of man to trace! How mysterious are his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or, who has become his counsellor? Who has first given anything to him, so that he is due any repayment from God? For all things come from him, and exist through him, and end in him. To him be glory for ever! Amen.

Paul never wrote a more characteristic passage than this. Here theology turns to poetry. Here the seeking of the mind turns to the adoration of the heart. In the end one must pass out in a mystery that man cannot now understand but at whose heart is love. If a man can say that all things come from God, that all things have their being through him, and that all things end in him, what more is left to say? There is a certain paradox in the human situation. God gave man a mind, and it is man's duty to use that mind to think to the very limit of human thought. But it is also true that there are times when that limit is reached and all that is left is to accept and to adore.

"How could I praise,
If such as I might understand?"

Paul had battled with a heartbreaking problem with every resource which his great mind possessed. He does not say that he has solved it, as one might neatly solve a geometrical problem; but he does say that, having done his best, he is content to leave it to the love and power of God. At many times in life there is nothing left but to say: "I cannot grasp thy mind, but with my whole heart I trust thy love. Thy will be done!"

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Romans 12:1-2

THE TRUE WORSHIP AND THE ESSENTIAL CHANGE

Romans 12:1-2

Brothers, I call upon you, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies to him, a living, consecrated sacrifice, well-pleasing to God--for that is the only kind of worship which is truly spiritual. And do not shape your lives to meet the fleeting fashions of this world; but be transformed from it, by the renewal of your mind, until the very essence of your being is altered, so that, in your own life, you may prove that the will of God is good and well pleasing and perfect.

Here we have Paul following the pattern he always followed when he wrote to his friends. He always ends his letters with practical advice. The sweep of his mind may search through the infinities, but he never gets lost in them; he always finishes with his feet firmly planted upon the earth. He can, and does, wrestle with the deepest problems which theology has to offer, but he always ends with the ethical demands which govern every man.

"Present your bodies to God," he says. There is no more characteristically Christian demand. We have already seen that that is what a Greek would never say. To the Greek, what mattered was the spirit; the body was only a prison-house, something to be despised and even to be ashamed of. No real Christian ever believed that. The Christian believes that his body belongs to God just as much as his soul does, and that he can serve him just as well with his body as with his mind or his spirit.

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the instrument through which the Holy Spirit works. After all, the great fact of the incarnation basically means that God did not grudge to take a human body upon himself, to live in it and to work through it. Take the case of a church or a cathedral. It is built for the offering of worship to God. But it has to be designed by the mind of some architect; it has to be built by the hands of craftsmen and of labouring men; only then does it become a shrine where men meet to worship. It is a product of the mind and the body and the spirit of man.

"So," Paul says, "take your body; take all the tasks that you have to do every day; take the ordinary work of the shop, the factory, the shipyard, the mine; and offer all that as an act of worship to God." The word in Rom.12:1 which we along with the Revised Standard Version have translated worship, has an interesting history. It is *latreia* (GSN2999), the noun of the verb *latreuein* (GSN3000). Originally *latreuein* (GSN3000) meant to work for hire or pay. It was the word used of the labouring man who gave his strength to an employer in return for the pay the employer would give him. It denotes, not slavery, but the voluntary undertaking of work. It then came to mean quite generally to serve; but it also came to mean that to which a man gives his whole life. For instance, a man could be said *latreuein kallei*, which means to give his life to the service of beauty. In that sense, it came very near meaning to dedicate one's life to. Finally, it came to be the word distinctively used of the service of the gods. In the Bible it never means human service; it is always used of service to and worship of God.

Here we have a most significant thing. True worship is the offering to God of one's body, and all that one does every day with it. Real worship is not the offering to God of a liturgy, however noble,

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Romans 12:1-2

and a ritual, however magnificent. Real worship is the offering of everyday life to him, not something transacted in a church, but something which sees the whole world as the temple of the living God. As Whittier wrote:

"For he whom Jesus loved hath truly spoken:
The holier worship which he deigns to bless,
Restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken,
And feeds the widow and the fatherless."

A man may say, "I am going to church to worship God," but he should also be able to say, "I am going to the factory, the shop, the office, the school, the garage, the locomotive shed, the mine, the shipyard, the field, the byre, the garden, to worship God."

This, Paul goes on, demands a radical change. We must not be conformed to the world, but transformed from it. To express this idea he uses two almost untranslatable Greek words--words which we have taken almost sentences to express. The word he uses to be conformed to the world is *suschematizesthai* (GSN4964); its root is *schema* (GSN4976), which means the outward form that varies from year to year and from day to day. A man's *schema* (GSN4976) is not the same when he is seventeen as it is when he is seventy; it is not the same when he goes out to work as when he is dressed for dinner. It is continuously altering. So Paul says, "Don't try to match your life to all the fashions of this world; don't be like a chameleon which takes its colour from its surroundings."

The word he uses for being transformed from the world is *metamorphousthai* (GSN3339). Its root is *morphe* (GSN3444), which means the essential unchanging shape or element of anything. A man has not the same *schema* (GSN4976) at seventeen and seventy, but he has the same *morphe* (GSN3444); a man in dungarees has not the same *schema* (GSN4976) as a man in evening dress, but he has the same *morphe* (GSN3444); his outward form changes, but inwardly he is the same person. So, Paul says, to worship and serve God, we must undergo a change, not of our outward form, but of our inward personality. What is that change? Paul would say that left to ourselves we live a life *kata* (GSN2596) *sarka* (GSN4561), dominated by human nature at its lowest; in Christ we live a life *kata* (GSN2596) *Christon* (GSN5547) or *kata* (GSN2596) *pneuma* (GSN4151), dominated by Christ or by the Spirit. The essential man has been changed; now he lives, not a self-centred, but a Christ-centred life.

This must happen, Paul says, by the renewal of your mind. The word he uses for renewal is *anakainosis* (GSN0342). In Greek there are two words for new--*neos* (GSN3501) and *kainos* (GSN2537). *Neos* (GSN3501) means new in point of time; *kainos* (GSN2537) means new in point of character and nature. A newly manufactured pencil is *neos*; but a man who was once a sinner and is now on the way to being a saint is *kainos* (GSN2537). When Christ comes into a man's life he is a new man; his mind is different, for the mind of Christ is in him.

When Christ becomes the centre of life then we can present real worship, which is the offering of every moment and every action to God.

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Romans 12:3-8

EACH FOR ALL AND ALL FOR EACH

Romans 12:3-8

For, through the grace that has been given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to have a mind proud beyond that which a mind should be, but to have a mind directed towards wisdom, as God has given the measure of faith to each one of you. For just as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so, although we are many, we are one body in Christ, and we are all members of each other. Since, then, we have different gifts, according to the grace that has been given to us, let us use them in mutual service. If we have received the gift of prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith that we have received. If we have received the gift of practical service, let us use it in service. If our gift is in teaching, let us use it in teaching. If it lies in exhortation, let us use it in exhortation. If we are called upon to share, let us do it with simple kindness. If we are called upon to supply leadership, let us do so with zeal. If the occasion arises when we must show mercy, let us do so with gracious cheerfulness.

One of Paul's favourite thoughts is of the Christian Church as a body (compare 1Cor.12:12-27). The members of the body neither argue with each other nor envy each other nor dispute about their relative importance. Each part of the body carries out its own function, however prominent or however humbly unseen that function may be. It was Paul's conviction that the Christian Church should be like that. Each member has a task to do; and it is only when each contributes the help of his own task that the body of the Church functions as it ought.

Beneath this passage lie very important rules for life.

(i) First of all, it urges us to know ourselves. One of the first basic commandments of the Greek wise men was: "Man, know thyself." We do not get very far in this world until we know what we can and what we cannot do. An honest assessment of our own capabilities, without conceit and without false modesty, is one of the first essentials of a useful life.

(ii) Second, it urges us to accept ourselves and to use the gift God has given us. We are not to envy someone else's gift and regret that some other gift has not been given to us. We are to accept ourselves as we are, and use the gift we have. The result may be that we have to accept the fact that service for us means some humble sphere and some almost unseen part.

It was one of the great basic beliefs of the Stoics that there was a spark of God in every living creature. The Sceptics laughed at this doctrine. "God in worms?" demanded the Sceptic. "God in dungbeetles?" Whereat the Stoic replied: "Why not? Cannot an earthworm serve God? Do you suppose that it is only a general who is a good soldier? Cannot the lowest private or camp attendant fight his best and give his life for the cause? Happy are you if you are serving God, and carrying out the great purpose as truly as an earthworm."

The efficiency of the life of the universe depends on the humblest creatures. Paul is here saying that a man must accept himself; and, even if he finds that the contribution he has to offer will be

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unseen, without praise and without prominence, he must make it, certain that it is essential and that without it the world and the Church can never be what they are meant to be.

(iii) Third, Paul is really saying that whatever gift a man has comes from God. He calls gifts *charismata* (GSN5486). In the New Testament a *charisma* (GSN5486) is something given to a man by God which the man himself could not have acquired or attained.

In point of fact, life is like that. A man might practise for a lifetime and yet never play the violin like Yehudi Menuhin. He has more than practice; he has the something plus, the *charisma* which is a gift of God. A man might toil for a lifetime and still be handless in the use of tools and wood and metals; another can fashion wood and mould metal with a special skill, and tools become part of himself; he has the something plus, the *charisma* (GSN5486) which is a gift of God. One man might practise speaking for ever and a day, and still never acquire that magic something which moves an audience or a congregation; another steps on to a platform or climbs into a pulpit, and the audience are in the hollow of his hand; he has that something plus, that *charisma* (GSN5486) which is a gift of God.

A man might toil for a lifetime and never acquire the gift of putting his thoughts on paper in a vivid and intelligible way; another without effort sees his thoughts grow on the sheet of paper in front of him; the second man has the something plus, the *charisma* (GSN5486), which is the gift of God.

Every man has his own *charisma* (GSN5486). It may be for writing sermons, building houses, sowing seeds, fashioning wood, manipulating figures, playing the piano, singing songs, teaching children, playing football or golf. It is a something plus given him by God.

(iv) Fourth, whatever gift a man has, he must use it and the motive of use must be, not his personal prestige, but the conviction that it is at one and the same time his duty and his privilege to make his own contribution to the common good.

Let us look now at the gifts Paul singles out here for special mention.

(i) There is the gift of prophecy. It is only rarely that prophecy in the New Testament has to do with foretelling the future; it usually has to do with forthtelling the word of God. The prophet is the man who can announce the Christian message with the authority of one who knows. To announce Christ to others a man must first know him himself. "What this parish needs," said Carlyle's father, "is a man who knows Christ other than at second-hand."

(ii) There is the gift of practical service (*diakonia*, GSN1248). It is surely significant that practical service came to Paul's mind so high on the list. It may be that a man will never have the privilege of standing forth in public and proclaiming Christ; but there is no man who cannot every day show the love of Christ in deeds of service to his fellow men.

(iii) There is teaching. The message of Christ needs not only to be proclaimed; it needs also to be explained. It may well be that one of the great failures of the Church at this present time is just in this realm. Exhortation and invitation without a background of teaching are empty things.

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(iv) There is exhortation. Exhortation should have one dominating note, and that should be encouragement. There is a naval regulation which says that no officer shall speak discouragingly to any other officer about any undertaking in which he may be engaged. There is a kind of exhortation which is daunting. Real exhortation aims not so much at dangling a man over the flames of hell as spurring him on to the joy of life in Christ.

(v) There is sharing. Sharing is to be carried out with simple kindness. The word that Paul uses is *haplotes* (GSN0572), and it is difficult to translate, because it has in it the meaning both of simplicity and of generosity. One great commentary quotes a passage from The Testament of Issachar which perfectly illustrates its meaning. "And my father blessed me, seeing that I walked in simplicity (*haplotes*, GSN0572). And I was not inquisitive in my actions, nor wicked and envious towards my neighbour. I did not speak evil of anyone or attack a man's life, but I walked with a single eye (literally, with *haplotes*, GSN0572, of my eyes). To every poor and every afflicted man I provided the good things of earth in simplicity (*haplotes*, GSN0572) of heart. The simple (*haplous*, GSN0572) man does not desire gold, doth not ravish his neighbour, doth not care for all kinds of dainty meats, doth not wish for diversity of clothing, doth not promise himself length of days, but receiveth only the will of God.

He walketh in uprightness of life and beholdeth all things in simplicity (*haplotes*, GSN0572)." There is a giving which pries into the circumstances of another as it gives, which gives a moral lecture along with the gift, which gives not so much to relieve the need of the other as to pander to its own vanity and self-satisfaction, which gives with a grim sense of duty instead of a radiant sense of joy, which gives always with some ulterior motive and never for the sheer joy of giving. Christian sharing is with *haplotes* (GSN0572), the simple kindness which delights in the sheer pleasure of giving for giving's sake.

(vi) There is being called to occupy a leading place. Paul says that if we are so called we must do it with zeal. One of the most difficult problems of the Church today is the getting of leaders in all departments of its work. There are fewer and fewer people with a sense of service and of responsibility, willing to give up their leisure and their pleasure to undertake leadership. In many cases unfitness and unworthiness is pleaded when the real reason is disinclination and laziness. If such leadership is taken up, Paul says that it is to be taken up with zeal. There are two ways in which an elder may deliver a communion card--through the letter-box or at the fireside. There are two ways in which a teacher may prepare a lesson--with heart and mind or in the most perfunctory way. A man may dully and drably go through some task in the Church, or he may do it with the joy and thrill of zeal. The Church today needs leaders with zeal in their hearts.

(vii) There is the time when mercy has to be shown. It has to be shown with gracious kindness, Paul says. It is possible to forgive in such a way that the very forgiveness is an insult. It is possible to forgive and at the same time to demonstrate an attitude of criticism and contempt. If ever we have to forgive a sinner, we must remember that we are fellow sinners. "There but for the grace of God, go I," said George Whitefield as he saw the criminal walk to the gallows. There is a way of forgiving a man which pushes him further into the gutter; and there is a way of forgiving him which lifts him out of the mire. Real forgiveness is always based on love and never on superiority.

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Romans 12:9-13

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN EVERYDAY ACTION

Romans 12:9-13

Your love must be completely sincere. Hate that which is evil and cling to that which is good. Be affectionate to one another in brotherly love. Give to each other priority in honour. Do not be sluggish in zeal. Keep your spirit at boiling point. Seize your opportunities. Rejoice in hope. Meet tribulation with triumphant fortitude. Be persevering in prayer. Share what you have to help the needs of God's dedicated people. Be eager in giving hospitality.

Paul presents his people with ten telegraphic rules for ordinary, everyday life. Let us look at them one by one.

(i) Love must be completely sincere. There must be no hypocrisy, no play-acting, no ulterior motive. There is such a thing as cupboard love, which gives affection with one eye on the gain which may result. There is such a thing as a selfish love, whose aim is to get far more than it is to give. Christian love is cleansed of self; it is a pure outgoing of the heart to others.

(ii) We must hate that which is evil and cling to that which is good. It has been said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked by it. It was Carlyle who said that what we need is to see the infinite beauty of holiness and the infinite damnability of sin. The words Paul uses are strong. It has been said that no virtue is safe which is not passionate. He must hate evil and love good. Regarding one thing we must be clear--what many people hate is not evil, but the consequences of evil. No man is really a good man when he is good simply because he fears the consequences of being bad. As Burns had it:

"The fear o' Hell's a hangman's whip
To haud the wretch in order;
But where ye feel your honour grip,
Let that ay be your border."

Not to fear the consequences of dishonour, but to love honour passionately is the way to real goodness.

(iii) We must be affectionate to one another in brotherly love. The word Paul uses for affectionate is *philostorgos* (GSN5387), and *storge* (GSN0000) is the Greek for family love. We must love each other, because we are members of one family. We are not strangers to each other within the Christian Church; much less are we isolated units; we are brothers and sisters, because we have the one father, God.

(iv) We must give each other priority in honour. More than half the trouble that arises in Churches concerns rights and privileges and prestige. Someone has not been given his or her place; someone has been neglected or unthanked. The mark of the truly Christian man has always been humility. One of the humblest of men was that great saint and scholar Principal Cairns. Someone recollects an incident which showed Cairns as he was. He was a member of a platform party at a

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great gathering. As he appeared there was a tremendous burst of applause. Cairns stood back to let the man next him pass, and began to applaud himself; he never dreamed that the applause was for him. It is not easy to give each other priority in honour. There is enough of the natural man in most of us to like to get our rights; but the Christian man has no rights--he has only duties.

(v) We must not be sluggish in zeal. There is a certain intensity in the Christian life; there is no room for lethargy in it. The Christian cannot take things in an easy-going way, for the world is always a battleground between good and evil, the time is short, and life is a preparation for eternity. The Christian may burn out, but he must not rust out.

(vi) We must keep our spirit at boiling point. The one man whom the Risen Christ could not stand was the man who was neither hot nor cold (Rev.3:15-16). Today people are apt to look askance upon enthusiasm: the modern battle-cry is "I couldn't care less." But the Christian is a man desperately in earnest; he is aflame for Christ.

(vii) Paul's seventh injunction may be one of two things. The ancient manuscripts vary between two readings. Some read, "Serve the Lord" and some read, "Serve the time." that is, "Grasp your opportunities." The reason for the double reading is this. All the ancient scribes used contractions in their writing. In particular the commoner words were always abbreviated. One of the commonest ways of abbreviating was to miss out the vowels--as shorthand does--and to place a stroke along the top of the remaining letters. Now the word for Lord is kurios (GSN2962) and the word for time is kairos (GSN2540), and the abbreviation for both of these words is krs. In a section so filled with practical advice it is more likely that Paul was saying to his people, "Seize your opportunities as they come." Life presents us with all kinds of opportunities--the opportunity to learn something new or to cut out something wrong; the opportunity to speak a word of encouragement or of warning; the opportunity to help or to comfort.

One of the tragedies of life is that we so often fail to grasp these opportunities when they come. "There are three things which come not back--the spent arrow, the spoken word, and the lost opportunity."

(viii) We are to rejoice in hope. When Alexander the Great was setting out upon one of his eastern campaigns, he was distributing all kinds of gifts to his friends. In his generosity he had given away nearly all his possessions. "Sir," said one of his friends, "you will have nothing left for yourself." "Oh, yes, I have," said Alexander, "I have still my hopes." The Christian must be essentially an optimist. Just because God is God, the Christian is always certain that "the best is yet to be." Just because he knows of the grace that is sufficient for all things and the strength that is made perfect in weakness, the Christian knows that no task is too much for him. "There are no hopeless situations in life; there are only men who have grown hopeless about them." There can never be any such thing as a hopeless Christian.

(ix) We are to meet tribulation with triumphant fortitude. Someone once said to a gallant sufferer: "Suffering colours all life, doesn't it?" "Yes," said the gallant one, "it does, but I propose to choose the colour." When the dreadful affliction of complete deafness began to descend on Beethoven and life seemed to be one unbroken disaster, he said: "I will take life by the throat." As William Cowper had it:

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"Set free from present sorrow,
We cheerfully can say.
'Even let the unknown tomorrow
Bring with it what it may,
It can bring with it nothing
But he will bear us through."

When Nebuchadnezzar cast Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the burning fiery furnace he was amazed that they took no harm. He asked if three men had not been cast into the flames. They told him it was so. He said, "But I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods" (Dn.3:24-25). A man can meet anything when he meets it with Christ.

(x) We are to persevere in prayer. Is it not the case that there are times in life when we let day add itself to day and week to week, and we never speak to God? When a man ceases to pray, he despoils himself of the strength of Almighty God. No man should be surprised when life collapses if he insists on living it alone.

(xi) We are to share with those in need. In a world bent on getting, the Christian is bent on giving, because he knows that "what we keep we lose, and what we give we have."

(xii) The Christian is to be given to hospitality. Over and over again the New Testament insists on this duty of the open door (Heb.13:2; 1Tim.3:2; Tit.1:8; 1Pet.4:9). Tyndale used a magnificent word when he translated it that the Christian should have a harborous disposition. A home can never be happy when it is selfish. Christianity is the religion of the open hand, the open heart, and the open door.

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Romans 12:14-21

THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS FELLOW MEN

Romans 12:14-21

Bless those who persecute you; bless them and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Keep your thoughts from pride; and never refuse to be associated with humble people. Don't become conceitedly wise in your own estimation. Never return evil for evil. Take thought to make your conduct fair for all to see. If it is possible, as far as you can, live at peace with all men. Beloved, do not seek to revenge yourself on others; leave such vengeance to The Wrath, for it stands written: "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." Rather, if your enemy is hungry, give him food. If he is thirsty, give him drink. If you do this you will heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Paul offers a series of rules and principles wherewith to govern our relationships with our fellow men.

(i) The Christian must meet persecution with a prayer for those who persecute him. Long ago Plato had said that the good man will choose rather to suffer evil than to do evil; and it is always evil to hate. When the Christian is hurt, and insulted, and maltreated, he has the example of his Master before him, for he, upon his Cross, prayed for forgiveness for those who were killing him.

There has been no greater force to move men into Christianity than this serene forgiveness which the martyrs in every age have showed. Stephen died praying for forgiveness for those who stoned him to death (Ac.7:60). Among those who killed him was a young man named Saul, who afterwards became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles and the slave of Christ. There can be no doubt that the death scene of Stephen was one of the things that turned Paul to Christ. As Augustine said: "The Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen. Many a persecutor has become a follower of the faith he once sought to destroy, because he has seen how a Christian can forgive."

(ii) We are to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep. There are few bonds like that of a common sorrow. A writer tells of the saying of an American negro woman. A lady in Charleston met the negro servant of a neighbour. "I'm sorry to hear of your Aunt Lucy's death," she said. "You must miss her greatly. You were such friends." "Yes'm," said the servant, "I is sorry she died. But we wasn't no friends." "Why," said the lady, "I thought you were. I've seen you laughing and talking together lots of times." "Yes'm. That's so," came the reply. "We've laughed together, and we've talked together, but we is just 'quaintances. You see, Miss Ruth, we ain't never shed no tears. Folks got to cry together before dey is friends."

The bond of tears is the strongest of all. And yet it is much easier to weep with those who weep than it is to rejoice with those who rejoice. Long ago Chrysostom wrote on this passage: "It requires more of a high Christian temper to rejoice with them that do rejoice than to weep with them that weep. For this nature itself fulfils perfectly; and thee is none so hard-hearted as not to weep over him that is in calamity; but the other requires a very noble soul, so as not only to keep from envying, but even to feel pleasure with the person who is in esteem." It is., indeed, more

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difficult to congratulate another on his success, especially if his success involves disappointment to us, than it is to sympathize with his sorrow and his loss. It is only when self is dead that we can take as much joy in the success of others as in our own.

(iii) We are to live in harmony with one another. It was Nelson who, after one of his great victories, sent back a despatch in which he gave us the reason for it: "I had the happiness to command a band of brothers." It is a band of brothers that any Christian Church should be. Leighton once wrote: "The mode of Church government is unconstrained; but peace and concord, kindness and good will are indispensable." When strife enters into any Christian society, the hope of doing any good work is gone.

(iv) We are to avoid all pride and snobbishness. We have always to remember that the standards by which the world judges a man are not necessarily the standards by which God judges him. Saintliness has nothing to do with rank, or wealth, or birth. Dr James Black in his own vivid way described a scene in an early Christian congregation. A notable convert has been made, and the great man comes to his first Church service. He enters the room where the service is being held. The Christian leader points to a place. "Will you sit there please?" "But," says the man, "I cannot sit there, for that would be to sit beside my slave." "Will you sit there please?" repeats the leader. "But," says the man, "surely not beside my slave." "Will you sit there please?" repeats the leader once again. And the man at last crosses the room, sits beside his slave, and gives him the kiss of peace. That is what Christianity did; and that is what it alone could do in the Roman Empire. The Christian Church was the only place where master and slave sat side by side. It is still the place where all earthly distinctions are gone, for with God there is no respect of persons.

(v) We are to make our conduct fair for all to see. Paul was well aware that Christian conduct must not only be good; it must also look good. So-called Christianity can be presented in the hardest and most unlovely way; but real Christianity is something which is fair for all to see.

(vi) We are to live at peace with all men. But Paul adds two qualifications. (a) He says, "if it be possible". There may come a time when the claims of courtesy have to submit to the claims of principle. Christianity is not an easy-going tolerance which will accept anything and shut its eyes to everything. There may come a time when some battle has to be fought, and when it does, the Christian will not shirk it. (b) He says, as far as you can. Paul knew very well that it is easier for some to live at peace than for others. He knew that one man can be compelled to control as much temper in an hour as another man in a lifetime. We would do well to remember that goodness is a great deal easier for some than for others; that will keep us alike from criticism and from discouragement.

(vii) We are to keep ourselves from all thought of taking revenge. Paul gives three reasons for that. (a) Vengeance does not belong to us but to God. In the last analysis no human being has a right to judge any other; only God can do that. (b) To treat a man with kindness rather than vengeance is the way to move him. Vengeance may break his spirit; but kindness will break his heart. "If we are kind to our enemies," says Paul, "it will heap coals of fire on their heads." That means, not that it will store up further punishment for them, but that it will move them to burning shame. (c) To stoop to vengeance is to be ourselves conquered by evil. Evil can never be conquered

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Romans 12:14-21

by evil. If hatred is met with more hatred it is only increased; but if it is met with love, an antidote for the poison is found. As Booker Washington said: "I will not allow any man to make me lower myself by hating him." The only real way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend.

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Romans 13:1-7

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE STATE

Romans 13:1-7

Let everyone render due obedience to those who occupy positions of outstanding authority, for there is no authority which is not allotted its place by God, for the authorities which exist have been set in their places by God. So he who sets himself up against authority has really set himself up against God's arrangement of things. Those who do set themselves against authority will receive condemnation upon themselves. For the man who does good has nothing to fear from rulers, but the man who does evil has. Do you wish to be free of fear of authority? Do good and you will enjoy praise from authority, for any servant of God exists for your good. If you do evil, then you must fear. For it is not for nothing that the man set in authority bears the sword, for he is the servant of God, and his function is to vent wrath and vengeance on the man who does evil. So, then, it is necessary for you to submit yourself, not because of the wrath, but for the sake of your own conscience.

For this same reason you must pay your taxes too; for those set in authority are the servants of God, and continue to work for that very end. Give to all men what is due to them. Give tribute to those to whom tribute is due; pay taxes to those to whom taxes are due. Give fear to those to whom fear is due. Give honour to those to whom honour is due.

At first reading this is an extremely surprising passage, for it seems to counsel absolute obedience on the part of the Christian to the civil power. But, in point of fact, this is a commandment which runs through the whole New Testament. In 1Tim.2:1-2, we read: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and for all who are in high positions; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way." In Tit.3:1 the advice to the preacher is: "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for any honest work." In 1Pet.2:13-17 we read: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.... Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor."

We might be tempted to argue that these passages come from a time when the Roman government had not begun to persecute the Christians. We know, for instance, in the Book of Acts that frequently, as Gibbon had it, the tribunal of the pagan magistrate was often the safest refuge against the fury of the Jewish mob. Time and again we see Paul receiving protection at the hands of impartial Roman justice. But the interesting and the significant thing is that many years, and even centuries later, when persecution had begun to rage and Christians were regarded as outlaws, the Christian leaders were saying exactly the same thing.

Justin Martyr (Apology 1: 17) writes, "Everywhere, we, more readily than all men, endeavour to pay to those appointed by you the taxes, both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by Jesus. We worship only God, but in other things we will gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men, and praying that, with your kingly power, you may be found to possess

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also sound judgment." Athenagoras, pleading for peace for the Christians, writes (chapter 37): "We deserve favour because we pray for your government, that you may, as is most equitable, receive the kingdom, son from father, and that your empire may receive increase and addition, until all men become subject to your sway." Tertullian (Apology 30) writes at length: "We offer prayer for the safety of our princes to the eternal, the true, the living God, whose favour, beyond all other things, they must themselves desire.... Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer.

We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection for the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest--whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish." He goes on to say that the Christian cannot but look up to the emperor because he "is called by our Lord to his office." And he ends by saying that "Caesar is more ours than yours because our God appointed him." Arnobius (4: 36) declares that in the Christian gatherings "peace and pardon are asked for all in authority."

It was the consistent and official teaching of the Christian Church that obedience must be given to, and prayers made for, the civil power, even when the wielder of that civil power was a Nero.

What is the thought and belief at the back of this?

(i) In Paul's case there was one immediate cause of his stressing of civil obedience. The Jews were notoriously rebellious. Palestine, especially Galilee, was constantly seething with insurrection. Above all there were the Zealots; they were convinced that there was no king for the Jews but God; and that no tribute must be paid to anyone except to God. Nor were they content with anything like a passive resistance. They believed that God would not be helping them unless they embarked on violent action to help themselves. Their aim was to make any civil government impossible. They were known as the dagger-bearers. They were fanatical nationalists sworn to terrorist methods. Not only did they use terrorism towards the Roman government; they also wrecked the houses and burned the crops and assassinated the families of their own fellow-Jews who paid tribute to the Roman government.

In this Paul saw no point at all. It was, in fact, the direct negation of all Christian conduct. And yet, at least in one part of the nation, it was normal Jewish conduct. It may well be that Paul writes here with such inclusive definiteness because he wished to dissociate Christianity altogether from insurrectionist Judaism, and to make it clear that Christianity and good citizenship went necessarily hand in hand.

(ii) But there is more than a merely temporary situation in the relationship between the Christian and the state. It may well be true that the circumstances caused by the unrest of the Jews are in Paul's mind, but there are other things as well. First and foremost, there is this--no man can entirely dissociate himself from the society in which he lives and has a part. No man can, in conscience, opt out of the nation. As a part of it, he enjoys certain benefits which he could not have as an individual; but he cannot reasonably claim all the privileges and refuse all the duties. As he is part of the body of the Church, he is also part of the body of the nation; there is no such thing in this world as an isolated individual. A man has a duty to the state and must discharge it even if a Nero is on the throne.

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Romans 13:1-7

(iii) To the state a man owes protection. It was the Platonic idea that the state existed for the sake of justice and safety and secured for a man security against wild beasts and savage men. "Men," as it has been put, "herded behind a wall that they might be safe." A state is essentially a body of men who have covenanted together to maintain certain relationships between each other by the observance of certain laws. Without these laws and the mutual agreement to observe them, the bad and selfish strong man would be supreme; the weaker would go to the wall; life would become ruled by the law of the jungle. Every ordinary man owes his security to the state, and is therefore under a responsibility to it.

(iv) To the state ordinary people owe a wide range of services which individually they could not enjoy. It would be impossible for every man to have his own water, light, sewage, transport system. These things are obtainable only when men agree to live together. And it would be quite wrong for a man to enjoy everything the state provides and to refuse all responsibility to it. That is one compelling reason why the Christian is bound in honour to be a good citizen and to take his part in all the duties of citizenship.

(v) But Paul's main view of the state was that the Roman Empire was the divinely ordained instrument to save the world from chaos. Take away that Empire and the world would disintegrate into flying fragments. It was in fact the pax Romana, the Roman peace, which gave the Christian missionary the chance to do his work. Ideally men should be bound together by Christian love; but they are not; and the cement which keeps them together is the state.

Paul saw in the state an instrument in the hand of God, preserving the world from chaos. Those who administered the state were playing their part in that great task. Whether they knew it or not they were doing God's work, and it was the Christian's duty to help and not to hinder.

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Romans 13:8-10

THE DEBTS WHICH MUST BE PAID AND THE DEBT WHICH NEVER CAN BE PAID

Romans 13:8-10

Owe no man anything, except to love each other; for he who loves the other man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, You must not commit adultery, You must not kill, You must not steal, You must not covet, and any other commandment there may be, are all summed up in this saying--You must love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbour. Love is, therefore, the complete fulfilment of the law.

The previous passage dealt with what might be called a man's public debts. Rom.13:7 mentions two of these public debts. There is what Paul calls tribute, and what he calls taxes. By tribute he means the tribute that must be paid by those who are members of a subject nation. The standard contributions that the Roman government levied on its subject nations were three. There was a ground tax by which a man had to pay, either in cash or in kind, one-tenth of all the grain, and one fifth of the wine and fruit produced by his ground. There was income tax, which was one per cent of a man's income. There was a poll tax, which had to be paid by everyone between the ages of fourteen and sixty five. By taxes Paul means the local taxes that had to be paid. There were customs duties, import and export taxes, taxes for the use of main roads, for crossing bridges, for entry into markets and harbours, for the right to possess an animal, or to drive a cart or wagon.

Paul insists that the Christian must pay his tribute and his taxes to state and to local authority, however galling it may be.

Then he turns to private debts. He says, "Owe no man anything." It seems a thing almost unnecessary to say; but there were some who even twisted the petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," into a reason for claiming absolution from all money obligations. Paul had to remind his people that Christianity is not an excuse for refusing our obligations to our fellow men; it is a reason for fulfilling them to the utmost.

He goes on to speak of the one debt that a man must pay every day, and yet, at the same time, must go on owing every day, the debt to love each other. Origen said: "The debt of love remains with us permanently and never leaves us; this is a debt which we both discharge every day and for ever owe." It is Paul's claim that if a man honestly seeks to discharge this debt of love, he will automatically keep all the commandments. He will not commit adultery, for when two people allow their physical passions to sweep them away, the reason is, not that they love each other too much, but that they love each other too little; in real love there is at once respect and restraint which saves from sin. He will not kill, for love never seeks to destroy, but always to build up; it is always kind and will ever seek to destroy an enemy not by killing him, but by seeking to make him a friend. He will never steal, for love is always more concerned with giving than with getting. He will not covet, for covetousness (epithumia, GSN1939) is the uncontrolled desire for the forbidden thing, and love cleanses the heart, until that desire is gone.

There is a famous saying, "Love God--and do what you like." If love is the mainspring of a man's heart, if his whole life is dominated by love for God and love for his fellow men, he needs no other law.

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Romans 13:11-14

THE THREAT OF TIME

Romans 13:11-14

Further, there is this--realize what time it is, that it is now high time to be awakened from sleep; for now your salvation is nearer than when you believed. The night is far gone; the day is near. So, then, let us put away the works of darkness, and let us clothe ourselves with the weapons of light. Let us walk in loveliness of life, as those who walk in the day, and let us not walk in revelry or drunkenness, in immorality and in shamelessness, in contention and in strife. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ as a man puts on a garment, and stop living a life in which your first thought is to gratify the desires of Christless human nature.

Like so many great men, Paul was haunted by the shortness of time. Andrew Marvell could always hear "time's winged chariot hurrying near." Keats was haunted by fears that he might cease to be before his pen had gleaned his teeming brain. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote:

"The morning drum-call on my eager ear
Thrills unforgotten yet; the morning dew
Lies yet undried along my fields of noon.
But now I pause at whiles in what I do
And count the bell, and tremble lest I hear
(My work untrimmed) the sunset gun too soon."

But there was more in Paul's thought than simply the shortness of time. He expected the Second Coming of Christ. The Early Church expected it at any moment, and therefore it had the urgency to be ready. That expectancy has grown dim and faint; but one permanent fact remains--no man knows when God will rise and bid him go. The time grows ever shorter, for we are every day one day nearer that time. We, too, must have all things ready.

The last verses of this passage must be forever famous, for it was through them Augustine found conversion. He tells the story in his Confessions. He was walking in the garden. His heart was in distress, because of his failure to live the good life. He kept exclaiming miserably, "How long? How long? Tomorrow and tomorrow--why not now? Why not this hour an end to my depravity?" Suddenly he heard a voice saying, "Take and read; take and read." It sounded like a child's voice; and he racked his mind to try to remember any child's game in which these words occurred, but could think of none. He hurried back to the seat where his friend Alypius was sitting, for he had left there a volume of Paul's writings. "I snatched it up and read silently the first passage my eyes fell upon: 'Let us not walk in revelry or drunkenness, in immorality and in shamelessness, in contention and in strife.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, as a man puts on a garment, and stop living a life in which your first thought is to gratify the desires of Christless human nature.' I neither wished nor needed to read further. With the end of that sentence, as though the light of assurance had poured into my heart, all the shades of doubt were scattered. I put my finger in the page and closed the book: I turned to Alypius with a calm countenance and told him." (C. H. Dodd's translation.) Out of his

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Romans 13:11-14

word God had spoken to Augustine. It was Coleridge who said that he believed the Bible to be inspired because, as he puts it, "It finds me." God's word can always find the human heart.

It is interesting to look at the six sins which Paul selects as being, as it were, typical of the Christless life.

(i) There is revelry (komos, GSN2889). This is an interesting word. Originally komos (GSN2889) was the band of friends who accompanied a victor home from the games, singing his praises and celebrating his triumph as they went. Later it came to mean a noisy band of revellers who swept their way through the city streets at night, a band of roysterers, what, in Regency England, would have been called a rout. It describes the kind of revelry which lowers a man's self and is a nuisance to others.

(ii) There is drunkenness (methe, GSN3178). To the Greeks drunkenness was a particularly disgraceful thing. They were a wine-drinking people. Even children drank wine. Breakfast was called akratisma, and consisted of a slice of bread dipped in wine. For all that, drunkenness was considered specially shameful, for the wine the Greek drank was much diluted, and was drunk because the water supply was inadequate and dangerous. This was a vice which not only a Christian but any respectable heathen also would have condemned.

(iii) There was immorality (koite, GSN2845). Koite (GSN2845) literally means a bed and has in it the meaning of the desire for the forbidden bed. This was the typical heathen sin. The word brings to mind the man who sets no value on fidelity and who takes his pleasure when and where he will.

(iv) There is shamelessness (aselgeia, GSN0766). Aselgeia (GSN0766) is one of the ugliest words in the Greek language. It does not describe only immorality; it describes the man who is lost to shame. Most people seek to conceal their evil deeds, but the man in whose heart there is aselgeia (GSN0766) is long past that. He does not care who sees him; he does not care how much of a public exhibition he makes of himself; he does not care what people think of him. Aselgeia (GSN0766) is the quality of the man who dares publicly to do the things which are unbecoming for any man to do.

(v) There is contention (eris, GSN2054). Eris (GSN2054) is the spirit that is born of unbridled and unholy competition. It comes from the desire for place and power and prestige and the hatred of being surpassed. It is essentially the sin which places self in the foreground and is the entire negation of Christian love.

(vi) There is envy (zelos, GSN2205). Zelos (GSN2205) need not be a bad word. It can describe the noble emulation of a man who, when confronted with greatness of character, wishes to attain to it. But it can also mean that envy which grudges a man his nobility and his preeminence. It describes here the spirit which cannot be content with what it has and looks with jealous eye on every blessing given to someone else and denied to itself.

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Romans 14:1

RESPECT FOR SCRUPLES

Romans 14:1

Welcome the man who is weak in the faith, but not with a view to passing judgment on his scruples.

In this chapter Paul is dealing with what may have been a temporary and local problem in the Roman Church, but is also one continually confronting the Church and always demanding solution. In the Church at Rome there were apparently two lines of thought. There were some who believed that in Christian liberty the old tabus were gone; they believed that the old food laws were now irrelevant; they believed that Christianity did not consist in the special observance of any one day or days. Paul makes it clear that this in fact is the standpoint of real Christian faith. On the other hand, there were those who were full of scruples; they believed that it was wrong to eat meat; they believed in the rigid observance of the Sabbath tyranny. Paul calls the ultra-scrupulous man the man who is weak in the faith. What does he mean by that?

Such a man is weak in the faith for two reasons.

(i) He has not yet discovered the meaning of Christian freedom; he is at heart still a legalist and sees Christianity as a thing of rules and regulations.

(ii) He has not yet liberated himself from a belief in the efficacy of works. In his heart he believes that he can gain God's favour by doing certain things and abstaining from others. Basically he is still trying to earn a right relationship with God, and has not yet accepted the way of grace, still thinking more of what he can do for God than of what God has done for him.

Paul bids the stronger brethren to welcome such a person and not to besiege him with continual criticisms.

This problem is not confined to the days of Paul. To this day in the Church there are two points of view. There is the more liberal which sees no harm in many things and is well content that many an innocent pleasure should go on within the Church. And there is the narrower point of view, which is offended at many things in which the liberal person sees no harm.

Paul's sympathies are all with the broader point of view; but, at the same time, he says that when one of these weaker brethren comes into the Church he must be received with brotherly sympathy. When we are confronted with someone who holds the narrower view there are three attitudes we must avoid.

(i) We must avoid irritation. An impatient annoyance with such a person gets us nowhere. However much we may disagree, we must try to see the other person's point of view and to understand it.

(ii) We must avoid ridicule. No man remains unwounded when that which he thinks precious is laughed at. It is no small sin to laugh at another man's beliefs. They may seem prejudices rather

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than beliefs; but no man has a right to laugh at what some other holds sacred. In any event, laughter will never woo the other man to a wider view; it will only make him withdraw still more determinedly into his rigidity.

(iii) We must avoid contempt. It is very wrong to regard the narrower person as an old-fashioned fool whose views may be treated with contempt. A man's views are his own and must be treated with respect. It is not even possible to win a man over to our position unless we have a genuine respect for his. Of all attitudes towards our fellow man the most unchristian is contempt.

Before we leave this verse, it should be noted that there is another perfectly possible translation. "Welcome the man who is weak in the faith, but do not introduce him straight away to the discussion of questions which can only raise doubts." There are some people whose faith is so strong that no amount of debate and questioning will really shake it. But there are others who have a simple faith which is only needlessly disturbed by clever discussion.

It may well be that our own age is overfond of discussion for discussion's sake. It is fatal to give the impression that Christianity consists of nothing but a series of questions under debate. "We have found," said G. K. Chesterton, "all the questions that can be found. It is time we stopped looking for questions and started looking for answers." "Tell me of your certainties," said Goethe, "I have doubts enough of my own." There is one good rule which should guide the progress of any discussion, even if it has been a bewildered discussion, and even if it has been discussing questions to which there is no real answer, it should always finish with an affirmation. There may be many questions left unanswered, but there must be some certainty left unshaken.

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Romans 14:2-4

TOLERANCE FOR ANOTHER'S POINT OF VIEW

Romans 14:2-4

One man has enough faith to believe that he can eat anything; but he who is weak in the faith eats vegetables. Let not him who eats contemptuously despise him who does not eat; and let not him who does not eat pass censorious judgment on him who does eat, for God has received him. Who are you to judge another man's servant? It is in his own master's judgment that he stands or falls-- and he will stand, for the Master is able to make him stand.

Here emerges one of the definite points of debate in the Roman Church. There were those who observed no special food laws and tabus at all, and who ate anything; and there were those who conscientiously abstained from meat, and ate only vegetables. There were many sects and religions in the ancient world which observed the strictest food laws. The Jews themselves did. Lev. 11 gives its lists of the creatures which may and which may not be eaten. One of the strictest sects of the Jews was the Essenes. They had communal meals for which they bathed and wore special clothes. The meals had to be specially prepared by priests or they would not eat them. The Pythagoreans had their distinctive food laws. Pythagoras taught that the soul of man was a fallen deity confined to the body as to a tomb. He believed in reincarnation through which the soul might dwell in a man, an animal, or a plant in an endless chain of being.

Release from this chain of being was found through absolute purity and discipline; and this discipline included silence, study, self-examination and abstention from all flesh. In almost any Christian congregation there would be those who observed special food laws and tabus.

It is the same problem. Within the Church there was a narrower party and there was a more liberal party. Paul unerringly pinpoints the danger that was likely to arise. Almost certainly the more liberal party would despise the scruples of the narrower party; and, still more certainly, the narrower party would pass censorious judgment on what they believed to be the laxity of the more liberal party. That situation is just as real and perilous in the Church today as it was in the time of Paul.

To meet it Paul lays down a great principle. No man has any right to criticize another man's servant. The servant is answerable to his master alone. Now all men are the servants of God. It is not open to us to criticize them, still less to condemn them. That right belongs to God alone. It is not in our judgment that a man stands or falls but in his. And, Paul goes on, if a man is honestly living out his principles as he sees them, God can make him able to stand.

Many a congregation of the Church is torn in two because those who hold broader views are angrily contemptuous of those whom they regard as die-hard conservatives; and because those who are stricter in their outlook are censorious of those who wish the right to do things which they think are wrong. It is not open to us to condemn each other. "I beseech you by the bowels of Christ," said Cromwell to the rigid Scots of his day, "think it possible that you may be mistaken." We must banish both censoriousness and contempt from the fellowship of the Church. We must leave the judgment of others to God, and seek only to sympathize and to understand.

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Romans 14:5-6

A DIFFERENT ROAD TO THE SAME GOAL

Romans 14:5-6

One man rates one day beyond another; one regards all days alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. The man who observes a particular day observes it to the Lord. The man who eats, eats to the Lord, for he says his grace. The man who does not eat, does not eat to the Lord, for he too says his grace to God.

Paul introduces another point on which narrower and more liberal people may differ. The narrower people make a great deal of the observance of one special day. That was indeed a special characteristic of the Jews. More than once Paul was worried about people who made a fetish of observing days. He writes to the Galatians: "You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years: I am afraid I have laboured over you in vain" (Gal.4:10-11). He writes to the Colossians: "Let no man pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col.2:16-17). The Jews had made a tyranny of the sabbath, surrounding it with a jungle of regulations and prohibitions. It was not that Paul wished to wipe out the Lord's Day--far from it; but he did fear an attitude which in effect believed that Christianity consisted in observing one particular day.

There is far more to Christianity than Lord's Day observance. When Mary Slessor spent three lonely years in the bush she frequently got the days mixed up because she had no calendar. "Once she was found holding her services on a Monday, and again on Sunday she was discovered on the roof, hammering away, in the belief that it was Monday!" No one is going to argue that Mary Slessor's services were any less valid because they were held on Monday, or that she was in any sense breaking the commandment because she was working on the Sunday. Paul would never have denied that the Lord's Day is a precious day, but he would have been equally insistent that not even it must become a tyranny, still less a fetish. It is not the day that we ought to worship, but him who is the Lord of all days.

In spite of all that, Paul pleads for sympathy between the narrower and the more liberal brethren. His point is that, however different their practice may be, their aim is the same. In their different attitude to days, both believe that they are serving God; when they sit down to eat, the one eats meat and the other does not, but both say their grace to God. We do well to remember that. If I am trying to get from Glasgow to London there are many routes I may use. I could in fact get there without traversing one half mile of road that another man might use. It is Paul's plea that the common aim should unite us and the differing practice should not be allowed to divide us.

But he insists on one thing. Whatever course a man chooses, let him be fully convinced in his own mind. His actions should be dictated not by convention, still less by superstition, but altogether by conviction. He should not do things simply because other people do them; he should not do them because he is governed by a system of semi-superstitious tabus; he should do them because he has thought them out and reached the conviction that for him at least they are the right things to do.

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Paul would have added something else to that--no man should make his own practice the universal standard for all other people. This, in fact, is one of the curses of the Church. Men are so apt to think that their way of worship is the only way. T. R. Glover somewhere quotes a Cambridge saying: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might--but remember that someone thinks differently." We would do well to remember that, in a great many matters, it is a duty to have our own convictions, but it is an equal duty to allow others to have theirs without regarding them as sinners and outcasts.

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Romans 14:7-9

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ISOLATION

Romans 14:7-9

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live or die we belong to the Lord. It was for this purpose that Christ died and rose to life again--that he might be the Lord of the dead and of the living.

Paul lays down the great fact that it is impossible in the nature of things to live an isolated life. There is no such thing in this world as a completely detached individual. That, in fact, is doubly true. "Man," said Macneile Dixon, "has an affair with the gods and an affair with the mortals." No man can disentangle himself either from his fellow men or from God.

In three directions a man cannot disentangle himself from his fellow men.

(i) He cannot isolate himself from the past. No man is self-made. "I am a part," said Ulysses, "of all that I have met." A man is a receiver of a tradition. He is an amalgam of all that his ancestors made him. True, he himself does something to that amalgam; but he does not start from nothing. For weal or for woe, he starts with what all the past has made him. The unseen cloud of witnesses do not only compass him about; they dwell within him. He cannot dissociate himself from the stock from which he springs and from the rock from which he is hewn.

(ii) He cannot isolate himself from the present. We live in a civilization which is daily binding men more and more closely together. Nothing a man does affects only himself. He has the terrible power of making others happy or sad by his conduct; he has the still more terrible power of making others good or bad. From every man goes out an influence which makes it easier for others to take the high way or the low way. From every man's deeds come consequences which affect others more or less closely. A man is bound up in the bundle of life, and from that bundle he cannot escape.

(iii) He cannot isolate himself from the future. As a man receives life so he hands life on. He hands on to his children a heritage of physical life and of spiritual character. He is not a self-contained individual unit; he is a link in a chain. Someone tells of a youth, who lived carelessly, who began to study biology. Through a microscope he was watching certain of these living things that you can actually see living and dying and begetting others in a moment of time. He rose from the microscope. "Now I see it," he said. "I am a link in the chain, and I will not be a weak link any more." It is our terrible responsibility that we leave something of ourselves in the world by leaving something of ourselves in others. Sin would be a far less terrible thing if it affected only a man himself. The terror of every sin is that it starts a new train of evil in the world.

Still less can a man disentangle himself from Jesus Christ.

(i) In this life Christ is forever a living presence. We do not need to speak of living as if Christ saw us; he does see us. All life is lived in his eye. A man can no more escape from the risen Christ than he can from his shadow. There is no place where he can leave Christ behind, and there is nothing which he can do unseen.

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Romans 14:7-9

(ii) Not even death breaks that presence. In this world we live in the unseen presence of Christ; in the next we shall see him in his visible presence. Death is not the chasm that ends in obliteration; it is the gateway that leads to Christ.

No human being can follow a policy of isolation. He is bound to his fellow men and to Christ by ties that neither time nor eternity can break. He can neither live nor die to himself.

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Romans 14:10-12

MEN UNDER JUDGMENT

Romans 14:10-12

Who are you to judge your brother in anything? Or, who are you contemptuously to despise your brother? For we shall all stand at God's judgment seat; for it stands written: "As I live, God says, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess its faith to God." So, then, each of us shall render account to God for himself.

There is one basic reason why we have no right to judge anyone else; and that is that we ourselves are men under judgment. It is the very essence of humanity that we are not the judges but the judged. To prove his point Paul quotes Isa.45:23.

This was indeed a thought with which any Jew would agree. There was a rabbinic saying: "Let not thine imagination assure thee that the grave is an asylum; for perforce thou wast framed, and perforce thou wast born, and perforce thou livest, and perforce thou diest, and perforce thou art about to give account and reckoning before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is he." The only person who has the right to judge anyone is God; the man who stands at the bar of God's judgment has no right to judge a fellow who also stands at that bar.

Just before this Paul has been thinking of the impossibility of the isolated life. But there is one situation in which a man is isolated, and that is when he stands before the judgment seat of God. In the old days of the Roman Republic, in the corner of the Forum farthest from the Capitol stood the tribunal, the judgment seat, where the Praetor Urbanus had sat dispensing justice. When Paul wrote, Roman justice required more than one judgment seat; and so in the great basilicas, the colonnaded porches around the Forum, the magistrates sat dispensing justice. The Roman well knew the sight of a man standing before the judge's judgment seat.

That is what happens to every man; and it is a judgment which he must face alone. Sometimes in this world he can make use of the merits of someone else. Many a young man has been spared some penalty for the sake of his parents; many a husband has been given mercy for the sake of his wife or child; but in the judgment of God a man stands alone. Sometimes, when a great one dies, the coffin lies in front of the mourning congregation, and, on the top of it, there is arranged the gowns of his academic honours, or the insignia of his state dignities; but he cannot take them with him. Naked we come into the world, and naked we leave it. We stand before God in the awful loneliness of our own souls; to him we can take nothing but the character which in life we have been building up.

Yet that is not the whole truth. We do not stand alone at the judgment seat of God, for we stand with Jesus Christ. We do not need to go stripped of everything; we may go clad in the merits that are his. Collin Brooks, writer and journalist, writes in one of his books: "God may be kinder than we think. If he cannot say, 'Well done! good and faithful servant,' it may be that he will say at last, 'Don't worry, my bad and faithless servant: I don't altogether dislike you.'" That was a man's whimsical way of stating his faith; but there is more to it than that. It is not that God merely does not dislike us; it is that, sinners as we are, he loves us for the sake of Jesus Christ. True, we must

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stand before God's judgment seat in the naked loneliness of our own souls; but, if we have lived with Christ in life, we shall stand with him in death, and before God he will be the advocate to plead our cause.

Barclay's Commentary

Romans 14:13-16

A MAN AND HIS NEIGHBOUR'S CONSCIENCE

Romans 14:13-16

So, then, let us stop passing judgment on each other, and rather let this be our only judgment--the determination not to put any hindrance or stumbling block in our brother's way. I know this, and I am firmly convinced of it in the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is nothing in itself which is unclean. All the same, if anyone thinks that anything is unclean, it is unclean to him. If your brother is grieved by something which you eat, you are no longer conducting yourself according to the principle that love lays down. Do not bring ruin by what you eat to that man for whom Christ died.

The Stoics used to teach that there were a great many things which they called adiaphora, that is, indifferent. In themselves they were quite neutral, neither good nor bad. The Stoics put it this way--it all depends by what handle you pick them up. Now that is profoundly true. To a student of art, a certain picture might be a work of art, to someone else an obscene drawing. To one group of people a discussion might be an interesting and stimulating and mind-kindling experience, to someone else a succession of heresies, and even blasphemies. An amusement, a pleasure, a pastime might seem to one quite permissible, and to another prohibited. More, there are pleasures which are quite harmless to one man, which can, in fact, be the ruin of another. The thing itself is neither clean nor unclean; its character is determined by the person who sees it or does it.

That is what Paul is getting at here. There are certain things which a man strong in the faith may see no harm in doing; but, if a person with a more narrow outlook saw him doing them, his conscience would be shocked; and if such a person were persuaded to do them himself his conscience would be outraged. We may take a very simple example. One man will genuinely see no harm in playing some outdoor game on Sunday, and he may be right; but another man's conscience is shocked at such a thing, and, if he were persuaded to take part in it, all the time he would have the haunting feeling that he was doing wrong.

Paul's advice is clear. It is a Christian duty to think of everything, not as it affects ourselves only, but also as it affects others. Note that Paul is not saying that we must always allow our conduct to be dictated by the views of others; there are matters which are essentially matters of principle, and in them a man must take his own way. But a great many things are neutral and indifferent; a great many things are neither in themselves good or bad; a great many things are not essential parts of life and conduct but belong to what we might call the extras of life. It is Paul's conviction that in regard to such things we have no right to give offence to the more scrupulous brother by doing them ourselves, or by persuading him to do them.

Life must be guided by the principle of love; and when it is, we will think, not so much of our right to do as we like as of our responsibilities to others. We have no right to distress another man's conscience in the things which do not really matter. Christian freedom must never be used as an excuse for rough-riding over the genuine feelings of others. No pleasure is so important that it can justify bringing offence and grief, and even ruin, to others. Augustine used to say that the whole Christian ethic could be summed up in a saying: "Love God, and do what you like." In a sense it is

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true; but Christianity consists not only in loving God; it consists also in loving our neighbour as ourselves.

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Romans 14:17-20

THE PERIL OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

Romans 14:17-20

Do not allow that good gift of freedom which you possess to become a thing which gets you into disrepute. For the Kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink, but of righteousness and peace and joy, which are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For the man who rules his life by this principle, and so becomes the slave of Christ, is well-pleasing to God and approved by men. So, then, let it be the things that make for peace that we pursue, and the things which build up one another. Do not destroy God's work for the sake of food. True, all things are pure; but it is wrong for a man to make life's road more difficult for someone else through what he eats.

In essence, Paul is here dealing with the peril and the abuse of Christian freedom. To a Jew, Christian freedom has its dangers. All his life he had been compassed about by a multiplicity of rules and regulations. So many things were unclean and so many were clean. So many animals might not be eaten; so many purity laws must be observed. When the Jew came into Christianity he found that all the petty rules and regulations were abolished at one stroke, and the danger was that he might interpret Christianity as a freedom to do exactly as he liked. We must remember that Christian freedom and Christian love go hand in hand; we must hold fast to the truth that Christian freedom and brotherly love are bound up together.

Paul reminds his people that Christianity does not consist in eating and drinking what one likes. It consists in three great things, all of which are essentially unselfish things.

There is righteousness, and this consists in giving to men and to God what is their due. Now the very first thing that is due to a fellow man in the Christian life is sympathy and consideration; the moment we become a Christian the feelings of the other man become more important than our own; Christianity means putting others first and self last. We cannot give a man what is due to him and do what we like.

There is peace. In the New Testament peace does not mean simply absence of trouble; it is not a negative thing, but is intensely positive; it means everything that makes for a man's highest good. The Jews themselves often thought of peace as a state of right relationships between man and man. If we insist that Christian freedom means doing what we like, that is precisely the state we can never attain. Christianity consists entirely in personal relationships to man and to God. The untrammelled freedom of Christian liberty is conditioned by the Christian obligation to live in a right relationship, in peace, with our fellow men.

There is joy. Christian joy can never be a selfish thing. It does not consist in making ourselves happy; it consists in making others happy. A so-called happiness which made someone else distressed would not be Christian. If a man, in his search for happiness, brings a hurt heart and a wounded conscience to someone else, the ultimate end of his search will be, not joy, but sorrow. Christian joy is not individualistic; it is interdependent. Joy comes to the Christian only when he brings joy to others, even if it costs him personal limitation.

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When a man follows this principle he becomes the slave of Christ. Here is the essence of the matter. Christian freedom means that we are free to do, not what we like, but what Christ likes. Without Christ a man is a slave to his habits, his pleasures, his indulgences. He is not really doing what he likes. He is doing what the things which have him in their grip make him do. Once the power of Christ enters into him he is master of himself, and then, and only then, real freedom enters his life. Then he is free not to treat men and not to live life as his own selfish human nature would have him do; he is free to show to all men the same attitude of love as Jesus showed.

Paul ends by setting out the Christian aim within the fellowship. (a) It is the aim of peace; the aim that the members of the fellowship should be in a right relationship with each other. A church where there is strife and contention, quarrels and bitterness, divisions and breaches, has lost all right to the name of church. It is not a fragment of the Kingdom of Heaven; it is simply an earthbound society. (b) It is the aim of upbuilding. The picture of the church as a building runs through the New Testament. The members are stones within the building. Anything which loosens the fabric of the church is against God; anything which makes that fabric stronger and more secure is of God.

The tragedy is that in so many cases it is little unimportant things which disturb the peace of the brethren, matters of law and procedure and precedent and prestige. A new age would dawn in the Church if we remembered that our rights are far less important than our obligations, if we remembered that, while we possess Christian liberty, it is always an offence to use it as if it conferred upon us the right to grieve the heart and conscience of someone else. Unless a church is a body of people who, in love, consider one another it is not a church at all.

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Romans 14:21-23

RESPECT FOR THE WEAKER BROTHER

Romans 14:21-23

It is the fine thing neither to eat meat, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything which makes the road more difficult for your brother to walk. As far as you yourselves are concerned you have enough faith to know that these things do not matter--well, then, let that be a matter between yourself and God. Happy is the man who never has cause to condemn himself for doing what he has come to the conclusion it was right to do. But he who has doubts about eating something stands condemned if he does eat it, because his decision to eat is not the result of faith.

We are back at the point that what is right for one man may be the ruin of another. Paul's advice is very practical.

(i) He has advice for the man who is strong in the faith. That man knows that food and drink make no difference. He has grasped the principle of Christian freedom. Well, then, let that freedom be something between him and God. He has reached this stage of faith; and God knows well that he has reached it. But that is no reason why he should flaunt his freedom in the face of the man who has not yet reached it. Many a man has insisted on the rights of his freedom, and then had cause to regret that he ever did so when he sees the consequences.

A man may come to the conclusion that his Christian freedom gives him a perfect right to make a reasonable use of alcohol; and, as far as he is concerned, it may be a perfectly safe pleasure, from which he runs no danger. But it may be that a younger man who admires him is watching him and taking him as an example. And it may also be that this younger man is one of these people to whom alcohol is a fatal thing. Is the older man to use his Christian freedom to go on setting an example which may well be the ruin of his young admirer? Or is he to limit himself, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the one who follows in his footsteps?

Surely conscious limitation for the sake of others is the Christian thing. If a man does not exercise it, he may well find that something that he genuinely thought to be permissible has brought ruin to someone else! It is surely better to make this deliberate limitation than to have the remorse of knowing that what one demanded as a pleasure has become death to someone else. Again and again, in every sphere of life, the Christian is confronted with the fact that he must examine things, not only as they affect himself, but also as they affect other people. A man is always in some sense his brother's keeper, responsible, not only for himself, but for everyone who comes into contact with him. "His friendship did me a mischief," said Burns of the older man he met in Irvine as he learned the art of flax-dressing. God grant that none may say that of us because we misused the glory of Christian freedom!

(ii) Paul has advice for the man who is weak in the faith, the man with the over-scrupulous conscience. This man may disobey or silence his scruples. He may sometimes do something because everyone else is doing it and he does not wish to be different. He may do it because he does not wish to court ridicule or unpopularity. Paul's answer is that if a man defies his conscience he is guilty of sin. If a man believes a thing to be wrong, then, if he does it, for him it is sin. A

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Romans 14:21-23

neutral thing becomes a right thing only when it is done out of the real, reasoned conviction that it is right. No man is the keeper of another man's conscience, and each man's conscience, in things indifferent, must be the arbiter for him of what is right or wrong.

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Romans 15:1-6

THE MARKS OF THE FELLOWSHIP

Romans 15:1-6

It is the duty of us who are strong to bear the weaknesses of those who are not strong, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please our neighbour, but always for his good and always for his upbuilding in the faith. For the Anointed One of God did not please himself, but, as it stands written, "The insults of those who were insulting you fell upon me." All the things that were written long ago were written to teach us, so that, through our fortitude, and through the encouragement which the scriptures give, we may hold fast to our hope. May the God who inspires us with fortitude, and gives us encouragement, grant to you to live in harmony with one another as Christ Jesus would have you to do, so that your praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ may rise from a united heart and a united voice.

Paul is still dealing with the duties of those within the Christian fellowship to one another, and especially with the duty of the stronger to the weaker brother. This passage gives us a wonderful summary of the marks which should characterize that fellowship.

(i) The Christian fellowship should be marked by the consideration of its members for each other. Always their thoughts should be, not for themselves, but for each other. But this consideration must not degenerate into an easy-going, sentimental laxity. It must always be designed for the other person's good and for his upbuilding in the faith. It is not the toleration which tolerates because it is too lazy to do anything else. It is the toleration which knows that a man may be won much more easily to a fuller faith by surrounding him with an atmosphere of love than by attacking him with a battery of criticism.

(ii) The Christian fellowship should be marked by the study of scripture; and from that study of scripture the Christian draws encouragement. Scripture, from this point of view, provides us with two things. (a) It gives us the record of God's dealing with a nation, a record which is the demonstration that it is always better to be right with God and to suffer, than to be wrong with men and to avoid trouble. The history of Israel is the demonstration in the events of history that ultimately it is well with good and evil with the wicked. Scripture demonstrates, not that God's way is ever an easy way, but in the end it is the only way to everything that makes life worth while in time and in eternity. (b) It gives us the great and precious promises of God.

It is said that Alexander Whyte sometimes had a habit of uttering one text when he left some home during his pastoral visitation; and, as he uttered it, he would say: "Put that under your tongue and suck it like a sweetie." These promises are the promises of a God who never breaks his word. In these ways scripture gives to the man who studies it comfort in his sorrow and encouragement in his struggle.

(iii) The Christian fellowship should be marked by fortitude. Fortitude is an attitude of the heart to life. Again we meet this great word hupomene (GSN5281). It is far more than patience; it is the triumphant adequacy which can cope with life; it is the strength which does not only accept things, but which, in accepting them, transmutes them into glory.

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(iv) The Christian fellowship should be marked by hope. The Christian is always a realist, but never a pessimist. The Christian hope is not a cheap hope. It is not the immature hope which is optimistic because it does not see the difficulties and has not encountered the experiences of life. It might be thought that hope is the prerogative of the young; but the great artists did not think that. When Watts drew "Hope" he drew her as a battered and bowed figure with one string left upon her lyre. The Christian hope has seen everything and endured everything, and still has not despaired, because it believes in God. It is not hope in the human spirit, in human goodness, in human achievement; it is hope in the power of God.

(v) The Christian fellowship should be marked by harmony. However ornate a church may be, however perfect its worship and its music, however liberal its giving, it has lost the very first essential of a Christian fellowship if it has lost harmony. That is not to say that there will not be differences of opinion; it is not to say that there will be no argument and debate; but it means that those who are within the Christian fellowship will have solved the problem of living together. They will be quite sure that the Christ who unites them is greater by far than the differences which may divide them.

(vi) The Christian fellowship should be marked by praise. It is no bad test of a man to ask whether the main accent of his voice is that of grumbling discontent or cheerful thanksgiving. "What can I do, who am a little old lame man," said Epictetus, "except give praise to God?" The Christian should enjoy life because he enjoys God. He will carry his secret within him, for he will be sure that God is working all things together for good.

(vii) And the essence of the matter is that the Christian fellowship takes its example, its inspiration and its dynamic from Jesus Christ. He did not please himself. The quotation which Paul uses is from Ps.69:9. It is significant that when Paul speaks of bearing the weaknesses of others he uses the same word as is used of Christ bearing his Cross (bastazein, GSN0941). When the Lord of Glory chose to serve others instead of to please himself, he set the pattern which every one who seeks to be his follower must accept.

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Romans 15:7-13

THE INCLUSIVE CHURCH

Romans 15:7-13

So, then, welcome one another as Christ welcomed you, that God may be praised. What I mean is this--Christ became a servant of the Jewish race and way of life for the sake of God's truth, not only to guarantee the promises which the fathers received, but also that the Gentiles should praise God for his mercy. As it stands written: "Therefore I will offer praise to God among the Gentiles and I will sing to your name." And, again it says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles with his people." And, again: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him." And again Isaiah says: "There shall live the scion of Jesse, even he who rises up to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles set their hopes." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may overflow with hope.

Paul makes one last appeal that all people within the Church should be bound into one, that those who are weak in the faith and those who are strong in the faith should be one united body, that Jew and Gentile should find a common fellowship. There may be many differences but there is only one Christ, and the bond of unity is a common loyalty to him. Christ's work was for Jew and Gentile alike. He was born a Jew and was subject to the Jewish law. This was in order that all the great promises given to the fathers of the Jewish race might come true and that salvation might come first to the Jew. But he came, not only for the Jew, but for the Gentile also.

To prove that this is not his own novel and heretical idea Paul cites four passages from the Old Testament; he quotes them from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, which is why they vary from the translation of the Old Testament as we know it. The passages are Ps.18:50; Deut.32:43; Ps.117:1; Isa.11:10. In all of them Paul finds ancient forecasts of the reception of the Gentiles into the faith. He is convinced that, just as Jesus Christ came into this world to save all men, so the Church must welcome all men, no matter what their differences may be. Christ was an inclusive Saviour, and therefore his Church must be an inclusive Church.

Then Paul once again goes on to sound the notes of the Christian faith. The great words of the Christian faith flash out one after another.

(i) There is hope. It is easy in the light of experience to despair of oneself. It is easy in the light of events to despair of the world. Someone tells of a meeting in a certain church at a time of emergency. The meeting was constituted with prayer by the chairman. He addressed God as "Almighty and eternal God, whose grace is sufficient for all things." When the prayer was finished, the business part of the meeting began; and the chairman introduced the business by saying: "Gentlemen, the situation in this church is completely hopeless, and nothing can be done." Either his prayer was composed of empty and meaningless words, or his statement was untrue.

It has long ago been said that there are no hopeless situations; there are only men who have grown hopeless about them. It is told that there was a cabinet meeting in the darkest days of the last war, just after France had capitulated. Mr. Churchill outlined the situation in its starkest colours. Britain stood alone. There was a silence when he had finished speaking, and on some faces was

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written despair, and some would have given up the struggle. Mr. Churchill looked round that dispirited company. "Gentlemen," he said, "I find it rather inspiring."

There is something in Christian hope that not all the shadows can quench--and that something is the conviction that God is alive. No man is hopeless so long as there is the grace of Jesus Christ; and no situation is hopeless so long as there is the power of God.

(ii) There is joy. There is all the difference in this world between pleasure and joy. The Cynic philosophers declared that pleasure was unmitigated evil. Anthisthenes made the strange statement that he would "rather be mad than pleased." Their argument was that "pleasure is only the pause between two pains." You have longing for something, that is the pain; you get it, the longing is satisfied and there is a pause in the pain; you enjoy it and the moment is gone; and the pain comes back. In truth, that is the way pleasure works. But Christian joy is not dependent on things outside a man; its source is in our consciousness of the presence of the living Lord, the certainty that nothing can separate us from the love of God in him.

(iii) There is peace. The ancient philosophers sought for what they called ataraxia, the untroubled life. They wanted all that serenity which is proof alike against the shattering blows and the petty pinpricks of this life. One would almost say that today serenity is a lost possession. There are two things which make it impossible.

(a) There is inner tension. Men live a distracted life, for the word distract literally means to pull apart. So long as a man is a walking civil war and a split personality, there can obviously be for him no such thing as serenity. There is only one way out of this, and that is for self to abdicate to Christ. When Christ controls, the tension is gone.

(b) There is worry about external things. Many are haunted by the chances and the changes of life. H. G. Wells tells how in New York harbour he was once on a liner. It was foggy, and suddenly out of the fog loomed another liner, and the two ships slid past each other with only yards to spare. He was suddenly face to face with what he called the general large dangerousness of life. It is hard not to worry, for man is characteristically a creature who looks forward to guess and fear. The only end to that worry is the utter conviction that, whatever happens, God's hand will never cause his child a needless tear. Things will happen that we cannot understand, but if we are sure enough of God's love, we can accept with serenity even those things which wound the heart and baffle the mind.

(iv) There is power. Here is the supreme need of men. It is not that we do not know the right thing; the trouble is the doing it. The trouble is to cope with and to conquer things, to make what Wells called "the secret splendour of our intentions" into actual facts. That we can never do alone. Only when the surge of Christ's power fills our weakness can we master life as we ought. By ourselves we can do nothing; but with God all things are possible.

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Romans 15:14-21

THE WORDS REVEAL THE MAN

Romans 15:14-21

Brothers, I myself am quite sure that you, as you are, are full of goodness and replete with all knowledge and well able to give good advice to one another. I write to you with a certain amount of boldness, as it were, with the purpose of reminding you of what you already know. My ground for doing so is the God-given grace which made me the servant of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, and gave me the sacred task of telling the good news, and my aim in doing so is to make the Gentiles an offering acceptable to God, an offering consecrated by the Holy Spirit. Now, in Christ, I have good reason to take a legitimate pride in my work in God's service. I can say this for I will not venture to speak of anything other than the things which Christ has wrought in me, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to bring the Gentiles into obedience to him. Thus from Jerusalem right round to Illyricum, I have completed the announcing of the good news of God's Anointed One.

But it has always been my ambition to announce the good news, not where Christ's name has already been preached, because I want to avoid building on another man's foundation. but as it stands written: "Those to whom the good news has not been told shall see; and those who have not heard will understand."

Few passages reveal Paul's character better than this. He is coming to the end of his letter and is wishing to prepare the ground for the visit that he hopes soon to pay to Rome. Here we see something at least of his secret in winning men.

(i) Paul reveals himself as a man of tact. There is no rebuke here. He does not nag the brethren at Rome nor speak to them like some angry schoolmaster. He tells them that he is only reminding them of what they well know, and assures them that he is certain that they have it in them to render outstanding service to each other and to their Lord. Paul was much more interested in what a man could be than in what he was. He saw faults with utter clarity, and dealt with them with utter fidelity; but all the time he was thinking, not of the wretched creature that a man was, but of the splendid creature that he might be.

It is told that once when Michelangelo began to carve a huge and shapeless block of marble, he said that his aim was to release the angel imprisoned in the stone. Paul was like that. He did not want to knock a man down and out; he did not criticize to cause pain; he spoke with honesty and with severity but always because he wished to enable a man to be what he could be and never yet attained to being.

(ii) The only glory that Paul claimed was that he was the servant of Christ. The word he uses (leitourgos, GSN3011) is a great one. In ancient Greece there were certain state duties called liturgies (leitourgiai, GSN3011) which were sometimes laid upon and sometimes voluntarily shouldered by men who loved their country. There were five of these voluntary services which patriotic citizens used to undertake.

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(a) There was choregia (GSN5524), which was the duty of supplying a chorus. When Aeschylus and Sophocles and Euripides were producing their immortal dramas, in each of them a verse-speaking chorus was necessary. There were great festivals like the City Dionysia when as many as eighteen new dramatic works were performed. Men who loved their city would volunteer to collect, maintain, instruct and equip such a chorus at their own expense.

(b) There was gymnasiarchia. The Athenians were divided into ten tribes; and they were great athletes. At certain of the great festivals there were the famous torch-races in which teams from the various tribes raced against each other. We still speak of handing on the torch. To win the torch-race was a great honour, and there were public-spirited men who at their own cost would select and support and train a team to represent their tribe.

(c) There was hestiasis. There were occasions when the tribes met together to share in a common meal and a common rejoicing; and there were generous men who undertook the task of meeting the expense of such a gathering.

(d) There was archetheoria. Sometimes the city of Athens sent an embassy to another city or to consult the oracle at Delphi or Dodona. On such an occasion everything had to be done in such a way that the honour of the city was maintained; and there were patriotic men who voluntarily defrayed the expenses of such an embassy.

(e) There was trierarchia. The Athenians were the great naval power of the ancient world. And one of the most patriotic things that a man could do was voluntarily to undertake the expenses of maintaining a trireme or warship for a whole year.

That is the background of this word leitourgos (GSN3009). In later days, as patriotism died, such liturgies became compulsory and not voluntary. Later the word came to be used of any kind of service; and later still it came to be used especially of worship and service rendered in the temple of the gods. But the word always had this background of generous service. Just as a man in the ancient days laid his fortune on the altar of the service of his beloved Athens, and counted it his only glory, so Paul laid his everything on the altar of the service of Christ, and was proud to be the servant of his Master.

(iii) Paul saw himself, in the scheme of things, as an instrument in the hands of Christ. He did not talk of what he had done; but of what Christ had done with him. He never said of anything: "I did it." He always said: "Christ used me to do it." It is told that the change in the life of D. L. Moody came when he went to a meeting and heard a preacher say: "If only one man would give himself entirely and without reserve to the Holy Spirit, what that Spirit might do with him!" Moody said to himself: "Why should I not be that man?" And all the world knows what the Spirit of God did with D. L. Moody. It is when a man ceases to think of what he can do and begins to think of what God can do with him, that things begin to happen.

(iv) Paul's ambition was to be a pioneer. It is told that when Livingstone volunteered as a missionary with the London Missionary Society they asked him where he would like to go. "Anywhere," he said, "so long as it is forward." And when he reached Africa he was haunted by the

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Romans 15:14-21

smoke of a thousand villages which he saw in the distance. It was Paul's one ambition to carry the good news of God to men who had never heard it. He takes a text from Isa.52:15 to tell his aim.

"Ye armies of the living God,
His sacramental host,
Where hallowed footstep never trod,
Take your appointed post."

Barclay's Commentary

Romans 15:22-29

PLANS PRESENT AND FUTURE

Romans 15:22-29

And that is why on many occasions I found the way to come to you blocked. But now, since I have no longer a sphere for work in these areas, and since for many years back I have had a great desire to come to you, when I shall go to Spain I hope to see you on my way through; and, I hope, after I have first enjoyed your company for a while, to be sped on my way by you. But at the moment I am on my way to Jerusalem, to render some service to God's dedicated people there. For Macedonia and Achaia resolved to make a contribution to the poor among God's dedicated people in Jerusalem. For that was their resolve and indeed they owe a debt to them. For if the Gentiles have received a share in spiritual blessings they also owe a debt to render service to them in material things. When I have completed this business, and when I have duly delivered the gifts to them intact, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I do come to you, I will come bringing a full blessing from Christ.

Here we have Paul telling of an immediate and of a future plan.

(i) His future plan was to go to Spain. There were two reasons why he should wish to go there. First, Spain was at the very western end of Europe. It was in one sense the then limit of the civilized world, and the very fact that it was such would lure Paul on to preach there. He would characteristically wish to take the good news of God so far that he could not take it farther.

(ii) At this time Spain was experiencing a kind of blaze of genius. Many of the greatest men in the Empire were Spaniards. Lucan, the epic poet, Martial, the master of the epigram, Quintilian, the greatest teacher of oratory of his day, were all Spaniards. Above all, Seneca, the great Stoic philosopher, who was first the guardian and afterwards the prime minister of Nero, was a Spaniard. It may well be that Paul was saying to himself that if only he could touch Spain for Christ tremendous things might happen.

(iii) His immediate plan was to go to Jerusalem. He had had a plan which was very dear to his heart. He had arranged for a collection to be taken from his young churches for the poor in the Church of Jerusalem. There is no doubt that that collection would be necessary. In a city like Jerusalem much of the available employment must have been connected with the Temple and its needs. All the priests and the Temple authorities were Sadducees, and the Sadducees were the supreme enemies of Jesus. It must therefore have happened that many a man, when he became a Christian in Jerusalem, lost his job and was in sore need. The help the younger churches could give was much needed. But there were at least three other great reasons why Paul was so eager to take this gift to Jerusalem.

(a) For himself it was the payment of a debt and a duty. When it had been agreed that Paul should be the apostle to the Gentiles, one injunction had been laid upon him by the leaders of the Church--that he would remember the poor (Gal.2:10). "Which very thing," said Paul, "I was eager to do." He was not the man to forget a debt, and now that debt was about to be paid, at least in part.

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Romans 15:22-29

(b) There was no better way of demonstrating in the most practical way the unity of the Church. This was a way of teaching the young churches that they were not isolated units but members of a great Church extending throughout all the world. The value of giving to others is that it makes us remember that we are not members of a congregation but of a Church which is worldwide.

(c) There was no better way of putting Christianity into practical action. It was easy enough to talk about Christian generosity; here was a chance to turn Christian words into Christian deeds.

So Paul is on the way to Jerusalem, and he is planning a journey to Spain. As far as we know he never got to Spain, for in Jerusalem he encountered the trouble which led to his long imprisonment and his death. It would seem that this was one plan of the great pioneer which never was worked out.

Barclay's Commentary

Romans 15:30-33

OPEN-EYED INTO DANGER

Romans 15:30-33

Brothers, I call upon you by the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, to strive along with me in prayer to God for me; for I need your prayers that I may be rescued from those in Jerusalem who do not believe, and that the help that I am bringing to Jerusalem may prove acceptable to God's dedicated people there. I want you to pray that by God's will I may come to you with joy, and enjoy a time of rest with you. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

We came to the end of the last passage by saying that as far as we know Paul's plans to go to Spain were never realized. We know for a certainty that when he went to Jerusalem he was arrested and spent the next four years in prison, two in Caesarea and two in Rome. Here again his great character comes out.

(i) When Paul went to Jerusalem he knew what he was doing and was well aware of the dangers that lay ahead. Just as his Master steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem (Lk.9:51) so also did Paul. The highest courage is to know that something perilous awaits us and still to go on. That is the courage that Jesus showed; that is the courage that Paul showed; and that is the courage that all Christ's followers must show.

(ii) In such a situation Paul asked for the prayers of the Christian Church at Rome. It is a great thing to go on knowing that we are wrapped in the warmth of the prayers of those who love us. However far we are separated from those we love, we and they can meet around the mercy-seat of God.

(iii) Paul leaves them his blessing as he goes. It was no doubt all that he had to give. Even when we have nothing else, we can still bear our friends and loved ones in prayer to God.

(iv) It was the blessing of the God of peace that Paul sent to Rome and it was with the presence of the God of peace that he himself went to Jerusalem with all its threats. The man who has the peace of God in his heart can meet all life's perils unafraid.

Barclay's Commentary

Romans 16:1-2

A LETTER OF COMMENDATION

Romans 16:1-2

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the Church which is in Cenchreae. I want you to welcome her in the Lord in the way that God's people should welcome one another; and I want you to help her in whatever way she needs your help, for she has been a helper to many, and to me, too.

When a person is applying for a new job, he usually gets a testimonial from someone who knows him well and who can pay tribute to his character and ability. When a person is going to live in some strange town, he often takes with him a letter of introduction from someone who knows people in that town. In the ancient world such letters were very common. They were known as *sustatikai* (GSN4956) *epistolai* (GSN1992), letters of commendation or introduction. We still possess many of these letters, written on papyrus and recovered from the rubbish heaps buried in the desert sands of Egypt.

A certain Mystarion, for instance, an Egyptian olive-planter, sends his servant on an errand to Stotoetis, a chief priest, and gives him a letter of introduction to take with him.

Mystarion to his own Stotoetis, many greetings.
I have sent my Blastus to you for forked sticks for my olive-gardens.
See then that you do not detain him, for you know how I need him every hour.
To Stotoetis, chief priest at the island.

That is a letter of commendation to introduce the Blastus who has gone upon the errand. So Paul writes to introduce Phoebe to the Church at Rome.

Phoebe came from Cenchreae which was the port of Corinth. Sometimes she is called a deaconess, but it is not likely that she held what might be called an official position in the Church. There can have been no time in the Christian Church when the work of women was not of infinite value. It must have been specially so in the days of the early Church. In the case of baptism by total immersion, as it then was, in the visitation of the sick, in the distribution of food to the poor, women must have played a big part in the life and work of the Church, but they did not at that time hold any official position.

Paul bespeaks a welcome for Phoebe. He asks the people at Rome to welcome her as God's dedicated people ought to welcome each other. There should be no strangers in the family of Christ; there should be no need for formal introductions between Christian people, for they are sons and daughters of the one father and therefore brothers and sisters of each other. And yet a church is not always the welcoming institution that it ought to be. It is possible for churches, and still more possible for church organizations, to become almost little closed societies which are not really interested in welcoming the stranger. When a stranger comes amongst us, Paul's advice still holds good--welcome such a one as God's dedicated people ought to welcome each other.

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Romans 16:3-4

A HOUSEHOLD WHICH WAS A CHURCH

Romans 16:3-4

Give my greetings to Prisca and to Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks to save my life. It is not only I who have cause to be thankful to them, but all the churches of the Gentiles; and give my greetings to the church that is in their house.

There is no more fascinating pair of people in the New Testament than Prisca and Aquila. Sometimes Prisca is also called Priscilla which is an affectionate diminutive form of her name. Let us begin with the facts about them of which we are sure.

They appear first in Ac.18:2. From that passage we learn that they had previously been resident in Rome. Claudius had issued an edict in A.D. 52 banishing the Jews. Anti-semitism is no new thing, and the Jews were hated in the ancient world as they so often are today. When they were banished from Rome, Prisca and Aquila settled in Corinth. They were tent-makers which was Paul's own trade, and he found a home with them. When he left Corinth and went to Ephesus, Prisca and Aquila went with him and settled there (Ac.18:18).

The very first incident related of them is characteristic. There came to Ephesus that brilliant scholar Apollos; but he had not at this time anything like a full grasp of the Christian faith; so Aquila and Prisca took him into their house and gave him friendship and instruction in that faith (Ac.18:24-26). From the very beginning Prisca and Aquila were people who kept an open heart and an open door.

The next time we hear of them they are still in Ephesus. Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus and in it he sends greetings from Prisca and Aquila and from the church that is in their house (1Cor.16:19). This was long before the days when there was any such thing as a church building; and the home of Prisca and Aquila served as a meeting place for a group of Christian folk.

The next time we hear of them they are in Rome. The edict of Claudius which had banished the Jews had ceased to be effective and no doubt Prisca and Aquila like many another Jew drifted back to their old homes and their old business. We discover that they are just the same--again there is a group of Christian people meeting in their house.

For the last time they emerge in 2Tim.4:19, and once again they are in Ephesus; and one of the last messages Paul ever sent was a greeting to this pair of Christians who had come through so much with him.

Prisca and Aquila lived a curiously nomadic and unsettled life. Aquila himself had been born in Pontus in Asia Minor (Ac.18:2). We find them resident first in Rome, then in Corinth, then in Ephesus, then back in Rome, and then finally again in Ephesus; but wherever we find them, we find their home a centre of Christian fellowship and service. Every home should be a church, for a church is a place where Jesus dwells. From the home of Prisca and Aquila, wherever it was,

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Romans 16:3-4

radiated friendship and fellowship and love. If one is a stranger in a strange town or a strange land, one of the most valuable things in the world is to have a home from home into which to go. It takes away loneliness and protects from temptation. Sometimes we think of a home as a place into which we can go and shut the door and keep the world out: but equally a home should be a place with an open door. The open door, the open hand, and the open heart are characteristics of the Christian life.

So much is certain about Prisca and Aquila; but it may be that there is even greater romance in their story. To this day in Rome there is a Church of St Prisca on the Aventine. There is also a cemetery of Priscilla. This cemetery is the burying place of the ancient Roman Acilian family. In it lies buried Acilius Glabrio. He was consul of Rome in A.D. 91 which was the highest office Rome could offer him; and it seems extremely likely that he died a martyr's death as a Christian. He must have been one of the first of the great Romans to become a Christian and to suffer for his faith. Now when people received their freedom in the Roman Empire they were enrolled in one of the great families and took one of the family names as theirs. One of the commonest female names in the Acilian family was Prisca; and Acilius is sometimes written Aquilius, which is very close to Aquila. Here we are faced with two fascinating possibilities.

(i) Perhaps Prisca and Aquila received their freedom from some member of the Acilian family, in which it may be that once they were slaves. Can it be that these two people sowed the seeds of Christianity into that family so that one day a member of it--Acilius Glabrio, no less a person than a Roman consul--became a Christian?

(ii) There is an even more romantic possibility. It is an odd thing that in four out of the six mentions of this pair in the New Testament Prisca is named before her husband, although normally the husband's name would come first, as we say "Mr and Mrs." There is just the possibility that this is because Prisca was not a freedwoman at all but a great lady, a member by birth of the Acilian family. It may be that at some meeting of the Christians this great Roman lady met Aquila, the humble Jewish tentmaker, that the two fell in love, that Christianity destroyed the barriers of race and rank and wealth and birth, and that these two, the Roman aristocrat and the Jewish artisan, were joined for ever in Christian love and Christian service.

Of these speculations we can never be sure, but we can be sure that there were many in Corinth, in Ephesus and in Rome, who owed their souls to Prisca and Aquila and to that home of theirs which was also a church.

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Romans 16:5-11

TO EVERY NAME A COMMENDATION

Romans 16:5-11

Give my greetings to my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Give my greetings to Mary who has toiled hard among you. Give my greetings to Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow-prisoners. They are of high mark among the apostles, and they were Christians before I was. Give my greetings to Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Give my greetings to Urbanus, our fellow-worker in Christ, and to my beloved Stachys. Give my greetings to Apelles, a man of sterling worth in Christ. Give my greetings to those who are of the household of Aristobulus. Give my greetings to Herodion, my kinsman. Give my greetings to those of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

No doubt behind every one of these names there is a story which is a romance in Christ. None of these stories do we know, but at some of them we can guess. In this chapter there are twenty-four individual names and there are two interesting things to note.

(i) Of the twenty-four, six are women. That is worth remembering, for often Paul is accused of belittling the status of women in the Church. If we really wish to see Paul's attitude, it is a passage like this that we should read, where his appreciation of the work that women were doing in the Church shines through his words.

(ii) Of the twenty-four names, thirteen occur in inscriptions or documents which have to do with the Emperor's palace in Rome. Although many are very common names, this fact is nonetheless suggestive. In Php.4:22 Paul speaks of the saints of Caesar's household. It may be that they were for the most part slaves, but it is still important that Christianity seems to have penetrated even thus early into the imperial palace.

Andronicus and Junias form an interesting pair, because it is most likely that Junias is a female name. That would mean that in the early Church a woman could be ranked as an apostle. The apostles in this sense were people whom the Church sent out to tell the story of Jesus at large. Paul says that Andronicus and Junias were Christians before he was. That means that they must go right back to the time of Stephen; they must have been a direct link with the earliest Church at Jerusalem.

Behind the name of Ampliatus may well lie an interesting story. It is a quite common slave name. Now in the cemetery of Domatilla, which is the earliest of the Christian catacombs, there is a decorated tomb with the single name Ampliatus carved on it in bold and decorative lettering. The fact that the single name Ampliatus alone is carved on the tomb--Romans who were citizens would have three names, a nomen, a praenomen, and a cognomen--would indicate that this Ampliatus was a slave; but the elaborate tomb and the bold lettering would indicate that he was a man of high rank in the Church. From that it is plain to see that in the early days of the Church the distinctions of rank were so completely wiped out that it was possible for a man at one and the same time to be a slave and a prince of the Church. Social distinctions did not exist. We have no means of knowing

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that Paul's Ampliatus is the Ampliatus in the cemetery of Domatilla, but it is not impossible that he is.

The household of Aristobulus may also be a phrase with an interesting history. In Rome household did not describe only a man's family and personal relations; it included also his servants and slaves. In Rome for long there had lived a grandson of Herod the Great whose name was Aristobulus. He had lived always as a private individual and had inherited none of Herod's domains; but he was a close friend of the Emperor Claudius. When he died his servants and slaves would become the property of the Emperor, but they would form a section of his establishment known as the household of Aristobulus. So this phrase may well describe Jewish servants and slaves who had once belonged to Aristobulus, Herod's grandson, and had now become the property of the Emperor. This is made the more probable by the name mentioned on each side of the phrase. Apelles may quite well be the Greek name that a Jew called Abel would take, and Herodion is a name which would obviously suit one who had some connection with the family of Herod.

The household of Narcissus may have still another interesting story behind it. Narcissus was a common name; but the most famous Narcissus was a freedman who had been secretary to the Emperor Claudius and had exercised a notorious influence over him. He was said to have amassed a private fortune of almost L 4,000,000. His power had lain in the fact that all correspondence addressed to the Emperor had to pass through his hands and never reached him unless he allowed it to do so. He made his fortune from the fact that people paid him large bribes to make sure that their petitions did reach the Emperor. When Claudius was murdered and Nero came to the throne, Narcissus survived for a short time, but in the end he was compelled to commit suicide, and all his fortune and all his household of slaves passed into Nero's possession. It may well be his one-time slaves which are referred to here.

If Aristobulus really is the Aristobulus who was the grandson of Herod, and if Narcissus really is the Narcissus who was Cladius' secretary, this means that many of the slaves at the imperial court were already Christians. The leaven of Christianity had reached the highest circles in the Empire.

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Romans 16:12-16

HIDDEN ROMANCES

Romans 16:12-16

Give my greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa who toil in the Lord. Give my greetings to Persis, the beloved, who has toiled hard in the Lord. Give my greetings to Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and to his mother who was a mother to me too. Give my greetings to Asyncritus, to Phlegon, to Hermes, to Patrobas, to Hermas, and to the brothers who are with them. Give my greetings to Philologos and to Julias, to Nereus and to his sister, to Olympas, and to all God's dedicated people who are with them. Greet each other with the kiss that God's dedicated people use. All the Churches of Christ send you greetings.

No doubt behind all these names lies a story; but it is only about a few of them that we can guess and reconstruct.

(i) When Paul wrote his greetings to Tryphaena and Tryphosa--who were very likely twin sisters--he wrote them with a smile, for the way in which he put it sounds like a complete contradiction in terms. Three times in this list of greetings Paul uses a certain Greek word for Christian toil. He uses it of Mary (Rom.16:6), and of Tryphaena and Tryphosa and of Persis in this passage. It is the verb *kopian* (GSN2872), which means to toil to the point of exhaustion. That is what Paul said that Tryphaena and Tryphosa were in the habit of doing; and the point is that Tryphaena (GSN5170) and Tryphosa (GSN5173) mean respectively dainty and delicate! It is as if he were saying: "You two may be called dainty and delicate; but you belie your names by working like Trojans for the sake of Christ." We can well imagine a twinkle in Paul's eye as he dictated that greeting.

(ii) One of the great hidden romances of the New Testament lies behind the name of Rufus and his mother, who was also a mother to Paul. It is obvious that Rufus is a choice spirit and a man well-known for saintliness in the Roman Church; and it is equally obvious that Paul felt that he owed a deep debt of gratitude to the mother of Rufus for the kindness he had received from her. Who was this Rufus?

Turn to Mk.15:21. There we read of one Simon a Cyrenian who was compelled to carry the Cross of Jesus on the road to Calvary; and he is described as the father of Alexander and Rufus. Now if a man is identified by the names of his sons, it means that, although he himself may not be personally known to the community to whom the story is being told, his sons are. To what Church, then, did Mark write his gospel? He wrote it to the Church of Rome, and he knew that it would know who Alexander and Rufus were. Almost certainly here we find Rufus again, the son of that Simon who carried the Cross of Jesus.

That must have been a terrible day for Simon. He was a Jew, from far-off Cyrene in North Africa. No doubt he had scraped and saved for half a lifetime to celebrate one Passover in Jerusalem. As he entered the city on that day, with his heart full of the greatness of the Feast he was going to attend, suddenly the flat of a Roman spear touched him on the shoulder; he was impressed into the Roman service; he found himself carrying a criminal's cross. How the resentment must have blazed in his heart! How angry and bitter he must have been at this terrible indignity! All the way from Cyrene

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Romans 16:12-16

for this! To have come so far to sit at the glory of the Passover and to have had this dreadful and shameful thing happen! No doubt he meant, as soon as he reached Calvary, to fling the cross down and stride away with loathing in his heart.

But something must have happened. On the way to Calvary the spell of the broken figure of Jesus must have laid its tendrils round his heart. He must have stayed to watch, and that figure on the Cross drew Simon to himself for ever. That chance encounter on the road to Calvary changed Simon's life. He came to sit at the Jewish Passover and he went away the slave of Christ. He must have gone home and brought his wife and sons into the same experience as he had himself.

We can weave all kinds of speculations about this. It was men from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and first preached the gospel to the Gentile world (Ac.11:20). Was Simon one of the men from Cyrene? Was Rufus with him? Was it they who took the first tremendous step to make Christianity the faith of a whole world? Was it they who helped the Church burst the bonds of Judaism? Can it be that in some sense we today owe the fact that we are Christians to the strange episode when a man from Cyrene was compelled to carry a cross on the road to Calvary?

Turn to Ephesus when there is a riot raised by the people who served Diana of the Ephesians and when the crowd would have lynched Paul if they could have got at him. Who stands out to look that mob in the face? A man called Alexander (Ac.19:33). Is this the other brother facing things out with Paul?

And as for their mother--surely she in some hour of need must have brought to Paul the help and the comfort and the love which his own family refused him when he became a Christian. It may be guesswork, for Alexander and Rufus are common names; but maybe it is true and maybe the most amazing things followed from that chance encounter on the way to Calvary.

(iii) There remains one other name which may have a perhaps even more amazing story behind it--that of Nereus. In A.D. 95 an event occurred which shocked Rome. Two of the most distinguished people in the city were condemned for being Christians. They were Flavius Clemens, who had been consul of Rome, and his wife Domatilla, who was of royal blood. She was the grand-daughter of Vespasian, a former Emperor, and the niece of Domitian the reigning Emperor. In fact the two sons of Flavius Clemens and Domatilla had been designated Domitian's successors in the imperial power. Flavius was executed and Domatilla was banished to the island of Pontia where years afterwards Paula saw the cave where "she drew out a long martyrdom for the Christian name."

The point is this--the name of the chamberlain of Flavius and Domatilla was Nereus. Is it possible that Nereus the slave had something to do with the making into Christians of Flavius Clemens the ex-consul and Domatilla the princess of the royal blood? It may be an idle speculation, for Nereus is a common name, but, on the other hand, it may be true.

There is one other fact of interest to add to this story. Flavius Clemens was the son of Flavius Sabinus, who had been Nero's city prefect when Nero sadistically persecuted the Christians after charging them with being responsible for the appalling fire which devastated Rome in A.D. 64. As city prefect Flavius Sabinus must have been Nero's executive officer in that persecution. It was then

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Romans 16:12-16

that Nero ordered the Christians to be rolled in pitch and set alight to form living torches for his gardens, to be sewn into the skins of wild beasts and flung to savage hunting dogs, to be shut up in ships which were sunk in the Tiber. Is it possible that thirty years before he died for Christ, the young Flavius Clemens had seen the dauntless courage of the martyrs and wondered what made men able to die like that?

Five verses of names and of greetings--but they open vistas which thrill the heart!

Barclay's Commentary

Romans 16:17-20

A LAST LOVING APPEAL

Romans 16:17-20

Brothers, I urge you to keep your eye on those who, contrary to the teaching which they have received, cause dissensions and put in your way things which would trip you up. Steer clear of them. Such men are not real servants of Christ, our Lord; they are the servants of their own greed. By their plausibility and their flattery they deceive the hearts of innocent folk. I know that you will deal with such people, for the story of your obedience has reached all men. So, then, I rejoice over you. I want you to be wise in what is good, and untainted with what is evil. The God of peace will soon overthrow Satan so that you may trample him under your feet. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Romans was a letter which Paul found very difficult to bring to an end. He has sent his greetings; but before he closes he makes one last appeal to the Christians in Rome to keep themselves from every evil influence. He picks out two characteristics of men hurtful to the Church and to the Christian fellowship.

(i) They are men who cause dissensions among the brethren. Any man who does anything which disturbs the peace of a church has much to answer for. A minister was once talking to a man newly come to his congregation from another town. The man had obviously little of the love of Christ upon him. He said to the minister: "You know such and such a congregation?" naming that of which he had formerly been a member. "Yes," said the minister. "Well," said the man with a certain evil relish. "I wrecked it!" There are people who take a pride in making trouble and who like nothing better than to sow the poisonous seeds of strife. The man who has brought strife to any band of brothers will answer for it some day to him who is the King and Head of the Church.

(ii) They are men who put hindrances in the way of others. The man who makes it harder for someone else to be a Christian also has much to answer for. The man whose conduct is a bad example, whose influence is an evil snare, whose teaching dilutes or emasculates the Christian faith which he pretends to teach, will someday bear his own punishment; and it will not be light, for Jesus was stern to any man who caused one of his little ones to stumble.

There are two interesting words in this passage. There is the word we have translated plausibility (chrestologia, GSN5542). The Greeks themselves defined a chrestologos (see GSN5542) as "a man who speaks well and who acts ill." He is the kind of man who, behind a facade of pious words, is a bad influence, who leads astray, not by direct attack, but by subtlety, who pretends to serve Christ, but in reality is destroying the faith. There is the word we have translated untainted with what is evil. It is the word *akeraios* (GSN0185) and it is used of metal which has no suspicion of alloy, of wine and of milk which are not adulterated with water. It describes something which is absolutely pure of any corruption. The Christian is a man whose utter sincerity must be beyond all doubt.

One thing is to be noted in this passage--it is clear that the latent trouble in the Church at Rome has not yet flared into action. Paul, indeed, says that he believes that the Roman Church is well able to deal with it. He was a wise pastor, because he believed firmly that prevention was better than

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cure. Often in a church or a society a bad situation is allowed to develop because no one has the courage to deal with it; and often, when it has fully developed, it is too late to deal with it. It is easy enough to extinguish a spark if steps are taken at once, but it is almost impossible to extinguish a forest fire. Paul had the wisdom to deal with a threatening situation in time.

The passage closes with a most suggestive thing. Paul says that the God of peace will soon crush and overthrow Satan, the power of evil. We must note that the peace of God is the peace of action and of victory. There is a kind of peace which can be had at the cost of evading all issues and refusing all decisions, a peace which comes of lethargic inactivity. The Christian must ever remember that the peace of God is not the peace which has submitted to the world, but the peace which has overcome the world.

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Romans 16:21-23

GREETINGS

Romans 16:21-23

Timothy, my fellow-worker, sends you his greetings, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I Tertius, who wrote this letter, send you my greetings in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole Church enjoy, sends you his greetings, as does brother Quartus.

It is tempting to try to identify the group of friends who send their greetings along with Paul's. Timothy was Paul's right hand man, the man whom Paul saw as his successor and of whom he later said that no one knew his mind so well (Php.2:19-20). Lucius may be the Lucius of Cyrene, who was one of the prophets and teachers of Antioch who first sent Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journeys (Ac.13:1). Jason may be the Jason who gave Paul hospitality at Thessalonica and suffered for it at the hands of the mob (Ac.17:5-9). Sosipater may be the Sopater of Beroea who took his Church's share of the collection to Jerusalem with Paul (Ac.20:4). Gaius may be the Gaius who was one of the two people whom Paul baptized at Corinth (1Cor.1:14).

For the first and only time, we know the name of the amanuensis who actually penned this letter to Paul's dictation, for Tertius slipped in his own greeting. No great man can do his work without the aid that humble helpers give him. Paul's other secretaries are anonymous, so that Tertius is the representative of those humble unknowns who were penmen for Paul.

One of the most interesting things in the whole chapter is the way in which again and again Paul characterizes people in a single sentence. Here there are two great summaries. Gaius is the man of hospitality; Quartus is the brother. It is a great thing to go down to history as the man with the open house or as the man with the brotherly heart. Some day people will sum us up in one sentence. What will that sentence be?

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Romans 16:25-27

THE END IS PRAISE

Romans 16:25-27

Now unto him who is able to make you stand firm, in the way that the gospel I preach promises and the message Jesus brought offers, in the way which is now unveiled in that secret, which was for long ages wrapped in silence, but which is now full disclosed, and made known to all the Gentiles-- as the writings of the prophets said it would be. and as the command of God now orders it to be-- that they might render to him a submission born of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory for ever. Amen.

The letter to the Romans comes to an end with a doxology which is also a summary of the gospel which Paul preached and loved.

(i) It is a gospel which makes men able to stand firm. "Son of man," said God to Ezekiel, "stand upon your feet and I will speak with you" (Eze.2:1). The gospel is a power which enables a man to stand foursquare against the shocks of the world and the assaults of temptation.

A journalist relates a great incident of the Spanish Civil War. There was a little garrison of beleaguered men. The end was near and some wished to surrender and so to save their lives; but others wished to fight on. The matter was settled when a gallant soul declared: "It is better to die upon our feet than to live upon our knees."

Life can be difficult; sometimes a man is beaten to his knees by the battering that it gives to him. Life can be perilous,, sometimes a man is like to fall in the slippery places of temptation. The gospel is God's power to save; that power which keeps a man erect, even when life is at its worst and its most threatening.

(ii) It is a gospel which Paul preached and which was offered by Jesus Christ. That is to say, the gospel takes its source in Christ and is transmitted by men. Without Jesus Christ there can be no gospel at all; but without men to transmit it, other men can never hear of it. The Christian duty is that when a man is himself found of Christ, he should straightway go and find others for him. After Andrew was found of Jesus, John says of him: "He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah'" (Jn.1:40-41).

Here is the Christian privilege and the Christian duty. The Christian privilege is to appropriate the good news for ourselves; the Christian duty is to transmit that good news to others. A famous story tells how Jesus, after the Cross and the Resurrection, returned to his glory, still bearing the marks of his sufferings. One of the angels said to him, "You must have suffered terribly for men down there." "I did," said Jesus. "Do they all know about what you did for them?" asked the angel. "No," said Jesus, "not yet. Only a few know about it so far." "And," said the angel, "what have you done that they should all know?" "Well," said Jesus, "I asked Peter and James and John to make it their business to tell others, and the others still others, until the farthest man on the widest circle has heard the story." The angel looked doubtful. for he knew well what poor creatures men were.

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Romans 16:25-27

"Yes," he said, "but what if Peter and James and John forget? What if they grow weary of the telling? What if, away down in the twentieth century, men fail to tell the story of your love for them? What then? Haven't you made any other plans?" Back came the answer of Jesus, "I haven't made any other plans. I'm counting on them." Jesus died to give us the gospel; and now he is counting on us to transmit it to all men.

(iii) It is a gospel which is the consummation of history. It is something which was there from all ages and which at the coming of Christ was revealed to the world. With the coming of Jesus something unique happened, eternity invaded time and God emerged on earth. His coming was the event to which all history was working up and the event from which all subsequent history flows. After the coming of Christ the world could never be the same again. It was the central fact of history, so that men date time in terms of before and after Christ's birth. It is as if with his coming life and the world began all over again.

(iv) It is a gospel which is meant for all men and which was always meant for all men. It is not a gospel which was meant for the Jews only; its going out to the Gentiles was not an afterthought. The prophets, perhaps scarcely knowing what they were saying, had their hints and forecasts of a time when all men of all nations would know God. That time is not yet; but it is the dream of God that some day the knowledge of him will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and it is the glory of man that he can help make God's dream come true.

(v) It is a gospel which issues in an obedient world, a world where God is King. But that obedience is not founded on submission to an iron law, which breaks the man who opposes it; it is an obedience founded on faith, on a surrender which is the result of love. For Paul the Christian is not a man who has surrendered to an ineluctable power; he is a man who has fallen in love with the God who is the lover of the souls of men and whose love stands for ever full-displayed in Jesus Christ.

And so the long argument of the letter to the Romans comes to an end in a song of praise.

Barclay's Commentary

Introduction to the Corinthian Letters

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

THE GREATNESS OF CORINTH

A glance at the map will show that Corinth was made for greatness. The southern part of Greece is very nearly an island. On the west the Corinthian Gulf deeply indents the land and on the east the Saronic Gulf. All that is left to join the two parts of Greece together is a little isthmus only four miles across. On that narrow neck of land Corinth stands. Such a position made it inevitable that it should be one of the greatest trading and commercial centres of the ancient world. All traffic from Athens and the north of Greece to Sparta and the Peloponnese had to be routed through Corinth, because it stood on the little neck of land that connected the two.

Not only did the north to south traffic of Greece pass through Corinth of necessity, by far the greater part of the east to west traffic of the Mediterranean passed through her from choice. The extreme southern tip of Greece was known as Cape Malea (now called Cape Matapan). It was dangerous, and to round Cape Malea had much the same sound as to round Cape Horn had in later times. The Greeks had two sayings which showed what they thought of it--"Let him who sails round Malea forget his home," and, "Let him who sails round Malea first make his will."

The consequence was that mariners followed one of two courses. They sailed up the Saronic Gulf, and, if their ships were small enough, dragged them out of the water, set them on rollers, hauled them across the isthmus, and re-launched them on the other side. The isthmus was actually called the Diolkos, the place of dragging across. The idea is the same as that which is contained in the Scottish place name Tarbert, which means a place where the land is so narrow that a boat can be dragged from loch to loch. If that course was not possible because the ship was too large, the cargo was disembarked, carried by porters across the isthmus, and re-embarked on another ship at the other side. This four mile journey across the isthmus, where the Corinth Canal now runs, saved a journey of two hundred and two miles round Cape Malea, the most dangerous cape in the Mediterranean.

It is easy to see how great a commercial city Corinth must have been. The north to south traffic of Greece had no alternative but to pass through her; by far the greater part of the east to west trade of the Mediterranean world chose to pass through her. Round Corinth there clustered three other towns, Lechaëum at the west end of the isthmus, Cenchrea at the east end and Schoenus just a short distance away. Farrar writes, "Objects of luxury soon found their way to the markets which were visited by every nation in the civilized world--Arabian balsam, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goats' hair, Lycaonian wool, Phrygian slaves."

Corinth, as Farrar calls her, was the Vanity Fair of the ancient world. Men called her The Bridge of Greece; one called her The Lounge of Greece. It has been said that if a man stands long enough in Piccadilly Circus he will in the end meet everyone in the country. Corinth was the Piccadilly Circus of the Mediterranean. To add to the concourse which came to it, Corinth was the place where the Isthmian Games were held, which were second only to the Olympics. Corinth was a rich and populous city with one of the greatest commercial trades in the ancient world.

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THE WICKEDNESS OF CORINTH

There was another side to Corinth. She had a reputation for commercial prosperity, but she was also a byword for evil living. The very word *korinthiazesthai*, to live like a Corinthian, had become a part of the Greek language, and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery. The word actually penetrated to the English language, and, in Regency times, a Corinthian was one of the wealthy young bucks who lived in reckless and riotous living. Aelian, the late Greek writer, tells us that if ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play he was shown drunk. The very name Corinth was synonymous with debauchery and there was one source of evil in the city which was known all over the civilized world. Above the isthmus towered the hill of the Acropolis, and on it stood the great temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

To that temple there were attached one thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and in the evenings they descended from the Acropolis and plied their trade upon the streets of Corinth, until it became a Greek proverb, "It is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth." In addition to these cruder sins, there flourished far more recondite vices, which had come in with the traders and the sailors from the ends of the earth, until Corinth became not only a synonym for wealth and luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, but also for filth.

THE HISTORY OF CORINTH

The history of Corinth falls into two parts. She was a very ancient city. Thucydides, the Greek historian, claims that it was in Corinth that the first triremes, the Greek battleships, were built. Legend has it that it was in Corinth that the Argo was built, the ship in which Jason sailed the seas, searching for the golden fleece. But in 146 B.C. disaster befell her. The Romans were engaged in conquering the world. When they sought to reduce Greece, Corinth was the leader of the opposition. But the Greeks could not stand against the disciplined Romans, and in 146 B.C. Lucius Mummius, the Roman general, captured Corinth and left her a desolate heap of ruins.

But any place with the geographical situation of Corinth could not remain a devastation. Almost exactly one hundred years later, in 46 B.C. Julius Caesar rebuilt her and she arose from her ruins. Now she became a Roman colony. More, she became a capital city, the metropolis of the Roman province of Achaia, which included practically all Greece.

In those days, which were the days of Paul, her population was very mixed. (i) There were the Roman veterans whom Julius Caesar had settled there. When a Roman soldier had served his time, he was granted the citizenship and was then sent out to some newly-founded city and given a grant of land so that he might become a settler there. These Roman colonies were planted all over the world, and always the backbone of them was the contingent of veteran regular soldiers whose faithful service had won them the citizenship. (ii) When Corinth was rebuilt the merchants came back, for her situation still gave her commercial supremacy. (iii) There were many Jews among the population. The rebuilt city offered them commercial opportunities which they were not slow to take. (iv) There was a sprinkling of Phoenicians and Phrygians and people from the east, with their exotic customs and their hysterical ways.

Farrar speaks of "this mongrel and heterogeneous population of Greek adventurers and Roman bourgeois, with a tainting infusion of Phoenicians; this mass of Jews, ex-soldiers, philosophers,

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merchants, sailors, freedmen, slaves, trades-people, hucksters and agents of every form of vice." He characterizes her as a colony "without aristocracy, without traditions and without well-established citizens."

Remember the background of Corinth, remember its name for wealth and luxury, for drunkenness and immorality and vice, and then read 1Cor.6:9-10.

Are you not aware that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Make no mistake--neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sensualists, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor rapacious men, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor robbers shall inherit the Kingdom of God--and such were some of you.

In this hotbed of vice, in the most unlikely place in all the Greek world, some of Paul's greatest work was done, and some of the mightiest triumphs of Christianity were won.

PAUL IN CORINTH

Paul stayed longer in Corinth than in any other city, with the single exception of Ephesus. He had left Macedonia with his life in peril and had crossed over to Athens. There he had had little success and had gone on to Corinth, and he remained there for eighteen months. We realize how little we really know of his work when we see that the whole story of that eighteen months is compressed by Luke into 17 verses (Ac.18:1-17).

When Paul arrived in Corinth he took up residence with Aquila and Prisca. He preached in the synagogue with great success. With the arrival of Timothy and Silas from Macedonia, he redoubled his efforts, but the Jews were so stubbornly hostile that he had to leave the synagogue. He took up his residence with one Justus who lived next door to the synagogue. His most notable convert was Crispus, who was actually the ruler of the synagogue, and amongst the general public he had good success.

In the year A.D. 52 there came to Corinth as its new governor a Roman called Gallio. He was famous for his charm and gentleness. The Jews tried to take advantage of his newness and good nature and brought Paul to trial before him on a charge of teaching contrary to their law. But Gallio, with impartial Roman justice, refused to have anything to do with the case or to take any action. So Paul completed his work in Corinth and moved on to Syria.

THE CORRESPONDENCE WITH CORINTH

It was when he was in Ephesus in the year A.D. 55 that Paul, learning that things were not all well in Corinth, wrote to the church there. There is every possibility that the Corinthian correspondence as we have it is out of order. We must remember that it was not until A.D. 90 or thereby that Paul's correspondence was collected. In many churches it must have existed only on scraps of papyrus and the putting it together would be a problem: and it seems that, when the

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Corinthian letters were collected, they were not all discovered and were not arranged in the right order. Let us see if we can reconstruct what happened.

(i) There was a letter which preceded 1 Corinthians. In 1Cor.5:9 Paul writes, "I wrote you a letter not to associate with immoral men." This obviously refers to some previous letter. Some scholars believe that letter is lost without trace. Others think it is contained in 2Cor.6:14-18 and 2Cor.7:1. Certainly that passage suits what Paul said he wrote about. It occurs rather awkwardly in its context, and, if we take it out and read straight on from 2Cor.6:13 to 2Cor.7:2, we get excellent sense and connection. Scholars call this letter The Previous Letter. (In the original letters there were no chapter or verse divisions. The chapters were not divided up until the thirteenth century and the verses not till the sixteenth, and because of that the arranging of the collection of letters would be much more difficult).

(ii) News came to Paul from various sources of trouble at Corinth. (a) News came from those who were of the household of Chloe (1Cor.1:11). They brought news of the contentions with which the church was torn. (b) News came with the visit of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus to Ephesus. (1Cor.16:17). By personal contact they were able to fill up the gaps in Paul's information. (c) News came in a letter in which the Corinthian Church had asked Paul's guidance on various problems. In 1Cor.7:1 Paul begins, "Concerning the matters about which you wrote..." In answer to all this information Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and despatched it to Corinth apparently by the hand of Timothy (1Cor.4:17).

(iii) The result of the letter was that things became worse than ever, and, although we have no direct record of it, we can deduce that Paul paid a personal visit to Corinth. In 2Cor.12:14 he writes, "The third time I am ready to come to you." In 2Cor.13:1-2, he says again that he is coming to them for the third time. Now, if there was a third time, there must have been a second time. We have the record of only one visit, whose story is told in Ac.18:1-17. We have no record at all of the second, but Corinth was only two or three days' sailing from Ephesus.

(iv) The visit did no good at all. Matters were only exacerbated and the result was an exceedingly severe letter. We learn about that letter from certain passages in 2 Corinthians. In 2Cor.2:4 Paul writes, "I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears." In 2Cor.7:8 he writes, "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it though I did regret it; for I see that that letter has grieved you, though only for a while." It was a letter which was the product of anguish of mind, a letter so severe that Paul was almost sorry that he ever sent it.

Scholars call this The Severe Letter. Have we got it? It obviously cannot be 1 Corinthians, because it is not a tear-stained and anguished letter. When Paul wrote it, it is clear enough that things were under control. Now if we read through 2 Corinthians we find an odd circumstance. In 2Cor.1-9 everything is made up, there is complete reconciliation and all are friends again; but at 2Cor.10 comes the strangest break. 2Cor.10-13 are the most heartbroken cry Paul ever wrote. They show that he has been hurt and insulted as he never was before or afterwards by any church. His appearance, his speech, his apostleship, his honesty have all been under attack.

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Most scholars believe that 2Cor.10-13 are the severe letter, and that they have become misplaced when Paul's letters were put together. If we want the real chronological course of Paul's correspondence with Corinth, we really ought to read 2Cor.10-13 before 2Cor.1-9. We do know that this letter was sent off with Titus. (2Cor.2:13; 2Cor.7:13).

(v) Paul was worried about this letter. He could not wait until Titus came back with an answer, so he set out to meet him (2Cor.2:13; 2Cor.7:5,13). Somewhere in Macedonia he met him and learned that all was well, and, probably at Philippi, he sat down and wrote 2Cor.1-9, the letter of reconciliation.

Stalker has said that the letters of Paul take the roof off the early churches and let us see what went on inside. Of none of them is that truer than the letters to Corinth. Here we see what "the care of all the churches" must have meant to Paul. Here we see the heart-breaks and the joys. Here we see Paul, the shepherd of his flock, bearing the sorrows and the problems of his people on his heart.

THE CORINTHIAN CORRESPONDENCE

Before we read the letters in detail let us set down the progress of the Corinthian correspondence in tabular form.

(i) The Previous Letter, which may be contained in 2Cor.6:14-18 and 2Cor.7:1.

(ii) The arrival of Chloe's people, of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, and of the letter to Paul from the Corinthian Church.

(iii) 1 Corinthians is written in reply and is despatched with Timothy.

(iv) The situation grows worse and Paul pays a personal visit to Corinth, which is so complete a failure that it almost breaks his heart.

(v) The consequence is The Severe Letter, which is almost certainly contained in 2Cor.10-13, and which was despatched with Titus.

(vi) Unable to wait for an answer, Paul sets out to meet Titus. He meets him in Macedonia, learns that all is well and, probably from Philippi, writes 2Cor.1-9, The Letter of Reconciliation.

The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians deal with the divided state of the Church of God at Corinth. Instead of being a unity in Christ it was split into sects and parties, who had attached themselves to the names of various leaders and teachers. It is Paul's teaching that these divisions had emerged because the Corinthians thought too much about human wisdom and knowledge and too little about the sheer grace of God. In fact, for all their so-called wisdom, they are really in a state of immaturity. They think that they are wise men, but really they are no better than babies.

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1 Corinthians 1:1-3

AN APOSTOLIC INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, and Sosthenes, our brother, write this letter to the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been consecrated in Christ Jesus, to those who have been called to be God's dedicated people in the company of those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus--their Lord and ours. Grace be to you and peace from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the first ten verses of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians the name of Jesus Christ occurs no fewer than ten times. This was going to be a difficult letter for it was going to deal with a difficult situation, and in such a situation Paul's first and repeated thought was of Jesus Christ. Sometimes in the Church we try to deal with a difficult situation by means of a book of laws and in the spirit of human justice; sometimes in our own affairs we try to deal with a difficult situation in our own mental and spiritual power. Paul did none of these things; to his difficult situation he took Jesus Christ, and it was in the light of the Cross of Christ and the love of Christ that he sought to deal with it.

This introduction tells us about two things.

(i) It tells us something about the Church. Paul speaks of The Church of God which is at Corinth. It was not the Church of Corinth; it was the Church of God. To Paul, wherever an individual congregation might be, it was a part of the one Church of God. He would not have spoken of the Church of Scotland or the Church of England; he would not have given the Church a local designation; still less would he have identified the congregation by the particular communion or sect to which it belonged. To him the Church was the Church of God. If we thought of the Church in that way we might well remember more of the reality which unites us and less of the local differences which divide us.

(ii) This passage tells us something about the individual Christian. Paul says three things about him.

(a) He is consecrated in Jesus Christ. The verb to consecrate (hagiazō, GSN0037) means to set a place apart for God, to make it holy, by the offering of a sacrifice upon it. The Christian has been consecrated to God by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to be one for whom Christ died and to know it, and to realize that that sacrifice in a very special way makes us belong to God.

(b) He describes the Christians as those who have been called to be God's dedicated people. We have translated one single Greek word by this whole phrase. The word is *hagios*, which the King James Version translates saints. Nowadays that does not paint the right picture to us. *Hagios* (GSN0040) describes a thing or a person that has been devoted to the possession and the service of God. It is the word by which to describe a temple or a sacrifice which has been marked out for God. Now, if a person has been marked out as specially belonging to God, he must show himself to be fit in life and in character for that service. That is how *hagios* comes to mean holy, saintly.

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1 Corinthians 1:1-3

But the root idea of the word is separation. A person who is hagios (GSN0040) is different from others because he has been separated from the ordinary run in order specially to belong to God. This was the adjective by which the Jews described themselves; they were the hagios (GSN0040) laos (GSN2992), the holy people, the nation which was quite different from other peoples because they in a special way belonged to God and were set apart for his service. When Paul calls the Christian hagios (GSN0040) he means that he is different from other men because he specially belongs to God and to God's service. And that difference is not to be marked by withdrawal from ordinary life, but by showing there a quality which will mark him out.

(e) Paul addresses his letter to those who have been called in the company of those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord. The Christian is called into a community whose boundaries include all earth and all heaven. It would be greatly to our good if sometimes we lifted our eyes beyond our own little circle and thought of ourselves as part of the Church of God which is as wide as the world.

(iii) This passage tells us something about Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then, as it were, he corrects himself and adds their Lord and ours. No man, no Church, has exclusive possession of Jesus Christ. He is our Lord but he is also the Lord of all men. It is the amazing wonder of Christianity that all men possess all the love of Jesus Christ, that "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love."

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1 Corinthians 1:4-9

THE NECESSITY OF THANKSGIVING

1 Corinthians 1:4-9

Always I thank my God for you, for the grace of God which has been given to you in Christ Jesus. I have good reason to do so, because in him you have been enriched in everything, in every form of speech and in every form of knowledge, inasmuch as what we promised you that Christ could do for his people has been proved to be true in you. The result is that there is no spiritual gift in which you lag behind, while you eagerly wait for the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will keep you secure right to the end so that no one will be able to impeach you in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. You can rely on God, by whom you were called to share the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In this passage of thanksgiving three things stand out.

(i) There is the promise which came true. When Paul preached Christianity to the Corinthians he told them that Christ could do certain things for them, and now he proudly claims that all that he pledged that Christ could do has come true. A missionary told one of the ancient Pictish kings, "If you will accept Christ, you will find wonder upon wonder--and every one of them true." In the last analysis we cannot argue a man into Christianity; we can only say to him, "Try it and see what happens," in the certainty that, if he does, the claims we make for it will all come true.

(ii) There is the gift which has been given. Paul here uses a favourite word of his. It is charisma (GSN5486), which means a gift freely given to a man, a gift which he did not deserve and which he could never by himself have earned. This gift of God, as Paul saw it, comes in two ways.

(a) Salvation is the charisma of God. To enter into a right relationship with God is something which a man could never achieve himself. It is an unearned gift, coming from the sheer generosity of the love of God. (compare Rom.6:23).

(b) It gives a man whatever special gifts he may possess and whatever special equipment he may have for life. (1Cor.12:4-10; 1Tim.4:14; 1Pet.4:10). If a man has the gift of speech or the gift of healing, if he has the gift of music or of any art, if he has a craftsman's gifts upon his hands, all these are gifts from God. If we fully realized that, it would bring a new atmosphere and character into life. Such skills as we possess are not our own achievement, they are gifts from God, and, therefore, they are held in trust. They are not to be used as we want to use them but as God wants us to use them; not for our profit or prestige but for the glory of God and the good of men.

(iii) There is the ultimate end. In the Old Testament the phrase, The Day of the Lord, keeps recurring. It was the day when the Jews expected God to break directly into history, the day when the old world would be wiped out and the new world born, the day when all men would be judged. The Christians took over this idea, only they took The Day of the Lord in the sense of The Day of the Lord Jesus, and regarded it as the day on which Jesus would come back in all his power and glory.

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1 Corinthians 1:4-9

That indeed would be a day of judgment. Caedmon, the old English poet, drew a picture in one of his poems about the day of judgment. He imagined the Cross set in the midst of the world; and from the Cross there streamed a strange light which had a penetrating X-ray quality about it and stripped the disguises from things and showed them as they were. It is Paul's belief that when the ultimate judgment comes the man who is in Christ can meet even it unafraid because he will be clothed not in his own merits but in the merits of Christ so that none will be able to impeach him.

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1 Corinthians 1:10-17

A DIVIDED CHURCH

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Brothers, I urge you through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you should make up your differences and that you should see to it that there may be no divisions among you, but that you should be knit together in the same mind and the same opinion. Brothers, it has become all too clear to me, from information that I have received from members of Chloe's household, that there are outbreaks of strife amongst you. What I mean is this--each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul; I belong to Apollos; I belong to Cephas; I belong to Christ." Has Christ been partitioned up? Was it Paul's name into which you were baptized? As things have turned out, I thank God that I baptized none of you, except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say you were baptized into my name. Now that I think of it, I baptized the household of Stephanas too. For the rest, I do not know if I baptized anyone else, for Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the good news, and that not with wisdom of speech, lest the Cross of Christ should be emptied of its effectiveness.

Paul begins the task of mending the situation which had arisen in the Church at Corinth. He was writing from Ephesus. Christian slaves who belonged to the establishment of a lady called Chloe had had occasion to visit Corinth and they had come back with a sorry tale of dissension and disunity.

Twice Paul addresses the Corinthians as brothers. As Beza, the old commentator said, "In that word too there lies hidden an argument." By the very use of the word Paul does two things. First, he softens the rebuke which is given, not as from a schoolmaster with a rod, but as from one who has no other emotion than love. Second, it should have shown them how wrong their dissensions and divisions were. They were brothers and they should have lived in brotherly love.

In trying to bring them together Paul uses two interesting phrases. He bids them to make up their differences. The phrase he uses is the regular one used of two hostile parties reaching agreement. He wishes them to be knit together, a medical word used of knitting together bones that have been fractured or joining together a joint that has been dislocated. The disunion is unnatural and must be cured for the sake of the health and efficiency of the body of the Church.

Paul identifies four parties in the Church at Corinth. They have not broken away from the Church; the divisions are as yet within it. The word he uses to describe them is schismata (GSN4978), which is the word for rents in a garment. The Corinthian Church is in danger of becoming as unsightly as a torn garment. It is to be noted that the great figures of the Church who are named, Paul and Cephas and Apollos, had nothing to do with these divisions. There were no dissensions between them. Without their knowledge and without their consent their names had been appropriated by these Corinthian factions. It not infrequently happens that a man's so-called supporters are a bigger problem than his open enemies. Let us look at these parties and see if we can find out what they were standing for.

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1 Corinthians 1:10-17

(i) There were those who claimed to belong to Paul. No doubt this was mainly a Gentile party. Paul had always preached the gospel of Christian freedom and the end of the law. It is most likely that this party were attempting to turn liberty into licence and using their new found Christianity as an excuse to do as they liked. Bultmann has said that the Christian indicative always brings the Christian imperative. They had forgotten that the indicative of the good news brought the imperative of the Christian ethic. They had forgotten that they were saved, not to be free to sin, but to be free not to sin.

(ii) There was the party who claimed to belong to Apollos. There is a brief character sketch of Apollos in Ac.18:24. He was a Jew from Alexandria, an eloquent man and well versed in the scriptures. Alexandria was the centre of intellectual activity. It was there that scholars had made a science of allegorizing the scriptures and finding the most recondite meanings in the simplest passages. Here is an example of the kind of thing they did. The Epistle of Barnabas, an Alexandrian work, argues from a comparison of Gen.14:14 and Gen.18:23 that Abraham had a household of 318 people whom he circumcised. The Greek for 18--the Greeks used letters as symbols for numbers--is iota followed by eta, which are the first two letters of the name Jesus; and the Greek for 300 is the letter tau, which is the shape of the Cross; therefore this old incident is a foretelling of the crucifixion of Jesus on his Cross! Alexandrian learning was full of that kind of thing. Further, the Alexandrians were enthusiasts for literary graces. They were in fact the people who intellectualized Christianity. Those who claimed to belong to Apollos were, no doubt, the intellectuals who were fast turning Christianity into a philosophy rather than a religion.

(iii) There were those who claimed to belong to Cephas. Cephas is the Jewish form of Peter's name. These were most likely Jews; and they sought to teach that a man must still observe the Jewish law. They were legalists who exalted law, and, by so doing, belittled grace.

(iv) There were those who claimed to belong to Christ. This may be one of two things. (a) There was absolutely no punctuation in Greek manuscripts and no space whatever between the words. This may well not describe a party at all. It may be the comment of Paul himself. Perhaps we ought to punctuate like this: "I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Cephas--but I belong to Christ." It may well be that this is Paul's own comment on the whole wretched situation. (b) If that is not so and this does describe a party, they must have been a small and rigid sect who claimed that they were the only true Christians in Corinth. Their real fault was not in saying that they belonged to Christ, but in acting as if Christ belonged to them. It may well describe a little, intolerant, self-righteous group.

It is not to be thought that Paul is belittling baptism. The people he did baptize were very special converts. Stephanas was probably the first convert of all (1Cor.16:15); Crispus had once been no less than the ruler of the Jewish synagogue at Corinth (Ac.18:8); Gaius had probably been Paul's host (Rom.16:23). The point is this--baptism was into the name of Jesus.

That phrase in Greek implies the closest possible connection. To give money into a man's name was to pay it into his account. To sell a slave into a man's name was to give that slave into his undisputed possession. A soldier swore loyalty into the name of Caesar; he belonged absolutely to the Emperor. Into the name of implied utter possession. In Christianity it implied even more; it

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1 Corinthians 1:10-17

implied that the Christian was not only possessed by Christ but was in some strange way identified with him. All that Paul is saying is, "I am glad that I was so busy preaching, because if I had baptized it would have given some of you the excuse to say that you were baptized into my possession instead of into Christ's." He is not making little of baptism; he is simply glad that no act of his could be misconstrued as annexing men for himself and not for Christ.

It was Paul's claim that he set before men the Cross of Christ in its simplest terms. To decorate the story of the Cross with rhetoric and cleverness would have been to make men think more of the language than of the facts, more of the speaker than of the message. It was Paul's aim to set before men, not himself, but Christ in all his lonely grandeur.

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1 Corinthians 1:18-25

A STUMBLING-BLOCK TO THE JEWS AND FOOLISHNESS TO THE GREEKS

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For the story of the Cross is foolishness to those who are on the way to destruction, but it is the power of God to those who are on the way to salvation. For it stands written, "I will wipe out the wisdom of the wise and I will bring to nothing the cleverness of the clever." Where is the wise? Where is the expert in the law? Where is the man who debates about this world's wisdom? Did not God render foolish the wisdom of this world? For when, in God's wisdom, the world for all its wisdom did not know God, it pleased God to save those who believe by, what men would call, the foolishness of the Christian message. For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks search for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ upon his Cross; to the Jews a stumbling-block, to the Greeks a thing of foolishness; but to those who have been called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Both to the cultured Greek and to the pious Jew the story that Christianity had to tell sounded like the sheerest folly. Paul begins by making free use of two quotations from Isaiah (Isa.29:14; Isa.33:18) to show how mere human wisdom is bound to fail. He cites the undeniable fact that for all its wisdom the world had never found God and was still blindly and gropingly seeking him. That very search was designed by God to show men their own helplessness and so to prepare the way for the acceptance of him who is the one true way:

What then was this Christian message? If we study the four great sermons in the Book of Acts (Ac.2:14-39; Ac.3:12-26; Ac.4:8-12; Ac.10:36-43) we find that there are certain constant elements in the Christian preaching. (i) There is the claim that the great promised time of God has come. (ii) There is a summary of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. (iii) There is a claim that all this was the fulfilment of prophecy. (iv) There is the assertion that Jesus will come again. (v) There is an urgent invitation to men to repent and receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

(i) To the Jews that message was a stumbling-block. There were two reasons.

(a) To them it was incredible that one who had ended life upon a cross could possibly be God's Chosen One. They pointed to their own law which unmistakably said, "He that is hanged is accursed by God." (Deut.21:23). To the Jew the fact of the crucifixion, so far from proving that Jesus was the Son of God, disproved it finally. It may seem extraordinary, but even with Isa.53 before their eyes, the Jews had never dreamed of a suffering Messiah. The Cross to the Jew was and is an insuperable barrier to belief in Jesus.

(b) The Jew sought for signs. When the golden age of God came he looked for startling happenings. This very time during which Paul was writing produced a crop of false Messiahs, and all of them had beguiled the people into accepting them by the promise of wonders. In A.D. 45 a man called Theudas had emerged. He had persuaded thousands of the people to abandon their homes and follow him out to the Jordan, by promising that, at his word of command, the Jordan would divide and he would lead them dryshod across. In A.D. 54 a man from Egypt arrived in

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Jerusalem, claiming to be the Prophet. He persuaded thirty thousand people to follow him out to the Mount of Olives by promising that at his word of command the walls of Jerusalem would fall down. That was the kind of thing that the Jews were looking for. In Jesus they saw one who was meek and lowly, one who deliberately avoided the spectacular, one who served and who ended on a Cross--and it seemed to them an impossible picture of the Chosen One of God.

(ii) To the Greeks the message was foolishness. Again there were two reasons.

(a) To the Greek idea the first characteristic of God was *apatheia* (compare GSN3806). That word means more than apathy; it means total inability to feel. The Greeks argued that if God can feel joy or sorrow or anger or grief it means that some man has for that moment influenced God and is therefore greater than he. So, they went on to argue, it follows that God must be incapable of all feeling so that none may ever affect him. A God who suffered was to the Greeks a contradiction in terms.

They went further. Plutarch declared that it was an insult to God to involve him in human affairs. God of necessity was utterly detached. The very idea of incarnation, of God becoming a man, was revolting to the Greek mind. Augustine, who was a very great scholar long before he became a Christian, could say that in the Greek philosophers he found a parallel to almost all the teaching of Christianity; but one thing, he said, he never found, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Celsus, who attacked the Christians with such vigour towards the end of the second century A.D., wrote, "God is good and beautiful and happy and is in that which is most beautiful and best. If then 'He descends to men' it involves change for him, and change from good to bad, from beautiful to ugly, from happiness to unhappiness, from what is best to what is worst. Who would choose such a change? For mortality it is only nature to alter and be changed; but for the immortal to abide the same forever.

God would never accept such a change." To the thinking Greek the incarnation was a total impossibility. To people who thought like that it was incredible that one who had suffered as Jesus had suffered could possibly be the Son of God.

(b) The Greek sought wisdom. Originally the Greek word *sophist* (compare GSN4678) meant a wise man in the good sense; but it came to mean a man with a clever mind and cunning tongue, a mental acrobat, a man who with glittering and persuasive rhetoric could make the worse appear the better reason. It meant a man who would spend endless hours discussing hair-splitting trifles, a man who had no real interest in solutions but who simply gloried in the stimulus of "the mental hike." Dio Chrysostom describes the Greek wise men. "They croak like frogs in a marsh; they are the most wretched of men, because, though ignorant, they think themselves wise; they are like peacocks, showing off their reputation and the number of their pupils as peacocks do their tails."

It is impossible to exaggerate the almost fantastic mastery that the silver-tongued rhetorician held in Greece. Plutarch says, "They made their voices sweet with musical cadences and modulations of tone and echoed resonances." They thought not of what they were saying, but of how they were saying it. Their thought might be poisonous so long as it was enveloped in honeyed words. Philostratus tells us that Adrian, the sophist, had such a reputation in Rome, that when his

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messenger appeared with a notice that he was to lecture, the senate emptied and even the people at the games abandoned them to flock to hear him.

Dio Chrysostom draws a picture of these so-called wise men and their competitions in Corinth itself at the Isthmian games. "You might hear many poor wretches of sophists, shouting and abusing each other, and their disciples, as they call them, squabbling; and many writers of books reading their stupid compositions, and many poets singing their poems, and many jugglers exhibiting their marvels, and many sooth-sayers giving the meaning of prodigies, and ten thousand rhetoricians twisting lawsuits, and no small number of traders driving their several trades." The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words; and to them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected.

It looked as if the Christian message had little chance of success against the background of Jewish or Greek life; but, as Paul said, "What looks like God's foolishness is wiser than men's wisdom; and what looks like God's weakness is stronger than men's strength."

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1 Corinthians 1:26-31

THE GLORY OF THE SHAME

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Brothers, just look at the way in which you have been called. You can see at once that not many wise men--by human standards--not many powerful men, not many high-born men have been called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise men; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the strong things and God has chosen the ignoble and the despised things of the world, yes, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things which are; and he did this so that no human being might be able to boast in the sight of God. It is through him that we are in Christ Jesus, who, for us, by God, was made wisdom and righteousness and consecration and deliverance, so that what stands written might come true in us. Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

Paul glories in the fact that, for the most part, the Church was composed of the simplest and the humblest people. We must never think that the early Church was entirely composed of slaves. Even in the New Testament we see that people from the highest ranks of society were becoming Christians. There was Dionysius at Athens (Ac.17:34); Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Crete (Ac.13:6-12); the noble ladies at Thessalonica and Beroea (Ac.17:4,12); Erastus, the city treasurer, probably of Corinth (Rom.16:23). In the time of Nero, Pomponia Graecina, the wife of Plautius, the conqueror of Britain, was martyred for her Christianity. In the time of Domitian, in the latter half of the first century, Flavius Clemens, the cousin of the Emperor himself, was martyred as a Christian. Towards the end of the second century Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, wrote to Trajan the Emperor, saying that the Christians came from every rank in society. But it remains true that the great mass of Christians were simple and humble folk.

Somewhere about the year A.D. 178 Celsus wrote one of the bitterest attacks upon Christianity that was ever written. It was precisely this appeal of Christianity to the common people that he ridiculed. He declared that the Christian point of view was, "Let no cultured person draw near, none wise, none sensible; for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any is wanting in sense and culture, if any is a fool let him come boldly." Of the Christians he wrote, "We see them in their own houses, wool dressers, cobblers and fullers, the most uneducated and vulgar persons." He said that the Christians were "like a swarm of bats--or ants creeping out of their nests--or frogs holding a symposium round a swamp--or worms in conventicle in a corner of mud."

It was precisely this that was the glory of Christianity. In the Empire there were sixty million slaves. In the eyes of the law a slave was a "living tool," a thing and not a person at all. A master could fling out an old slave as he could fling out an old spade or hoe. He could amuse himself by torturing his slaves; he could even kill them. For them there was no such thing as marriage; even their children belonged to the master, as the lambs of the fold belonged not to the sheep but to the shepherd. Christianity made people who were things into real men and women, more, into sons and daughters of God; it gave those who had no respect, their self-respect; it gave those who had no life, life eternal; it told men that, even if they did not matter to other men, they still mattered intensely to God. It told men who, in the eyes, of the world were worthless, that, in the eyes of God

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1 Corinthians 1:26-31

they were worth the death of his only Son. Christianity was, and still is, the most uplifting thing in the whole universe.

The quotation with which Paul finishes this passage is from Jer.9:23-24. As Bultmann put it, the one basic sin is self-assertion, or the desire for recognition. It is only when we realize that we can do nothing and that God can and will do everything that real religion begins. It is the amazing fact of life that it is the people who realize their own weakness and their own lack of wisdom, who in the end are strong and wise. It is the fact of experience that the man who thinks that he can take on life all by himself is certain in the end to make shipwreck.

We must note the four great things which Paul insists Christ is for us.

(i) He is wisdom. It is only in following him that we walk aright and only in listening to him that we hear the truth. He is the expert in life.

(ii) He is righteousness. In the writings of Paul righteousness always means a right relationship with God. Of our own efforts we can never achieve that. It is ours only by realizing through Jesus Christ that it comes not from what we can do for God, but from what he has done for us.

(iii) He is consecration. It is only in the presence of Christ that life can be what it ought to be. Epicurus used to tell his disciples, "Live as if Epicurus always saw you." There is no "as if" about our relationship to Christ. The Christian walks with him and only in that company can a man keep his garments unspotted from the world.

(iv) He is deliverance. Diogenes used to complain that men flocked to the oculist and to the dentist but never to the man (he meant the philosopher) who could cure their souls. Jesus Christ can deliver a man from past sin, from present helplessness, and from future fear. He is the emancipator from slavery to self and to sin.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

THE PROCLAMATION AND THE POWER

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

So, brothers, when I came to you, I did not come announcing God's secret to you with any outstanding gifts of rhetoric or wisdom, for it was my deliberate decision to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him upon his Cross. So I was with you in weakness and in diffidence and in much nervousness. My story and my proclamation were not made with persuasive words of wisdom; it was by the Spirit and by power that they were unanswerably demonstrated to be true, so that your faith should not depend on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Paul remembers back to the time when first he came to Corinth, and three things stand out.

(i) He came speaking in simplicity. It is worth noting that Paul had come to Corinth from Athens. It was at Athens that, for the only time in his life, as far as we know, he had attempted to reduce Christianity to philosophic terms. There, on Mars' Hill, he had met the philosophers and had tried to speak in their own language (Ac.17:22-31); and it was there that he had one of his very few failures. His sermon in terms of philosophy had had very little effect (Ac.17:32-34). It would almost seem that he had said to himself, "Never again! From henceforth I will tell the story of Jesus in utter simplicity. I will never again try to wrap it up in human categories. I will know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him upon his Cross."

It is true that the sheer unadorned story of the life of Jesus has in it a unique power to move the hearts of men. Dr. James Stewart quotes an example. The Christian missionaries had come to the court of Clovis, the king of the Franks. They told the story of the Cross, and, as they did, the hand of the old king stole to his sword hilt. "If I and my Franks had been there," he said, "we would have stormed Calvary and rescued him from his enemies." When we deal with ordinary, untechnical people, a vivid, factual picture has a power that a close knit argument lacks. For most people, the way to the recesses of a man's inmost being lies, not through his mind, but through his heart.

(ii) He came speaking in fear. Here we have to be careful to understand. It was not fear for his own safety; still less was it that he was ashamed of the gospel that he was preaching. It was what has been called "the trembling anxiety to perform a duty." The very phrase which he uses here of himself Paul also uses of the way in which conscientious slaves should serve and obey their masters. (Eph.6:5). It is not the man who approaches a great task without a tremor who does it really well. The really great actor is he who is wrought up before the performance; the really effective preacher is he whose heart beats faster while he waits to speak. The man who has no nervousness, no tension, in any task, may give an efficient performance; but it is the man who has this trembling anxiety who can produce an effect which artistry alone can never achieve.

(iii) He came with results and not with words alone. The result of Paul's preaching was that things happened. He says that his preaching was unanswerably demonstrated to be true by the Spirit and by power. The word he uses is the word for the most stringent possible proof, the kind against which there can be no argument. What was it? It was the proof of changed lives. Something re-creating had entered into the polluted society of Corinth.

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1 Corinthians 2:1-5

John Hutton used to tell a story with gusto. A man who had been a reprobate and a drunkard was captured by Christ. His workmates used to try to shake him and say, "Surely a sensible man like you cannot believe in the miracles that the Bible tells about. You cannot, for instance, believe that this Jesus of yours turned water into wine." "Whether he turned water into wine or not," said the man, "I do not know; but in my own house I have seen him turn beer into furniture."

No one can argue against the proof of a changed life. It is our weakness that too often we have tried to talk men into Christianity instead of, in our own lives, showing them Christ. "A saint," as someone said, "is someone in whom Christ lives again."

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 2:6-9

THE WISDOM WHICH IS FROM GOD

1 Corinthians 2:6-9

True, we speak wisdom among those who are mature--but it is a wisdom which does not belong to this world, nor to the rulers of this world whose extinction is inevitable. But we speak the wisdom of God in a way that only he who is initiated into Christianity can understand, a wisdom which up to now has been kept hidden, a wisdom which God fore-ordained before time for our eternal glory, a wisdom which none of the leaders of this world knew; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but as it stands written, "Things which eye has not seen, which ear has not heard and which have not entered into the heart of man, all these God has prepared for them that love him."

This passage introduces us to a distinction between different kinds of Christian instruction and different stages of the Christian life. In the early Church there was a quite clear distinction between two kinds of instruction. (i) There was what was called Kerygma (GSN2782). Kerygma means a herald's announcement from a king; and this was the plain announcement of the basic facts of Christianity, the announcement of the facts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and his coming again. (ii) There was what was called Didache (GSN1322). Didache means teaching; and this was the explanation of the meaning of the facts which had already been announced. Obviously it is a second stage for those who have already received kerygma (GSN2782).

That is what Paul is getting at here. So far he has been talking about Jesus Christ and him crucified; that was the basic announcement of Christianity; but, he goes on to say, we do not stop there; Christian instruction goes on to teach not only the facts but the meaning of the facts. Paul says that this is done amongst those who are teleioi (GSN5046). The King James Version translates that word as perfect. That is certainly one of its meanings; but it is not appropriate here. Teleios (GSN5046) has a physical sense; it describes an animal or a person who has reached the height of his physical development. It has a mental sense. Pythagoras divided his disciples into those who were babes and those who were teleioi (GSN5046). That is to say it describes a person who is a mature student. That is the translation given in the Revised Standard version, and that is the sense in which Paul uses it here.

He says, "Out in the streets, and to those who have just newly come into the Church, we talk about the basic elements of Christianity; but when people are a little more mature we give them deeper teaching about what these basic facts mean." It is not that Paul is hinting at a kind of caste distinction between Christians; it is a difference of the stages at which they are. The tragedy so often is that people are content to remain at the elementary stage when they should be going on strenuously to think things out for themselves.

Paul uses a word here which has a technical sense. The King James Version has it, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." The Greek word musterion (GSN3466) means something whose meaning is hidden from those who have not been initiated, but crystal clear to those who have. It would describe a ceremony carried out in some society whose meaning was quite clear to the members of the society, but unintelligible to the outsider. What Paul is saying is, "We go on to explain things which only the man who has already given his heart to Christ can understand."

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1 Corinthians 2:6-9

He insists that this special teaching is not the product of the intellectual activity of men; it is the gift of God and it came into the world with Jesus Christ. All our discoveries are not so much what our minds have found out as what God has told us. This by no means frees us from the responsibility of human effort. Only the student who works can make himself fit to receive the real riches of the mind of a great teacher. It is so with us and God. The more we strive to understand, the more God can tell us; and there is no limit to this process, because the riches of God are unsearchable.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 2:10-16

SPIRITUAL THINGS TO SPIRITUAL MEN

1 Corinthians 2:10-16

But God revealed it through his Spirit, for the Spirit explores all things, even the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of the man unless the spirit of the man which is in him? So no one ever knew the things of God except the Spirit of God. It is not the spirit of the world that we have received, but the Spirit which comes from God, so that we may know the things given to us by the grace of God. The things we speak we do not speak in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. A man who has no life but physical life cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God. To him they are foolishness and he cannot understand them, because it takes the Spirit to discern them. But a spiritual man exercises his judgment on the value of all things, but he himself is under no man's judgment. For who ever understood the mind of the Lord so as to be able to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

There are certain very basic things in this passage.

(i) Paul lays down that the only person who can tell us about God is the Spirit of God. He uses a human analogy. There are feelings which are so personal, things which are so private, experiences which are so intimate that no one knows them except a man's own spirit. Paul argues that the same is true of God. There are deep and intimate things in him which only his Spirit knows; and that Spirit is the only person who can lead us into really intimate knowledge of God.

(ii) Even then it is not every man who can understand these things. Paul speaks about interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people. He distinguishes two kinds of men. (a) There are those who are pneumatikoi (GSN4152). Pneuma (GSN4151) is the word for Spirit; and the man who is pneumatikos (GSN4152) is the man who is sensitive to the Spirit and whose life is guided by the Spirit. (b) There is the man who is psuchikos (GSN5591). Psuche (GSN5590) in Greek is often translated soul; but that is not its real meaning. It is the principle of physical life. Everything which is alive has psuche (GSN5590); a dog, a cat, any animal has psuche (GSN5590), but it has not got pneuma (GSN4151). Psuche (GSN5590) is that physical life which a man shares with every living thing; but pneuma (GSN4151) is that which makes a man different from the rest of creation and kin to God.

So in 1Cor.2:14 Paul speaks of the man who is psuchikos (GSN5591). He is the man who lives as if there was nothing beyond physical life and there were no needs other than material needs, whose values are all physical and material. A man like that cannot understand spiritual things. A man who thinks that nothing is more important than the satisfaction of the sex urge cannot understand the meaning of chastity; a man who ranks the amassing of material things as the supreme end of life cannot understand generosity; and a man who has never a thought beyond this world cannot understand the things of God. To him they look mere foolishness. No man need be like this; but if he stifles "the immortal longings" that are in his soul he may make himself like this so that the Spirit of God will speak and he will not hear.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 2:10-16

It is easy to become so involved in the world that there exists nothing beyond it. We must pray to have the mind of Christ, for only when he dwells within us are we safe from the encroaching invasion of the demands of material things.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF GOD

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

And I, brothers, could not talk to you as I would to spiritual men, but I had to talk to you as to those who had not yet got beyond merely human things, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food. But now not even yet can you digest solid food, because you are still under the sway of human passions. Where there is envy and strife among you, are you not under the sway of human passions and is not your behaviour on a purely human level? For when anyone says, "I belong to Paul," and, "I belong to Apollos," are you not acting like merely human creatures? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are only servants through whom you believed, and what success each of them had was the gift of God. It was I who planted; it was Apollos who watered; but it was God who made the seed grow. So that neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything; but God who made the seed grow is everything. He who plants and he who waters are in the same category.

Each will receive his own reward according to his own labour. We are fellow-workers and we both belong to God; you are God's husbandry; you are God's building.

Paul has just been talking about the difference between the man who is spiritual (pneumatikos, GSN4152), and who therefore can understand spiritual truths, and the man who is psuchikos (GSN5591), whose interests and aims do not go beyond physical life and who is therefore unable to grasp spiritual truth. He now accuses the Corinthians of being still at the physical stage. But he uses two new words to describe them.

In 1Cor.3:1 he calls them sarkinoi (GSN4560). This word comes from sarx (GSN4561) which means flesh and is so common in Paul. Now all Greek adjectives ending in -inos mean made of something or other. So Paul begins by saying that the Corinthians are made of flesh. That was not in itself a rebuke; a man just because he is a man is made of flesh, but he must not stay that way. The trouble was that the Corinthians were not only sarkinoi (GSN4560) they were sarkikoi (GSN4559), which means not only made of flesh but dominated by the flesh. To Paul the flesh is much more than merely a physical thing. It means human nature apart from God, that part of man both mental and physical which provides a bridgehead for sin. So the fault that Paul finds with the Corinthians is not that they are made of flesh--all men are--but that they have allowed this lower side of their nature to dominate all their outlook and all their actions.

What is it about their life and conduct that makes Paul level such a rebuke at them? It is their party spirit, their strife and their factions. This is extremely significant because it means that you can tell what a man's relations with God are by looking at his relations with his fellow men. If he is at variance with his fellow men, if he is a quarrelsome, argumentative, trouble-making creature, he may be a diligent church attender, he may even be a church office-bearer, but he is not a man of God. But if a man is at one with his fellow men, if his relations with them are marked by love and unity and concord then he is on the way to being a man of God.

If a man loves God he will also love his fellow men. it was this truth that Leigh Hunt took from an old eastern tale and enshrined in his poem:

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1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold:
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?"--The vision rais'd its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answer'd, "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still; and said, "I pray thee then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men."
The angel wrote, and vanish'd. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And show'd the names whom love of God had bless'd,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

Paul goes on to show the essential folly of this party spirit with its glorification of human leaders. In a garden one man may plant a seed and another may water it; but neither can claim to have made the seed grow. That belongs to God and to God alone. The man who plants and the man who waters are on one level; neither can claim any precedence over the other; they are but servants working together for the one Master--God. God uses human instruments to bring to men the message of his truth and love; but it is he alone who wakes the hearts of men to new life. As he alone created the heart, so he alone can re-create it.

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1 Corinthians 3:10-15

THE FOUNDATION AND THE BUILDERS

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

According to the grace of God that was given to me, I laid the foundation like a skilled master-builder, but another builds upon it. Let each see to it how he builds upon it; for no one can lay any other foundation beside that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds upon that foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, straw, stubble, it will become quite clear what each man's work is. The Day will show it because it is going to be revealed by fire, and the fire itself will test what kind of work each man's work is. If the work which any man erected upon that foundation remains he will receive a reward. If the work of any man will be burned up he will lose it all. But he himself will be saved, though it be like one who has passed through fire.

In this passage Paul is surely speaking from personal experience. He was of necessity a foundation layer and was forever on the move. True, he stayed for eighteen months in Corinth (Ac.18:11) and for three years in Ephesus (Ac.20:31); but in Thessalonica he can have stayed less than a month, and that was far more typical. There was so much ground waiting to be covered; there were so many men who had never heard the name of Jesus Christ; and, if a fair start was to be made with the evangelization of the world, Paul could only lay the foundations and move on. It was only when he was in prison that his restless spirit could stay in the one place.

Wherever he went, he laid the same foundation. That was the proclamation of the facts about and the offer of Jesus Christ. It was his tremendous function to introduce men to Jesus Christ because it is in him, and in him alone, that a man can find three things.

(a) He finds forgiveness for past sins. He finds himself in a new relationship to God and suddenly discovers that he is his friend and not his enemy. He discovers that God is like Jesus; where once he saw hatred he now sees love, and where once he saw infinite remoteness he now sees tender intimacy.

(b) He finds strength for the present. Through the presence and help of Jesus he finds courage to cope with life, for he is now no longer an isolated unit fighting a lonely battle with an adverse universe. He lives a life in which nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord. He walks life's ways and fights its battles with Christ.

(c) He finds hope for the future. He no longer lives in a world in which he is afraid to look forward but in one where God is in control and working together all things for good. He lives in a world where death is no longer the end, but only the prelude to greater glory. Without the foundation of Christ a man can have none of these things.

But on this foundation of Christ others built. Paul is not here thinking of the building up of wrong things, but the building up of inadequate things. A man may present to his fellow men a version of Christianity which is weak and watered down; a one-sided thing which has stressed some things too much and others too little, and in which things have got out of balance; a warped thing in which even the greatest matters have emerged distorted.

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1 Corinthians 3:10-15

The Day that Paul refers to is the Day when Christ will come again. Then will come the final test. The wrong and the inadequate will be swept away. But, in the mercy of God, even the inadequate builder will be saved, because at least he tried to do something for Christ. At best all our versions of Christianity are inadequate; but we would be saved much inadequacy if we tested them not by our own prejudices and presuppositions, nor by agreement with this or that theologian, but set them in the light of the New Testament and, above all, in the light of the Cross. Longinus the great Greek literary critic, offers his students a test. "When you write anything," he said, "ask yourself how Homer or Demosthenes would have written it; and, still more, ask yourself how Homer and Demosthenes would have listened to it." When we speak for Christ we must speak as if Christ was listening--as indeed he is. A test like that will rescue us from many a mistake.

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1 Corinthians 3:16-23

WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that the Spirit of God has his dwelling place in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy and you are that temple.

Let no one deceive you. If any one among you thinks he is wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, for it stands written, "He who clutches the wise in their cunning craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of their hearts are vain." So then, let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's, but you are Christ's and Christ is God's.

To Paul the Church was the very temple of God because it was the society in which the Spirit of God dwelt. As Origen later said, "We are most of all God's temple when we prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Spirit." But, if men introduce dissension and division into the fellowship of the Church, they destroy the temple of God in a double sense.

(a) They make it impossible for the Spirit to operate. Immediately bitterness enters a church, love goes from it. The truth can neither be spoken nor heard rightly in that atmosphere. "Where love is, God is," but, where hatred and strife are, God stands at the door and knocks and receives no entry. The very badge of the Church is love for the brethren. He who destroys that love destroys the Church and thereby destroys the temple of God.

(b) They split up the Church and reduce it to a series of disconnected ruins. No building can stand firm and four-square if sections of it are removed. The Church's greatest weakness is still its divisions. They too destroy it.

Paul goes on once again to pin down the root cause of this dissension and consequent destruction of the Church. It is the worship of intellectual, worldly wisdom. He shows the condemnation of that wisdom by two Old Testament quotations--Jb.5:13 and Ps.94:11. It is by this very worldly wisdom that the Corinthians assess the worth of different teachers and leaders. It is this pride in the human mind which makes them evaluate and criticize the way in which the message is delivered, the correctness of the rhetoric, the weight of the oratory, the subtleties of the arguments, rather than think only of the content of the message itself. The trouble about this intellectual pride is that it is always two things.

(a) It is always disputatious. It cannot keep silent and admire; it must talk and criticize. It cannot bear to have its opinions contradicted; it must prove that it and it alone is right. It is never humble enough to learn; it must always be laying down the law.

(b) Intellectual pride is characteristically exclusive. Its tendency is to look down on others rather than to sit down beside them. Its outlook is that all who do not agree with it are wrong. Long ago

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1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Cromwell wrote to the Scots, "I beseech you by the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken." That is precisely what intellectual pride cannot think. It tends to cut men off from each other rather than to unite them.

Paul urges the man who would be wise to become a fool. This is simply a vivid way of urging him to be humble enough to learn. No one can teach a man who thinks that he knows it all already. Plato said, "He is the wisest man who knows himself to be very ill-equipped for the study of wisdom." Quintilian said of certain students, "They would doubtless have become excellent scholars if they had not been so fully persuaded of their own scholarship." The old proverb laid it down, "He who knows not, and knows not that he knows not is a fool; avoid him. He who knows not, and knows that he knows not is a wise man; teach him." The only way to become wise is to realize that we are fools; the only way to knowledge is to confess our ignorance.

In 1Cor.3:22, as so often happens in his letters, the march of Paul's prose suddenly takes wings and becomes a lyric of passion and poetry. The Corinthians are doing what is to Paul an inexplicable thing. They are seeking to give themselves over into the hands of some man. Paul tells them that, in point of fact, it is not they who belong to him but he who belongs to them. This identification with some party is the acceptance of slavery by those who should be kings. In fact they are masters of all things, because they belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. The man who gives his strength and his heart to some little splinter of a party has surrendered everything to a petty thing, when he could have entered into possession of a fellowship and a love as wide as the universe. He has confined into narrow limits a life which should be limitless in its outlook.

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1 Corinthians 4:1-5

THE THREE JUDGMENTS

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Let a man then so think of us as the servants of Christ and stewards of the secrets which God reveals to his own people. In ordinary everyday life, that a man should be found faithful, is a quality required in stewards. To me it matters very little that I should be judged by you or by any human day. No--I do not even judge myself. For, supposing that I am conscious of no fault, yet I am not acquitted because of that. He who judges me is the Lord. So then, make a practice of passing no judgment before the proper time--until the Lord comes--for he will light up the hidden things of darkness and he will bring to light the counsels of men's hearts; and then each man will receive his praise from God.

Paul urges the Corinthians not to think of Apollos and Cephas and himself as leaders of parties; but to think of them all as servants of Christ. The word that he uses for a servant is interesting; it is *huperetes* (GSN5257) and originally meant a rower on the lower bank of a trireme, one of the slaves who pulled at the great sweeps which moved the triremes through the sea. Some commentators have wished to stress this and to make it a picture of Christ as the pilot who directs the course of the ship and Paul as the servant who accepts the pilot's orders and labours only as his Master directs.

Then Paul uses another picture. He thinks of himself and his fellow preachers as stewards of the secrets which God desires to reveal to his own people. The steward (*oikonomos*, GSN3623) was the major domo. He was in charge of the whole administration of the house or the estate; he controlled the staff; he issued the supplies; but, however much he controlled the household staff, he himself was still a slave where the master was concerned. Whatever be a man's position in the Church, and whatever power he may yield there or whatever prestige he may enjoy, he still remains the servant of Christ.

That brings Paul to the thought of judgment. The one thing that an *oikonomos* (GSN3623) must be is reliable. The very fact that he enjoys so much independence and responsibility makes it all the more necessary that his master should be able to depend absolutely upon him. The Corinthians, with their sects and their appropriation of the leaders of the Church as their masters, have exercised judgments on these leaders, preferring one to the other. So Paul speaks of three judgments that every man must face.

(i) He must face the judgment of his fellow men. In this case Paul says that that is nothing to him. But there is a sense in which a man cannot disregard the judgment of his fellow men. The odd thing is that, in spite of its occasional radical mistakes, the judgment of our fellow men is often right. That is due to the fact that every man instinctively admires the basic qualities of honour, honesty, reliability, generosity, sacrifice and love. Antisthenes, the Cynic philosopher, used to say, "There are only two people who can tell you the truth about yourself--an enemy who has lost his temper and a friend who loves you dearly." It is quite true that we should never let the judgment of men deflect us from what we believe to be right; but it is also true that the judgment of men is often more accurate than we would like to think, because they instinctively admire the lovely things.

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1 Corinthians 4:1-5

(ii) He must face the judgment of himself. Once again Paul disregards that. He knew very well that a man's judgment of himself can be clouded by self-satisfaction, by pride and by conceit. But in a very real sense every man must face his own judgment. One of the basic Greek ethical laws was, "Man, know thyself." The Cynics insisted that one of the first characteristics of a real man was "the ability to get on with himself." A man cannot get away from himself and if he loses his self-respect, life becomes an intolerable thing.

(iii) He must face the judgment of God. In the last analysis this is the only real judgment. For Paul, the judgment he awaited was not that of any human day but the judgment of the Day of the Lord. God's is the final judgment for two reasons. (a) Only God knows all the circumstances. He knows the struggles a man has had; he knows the secrets that a man can tell to no one; he knows what a man might have sunk to and he also knows what he might have climbed to. (b) Only God knows all the motives. "Man sees the deed but God sees the intention." Many a deed that looks noble may have been done from the most selfish and ignoble motives; and many a deed which looks base may have been done from the highest motives. He who made the human heart alone knows it and can judge it.

We would do well to remember two things--first, even if we escape all other judgments or shut our eyes to them, we cannot escape the judgment of God; and, second, judgment belongs to God and we do well not to judge any man.

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1 Corinthians 4:6-13

APOSTOLIC HUMILITY AND UNCHRISTIAN PRIDE

1 Corinthians 4:6-13

Brothers, I have transferred these things by way of illustration to myself and to Apollos, so that through us you may learn to observe the principle of not going beyond that which is written, so that none of you may speak boastfully of one teacher and disparagingly of the other.

Who sees anything special in you? What do you possess that you did not receive? And, if you did receive it, why are you boasting as if you had acquired it yourself? No doubt you are already fed to the full! No doubt you are already rich! No doubt you have already come into your kingdom without any help from us! I would that you had already come into your kingdom so that we too might reign with you! For I think that God has exhibited the apostles, bringing up the rear of the procession, like men marked out to die! I think that we have become a spectacle for the world and for angels and for men! We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak but you are strong! You are famous, we have no honour! Until this very hour, we are hungry, we are thirsty, we are naked, we are buffeted, we are homeless wanderers, we toil working with our own hands. When we are insulted, we bless; when we are persecuted, we bear it. When we are slandered, we gently plead.

We have been treated like the scum of the earth, like the dregs of all things--and this treatment still goes on.

All that Paul has been saying about himself and about Apollos is true not only for them but also for the Corinthians. It is not only he and Apollos who must be kept humble by the thought that it is not the judgment of men they are facing, but the judgment of God; the Corinthians must walk in a like humility. Paul had a wonderfully courteous way of including himself in his own warnings and his own condemnations. The true preacher seldom uses the word you and always uses the word we; he does not speak down to men; he speaks as one who sits where they sit and who is a man of like passions with them. If we really wish to help and to save men our attitude must be not that of condemnation but of pleading; our accent must be not that of criticism but of compassion. It is not his own words that Paul insists the Corinthians must not go beyond; it is the word of God, which condemns all pride.

Then Paul asks them the most pertinent and basic of all questions. "What do you possess," he said, "that you did not receive?" In this single sentence Augustine saw the whole doctrine of grace. At one time Augustine had thought in terms of human achievement, but he came to say, "To solve this question we laboured hard in the cause of the freedom of man's will, but the grace of God won the day." No man could ever have known him unless God had revealed himself; no man could ever have won his own salvation; a man does not save himself, he is saved. When we think of what we have done and think of what God has done for us, pride is ruled out and only humble gratitude remains. The basic fault of the Corinthians was that they had forgotten that they owed their souls to God.

Then comes one of these winged outbursts which meet us ever and again in the letters of Paul. He turns on the Corinthians with scathing irony. He compares their pride, their self-satisfaction, their

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1 Corinthians 4:6-13

feeling of superiority with the life that an apostle lives. He chooses a vivid picture. When a Roman general won a great victory he was allowed to parade his victorious army through the streets of the city with all the trophies that he had won; the procession was called a Triumph. But at the end there came a little group of captives who were doomed to death; they were being taken to the arena to fight with the beasts and so to die. The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general displaying the trophies of his prowess; the apostles were like the little group of captives doomed to die. To the Corinthians the Christian life meant flaunting their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant humble service and a readiness to die for Christ.

In the list of things which Paul declares that the apostles undergo there are two specially interesting words. (i) He says that they are buffeted (*kolaphizesthai*, GSN2852). That is the word used for beating a slave. Plutarch tells how a witness gave evidence that a slave belonged to a certain man because he had seen the man beating him and this is the word that is used. Paul was willing for the sake of Christ to be treated like a slave. (ii) He says, "When we are insulted (*loidoresthai*, GSN3058), we bless." We probably do not realize just how surprising a statement this would be to a pagan. Aristotle declares that the highest virtue is *megalopsuchia*, great-heartedness, the virtue of the man with the great soul; and he defines this virtue as the quality which will not endure to be insulted. To the ancient world Christian humility was a virtue altogether new. This indeed was the kind of conduct that to men looked crazily foolish although this very foolishness was the wisdom of God.

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1 Corinthians 4:14-21

A FATHER IN THE FAITH

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

It is not to shame you that I write these things, but to warn you as my beloved children. You may have thousands of tutors in Christ, but you have not many fathers; for, in Christ Jesus, through the good news, I begat you. So then, I urge you, show yourselves imitators of me. That is why I send to you Timothy, who is my beloved child and faithful in the Lord, for he will bring back to your memory my ways in Christ--exactly the same things as I teach everywhere and in every Church. There are some who have been inflated with their own importance, as though I were not coming to you. I will come to you soon, if the Lord will, and I will find out, not what these inflated people say, but what they can do; for the Kingdom of God does not exist in talking but in powerful action. What do you wish? Am I to come to you with a stick? Or am I to come in love and in the spirit of gentleness?

With this passage Paul brings to an end the section of the letter which deals directly with the dissensions and divisions at Corinth. It is as a father that he writes. The very word which he uses in 1Cor.4:14 for to warn (nouthetein, GSN3560) is the word regularly used to express the admonition and advice which a father gives his children. (Eph.6:4). He may be speaking with the accents of severity; but it is not the severity which seeks to bring an unruly slave to heel, but the severity which seeks to put back on the right rails a foolish son who has gone astray.

Paul felt that he was in a unique position as regards the Corinthian Church. The tutor (paidagogos, GSN3807: compare Gal.3:24) was not the teacher of the child. He was an old and trusted slave who daily took the child to school, who trained him in moral matters, cared for his character and tried to make a man of him. A child might have many tutors but he had only one father; in the days to come the Corinthians might have many tutors but none of them could do what Paul had done; none of them could beget them to life in Christ Jesus.

Then Paul says an amazing thing. In effect he says, "I call upon my children to take after their father." It is so seldom that a father can say that. For the most part it is too often true that a father's hope and prayer is that a son will turn out to be all that he has never succeeded in being. Most of us who teach cannot help saying, not, "Do as I do," but, "Do as I say." But Paul, not with pride, but with complete unself-consciousness, can call upon his children in the faith to copy him.

Then he pays them a delicate compliment. He says that he will send Timothy to remind them of his ways. In effect, he says that all their errors and mistaken ways are due, not to deliberate rebellion, but to the fact that they have forgotten. That is so true of human nature. So often it is not that we rebel against Christ; it is simply that we forget him. So often it is not that we deliberately turn our backs upon him; it is simply that we forget that he is in the scheme of things at all. Most of us need one thing above all--a deliberate effort to live in the conscious realization of the presence of Jesus Christ. It is not only at the sacrament but at every moment of every day that Jesus Christ is saying to us, "Remember Me."

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1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Paul moves on to a challenge. They need not say that because he is sending Timothy he is not coming himself. He will come if the way opens up; and then will come their test. These Corinthians can talk enough; but it is not their high-sounding words that matter; it is their deeds. Jesus never said, "By their words you shall know them," He said, "By their fruits you shall know them." The world is full of talk about Christianity, but one deed is worth a thousand words.

In the end Paul demands whether he is to come to mete out discipline or to company with them in love. The love of Paul for his children in Christ throbs through every letter he wrote; but that love was no blind, sentimental love; it was a love which knew that sometimes discipline was necessary and was prepared to exercise it. There is a love which can ruin a man by shutting its eyes to his faults; and there is a love which can mend a man because it sees him with the clarity of the eyes of Christ. Paul's love was the love which knows that sometimes it has to hurt in order to amend.

Paul has dealt with the problem of strife and divisions within the Corinthian Church, and now he goes on to deal with certain very practical questions and certain very grave situations within the Church, of which news has come to him. This section includes 1Cor.5 and 1Cor.6. 1Cor.5:1-8 deals with a case of incest. 1Cor.5:9-13 urges discipline for the unchaste. 1Cor.6:1-8 deals with the tendency of the Corinthians to go to law with each other. 1Cor.6:9-20 stresses the need for purity.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 5:1-8

SIN AND COMPLACENCY

1 Corinthians 5:1-8

It is actually reported that there is unchastity among you, and unchastity so monstrous that it does not even exist among the heathen, unchastity the consequence of which is that a certain man has formed a union with his father's wife; and you have regarded the matter with inflated self-complacency and you have not--as you should have--regarded it with a grief so bitter that it would take steps to see that the perpetrator of this deed should be removed from your midst. Now I, absent in the body but present in the spirit, have already come to a decision as if I were present.

Regarding the man who has perpetrated this deed, it is my judgment that when you have assembled together in the name of the Lord and when my spirit is with you, backed by the power of the Lord Jesus, you should hand over this man who has acted in such a way to Satan until his sinful lusts shall be eliminated from his body so that his spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus. Your glorying is no fine thing.

Do you not know that a little evil influence can corrupt a whole society? Cleanse out the old evil influence that you may make a clean fresh start, even as you are cleansed from it; for our Passover sacrifice has been made--I mean Christ; so that we feast not on the old corrupt things nor with the evil influence of wickedness but with the pure bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul is dealing with what, for him, was an ever recurring problem. In sexual matters the heathen did not know the meaning of chastity. They took their pleasure when and where they wanted it. It was so hard for the Christian Church to escape the infection. They were like a little island surrounded on every side by a sea of paganism; they had come so newly into Christianity; it was so difficult to unlearn the practices which generations of loose-living had made part of their lives; and yet if the Church was to be kept pure they must say a final good-bye to the old heathen ways. In the Church at Corinth a specially shocking case had arisen. A man had formed an illicit association with his own step-mother, a thing which would revolt even a heathen and which was explicitly forbidden by the Jewish law (Lev.18:8). The phrasing of the charge may suggest that this woman was already divorced from her husband.

She herself must have been a heathen, for Paul does not seek to deal with her at all so that she must have been outside the jurisdiction of the Church.

Shocked as he was at the sin, Paul was even more shocked by the attitude of the Corinthian Church to the sinner. They had complacently accepted the situation and done nothing about it when they should have been grief-stricken. The word Paul uses for the grief they should have shown (*penthein*, GSN3996) is the word that is used for mourning for the dead. An easy-going attitude to sin is always dangerous. It has been said that our one security against sin lies in our being shocked at it. Carlyle said that men must see the infinite beauty of holiness and the infinite damnability of sin. When we cease to take a serious view of sin we are in a perilous position. It is not a question of being critical and condemnatory; it is a question of being wounded and shocked. It was sin that crucified Jesus Christ; it was to free men from sin that he died. No Christian man can take an easy-going view of it.

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1 Corinthians 5:1-8

Paul's verdict is that the man must be dealt with. In a vivid phrase he says that he must be handed over to Satan. He means that he must be excommunicated. The world was looked upon as the domain of Satan (Jn.12:31; Jn.16:11; Ac.26:18; Col.1:13) just as the Church was the domain of God. Send this man back to Satan's world to which he belongs, is Paul's verdict. But we have to note that even a punishment as serious as that was not vindictive. It was in order to humiliate the man, to bring about the taming and the eradication of his lusts so that in the end his spirit should be saved. It was discipline, not exercised solely to punish, but rather to awaken; and was a verdict to be carried out, not with cold, sadistic cruelty, but rather in sorrow as for one who had died. Always at the back of punishment and discipline in the early Church there is the conviction that they must seek not to break but to make the man who has sinned.

Paul goes on to some very practical advice. 1Cor.5:6-8 have been modernised in the translation. In the original they literally run: "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For our Passover sacrifice has been sacrificed--I mean Christ, so that we feast not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of wickedness and evil, but on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Here we have a picture expressed in Jewish terms. With very few exceptions, leaven stands in Jewish literature for an evil influence. It was dough which had been kept over from a previous baking and which, in the keeping, had fermented. The Jews identified fermentation with putrefaction; and so leaven stood for a corrupting influence.

Now the Passover bread was unleavened (Exo.12:15ff; Exo.13:7). More than that, on the day before the Passover Feast the law laid it down that the Jew must light a candle and search his house ceremonially for leaven, and that every last bit must be cast out (compare the picture of God's search in Zeph.1:12). (We may note in the by going that the date of this search was 14th April and that in the search has been seen the origin of spring-cleaning!). Paul takes that picture. He says our sacrifice has been sacrificed, even Christ; it is his sacrifice which has delivered us from sin, as God delivered the Israelites from Egypt. Therefore, he goes on, the last remnant of evil must be cleared out of your lives. If you let an evil influence into the Church, it can corrupt the whole society, as the leaven permeates the whole lump of dough.

Here again we have a great practical truth. Discipline has sometimes to be exercised for the sake of the Church. To shut our eyes to offences is not always a kind thing to do; it may be damaging. A poison must be eliminated before it spreads; a weed must be plucked out before it pollutes the whole ground. Here we have a whole principle of discipline. Discipline should never be exercised for the satisfaction of the person who exercises it, but always for the mending of the person who has sinned and for the sake of the Church. Discipline must never be vengeful; it must always be curative and prophylactic.

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1 Corinthians 5:9-13

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

In my letter I wrote to you not to associate with fornicators. You cannot altogether avoid associating with the fornicators of this world, or with those who are greedy and grasping for this world's goods, or with idolaters, for, in that case, you would have to withdraw entirely from the world. But, as things now are, I write to you not to associate or to eat with anyone who bears the name of brother, if he is a fornicator, or a greedy person, or an idolater, or a slanderer, or a drunken person, or a thief. What business have I to judge those who are outside the Church? Is it not those who are within the Church that you judge, while God judges those who are outside? Put away the wicked man from among you.

It appears that Paul had already written a letter to the Corinthians in which he had urged them to avoid the society of all evil men. He had meant that to apply only to members of the Church; he had meant that wicked men must be disciplined by being ejected from the society of the Church until they mended their ways. But some at least of the Corinthians had taken this to be an absolute prohibition, and, of course, such a prohibition could be observed only if they withdrew themselves from the world altogether. In a place like Corinth it would have been impossible to carry on a normal life at all without associating in ordinary everyday affairs with those whose lives the Church would utterly condemn.

But Paul never meant that; he would never have recommended a kind of Christianity which withdrew from the world; to him it was something that had to be lived out in the world. "God," as the old saint said to John Wesley, "knows nothing of solitary religion." And Paul would have agreed with that.

It is very interesting to see the three sins which he chooses as typical of the world; he names three classes of people.

(i) There are the fornicators, those guilty of lax morality. Christianity alone can guarantee purity. The root cause of sexual immorality is a wrong view of men. In the end it views men as beasts.

It declares that the passions and instincts which they share with the beasts must be shamelessly gratified and regards the other person merely as an instrument through which that gratification may be obtained. Now Christianity regards man as a child of God, and, just because of that, as a creature who lives in the world but who always looks beyond it, a person who will not dictate his life by purely physical needs and desires, one who has a body but also a spirit. If men regarded themselves and others as the sons and daughters of God, moral laxity would automatically be banished from life.

(ii) There are those who are greedy for this world's goods. Once again only Christianity can banish that spirit. If we judge things by purely material standards, there is no reason why we should not dedicate our lives to the task of getting. But Christianity introduces a spirit which looks

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1 Corinthians 5:9-13

outwards and not inwards. It makes love the highest value in life and service the greatest honour. When the love of God is in a man's heart, he will find his joy not in getting but in giving.

(iii) There are the idolaters. Ancient idolatry is paralleled in modern superstition. There can have been few ages so interested in amulets and charms and luck-bringers, in astrologers and horoscopes, as this. The reason is that it is a basic rule of life that a man must worship something. Unless he worships the true God he will worship the gods of luck. Whenever religion grows weak, superstition grows strong.

It is to be noted that these three basic sins are representative of the three directions in which a man sins.

(a) Fornication is a sin against a man's own self. By falling to it he has reduced himself to the level of an animal; he has sinned against the light that is in him and the highest that he knows. He has allowed his lower nature to defeat his higher and made himself less than a man.

(b) Greediness is a sin against our neighbours and our fellow men. It regards human beings as persons to be exploited rather than as brothers to be helped. It forgets that the only proof that we do love God must be the fact that we love our neighbours as ourselves.

(c) Idolatry is a sin against God. It allows things to usurp God's place. It is the failure to give God the first and only place in life.

It is Paul's principle that we are not to judge those outside the Church. "Those outside" was a Jewish phrase used to describe people outside the Chosen People. We must leave their judgment to God who alone knows the hearts of men. But the man within the Church has special privileges and therefore special responsibilities; he is a man who has taken an oath to Christ and can therefore be called in question for how he keeps it.

So Paul comes to an end with the definite command, "Put away the wicked man from amongst you." That is a quotation from Deut.17:7 and Deut.24:7. There are times when a cancer must be cut out; there are times when drastic measures must be taken to avoid infection. It is not the desire to hurt or the wish to show his power that moves Paul; it is the pastor's desire to protect his infant Church from the ever-threatening infection of the world.

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1 Corinthians 6:1-8

THE FOLLY OF THE LAW COURTS

1 Corinthians 6:1-8

When any of you has a ground of complaint against his fellow, does he dare to go to law before unrighteous men, and not before God's dedicated people? Are you not aware that God's dedicated people will one day judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you unfit to deal with the smallest matters of judgment? Are you not aware that we will judge angels--let alone things which have to do with ordinary everyday life? If then you have questions of judgment which have to do with ordinary everyday life, put those who are of no consequence in the eyes of the Church in charge of them. It is to shame you that I speak. Do you go on like this because there is not a wise man among you who will be able to arbitrate between one brother and another? Must brother really go to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? If it comes to that there is a grave defect among you that you have court cases with each other at all.

Why not rather submit to injury? Why not rather submit to being deprived of something? But you injure others and you deprive others of things--and brothers at that!

Paul is dealing with a problem which specially affected the Greeks. The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public law courts at all; they settled things before the elders of the village or the elders of the synagogue; to them justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. In fact the Jewish law expressly forbade a Jew to go to law at all in a non-Jewish court; to do so was considered blasphemy against the divine law of God. It was far otherwise with the Greeks; they were characteristically a litigious people. The law courts were one of their chief entertainments.

When we study the details of Athenian law we see what a major part the law courts played in the life of any Athenian citizen; and the situation in Corinth would not be so very different. If there was a dispute in Athens, the first attempt to settle it was by private arbitrator. In that event one arbitrator was chosen by each party, and a third was chosen by agreement between both parties to be an impartial judge. If that failed to settle the matter, there was a court known as The Forty. The Forty referred the matter to a public arbitrator and the public arbitrators consisted of all Athenian citizens in their sixtieth year; and any man chosen as an arbitrator had to act whether he liked it or not under penalty of disfranchisement. If the matter was still not settled, it had to be referred to a jury court which consisted of 201 citizens for cases involving less than about 50 British pounds and 401 citizens for cases involving more than that figure.

There were indeed cases when juries could be as large as anything from 1,000 to 6,000 citizens. Juries were composed of Athenian citizens over 30 years of age. They were actually paid 3 obols a day for acting as jurymen, 1 obol being worth about 1/2 pence. The citizens entitled to act as jurymen assembled in the mornings and were allocated by lot to the cases on trial.

It is plain to see that in a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. The Greeks were in fact famous, or notorious, for their love of going to law. Not unnaturally, certain of the Greeks had brought their litigious tendencies into the Christian Church; and Paul was shocked. His Jewish background made the whole thing seem revolting to him; and his Christian principles made it even more so. "How,"

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1 Corinthians 6:1-8

he demanded, "can anyone follow the paradoxical course of looking for justice in the presence of the unjust?"

What made the matter still more fantastic to Paul was that, in the picture of the golden age to come, the Messiah was to judge the nations and the saints were to share in that judgment. The Book of Wisdom says, "They shall judge the nations and have dominion over the people" (Wis.3:8). The Book of Enoch says, "I will bring forth those who have loved my name clad in shining light, and I will set each on the throne of his honour" (Wis.108:12). So Paul demands, "If some day you are going to judge the world, if even the angels, the highest created beings, are going to be subject to your judgment, how, in the name of all that is reasonable, can you go and submit your cases to men and to heathen men at that?" "If you must do it," he says, "do it inside the Church, and give the task of judging to the people of whom you think least, for no man who is destined to judge the world could possibly be bothered getting himself involved in petty everyday squabbles."

Then suddenly Paul seizes on the great essential principle. To go to law at all, and especially to go to law with a brother, is to fall far below the Christian standard of behaviour. Long ago Plato had laid it down that the good man will always choose to suffer wrong rather than to do wrong. If the Christian has even the remotest tinge of the love of Christ within his heart, he will rather suffer insult and loss and injury than try to inflict them on someone else--still more so, if that person is a brother. To take vengeance is always an unchristian thing. A Christian does not order his dealings with others by the desire for recompense and the principles of crude justice. He orders them by the spirit of love; and the spirit of love will insist that he live at peace with his brother, and will forbid him to demean himself by going to law.

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1 Corinthians 6:9-11

SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Are you not aware that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Make no mistake--neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sensualists, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor rapacious men, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor robbers shall inherit the Kingdom of God--and such were some of you. But you have been washed; you have been consecrated; you have been put into a right relationship with God through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God.

Paul breaks out into a terrible catalogue of sins that is a grim commentary on the debauched civilization in which the Corinthian Church was growing up. There are certain things which are not pleasant to talk about, but we must look at this catalogue to understand the environment of the early Christian Church; and to see that human nature has not changed very much.

There were fornicators and adulterers. We have already seen that sexual laxity was part of the background of heathen life and that the virtue of chastity was well-nigh unknown. The word used for fornicators is specially unpleasant; it means a male prostitute. It must have been hard to be a Christian in the tainted atmosphere of Corinth.

There were idolaters. The greatest building in Corinth was the Temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, where idolatry and immorality flourished side by side. Idolatry is a grim example of what happens when we try to make religion easier. An idol did not begin by being a god; it began by being a symbol of a god; its function was to make the worship of the god easier by providing some object in which his presence was localized. But very soon men began to worship not the god behind the idol but the idol itself. It is one of the chronic dangers of life that men will come to worship the symbol rather than the reality behind it.

There were sensualists. The word (*malakos*, GSN3120) literally means those who are soft and effeminate, those who have lost their manhood and live for the luxuries of recondite pleasures. It describes what we can only call a kind of wallowing in luxury in which a man has lost all resistance to pleasure. When Ulysses and his sailors came to the island of Circe they came to the land where the lotus flower grew. He who ate of that flower forgot his home and his loved ones and wished to live forever in that land where "it was always afternoon." He had no more any of the stern joy that comes from "climbing up the climbing wave." The sensualist desires this life in which it is always afternoon.

There were thieves and robbers. The ancient world was cursed with them. Houses were easy to break into. The robbers particularly haunted two places--the public baths and the public gymnasias where they stole the clothes of those who were washing or exercising themselves. It was common to kidnap slaves who had special gifts. The state of the law shows how serious this problem was. There were three kinds of theft punishable by death: (1) Theft to the value of more than 50 drachmae, that is, about 2 British pounds. (ii) Theft from the baths, the gymnasias and the ports and

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1 Corinthians 6:9-11

harbours to the value of 10 drachmae, that is about 40 pence. (iii) Theft of anything by night. The Christians lived in the middle of a pilfering population.

There were drunkards. The word used comes from a word (methos, compare GSN3178) which signifies uncontrolled drinking. Even little children in ancient Greece drank wine; the name for breakfast is akratisma and it consisted of bread dipped in wine. The universality of wine drinking was of course due to the inadequate water-supplies. But normally the Greeks were sober people, for their drink was three parts of wine mixed with two of water. But in luxury-loving Corinth uncontrolled drunkenness abounded.

There were rapacious men and robbers. Both words are interesting. The word used for rapacious is pleonektes (GSN4123). It describes, as the Greeks defined it, "the spirit which is always reaching after more and grabbing that to which it has no right." It is aggressive getting. It is not the miser's spirit, for it aimed to get in order to spend, so that it could live in more luxury and greater pleasure; and it cared not over whom it took advantage so long as it could get. The word translated "robbers" is harpax (GSN0727). It means grasping. It is interesting to note that it is used for a certain kind of wolf and also for the grappling irons by which ships were boarded in naval battles. It is the spirit which grasps that to which it has no right with a kind of savage ferocity.

We have left the most unnatural sin to the end--there were homosexuals. This sin had swept like a cancer through Greek life and from Greece, invaded Rome. We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it. Even so great a man as Socrates practised it; Plato's dialogue The Symposium is always said to be one of the greatest works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural but unnatural love. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practised unnatural vice. At this very time Nero was emperor. He had taken a boy called Sporus and had him castrated. He then married him with a full marriage ceremony and took him home in procession to his palace and lived with him as wife. With an incredible viciousness, Nero had himself married a man called Pythagoras and called him his husband. When Nero was eliminated and Otho came to the throne one of the first things he did was to take possession of Sporus.

Much later, the Emperor Hadrian's name was associated with a Bithynian youth called Antinous. He lived with him inseparably, and when he died, he deified him and covered the world with his statues and immortalised his sin by calling a star after him. In this particular vice, in the time of the Early Church, the world was lost to shame; and there can be little doubt that this was one of the main causes of its degeneracy and the final collapse of its civilization.

After this dreadful catalogue of vices, natural and unnatural, comes Paul's shout of triumph "and such were some of you." The proof of Christianity lay in its power. It could take the dregs of humanity and make them into men. It could take men lost to shame and make them sons of God. There were in Corinth, and all over the world, men who were living proofs of the re-creating power of Christ.

The power of Christ is still the same. No man can change himself, but Christ can change him. There is the most amazing contrast between the pagan and the Christian literature of the day. Seneca, a contemporary of Paul, cries out that what men want is "a hand let down to lift them up." "Men," he declared, "are overwhelmingly conscious of their weakness in necessary things." "Men

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1 Corinthians 6:9-11

love their vices," he said with a kind of despair, "and hate them at one and the same time." He called himself a homo non tolerabilis, a man not to be tolerated. Into this world, conscious of a tide of decadence that nothing could stop, there came the radiant power of Christianity, which was triumphantly able to make all things new.

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1 Corinthians 6:12-20

BOUGHT WITH A PRICE

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

True, all things are allowed to me; but all things are not good for me. All things are allowed to me, but I will not allow any thing to get control of me. Foods were made for the stomach and the stomach was made for foods; but God will obliterate both it and them. The body is not made for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. God raised up the Lord, and by his power he will raise us too. Are you not aware that your bodies are the limbs of Christ? Am I then to take away the limbs which belong to Christ and make them the limbs which belong to a harlot? Or, are you not aware that he who has intercourse with a harlot is one body with her? For these two, it says, will become one flesh. But he who unites himself to the Lord is of one spirit with him. Strenuously avoid fornication at all times. Every sin which a man may commit is external to his body; but the man who commits fornication sins against his own body. Or, are you not aware that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is within you, the Spirit which you have received from God? So you are not your own, for you have been bought with a price. So then glorify God with your body.

In this passage Paul is up against a whole series of problems. It ends with the summons, "Glorify God with your body." This is Paul's battle cry here.

The Greeks always looked down on the body. There was a proverbial saying, "The body is a tomb." Epictetus said, "I am a poor soul shackled to a corpse." The important thing was the soul, the spirit of a man; the body was a thing that did not matter. That produced one of two attitudes. Either it issued in the most rigorous asceticism in which everything was done to subject and humiliate the desires and instincts of the body. Or--and in Corinth it was this second outlook which was prevalent--it was taken to mean that, since the body was of no importance, you could do what you liked with it; you could let it sate its appetites. What complicated this was the doctrine of Christian freedom which Paul preached. If the Christian man is the freest of all men, then is he not free to do what he likes, especially with this completely unimportant body of his?

So, the Corinthians argued, in a way that they thought very enlightened, let the body have its way. But what is the body's way? The stomach was made for food and food for the stomach, they went on. Food and the stomach naturally and inevitably go together. In precisely the same way the body is made for its instincts; it is made for the sexual act and the sexual act is made for it; therefore let the desires of the body have their way.

Paul's answer is clear. Stomach and food are passing things; the day will come when they will both pass away. But the body, the personality, the man as a whole will not pass away; he is made for union with Christ in this world and still closer union hereafter. What then happens if he commits fornication? He gives his body to a harlot, for scripture says that intercourse makes two people into one united body (Gen.2:24). That is to say, a body which rightly belongs to Christ has been prostituted to someone else.

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1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Remember that Paul is not writing a systematic treatise; he is preaching, pleading with a heart on fire and a tongue that will use whatever arguments it can find. He says that of all sins fornication is the one that affects a man's body and insults it. That is not strictly true--drunkenness might do the same. But Paul is not writing in order to satisfy an examiner in logic, but in order to save the Corinthians in body and in soul; and so he pleads that other sins are external to a man, but in this he sins against his own body, which is destined for union with Christ.

Then he makes one last appeal. Just because God's Spirit dwells in us we have become a temple of God; and so our very bodies are sacred. And more--Christ died to save not a bit of a man, but the whole man, body and soul. Christ gave his life to give a man a redeemed soul and a pure body. Because of that a man's body is not his own to do with as he likes; it is Christ's and he must use it, not for the satisfaction of his own lusts, but for the glory of Christ.

There are two great thoughts here.

(i) It is Paul's insistence that, though he is free to do anything, he will let nothing master him. The great fact of the Christian faith is, not that it makes a man free to sin, but that it makes a man free not to sin. It is so easy to allow habits to master us; but the Christian strength enables us to master them. When a man really experiences the Christian power, he becomes, not the slave of his body, but its master. Often a man says, "I will do what I like," when he means that he will indulge the habit or passion which has him in its grip; it is only when a man has the strength of Christ in him that he can really say, "I will do what I like," and not, "I will satisfy the things that have me in their power."

(ii) It is Paul's insistence that we are not our own. There is no such thing in this world as a self-made man. The Christian is a man who thinks not of his rights but of his debts. He can never do what he likes, because he never belongs to himself; he must always do what Christ likes, because Christ bought him at the cost of his life.

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Introduction to 1 Corinthians 7

PROBLEMS IN CORINTH

In the section of our letter which stretches from the beginning of 1Cor.7 to the end of 1Cor.15, Paul sets himself to deal with a set of problems concerning which the Corinthian Church had written to him, asking advice. He begins the section by saying, "With regard to what you wrote to me about...." In modern language, we might say, "With reference to your letter...." We shall outline each problem as we come to it. 1Cor.7 deals with a whole series of problems regarding marriage. Here is a summary of the areas in which the Corinthian Church sought and obtained advice from Paul.

1Cor.7:1-2: Advice to those who think that Christians should not marry at all.

1Cor.7:3-7: Advice to those who urge that even those who are married should abstain from all sexual relations with each other.

1Cor.7:8-9: Advice to the unmarried and to widows.

1Cor.7:10-11: Advice to those who think that married people should separate.

1Cor.7:12-17: Advice to those who think that, if the marriage is one in which one of the partners is a Christian and one a pagan, it should be broken up and dissolved.

1Cor.7:18,24: Instruction to live the Christian life in whatever state they happen to be.

1Cor.7:25: Advice regarding virgins.

1Cor.7:36-38: Advice regarding virgins.

1Cor.7:26-35: Exhortation that nothing should interfere with concentration upon serving Christ because the time is short and he will very soon come again.

1Cor.7:38-40: Advice to those who wish to remarry.

We must study this chapter with two facts firmly in our minds. (i) Paul is writing to Corinth which was the most immoral town in the world. Living in an environment like that, it was far better to be too strict than to be too lax. (ii) The thing which dominates every answer Paul gives is the conviction that the Second Coming of Christ was about to happen almost immediately. This expectation was not realized; but Paul was convinced that he was giving advice for a purely

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temporary situation. We can be quite certain that in many cases his advice would have been quite different if he had visualized a permanent, instead of a temporary, situation. Now let us turn to the chapter in detail.

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1 Corinthians 7:1-2

COMPLETE ASCETICISM

1 Corinthians 7:1-2

With regard to your letter and its suggestion that it would be a fine thing for a man not to have anything to do with a woman--to avoid fornication, let each man possess his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

We have already seen that in Greek thought there was strong tendency to despise the body and the things of the body; and that that tendency could issue in a position where men said, "The body is utterly unimportant; therefore we can do what we like with it and it makes no difference if we allow its appetites to have their fullest play." But that very tendency could issue in a precisely opposite point of view. It could move a man to say, "The body is evil; therefore we must bring it into subjection; therefore we must completely obliterate, and if that is not possible, we must completely deny, all the instincts and desires which are natural to it." It is that second way of looking at things with which Paul is dealing here. The Corinthians, or at least some of them, had suggested that, if a man was going to be a Christian in the fullest sense of the term, he must have done with physical things and must refuse to marry altogether.

Paul's answer is extremely practical. In effect he says, "Remember where you are living; remember that you are living in Corinth where you cannot even walk along the street without temptation rearing its head at you. Remember your own physical constitution and the healthy instincts which nature has given you. You will be far better to marry than to fall into sin."

This sounds like a low view of marriage. It sounds as if Paul is advising marriage in order to avoid a worse fate. In point of fact he is honestly facing the facts and laying down a rule which is universally true. No man should attempt a way of life for which he is naturally unfitted; no man should set out on a pathway whereby he deliberately surrounds himself with temptations. Paul knew very well that all men are not made the same. "Examine yourself," he says, "and choose that way of life in which you can best live the Christian life, and don't attempt an unnatural standard which is impossible and even wrong for you being such as you are."

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1 Corinthians 7:3-7

THE PARTNERSHIP OF MARRIAGE

1 Corinthians 7:3-7

Let the husband give to the wife all that is due to her; and in the same way let the wife give to the husband all that is due to him. A wife is not in absolute control of her own body, but her husband is. In the same way a husband is not in absolute control of his own body, but his wife is. Do not deprive each other of each other's legitimate rights, unless it be by common agreement, and for a limited time. You could do so in order to have time for prayer and afterwards come together again; but you must come together again, so that Satan may not get the chance to tempt you because you find it impossible to control your desires. But I am giving this advice more as a concession than as a command. I wish that all men were like myself; but each man has his own gift from God, one one way, and another another.

This passage arises from a suggestion from Corinth that if married people are to be really Christian they must abstain from all intercourse with each other. This is another manifestation of that line of thought which looked on the body and its instincts as essentially evil. Paul declares a supremely great principle. Marriage is a partnership. The husband cannot act independently of the wife, nor the wife of the husband. They must always act together. The husband must never regard the wife simply as a means of self-gratification. The whole marriage relationship, both in its physical and spiritual sides, is something in which both are to find their gratification and the highest satisfaction of all their desires. In a time of special discipline, in a time of long and earnest prayer, it might be right to set aside all bodily things; but it must be by mutual agreement and only for a time, or it simply begets a situation which gives temptation an easy chance.

Once again Paul seems to belittle marriage. This, he suggests, is not an ideal command; it is a considerate concession to human weakness. He would prefer as an ideal that everyone was as he was. What exactly was that? We can only deduce.

We may be fairly certain that at some time Paul had been married. (i) We may be certain of that on general grounds. He was a Rabbi and it was his own claim that he had failed in none of the duties which Jewish law and tradition laid down. Now orthodox Jewish belief laid down the obligation of marriage. If a man did not marry and have children, he was said to have "slain his posterity," "to have lessened the image of God in the world." Seven were said to be excommunicated from heaven, and the list began, "A Jew who has no wife; or who has a wife but no children." God had said, "Be fruitful and multiply," and, therefore, not to marry and not to have children was to be guilty of breaking a positive commandment of God. The age for marriage was considered to be eighteen; and therefore it is in the highest degree unlikely that so devout and orthodox a Jew as Paul once was would have remained unmarried. (ii) On particular grounds there is also evidence that Paul was married.

He must have been a member of the Sanhedrin for he says that he gave his vote against the Christians. (Ac.26:10). It was a regulation that members of the Sanhedrin must be married men, because it was held that married men were more merciful.

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1 Corinthians 7:3-7

It may be that Paul's wife died; it is even more likely that she left him and broke up his home when he became a Christian, so that he did indeed literally give up all things for the sake of Christ. At all events he banished that side of life once and for all and never remarried. A married man could never have lived the life of journeying which Paul lived. His desire that others ideally should be the same sprang entirely from the fact that he expected the Second Coming at once; time was so short that earthly ties and physical things must not be allowed to interfere. It is not that Paul is really disparaging marriage; it is rather that he is insisting that all a man's concentration must be on being ready for the coming of Christ.

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1 Corinthians 7:8-16

THE BOND THAT MUST NOT BE BROKEN

1 Corinthians 7:8-16

To the unmarried and to the widows I say, it would be a fine thing if they were to remain like myself, but if they find continence impossible, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to go on being inflamed with passion. To those who are married I give this order--and the order is not mine but the Lord's--that a wife should not separate herself from her husband; but if she does separate, let her either remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband; and that a husband should not put his wife away. To others I say this--but I give it as my advice and not as a commandment of the Lord--if any brother has a wife who is not a believer, and she agrees to live with him, let him not put her away; and if there is any wife who has a husband who is not a believer, and he agrees to live with her, let her not put her husband away; for the unbelieving husband is consecrated by his wife and the unbelieving wife is consecrated by the husband who is a brother.

If this were not so your children would not be cleansed; but as it is they are set apart for God. If the unbelieving partner wishes to separate, let him or her separate, for the Christian brother or sister in such cases is not under any slavish obligation. it is in peace that God has called us. Wife, how can you tell whether you will save your husband? Or, Husband, how can you tell whether you will save your wife?

This passage deals with three different sets of people.

(i) It deals with those who are unmarried or who are widows. In the circumstances of an age which, as Paul thought, was hastening to its end, they would be better to remain as they are; but once again, he warns them not to court temptation, not to attempt a situation which would be for them dangerous. If they have a nature naturally passionate, let them marry. Paul was always sure that no one could lay down one course of action for everyone. It all depended on the person involved.

(ii) It deals with those who are married. Paul forbids divorce on the ground that Jesus forbade it. (Mk.10:9; Lk.16:18). If there is such a separation, he forbids remarriage. This may seem a hard doctrine, but in Corinth with its characteristic laxity, it was better to keep the standards so high that no taint of loose-living could enter the Church.

(iii) It deals with the marriage of believers and unbelievers. On this Paul has to give his own judgment, because there is no definite command of Jesus to which he can refer them. The background must be that there were those in Corinth who declared that a believer must never live with an unbeliever; and that, in the event of one partner of a marriage becoming a Christian and the other remaining a heathen, separation must at once follow.

In fact one of the great heathen complaints against Christianity was exactly that Christianity did break up families and was a disruptive influence in society. "Tampering with domestic relationships" was one of the first charges brought against the Christians. (1Pet.4:15). Sometimes the Christians did in fact take a very high stand. "Of what parents are you born?" the judge asked

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1 Corinthians 7:8-16

Lucian of Antioch. "I am a Christian," Lucian answered, "and a Christian's only relatives are the saints."

Undoubtedly mixed marriages produced problems. Tertullian wrote a book about them in which he describes the heathen husband who is angry with his Christian wife because, "for the sake of visiting the brethren she goes round from street to street to other men's cottages, especially those of the poor.... He will not allow her to be absent all night long at nocturnal convocations and paschal solemnities...or suffer her to creep into prison to kiss a martyr's bonds, or even to exchange a kiss with one of the brethren." (In the early Church Christians greeted each other with the holy kiss of peace). It is indeed difficult not to sympathize with the heathen husband.

Paul dealt with this problem with supreme practical wisdom. He knew the difficulty and he refused to exacerbate it. He said that if the two could agree to live together by all means let them do so; but if they wished to separate and found living together intolerable, let them do so, because the Christian was never meant to be a slave.

Paul has two great things to say which are of permanent value.

(i) He has the lovely thought that the unbelieving partner is consecrated by the believer. They two have become one flesh and the wonder is that in such a case it is not the taint of heathenism but the grace of Christianity which wins the victory. There is an infection about Christianity which involves all those who come into contact with it. A child born into a Christian home, even into a home where only one of the partners is a Christian, is born into the family of Christ. In a partnership between a believer and an unbeliever, it is not so much that the believer is brought into contact with the realm of sin, as that the unbeliever is brought into contact with the realm of grace.

(ii) He has the equally lovely thought that this very association may be the means of saving the soul of the unbelieving partner. For Paul evangelization began at home. The unbeliever was to be looked on, not as something unclean to be avoided with repulsion, but as another son or daughter to be won for God. Paul knew that it is blessedly true that often human love has led to love of God.

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1 Corinthians 7:17-24

SERVING GOD WHERE GOD HAS SET US

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

The one thing that is necessary is that each man should walk as God has allotted to him and as God has called him. It is thus that I order things in all the Churches. Was any man called after he had been circumcised? Let him not try to efface it. Was any man called when he was not circumcised? Let him not get himself circumcised. Circumcision is of no importance and uncircumcision is of no importance, but keeping God's commandments is everything. Let each man remain in the condition in which he was when God called him. Were you called as a slave? Do not let that distress you. But if you can become free, grasp the opportunity, for he who, in the Lord, was called as a slave is the Lord's free man; and in the same way, the free man who has been called is Christ's slave. You have been bought with a price. Do not become slaves of men. Brothers, let each man remain in the sight of God in the state in which he was called.

Paul lays down one of the first rules of Christianity, "Be a Christian where you are." It must often have happened that when a man became a Christian he would have liked to break away from his job, and from the circle in which he moved, and begin a new life. But Paul insisted that the function of Christianity was not to give a man a new life, but to make his old life new. Let the Jew remain a Jew; let the Gentile remain a Gentile; race and the marks of race made no difference. What did make a difference was the kind of life he lived. Long ago the Cynics had insisted that a true man can never be a slave in nature although he may be a slave in status; and that a false man can never be a free man in reality but is always a slave. Paul reminds them that slave or free, a man is a slave of Christ because Christ bought him with a price.

Here there is a picture in Paul's mind. In the ancient world it was possible for a slave at a great effort to purchase his own freedom. This was how he did it. In the little spare time he had, he took odd jobs and earned a few coppers. His master had the right to claim commission even on these poor earnings. But the slave would deposit every farthing he could earn in the Temple of some god. When, it might be at the end of years, he had his complete purchase price laid up in the Temple, he would take his master there, the priest would hand over the money, and then symbolically the slave became the property of the god and therefore free of all men. That is what Paul is thinking of. The Christian man has been purchased by Christ; therefore, no matter what his human status may be, he is free of all men because he is the property of Christ.

Paul insists that Christianity does not make a man kick over the traces and become querulously discontented with things as they are; it makes him, wherever he is, carry himself as the slave of Christ. Even the meanest work is no longer done for men but for Christ. As George Herbert wrote:

All may of thee partake;
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture, "for thy sake,"
Will not grow bright and clean.
A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:

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1 Corinthians 7:17-24

Who sweeps a room, as for, thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.
This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.

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1 Corinthians 7:25, 36-38

WISE ADVICE ON A DIFFICULT PROBLEM

1 Corinthians 7:25,36-38

I have no command of the Lord with regard to virgins, but I give you my opinion, as one who has found the mercy of God and who can be trusted.... If anyone thinks that his conduct to his virgin is unseemly, if he finds that his passions are too strong, and if he thinks that they ought to marry, let him do what he wishes. He does no wrong; let them marry. But if any man is fixed and settled in his mind, and if there is no compulsion on him, but if he has complete power to abide by his own wish, and if in his mind he has come to the decision to keep his own virgin, he will do well. The thing comes to this--he who marries his virgin acts rightly; and he who does not marry her will do better.

1Cor.7:25-38, while they form a paragraph, really fall into two parts, which it is simpler to examine separately. 1Cor.7:25 and 1Cor.7:36-38 deal with this problem concerning virgins; while the verses between give the reason for accepting the advice which runs through the whole chapter. This section concerning virgins has always been a problem. It has been given three different explanations.

(i) It has been regarded simply as advice to fathers as to the marriage of their unmarried daughters; but it does not read like that; and it is hard to see why Paul uses the word virgin if he means daughter; and for a father to speak of his virgin when he meant his daughter would be an odd way of speaking.

(ii) It has been regarded as dealing with a problem which in later times became acute and which more than one Church Council tried to deal with and forbade. Certainly later on it was the custom for a man and woman to live together, sharing the same house and even sharing the same bed, and yet to have no physical relations with each other at all. The idea was that if they could discipline themselves to share the spiritual life in such intimacy without allowing the body to enter into their relationship at all, it was a specially meritorious thing. We can understand the idea behind this, the attempt to cleanse human relationships of all passion; but it is clear how dangerous a practice it was, and how, on occasion, it must have resulted in a quite impossible situation. In such a relationship the woman was known as the man's virgin. It may well be that that custom had arisen in the Church at Corinth.

If so, and we think that it was so, then Paul is saying, "If you can retain this difficult situation, if your self-discipline and your self-control are sufficient to maintain it, then it is better to do so; but, if you have tried it and have found that it is too great a strain on human nature, then abandon it and marry; and to do so will be no discredit to you."

(iii) While we think that is the correct interpretation of this passage, there is a modification of it which deserves to be noted. It is suggested that in Corinth there were men and women who had actually gone through the marriage ceremony but had decided never to consummate the marriage and to live in absolute continence so as to devote themselves entirely to the spiritual life. Having done so, it might well be that they discovered that what they planned to do placed too great a strain upon them. In that case, Paul would be saying, "If you can keep your vow, you will do supremely well; but if you cannot, frankly admit it and enter into normal relations with each other."

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1 Corinthians 7:25, 36-38

To us the whole relationship seems dangerous and abnormal and even wrong; and so indeed it was; and in time the Church was compelled to brand it as wrong. But given the situation, Paul's advice is full of wisdom. He really says three things.

(i) Self-discipline is an excellent thing. Any means whereby a man tames himself until he has every passion under perfect control is an excellent thing; but it is no part of Christian duty to eliminate the natural instincts of man; rather the Christian uses them to the glory of God.

(ii) Paul really says, "Don't make an unnatural thing of your religion." That, in the last analysis, is the fault of the monks and the hermits and the nuns. They regard it as necessary to eliminate the natural feelings of mankind in order to be truly religious; they regard it as necessary to separate themselves from all the normal life of men and women in order to serve God. But Christianity was never meant to abolish normal life; it was meant to glorify it.

(iii) In the end Paul is saying, "Don't make an agony of your religion." Collie Knox tells how, when he was a young man, he was apt to find religion a stress and a strain; and he tells how a well-loved chaplain once came to him and laid a hand on his shoulder and said, "Young Knox, don't make an agony of your religion." It was said of Burns that he was "haunted rather than helped by his religion." No man should be ashamed of the body God gave him, the heart God put into him, the instincts that, by God's creation, dwell within him. Christianity will teach him, not how to eliminate them, but how to use them in such a way that passion is pure and human love the most ennobling thing in all God's world.

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1 Corinthians 7:26-35

THE TIME IS SHORT

1 Corinthians 7:26-35

I think that this is the right thing because of the present crisis-- that it is the right thing for a man to remain as he is. Have you been bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released from that bond. Are you free from marriage ties? Do not seek a wife. But, if you do marry, you have committed no sin. Those who do marry will have trouble about bodily things, and I would wish to spare you this. This I do say, brothers, the time is short, so short that, for the future those who have wives must live as if they had not, those who have sorrow must live as not sorrowing, those who rejoice must live as not rejoicing, those who buy must buy as if they had no secure possession of anything, those who use this world must use it as if they had no full use of it; for the outward form of this world is passing away. I want you to be without anxieties. The man who remains unmarried is anxious for the things of the Lord; his anxiety is how he may please the Lord.

The man who marries is anxious for the things of the world; his anxiety is how he may please his wife. There is a distinct difference between the married and the unmarried woman. The unmarried woman is anxious for the things of the Lord; her aim is that she may be dedicated to God both in her body and in her spirit. The woman who has married is anxious for the things of the world; her anxiety is that she may please her husband, It is for your advantage that I am saying this. I do not want to put a halter round your neck. My aim is that you should live a lovely life and that you should serve the Lord without distractions.

It is in many ways a pity that Paul did not begin the chapter with this section because it has the heart of his whole position in it. All through this chapter we must have felt that he was belittling marriage. It looked again and again as if he was allowing marriage only as a concession to avoid fornication and adultery; as if marriage was only a second best.

We have seen that the Jews glorified marriage and considered it a sacred duty. There was only one valid reason, according to Jewish tradition, for not marrying, and that was in order to study the law. Rabbi ben Azai asked, "Why should I marry? I am in love with the Law. Let others see to the prolongation of the human race." In the Greek world, Epictetus, the stoic philosopher, never married. He said that he was doing far more for the world by being a teacher than if he had produced two or three "ugly-nosed brats." "How," he asked, "can one whose function is to teach mankind be expected to run for something in which to heat the water to give the baby its bath?" But that was not the Jewish point of view and it was certainly not the Christian point of view.

Nor was it Paul's final point of view. Years later when he wrote the letter to the Ephesians he had changed; for there he uses the relationship of man and wife as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Eph.5:22-26). When he wrote to the Corinthians, his outlook was dominated by the fact that he expected the Second Coming of Christ at any moment. What he is laying down is crisis legislation. "The time is short." So soon was Christ to come, he believed, that everything must be laid aside in one tremendous effort to concentrate on preparation for that coming. The most important human activity and the dearest human relationship must be abandoned if they threatened to interrupt or to slacken that concentration. A man must have no ties whatsoever to keep him when Christ bade him rise and go. He must think of pleasing no one other than Christ. Had Paul thought

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1 Corinthians 7:26-35

that he and his converts were living in a permanent situation, he would never have written as he did.

By the time he wrote Ephesians he had realized the permanency of the human situation and regarded marriage as the most precious relationship within it, the only one which was even faintly parallel to the relationship of Christ and the Church.

For us it must always be true that home is the place which does two things for us. It is the place where we find the noblest opportunity to live the Christian life; and the pity is it is so often the place where we claim the right to be as querulous and critical and boorish as we may, and to treat those who love us as we would never dare to treat a stranger. Also it is the place from whose rest and sweetness we draw strength to live more nearly as we ought within the world.

Paul in this chapter looked on marriage as a second best because he believed that life as we know it had only days to run; but the day came when he saw it as the loveliest relationship upon earth.

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1 Corinthians 7:39-40

MARRYING AGAIN

1 Corinthians 7:39-40

A wife is bound for as long as her husband is alive; but, if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, so long as the marriage is made in the Lord. In my opinion she will be happier if she remains as she is--and I think that I have the Spirit of God.

Again Paul takes up his consistent point of view. Marriage is a relationship which can be broken only by death. A second marriage is perfectly allowable, but Paul would rather see the widow stay a widow. We know now that he was speaking only of the crisis situation in which he thought men were living.

In many ways a second marriage is the highest compliment that the one who survives can pay the one who has gone before; for it means that without him or her life was so lonely as to be insupportable; it means that with him or her the married state was so happy that it can fearlessly be entered into again. So far from being an act of disrespect it can be a mark of honour to the dead.

One condition Paul lays down--it must be a marriage in the Lord. That is, it must be a marriage between Christian folk. It is seldom that a mixed marriage can be successful. Long, long ago Plutarch laid it down, that "marriage cannot be happy unless husband and wife are of the same religion." The highest love comes when two people love each other and their love is sanctified by a common love of Christ. For then they not only live together but also pray together; and life and love combine to be one continual act of worship to God.

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Introduction to 1 Corinthians 8

Advice to the Wise (1Corinthians 8)

1Cor.8-10 deal with a problem which may seem extremely remote to us, but was intensely real to the Christians at Corinth and demanded a solution. It was the problem of whether or not to eat meat which had been offered to idols. Before we begin to study these chapters in detail, it will be well to state the problem and the broad lines of the solutions which Paul offers in the various cases in which it impinged upon life.

Sacrifice to the gods was an integral part of ancient life. It might be of two kinds, private or public. In neither case was the whole animal consumed upon the altar. Often all that was burned was a mere token part as small as some of the hairs cut from the forehead.

In private sacrifice the animal, so to speak, was divided into three parts. First, a token part was burned on the altar. Second, the priests received as their rightful portion the ribs, the ham and the left side of the face. Third, the worshipper himself received the rest of the meat. With the meat he gave a banquet. This was specially the case at times like weddings. Sometimes these feasts were in the house of the host; sometimes they were even in the temple of the god to whom the sacrifice had been made. We have, for instance, a papyrus invitation to dinner which runs like this: "Antonius, son of Ptolemaeus, invites you to dine with him at the table of our Lord Serapis." Serapis was the god to whom he had sacrificed.

The problem which confronted the Christian was, "Could he take part in such a feast? Could he possibly take upon his lips meat that had been offered to an idol?" If he could not, then obviously he was going to cut himself off almost entirely from social occasions.

In public sacrifice, that is sacrifice offered by the state, and such sacrifices were common, after the requisite symbolic amount of the meat had been burned and after the priests had received their share, the rest of the meat fell to the magistrates and others. What they did not need, they sold to the shops and the markets; and therefore, even when meat was bought in the shops, it might well have been already offered to some idol. A man never knew when he might be eating meat that had formed part of a sacrifice to an idol.

What complicated matters still further was that this age believed strongly and fearfully in demons and devils. The air was full of them and they were always lurking to gain an entry into a man, and, if they did, they would injure his body and unhinge his mind. One of the special ways in which these spirits gained entry was through food; they settled on the food as a man ate and so got inside him. One of the ways of avoiding that was to dedicate the meat to some good god whose presence in the meat put up a barrier against the evil spirit. For that reason, nearly all animals were dedicated to a god before being slaughtered; and, if that was not done, as a defence meat was blessed in the name of a god before it was eaten.

It therefore followed that a man could hardly eat meat at all which was not in some way connected with a heathen god. Could the Christian eat it? That was the problem; and, clearly, although to us it may be a matter of merely antiquarian interest, the fact remains that, to the

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Introduction to 1 Corinthians 8

Christian in Corinth or any other Greek city, it was one which pervaded all life, and which had to be settled one way or another.

(i) In 1Cor.8 he lays down the principle that, however safe the strong and enlightened Christian may feel from the infection of heathen idols and even if he believes that an idol is the symbol of something which does not exist at all, he must do nothing which will hurt or bewilder a brother whose conscience is neither so enlightened nor so strong as his.

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1 Corinthians 8

ADVICE TO THE WISE

1 Corinthians 8

With reference to things offered to idols--we are well aware that we all possess knowledge; but knowledge inflates a man, whereas love builds him up. If anyone thinks he has reached a certain stage of knowledge, it is not the kind of knowledge it ought to be. If a man loves God, he is known by God. With regard to food which consists of things offered to idols, we well know that there is nothing in the universe for which an idol stands, and that there is no God but one; and even if the so-called gods do exist, just as there are gods many and lords many, as far as we are concerned, it remains true that there is one God, the Father, from whom all things come and to whom we go; and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came into being and through whom we were re-created.

But it is not everyone who has knowledge; but there are some who, even up to now, have been accustomed to regard idols as real, and who still cannot help doing so; the consequence is that, when they eat meat offered to idols, they regard it as eating a real sacrifice, and because their conscience is weak, a stain is left upon it. Food will not commend us to God. If we do not eat it we are none the worse; and if we do eat it we are not specially better. You must take care to see to it that your very liberty does not become a stumbling-block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you, who have knowledge, sitting at meat in the temple of an idol, will the conscience of the weak man not be encouraged to eat things which have been offered to idols, while he still really believes in the reality of the idol and the sacrifice? And so the person who is weak will be ruined by your knowledge, the brother for whom Christ died.

If you sin like that against a brother, and if you strike blows like that against his conscience in its weakness, you are sinning against Christ. Therefore, if a thing like food is going to cause my brother to stumble, I will most certainly abstain from eating flesh forever, so that I may not cause my brother to stumble.

We have seen how it was scarcely possible to live in any Greek city and not to come daily up against the problem of what to do about eating meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to idols. There were certain of the Corinthians to whom the matter was no problem. They held that their superior knowledge had taught them that the heathen gods simply did not exist, and that therefore it was possible for a Christian to eat meat that had been offered to idols without a qualm. In reality Paul has two answers to that. One does not come until 1Cor. 10:20. In that passage Paul makes it clear that, although he quite agreed that the heathen gods did not exist, he felt certain that the spirits and the demons did exist and that they were behind the idols and were using them to seduce men from the worship of the true God.

In the present passage he uses a much simpler argument. He says that in Corinth there were men who all their lives, up until now, had really believed in the heathen gods; and these men, simple souls, could not quite rid themselves of a lingering belief that an idol really was something, although it was a false something. Whenever they ate meat offered to idols, they had qualms of conscience. They could not help it; instinctively they felt that it was wrong. So Paul argues that if you say that there is absolutely no harm in eating meat offered to idols you are really hurting and bewildering the conscience of these simple souls. His final argument is that, even if a thing is

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harmless for you, when it hurts someone else, it must be given up, for a Christian must never do anything which causes his brother to stumble.

In this passage which deals with so remote a thing there are three great principles which are eternally valid.

(i) What is safe for one man may be quite unsafe for another. It has been said, and it is blessedly true, that God has his own secret stairway into every heart; but it is equally true that the devil has his own secret and subtle stairway into every heart. We may be strong enough to resist some temptation, but it may well be that someone else is not. Something may be no temptation whatever to us, but it may be a violent temptation to someone else. Therefore, in considering whether we will or will not do anything, we must think not only of its effect on us, but of its effect on others as well.

(ii) Nothing ought to be judged solely from the point of view of knowledge; everything ought to be judged from the point of view of love. The argument of the advanced Corinthians was that they knew better than to regard an idol as anything; their knowledge had taken them far past that. There is always a certain danger in knowledge. It tends to make a man arrogant and feel superior and look down unsympathetically on the man who is not as far advanced as himself. Knowledge which does that is not true knowledge. But the consciousness of intellectual superiority is a dangerous thing. Our conduct should always be guided not by the thought of our own superior knowledge, but by sympathetic and considerate love for our fellow man. And it may well be that for his sake we must refrain from doing and saying certain otherwise legitimate things.

(iii) This leads to the greatest truth of all. No man has any right to indulge in a pleasure or to demand a liberty which may be the ruination of someone else. He may have the strength of mind and will to keep that pleasure in its proper place; that course of action may be safe enough for him; but he has not only himself to think about, he must think of the weaker brother. An indulgence which may be the ruin of someone else is not a pleasure but a sin.

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1 Corinthians 9:1-14

(ii) In 1Cor.9 he deals with those who invoke the principle of Christian freedom. He points out that there are many things that he is free to do which he abstains from doing for the sake of the Church. He is well aware of Christian freedom, but equally aware of Christian responsibility.

THE UNCLAIMED PRIVILEGES

1 Corinthians 9:1-14

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? Even if I am not an apostle to others, I certainly am to you; you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defence to those who are trying to put me on my trial. Do you mean to say that I have not the right to eat and drink at the cost of the Church? Do you mean to say that I have not the right to take a sister about with me as wife, as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas do? Are you going to maintain that it is only I and Barnabas who have not the right to be set free from manual labour? What soldier who goes on a campaign has ever to provide his own rations? Who plants a vineyard and has no right to eat of its fruits? Who shepherds a flock and has not the right to drink of the milk of the flock? Don't think that this is a merely human point of view.

Doesn't the law itself say this? For in the law of Moses it stands written, "You must not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it only oxen that God was thinking about? Or, was it not really for our sakes that he says this? It was for our sakes that it was written, because the ploughman ought to plough and the thresher ought to thresh in the expectation of a share of the crop. If we have sown for you things which nourish the spirit, is it a great boon if we reap from you things which nourish the body? If others share in the privileges which you provide, should we not even more? But we have not used our right to this privilege; but we have put up with all things so as not to put any hindrance in the way of the good news of Christ.

Are you not aware that those who perform the Temple rites have a right to eat their share of the Temple offerings, that those who serve at the altar share things with the altar? Just so the Lord laid it down that those who proclaim the good news should get enough to live on from the good news.

At first sight this chapter seems quite disconnected from what goes before but in fact it is not. The whole point lies in this--the Corinthians who considered themselves mature Christians have been claiming that they are in such a privileged position that they are free to eat meat offered to idols if they like. Their Christian freedom gives them--as they think--a special position in which they could do things which might not be permissible to lesser men. Paul's way of answering that argument is to set forth the many privileges which he himself had a perfect right to claim, but which he did not claim in case they should turn out to be stumbling-blocks to others and hindrances to the effectiveness of the gospel.

First, he claims to be an apostle, which immediately set him in a very special position. He uses two arguments to prove the reality of his apostleship.

(i) He has seen the Lord. Over and over again the Book of Acts makes it clear that the supreme test of an apostle is that he is a witness of the Resurrection. (Ac.1:22; Ac.2:32; Ac.3:15; Ac.4:33). This is of intense importance. Faith, in the New Testament, is very seldom acquiescence in a creed;

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1 Corinthians 9:1-14

it is almost always trust in a person. Paul does not say, "I know what I have believed." He says, "I know whom I have believed." (2Tim.1:12). When Jesus called his disciples, he did not say to them, "I have a philosophy which I would like you to examine," or, "I have an ethical system which I would like you to consider," or, "I offer you a statement of belief which I would like you to discuss." He said, "Follow me." All Christianity begins with this personal relationship with Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to know him personally. As Carlyle once said when a minister was being chosen, "What this Church needs is someone who knows Christ other than at second-hand."

(ii) Paul's second claim is that his ministry has been effective. The Corinthians themselves are the proof of that. He calls them his seal. In ancient days the seal was extremely important. When a cargo of grain or dates or the like was being sent off, the last thing done was that the containers were sealed with a seal to show that the consignment was genuinely what it claimed to be. When a will was made it was sealed with seven seals; and it was not legally valid unless it was produced with the seven seals intact. The seal was the guarantee of genuineness. The very fact of the Corinthian Church was the guarantee of Paul's apostleship. The final proof that a man himself knows Christ is that he can bring others to him. It is said that once a young soldier, lying in pain in a hospital, said to Florence Nightingale as she bent over to tend him, "You are Christ to me." The reality of a man's Christianity is best proved by the fact that he helps others to be Christian.

The privilege that Paul might have claimed was support from the Church. Not only could he have claimed such support for himself but also for a wife. In fact the other apostles did receive such support. The Greeks despised manual labour; no free Greek would willingly work with his hands. Aristotle declared that all men were divided into two classes--the cultured and the hewers of wood and drawers of water who existed solely to perform the menial tasks for the others, and whom it was not only mistaken but actually wrong to seek to raise and educate. The enemies of Socrates and Plato had in fact taunted them because they took no money for teaching, and had hinted that they did so because their teaching was worth nothing. It is true that every Jewish Rabbi was supposed to teach for nothing and to have a trade whereby he earned his daily bread; but these same Rabbis took very good care to inculcate the teaching that there was no more meritorious deed than to support a Rabbi.

If a man wished a comfortable place in heaven he could not better assure himself of it than by supplying all a Rabbi's needs. On every ground Paul could have claimed the privilege of being supported by the Church.

He uses ordinary human analogies. No soldier has to provide his own rations. Why should the soldier of Christ have to do so? The man who plants a vineyard shares in the fruits. Why should the man who plants churches not do so? The shepherd of the flock gets his food from the flock. Why should not the Christian pastor do likewise? Even scripture says that the ox who works the threshing machine is not to be muzzled but is to be allowed to eat of the grain (Deut.25:4). As any Rabbi would, Paul allegorizes that instruction and makes it apply to the Christian teacher.

The priest who serves in the Temple receives his share of the offerings. In Greek sacrifice the priest, as we have seen, received the ribs, the ham and the left side of the face. But it is worth while looking at the perquisites of the priests in the Temple at Jerusalem.

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There were five main offerings. (i) The Burnt-offering. This alone was burnt entire except the stomach, the entrails and the sinew of the thigh (compare Gen.32:32). But even in this the priests received the hides, and did a flourishing trade with them. (ii) The Sin-offering. In this case only the fat was burned on the altar and the priests received all the flesh. (iii) The Trespass-offering. Again the fat alone was burned and the priests received all the flesh. (iv) The Meat-offering. This consisted of flour and wine and oil. Only a token part was offered on the altar; by far the greater part was the perquisite of the priests. (v) The Peace-offering. The fat and the entrails were burned on the altar; the priest received the breast and the right shoulder; and the rest was given back to the worshipper.

The priests enjoyed still further perquisites. (i) They received the first-fruits of the seven kinds--wheat, barley, the vine, the fig-tree, the pomegranate, the olive and honey. (ii) The Terumah (HSN8641). This was the offering of the choicest fruits of every growing thing. The priests had the right to an average of one fiftieth of any crop. (iii) The Tithe. A tithe had to be given of "everything which may be used as food and is cultivated and grows out of the earth." This tithe belonged to the Levites; but the priests received a tithe of the tithe that the Levites received. (iv) The Challah (HSN2471). This was the offering of kneaded dough. If dough was made with wheat, barley, spelt, oats or rye, a private individual had to give to the priests one twenty-fourth part, a public baker one forty-eighth part.

All this is at the back of Paul's refusal to accept even the basic supplies of life from the Church. He refused for two reasons: (i) The priests were a byword. While the ordinary Jewish family ate meat at the most once a week the priests suffered from an occupational disease consequent on eating too much meat. Their privileges, the luxury of their lives, their rapacity were notorious; Paul knew all about this. He knew how they used religion as a means to grow fat; and he was determined that he would go to the other extreme and take nothing. (ii) The second reason was his sheer independence. It may well be that he carried it too far, because it seems that he hurt the Corinthians by refusing all aid. But Paul was one of those independent souls who would starve rather than be beholden to anyone.

In the last analysis one thing dominated his conduct. He would do nothing that would bring discredit on the gospel or hinder it. Men judge a message by the life and character of the man who brings it; and Paul was determined that his hands would be clean. He would allow nothing in his life to contradict the message of his lips. Someone once said to a preacher, "I cannot hear what you say for listening to what you are." No one could ever say that to Paul.

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1 Corinthians 9:15-23

THE PRIVILEGE AND THE TASK

1 Corinthians 9:15-23

But I have claimed none of these rights. I am not writing this to claim that these privileges should be extended to me. I would rather die than let anyone make ineffective my boast that I take nothing for my work. If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about in that. I do it because necessity is laid upon me. Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! If I do this of my own choice I do deserve a reward. But if I do it whether I like it or not, it is because I have been entrusted with this task. What then is my reward? My reward is that by my preaching I make the good news free, so that I do not use the privileges that I could claim as a preacher. For, though I am free from all men, yet I make myself a slave to all men, so that I might win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew that I might win the Jews. To those under the law I became as under the law, although I am not under the law, that I might win those under the law.

To those who live without the law I became as one without the law--not without the law of God, but within the law of Christ--that I might win those who live without the law. To the weak I became weak that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, so that by any means I might save some. I do this because of the good news, that I may share it with all men.

In this passage there is a kind of outline of Paul's whole conception of his ministry.

(i) He regarded it as a privilege. The one thing he will not do is take money for working for Christ. When a certain famous American professor retired from his chair he made a speech in which he thanked his university for paying him a salary all these years for doing work which he would gladly have paid to do. This does not mean that a man must always work for nothing; there are certain obligations that he must fulfil which he cannot fulfil for nothing; but it does mean that he should never work primarily for money. He should regard his work not as a career of accumulation but as an opportunity of service. He must regard himself as a man whose primary duty is not to help himself but whose privilege is to serve others for God's sake.

(ii) He regarded it as a duty. Paul's point of view was that if he had chosen to be a preacher of the gospel he might quite legitimately have demanded payment for his work; but he had not chosen the work; it had chosen him; he could no more stop doing it than he could stop breathing; and there could, therefore, be no question of payment.

Ramon Lull, the great Spanish saint and mystic, tells us how he became a missionary of Christ. He had been living a careless and pleasure-loving life. Then one day, when he was alone, Christ came carrying his Cross and saying to him, "Carry this for me." But he refused. Again, when he was in the silence of a great cathedral, Christ came and asked him to carry his Cross; and again he refused. In a lonely moment Christ came a third time, and this time, said Ramon Lull, "He took his Cross and with a look he left it lying in my hands. What could I do but take it up and carry it on?" Paul would have said, "What can I do but tell men the good news of Christ?"

(iii) In spite of the fact that he would take no payment, Paul knew that he received daily a great reward. He had the satisfaction of bringing the gospel freely to all men who would receive it. It is a

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ways true that the real reward of any task is not its money payment but the satisfaction of a job well done. That is why the biggest thing in life is not to choose the job with the biggest pay but the one in which we will find the greatest satisfaction.

Albert Schweitzer describes the kind of moment which brought him the greatest happiness. Someone suffering intensely is brought into his hospital. He soothes the man by telling him that he will put him to sleep and will operate on him and all will be well. After the operation he sits beside the patient waiting for him to regain consciousness. Slowly he opens his eyes and then whispers in sheer wonderment, "I have no more pain." That was it. There was no material reward there, but a satisfaction as deep as the depths of the heart itself.

To have mended one shattered life, to have restored one wanderer to the right way, to have healed one broken heart, to have brought one soul to Christ is not a thing whose reward can be measured in financial terms, but its joy is beyond all measurement.

(iv) Finally, Paul speaks about the method of his ministry, which was to become all things to all men. This is not a case of being hypocritically one thing to one man and another to another. It is a matter in the modern phrase, of being able to get alongside anyone. The man who can never see anything but his own point of view and who never makes any attempt to understand the mind and heart of others, will never make a pastor or an evangelist or even a friend.

Boswell somewhere speaks of "the art of accommodating oneself to others." That was an art which Dr. Johnson possessed in a supreme degree, for, not only was he a great talker, but he was also a great listener with a supreme ability to get alongside any man. A friend said of him that he had the art of "leading people to talk on their favourite subjects, and on what they knew best." Once a country clergyman complained to Mrs. Thrale's mother of the dullness of his people. "They talk of runts" (young cows), he said bitterly. "Sir," said the old lady, "Mr. Johnson would have learned to talk of runts." To the countryman he would have become a countryman. Robert Lynd points out how Johnson would discuss the digestive apparatus of a dog with a country parson; how he talked dancing with a dancing master; how he talked on farm management, thatching, the process of malting, the manufacture of gunpowder, the art of tanning. He talks of Johnson's "readiness to throw himself into the interests of other people.

He was a man who would have enjoyed discussing the manufacture of spectacles with a spectacle-maker, law with a lawyer, pigs with a pig-breeder, diseases with a doctor, or ships with a ship-builder. He knew that in conversation it is only more blessed to give than to receive."

We can never attain to any kind of evangelism or friendship without speaking the same language and thinking the same thoughts as the other man. Someone once described teaching, medicine and the ministry as "the three patronizing professions." So long as we patronize people and make no effort to understand them, we can never get anywhere with them. Paul, the master missionary, who won more men for Christ than any other man, saw how essential it was to become all things to all men. One of our greatest necessities is to learn the art of getting alongside people; and the trouble so often is that we do not even try.

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1 Corinthians 9:24-27

A REAL FIGHT

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Are you not aware that those who run in the stadium all run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may win the prize. Now every athlete in the games practises complete self-discipline. They therefore do so to win a crown that quickly fades away; we do so to win a crown that never fades. I therefore so run as one who knows his goal; I fight, not like one who shadow-boxes; but I batter my body; I make it my slave; lest after I have preached to others I myself should fail to stand the test.

Paul takes another line. He insists to those Corinthians who wanted to take the easy way that no man will ever get anywhere without the sternest self-discipline. Paul was always fascinated by the picture of the athlete. An athlete must train with intensity if he is to win his contest; and Corinth knew how thrilling contests could be, for at Corinth the Isthmian games, second only to the Olympic games, were held. Furthermore, the athlete undergoes this self-discipline and this training to win a crown of laurel leaves that within days will be a withered chaplet. How much more should the Christian discipline himself to win the crown which is eternal life.

In this passage Paul sets out a kind of brief philosophy of life.

(i) Life is a battle. As William James put it, "If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is not better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will. But it feels like a fight--as if there were something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem." As Coleridge had it, "So far from the world being a goddess in petticoats, it is rather a devil in a strait waistcoat." A flabby soldier cannot win battles; a slack trainer cannot win races. We must regard ourselves always as men engaged upon a campaign, as men pressing onwards to a goal.

(ii) To win the fight and to be victorious in the race demands discipline. We have to discipline our bodies; it is one of the neglected facts of the spiritual life that very often spiritual depression springs from nothing else than physical unfitness. If a man is going to do his best work in anything he must bring to it a body as fit as he can make it. We have to discipline our minds; it is one of the tragedies of life that men may refuse to think until they become incapable of thinking. We can never solve problems by refusing to see them or by running away from them. We must discipline our souls; we can do so by facing life's sorrows with calm endurance, its temptations with the strength God gives, its disappointments with courage.

(iii) We need to know our goal. A distressing thing is the obvious aimlessness of the lives of so many people; they are drifting anywhere instead of going somewhere. Maarten Maartens has a parable. "There was a man once, a satirist. In the natural course of time his friends slew him, and he died. And the people came and stood round about his corpse. 'He treated the whole round world as his football,' they said indignantly, 'and he kicked it.' The dead man opened one eye. 'But,' he said, 'always towards the goal.'" Someone once drew a cartoon showing two men on Mars looking down at the people in this world scurrying here, there and everywhere. One said to the other, "What are

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they doing?" The other replied, "They are going." "But," said the first, "where are they going?" "Oh," said the other, "they are not going

anywhere; they are just going." And to go just anywhere is the certain way to arrive nowhere.

(iv) We need to know the worth of our goal. The great appeal of Jesus was rarely based on penalty and punishment. It was based on the declaration, "Look what you are missing if you do not take my way." The goal is life, and surely it is worth anything to win that.

(v) We cannot save others unless we master ourselves. Freud once said, "Psycho-analysis is learnt first of all on oneself, through the study of one's own personality." The Greeks declared that the first rule of life is, "Man know thyself." Certainly we cannot serve others until we have mastered ourselves; we cannot teach what we do not know; we cannot bring others to Christ until we ourselves have found him.

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1 Corinthians 10:1-13

(iii) In 1Cor.10:1-13 he deals with those who declare that their Christian knowledge and privileged position make them quite safe from any infection. He cites the example of the Israelites who had all the privileges of God's Chosen People and who yet fell into sin.

(iv) In 1Cor.10:14-22 he uses the argument that any man who has sat at the table of the Lord cannot sit at the table of a heathen god, even if that god be nothing. There is something essentially wrong in taking meat offered to a false god upon lips that have eaten the body and blood of Christ.

(v) In 1Cor.10:23-26 he advises against overfussiness. A man can buy what is offered in the shops and ask no questions.

(vi) In 1Cor.10:27-28 he deals with the problem of what to do in a private house. In a private house the Christian will eat what is put before him and ask no questions; but if he is deliberately informed that the meat set before him was part of a heathen sacrifice, that is a challenge to his Christian position and he will refuse to eat it.

(vii) Finally in 1Cor.10:29-33 to 1Cor.11:1 Paul lays down the principle that the conduct of the Christian must be so far above reproach that it gives no possible offence either to Jew or non-Jew. He is better to sacrifice his rights than to allow these rights to become an offence.

THE PERIL OF OVER-CONFIDENCE

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Brothers, I do not want you to forget that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all of them passed through the midst of the sea, and all of them were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same food which the Spirit of God gave to them; and all drank the same drink which came to them by the action of the Spirit; for they drank of the rock which accompanied them through the action of the Spirit, and that rock was Christ. All the same, with the majority of them God was not well pleased; for they were left dead, strewn in the desert. These things have become examples to us, so that we should not be men who long for evil and forbidden things as they longed after them. Nor must you become idolaters as some of them did, as it stands written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to enjoy their sport." Nor must we practise fornication, as certain of them practised fornication, with the consequence that twenty-three thousand of them died in one day.

Nor must we try the patience of the Lord beyond the limit, as some of them tried it, and in consequence were destroyed by serpents. Nor must you grumble, as certain of them grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer. It was to show what can happen that these things happened to them. They were written to warn us upon whom the ends of the ages have come. So then let him who thinks that he stands secure take care lest he fall. No test has come upon you other than that which comes on every man. You can rely on God, for he will not allow you to be tested beyond what you are able to bear, but he will send with the trial an escape route as well, so that you may be able to bear it.

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1 Corinthians 10:1-13

In this chapter Paul is still dealing with the question of eating meat which has been offered to idols. At the back of this passage lies the over-confidence of some of the Corinthian Christians. Their point of view was, "We have been baptized and are therefore one with Christ; we have partaken of the sacrament and so of the body and the blood of Christ; we are in him and he is in us; therefore we are quite safe; we can eat meat offered to idols and take no harm." So Paul warns of the danger of over-confidence.

When Oliver Cromwell was planning the education of his son Richard, he said, "I would have him learn a little history." And it is to history that Paul goes to show what can happen to people who have been blessed with the greatest privileges. He goes back to the days when the children of Israel were wayfarers in the desert. In those days the most wonderful things happened to them. They had the cloud which showed them the way and protected them in the hour of danger. (Exo.13:21; Exo.14:19). They were brought through the midst of the Red Sea (Exo.14:19-31). Both these experiences had given them a perfect union with Moses the greatest of leaders and law-givers, until it could be said that they were baptized into him as the Christian is baptized into Christ. They had eaten of the manna in the wilderness (Exo.16:11-15). In 1Cor.10:5 Paul speaks of them drinking of the rock which followed them. This is taken not from the Old Testament itself but from Rabbinic tradition.

Num.20:1-11 tells how God enabled Moses to draw water from the rock for the thirsty people; the Rabbinic tradition was that that rock thereafter followed the people and always gave them water to drink. That was a legend which all the Jews knew.

All these privileges the children of Israel possessed, and yet in spite of them they failed most signally. When the people were too terrified to go forward into the Promised Land and all the scouts except Joshua and Caleb brought back a pessimistic report, God's judgment was that that whole generation would die in the desert. (Num.14:30-32). When Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law, the people seduced Aaron into making a golden calf and worshipping it. (Exo.32:6). They were guilty of fornication, even in the desert, with the Midianites and the Moabites and thousands perished in the judgment of God. (Num.25:1-9). (It is to be noted in passing that Num.25:9 says twenty-four thousand perished; Paul says twenty-three thousand. The explanation is simply that Paul is quoting from memory. He rarely quotes scripture with verbatim accuracy; no one did in those days.

There was no such thing as a concordance to help find a passage easily; scripture was not written in books, which had not yet been invented, but on unwieldy rolls.) They were wasted with serpents because they grumbled on the way (Num.21:4-6). When Korah, Dathan and Abiram led a grumbling revolt, judgment fell on many and they died. (Num.16).

The history of Israel shows that people who enjoyed the greatest privileges of God were far from being safe from temptation; special privilege, Paul reminds the Corinthians, is no guarantee whatever of security.

We must note the temptations and the failures which Paul singles out.

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1 Corinthians 10:1-13

(i) There is the temptation to idolatry. We do not now worship idols so blatantly; but if a man's god be that to which he gives all his time and thought and energy, men still worship the works of their own hands more than they worship God.

(ii) There is the temptation to fornication. So long as a man is a man there come to him temptations from his lower self. Only a passionate love of purity can save him from impurity.

(iii) There is the temptation to try God too far. Consciously or unconsciously many a man trades on the mercy of God. At the back of his mind there is the idea, "It will be all right; God will forgive." It is at his peril that he forgets that there is a holiness as well as a love of God.

(iv) There is the temptation to grumble. There are still many who greet life with a whine and not with a cheer.

So Paul insists on the need of vigilance. "Let him who thinks he stands secure take care lest he fall." Again and again a fortress has been stormed because its defenders thought that it was impregnable. In Rev.3:3 the risen Christ warns the Church of Sardis to be on the watch. The Acropolis of Sardis was built on a jutting spur of rock that was held to be impregnable. When Cyrus was besieging it, he offered a special reward to any who could find a way in. A certain soldier, Hyeroeades by name, was watching one day and saw a soldier in the Sardian garrison drop his helmet accidentally over the battlements. He saw him climb down after it and marked his path. That night he led a band up the cliffs by that very path and when they reached the top they found it quite unguarded; so they entered in and captured the citadel, which had been counted too safe. Life is a chancy business; we must be ever on the watch.

Paul concludes this section by saying three things about temptation.

(i) He is quite sure that temptation will come. That is part of life. But the Greek word which we translate temptation means far more a test. It is something designed, not to make us fall, but to test us, so that we emerge from it stronger than ever.

(ii) Any temptation that comes to us is not unique. Others have endured it and others have come through it. A friend tells how he was once driving Lightfoot, the great Bishop of Durham, in a horse carriage along a very narrow mountain road in Norway. It got so narrow that there were only inches between the wheels of the carriage and the cliffs on one side and the precipice on the other. He suggested in the end that Lightfoot would be safer to get out and walk. Lightfoot surveyed the situation and said, "Other carriages must have taken this road. Drive on." In the Greek Anthology there is an epigram which gives the epitaph of a shipwrecked sailor, supposedly from his own lips. "A shipwrecked mariner on this coast bids you set sail," he says. His bark may have been lost but many more have weathered the storm. When we are going through it, we are going through what others have, in the grace of God, endured and conquered.

(iii) With the temptation there is always a way of escape. The word is vivid (ekbasis, GSN1545). It means a way out of a defile, a mountain pass. The idea is of an army apparently surrounded and then suddenly seeing an escape route to safety. No man need fall to any temptation, for with the

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temptation there is the way out, and the way out is not the way of surrender nor of retreat, but the way of conquest in the power of the grace of God.

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1 Corinthians 10:14-22

THE SACRAMENTAL OBLIGATION

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

So then, my beloved ones, avoid everything that has to do with idols. I speak as I would to sensible men; pass your own judgment on what I am saying. Is not this blessed cup on which we ask the blessing, a very sharing in the blood of Jesus Christ? Is not the bread which we break a very sharing in the body of Christ? Just as the broken bread is one, so we, though we are many, are one body. For we all share in the one bread. Look at the nation of Israel in the racial sense. Do not those who eat of the sacrifices become sharers with the altar in them? What then am I saying? Am I saying that a thing which has been offered to idols is actually a real sacrifice? Am I saying that an idol is actually something? I do not say that, but I do say that what pagans sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to share things with the demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.

Or are we too to provoke the jealousy of the Lord? Surely you do not think that you are stronger than he is?

Behind this passage there are three ideas; two of them are peculiar to the age in which Paul lived; one is forever true and valid.

(i) As we have seen, when sacrifice was offered, part of the meat was given back to the worshipper to hold a feast. At such a feast it was always held that the god himself was a guest. More, it was often held that, after the meat had been sacrificed, the god himself was in it and that at the banquet he entered into the very bodies and spirits of those who ate. Just as an unbreakable bond was forged between two men if they ate each other's bread and salt, so a sacrificial meal formed a real communion between the god and his worshipper. The person who sacrificed was in a real sense a sharer with the altar; he had a mystic communion with the god.

(ii) At this time the whole world believed in demons. These demons might be good or bad, but more often they were bad. They were spirits who were intermediate between the gods and men. For the Greek every spring, every grove, every mountain, every tree, every stream, every pool, every rock, every place had its demon. "There were gods in every fountain and every mountain summit; gods breathing in the wind and flashing in the lightning; gods in the ray of the sun and the star; gods heaving in the earthquake and the storm." The world was packed with demons. For the Jew there were the shedim (HSN7700). These were evil spirits who haunted empty houses, who lurked "in the crumbs on the floor, in the oil in the vessels, in the water which we would drink, in the diseases which attack us, in the air, in the room, by day and by night."

Paul believed in these demons; he called them "principalities and powers." His point of view was this--an idol was nothing and stood for nothing; but the whole business of idol worship was the work of the demons; through it they seduced men from God. When they were worshipping idols, men thought they were worshipping gods; in fact they were being deluded by these malignant demons. Idol worship brought a man into contact, not with God, but with demons; and anything to do with it had the demonic taint on it. Meat offered to idols was nothing, but the fact remained it had served the purposes of demons and was therefore a polluted thing.

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1 Corinthians 10:14-22

(iii) Out of this ancient set of beliefs comes one permanent principle--a man who has sat at the table of Jesus Christ cannot go on to sit at the table which is the instrument of demons. If a man has handled the body and blood of Christ there are things he cannot touch.

One of the great statues of Christ is that by Thorwaldsen; after he had carved it, he was offered a commission to carve a statue of Venus for the Louvre. His answer, was "The hand that carved the form of Christ can never carve the form of a heathen goddess."

When Prince Charlie was fleeing for his life he found refuge with the eight men of Glenmoriston. They were outlaws and criminals every one; there was a price of 30,000 British pounds on Charlie's head; they had not a shilling among them; but for weeks they hid him and kept him safe and not a man betrayed him. The years passed on until the rebellion was but an old, unhappy memory. One of the eight men, Hugh Chisholm by name, found his way to Edinburgh. People were interested now in his story of the prince and they talked to him. He was poor and sometimes they would give him money. But always Hugh Chisholm would shake hands with his left hand. He said that when Prince Charlie left the eight men he shook hands with them; and Hugh had sworn that he would never again give to any man the hand he had given to his prince.

It was true in Corinth and it is true today, that the man who has handled the sacred things of Christ cannot soil his hands with mean and unworthy things.

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1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

THE LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

All things are allowed to me, but all things are not good for me. All things are allowed, but all things do not build up. Let no one think only of his own good, but let him think of the good of the other man too. Eat everything that is sold in the market place, and don't ask fussy questions for conscience sake; for the earth and its fulness belong to god. If one of the pagans invites you to a meal, and you are willing to go, eat anything that is put before you, and don't ask questions for conscience sake. But if anyone says to you, "This is meat that was part of a sacrifice," don't eat it, for the sake of him who told you and for conscience sake.

I don't mean your own conscience, but the conscience of the other man, for why has my liberty to be subject to the judgment of any man's conscience? If I partake of something after I have given thanks for it, how can I unjustly be criticized for eating that for which I gave thanks? So then, whether you eat or whether you drink or whatever you do, do all things to God's glory. Live in such a way that you will cause neither Jew nor Greek nor church member to stumble, just as I in all things try to win the approval of all men, for I am not in this job for what I can get out of it, but for what benefits I can bring to the many, that they may be saved. So then show yourselves to be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Paul brings to an end this long discussion of the question of meat offered to idols with some very practical advice.

(i) His advice is that a Christian can buy anything that is sold in the shops and ask no questions. It was true that the meat sold in the shops might well have formed part of a sacrifice or have been slaughtered in the name of some god lest the demons enter into it; but it is possible to be too fussy and to create difficulties where none need exist. After all, in the last analysis, all things are God's.

(ii) If the Christian accepts an invitation to dinner in the house of a pagan, let him eat what is put before him and ask no questions. But, if he is deliberately informed that the meat is part of a sacrifice, he must not eat it. The assumption is that he is told by one of these brothers who cannot rid his conscience of the feeling that to eat such meat is wrong. Rather than bring worry to such a man the Christian must not eat.

(iii) So once again out of an old and remote situation emerges a great truth. Many a thing that a man may do with perfect safety as far as he himself is concerned, he must not do if it is going to be a stumbling-block to someone else. There is nothing more real than Christian freedom; but Christian freedom must be used to help others and not to shock or hurt them. A man has a duty to himself but a still greater duty to others.

We must note to where that duty extends.

(i) Paul insisted that a Corinthian Christian must be a good example to the Jews. Even to his enemies a man must be an example of the fine things.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

(ii) The Corinthian Christian had a duty to the Greeks; that is to say he had to show a good example to those who were quite indifferent to Christianity. It is in fact by that example that many are won. There was a minister who went far out of his way to help a man who had nothing to do with the Church and rescued him from a difficult situation. That man began to come to Church and in the end made an astonishing request. He asked to be made an elder that he might spend his life showing his gratitude for what Christ through his servant had done for him.

(iii) The Corinthian Christian had a duty to his fellow Church member. It is the plain fact of life that somebody takes the cue for his conduct from everyone of us. We may not know it; but a younger or a weaker brother is often looking to us for a lead. It is our duty to give that lead which will strengthen the weak and confirm the waverer and save the tempted from sin.

We can do all things to the glory of God only when we remember the duty we must discharge to our fellow men; and we will do that only when we remember that our Christian freedom is given to us not for our own sake but for the sake of others.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

1Cor.11-14 are amongst the most difficult in the whole epistle for a modern person in the western world to understand; but they are also among the most interesting, for they deal with the problems which had arisen in the Corinthian Church in connection with public worship. In them we see the infant Church struggling with the problem of offering a fitting and a seemly worship to God. It will make the section easier to follow if we set out at the beginning the various parts of which it is composed.

THE NECESSARY MODESTY

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

I praise you because you remember me in all things and because you hold fast to the traditions as I handed them down to you. But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and that the man is the head of the woman, and that God is the head of Christ. Every man who prays or preaches with his head covered shames his head. Every woman who prays or preaches with her head uncovered shames her head, for she is in exactly the same case as a woman whose head has been shaved; for, if a woman does not cover her head, let her have her hair cut also. If it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or to be shaved, let her have her head covered. A man ought not to cover his head because he is the image and the glory of God; but woman is the glory of man; for the man did not come from the woman but the woman from the man; for the man was not created for the sake of the woman but woman for the sake of man.

For this reason a woman ought to retain upon her head the sign that she is under someone else's authority, for the sake of the angels. All the same it is true that, in the Lord, woman is nothing without man nor man without woman; for just as woman came from man, so man is born through woman, and all things are from God. Use your own judgment on this. Is it fitting for a woman to pray to God uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach us that it is a dishonour to a man if he lets his hair grow long? But if a woman lets her hair grow long it is her glory, because her hair was given to her for a covering. All the same, if anyone wishes to go on arguing for the sake of arguing, it is sufficient to say that we have no such custom, nor have the Churches of God.

This is one of these passages which have a purely local and temporary significance; they look at first sight as if they had only an antiquarian interest because they deal with a situation which has long since ceased to have any relevance for us; and yet such passages have a very great interest because they shed a flood of light on the domestic affairs and problems of the early Church; and, for him who has eyes to see, they have a very great importance, because Paul solves the problems by principles which are eternal.

The problem was whether or not in the Christian Church a woman had the right to take part in the service unveiled. Paul's answer was bluntly this--the veil is always a sign of subjection, worn by an inferior in the presence of a superior; now woman is inferior to man, in the sense that man is head of the household; therefore it is wrong for a man to appear at public worship veiled and equally wrong for a woman to appear unveiled. It is very improbable that in the twentieth century we are likely to accept this view of the inferiority and subordination of women. But we must read this chapter in the light not of the twentieth century but of the first, and as we read it we must remember three things.

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1 Corinthians 11:2-16

(i) We must remember the place of the veil in the East. To this day eastern women wear the yashmak which is a long veil leaving the forehead and the eyes uncovered but reaching down almost to the feet. In Paul's time the eastern veil was even more concealing. It came right over the head with only an opening for the eyes and reached right down to the feet. A respectable eastern woman would never have dreamed of appearing without it. Writing in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, T. W. Davies says, "No. respectable woman in an eastern village or city goes out without it, and, if she does, she is in danger of being misjudged. Indeed English and American missionaries in Egypt told the present writer that their own wives and daughters when going about find it often best to wear the veil."

The veil was two things. (a) It was a sign of inferiority. (b) But it was also a great protection. 1Cor.11:10 is very difficult to translate. We have translated it: "For this reason a woman ought to retain upon her head the sign that she is under someone else's authority," but the Greek literally means that a woman ought to retain "her authority upon her head." Sir William Ramsay explains it this way--"In Oriental lands the veil is the power and honour and dignity of the woman. With the veil on her head she can go anywhere in security and profound respect. She is not seen; it is a mark of thoroughly bad manners to observe a veiled woman in the street. She is alone. The rest of the people around are non-existent to her, as she is to them. She is supreme in the crowd.... But without the veil the woman is a thing of nought, whom anyone may insult.... A woman's authority and dignity vanish along with the all-covering veil that she discards."

In the East, then, the veil is all-important. It does not only mark the inferior status of a woman; it is the inviolable protection of her modesty and chastity.

(ii) We must remember the status of women in Jewish eyes. Under Jewish law woman was vastly inferior to man. She had been created out of Adam's rib (Gen.2:22-23) and she had been created to be the helpmeet of man (Gen.2:18). There was a Rabbinic piece of fanciful exegesis which said, "God did not form woman out of the head lest she should become proud; nor out of the eye lest she should lust; nor out of the ear lest she should be curious; nor out of the mouth lest she should be talkative; nor out of the heart lest she should be jealous; nor out of the hand lest she should be covetous; nor out of the foot lest she should be a wandering busybody; but out of a rib which was always covered; therefore modesty should be her primary quality."

It is the unfortunate truth that in Jewish law a woman was a thing and was part of the property of her husband over which he had complete rights of disposal. It was true that in the synagogue, for instance, women had no share whatever in the worship but were segregated completely from the men in a shut-off gallery or other part of the building. In Jewish law and custom it was unthinkable that women should claim any kind of equality with men.

In 1Cor.11:10 there is the curious phrase that women should be veiled "for the sake of the angels." It is not certain what this means, but probably it goes back to the strange old story in Gen.6:1-2 which tells how the angels fell a prey to the charms of mortal women and so sinned; it may well be that the idea is that the unveiled woman is a temptation even to the angels, for an old Rabbinic tradition said that it was the beauty of women's long hair which tempted the angels.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

(iii) It must always be remembered that this situation arose in Corinth, probably the most licentious city in the world. Paul's point of view was that in such a situation it was far better to err on the side of being too modest and too strict rather than to do anything which might either give the heathen a chance to criticize the Christians as being too lax or be a cause of temptation to the Christians themselves.

It would be quite wrong to make this passage of universal application; it was intensely relevant to the Church of Corinth but it has nothing to do with whether or not women should wear hats in church at the present day. But for all its local significance it has three great permanent truths in it.

(i) It is always better to err on the side of being too strict than on the side of being too lax. It is far better to abandon rights which may be a stumbling-block to some than to insist on them. It is the fashion to decry convention; but a man should always think twice before he defies it and shocks others. True, he must never be the slave of convention, but conventions do not usually come into being for nothing.

(ii) Even after he has stressed the subordination of women, Paul goes on to stress even more directly the essential partnership of man and woman. Neither can live without the other. If there be subordination, it is in order that the partnership may be more fruitful and more lovely for both.

(iii) Paul finishes the passage with a rebuke to the man who argues for the sake of argument. Whatever the differences that may arise between men, there is no place in the Church for the deliberately contentious man or woman. There is a time to stand on principle; but there is never a time to be contentiously argumentative. There is no reason why people should not differ and yet remain at peace.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

THE WRONG KIND OF FEAST

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

When I give you this instruction, I am not praising you, because when you meet together it is actually doing you more harm than good. Firstly, I hear that when you meet together in assembly, there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. There are bound to be differences of opinion among you, so that it may become clear which of you are of tried and sterling quality. So then when you assemble together in the same place it is certainly not the Lord's meal that you eat; for each of you, when you eat, is in a hurry to get his own meal first, and the result is that some go hungry and some drink until they are drunk. Have you not your own houses for eating and drinking? Have you no reverence for the assembly of God? Are you going to shame those who are poor? What am I to say to you? Am I to commend you in this? I certainly do not.

The ancient world was in many ways much more social than ours is. It was the regular custom for groups of people to meet together for meals. There was, in particular, a certain kind of feast called an eranos to which each participant brought his own share of the food, and in which all the contributions were pooled to make a common meal. The early Church had such a custom, a feast called the Agape (GSN0026) or Love Feast. To it all the Christians came, bringing what they could, the resources were pooled and they sat down to a common meal. It was a lovely custom; and it is to our loss that the custom has vanished. It was a way of producing and nourishing real Christian fellowship.

But in the Church at Corinth things had gone sadly wrong with the Love Feast. In the Church there were rich and poor; there were those who could bring plenty, and there were slaves who could bring hardly anything at all. In fact for many a poor slave the Love Feast must have been the only decent meal in the whole week. But in Corinth the art of sharing had got lost. The rich did not share their food but ate it in little exclusive groups by themselves, hurrying through it in case they had to share, while the poor had next to nothing. The result was that the meal at which the social differences between members of the Church should have been obliterated only succeeded in aggravating these same differences. Unhesitatingly and unsparingly Paul rebukes this.

(i) It may well be that the different groups were composed of those who held different opinions. A great scholar has said, "To have religious zeal, without becoming a religious partisan, is a great proof of true devotion." When we think differently from a man, we may in time come to understand him and even to sympathize with him, if we remain in fellowship with him and talk things over with him; but, if we shut ourselves off from him and form our own little group while he remains in his, there is never any hope of mutual understanding.

He drew a circle that shut me out--
Rebel, heretic, thing to flout--
But love and I had the wit to win--
We drew a circle that took him in.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

(ii) The early Church was the one place in all the ancient world where the barriers were down. That world was very rigidly divided; there were the free men and the slaves; there were the Greeks and the barbarians--the people who did not speak Greek; there were the Jews and the Gentiles; there were the Roman citizens and the lesser breeds without the law; there were the cultured and the ignorant. The Church was the one place where all men could and did come together. A great Church historian has written about these early Christian congregations, "Within their own limits they had solved almost by the way the social problem which baffled Rome and baffles Europe still. They had lifted woman to her rightful place, restored the dignity of labour, abolished beggary, and drawn the sting of slavery. The secret of the revolution is that the selfishness of race and class was forgotten in the Supper of the Lord, and a new basis for society found in love of the visible image of God in men for whom Christ died."

A church where social and class distinctions exist is no true church at all. A real church is a body of men and women united to each other because all are united to Christ. Even the word used to describe the sacrament is suggestive. We call it the Lord's Supper; but supper is to some extent misleading. Usually to us it is not the main meal of the day. But the Greek word is *deipnon* (GSN1173). For the Greek the breakfast was a meal where all that was eaten was a little bread dipped in wine; the midday meal was eaten anywhere, even on the street or in a city square; the *deipnon* (GSN1173) was the main meal of the day, where people sat down with no sense of hurry and not only satisfied their hunger but lingered long together. The very word shows that the Christian meal ought to be a meal where people linger long in each other's company.

(iii) A church is no true church if the art of sharing is forgotten. When people wish to keep things to themselves and to their own circle they are not even beginning to be Christian. The true Christian cannot bear to have too much while others have too little; he finds his greatest privilege not in jealously guarding his privileges but in giving them away.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

THE LORD'S SUPPER

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

For I received of the Lord that which I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night on which he was being delivered up, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you; this do that you may remember me." In the same way, after the meal, he took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant and it cost my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, so that you will remember me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you do proclaim the death of the Lord until he will come. Therefore whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unfitting way is guilty of a sin against the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks as some of you do, eats and drinks judgment to himself, because he does not discern what the body means. It is because of this that many among you are ill and weak and some have died.

But if we truly discerned what we are like we would not be liable to judgment. But in this very judgment of the Lord we are being disciplined that we may not be finally condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together wait for each other. If anyone is hungry let him eat at home, so that you may not meet together in such a way as to render yourselves liable to judgment. As for the other matters, I will put them in order when I shall have come.

No passage in the whole New Testament is of greater interest than this. For one thing, it gives us our warrant for the most sacred act of worship in the Church, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and, for another since the letter to the Corinthians is earlier than the earliest of the gospels, this is actually the first recorded account we possess of any word of Jesus.

The Sacrament can never mean the same for every person; but we do not need fully to understand it to benefit from it. As someone has said, "We do not need to understand the chemistry of bread in order to digest it and to be nourished by it." For all that we do well to try at least to understand something of what Jesus meant when he spoke of the bread and the wine as he did.

"This is my body," he said of the bread. One simple fact precludes us from taking this with a crude literalism. When Jesus spoke, he was still in the body; and there was nothing clearer than that his body and the bread were at that moment quite different things. Nor did he simply mean, "This stands for my body." In a sense that is true. The broken bread of the Sacrament does stand for the body of Christ; but it does more. To him who takes it into his hands and upon his lips with faith and love, it is a means not only of memory but of living contact with Jesus Christ. To an unbeliever it would be nothing; to a lover of Christ it is the way to his presence.

"This cup," said Jesus, in the usual version, "is the new covenant in my blood." We have translated it slightly differently, "This cup is the new covenant and it cost my blood." The Greek preposition *en* most commonly means in; but it can, and regularly does, mean at the cost or price of, especially when it translates the Hebrew preposition *be*. Now a covenant is a relationship entered into between two people. There was an old covenant between God and man and that old relationship was based on law. In it God chose and approached the people of Israel and became in a

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1 Corinthians 11:23-34

special sense their God; but there was a condition, that, if this relationship was going to last, they must keep his law. (compare Exo.24:1-8). With Jesus a new relationship is opened to man, dependent not on law but on love, dependent not on man's ability to keep the law--for no man can do that--but on the free grace of God's love offered to men.

Under the old covenant a man could do nothing other than fear God for he was ever in default since he could never perfectly keep the law; under the new covenant he comes to God as a child to a father. However you look at things, it cost the life of Jesus to make this new relationship possible. "The blood is the life," says the law (Deut.12:23); it cost Jesus' life, his blood, as the Jew would put it. And so the scarlet wine of the sacrament stands for the very life-blood of Christ without which the new covenant, the new relationship of man to God, could never have been possible.

This passage goes on to talk about eating and drinking this bread and wine unworthily. The unworthiness consisted in the fact that the man who did so did "not discern the Lord's body." That phrase can equally well mean two things; and each is so real and so important that it is quite likely that both are intended.

(i) It may mean that the man who eats and drinks unworthily does not realize what the sacred symbols mean. It may mean that he eats and drinks with no reverence and no sense of the love that these symbols stand for or the obligation that is laid upon him.

(ii) It may also mean this. The phrase the body of Christ again and again stands for the Church; it does so, as we shall see, in 1Cor.12. Paul has just been rebuking those who with their divisions and their class distinctions divide the Church; so this may mean that he eats and drinks unworthily who has never realized that the whole Church is the body of Christ but is at variance with his brother. Every man in whose heart there is hatred, bitterness, contempt against his brother man, as he comes to the Table of our Lord, eats and drinks unworthily. So then to eat and drink unworthily is to do so with no sense of the greatness of the thing we do, and to do so while we are at variance with the brother for whom also Christ died.

Paul goes on to say that the misfortunes which have fallen upon the Church at Corinth may be due to nothing else than the fact that they come to this sacrament while they are divided among themselves; but these misfortunes are sent not to destroy them but to discipline them and to bring them back to the right way.

We must be clear about one thing. The phrase which forbids a man to eat and drink unworthily does not shut out the man who is a sinner and knows it. An old highland minister seeing an old woman hesitate to receive the cup, stretched it out to her, saying, "Take it, woman; it's for sinners; it's for you." If the Table of Christ were only for perfect people none might ever approach it. The way is never closed to the penitent sinner. To the man who loves God and his fellow men the way is ever open, and his sins, though they be as scarlet, shall be white as snow.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

THE CONFESSION OF THE SPIRIT

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant about manifestations of the Spirit. You know that when you were heathens you were led away to dumb idols, just as any impulse moved you. I want you therefore to know that no one, speaking through the Spirit of God, can say, "Accursed be Jesus," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," unless through the Holy Spirit.

In the Church of Corinth the most amazing things were happening through the action of the Holy Spirit, but in an age of ecstasy and of enthusiasm there can be hysterical excitement and self-delusion as well as the real thing, and in this and the next two chapters Paul deals with true manifestations of the Spirit.

This is a very interesting passage because it gives us two phrases which were battle cries.

(i) There is the phrase Accursed be Jesus. There could be four ways in which this terrible phrase might arise.

(a) It would be used by the Jews. The synagogue prayers included regularly a cursing of all apostates; and Jesus would come under that. Further, as Paul knew so well (Gal.3:13), the Jewish law laid it down, "Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree." And Jesus had been crucified. It would be no uncommon thing to hear the Jews pronouncing their anathemas on this heretic and criminal whom the Christians worshipped.

(b) It is by no means unlikely that the Jews would make proselytes attracted by Christianity either pronounce this curse or suffer excommunication from all Jewish worship. When Paul was telling Agrippa about his persecuting days, he said, "I often punished them in every synagogue and I forced them to blaspheme." (Ac.26:11). It must often have been a condition of remaining within the synagogue that a man should pronounce a curse on Jesus Christ.

(c) Whatever was true when Paul was writing, it is certainly true that later on, in the sore days of persecution, Christians were compelled either to curse Christ or to die. In the time of Trajan, it was the test of Pliny, governor of Bithynia, to demand that a person accused of being a Christian should curse Christ. When Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was arrested, the demand of the proconsul Statius Quadratus was, "Say, 'Away with the atheists,' swear by the godhead of Caesar, and blaspheme Christ." And it was the great answer of the aged bishop, "Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" There certainly came a time when a man was confronted with the choice of cursing Christ or facing death.

(d) There was the possibility that, even in the Church, someone in a semi-mad frenzy might cry out, "Accursed be Jesus." In that hysterical atmosphere anything might happen and be claimed to be the work of the Spirit. Paul lays it down that no man can say a word against Christ and attribute it to the influence of the Spirit.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

(ii) Beside this there is the Christian battle cry, Jesus is Lord. In so far as the early Church had a creed at all, that simple phrase was it. (compare Php.2:11). The word for Lord was kurios (GSN2962) and it was a tremendous word. It was the official title of the Roman Emperor. The demand of the persecutors always was, "Say, `Caesar is Lord (kurios, GSN2962).'" It was the word by which the sacred name Jehovah was rendered in the Greek translation of the Old Testament scriptures. When a man could say, "Jesus is Lord," it meant that he gave to Jesus the supreme loyalty of his life and the supreme worship of his heart.

It is to be noted that Paul believed that a man could say, "Jesus is Lord," only when the Spirit enabled him to say it. The Lordship of Jesus was not so much something which he discovered for himself as something which God, in his grace, revealed to him.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

GOD'S DIFFERING GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

There are distinctions between different kinds of special gifts, but there is one and the same Spirit. There are distinctions between different kinds of service, but there is one and the same Lord. There are distinctions between different kinds of effects, but it is one and the same God who causes them all in every man. To each man there is given his own manifestation of the Spirit, and always towards some beneficial end. To one man there is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit; to still another, faith, by the same Spirit; to another, the special gifts of healing through one and the same Spirit; to another, the ability to produce wonderful deeds of power; to another, prophecy; to another, the ability to distinguish between different kinds of spirits; to another, different kinds of tongues; to another, the power to interpret tongues. One and the same Spirit produces all these effects, sharing them out individually to each man, as the Spirit wishes.

Paul's idea in this section is to stress the essential unity of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ and the characteristic of a healthy body is that every part in it performs its own function for the good of the whole; but unity does not mean uniformity, and therefore within the Church there are differing gifts and differing functions. But every one of them is a gift of the same Spirit and designed, not for the glory of the individual member of the Church, but for the good of the whole.

Paul begins by saying that all special gifts (charismata, GSN5486) come from God and it is his belief that they must, therefore, be used in God's service. The fault of the Church, in modern times at least, is that it has interpreted the idea of special gifts far too narrowly. It has too often acted on the apparent assumption that the special gifts which it can use consist of things like speaking, praying, teaching, writing--the more or less intellectual gifts. It would be well if the Church would realize that the gifts of the man who can work with his hands, are just as special gifts from God. The mason, the carpenter, the electrician, the painter, the engineer, the plumber all have their special gifts, which are from God and can be used for him.

It is of the greatest interest to examine the list of special gifts which Paul gives, because from it we learn much about the character and work of the early Church.

He begins with two things which sound very like each other--the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. The Greek word we have translated wisdom is sophia (GSN4678). It is defined by Clement of Alexandria as "the knowledge of things human and divine and of their causes." Aristotle described it as "striving after the best ends and using the best means." This is the highest kind of wisdom; it comes not so much from thought as from communion with God. It is the wisdom which knows God. Knowledge--the Greek word is gnosis (GSN1108)--is a much more practical thing. It is the knowledge which knows what to do in any given situation. It is the practical application to human life and affairs of sophia (GSN4678). The two things are necessary--the wisdom which knows by communion with God the deep things of God, and the knowledge which, in the daily life of the world and the Church, can put that wisdom into practice.

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1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Next on the list comes faith. Paul means more than what we might call ordinary faith. It is the faith which really produces results. It is not just the intellectual conviction that a thing is true; it is the passionate belief in a thing which makes a man spend all that he is and has on it. It is the faith which steels the will and nerves the sinew of a man into action.

O God, when the heart is warmest,
And the head is clearest,
Give me to act;
To turn the purposes Thou formest
Into fact!

It is the faith which turns the vision into deeds.

Next Paul speaks of special gifts of healings. The early Church lived in a world where healing miracles were a common-place. If a Jew was ill he was much more likely to go to the Rabbi than to the doctor; and he would most likely be healed. Aesculapius was the Greek God of healing. People went to his temples, usually spending whole nights there, to be healed, and often they were. To this day we find among the ruins of these temples votive tablets and inscriptions commemorating healings; and no one goes to the trouble and expense of erecting an inscription for nothing. In the Temple at Epidaurus there is an inscription which tells how a certain Alketas, "although blind saw the dream vision. The god seemed to come to him and to open his eyes with his fingers, and he first saw the trees that were in the temple.

At day-break he went away cured." In the temple at Rome there is an inscription, "To Valerius Aper, a blind soldier, the god gave an oracle to come and take blood of a white cock with honey and to mix them into a salve and anoint his eyes for three days, and he received his sight and came and gave thanks publicly to the god." It was an age of cures.

There is not the slightest doubt that gifts of healing did exist in the early Church; Paul would never have cited them unless they were real. In the letter of James (Jas.5:14) there is an instruction that if a man is ill he must come to the elders and they will anoint him with oil. It is the simple historical fact that until the ninth century the Sacrament of Unction was for healing; and only then did it become the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, and a preparation for death. The Church never altogether lost this gift of healing; and in recent times it has been somewhat rediscovered.

Montaigne, one of the wisest writers who ever wrote, said about a boy's education, "I would have his limbs trained no less than his brains. It is not a mind we are educating nor a body; it is a man. And we must not split him in two." For too long the Church split man into a soul and a body, and accepted responsibility for his soul but not for his body. It is good that in our time we have once again learned to treat man as a whole.

Next Paul lists wonderful deeds of power. Almost certainly he refers to exorcisms. In those days many illnesses, often all illnesses, and especially mental illnesses, were attributed to the work of demons; and it was one of the functions of the Church to exorcise these demons. Whether or not they were in fact real, the person so possessed was convinced that they were, and the Church could and did help him. Exorcism is still very much a reality in the mission field; and at all times it is the function of the Church to minister to a mind diseased and disturbed.

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1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Paul goes on to mention prophecy. It would give a better idea of the meaning of this word if we translated it preaching. We have too much associated prophecy with the foretelling of what was to happen. But at all times prophecy has been far more forthtelling than foretelling. The prophet is a man who lives so close to God that he knows his mind and heart and will, and so can make them known to men. Because of that his function is twofold. (a) He brings rebuke and warning, telling men that their way of action is not in accordance with the will of God. (b) He brings advice and guidance, seeking to direct men into the ways God wishes them to go.

Paul then mentions the ability to distinguish between different kinds of spirits. In a society where the atmosphere was tense and where all kinds of manifestations were normal, it was necessary to distinguish between what was real and what was merely hysterical, between what came from God and what came from the devil. To this day, when a thing is outside our ordinary orbit, it is supremely difficult to tell whether it is from God or not. The one principle to observe is that we must always try to understand before we condemn.

Lastly Paul lists the gift of tongues and the ability to interpret them. This matter of tongues was causing a great deal of perplexity in the Church at Corinth. What happened was this--at a church service someone would fall into an ecstasy and pour out a torrent of unintelligible sounds in no known language. This was a highly-coveted gift because it was supposed to be due to the direct influence of the Spirit of God. To the congregation it was of course completely meaningless. Sometimes the person so moved could interpret his own outpourings, but usually it required someone else who had the gift of interpretation. Paul never questioned the reality of the gift of tongues, but he was well aware that it had its dangers, for ecstasy and a kind of self-hypnotism are very difficult to distinguish.

The picture we get is of a Church vividly alive. Things happened; in fact astonishing things happened. Life was heightened and intensified. There was nothing dull and ordinary about the early Church. Paul knew that all this vivid, powerful activity was the work of the Spirit who gave to each man his gift to use for all.

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1 Corinthians 12:12-31

THE BODY OF CHRIST

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Just as the body is one, although it has many members, and just as all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by the one Spirit we have all been baptized in such a way as to become one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be slaves or free men; and we have all been watered by the one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, "Because I am not the hand I am not of the body," it is not because of that not part of the body. And if the ear were to say, "Because I am not the eye, I am not part of the body," it is not because of that not part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body consisted only of the sense of hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But, as it is, God has arranged the members, each individual one of them, as he willed. If everything were one member where would the body be? But, as it is, there are many members but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you." Or again, the head cannot say to the feet, "I do not need you." Rather indeed those parts of the body which seem to be weaker are all the more essential; and to those parts of the body which seem to be rather without honour we apportion a very special honour; and the uncomely parts of the body have a special comeliness, while the comely parts need no special consideration. God has so compounded the body, giving a special honour to that part of it which seemed to lack all honour, so that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should all have the same care for each other. So, if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member is glorified all the members share its joy. You are the body of Christ and each of you is a member of it.

So God appointed in the Church some, in the first place, as apostles; in the second place, prophets; in the third place, teachers; then the power to work wonders; then special gifts of healings; the ability to help; the ability to administer; different kinds of tongues. Surely all are not apostles? Surely all are not prophets? Surely all are not teachers? Surely all have not the power to do wonderful things? Surely all do not possess the gifts of healings? Surely all do not speak with tongues? Surely all cannot interpret? Long for the yet greater gifts. I show you a still more excellent way.

Here is one of the most famous pictures of the unity of the Church ever written. Men have always been fascinated by the way in which the different parts of the body cooperate. Long ago Plato had drawn a famous picture in which he had said that the head was the citadel; the neck, the isthmus between the head and the body; the heart, the fountain of the body; the pores, the lanes of the body; the veins, the canals of the body. So Paul drew his picture of the Church as a body. A body consists of many parts but there is in it an essential unity. Plato had pointed out that we do not say, "My finger has a pain," we say, "I have a pain." There is an I, a personality, which gives unity to the many and varying parts of the body. What the I is to the body, Christ is to the Church. It is in him that all the diverse parts find their unity.

Paul goes on to look at this in another way. "You," he says, "are the body of Christ." There is a tremendous thought here. Christ is no longer in this world in the body; therefore if he wants a task done within the world he has to find a man to do it. If he wants a child taught, he has to find a

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1 Corinthians 12:12-31

teacher to teach him; if he wants a sick person cured, he has to find a physician or surgeon to do his work; if he wants his story told, he has to find a man to tell it. Literally, we have to be the body of Christ, hands to do his work, feet to run upon his errands, a voice to speak for him.

"He has no hands but our hands
To do his work today;
He has no feet but our feet
To lead men in his way;
He has no voice but our voice
To tell men how he died;
He has no help but our help
To lead them to his side."

Here is the supreme glory of the Christian man--he is part of the body of Christ upon earth.

So Paul draws a picture of the unity which should exist inside the Church if it is to fulfil its proper function. A body is healthy and efficient only when each part is functioning perfectly. The parts of the body are not jealous of each other and do not covet each other's functions. From Paul's picture we see certain things which ought to exist in the Church, the body of Christ.

(i) We ought to realize that we need each other. There can be no such thing as isolation in the Church. Far too often people in the Church become so engrossed in the bit of the work that they are doing and so convinced of its supreme importance that they neglect or even criticize others who have chosen to do other work. If the Church is to be a healthy body, we need the work that everyone can do.

(ii) We ought to respect each other. In the body there is no question of relative importances. If any limb or any organ ceases to function, the whole body is thrown out of gear. It is so with the Church. "All service ranks the same with God." Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Christian Church, the possibility of really Christian work is gone.

(iii) We ought to sympathize with each other. If any one part of the body is affected, all the others suffer in sympathy because they cannot help it. The Church is a whole. The person who cannot see beyond his or her own organization, the person who cannot see beyond his or her congregation, worse still, the person who cannot see beyond his or her own family circle, has not even begun to grasp the real unity of the Church.

At the end of the passage Paul speaks of various forms of service in the Church. Some he has already mentioned, but some are new.

(i) At the head of everything he puts the apostles. They were beyond question the greatest figures in the Church. Their authority was not confined to one place; they had no settled and localized ministry; their writ ran through the whole Church. Why should that be? The essential qualification of an apostle was that he must have companied with Jesus during his earthly life and been a witness of the Resurrection (Ac.1:22). The apostles were those who had the closest contact with Jesus in the

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days of his flesh and in the days of his risen power. Jesus never wrote a word on paper; instead he wrote his message upon men, and these men were the apostles. No human ceremony can ever give a man real authority; that must always come from the fact that he has companied with Christ. Once someone said to Alexander Whyte after a service, "Dr. Whyte, you preached today as if you had come straight from the presence." "Perhaps I did," answered Whyte softly.

The man who comes from the presence of Christ has apostolic authority no matter what may be his Church denomination.

(ii) We have already spoken about the prophets, but now Paul adds teachers. It is impossible to exaggerate their importance. These were the men who had to build up the converts won by the preaching of the evangelists and the apostles. They had to instruct men and women who knew literally nothing about Christianity. Their supreme importance lies in this--the first gospel, Mark's, was not written until about A.D. 60, that is to say, not until about thirty years after the crucifixion of Jesus. We have to think ourselves back to a time when printing did not exist, when books had to be hand-written and were scarce, when a volume the size of the New Testament would cost pounds to buy, when ordinary folk could never hope to possess a book. As a result the story of Jesus had to be handed down in the beginning by word of mouth. That was the teacher's task; and we must remember this--a scholar will learn more from a good teacher than from any book.

We have books in plenty nowadays, but it is still true that it is through people that a man really learns of Christ.

(iii) Paul speaks of helpers. These were people whose duty it was to succour the poor, the orphan, the widow and the stranger. From the very beginning Christianity was an intensely practical thing. A man may be a poor speaker and have no gift of teaching; but it is open to everyone to help.

(iv) Paul speaks of what the Revised Standard Version calls administrators (kuberneseis, GSN2941). The Greek is very interesting; it literally refers to the work of a pilot who steers the ship through the rocks and shoals to harbour. Paul is referring to the people who carry out the administration of the Church. It is a supremely essential work. In the foreground the preacher and the teacher hold the limelight; but they could never do their work at all unless in the background there were those who shouldered the routine day to day administration. There are parts of the body which are never seen but whose function is more important than any other; there are those who serve the Church in ways that win no publicity, but without whose service the Church could not go on.

But in the end Paul is going to go on to speak of a greater gift than all the others. The danger always is that those who have different gifts will be at variance with each other, and so the effective working of the body will be hindered. Love is the only thing which can bind the Church into a perfect unity; and Paul goes on to sing his hymn to love.

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1 Corinthians 13:1-3

THE HYMN OF LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but if I have not love, I am become no better than echoing brass or a clanging cymbal. I may have the gift of prophecy, I may understand all sacred secrets and all knowledge, I may have faith enough to remove mountains, but if I have not love I am nothing. I may dole out all that I have, I may surrender my body that I may be burned, but if I have not love it is no good to me.

For many this is the most wonderful chapter in the whole New Testament and we will do well to take more than one day to study words whose full meaning not a lifetime itself would be sufficient to unveil.

Paul begins by declaring that a man may possess any spiritual gift, but if it is unaccompanied by love it is useless.

(i) He may have the gift of tongues. A characteristic of heathen worship, especially the worship of Dionysus and Cybele, was the clanging of cymbals and the braying of trumpets. Even the coveted gift of tongues was no better than the uproar of heathen worship if love was absent.

(ii) He may have the gift of prophecy. We have already seen that prophecy corresponds most closely to preaching. There are two kinds of preachers. There is the preacher whose one aim is to save the souls of his people and who woos them with the accents of love. Of no one was that more true than of Paul himself. Myers, in his poem St. Paul, draws the picture of him looking at the Christless world,

"Then with a thrill the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call--
O to save these--to perish for their saving--
Die for their lives, be offered for them all."

On the other hand there is the preacher who dangles his hearers over the flames of hell and gives the impression that he would rejoice in their damnation as much as in their salvation. It is told that Sir George Adam Smith once asked a member of the Greek Church, which has suffered much at the hands of Islam, why God had created so many Mohammedans, and received the answer, "To fill up hell." The preaching which is all threat and no love may terrify but it will not save.

(iii) He may have the gift of intellectual knowledge. The permanent danger of intellectual eminence is intellectual snobbery. The man who is learned runs the grave danger of developing the spirit of contempt. Only a knowledge whose cold detachment has been kindled by the fire of love can really save men.

(iv) He may have a passionate faith. There are times when faith can be cruel. There was a man who visited his doctor and was informed that his heart was tired and he must rest. He telephoned

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1 Corinthians 13:1-3

his employer, a notable Christian figure, with the news, only to receive the answer, "I have an inward strength which enables me to carry on." These were the words of faith but a faith which knew no love and was therefore a hurting thing.

(v) He may practise what men call charity; he may dole out his goods to the poor. There is nothing more humiliating than this so-called charity without love. To give as a grim duty, to give with a certain contempt, to stand on one's own little eminence and throw scraps of charity as to a dog, to give and to accompany the giving with a smug moral lecture or a crushing rebuke, is not charity at all--it is pride, and pride is always cruel for it knows no love.

(vi) He may give his body to be burned. Possibly Paul's thoughts are going back to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego and the burning fiery furnace (Dn.3). Perhaps more likely, he is thinking of a famous monument in Athens called "The Indian's Tomb." There an Indian had burned himself in public on a funeral pyre and had caused to be engraved on the monument the boastful inscription: "Zarmano-chegas, an Indian from Bargarosa, according to the traditional customs of the Indians, made himself immortal and lies here." Just possibly, he may have been thinking of the kind of Christian who actually courted persecution. If the motive which makes a man give his life for Christ is pride and self-display, then even martyrdom becomes valueless. It is not cynical to remember that many a deed which looks sacrificial has been the product of pride and not of devotion.

Hardly any passage in scripture demands such self-examination from the good man as this.

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1 Corinthians 13:4-7

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is patient; love is kind; love knows no envy; love is no braggart; it is not inflated with its own importance; it does not behave gracelessly; it does not insist on its rights; it never flies into a temper; it does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received; it finds no pleasure in evil-doing; it rejoices with the truth; it can endure anything; it is completely trusting; it never ceases to hope; it bears everything with triumphant fortitude.

In 1Cor.13:4-7 Paul lists fifteen characteristics of Christian love.

Love is patient. The Greek word (makrothumein, GSN3114) used in the New Testament always describes patience with people and not patience with circumstances. Chrysostom said that it is the word used of the man who is wronged and who has it easily in his power to avenge himself and who yet will not do it. It describes the man who is slow to anger and it is used of God himself in his relationship with men. In our dealings with men, however refractory and however unkind and hurting they are, we must exercise the same patience as God exercises with us. Such patience is not the sign of weakness but the sign of strength; it is not defeatism but rather the only way to victory. Fosdick points out that no one treated Lincoln with more contempt than did Stanton. He called him "a low cunning clown", he nicknamed him "the original gorilla" and said that Du Chaillu was a fool to wander about Africa trying to capture a gorilla when he could have found one so easily at Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln said nothing.

He made Stanton his war minister because he was the best man for the job and he treated him with every courtesy. The years wore on. The night came when the assassin's bullet murdered Lincoln in the theatre. In the little room to which the President's body was taken stood that same Stanton, and, looking down on Lincoln's silent face, he said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." The patience of love had conquered in the end.

Love is kind. Origen had it that this means that love is "sweet to all." Jerome spoke of what he called "the benignity" of love. So much Christianity is good but unkind. There was no more religious a man than Philip the Second of Spain, and yet he founded the Spanish Inquisition and thought he was serving God by massacring those who thought differently from him. The famous Cardinal Pole declared that murder and adultery could not compare in heinousness with heresy. Apart altogether from that persecuting spirit, there is in so many good people an attitude of criticism. So many good Church people would have sided with the rulers and not with Jesus if they had had to deal with the woman taken in adultery.

Love knows no envy. It has been said that there are really only two classes of people in this world--"those who are millionaires and those who would like to be." There are two kinds of envy. The one covets the possessions of other people; and such envy is very difficult to avoid because it is a very human thing. The other is worse--it grudges the very fact that others should have what it has not; it does not so much want things for itself as wish that others had not got them. Meanness of soul can sink no further than that.

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1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is no braggart. There is a self-effacing quality in love. True love will always be far more impressed with its own unworthiness than its own merit. In Barrie's story Sentimental Tommy used to come home to his mother after some success at school and say, "Mother, am I no' a wonder?" Some people confer their love with the idea that they are conferring a favour. But the real lover cannot ever get over the wonder that he is loved. Love is kept humble by the consciousness that it can never offer its loved one a gift which is good enough.

Love is not inflated with its own importance. Napoleon always advocated the sanctity of the home and the obligation of public worship--for others. Of himself he said, "I am not a man like other men. The laws of morality do not apply to me." The really great man never thinks of his own importance. Carey, who began life as a cobbler, was one of the greatest missionaries and certainly one of the greatest linguists the world has ever seen. He translated at least parts of the Bible into no fewer than thirty-four Indian languages. When he came to India, he was regarded with dislike and contempt. At a dinner party a snob, with the idea of humiliating him, said in a tone that everyone could hear, "I suppose, Mr. Carey, you once worked as a shoe-maker." "No, your lordship," answered Carey, "not a shoe-maker, only a cobbler." He did not even claim to make shoes--only to mend them. No one likes the "important" person. Man "dressed in a little brief authority" can be a sorry sight.

Love does not behave gracelessly. It is a significant fact that in Greek the words for grace and for charm are the same. There is a kind of Christianity which takes a delight in being blunt and almost brutal. There is strength in it but there is no winsomeness. Lightfoot of Durham said of Arthur F. Sim, one of his students, "Let him go where he will, his face will be a sermon in itself." There is a graciousness in Christian love which never forgets that courtesy and tact and politeness are lovely things.

Love does not insist upon its rights. In the last analysis, there are in this world only two kinds of people--those who always insist upon their privileges and those who always remember their responsibilities; those who are always thinking of what life owes them and those who never forget what they owe to life. It would be the key to almost all the problems which surround us today if men would think less of their rights and more of their duties. Whenever we start thinking about "our place", we are drifting away from Christian love.

Love never flies into a temper. The real meaning of this is that Christian love never becomes exasperated with people. Exasperation is always a sign of defeat. When we lose our tempers, we lose everything. Kipling said that it was the test of a man if he could keep his head when everyone else was losing his and blaming it on him, and if when he was hated he did not give way to hating. The man who is master of his temper can be master of anything.

Love does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received. The word translated store up (logizesthai, GSN3049) is an accountant's word. It is the word used for entering up an item in a ledger so that it will not be forgotten. That is precisely what so many people do. One of the great arts in life is to learn what to forget. A writer tells how "in Polynesia, where the natives spend much of their time in fighting and feasting, it is customary for each man to keep some reminders of his hatred. Articles are suspended from the roofs of their huts to keep alive the memory of their

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wrongs--real or imaginary." In the same way many people nurse their wrath to keep it warm; they brood over their wrongs until it is impossible to forget them. Christian love has learned the great lesson of forgetting.

Love finds no pleasure in evil-doing. It might be better to translate this that love finds no pleasure in anything that is wrong. It is not so much delight in doing the wrong thing that is meant, as the malicious pleasure which comes to most of us when we hear something derogatory about someone else. It is one of the queer traits of human nature that very often we prefer to hear of the misfortune of others rather than of their good fortune. It is much easier to weep with them than to rejoice with those who rejoice. Christian love has none of that human malice which finds pleasure in ill reports.

Love rejoices with the truth. That is not so easy as it sounds. There are times when we definitely do not want the truth to prevail; and still more times when it is the last thing we wish to hear. Christian love has no wish to veil the truth; it has nothing to conceal and so is glad when the truth prevails.

Love can endure anything. It is just possible that this may mean "love can cover anything," in the sense that it will never drag into the light of day the faults and mistakes of others. It would far rather set about quietly mending things than publicly displaying and rebuking them. More likely it means that love can bear any insult, any injury, any disappointment. It describes the kind of love that was in the heart of Jesus himself,

"Thy foes might hate, despise, revile,
Thy friends unfaithful prove;
Unwearied in forgiveness still,
Thy heart could only love."

Love is completely trusting. This characteristic has a twofold aspect. (i) In relation to God it means that love takes God at his word, and can take every promise which begins "Whosoever" and say, "That means me." (ii) In relation to our fellow men it means that love always believes the best about other people. It is often true that we make people what we believe them to be. If we show that we do not trust people, we may make them untrustworthy. If we show people that we trust them absolutely, we may make them trustworthy. When Arnold became headmaster of Rugby he instituted a completely new way of doing things. Before him, school had been a terror and a tyranny. Arnold called the boys together and told them that there was going to be much more liberty and much less flogging. "You are free," he said, "but you are responsible--you are gentlemen.

I intend to leave you much to yourselves, and put you upon your honour, because I believe that if you are guarded and watched and spied upon, you will grow up knowing only the fruits of servile fear; and when your liberty is finally given you, as it must be some day, you will not know how to use it." The boys found it difficult to believe. When they were brought before him they continued to make the old excuses and to tell the old lies. "Boys," he said, "if you say so, it must be true--I believe your word." The result was that there came a time in Rugby when boys said, "It is a shame

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1 Corinthians 13:4-7

to tell Arnold a lie--he always believes you." He believed in them and he made them what he believed them to be. Love can ennoble even the ignoble by believing the best.

Love never ceases to hope. Jesus believed that no man is hopeless. Adam Clark was one of the great theologians but at school he was very slow to learn. One day a distinguished visitor paid a visit to the school, and the teacher singled out Adam Clark and said, "That is the stupidest boy in the school." Before he left the school, the visitor came to the boy and said kindly, "Never mind, my boy, you may be a great scholar some day. Don't be discouraged but try hard, and keep on trying." The teacher was hopeless, the visitor was hopeful, and--who knows?--it may well have been that word of hope which made Adam Clark what he one day became.

Love bears everything with triumphant fortitude. The verb used here (*hupomenein*, GSN5278) is one of the great Greek words. It is generally translated to bear or to endure; but what it really describes is not the spirit which can passively bear things, but the spirit which, in bearing them, can conquer and transmute them. It has been defined as "a masculine constancy under trial." George Matheson, who lost his sight and who was disappointed in love, wrote in one of his prayers that he might accept God's will, "Not with dumb resignation but with holy joy; not only with the absence of murmur but with a song of praise." Love can bear things, not merely with passive resignation, but with triumphant fortitude, because it knows that "a father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear."

One thing remains to be said--when we think of the qualities of this love as Paul portrays them we can see them realized in the life of Jesus himself

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1 Corinthians 13:8-13

THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Love never fails. Whatever prophecies there are, they will vanish away. Whatever tongues there are, they will cease. Whatever knowledge we have, it will pass away. It is only part of the truth that we know now and only part of the truth that we can forthtell to others. But when that which is complete shall come, that which is incomplete will vanish away. When I was a child I used to speak like a child; I used to think like a child; I used to reason like a child. When I became a man I put an end to childish things. Now we see only reflections in a mirror which leave us with nothing but riddles to solve, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; but then I will know even as I am known. Now faith, hope, love remain--these three; but the greatest of these is love.

In 1Cor.13:8-13 Paul has three final things to say of this Christian love.

(i) He stresses its absolute permanency. When all the things in which men glory have passed away love will still stand. In one of the most wonderfully lyrical verses of scripture The Song of Solomon (SS.8:7) sings, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it." The one unconquerable thing is love. That is one of the great reasons for believing in immortality. When love is entered into, there comes into life a relationship against which the assaults of time are helpless and which transcends death.

(ii) He stresses its absolute completeness. As things are, what we see are reflections in a mirror. That would be even more suggestive to the Corinthians than it is to us. Corinth was famous for its manufacture of mirrors. But the modern mirror as we know it, with its perfect reflection, did not emerge until the thirteenth century. The Corinthian mirror was made of highly polished metal and, even at its best, gave but an imperfect reflection. It has been suggested that what this phrase means is that we see as through a window made with horn. In those days windows were so made and all that could be seen through them was a dim and shadowy outline. In fact the Rabbis had a saying that it was through such a window that Moses saw God.

In this life Paul feels we see only the reflections of God and are left with much that is mystery and riddle. We see that reflection in God's world, for the work of anyone's hands tells us something about the workman, we see it in the Gospel and we see it in Jesus Christ. Even if in Christ we have the perfect revelation, our seeking minds can grasp it only in part, for the finite can never grasp the infinite. Our knowledge is still like the knowledge of a child. But the way of love will lead us in the end to a day when the veil is drawn aside and we see face to face and know even as we are known. We cannot ever reach that day without love, because God is love and only he who loves can see him.

(iii) He stresses its absolute supremacy. Great as faith and hope are, love is still greater. Faith without love is cold, and hope without love is grim. Love is the fire which kindles faith and it is the light which turns hope into certainty.

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1 Corinthians 14:1-19

THE FALSE AND THE TRUE WORSHIP (Speaking with Tongues)

1 Corinthians 14:1-19

Pursue this love. Covet the spiritual things, especially the gift of forthtelling the truth to others. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one can understand. By the Spirit he speaks things which only the initiated can understand. But he who forthtells the truth to men speaks something which builds them up and encourages them and comforts them. He who speaks in a tongue builds up his own spiritual life, but he who forthtells the truth builds up the spiritual life of the Church. I wish that you could all speak with tongues, but I wish still more that you could all forthtell the truth. He who forthtells the truth is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless the tongues are interpreted so that the Church may receive spiritual upbuilding. Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking with tongues what good would I do you? I cannot do you any good unless I speak to you through some special message given to me direct by God, or with some special knowledge, or with the forthtelling of the truth, or with teaching. There are instruments which, though they are lifeless, have a voice--for example, the flute and the harp but if they do not observe the correct intervals between the notes, how can the tune that is being played on the flute or the harp be recognized? If the trumpet gives a meaningless sound who will prepare for the battle? So, too, if you produce in a tongue speech the meaning of which cannot be grasped, how can what is being said be understood? You might as well be talking to the air. There are so many voices--whatever the number of them may be--in the world and nothing is without a voice. So then if I do not understand what the voice is trying to say, I will be a foreigner to him who speaks and he who speaks will be a foreigner as far as I am concerned. So, when you are eager for spiritual gifts, be eager to excel in gifts which are useful for the upbuilding of the Church. Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray to be able to interpret what he says, for, if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind gets no benefit at all. What then emerges from all this? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with my mind too. I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing with my mind too. For if you are blessing God in the spirit, how can the man who occupies the position of a simple layman say the customary Amen to your thanksgiving, since he does not understand what you are saying? It is a fine thing that you give thanks, but the other man receives no spiritual upbuilding. I thank God that I can speak with tongues more than any of you. But in any Christian gathering I would rather speak five words with my intelligence, so that I may teach others as well, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

This chapter is very difficult to understand because it deals with a phenomenon which, for most of us, is outside our experience. Throughout Paul sets two spiritual gifts in comparison with each other.

First there is speaking with tongues. This phenomenon was very common in the early Church. A man became worked up to an ecstasy and in that state poured out a quite uncontrollable torrent of sounds in no known language. Unless these sounds were interpreted, no one had any idea what they meant. Strange as it may seem to many of us, in the early Church this was a highly coveted gift. It was dangerous. For one thing, it was abnormal and was greatly admired and therefore the person who possessed it was very liable to develop a certain spiritual pride; and for another thing, the very

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desire to possess it produced, at least in some, a kind of self-hypnotism and deliberately induced hysteria which issued in a completely false and synthetic speaking with tongue.

Over against this speaking with tongues, Paul sets the gift of prophecy. In the translation we have not used the word prophecy, for that would have further complicated an already complicated situation. In this case, and in fact usually, it has nothing to do with foretelling the future but everything to do with forthtelling the will and the message of God. We have already said that preaching very nearly gives the meaning, but in this case we have kept the literal meaning and have translated it forthtelling.

In this whole section Paul deals with the dangers of the gift of speaking with tongues, and the superiority of the gift of forthtelling the truth in such a way that all can understand it.

We can best follow Paul's line of thought by analysing the section.

He begins by declaring that tongues are addressed to God and not to men, for men cannot understand them. If a man exercises this gift of tongues he may be enriching his own spiritual experience, but he is certainly not enriching the souls of the congregation because to them it is unintelligible; on the other hand, the gift of forthtelling the truth produces something which everyone can understand and which profits every man's soul.

Paul goes on to use certain illustrations and analogies. He is going to come to them; but if he came speaking with tongues what use would that be? They would have no idea what he was talking about. Take the case of a musical instrument. If it obeys the normal laws of harmony, it can produce a melody; but, if it does not, it produces simply a chaos of sound. Take the case of a trumpet. If it plays the correct call, it can summon men to advance, to retreat, to sleep, to wake. But if it produces simply a medley of meaningless sound, no man can know what to do. There are in this world many kinds of speech; but if two men meet each other who do not understand each other's language, the speech of each sounds like gibberish to the other and makes no sense.

Paul does not deny that the gift of tongues exists. Nor can anyone say that with him it is a case of sour grapes, for he possesses the gift more than anyone else does; but he insists that any gift to be of value must benefit the whole congregation, and therefore, if the gift of tongues is used, it is useless unless it is interpreted. Whether a man is speaking or praying or singing, he must do it not only with his spirit, but with his mind. He must know what is going on and others must be able to understand it. And so Paul reaches the blunt conclusion that in a Christian congregation it is better to speak a few intelligible sentences than to pour out a flood of unintelligible sounds.

Out of this difficult section emerge certain valuable truths.

1Cor.14:3 succinctly lays down the aim of all preaching. It is threefold. (i) It must aim to build up; to increase a man's knowledge of Christian truth and his ability to live the Christian life. (ii) It must aim to encourage. In every group of people there are those who are depressed and discouraged. Dreams will not come true; effort seems to have achieved so little; self-examination serves to show nothing but failures and inadequacies. Within the Christian fellowship, a man

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should find something to cheer his heart and nerve his arm. It was said of a certain preacher that he preached the gospel as if he were announcing a deep depression off Iceland. A service may begin by humbling a man through showing him his sin, but it is a failure unless it ends by pointing him to the grace of God that can enable him to conquer it. (iii) It must aim to comfort.

"Never morning wore to evening but some heart did break." There are what Virgil called, "the tears of things." In any company of people there will always be some whom life has hurt; and within the Christian fellowship they must be able to find beauty for their ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of their heaviness.

1Cor.14:5 gives us the things which for Paul were the background and the substance of all preaching. (i) It comes from a direct revelation from God. No man can speak to others unless God has first spoken to him. It was said of a great preacher that ever and again he paused as if listening for a voice. We never give to men or to scholars truth which we have produced, or even discovered; we transmit truth which has been given to us. (ii) It may bring some special knowledge. No man can possibly be an expert in everything, but every man has special knowledge of something. It has been said that any man can write an interesting book if he will simply set down completely honestly all that has happened to him. The experiences of life give something special to each one of us, and the most effective preaching is simply witness to what we have found to be true. (iii) It consists of forthtelling the truth.

In the early Church the first preaching given to any fellowship was a simple proclamation of the facts of the Christian story. Certain things are beyond argument. "Tell me of your certainties," said Goethe, "I have doubts enough of my own." However we may finish, it is well to begin with the facts of Christ. (iv) It goes on to teaching. There comes a time when a man has to ask, "What is the meaning of these facts?" Simply because we are thinking creatures, religion implies theology. And it may well be that the faith of many people collapses and the loyalty of many people grows cold because they have not thought things out and thought them through.

From the whole passage two broad principles regarding Christian worship emerge.

(i) Worship must never be selfish. All that is done in it must be done for the sake of all. No man in worship, whether he leads it or shares in it, has any right to direct it according to his own personal preferences. He must seek the good of the whole worshipping fellowship. The great test of any part of worship is, "Will this help everyone?" It is not, "Will this display my special gifts?" It is, "Will this bring all here nearer to each other and nearer to God?"

(ii) Worship must be intelligible. The great things are essentially the simple things; the noblest language is essentially the simplest language. In the end only what satisfies my mind can comfort my heart, and only what my mind can grasp can bring strength to my life.

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1 Corinthians 14:20-25

THE EFFECTS OF FALSE AND TRUE WORSHIP

1 Corinthians 14:20-25

Brothers, don't be childish in your judgment. True, you must be innocent babes as far as evil goes, but in your judgments you must be mature men. In the law it stands written, "With people of a foreign tongue and with the lips of aliens I will speak to this people, and not even so will they listen to me, says the Lord." So you see tongues are meant for a sign not to believers but to unbelievers.

Suppose, then, the whole Christian congregation meets together, and suppose all speak with tongues, and suppose some simple folk or some pagans come in, will they not say that you are raving mad? But suppose all forthtell the truth, and then suppose some pagan or some simple person comes in, his sin will be brought home to him by all, he will be brought to judgment by all, the hidden things of his heart will be brought to light, and so, falling upon his face, he will worship God, and will tell all men that God is really among you.

Paul is still dealing with this question of speaking with tongues. He begins with an appeal to the Corinthians not to be childish. This passion for and over-evaluation of speaking with tongues is really a kind of childish ostentation.

Paul then finds an argument in the Old Testament. We have seen over and over again how Rabbinic exegesis--and Paul was a trained Rabbi--can find in the Old Testament hidden meanings which were certainly not originally there. He goes back to Isa.28:9-12. God, through his prophet, is threatening the people. Isaiah has preached to them in their own Hebrew language and they have not listened. Because of their disobedience, the Assyrians will come and conquer them and occupy their cities and then they will have to listen to language which they cannot understand. They will have to listen to the foreign tongues of their conquerors speaking unintelligible things; and not even that terrible experience will make an unbelieving people turn to God. So Paul uses the argument that tongues were meant for a hard-hearted and unbelieving people and were, in the end, ineffective to them.

Then he uses a very practical argument. If any stranger, or any simple person, came into a Christian assembly where everyone was pouring out a flood of unintelligible sounds, he would think that the place was a madhouse. But if the truth of God was being soberly and intelligibly proclaimed, the result would be very different. He would be brought face to face with himself and with God.

1Cor.14:24-25 give us a vivid summary of what happens when the truth of God is intelligibly proclaimed.

(i) It convicts a man of his sin. He sees what he is and is appalled. Alcibiades, the spoilt darling of Athens, was the friend of Socrates, and sometimes he used to say to him, "Socrates, I hate you, for every time I meet you you make me see what I am." "Come," said the woman of Samaria in shamed amazement, "see a man who told me all that I ever did." (Jn.4:29). The first thing the message of God does is to make a man realize that he is a sinner.

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(ii) It brings a man under judgment. He sees that he must answer for what he has done. So far he may have lived life with no thought of its end. He may have followed the impulses of the day and seized its pleasures. But now he sees that the day has an ending, and there stands God.

(iii) It shows a man the secrets of his own heart. The last thing we face is our own hearts. As the proverb has it, "There are none so blind as those who will not see." The Christian message compels a man to that searing, humiliating honesty which will face himself

(iv) It brings a man to his knees before God. All Christianity begins with a man on his knees in God's presence. The gateway to that presence is so low that we can enter it only upon our knees. When a man has faced God and faced himself, all that is left for him to do is to kneel and to pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

The test of any act of worship is, "Does it make us feel the presence of God?" Joseph Twitchell tells how he went to visit Horace Bushnell when Bushnell was an old man. At night Bushnell took him out for a walk on the hillside. As they walked in the dark, suddenly Bushnell said, "Let us kneel and pray," and they did. Twitchell, telling of it afterwards, said, "I was afraid to stretch out my hand in the darkness in case I should touch God." When we feel as near to God as that, we have really and truly shared in an act of worship.

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1 Corinthians 14:26-33

PRACTICAL ADVICE

1 Corinthians 14:26-33

What then emerges from all this, brothers? Whenever you meet together, let each have his psalm, let each have his teaching, let each have his message direct from God, let each have his tongue, let each have his interpretation. Let all things be done for the spiritual upbuilding of the congregation. If anyone speaks with a tongue, let it be two, or at the most three, and let them do it by turns, and let one interpret. If there is no interpreter present, let him who has the gift of tongues keep silent in the congregation, and let him speak to God when he is by himself. Let two or three forthtellers of the truth speak, and let the others exercise the gift of discernment.

If someone who is seated is conscious that he has been given a special message, let the first be silent, for you can all forthtell the truth one by one so that all may learn and may be encouraged--and the spirits of those who forthtell the truth are under control of those who do forthtell the truth, for God is not the God of disorder but the God of peace, as we see that he is in all the congregation of his dedicated people.

Paul comes near to the end of this section with some very practical advice. He is determined that anyone who possesses a gift should receive every chance to exercise it; but he is equally determined that the services of the Church should not become a kind of competitive disorder. Only two or three are to exercise the gift of tongues, and then only if there is someone there to interpret. All have the gift of forthtelling the truth, but again only two or three are to exercise it; and if someone in the congregation has the conviction that he has received a special message, the man who is speaking must give way to him and give him the opportunity to express it. The man who is speaking can perfectly well do so, and need not say that he is carried away by inspiration and cannot stop, because the preacher is able to control his own spirit. There must be liberty but there must be no disorder. The God of peace must be worshipped in peace.

There is no more interesting section in the whole letter than this, for it sheds a flood of light on what an early church service was like. There was obviously great freedom and an informality about it. From this passage two great questions emerge.

(i) Clearly the early Church had no professional ministry. True, the apostles stood out with special authority; but at this stage there was no professional local ministry. It was open to anyone who had a gift to use it. Has the Church been right or wrong in instituting a professional ministry? Clearly it is essential that, in our busy age when men are so preoccupied with material things, one should be set apart to live close to God and to bring to his fellows the truth and the guidance and the comfort which God gives to him. But there is the obvious danger that when a man becomes a professional preacher he may sometimes be in the position of having to say something when he has really nothing to say. However that may be, it must remain true that if a man has a message to give his fellow men no ecclesiastical rules and regulations should be able to stop him giving it. It is a mistake to think that only the professional ministry can ever bring God's truth to men.

(ii) There was obviously a flexibility about the order of service in the early Church. Everything was informal enough to allow any man who felt that he had a message to give to give it. It may well

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be that we set far too much store on dignity and order nowadays, and have become the slaves of orders of service. The really notable thing about an early Church service must have been that almost everyone came feeling that he had both the privilege and the obligation of contributing something to it. A man did not come with the sole intention of being a passive listener; he came not only to receive but to give. Obviously this had its dangers, for it is clear that in Corinth there were those who were too fond of the sound of their own voices; but nonetheless the Church must have been in those days much more the real possession of the ordinary Christian.

It may well be that the Church lost something when she delegated so much to the professional ministry and left so little to the ordinary Church member; and it may well be that the blame lies not with the ministry for annexing those rights but with the laity for abandoning them, certainly it is all too true that many Church members think far more of what the Church can do for them than of what they can do for the Church, and are very ready to criticize what is done but very unready to take any share in doing the Church's work themselves.

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1 Corinthians 14:34-40

FORBIDDEN INNOVATIONS (Women in Worship)

1 Corinthians 14:34-40

Let women keep silent in the congregation, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but let them be in subjection even as the law says. If they wish to learn about anything, let them question their husbands at home. It is a shameful thing for a woman to speak in the congregation. Was it from you that God's word went out? Or, was it to you alone that it came?

If anyone thinks that he is a forthteller of the truth, or that he has a special spiritual gift, let him understand what I write to you because it is the Lord's command. If anyone does not understand it, let him remain in his ignorance.

So then, my brothers, be eager to have the gift of forthtelling the truth and do not forbid speaking with tongues. Let everything be done with propriety and with order.

There were innovations threatening in the Church at Corinth which Paul did not like. In effect, he asks what right they had to make them. Were they the originators of the Christian Church? Had they a monopoly of the gospel truth? They had received a tradition and to it they must be obedient.

No man ever rose completely above the background of the age in which he lived and the society in which he grew up; and Paul, in his conception of the place of women within the Church, was unable to rise above the ideas which he had known all his life.

We have already said that in the ancient world the place of women was low. In the Greek world Sophocles had said, "Silence confers grace upon a woman." Women, unless they were very poor or very loose in their morals, led a very secluded life in Greece. The Jews had an even lower idea of women. Amongst the Rabbinic sayings there are many which belittle their place. "As to teaching the law to a woman one might as well teach her impiety." To teach the law to a woman was "to cast pearls before swine." The Talmud lists among the plagues of the world "the talkative and the inquisitive widow and the virgin who wastes her time in prayers." It was even forbidden to speak to a woman on the street. "One must not ask a service from a woman, or salute her."

It was in a society like that that Paul wrote this passage. In all likelihood what was uppermost in his mind was the lax moral state of Corinth and the feeling that absolutely nothing, must be done which would bring upon the infant Church the faintest suspicion of immodesty. It would certainly be very wrong to take these words out of their context and make them a universal rule for the Church.

Paul goes on to speak with a certain sternness. He is quite certain that, even if a man has spiritual gifts, that gives him no right to be a rebel against authority. He is conscious that the advice he has given and the rules he has laid down have come to him from Jesus Christ and his Spirit, and if a man refuses to understand them he must be left in his wilful ignorance.

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So Paul draws to an end. He makes it clear that he has no wish to quench anyone's gift; the one thing he strives for is the good order of the Church. The great rule which he in effect lays down is that a man has received from God whatever gift he may possess, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Church. When a man can say, "To God be the glory," then and only then will he use his gifts aright within the Church and outside it.

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Introduction to 1 Corinthians 15

JESUS' RESURRECTION AND OURS

1 Corinthians 15

1Cor.15 is both one of the greatest and one of the most difficult chapters in the New Testament. Not only is it in itself difficult, but it has also given to the creed a phrase which many people have grave difficulty in affirming, for it is from this chapter that we mainly derive the idea of the resurrection of the body. The chapter will be far less difficult if we study it against its background, and even that troublesome phrase will become quite clear and acceptable when we realize what Paul really meant by it. So then, before we study the chapter, there are certain things we would do well to have in mind.

(i) It is of great importance to remember that the Corinthians were denying not the Resurrection of Jesus Christ but the resurrection of the body; and what Paul was insistent upon was that if a man denied the resurrection of the body he thereby denied the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and therefore emptied the Christian message of its truth and the Christian life of its reality.

(ii) In any early Christian church there must have been two backgrounds, for in all churches there were Jews and Greeks.

First, there was the Jewish background. To the end of the day the Sadducees denied that there was any life after death at all. There was therefore one line of Jewish thought which completely denied both the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body (Ac.23:8). In the Old Testament there is very little hope of anything that can be called life after death. According to the general Old Testament belief all men, without distinction, went to Sheol after death. Sheol, often wrongly translated Hell, was a gray land beneath the world, where the dead lived a shadowy existence, without strength, without light, cut off alike from men and from God. The Old Testament is full of this bleak, grim pessimism regarding what is to happen after death.

For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in Sheol
who can give thee praise? (Ps.6:5).

What profit is there in my death if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?
(Ps.30:9).

Dost thou work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise
up to praise thee? Is thy steadfast love declared in the
grave? Or thy faithfulness in Abaddon? Are thy wonders
known in the darkness, or thy saving help in the land of
forgetfulness? (Ps.88:10-12).

The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down
into silence. (Ps.115:17).

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For Sheol cannot thank thee, death cannot praise thee;
those who go down to the pit cannot hope for thy
faithfulness. (Isa.38:18).

Look away from me, that I may know gladness, before
I depart and be no more. (Ps.39:13).

But he who is joined with all the living has hope; for a living
dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that
they will die; but the dead know nothing.... Whatever
your hand finds to do do it with your might; for there
is no work, or thought, or knowledge, or wisdom, in
Sheol to which you are going. (Ecc.9:4-5,10).

Who shall give praise to the Most High in the grave?
(Ecc.17:27).

The dead that are in the grave, whose breath is taken from
their bodies, will give unto the Lord neither glory nor
righteousness. (Bar.2:17).

J. E. McFadyen, a great Old Testament scholar, says that this lack of a belief in immortality in the Old Testament is due "to the power with which those men apprehended God in this world." He goes on to say, "There are few more wonderful things than this in the long story of religion, that for centuries men lived the noblest lives, doing their duties and bearing their sorrows, without hope of future reward; and they did this because in all their going out and coming in they were very sure of God."

It is true that in the Old Testament there are some few, some very few, glimpses of a real life to come. There were times when a man felt that, if God be God at all, there must be something which would reverse the incomprehensible verdicts of this world. So Job cries out,

Still, I know One to champion me at last,
to stand up for me upon earth.
This body may break up, but even then
my life shall have a sight of God.
(Jb.19:25-27. Moffatt).

The real feeling of the saint was that even in this life a man might enter into a relationship with God so close and so precious that not even death could break it.

My body also dwells secure. For thou dost not give me up
to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou dost
show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness
of joy; in thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

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(Ps.16:9-11).

Thou dost hold my right hand. Thou dost guide me with thy counsel, and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory.

(Ps.73:24).

It is also true that in Israel the immortal hope developed. Two things helped that development. (a) Israel was the chosen people, and yet her history was one continued tale of disaster. Men began to feel that it required another world to redress the balance. (b) For many centuries it is true to say that the individual hardly existed. God was the God of the nation and the individual was an unimportant unit. But as the centuries went on religion became more and more personal. God became not the God of the nation but the friend of every individual; and so men began dimly and instinctively to feel that once a man knows God and is known by him, a relationship has been created which not even death can break.

(iii) When we turn to the Greek world, we must firmly grasp one thing, which is at the back of the whole chapter. The Greeks had an instinctive fear of death. Euripides wrote, "Yet mortals, burdened with countless ills, still love life. They long for each coming day, glad to bear the thing they know, rather than face death the unknown." (Fragment 813). But on the whole the Greeks, and that part of the world influenced by Greek thought, did believe in the immortality of the soul. But for them the immortality of the soul involved the complete dissolution of the body.

They had a proverb, "The body is a tomb." "I am a poor soul," said one of them, "shackled to a corpse." "It pleased me," said Seneca, "to enquire into the eternity of the soul--nay! to believe in it. I surrendered myself to that great hope." But he also says, "When the day shall come which shall part this mixture of divine and human, here, where I found it, I will leave my body, myself I will give back to the gods." Epictetus writes, "When God does not supply what is necessary, he is sounding the signal for retreat--he has opened the door and says to you 'Come!' But whither? To nothing terrible, but to whence you came, to the things which are dear and kin to you, to the elements.

What in you was fire shall go to fire, earth to earth, water to water." Seneca talks about things at death "being resolved into their ancient elements." For Plato "the body is the antithesis of the soul, as the source of all weaknesses as opposed to what alone is capable of independence and goodness." We can see this best in the Stoic belief. To the Stoic God was fiery spirit, purer than anything on earth. What gave men life was that a spark of this divine fire came and dwelt in a man's body. When a man died, his body simply dissolved into the elements of which it was made, but the divine spark returned to God and was absorbed in the divinity of which it was a part.

For the Greek immortality lay precisely in getting rid of the body. For him the resurrection of the body was unthinkable. Personal immortality did not really exist because that which gave men life was absorbed again in God the source of all life.

(iv) Paul's view was quite different. If we begin with one immense fact, the rest will become clear. The Christian belief is that after death individuality will survive, that you will still be you and I will still be I. Beside that we have to set another immense fact. To the Greek the body could not

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be consecrated. It was matter, the source of all evil, the prison-house of the soul. But to the Christian the body is not evil. Jesus, the Son of God, has taken this human body upon him and therefore it is not contemptible because it has been inhabited by God. To the Christian, therefore the life to come involves the total man, body and soul.

Now it is easy to misinterpret and to caricature the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Celsus, who lived about A.D. 220, a bitter opponent of Christianity, did this very thing long ago. How can those who have died rise with their identical bodies? he demands. "Really it is the hope of worms! For what soul of a man would any longer wish for a body that had rotted?" It is easy to cite the case of a person smashed up in an accident or dying of cancer.

But Paul never said that we would rise with the body with which we died. He insisted that we would have a spiritual body. What he really meant was that a man's personality would survive. It is almost impossible to conceive of personality without a body, because it is through the body that the personality expresses itself. What Paul is contending for is that after death the individual remains. He did not inherit the Greek contempt of the body but believed in the resurrection of the whole man. He will still be himself; he will survive as a person. That is what Paul means by the resurrection of the body. Everything of the body and of the soul that is necessary to make a man a person will survive, but, at the same time, all things will be new, and body and spirit will alike be very different from earthly things, for they will alike be divine.

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1 Corinthians 15:1-11

THE RISEN LORD

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Brothers, I want to make clear to you the nature of the good news that I preached to you, that gospel which you also received, and in which you stand, and through which you are saved. I want to make clear to you what account I gave you of the good news, an account which can save you if you hold fast to it, unless your belief is a random and haphazard thing. In the very forefront of it I handed on to you what I myself received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was laid in the tomb, and that he was raised up on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he was seen by Cephas and then by The Twelve, and that then he was seen by more than five hundred brothers all at the one time, of whom the majority are still alive, although some have fallen asleep. After that he was seen by James, and then by all the apostles, and last of all, as if by the abortion of the apostolic family, he was seen by me too.

For I am the least of the apostles; in fact I am not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God. It is by the grace of God that I am what I am, and his grace to me has not proved ineffective, but I have toiled more exceedingly than all of them; but it was not I who achieved anything but God's grace working with me. So then, whether I be the preacher or they, this is what we preach and this is what we have believed.

Paul is recapitulating the good news which he first brought to the Corinthians. It was not news which he had invented but news which had first been delivered to him, and it was news of a Risen Lord.

In 1Cor.15:1-2 Paul says an extremely interesting series of things about the good news.

(i) It was something which the Corinthians had received. No man ever invented the gospel for himself; in a sense no man ever discovers it for himself. It is something which he receives. Therein indeed is the very function of the Church. The Church is the repository and the transmitter of the good news. As one of the old fathers had it, "No man can have God for his Father, unless he has the Church for his mother." The good news is something that is received within a fellowship.

(ii) It was something in which the Corinthians stood. The very first function of the good news was to give a man stability. In a slippery world it kept him on his feet. In a tempting world it gave him resistance power. In a hurting world it enabled him to endure a broken heart or an agonized body and not to give in. Moffatt finely translates Jb.4:4, "Your words have kept men on their feet." That is precisely what the gospel does.

(iii) It was something in which they were being saved. It is interesting to note that in the Greek this is a present tense, and not past. It would be strictly correct to translate it not, "in which you have been saved," but, "in which you are being saved." Salvation goes from glory to glory. It is not something which is ever completed in this world. There are many things in this life which we can exhaust, but the meaning of salvation is something which a man can never exhaust.

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1 Corinthians 15:1-11

(iv) It was something to which a man had to hold tenaciously. Life makes many an attempt to take away our faith. Things happen to us and to others which baffle our understanding; life has its problems to which there seems no solution and its questions to which there seems no answer; life has its dark places where there seems to be nothing to do but hold on. Faith is always a victory, the victory of the soul which tenaciously maintains its clutch on God.

(v) It was something which must not be held haphazardly and at random. The faith which collapses is the faith which has not thought things out and thought them through. For so many of us faith is a superficial thing. We tend to accept things because we are told them and to possess them merely at secondhand. If we undergo the agony of thought there may be much that we must discard, but what is left is really ours in such a way that nothing can ever take it from us.

In Paul's list of appearances of the Risen Lord two are specially interesting.

(i) There is the appearance to Peter. In the earliest account of the Resurrection story, the word of the messenger in the empty tomb is, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter." (Mk.16:7). In Lk.24:34 the disciples say, "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon." It is an amazing thing that one of the first appearances of the Risen Lord was to the disciple who had denied him. There is all the wonder of the love and grace of Jesus Christ here. Others might have hated Peter forever, but the one desire of Jesus was to set this erratic disciple of his upon his feet. Peter had wronged Jesus and then had wept his heart out; and the one desire of this amazing Jesus was to comfort him in the pain of his disloyalty. Love can go no further than to think more of the heartbreak of the man who wronged it than of the hurt that it itself has received.

(ii) There is the appearance to James. Without doubt this James is the brother of our Lord. It is quite clear from the gospel narrative that Jesus' own family did not understand him and were even actively hostile to him. Mk.3:21 tells us that they actually sought to restrain him because they believed him to be mad. Jn.7:5 tells us that his brothers did not believe in him. One of the earliest of those gospels which did not succeed in getting into the New Testament is the Gospel according to the Hebrews. Only fragments of it remain.

One fragment, preserved by Jerome, reads, "Now the Lord, when he had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the priest, went unto James and appeared unto him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour wherein he had drunk the Lord's cup until he should see him risen again from among them that sleep)." So, the story runs, "Jesus went to James and said, 'Bring ye a table and bread.' And he took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it unto James the Just and said unto him, 'My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep.'" We can only conjecture what lies behind this. It may well be that the last days turned James' contempt into wondering admiration so that when the end came, he was so torn with remorse for the way in which he had treated his brother that he swore that he would starve unless he came back to forgive him. Here once again we have the amazing grace and love of Christ.

He came to bring peace to the troubled soul of the man who had called him mad and who had been his opponent.

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It is one of the most heart-moving things in all the story of Jesus that two of his first appearances, after he rose from the tomb, were to men who had hurt him and were sorry for it. Jesus meets the penitent heart far more than halfway.

Finally, in this passage we have a vivid light thrown on the character of Paul himself. To him it was the most precious thing in the world that Jesus had appeared also to him. That was at one and the same time the turning point and the dynamic moment of his life. But 1Cor.15:9-11 tell us much about him.

(i) They tell us of his utter humility. He is the least of the apostles; he has been glorified with an office for which he is not worthy. Paul would never have claimed to be a self-made man. It was by the grace of God that he was what he was. He is perhaps even accepting a taunt made against him. It would seem that he was a little and an unhandsome man (2Cor.10:10). It may be that the Jewish Christians who wished to impose the law upon Christian converts and who hated his doctrine of free grace, declared that, so far from being born again, Paul was an abortion. He, for his part, was so conscious of his own unworthiness that he felt no one could say anything too bad about him. Charles Gore once said, "On a general review of life we can seldom feel that we are suffering unmerited wrong." Paul felt like that. His was not the pride which resented the criticisms and the taunts of men, but the humility which felt that it deserved them.

(ii) They tell us at the same time of the consciousness of his own worth. He was well aware that he had laboured beyond them all. His was not a false modesty. But even at that, he spoke always, not of what he had done, but of what God had enabled him to do.

(iii) They tell of his sense of fellowship. He did not regard himself as an isolated phenomenon with a message that was unique. He and the other apostles preached the same gospel. His was the greatness which bound him closer to the Christian fellowship; there is always something lacking in the greatness which divides a man from his fellows.

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1 Corinthians 15:12-19

IF CHRIST BE NOT RAISED

1 Corinthians 15:12-19

If it is continually proclaimed that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some among you say that the resurrection of the dead does not exist? If the resurrection from among the dead does not exist, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then the proclamation of the faith is emptied of its meaning, and your faith has been emptied of its meaning too. If that is so we are shown to have borne false witness about God, because we witnessed about God, that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise, if indeed the dead are not raised up. If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised your faith is worthless, you are still in your sins; and, if that is so, those who died trusting in Christ have perished. If it is only in this life that we have hope in Christ, then we are more to be pitied than all men.

Paul attacks the central position of his opponents at Corinth. They said flatly, "Dead men do not rise again." Paul's answer is, "If you take up that position it means that Jesus Christ has not risen again; and if that be so, the whole Christian faith is wrecked."

Why did Paul regard a belief in the Resurrection of Jesus as so essential? What great values and great truths does it conserve? It proves four great facts, which can make all the difference to a man's view of life here and hereafter.

(i) The Resurrection proves that truth is stronger than falsehood. According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus said to his enemies, "Now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth." (Jn.8:40). Jesus came with the true idea of God and of goodness; his enemies procured his death because they did not want their own false view destroyed. If they had succeeded in finally obliterating him, falsehood would have been stronger than truth. On one occasion the Earl of Morton, regent of Scotland, sent for Andrew Melville, the great Reformation leader. "There will never be quietness in this country," said Morton, "till half a dozen of you be hanged or banished the country." "Tush! sir," said Melville, "threaten your courtiers in that fashion. It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or in the ground.... Yet God be glorified, it will not lie in your power to hang nor excommunicate his truth!" The Resurrection is the final guarantee of the indestructibility of the truth.

(ii) The Resurrection proves that good is stronger than evil. Again to quote the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is represented as saying to his enemies, "You are of your father, the devil." (Jn.8:44). The forces of evil crucified Jesus and if there had been no Resurrection these forces would have been triumphant. J. A. Froude, the great historian, wrote, "One lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctness, that the world is built somehow on moral foundations, that in the long run it is well with the good, and in the long run it is ill with the wicked." But if the Resurrection had not taken place, that very principle would have been imperilled, and we could never again be certain that goodness is stronger than evil.

(iii) The Resurrection proves that love is stronger than hatred. Jesus was the love of God incarnate.

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1 Corinthians 15:12-19

"Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine."

On the other hand, the attitude of those who procured his crucifixion was an almost virulent hatred, so bitter that in the end it was capable of ascribing the loveliness and graciousness of his life to the power of the devil. If there had been no Resurrection, it would have meant that the hatred of man in the end conquered the love of God. The Resurrection is the triumph of love over all that hatred could do. This very beautiful poem sums up the whole matter.

"I heard two soldiers talking
As they came down the hill,
The sombre hill of Calvary,
Bleak and black and still.
And one said, 'The night is late,
These thieves take long to die.'
And one said, 'I am sore afraid,
And yet I know not why.'

I heard two women weeping
As down the hill they came,
And one was like a broken rose,
And one was like a flame.
One said, 'Men shall rue
This deed their hands have done.'
And one said only through her tears,
'My son! my son! my son!'

I heard two angels singing
Ere yet the dawn was bright,
And they were clad in shining robes,
Robes and crowns of light.
And one sang, 'Death is vanquished,'
And one in golden voice
Sang, 'Love hath conquered, conquered all,
O heaven and earth rejoice!'"

The Resurrection is the final proof that love is stronger than hate.

(iv) The Resurrection proves that life is stronger than death. If Jesus had died never to rise again, it would have proved that death could take the loveliest and best life that ever lived and finally break it. During the second world war a certain city church in London was all set out for harvest thanksgiving. In the centre of the gifts was a sheaf of corn. The service was never held, for, on the Saturday night, a savage air raid laid the church in ruins. The months passed and the spring came, and someone noticed that, on the bomb site where the church had stood, there were shoots of green.

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The summer came and the shoots flourished and in the autumn there was a flourishing patch of corn growing amidst the rubble. Not even the bombs and the destruction could kill the life of the corn and its seeds. The Resurrection is the final proof that life is stronger than death.

Paul insisted that if the Resurrection of Jesus was not a fact the whole Christian message was based on a lie, that many thousands had died trusting in a delusion, that without it the greatest values in life have no guarantee. "Take away the Resurrection," he said, "and you destroy both the foundation and the fabric of the Christian faith."

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1 Corinthians 15:20-28

THE FIRST-FRUITS OF THOSE THAT SLEEP

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Now then Christ has been raised from among the dead, the first-fruits of those who sleep. For, since it was through one man that death came, it was also through one man that the resurrection of the dead came. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. Each comes in his own rank. Christ is the first-fruits, and then those who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes. After that comes the final end, when he will hand over the Kingdom to God, his father, when he has reduced to helplessness every other rule, and every other authority and power. For he must reign until he puts all his enemies under his feet. Death will be the last enemy to be reduced to helplessness. For God has subjected all things to him. (When we say that all things have been subjected to him, that of course does not include him who subjected them to him). But when all things have been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to him who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all.

This again is a very difficult passage because it deals with ideas which are strange to us.

It speaks of Christ as "the first-fruits of them that sleep." Paul is thinking in terms of a picture which every Jew would recognize. The Feast of the Passover had more than one significance. It commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. But it was also a great harvest festival. It fell just at the time when the barley harvest was due to be ingathered. The law laid it down, "You shall bring the sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest to the priest; and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance; on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it." (Lev.23:10-11). Some sheaves of barley must be reaped from a common field. They must not be taken from a garden or an orchard or from specially prepared soil. They must come from a typical field. When the barley was cut, it was brought to the Temple. There it was threshed with soft canes so as not to bruise it.

It was then parched over the fire in a perforated pan so that every grain was touched by the fire. It was then exposed to the wind so that the chaff was blown away. It was then ground in a barley mill and its flour was offered to God. That was the first-fruits.

It is significant to note that not until after that was done could the new barley be bought and sold in the shops and bread be made from the new flour. The first-fruits were a sign of the harvest to come; and the Resurrection of Jesus was a sign of the resurrection of all believers which was to come. Just as the new barley could not be used until the first-fruits had been duly offered, so the new harvest of life could not come until Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Paul goes on to use another Jewish idea. According to the old story in Gen.3:1-19 it was through Adam's sin that death came into the world as its direct consequence and penalty. The Jews believed that all men literally sinned in Adam; we see that his sin might transmit to his descendants the tendency to sin. As Aeschylus said, "The impious deed leaves after it a larger progeny, all in the likeness of the parent stock." As George Eliot wrote, "Our deeds are like children that are born to us, they live and act apart from our will; nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never. They have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness."

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Nobody would be likely to deny that a child can inherit a tendency to sin and that the father's sins are literally visited upon the children. No one would deny that a child can inherit the consequences of a father's sin, for we know all too well how physical conditions which are the consequence of an immoral life can be transmitted to the child. But the Jew meant more than that. He had a tremendous sense of solidarity. He was sure that no man could ever do anything that could affect only himself. And he held that all men sinned in Adam. The whole world of men was, as it were, in him; and when he sinned all sinned.

That may seem a strange idea to us and unfair. But that was the Jewish belief. All had sinned in Adam, therefore all were under the penalty of death. With the coming of Christ that chain was broken. Christ was sinless and conquered death. Just as all men sinned in Adam, so all men escape from sin in Christ; and just as all men died in Adam, so all men conquered death in Christ. Our unity with Christ is just as real as our unity with Adam and this destroys the evil effect of the old.

So we get two contrasting sets of facts. First, there is Adam--sin--death. Second, there is Christ--goodness--life. And just as we were all involved in the sin of him who was first created, we are all involved in the victory of him who re-created mankind. However we may estimate that way of thinking today, it was convincing to those who heard it for the first time; and, whatever else is doubtful, it remains true that with Jesus Christ a new power came into the world to liberate men from sin and death.

1Cor.15:24-28 read very strangely to us. We are used to thinking of the Father and the Son on terms of equality. But here Paul clearly and deliberately subordinates the Son to the Father. What he is thinking of is this. We can use only human terms and analogies. God gave to Jesus a task to do, to defeat sin and death and to liberate man. The day will come when that task will be fully and finally accomplished, and then, to put it in pictorial terms, the Son will return to the Father like a victor coming home and the triumph of God will be complete. It is not a case of the Son being subject to the Father as a slave or even a servant is to a master. It is a case of one who, having accomplished the work that was given him to do, returns with the glory of complete obedience as his crown. As God sent forth his Son to redeem the world, so in the end he will receive back a world redeemed; and then there will be nothing in heaven or in earth outside his love and power.

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1 Corinthians 15:29-34

IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

If there is no resurrection, what will those who are baptized for the dead do? If the dead are not raised at all, why do people get themselves baptized for them? Every day I take my life in my hands, I swear it by the pride which I have in you in Christ Jesus our Lord. What good is it to me--looking at it from the human point of view--if at Ephesus I had to fight with beasts in the arena? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. Don't deceive yourselves--evil friendships destroy good characters. Turn to sober living, as it is only right that you should, and don't go on sinning. Some of you boast about your knowledge, but you have not a vestige of knowledge about God. It is to shame you that I speak.

Once again this passage begins with a very difficult section. People have always been puzzled about what being baptized for the dead means, and even yet the problem is not definitely settled. The preposition for in the phrase for the dead is the Greek *huper* (GSN5228). In general this word can have two main meanings. When used of place, it can mean above or over. Far more commonly it is used of persons or things and means instead of or on behalf of. Remembering these two meanings, let us look at some of the ways this phrase has been understood.

(i) Beginning from the meaning of over or above, some scholars have suggested that it refers to those who get themselves baptized over the graves of the martyrs. The idea is that there would be something specially moving in being baptized on sacred ground with the thought of the unseen cloud of witnesses all around. It is an attractive and rather lovely idea, but at the time Paul was writing to the Corinthians persecution had not yet broken out in anything like a big way. Christians might suffer ostracism and social persecution, but the time of the martyrs had not yet come.

(ii) It is in any event much more natural to take *huper* in the sense of instead of or on behalf of. If we take it that way there are three possibilities. It is suggested that the phrase refers to those who get themselves baptized in order to fill up the vacant places in the Church which the dead have left. The idea is that the new believer, the young Christian, comes into the Church like a new recruit to take the place of the veterans who have served their campaign and earned their release. There is a great thought there. The Church ever needs its replacements and the new member is like the volunteer who fills up the depleted ranks.

(iii) It is suggested that the phrase means those who get themselves baptized out of respect for and affection for the dead. Again there is a precious truth here. Many of us came into the Church because we knew and remembered that some loved one had died praying and hoping for us. Many have in the end given their lives to Christ because of the unseen influence of one who has passed over to the other side.

(iv) All these are lovely thoughts, but in the end we think that this phrase can refer to only one custom, which has quite correctly passed out of Church practice altogether. In the early Church there was vicarious baptism. If a person died who had intended to become a member of the Church and was actually under instruction, sometimes someone else underwent baptism for him. The

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custom sprang from a superstitious view of baptism, that, without it, a person was necessarily excluded from the bliss of heaven. It was to safeguard against this exclusion that sometimes people volunteered to be baptized literally on behalf of those who had died. Here Paul neither approves nor disapproves that practice. He merely asks if there can be any point in it if there is no resurrection and the dead never rise again.

From that he passes on to one of the great motives of the Christian life. In effect he asks, "Why should a Christian accept the perils of the Christian life if it is all to go for nothing?" He quotes his own experience. Every day he is in jeopardy of his life. Something terrible of which the New Testament has no record happened to Paul at Ephesus. He refers to it again in 2Cor.1:8-10: he says that in Asia, that is in Ephesus, he was in such dire peril that he despaired of life and had the sentence of death passed upon him. To this day in Ephesus there is a building known as Paul's prison. Here he calls his peril fighting with beasts. The word he uses is that used of a gladiator in the arena. The later legends tell us that he actually did so fight and that he was wondrously preserved because the beasts would not attack him. But Paul was a Roman citizen and no Roman citizen could be compelled to fight in the arena.

Much more likely he used the phrase as a vivid picture of being threatened by men who were as savage for his life as a wild beast might have been. In any event he demands, "To what end is all the peril and the suffering if there is no life beyond?"

The man who thinks that this life is all, and that there is nothing to follow it, may well say, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." The Bible itself quotes those who speak like that. "Come," they say, "let us get wine, let us fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow will be like this day, great beyond measure." (Isa.56:12). The preacher, who held that death was extinction, wrote, "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment from his toil." (Ecc.2:24, compare Ecc.3:12; Ecc.5:18; Ecc.8:15; Ecc.9:7). Jesus himself told about the rich fool who forgot eternity and took as his motto, "Eat, drink and be merry." (Lk.12:19).

Classical literature is full of this spirit. Herodotus, the Greek historian, tells of a custom of the Egyptians. "In social meetings among the rich, when the banquet is ended, a servant carries round to the several guests a coffin, in which there is a wooden image of a corpse, carved and painted to resemble nature as nearly as possible, about a cubit or two cubits in length. As he shows it to each guest in turn, the servant says, 'Gaze here, and drink and be merry, for when you die, such will you be.'" Euripides writes in the *Alcestis* (781-789, A. S. Way's translation):

"From all mankind the debt of death is due,
For of all mortals is there one that knows
If through the coming morrow he shall live?
For trackless is the way of fortune's feet,
Not to be taught nor won by art of man.
This hearing then, and learning it of me,
Make merry, drink; the life from day to day
Account thine own, all else in fortune's power."

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Thucydides (2: 53) tells how, when the mortal plague came to Athens, people committed every shameful crime and eagerly snatched at every lustful pleasure because they believed that life was short and they would never have to pay the penalty. Horace (Odes 2: 13; 13) gives as his philosophy, "Tell them to bring wines and perfumes and the too-short-lived blossoms of the lovely rose while circumstances and age and the black threads of the three sisters (the Fates) still allow us to do so." In one of the most famous poems in the world the Latin poet Catullus wrote, "Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love, and let us value the tales of austere old men at a single halfpenny. Suns can set and then return again, but for us, when once our brief light sets, there is but one perpetual night through which we must sleep."

Take away the thought of a life to come and this life loses its values. Take away the idea that this life is a preparation for a greater life to follow and the bonds of honour and morality are loosened. It is useless to argue that this should not be so and that men should not be good and honourable simply for the sake of some reward. The fact remains that the man who believes that this is the only world tends to live as if the things of this world are all that matter.

So Paul insists that the Corinthians must not associate with those who say that there is no resurrection; for this would be to risk an infection which can pollute life. To say that there is no resurrection is not a sign of superior knowledge; it is a sign of utter ignorance of God. Paul is unleashing the lash that very shame may bring these wanderers back into the right way.

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1 Corinthians 15:35-49

THE PHYSICAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

1 Corinthians 15:35-49

But perhaps someone says, "In what form are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" That is a foolish question. When you sow a seed, it cannot be made alive, unless it first dies. It is not the body which is going to come into existence that is sown, but a seed which is not clothed in a body at all, it may be of corn, or of some other of the crops. But God gives it a body as he wills, and to each of the seeds he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh. But there is one kind of flesh of men, and another of beasts, and another of birds, and another of fishes. There are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies. The splendour of the heavenly bodies is one thing, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one splendour and the moon another splendour and the stars another splendour. I say stars, not star, for star differs from star in splendour. There is the same difference between this body and the body we shall have in the resurrection of the dead.

Our body is like the seed. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. For if a physical body exists, so does a spiritual one. For it stands written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." It is not the spiritual that comes first, but the physical, and after that the spiritual. The first man is of the earth and was made of earth--the second man is from heaven. Such as are made of earth are like earth; such as are heavenly, are like the heavenly one; and, as we have borne the image of that which is of earth, so we shall also bear the image of him who is of heaven.

Before we begin to try to interpret this section we would do well to remember one thing--all through it Paul is talking about things that no one really knows anything about. He is talking not about verifiable matters of fact, but about matters of faith. Trying to express the inexpressible and to describe the indescribable, he is doing the best he can with the human ideas and human words that are all that he has to work with. If we remember that, it will save us from a crudely literalistic interpretation and make us fasten our thoughts on the underlying principles in Paul's mind. In this section he is dealing with people who say, "Granted that there is a resurrection of the body, with what kind of body do people rise again?" His answer has three basic principles in it.

(i) He takes the analogy of a seed. The seed is put in the ground and dies, but in due time it rises again; and does so with a very different kind of body from that with which it was sown. Paul is showing that, at one and the same time, there can be dissolution, difference and yet continuity. The seed is dissolved; when it rises again, there is a vast difference in its body; and yet, in spite of the dissolution and the difference, it is the same seed. So our earthly bodies will dissolve; they will rise again in very different form; but it is the same person who rises. Dissolved by death, changed by resurrection, it is still we who exist.

(ii) In the world, even as we know it, there is not one kind of body; each separate part of creation has its own. God gives to each created thing a body suitable for its part in creation. If that be so, it is only reasonable to expect that he will give us a body fitted for the resurrection life.

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(iii) In life there is a development. Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth (Gen.2:7). But Jesus is far more than a man made from the dust of the earth. He is the incarnation of the very Spirit of God. Now, under the old way of life, we were one with Adam, sharing his sin, inheriting his death and having his body; but, under the new way of life, we are one with Christ and we shall therefore share his life and his being. It is true that we have a physical body to begin with, but it is also true that one day we shall have a spiritual body.

All through this section Paul has maintained a reverent and wise reticence as to what that body will be like; it will be spiritual, it will be such as God knows that we need and we will be like Christ. But in 1Cor.15:42-44 he draws four contrasts which shed light on our future state.

(i) The present body is corruptible; the future body will be incorruptible. In this world everything is subject to change and decay. "Youth's beauty fades, and manhood's glory fades," as Sophocles had it. But in the life to come there will be a permanence in which beauty will never lose its sheen.

(ii) The present body is in dishonour; the future body will be in glory. It may be that Paul means that in this life it is through our bodily feelings and passions that dishonour can so easily come; but in the life to come our bodies will no longer be the servants of passion and of impulse but the instruments of the pure service of God, than which there can be no greater honour.

(iii) The present body is in weakness; the future body will be in power. It is nowadays fashionable to talk of man's power, but the really remarkable thing is his weakness. A draught of air or a drop of water can kill him. We are limited in this life so often simply because of the necessary limitations of the body. Time and time again our physical constitution says to our visions and our plans, "Thus far and no farther." We are so often frustrated because we are what we are. But in the life to come the limitations will be gone. Here we are compassed about with weakness; there we will be clad with power.

"All we have hoped or willed or dreamed of good
shall exist;
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth
too hard."

On earth we have the "broken arcs"; in the life to come "the perfect round."

(iv) The present body is a natural body; the future body will be a spiritual body. By that, it may be, Paul meant that here we are but imperfect vessels and imperfect instruments for the Spirit; but in the life to come we will be such that the Spirit can truly fill us, as can never happen here, and the Spirit can truly use us, as is never possible now. Then we will be able to render the perfect worship, the perfect service, the perfect love that now can only be a vision and a dream.

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1 Corinthians 15:50-58

THE CONQUEST OF DEATH

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

Brothers, I say this, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption. Look now--I tell you something which only the initiated can understand. We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed, in a moment of time, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised up incorruptible and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, then the word which stands written will happen, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, beloved brothers, show yourselves steady, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your toil does not go for nothing.

Once again we must remember that Paul is dealing with things which defy language and baffle expression. We must read this as we would read great poetry, rather than as we would dissect a scientific treatise. The argument follows a series of steps until it reaches its climax.

(i) Paul insists that, as we are, we are not fit to inherit the Kingdom of God. We may be well enough equipped to get on with the life of this world, but for the life of the world to come we will not do. A man may be able to run enough to catch his morning train and yet need to be very different to be able to run enough for the Olympic games. A man may write well enough to amuse his friends and yet need to be very different to write something which men will not willingly let die. A man may talk well enough in the circle of his club and yet need to be very different to hold his own in a circle of real experts. A man always needs to be changed to enter into a higher grade of life; and Paul insists that before we can enter the Kingdom of God we must be changed.

(ii) Further he insists that this shattering change is going to come in his own lifetime. In this he was in error; but he looked to that change coming when Jesus Christ came again.

(iii) Then Paul goes on triumphantly to declare that no man need fear that change. The fear of death has always haunted men. It haunted Dr. Johnson, one of the greatest and best men who ever lived. Once Boswell said to him that there had been times when he had not feared death. Johnson answered that "he never had a moment in which death was not terrible to him." Once Mrs. Knowles told him that he should not have a horror for that which is the gate of life. Johnson answered, "No rational man can die without uneasy apprehension." He declared that the fear of death was so natural to man that all life was one long effort not to think about it.

Wherein lies the fear of death? Partly it comes from fear of the unknown. But still more it comes from the sense of sin. If a man felt that he could meet God easily then to die would be only, as Peter Pan said, a great adventure. But where does that sense of sin come from? It comes from a sense of being under the law. So long as a man sees in God only the law of righteousness, he must ever be in the position of a criminal before the bar with no hope of acquittal. But this is precisely what Jesus came to abolish. He came to tell us that God is not law, but love, that the centre of God's being is

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1 Corinthians 15:50-58

not legalism but grace, that we go out, not to a judge, but to a Father who awaits his children coming home. Because of that Jesus gave us the victory over death, its fear banished in the wonder of God's love.

(iv) Finally, at the end of the chapter, Paul does what he always does. Suddenly the theology becomes a challenge; suddenly the speculations become intensely practical; suddenly the sweep of the mind becomes the demand for action. He ends by saying, "If you have all that glory to look forward to, then keep yourself steadfast in God's faith and service, for if you do, all your effort will not be in vain." The Christian life may be difficult, but the goal is infinitely worth the struggle.

"A hope so great and so divine,
May trials well endure;
And purge the soul from sense and sin,
As Christ himself is pure."

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1 Corinthians 16:1-12

PRACTICAL PLANS

1 Corinthians 16:1-12

With regard to the collection for the people of Christ, do you too follow the instructions which I gave to the Churches of Galatia. Every first day of the week each of you must put by and save up whatever his prosperity demands, so that there may be no need to take collections when I arrive. Whenever I arrive, I will send whoever you approve by letter to take your gifts to Jerusalem. If it is fitting for me to go, too, they will travel with me. I will come to you after I have passed through Macedonia. Possibly I may stay with you, or I may even spend the winter with you so that you may speed me on my way wherever I go. I do not want to see you now in the passing, for I hope to stay some time with you, if the Lord permits it. I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a great and effective door stands open to me, although my opponents are many.

If Timothy comes, see that he may be able to stay with you without fear. He is doing God's work just as I, too, am doing it, so let no one look down on him. Speed him on his way with the blessing of peace that he may come to me, for I and the brothers are eagerly waiting for him. With regard to Apollos, the brother, I have strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers, but he was all against coming to you just now, but will come when the time is convenient.

There is nothing more typical of Paul than the abrupt change between 1Cor.15 and 1Cor.16. 1Cor.15 has been walking in the loftiest realms of thought and theology, and discussing the life of the world to come. 1Cor.16 deals with the most practical things in the most practical way and is concerned with the everyday life of this world and the administration of the Church. There is no reach of thought too high for Paul to scale and no practical detail of administration too small for him to remember. He was very far from being one of those visionaries, who are at home in the realms of theological speculation and quite lost in practical matters. There might be times when his head was in the clouds but his feet were always planted firmly on the solid earth.

He begins by dealing with the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. This was an undertaking very dear to Paul's heart. (compare Gal.2:10; 2Cor.8-9; Rom.15:25; Ac.24:17). There was a certain brotherliness in the ancient world. In the Greek world there were associations called *eranoi*. If a person fell on evil days or was in sudden need, his friends would club together to raise an interest-free loan to help him. The synagogue had officials whose duty it was to collect from those who had and to share out to those who had not. Quite frequently Jews who had gone abroad and prospered sent their envoys to Jerusalem with contributions for the Temple and for the poor. Paul did not want the Christian Church to be behind the Jewish and the heathen world in generosity.

But to him this collection for the poor at Jerusalem meant more than that. (i) It was a way of demonstrating the unity of the Church. It was a way of teaching the scattered Christians that they were not members of a congregation only, but members of a Church, each part of which had obligations to the rest. The narrowly congregational outlook was far from the Pauline conception of the Church. (ii) It was a way of putting into effect the practical teaching of Christianity. By arranging this collection Paul was providing his converts with an opportunity of translating into action the teaching of Christ on the virtue of love.

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1 Corinthians 16:1-12

It has been pointed out that, in different letters and speeches, Paul uses no fewer than nine different words to describe this collection.

(i) Here he calls it a logia (GSN3048); the word means an extra collection. A logia was something which was the opposite of a tax which a man had to pay; it was an extra piece of giving. A man never satisfies his Christian duty by discharging the obligations which he can legally be compelled to fulfil. The question of Jesus was, "What more are you doing than others?" (Matt.5:47).

(ii) Sometimes he calls it a charis (GSN5485) (1Cor.16:3; 2Cor.8:4). As we have already seen, the characteristic of charis (GSN5485) is that it describes a free gift freely given. The really lovely thing is not something extracted from a man, however large it be, but something given in the overflowing love of a man's heart, however small it be. We must note that Paul does not lay down a flat rate which each Corinthian Christian must give; he tells them that they must give as their prosperity demands. A man's heart must tell him what to give.

(iii) Sometimes he uses the word koinonia (GSN2842) (2Cor.8:4; 2Cor.9:13; Rom.15:6). Koinonia means fellowship, and the essence of fellowship is sharing. Christian fellowship is based on the spirit which cannot hug to itself that which it has, but which regards all its possessions as things to be shared with others. Its dominating question is not, "What can I keep?" but, "What can I give?"

(iv) Sometimes he uses the word diakonia (GSN1248) (2Cor.8:4; 2Cor.9:1, 2Cor.9:12-13). Diakonia means practical Christian service. It is from its kindred word diakonos (GSN1249) that we get our English word deacon. It may sometimes happen that the limitations of life prevent us from rendering personal service and it may often happen that our money can go where we cannot go.

(v) Once he uses the word hadrotes (GSN0100), whose meaning is abundance (2Cor.8:20). In that passage Paul speaks of the envoys of the Church who accompany him to guarantee that he does not misuse the abundance which is entrusted to him. Paul would never have desired an abundance for himself. He was content with what he could earn with the toil of his hands and the sweat of his brow. But he was glad in heart when he had abundance to give away. It is a grim commentary on human nature that, when a man is dreaming of what he would do if he was a millionaire, he almost always begins by thinking what he would buy for himself, and seldom of what he would give away.

(vi) Sometimes he uses the word eulogia (GSN2129), which in this case means bounty (2Cor.9:5). There is a kind of giving which is not a bounty. The gift is given as a bleak and unavoidable duty, given with a grudge and with no delight. All true giving is a bounty which we are supremely glad to give.

(vii) Sometimes he uses the word leitourgia (GSN3009) (2Cor.9:12). In classical Greek this is a word with a noble history. In the great days of Athens there were generous citizens who volunteered out of their own pockets to shoulder the expenses of some enterprise on which the city

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was engaged. It might be to defray the expenses of training the chorus for some new drama or some team to compete for the honour of the city in the games; it might be to pay for the outfitting and manning of a trireme or man-of-war in time of the city's peril. A leitourgia (GSN3009) was originally a service of the state voluntarily accepted. Christian giving is something which should be volunteered. It should be accepted as a privilege to help in some way the household of God.

(viii) Once he speaks of this collection as eleemosune (GSN1654) (Ac.24:17). That is the Greek word for alms. So central was alms-giving to the Jewish idea of religion, that the Jew could use the same word for almsgiving and righteousness.

"Alms given to a father shall not be blotted out,
And it shall stand firm as a substitute for sin;
In the day of trouble it shall be remembered,
Obliterating thine iniquities as the heat the
hoar frost" (Ecc.14:15).

The Jew would have said, "How can a man show that he is a good man except by being generous?"

(ix) Lastly he uses the word prosphora (GSN4376) (Ac.24:17). The interesting thing is that prosphora is the word for an offering and a sacrifice. In the realest sense that which is given to a man in need is a sacrifice to God. The best of all sacrifices to him, after the sacrifice of the penitent heart, is kindness shown to one of his children in trouble.

At the end of this section Paul commends two of his helpers. The first is Timothy. Timothy had the disadvantage of being a young man. The situation in Corinth was difficult enough for the experienced Paul; it would be infinitely worse for Timothy. Paul's commendation is that they are to respect Timothy, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the work that he is doing. It is not the man who glorifies the work but the work which glorifies the man. There is no dignity like the dignity of a great task. The second is Apollos. Apollos emerges from this passage as a man of great wisdom. Right at the beginning of this letter we saw that there was a party in Corinth who, quite without the sanction of Apollos, had attached themselves to his name. Apollos knew that, and, no doubt, he wished to stay away from Corinth, lest that party try to annex him. He was wise enough to know that, when a Church is torn with party politics, there is a time when it is wiser and more far-sighted to stay away.

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1 Corinthians 16:13-24

CLOSING WORDS AND GREETINGS

1 Corinthians 16:13-24

Be on the alert; stand fast in the faith; play the man; be strong. Let all your affairs be transacted in love.

Brothers I urge you--(you know the family of Stephanas was the first-fruits of God's harvest in Achaia and that they have laid themselves out to be of help to Christ's people)--that you too may be obedient to such men and to all who share in the common work of the gospel and who toil for it. I rejoice at the arrival of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they filled up all the gaps in my news about you. They have refreshed my spirit and yours. Give full acknowledgment to such men.

The Churches of Asia send you their greetings. Aquila and Prisca send you many greetings in the Lord together with the Church that is in their house. All the brothers send their greetings. Greet each other with a holy kiss.

Here is my greeting written in the handwriting of me Paul. If anyone does not love the Lord let him be accursed. The Lord is at hand. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

This is an interesting passage because its very practical nature and its ordinariness shed a vivid light on the day to day life of the early Church.

Paul begins with a series of five imperatives. It may well be that all the first four have a military background and are like a commander's orders to his soldiers. "As a sentinel, be ever on the alert. When under attack, stand fast in the faith and yield not an inch. In time of battle, play a hero's part. Like a well-equipped and well-trained soldier, be strong to fight for your King." Then the metaphor changes. Whatever the Christian soldier be to those persons and things which threaten the Christian faith from the outside, to those within the Church he must be a comrade and a lover. In the Christian life there must be the courage which will never retreat and the love which will never fail.

To Paul in Ephesus there had come Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, and they had brought him first-hand information which filled in the gaps in his knowledge of what was happening at Corinth. His commendation of Stephanas is very interesting. Stephanas deserved respect because he had put himself at the service of the Church. In the early Church willing and spontaneous service was the beginning of official office. A man became a leader of the Church, not so much by man-made appointment, as by the fact that his life and work marked him out as one whom all men must respect. T. C. Edwards says, "In the Church many work, but few toil."

1Cor.16:19-20 are a series of greetings. Greetings are sent from Aquila and Priscilla. These two people, man and wife, move across the background of Paul's letters and the Book of Acts. They were Jews, and, like Paul, were tent-makers. Originally they had been settled in Rome, but in A.D. 49 or 50 Claudius, the Roman Emperor, had issued a decree banishing all Jews from Rome. Aquila

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and Priscilla found their way to Corinth, and it was there that Paul first met them (Ac.18:2). From Corinth they found their way to Ephesus, from which now Paul sends their greetings to their old associates in Corinth. From Rom.16:3 we find that they found their way back to Rome and settled there again. One of the interesting things about Aquila and Priscilla is that they show us how easy and natural travel was even at that time. They followed their trade from Palestine to Rome, from Rome to Corinth, from Corinth to Ephesus, and from Ephesus back to Rome.

There is one great thing about these two. In those early days there were no church buildings. It is, in fact, not until the third century that we hear about a church building at all. The little congregations met in private houses. If a house had a room big enough, it was there that the Christian fellowship met. Now wherever Aquila and Priscilla went, their home became a church. When they are in Rome, Paul sends greetings to them and to the church that is their house (Rom.16:3-5). When he writes from Ephesus, he sends greetings from them and from the church that is in their house. Aquila and Priscilla were two of these wonderful people who make their homes centres of Christian light and love, who welcome many guests because Christ is always their unseen guest, who make their houses havens of rest and peace and friendship for the lonely and the tempted and the sad and the depressed.

A great compliment Homer paid one of his characters was to say of him, "He dwelt in a house by the side of the road and he was the friend of wayfaring men." The Christian wayfarer ever found an inn of peace where Aquila and Priscilla lived. God grant to us to make our homes like that!

"Greet each other," writes Paul, "with a holy kiss." The kiss of peace was a lovely custom of the early Church. It may have been a Jewish custom which the early Church took over. It was apparently given at the end of the prayers and just before the congregation partook of the sacrament. It was the sign and symbol that they sat at the table of love joined together in perfect love. Cyril of Jerusalem writes of it, "Do not think that this kiss is like the kiss given to each other by mutual friends in the market place." It was not given promiscuously. Certainly in later times it was not given between men and women, but between man and man, and woman and woman. Sometimes it was given not on the lips but on the hand. It came to be called simply "The Peace." Surely never did a church need to be recalled to that lovely custom more than this Church at Corinth, so torn with strife and dissension.

Why did that lovely custom pass from the Church's life? First, it faded because, lovely though it was, it was obviously liable to abuse, and, still more, it was liable to misinterpretation by heathen slanders. Second, it faded because the Church became less and less of a fellowship. In the little house churches, where friend met with friend and all were closely bound together, it was the most natural thing in the world; but, when the house fellowship became a vast congregation and the little room became a great church, the intimacy went lost and the kiss of peace went lost with it. It may well be that with our vast congregations we have lost something, for the bigger and more scattered a congregation is the more difficult it is for it to be a fellowship, where people really know and really love each other. And yet a church which is a collection of strangers, or, at the best, of acquaintances, is not a true church in the deepest sense.

And so to the end. Paul sends his own autograph greeting on the last page of the letter which some secretary had taken down for him. He warns them against anyone who does not love Christ.

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And then he writes in Aramaic the phrase, "Maran atha (GSN3134)," which most probably means, "The Lord is at hand." It is strange to meet with an Aramaic phrase in a Greek letter to a Greek church. The explanation is that that phrase had become a watchword and a password. It summed up the vital hope of the early Church, and Christians identified each other by it, in a language which the heathen could not understand.

Two last things Paul sends to the folk at Corinth--the grace of Christ and his own love. He might have had occasion to warn, to rebuke, to speak with righteous anger, but the last word is love.

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Introduction to the Corinthian Letters

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

THE GREATNESS OF CORINTH

A glance at the map will show that Corinth was made for greatness. The southern part of Greece is very nearly an island. On the west the Corinthian Gulf deeply indents the land and on the east the Saronic Gulf. All that is left to join the two parts of Greece together is a little isthmus only four miles across. On that narrow neck of land Corinth stands. Such a position made it inevitable that it should be one of the greatest trading and commercial centres of the ancient world. All traffic from Athens and the north of Greece to Sparta and the Peloponnese had to be routed through Corinth, because it stood on the little neck of land that connected the two.

Not only did the north to south traffic of Greece pass through Corinth of necessity, by far the greater part of the east to west traffic of the Mediterranean passed through her from choice. The extreme southern tip of Greece was known as Cape Malea (now called Cape Matapan). It was dangerous, and to round Cape Malea had much the same sound as to round Cape Horn had in later times. The Greeks had two sayings which showed what they thought of it--"Let him who sails round Malea forget his home," and, "Let him who sails round Malea first make his will."

The consequence was that mariners followed one of two courses. They sailed up the Saronic Gulf, and, if their ships were small enough, dragged them out of the water, set them on rollers, hauled them across the isthmus, and re-launched them on the other side. The isthmus was actually called the Diolkos, the place of dragging across. The idea is the same as that which is contained in the Scottish place name Tarbert, which means a place where the land is so narrow that a boat can be dragged from loch to loch. If that course was not possible because the ship was too large, the cargo was disembarked, carried by porters across the isthmus, and re-embarked on another ship at the other side. This four mile journey across the isthmus, where the Corinth Canal now runs, saved a journey of two hundred and two miles round Cape Malea, the most dangerous cape in the Mediterranean.

It is easy to see how great a commercial city Corinth must have been. The north to south traffic of Greece had no alternative but to pass through her; by far the greater part of the east to west trade of the Mediterranean world chose to pass through her. Round Corinth there clustered three other towns, Lechaëum at the west end of the isthmus, Cenchrea at the east end and Schoenus just a short distance away. Farrar writes, "Objects of luxury soon found their way to the markets which were visited by every nation in the civilized world--Arabian balsam, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goats' hair, Lycaonian wool, Phrygian slaves."

Corinth, as Farrar calls her, was the Vanity Fair of the ancient world. Men called her The Bridge of Greece; one called her The Lounge of Greece. It has been said that if a man stands long enough in Piccadilly Circus he will in the end meet everyone in the country. Corinth was the Piccadilly Circus of the Mediterranean. To add to the concourse which came to it, Corinth was the place where the Isthmian Games were held, which were second only to the Olympics. Corinth was a rich and populous city with one of the greatest commercial trades in the ancient world.

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THE WICKEDNESS OF CORINTH

There was another side to Corinth. She had a reputation for commercial prosperity, but she was also a byword for evil living. The very word *korinthiazesthai*, to live like a Corinthian, had become a part of the Greek language, and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery. The word actually penetrated to the English language, and, in Regency times, a Corinthian was one of the wealthy young bucks who lived in reckless and riotous living. Aelian, the late Greek writer, tells us that if ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play he was shown drunk. The very name Corinth was synonymous with debauchery and there was one source of evil in the city which was known all over the civilized world. Above the isthmus towered the hill of the Acropolis, and on it stood the great temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

To that temple there were attached one thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and in the evenings they descended from the Acropolis and plied their trade upon the streets of Corinth, until it became a Greek proverb, "It is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth." In addition to these cruder sins, there flourished far more recondite vices, which had come in with the traders and the sailors from the ends of the earth, until Corinth became not only a synonym for wealth and luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, but also for filth.

THE HISTORY OF CORINTH

The history of Corinth falls into two parts. She was a very ancient city. Thucydides, the Greek historian, claims that it was in Corinth that the first triremes, the Greek battleships, were built. Legend has it that it was in Corinth that the Argo was built, the ship in which Jason sailed the seas, searching for the golden fleece. But in 146 B.C. disaster befell her. The Romans were engaged in conquering the world. When they sought to reduce Greece, Corinth was the leader of the opposition. But the Greeks could not stand against the disciplined Romans, and in 146 B.C. Lucius Mummius, the Roman general, captured Corinth and left her a desolate heap of ruins.

But any place with the geographical situation of Corinth could not remain a devastation. Almost exactly one hundred years later, in 46 B.C. Julius Caesar rebuilt her and she arose from her ruins. Now she became a Roman colony. More, she became a capital city, the metropolis of the Roman province of Achaia, which included practically all Greece.

In those days, which were the days of Paul, her population was very mixed. (i) There were the Roman veterans whom Julius Caesar had settled there. When a Roman soldier had served his time, he was granted the citizenship and was then sent out to some newly-founded city and given a grant of land so that he might become a settler there. These Roman colonies were planted all over the world, and always the backbone of them was the contingent of veteran regular soldiers whose faithful service had won them the citizenship. (ii) When Corinth was rebuilt the merchants came back, for her situation still gave her commercial supremacy. (iii) There were many Jews among the population. The rebuilt city offered them commercial opportunities which they were not slow to take. (iv) There was a sprinkling of Phoenicians and Phrygians and people from the east, with their exotic customs and their hysterical ways.

Farrar speaks of "this mongrel and heterogeneous population of Greek adventurers and Roman bourgeois, with a tainting infusion of Phoenicians; this mass of Jews, ex-soldiers, philosophers,

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merchants, sailors, freedmen, slaves, trades-people, hucksters and agents of every form of vice." He characterizes her as a colony "without aristocracy, without traditions and without well-established citizens."

Remember the background of Corinth, remember its name for wealth and luxury, for drunkenness and immorality and vice, and then read 1Cor.6:9-10.

Are you not aware that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Make no mistake--neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sensualists, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor rapacious men, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor robbers shall inherit the Kingdom of God--and such were some of you.

In this hotbed of vice, in the most unlikely place in all the Greek world, some of Paul's greatest work was done, and some of the mightiest triumphs of Christianity were won.

PAUL IN CORINTH

Paul stayed longer in Corinth than in any other city, with the single exception of Ephesus. He had left Macedonia with his life in peril and had crossed over to Athens. There he had had little success and had gone on to Corinth, and he remained there for eighteen months. We realize how little we really know of his work when we see that the whole story of that eighteen months is compressed by Luke into 17 verses (Ac.18:1-17).

When Paul arrived in Corinth he took up residence with Aquila and Prisca. He preached in the synagogue with great success. With the arrival of Timothy and Silas from Macedonia, he redoubled his efforts, but the Jews were so stubbornly hostile that he had to leave the synagogue. He took up his residence with one Justus who lived next door to the synagogue. His most notable convert was Crispus, who was actually the ruler of the synagogue, and amongst the general public he had good success.

In the year A.D. 52 there came to Corinth as its new governor a Roman called Gallio. He was famous for his charm and gentleness. The Jews tried to take advantage of his newness and good nature and brought Paul to trial before him on a charge of teaching contrary to their law. But Gallio, with impartial Roman justice, refused to have anything to do with the case or to take any action. So Paul completed his work in Corinth and moved on to Syria.

THE CORRESPONDENCE WITH CORINTH

It was when he was in Ephesus in the year A.D. 55 that Paul, learning that things were not all well in Corinth, wrote to the church there. There is every possibility that the Corinthian correspondence as we have it is out of order. We must remember that it was not until A.D. 90 or thereby that Paul's correspondence was collected. In many churches it must have existed only on scraps of papyrus and the putting it together would be a problem: and it seems that, when the

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Corinthian letters were collected, they were not all discovered and were not arranged in the right order. Let us see if we can reconstruct what happened.

(i) There was a letter which preceded 1 Corinthians. In 1Cor.5:9 Paul writes, "I wrote you a letter not to associate with immoral men." This obviously refers to some previous letter. Some scholars believe that letter is lost without trace. Others think it is contained in 2Cor.6:14-18 and 2Cor.7:1. Certainly that passage suits what Paul said he wrote about. It occurs rather awkwardly in its context, and, if we take it out and read straight on from 2Cor.6:13 to 2Cor.7:2, we get excellent sense and connection. Scholars call this letter The Previous Letter. (In the original letters there were no chapter or verse divisions. The chapters were not divided up until the thirteenth century and the verses not till the sixteenth, and because of that the arranging of the collection of letters would be much more difficult).

(ii) News came to Paul from various sources of trouble at Corinth. (a) News came from those who were of the household of Chloe (1Cor.1:11). They brought news of the contentions with which the church was torn. (b) News came with the visit of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus to Ephesus. (1Cor.16:17). By personal contact they were able to fill up the gaps in Paul's information. (c) News came in a letter in which the Corinthian Church had asked Paul's guidance on various problems. In 1Cor.7:1 Paul begins, "Concerning the matters about which you wrote..." In answer to all this information Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and despatched it to Corinth apparently by the hand of Timothy (1Cor.4:17).

(iii) The result of the letter was that things became worse than ever, and, although we have no direct record of it, we can deduce that Paul paid a personal visit to Corinth. In 2Cor.12:14 he writes, "The third time I am ready to come to you." In 2Cor.13:1-2, he says again that he is coming to them for the third time. Now, if there was a third time, there must have been a second time. We have the record of only one visit, whose story is told in Ac.18:1-17. We have no record at all of the second, but Corinth was only two or three days' sailing from Ephesus.

(iv) The visit did no good at all. Matters were only exacerbated and the result was an exceedingly severe letter. We learn about that letter from certain passages in 2 Corinthians. In 2Cor.2:4 Paul writes, "I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears." In 2Cor.7:8 he writes, "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it though I did regret it; for I see that that letter has grieved you, though only for a while." It was a letter which was the product of anguish of mind, a letter so severe that Paul was almost sorry that he ever sent it.

Scholars call this The Severe Letter. Have we got it? It obviously cannot be 1 Corinthians, because it is not a tear-stained and anguished letter. When Paul wrote it, it is clear enough that things were under control. Now if we read through 2 Corinthians we find an odd circumstance. In 2Cor.1-9 everything is made up, there is complete reconciliation and all are friends again; but at 2Cor.10 comes the strangest break. 2Cor.10-13 are the most heartbroken cry Paul ever wrote. They show that he has been hurt and insulted as he never was before or afterwards by any church. His appearance, his speech, his apostleship, his honesty have all been under attack.

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Introduction to the Corinthian Letters

Most scholars believe that 2Cor.10-13 are the severe letter, and that they have become misplaced when Paul's letters were put together. If we want the real chronological course of Paul's correspondence with Corinth, we really ought to read 2Cor.10-13 before 2Cor.1-9. We do know that this letter was sent off with Titus. (2Cor.2:13; 2Cor.7:13).

(v) Paul was worried about this letter. He could not wait until Titus came back with an answer, so he set out to meet him (2Cor.2:13; 2Cor.7:5,13). Somewhere in Macedonia he met him and learned that all was well, and, probably at Philippi, he sat down and wrote 2Cor.1-9, the letter of reconciliation.

Stalker has said that the letters of Paul take the roof off the early churches and let us see what went on inside. Of none of them is that truer than the letters to Corinth. Here we see what "the care of all the churches" must have meant to Paul. Here we see the heart-breaks and the joys. Here we see Paul, the shepherd of his flock, bearing the sorrows and the problems of his people on his heart.

THE CORINTHIAN CORRESPONDENCE

Before we read the letters in detail let us set down the progress of the Corinthian correspondence in tabular form.

(i) The Previous Letter, which may be contained in 2Cor.6:14-18 and 2Cor.7:1.

(ii) The arrival of Chloe's people, of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, and of the letter to Paul from the Corinthian Church.

(iii) 1 Corinthians is written in reply and is despatched with Timothy.

(iv) The situation grows worse and Paul pays a personal visit to Corinth, which is so complete a failure that it almost breaks his heart.

(v) The consequence is The Severe Letter, which is almost certainly contained in 2Cor.10-13, and which was despatched with Titus.

(vi) Unable to wait for an answer, Paul sets out to meet Titus. He meets him in Macedonia, learns that all is well and, probably from Philippi, writes 2Cor.1-9, The Letter of Reconciliation.

The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians deal with the divided state of the Church of God at Corinth. Instead of being a unity in Christ it was split into sects and parties, who had attached themselves to the names of various leaders and teachers. It is Paul's teaching that these divisions had emerged because the Corinthians thought too much about human wisdom and knowledge and too little about the sheer grace of God. In fact, for all their so-called wisdom, they are really in a state of immaturity. They think that they are wise men, but really they are no better than babies.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

COMFORTED TO COMFORT

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will, and Timothy, the brother you all know, send this letter to the Church of God which is at Corinth, together with all God's dedicated people who are in the whole of Achaia. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father who is ever compassionate and the God who sends all comfort, he who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we are able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through that comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For, even as the things which Christ had to suffer have overflowed to us, so the comfort which we can bring you also overflowed through Christ. If we are undergoing affliction it is that we may be the better able to comfort you and bring you salvation. If we are comforted, it is that we may be the better able to bring to you that comfort whose effectiveness is demonstrated by your ability triumphantly to endure the hard experiences which we also are going through. So our hope concerning you is well-grounded, for we know that just as you share the sufferings which we undergo, you also share the source of comfort we possess.

Behind this passage there is a kind of summary of the Christian life.

(i) Paul writes as a man who knows trouble to those who are in trouble. The word that he uses for affliction is *thlipsis* (GSN2347). In ordinary Greek this word always describes actual physical pressure on a man. R. C. Trench writes, "When, according to the ancient law of England, those who wilfully refused to plead had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and were so pressed and crushed to death, this was literally *thlipsis* (GSN2347)."

Sometimes there falls upon a man's spirit the burden and the mystery of this unintelligible world. In the early years of Christianity the man who chose to become a Christian chose to face trouble. There might well come to him abandonment by his own family, hostility from his heathen neighbours, and persecution from the official powers. Samuel Rutherford wrote to one of his friends, "God has called you to Christ's side, and the wind is now in Christ's face in this land: and seeing ye are with him ye cannot expect the lee-side or the sunny side of the brae." It is always a costly thing to be a real Christian, for there can be no Christianity without its cross.

(ii) The answer to this suffering lies in endurance. The Greek word for this endurance is *hupomone* (GSN5281). The keynote of *hupomone* is not grim, bleak acceptance of trouble but triumph. It describes the spirit which can not only accept suffering but triumph over it. Someone once said to a sufferer, "Suffering colours life, doesn't it?" The sufferer replied, "Yes, but I propose to choose the colours" As the silver comes purer from the fire, so the Christian can emerge finer and stronger from hard days. The Christian is the athlete of God whose spiritual muscles become stronger from the discipline of difficulties.

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2 Corinthians 1:1-7

(iii) But we are not left to face this trial and to provide this endurance alone. There comes to us the comfort of God. Between 2Cor.1:3 and 2Cor.1:7 the noun comfort or the verb to comfort occurs no fewer than nine times. Comfort in the New Testament always means far more than soothing sympathy. Always it is true to its root meaning, for its root is the Latin fortis and fortis means brave. Christian comfort is the comfort which brings courage and enables a man to cope with all that life can do to him. Paul was quite sure that God never sends a man a vision without the power to work it out and never sends him a task without the strength to do it.

Even apart from that, there is always a certain inspiration in any suffering which a man's Christianity may incur, for such suffering, as Paul puts it, is the overflow of Christ's suffering reaching to us. It is a sharing in the suffering of Christ. In the old days of chivalry, the knights used to come demanding some specially difficult task, in order that they might show their devotion to the lady whom they loved. To suffer for Christ is a privilege. When the hard thing comes, the Christian can say, as Polycarp, the aged Bishop of Smyrna, said when they bound him to the stake, "I thank thee that thou hast judged me worthy of this hour."

(iv) The supreme result of all this is that we gain the power to comfort others who are going through it. Paul claims that the things which have happened to him and the comfort which he has received have made him able to be a source of comfort to others. Barrie tells how his mother lost her dearest son, and then he says, "That is where my mother got her soft eyes and why other mothers ran to her when they had lost a child." It was said of Jesus, "Because he himself has gone through it, he is able to help others who are going through it." (Heb.2:18). It is worth while experiencing suffering and sorrow if that experience will enable us to help others struggling with life's billows.

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2 Corinthians 1:8-11

DRIVEN BACK ON GOD

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

I want you to know, brothers, about the terrible experience which happened to us in Asia, an experience in which we were excessively weighted down till it was beyond bearing, so that we despaired even of life. The only verdict we could give on our condition was the verdict of death; but this happened in order that we should not trust in ourselves but in the God who raises the dead. It was he who rescued us from so terrible a death, and who will rescue us. We hope in him that he will continue to rescue us, while you lend the help of your prayers for us, so that thanks on our behalf will be given from many faces and through many people for the gift of God's grace which came to us.

The most extraordinary thing about this passage is that we have no information at all about this terrible experience which Paul went through at Ephesus. Something happened to him which was almost beyond bearing. He was in such danger that he believed that sentence of death had been passed on him and that there was no escape, and yet, beyond this passing reference and some others like it in these letters, we have no account of what happened.

There is a very human tendency to make the most of anything that we have to go through. Often a person who has undergone a quite simple operation will make it a subject of conversation for a long time to come. H. L. Gee tells of two men who met to transact some business in days of war. The one was full of how the train in which he had travelled had been attacked from the air. He would not stop talking about the excitement, the danger, the narrow escape. The other in the end said quietly, "Well, let's get on with our business now. I'd like to get away fairly early because my house was demolished by a bomb last night."

People who have really suffered usually do not talk about it very much. King George the Fifth had as one of his rules of life, "If I have to suffer let me be like a well-bred animal and go and suffer in silence and alone." Paul made no parade of his sufferings, and we who have so much less to suffer should follow his example.

But Paul saw that the terrifying experience he had gone through had had one tremendous use--it had driven him back to God and demonstrated to him his utter dependence on him. The Arabs have a proverb, "All sunshine makes a desert." The danger of prosperity is that it encourages a false independence; it makes us think that we are well able to handle life alone. For every one prayer that rises to God in days of prosperity, ten thousand rise in days of adversity. As Lincoln had it, "I have often been driven to my knees in prayer because I had nowhere else to go." It is often in misfortune that a man finds out who are his true friends, and it often needs some time of adversity to show us how much we need God.

The outcome was that Paul had an unshakable confidence in God. He knew now beyond all argument what he could do for him. If God could bring him through that, he could bring him through anything. The joyful cry of the Psalmist is, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling." (Ps. 116:8.) What really converted John Bunyan was

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2 Corinthians 1:8-11

when he heard some old women sitting in the sun "talking about what God had done for their souls." The confidence of the Christian in God is not a thing of theory and speculation; it is a thing of fact and experience. He knows what God has done for him and therefore he is not afraid.

Finally, Paul asks for the prayers of the Corinthians. As we have noted before, the greatest of the saints is not ashamed to ask for the prayers of the least of the brethren. We may have very little to give our friends; but, however little of this world's goods we possess, we may give them the priceless treasure of our prayers.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Corinthians 1:12-14

OUR ONLY BOAST

2 Corinthians 1:12-14

The only boast we make is this--and it is backed by the witness of our conscience--that in the world we have behaved ourselves with the holiness and the purity of God, not with a wisdom dominated by human motives, but with the grace of God, and especially so towards you. We have written no other things to you than those which you read and understand, and I hope that you will go on to understand even their deepest meanings and significances, just as you have already understood them at least in part, because we are your boast, as you are ours, in the day of Christ.

Here we begin to catch the undertones of the accusations that the Corinthians were levelling against Paul and of the slanders with which they were trying to besmirch him.

(i) They must have been saying that there was more in Paul's conduct than met the eye. His answer is that he has lived with the holiness and the purity of God. There were no hidden actions in Paul's life. We might well add a new beatitude to the list, "Blessed is the man who has nothing to hide." It is an old jest to tell of how a man went from door to door saying, "Flee! All is discovered!" and how the most unlikely people fled. It is said that once an architect offered to build a Greek philosopher a house so constructed that it would be impossible to see into it. "I will give you double your fee," said the philosopher, "if you will build me a house into every room of which everyone can see." The word Paul uses for purity (eilikrineia, GSN1505) is most interesting. It may describe something which can bear the test of being held up to the light of the sun and looked at with the sun shining through it.

Happy is the man whose every action will bear the light of day and who, like Paul, can claim that there are no hidden actions in his life.

(ii) There were those who were attributing hidden motives to Paul. His answer is that his whole conduct is dominated, not by calculating shrewdness, but by the grace of God. There were no hidden motives in Paul's life. Burns in another connection points out the difficulty of discovering "the moving why they did it." If we are honest, we will have to admit that we seldom do anything with absolutely unmixed motives. Even when we do something fine, there may be entangled with it motives of prudence, of prestige, of self-display, of fear, of calculation. Men may never see these motives, but, as Thomas Aquinas said, "Man regardeth the deed but God seeth the intention." Purity of action may be difficult, but purity of motive is still more difficult. Such purity can come to us only when we too can say that our old self has died and Christ lives in us.

(iii) There were those who said that Paul in his letters did not quite mean what he said. His answer was that there were no hidden meanings in his words. Words are odd things. A man may use them to reveal his thoughts or equally to conceal them. Few of us can honestly say that we mean to the full every word we say. We may say a thing because it is the right thing to say; we may say it for the sake of being agreeable; we may say it for the sake of avoiding trouble. James, who saw the dangers of the tongue more clearly than any man, said, "If any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man." (Jas.3:2.)

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2 Corinthians 1:12-14

In Paul's life there were no hidden actions, no hidden motives and no hidden meanings. That is indeed something to aim at.

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2 Corinthians 1:15-22

GOD'S YES IN JESUS CHRIST

2 Corinthians 1:15-22

It was with this confidence that I previously planned to visit you, that I might bring you pleasure for the second time, and so go on to Macedonia by way of you, and be sped by you on my way to Judaea. So then, when I made this plan, surely you cannot think that I did so with a fickle intention? Or can you really think that when I make plans I make them as a worldly man might make them, so that I say yes and no at one and the same time? You can rely on God. You can be quite sure that the message we brought to you does not vacillate between yes and no. For God's Son, Jesus Christ, he who was proclaimed among you through myself and Silvanus and Timothy, was not one who vacillated between yes and no. It was always yes with him. He is the yes to all the promises of God. That is why we can say, "Amen," through him when we speak it to the glory of God.

But it is God who guarantees you with us for Christ, the God who has anointed us and sealed us, and who has given us the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first instalment and pledge of the life that shall be.

At first sight this is a difficult passage. Behind it lies another accusation and slander against Paul. Paul had said that he would visit the Corinthians, but the situation had become so bitter that he postponed his visit so as not to give them pain (2Cor.1:23). His enemies had promptly accused him of being the kind of man who made frivolous promises with a fickle intention and could not be pinned down to a definite yes or no. That was bad enough, but they went on to argue, "If we cannot trust Paul's everyday promises, how can we trust the things he told us about God?" Paul's answer is that we can rely on God and that there is no vacillation in Jesus between yes and no.

Then he puts the matter in a vivid phrase--"Jesus is the yes to every promise of God." He means this--had Jesus never come we might have doubted the tremendous promises of God, might have argued that they were too good to be true. But a God who loves us so much that he gave us his Son is quite certain to fulfil every promise that he ever made. He is the personal guarantee of God that the greatest and the least of his promises are all true.

Although the Corinthians were slandering Paul, there remains this salutary truth--the trustworthiness of the messenger affects the trustworthiness of the message. Preaching is always "truth through personality." And if a man cannot trust the preacher, he is not likely to trust the preacher's message. Amongst the Jewish regulations regarding the conduct and character of a teacher, it is laid down that he must never promise anything to a class which he cannot or will not do. This would be to accustom the class to falsehood. Here is a warning that promises should never be lightly given, for they may well be as lightly broken. Before a man gives a promise, he should count the cost of keeping it and make sure that he is able and willing to pay it.

Paul goes on to say two great things.

(i) It is through Jesus that we say "Amen" to the promises of God. We finish our prayers by saying, "through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." When we have read scripture we frequently

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2 Corinthians 1:15-22

conclude it by saying, "Amen." Amen means So let it be, and the great truth is that it is not just a formality and a bit of ritual; it is the word that expresses our confidence that we can offer our prayers with every confidence to God and can appropriate with confidence all his great promises, because Jesus is the guarantee that our prayers will be heard and that all the great promises are true.

(ii) Finally, Paul speaks about what the King James Version calls the earnest of the Spirit. The Greek word is arrabon (GSN0728). And an arrabon was the first instalment of a payment, paid as a guarantee that the rest was sure to follow. It is a common word in Greek legal documents. A woman selling a cow receives 1,000 drachmae as arrabon (GSN0728) that the rest of the purchase price will be paid. Some dancing girls being engaged for a village festival receive so much as arrabon (GSN0728), which will be included in the final payment, but which is a present guarantee that the contract will be honoured and the full money paid. A certain man writes to his master that he has paid Lampon, the mouse-catcher, an arrabon of 8 drachmae so that he will start work and catch the mice while they are still with young. It was the first instalment and the guarantee that the rest would be paid. Everyone knew this word.

It is the same idea as is in the Scots word arles which was a token payment made when a man was employed or a house bought, and a guarantee that the full contract would be honoured. When Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as an arrabon (GSN0728) given us by God, he means that the kind of life we live by the help of the Holy Spirit is the first instalment of the life of heaven and the guarantee that the fullness of that life will some day open upon us. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's token and pledge of still greater things to come.

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2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4

WHEN A SAINT REBUKES

2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4

I call God to witness against my soul that it was because I wished to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. I am not saying this because we have any desire to domineer over your faith, but because we desire to labour with you to produce joy. As far as faith is concerned, you stand firm. But for my own peace of mind I came to this decision--not to come to you again in grief. For, if I grieve you, who then is there to make me glad, except him who is grieved by what I have done? I write this very letter so that when I do come I may not incur grief at the hands of those from whom I ought to have joy, for I have never lost my confidence in every one of you, and I am still sure that my joy and the joy of all of you are one and the same thing. So I wrote you a letter out of much affliction and anguish of heart, it was through my tears I wrote it, not that I wanted you to be grieved, but that I wanted you to know the love I bear especially to you.

Here is the echo of unhappy things. As we have seen in the introduction, the sequence of events must have been this. The situation in Corinth had gone from bad to worse. The Church was torn with party divisions and there were those who denied the authority of Paul. Seeking to mend matters, Paul had paid a flying visit to Corinth. So far from mending things, that visit had exacerbated them and had nearly broken his heart. In consequence he had written a very severe letter of rebuke, written with a sore heart and through tears. It was just for that very reason that he had not fulfilled his promise to visit them again, for, as things were, the visit could only have hurt him and them.

Behind this passage lies the whole heart of Paul when he had to deal in severity with those he loved.

(i) He used severity and rebuke very unwillingly. He used them only when he was driven to use them and there was nothing else left to do. There are some people whose eyes are always focussed to find fault, whose tongues are always tuned to criticize, in whose voice there is always a rasp and an edge. Paul was not like that. In this he was wise. If we are constantly critical and fault-finding, if we are habitually angry and harsh, if we rebuke far more than we praise, the plain fact is that even our severity loses its effect. It is discounted because it is so constant. The more seldom a man rebukes, the more effective it is when he does. In any event, the eyes of a truly Christian man seek ever for things to praise and not for things to condemn.

(ii) When Paul did rebuke, he did it in love. He never spoke merely to hurt. There can be sadistic pleasure in seeing someone wince at a sharp and cruel word. But Paul was not like that. He never rebuked to cause pain; he always rebuked to restore joy. When John Knox was on his deathbed he said, "God knows that my mind was always void of hatred to the persons of those against whom I thundered my severest judgments." It is possible to hate the sin but love the sinner. The effective rebuke is that given with the arm of love round the other person. The rebuke of blazing anger may hurt and even terrify; but the rebuke of hurt and sorrowing love alone can break the heart.

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2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4

(iii) When Paul rebuked, the last thing he wanted was to domineer. In a modern novel, a father says to his son, "I'll beat the fear of the loving God into you." The great danger which the preacher and the teacher ever incur is of coming to think that our duty is to compel others to think exactly as we do and to insist that if they do not see things as we see them, they must be wrong. The duty of the teacher is not to impose beliefs on other people, but to enable and to encourage them to think out their own beliefs. The aim is not to produce a pale copy of oneself, but to create an independent human being. One who was taught by that great teacher, A. B. Bruce, said, "He cut the cables and gave us a glimpse of the blue waters." Paul knew that as a teacher he must never domineer, although he must discipline and guide.

(iv) Finally, for all his reluctance to rebuke, for all his desire to see the best in others, for all the love that was in his heart, Paul nonetheless does rebuke when rebuke becomes necessary. When John Knox rebuked Queen Mary for her proposed marriage to Don Carlos, at first she tried anger and outraged majesty and then she tried "tears in abundance." Knox's answer was, "I never delighted in the weeping of any of God's creatures. I can scarcely well abide the tears of my own boys, whom my own hand correcteth, much less can I rejoice in Your Majesty's weeping. But I must sustain, albeit unwillingly, Your Majesty's tears rather than I dare hurt my conscience, or betray my commonwealth through my silence." Not seldom we refrain from rebuke because of mistaken kindness, or because of the desire to avoid trouble. But there is a time when to avoid trouble is to store up trouble and when to seek for a lazy or cowardly peace is to court a still greater danger.

If we are guided by love and by consideration, not for our own pride but for the ultimate good of others, we will know the time to speak and the time to be silent.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

PLEADING FOR A SINNER'S PARDON

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

If anyone has caused grief, it is not I whom he has grieved, but to some extent--not to overstress the situation--all of you. To such a man the punishment that has been imposed by the majority is sufficient, so that, so far from inflicting severer punishment, you must forgive him and comfort him, lest such a one be engulfed by excess of grief. So then, I urge you, let your decision in regard to him be a decision of love. For when I wrote to you my purpose was to test you, to see if you are obedient in all things. Whatever you have forgiven anyone, I, too forgive. For what I have forgiven, if I had anything to forgive, I forgave for your sakes, in the presence of Christ, so that we might not be over-reached by Satan, for we well know his intentions.

Again we have a passage which is an echo of trouble and of unhappiness. When Paul had visited Corinth there had been a ring-leader to the opposition. This man had clearly personally insulted Paul who had insisted that discipline must be exercised upon him. The majority of the Corinthians had come to see that his conduct had not only hurt Paul, but had injured the good name of the whole Corinthian Church. Discipline had been exercised, but there were some who felt that it had not been sufficiently severe and who desired to impose a still greater punishment.

It is now that the supreme greatness of Paul emerges. His plea is that enough has been done; the man is now penitent and to exercise still further discipline would do far more harm than good. It might simply drive the man to despair, and to do that is not to serve Christ and the Church, but to offer an opportunity to Satan to lay hold upon the man. Had Paul been actuated by merely human motives he would have gloated over the hard fate of his former enemy. Nowhere does the majesty of his character better emerge than on this occasion, when, in the graciousness of his heart, he pleads for mercy on the man who had hurt him so much. Here is a supreme example of Christian conduct in face of injury and insult.

(i) Paul did not take the matter personally at all. It was not the injury done to his personal feelings which was important. What he was anxious about was the good discipline and the peace of the Church. There are some people who take everything personally. Criticism, even when it is kindly meant and kindly given, they take as a personal insult. Such people do more than any other kind of people to disturb the peace of a fellowship. It would be well to remember that criticism and advice are usually offered, not to hurt us, but to help us.

(ii) Paul's motive in the exercise of discipline was not vengeance but correction; he did not aim to knock a man down, but to help him to get up. His aim was to judge a man, not by the standards of abstract justice, but of Christian love. The fact is that quite often sins are good qualities gone wrong. The man who can plan a successful burglary has initiative and organizing power; pride is a kind of intensification of the independent spirit; meanness is thrift run to seed. Paul's aim in discipline was, not to eradicate such qualities as a man might have, but rather to harness them to higher purposes. The Christian duty is not to render the sinner harmless by battering him into submission, but to inspire him to goodness.

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2 Corinthians 2:5-11

(iii) Paul's insistence was that punishment must never drive to despair and must never take the heart out of a man. The wrong kind of treatment often gives a man the last push into the arms of Satan. Over-severity may well drive him from the Church and its fellowship, while sympathetic amendment might well bring him in. Mary Lamb, who had terrible periods of insanity, was harshly treated by her mother. She used to sigh, "Why is it that I never seem able to do anything to please my mother?" Luther could scarcely bear to pray the Lord's Prayer because his own father had been so stern that the word father painted a picture of grim terror to him. He used to say, "Spare the rod and spoil the child--yes; but, beside the rod keep an apple, to give the child when he has done well." Punishment should encourage and not discourage. In the last analysis, this can happen only when we make it clear that, even when we are punishing a person, we still believe in him.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

IN THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

When we had come to Troas to tell the good news of Christ, even when a door of opportunity stood open to us in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, because I did not find Titus, my brother, there. But thanks be to God who at all times leads us in the train of his triumph in Christ, and who, through us, displays the perfume of the knowledge of him in every place; for we are the sweet scent of Christ in God to those who are destined for salvation and to those who are destined for destruction. To the one we are a perfume from death, to the other a perfume from life to life. And who is adequate for these tasks? We do not, as so many do, make a traffic of the word of God but, as from utter purity of motives, as from God, in the very presence of God in Christ we speak.

Paul begins by telling how his anxiety to know what was happening in Corinth made him so restless that he could not wait in Troas, although a fruitful field was there, and sent him off to meet Titus who had not yet arrived. Then comes his shout of triumph to God who brought all things to a happy ending.

2Cor.2:14-16 are difficult to understand by themselves, but when set against the background which was in Paul's thoughts they become a vivid picture. Paul speaks of being led in the train of the triumph of Christ; and then he goes on to speak of being the sweet scent of Christ to men, to some the perfume of death and to others the perfume of life.

In his mind is the picture of a Roman Triumph and of Christ as a universal conqueror. The highest honour which could be given to a victorious Roman general was a Triumph. To attain it he must satisfy certain conditions. He must have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field. The campaign must have been completely finished, the region pacified and the victorious troops brought home. Five thousand of the enemy at least must have fallen in one engagement. A positive extension of territory must have been gained, and not merely a disaster retrieved or an attack repelled. And the victory must have been won over a foreign foe and not in a civil war.

In a Triumph the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First came the state officials and the senate. Then came the trumpeters. Then were carried the spoils taken from the conquered land. For instance, when Titus conquered Jerusalem, the seven-branched candlestick, the golden table of the shew-bread and the golden trumpets were carried through the streets of Rome. Then came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. There followed the white bull for the sacrifice which would be made. Then there walked the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains, shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to be executed. Then came the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres; then the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. After that came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses.

He was clad in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory sceptre with the Roman eagle at its top, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter. After him rode his family; and finally came the

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2 Corinthians 2:12-17

army wearing all their decorations and shouting Io triumphs! their cry of triumph. As the procession moved through the streets, all decorated and garlanded, amid the cheering crowds, it made a tremendous day which might happen only once in a lifetime.

That is the picture that is in Paul's mind. He sees Christ marching in triumph throughout the world, and himself in that conquering train. It is a triumph which, Paul is certain, nothing can stop.

We have seen how in that procession there were the priests swinging the incense-filled censers. To the victors the perfume from the censers would be the perfume of joy and triumph and life; but to the wretched captives who walked so short a distance ahead it was the perfume of death, standing for the past defeat and their coming execution. So Paul thinks of himself and his fellow apostles preaching the gospel of the triumphant Christ. To those who will accept it, it is the perfume of life, as it was to the victors; to those who refuse it, it is the perfume of death, as it was to the vanquished.

Of one thing Paul was certain--not all the world could defeat Christ. He lived not in pessimistic fear, but in the glorious optimism which knew the unconquerable majesty of Christ.

Then once more comes the unhappy echo. There were those who said that he was not fit to preach Christ. There were those who said worse, that he was using the gospel as an excuse to line his own pockets. Again Paul uses the word eilikrineia (GSN1505) for purity. His motives will stand the penetrating rays of the sun; his message is from God, it will stand the very scrutiny of Christ himself Paul never feared what men might say, because his conscience told him that he had the approval of God and the "Well done!" of Christ.

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2 Corinthians 3:1-3

EACH MAN A LETTER OF CHRIST

2 Corinthians 3:1-3

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely you do not think that we need--as some people need--letters of commendation neither to you or from you? You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all men. It is plain to see that you are a letter written by Christ, produced under our ministry, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets which are living, beating, human hearts.

Behind this passage lies the thought of a custom which was common in the ancient world, that of sending letters of commendation with a person. If someone was going to a strange community, a friend of his who knew someone in that community would give him a letter of commendation to introduce him and to testify to his character.

Here is such a letter, found among the papyri, written by a certain Aurelius Archelaus, who was a beneficiarius, that is a soldier privileged to have special exemption from all menial duties, to his commanding officer, a military tribune called Julius Domitius. It is to introduce and commend a certain Theon. "To Julius Domitius, military tribune of the legion, from Aurelius Archelaus, his beneficiarius, greeting. I have already before this recommended to you Theon, my friend, and now also, I ask you, sir, to have him before your eyes as you would myself. For he is a man such as to deserve to be loved by you, for he left his own people, his goods and his business and followed me, and through all things he has kept me safe. I therefore pray you that he may have the right to come and see you. He can tell you everything about our business...I have loved the man...I wish you, sir, great happiness and long life with your family and good health. Have this letter before your eyes and let it make you think that I am speaking to you. Farewell."

That was the kind of commendatory letter, or reference, of which Paul was thinking. There is one such in the New Testament. Rom. 16 is a letter of commendation written to introduce Phoebe, a member of the Church at Cenchrea, to the Church at Rome.

In the ancient world, as nowadays, sometimes written testimonials did not mean very much. A man once asked Diogenes, the Cynic philosopher, for such a letter. Diogenes answered, "That you are a man he will know at a glance; but whether you are a good or a bad man he will discover if he has the skill to distinguish between good and bad, and if he is without that skill he will not discover the facts even though I write to him thousands of times." Yet in the Christian Church such letters were necessary, for even Lucian, the pagan satirist, noted that any charlatan could make a fortune out of the simple-minded Christians, because they were so easily imposed upon.

The previous sentences of Paul's letter seemed to read as if he was giving himself a testimonial. He declares that he has no need of such commendation. Then he takes a side-glance at those who have been causing trouble in Corinth. "There may be some," he says, "who brought you letters of commendation or who got them from you." In all probability these were emissaries of the Jews who had come to undo Paul's work and who had brought introductory letters from the Sanhedrin to accredit them. Once Paul had had such letters himself, when he set out to Damascus to obliterate

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2 Corinthians 3:1-3

the Church. (Ac.9:2). He says that his only testimonial is the Corinthians themselves. The change in their character and life is the only commendation that he needs.

He goes on to make a great claim. Every one of them is a letter of Christ. Long ago Plato had said that the good teacher does not write his message in ink that will fade; he writes it upon men. That is what Jesus had done. He had written his message on the Corinthians, through his servant, Paul, not with fading ink but with the Spirit, not on tablets of stone as the law was first written, but on the hearts of men.

There is a great truth here, which is at once an inspiration and an awful warning--every man is an open letter for Jesus Christ. Every Christian, whether he likes it or not, is an advertisement for Christianity. The honour of Christ is in the hands of his followers. We judge a shopkeeper by the kind of goods he sells; we judge a craftsman by the kind of articles he produces; we judge a Church by the kind of men it creates; and therefore men judge Christ by his followers. Dick Sheppard, after years of talking in the open air to people who were outside the Church, declared that he had discovered that "the greatest handicap the Church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians." When we go out into the world, we have the awe-inspiring responsibility of being open letters, advertisements, for Christ and his Church.

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2 Corinthians 3:4-11

THE SURPASSING GLORY

2 Corinthians 3:4-11

We can believe this with such confidence because we believe it through Christ and in the sight of God. It is not that in our own resources we are adequate to reckon up the effect of anything that we have done, as it were personally, but our adequacy comes from God, who has made us adequate to be ministers of the new relationship which has come into existence between him and men. This new relationship does not depend on a written document, but on the Spirit. The written document is a deadly thing; the Spirit is a life-giving power. If the ministry which could only produce death, the ministry which depends on written documents, the ministry which was engraved on stone, came into being with such glory that the children of Israel could not bear to look for any time at the face of Moses, because of the glory which shone upon his face--and it was a glory that was doomed to fade surely even more will the ministry of the Spirit be clad in glory.

For if the ministry which could not produce anything else but condemnation was a glory, the ministry which produces the right relationship between God and man excels still more in glory. For, indeed, that which was clad with glory no longer enjoys glory because of this--because of the glory that surpasses it. If that which was doomed to pass away emerged in glory, much more that which is destined to remain exists in glory.

This passage really falls into two parts. At the beginning of it Paul is feeling that perhaps his claim that the Corinthians are a living epistle of Christ, produced under his ministry, may sound a little like self-praise. So he hastens to insist that whatever he has done is not his own work but the work of God. It is God who has made him adequate for the task which was his. It may be that he is thinking of a fanciful meaning that the Jews sometimes gave to one of the great titles of God. God was called El (HSN0410) Shaddai (HSN7706), which is The Almighty, but sometimes the Jews explained El Shaddai to mean The Sufficient One. It is he who is all-sufficient who has made Paul sufficient for his task.

When Harriet Beecher Stowe produced Uncle Tom's Cabin, 300,000 copies were sold in America in one year. It was translated into a score of languages. Lord Palmerston, who had not read a novel for thirty years, praised it "not only for the story, but for the statesmanship." Lord Cockburn, a Privy Counsellor, declared that it had done more for humanity than any other book of fiction. Tolstoi ranked it among the great achievements of the human mind. It certainly did more than any other single thing to advance the freedom of the slaves. Harriet Beecher Stowe refused to take any credit for what she had written. She said, "I, the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin? No, indeed, I could not control the story; it wrote itself. The Lord wrote it, and I was but the humblest instrument in his hand. It all came to me in visions, one after another, and I put them down in words. To him alone be the praise!"

Her adequacy was of God. It was so with Paul. He never said, "See what I have done!" He always said, "To God be the glory!" He never conceived of himself as adequate for any task; he thought of God as making him adequate. And that is precisely why, conscious as he was of his own weakness, he feared to set his hand to no task. He never had to do it alone; he did it with God.

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2 Corinthians 3:4-11

The second part of the passage deals with the contrast between the old and the new covenant. A covenant means an arrangement made between two people through which they enter into a certain relationship. It is not, in the biblical usage, an ordinary agreement, because the contracting parties enter into an ordinary agreement on equal terms. But in the biblical sense of covenant, it is God who is the prime mover and approaches man to offer him a relationship upon conditions which man could neither initiate nor alter but only accept or reject.

The word Paul uses for new when he speaks of the new covenant is the same as Jesus used and it is very significant. In Greek there are two words for new. First, there is *neos* (GSN3501), which means new in point of time and that alone. A young person is *neos* (GSN3501) because he is a newcomer into the world. Second, there is *kainos* (GSN2537), which means not only new in point of time, but also new in quality. If something is *kainos* (GSN2537) it has brought a fresh element into the situation. It is the word *kainos* (GSN2537) that both Jesus and Paul use of the new covenant, and the significance is that the new covenant is not only new in point of time; it is quite different in kind from the old covenant. It produces between man and God a relationship of a totally different kind.

Wherein does this difference lie?

(i) The old covenant was based on a written document. We can see the story of its initiation in Exo.24:1-8. Moses took the book of the covenant and read it to the people and they agreed to it. On the other hand the new covenant is based on the power of the life-giving Spirit. A written document is always something that is external; whereas the work of the Spirit changes a man's very heart. A man may obey the written code while all the time he wishes to disobey it; but when the Spirit comes into his heart and controls it, not only does he not break the code, he does not even wish to break it, because he is a changed man. A written code can change the law; only the Spirit can change human nature.

(ii) The old covenant was a deadly thing, because it produced a legal relationship between God and man. In effect it said, "If you wish to maintain your relationship with God, you must keep these laws." It thereby set up a situation in which God was essentially judge and man was essentially a criminal, forever in default before the bar of God's judgment.

The old covenant was deadly because it killed certain things. (a) It killed hope. There was never any hope that any man could keep it, human nature being what it is. It therefore could issue in nothing but frustration. (b) It killed life. Under it a man could earn nothing but condemnation; and condemnation meant death. (c) It killed strength. It was perfectly able to tell a man what to do, but it could not help him to do it.

The new covenant was quite different. (a) It was a relationship of love. It came into being because God so loved the world. (b) It was a relationship between a father and his sons. Man was no longer the criminal in default, he was the son of God, even if a disobedient son. (c) It changed a man's life, not by imposing a new code of laws on him, but by changing his heart. (d) It therefore not only told a man what to do but gave him the strength to do it. With its commandments it brought power.

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2 Corinthians 3:4-11

Paul goes on to contrast the two covenants. The old covenant was born in glory. When Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments, which are the code of the old covenant, his face shone with such a splendour that no one could look at it (Exo.34:30). Obviously that was a transient splendour. It did not and it could not last. The new covenant, the new relationship which Jesus Christ makes possible between man and God, has a greater splendour which will never fade because it produces pardon and not condemnation, life and not death.

Here is the warning. The Jews preferred the old covenant, the law; they rejected the new covenant, the new relationship in Christ. Now the old covenant was not a bad thing; but it was only a second-best, a stage upon the way. As a great commentator has put it, "When the sun has risen the lamps cease to be of use." And as has been so truly said, "The second-best is the worst enemy of the best." Men have always tended to cling to the old even when something far better is offered. For long people, on so-called religious grounds, refused to use chloroform. When Wordsworth and the romantic poets emerged, criticism said, "This will never do." When Wagner began to write his music, people would not have it. Churches all over the world cling to the old and refuse the new. Because a thing was always done, it is right, and because a thing was never done, it is wrong. We must be careful not to worship the stages instead of the goal, not to cling to the second-best while the best is waiting, not, as the Jews did, to insist that the old ways are right and refuse the new glories which God is opening to us.

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2 Corinthians 3:12-18

THE VEIL WHICH HIDES THE TRUTH

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

It is because we possess such a hope that we speak with such freedom. We do not draw a veil over things, as Moses did over his face so that the children of Israel should not gaze at the end of the glory which was doomed to fade away. But their minds were dulled. To this very day the same veil remains, still not drawn aside, when they read the record of the old relationship between God and man, because only in Christ is that veil abolished. Yes, to this day, whenever the books that Moses wrote are read, the veil rests upon their heart. But, whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. The Lord is the Spirit. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. And we all, with no veil upon our faces, see as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and we go on changing this image from glory to glory, even as it comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

All the pictures in this passage emerge directly from the passage which goes before. Paul begins from the thought that when Moses came down from the mount the glory upon his face was so bright that no one could gaze steadily upon it.

(1) He thinks back to Exo.34:33. The King James Version has it that Moses put a veil upon his face until he had finished speaking; but the correct translation of the Hebrew, is that Moses, as in the R.S.V., did this when he had finished speaking. Paul takes this to mean that Moses veiled his face so that the people should not have to see the slow fading of the glory that once was there. His first thought is that the glory of the old covenant, the old relationship between God and men, was essentially a fading one. It was destined to be overpassed, not as the wrong is overpassed by the right, but as the incomplete is overpassed by the complete. The revelation that came by Moses was true and great, but it was only partial; the revelation that came in Jesus Christ is full and final. As Augustine so wisely put it long ago, "We do wrong to the Old Testament if we deny that it comes from the same just and good God as the New.

On the other hand we do wrong to the New Testament, if we put the Old on a level with it." The one is a step to glory; the other is the summit of glory.

(ii) The idea of the veil now takes hold of Paul's mind and he uses it in different ways. He says that, when the Jews listen to the reading of the Old Testament, as they do every Sabbath day in the synagogue, a veil upon their eyes keeps them from seeing the real meaning of it. It ought to point them to Jesus Christ, but the veil keeps them from seeing that. We, too, may fail to see the real meaning of scripture because our eyes are veiled.

(a) They may be veiled by prejudice. We, too, often go to scripture to find support for our own views rather than to find the truth of God.

(b) They may be veiled by wishful-thinking. Too often we find what we want to find, and neglect what we do not want to see. To take an example, we may delight in all the references to the love and the mercy of God, but pass over all the references to his wrath and judgment.

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(c) They may be veiled by fragmentary thinking. We should always regard the Bible as a whole. It is easy to take individual texts and criticize them. It is easy to prove that parts of the Old Testament are sub-Christian. It is easy to find support for private theories by choosing certain texts and passages and putting others aside. But it is the whole message that we must seek; and that is just another way of saying that we must read all scripture in the light of Jesus Christ.

(iii) Not only is there a veil which keeps the Jews from seeing the real meaning of scripture; there is also a veil which comes between them and God.

(a) Sometimes it is the veil of disobedience. Very often it is moral and not intellectual blindness which keeps us from seeing God. If we persist in disobeying him we become less and less capable of seeing him. The vision of God is to the pure in heart.

(b) Sometimes it is the veil of the unteachable spirit. As the Scots saying has it, "There's none so blind as those who winna see." The best teacher on earth cannot teach the man who knows it all already and does not wish to learn. God gave us free will, and, if we insist upon our own way, we cannot learn his.

(iv) Paul goes on to say that we see the glory of the Lord with no veil upon our faces, and because of that we, too, are changed from glory into glory. Possibly what Paul means is that, if we gaze at Christ, we in the end reflect him. His image appears in our lives. It is a law of life that we become like the people we gaze at. People hero-worship someone and begin to reflect his ways. If we contemplate Jesus Christ, in the end we come to reflect him.

Paul sets for many a theological problem when he says, "The Lord is the Spirit." He seems to identify the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit. We must remember that he was not writing theology; he was setting down experience. And it is the experience of the Christian life that the work of the Spirit and the work of the Risen Lord are one and the same. The strength and guidance we receive come alike from the Spirit and from the Risen Lord.

Where the Spirit is, says Paul, there is liberty. He means that so long as man's obedience to God is conditioned by obedience to a code of laws he is in the position of an unwilling slave. But when it comes from the operation of the Spirit in his heart, the very centre of his being has no other desire than to serve God, for then it is not law but love which binds him. Many things which we would resent doing under compulsion for some stranger are a privilege to do for someone we love. Love clothes the humblest and the most menial tasks with glory. "In God's service we find our perfect freedom."

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2 Corinthians 4:1-6

THE BLINDED EYE

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Since therefore this part of God's service has been given to us, even as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have refused to have anything to do with hidden and shameful methods. We do not act with unscrupulous cleverness. We do not adulterate the word which God gave us to preach. But by making the truth clear, we commend ourselves to the human conscience in all its forms in the sight of God. But if in fact the good news that we preach is veiled to some, it is veiled in the case of those who are doomed to perish. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who refuse to believe, in order that upon them there may not dawn the light of the good news which tells of the glory of Christ in whom we can see God. It is not ourselves that we proclaim, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

This we must do because it is the God who said, "Out of darkness light shall shine," who has shined in our hearts to illumine us with the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

In this passage Paul has something to say, either directly or by implication, about four different people or sets of people.

(i) Right at the beginning he has something to say about himself. He says that he never loses heart in the great task that has been given to him, and by implication he tells us why. Two things keep him going. (a) There is the consciousness of a great task. A man who is conscious of a great task can do amazing things. One of the great works of musical genius is Handel's Messiah. It is on record that the whole work was composed and written down in twenty-two days, and that during all that time Handel would scarcely consent to eat or to sleep. A great task brings its own strength with it. (b) There is the memory of mercy received. It was Paul's aim to spend all his life seeking to do something for the love which had redeemed him.

(ii) Then by implication Paul has something to say about his opponents and his slanderers. Again there is the echo of unhappy things. Behind this we can see that his enemies had levelled three charges against him. They had said that he used underhand methods, that he exercised an unscrupulous cleverness to get his own way, and that he adulterated the message of the gospel. When our motives are misinterpreted, our actions misconstrued and our words twisted out of their real meaning, it is a comfort to remember that this also happened to Paul.

(iii) Paul goes on to speak of those who have refused to accept the gospel. He insists that he has proclaimed the gospel in such a way that any man with any kind of conscience at all is bound to admit its claim and its appeal. Even in spite of that some are deaf to its appeal and blind to its glory. What of them?

Paul says something very difficult about them. He says that the god of this world has blinded their minds so that they cannot believe. All through the Bible the writers are conscious that in this world there is a power of evil. Sometimes that power is called Satan, sometimes the Devil. Three times John makes Jesus speak of the prince of this world and of his defeat. (Jn.12:31, Jn.14:30, Jn.16:11). Paul in Eph.2:2 speaks of the prince of the power of the air, and here he speaks of the

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2 Corinthians 4:1-6

god of this world. Even in the Lord's Prayer there is a reference to this malign power, for it is most probable that the correct translation of Matt.6:13 is "Deliver us from the Evil One." At the back of this idea as it emerges in the New Testament there are certain influences.

(a) The Persian faith called Zoroastrianism sees the whole universe as a battle-ground between the god of the light and the god of the dark, between Ormuzd and Ahriman. That which settles a man's destiny is the side he chooses in this cosmic conflict. When the Jews were subject to the Persians they came into contact with that idea and it undoubtedly coloured their thinking.

(b) Basic to the Jewish faith is the thought of the two ages, the present age and the age to come. By the time of the Christian era, the Jews had come to think of the present age as incurably bad and destined for total destruction when the age to come dawned. It could fitly be said that the present age was under the power of the god of this world and at enmity with the true God.

(c) It has to be remembered that this idea of an evil and a hostile power is not so much a theological idea, as a fact of experience. If we regard it in a theological way we are up against serious difficulties. Where did that evil power come from in a universe created by God? What is its ultimate end? But if we regard it as a matter of experience, we all know how real the evil of the world is. Robert Louis Stevenson somewhere says, "You know the Caledonian Railway Station in Edinburgh? One cold, east windy morning I met Satan there."

Everyone knows the kind of experience of which Stevenson speaks. However difficult the idea of a power of evil may be theologically or philosophically, it is one which experience understands only too well. Those who cannot accept the good news of Christ are those who have so given themselves over to the evil of the world that they can no longer hear God's invitation. It is not that God has abandoned them; they by their own conduct have shut themselves off from him.

(iv) Paul has something to say about Jesus. The great thought that he drives home here is that in Jesus Christ we see what God is like. "He who has seen me," said Jesus, "has seen the Father." (Jn.14:9). When Paul preached he did not say, "Look at me!" He said, "Look at Jesus Christ! and there you will see the glory of God come to earth in a form that a man can understand."

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2 Corinthians 4:7-15

TRIBULATION AND TRIUMPH

2 Corinthians 4:7-15

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the power which surpasses all things may be seen to be of God and not of us. We are sore pressed at every point, but not hemmed in. We are at our wit's end, but never at our hope's end. We are persecuted by men, but never abandoned by God. We are knocked down, but not knocked out. In our bodies we have to run the same risk of death as Jesus Christ did, so that in our body the same life as Jesus lived may be clear for all to see. For all through our lives we are continually handed over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life also which Jesus gives may be clear for all to see in our mortal flesh. The result is that death operates in us, but life operates in you.

Because we have the same spirit of faith as appears in that passage of scripture where it stands written, "I have believed and therefore have I spoken," we, too, believe and therefore speak, for we know that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will raise us up also with Jesus, and will present us with you. Everything that happens to us is for your sake, so that grace may abound more and more, and so swell the thanksgiving which rises from many to the glory of God.

Paul begins this passage with the thought that it might well be that the privileges which a Christian enjoys might move him to pride. But life is designed to keep a man from pride. However great his Christian glory he is still a mortal man; still the victim of circumstances; still subject to the chances and the changes of human life; still a mortal body with all that body's weakness and pain. He is like a man with a precious treasure contained in an earthen vessel, which itself is weak and worthless. We talk a great deal about the power of man and about the vast forces which he now controls. But the real characteristic of man is not his power but his weakness. As Pascal said, "A drop of water or a breath of air can kill him."

We have already seen what a proud and glorious thing a triumph was for a Roman general. But there were two things designed to keep the general from pride. First, as he rode in the chariot with the crown held over his head, the populace not only shouted their applause but also, ever and again, they shouted, "Look behind you and remember you will die." Second, at the very end of the procession there came the conquering general's own soldiers, and they did two things as they marched. They sang songs in the general's praise, but they also shouted ribald jests and insults to keep him from too much pride.

Life has surrounded us with infirmity, although Christ has surrounded us with glory, so that we may remember that the infirmity is ours and the glory is God's, and recognize our own utter dependence on him.

Paul goes on to describe this Christian life, in which our infirmity is intermingled with God's glory, in a series of paradoxes.

(i) We are sore pressed at every point but not hemmed in. There are all kinds of pressure on us, but we are never in so tight a corner that there is no way out. It is characteristic of the Christian

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that, even if his body be confined in some difficult environment or some narrow circumstance, there is always an escape route for his spirit to the spaciousness of God.

Matthew Arnold writes of his meeting with a minister of Christ in the London slums.

"'Twas August and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid slums of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his window seen
In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.
I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
'Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this scene?'
'Bravely,' said he, 'for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, the living bread'."

His body might be hemmed in in a slum but his soul reached out into the spaciousness of communion with Christ.

(ii) We are persecuted by men but never abandoned by God. One of the most notable things about the martyrs is that it was amidst their sorest times that they had their sweetest times with Christ. As Joan of Arc said when she was abandoned by those who should have stood by her, "It is better to be alone with God. His friendship will not fail me, nor his counsel, nor his love. In his strength, I will dare and dare and dare until I die." As the psalmist wrote, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." (Ps.27:10). Nothing can alter the loyalty of God.

(iii) We are at our wit's end but never at our hope's end. There are times when the Christian does not know what is to be done, but even then he never doubts that something can be done. There are times when he cannot well see where life is going, but he never doubts that it is going somewhere. If he must "stoop into a dark, tremendous sea of cloud", he still knows that he will emerge. There are times when a Christian has to learn the hardest lesson of all, the very lesson which Jesus himself had to learn in Gethsemane--how to accept what he cannot understand and still to say, "God, Thou art love; I build my faith on that."

Francis Thompson wrote of the presence of Christ on the darkest days:

"But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry--and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt heaven and Charing Cross.
Yea, in the night, my soul, my daughter,
Cry--clinging heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesaret but Thames."

A man may be at his wit's end but he can never be at his hope's end while he has the presence of Christ.

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2 Corinthians 4:7-15

(iv) We are knocked down but not knocked out. The supreme characteristic of the Christian is not that he does not fall, but that every time he falls he rises again. It is not that he is never beaten, but he is never ultimately defeated. He may lose a battle, but he knows that in the end he can never lose the campaign. Browning in his Epilogue describes the gallant character:

"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

After he has stated the great paradoxes of the Christian life Paul goes on to give the secret of his own life, the reasons why he was able to do and to endure as he did.

(i) He was well aware that if a man would share the life of Christ he must share his risks, that if a man wished to live with Christ he must be ready to die with him. Paul knew and accepted the inexorable law of the Christian life--"No Cross, No Crown."

(ii) He faced everything in the memory of the power of God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. He was able to speak with such courage and such disregard of personal safety because he believed that even if death took him, that God could and would also raise him up. He was certain that he could draw on a power which was sufficient for life and greater than death.

(iii) He bore everything in the conviction that through his sufferings and trials others were being led into the light and love of God. The great Boulder Dam scheme in America brought fertility to vast areas which had once been desert. In the making of it there were inevitably those who lost their lives. When the scheme was completed, a tablet was let into the wall of the dam bearing the names of the workmen who had died, and below stands the inscription: "These died that the desert might rejoice and blossom as the rose." Paul could go through what he did because he knew that it was not for nothing; he knew that it was to bring others to Christ. When a man has the conviction that what is happening to him is happening literally for Christ's sake he can face anything.

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2 Corinthians 4:16-18

THE SECRET OF ENDURANCE

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

That is the reason why we do not grow weary. But if indeed our outward frame is wasting away, our inward self is renewed day by day, for the light affliction which at the moment we must endure produces for us in a way that cannot be exaggerated an eternal weight of glory, so long as we do not think of the things which are seen, but of the things which are unseen, for the things which are seen are passing, but the things which are unseen are eternal.

Here Paul sets out the secret of endurance.

(i) All through life it must happen that a man's bodily strength fades away, but all through life it ought to happen that a man's soul keeps growing. The sufferings which leave a man with a weakened body may be the very things which strengthen the sinews of his soul. It was the prayer of the poet, "Let me grow lovely growing old." From the physical point of view life may be a slow but inevitable slipping down the slope that leads to death. But from the spiritual point of view life is a climbing up the hill that leads to the presence of God. No man need fear the years, for they bring him nearer, not to death, but to God.

(ii) Paul was convinced that anything he had to suffer in this world would be as nothing compared with the glory he would enjoy in the next. He was certain that God would never be in any man's debt. Alistair Maclean, minister father of the author of H.M.S. Ulysses and the rest, tells of an old Highland woman who had to leave the clean air and the blue waters and the purple hills and live in the slum of a great city. She still lived close to God, and one day she said, "God will make it up to me, and I will see the flowers again."

In Christmas Eve Browning writes of the martyr whose story was set out "on the rude tablet overhead."

"I was born sickly, poor and mean,
A slave; no misery could screen
The holders of the pearl of price
From Caesar's envy,--therefore twice
I fought with beasts and three times saw
My children suffer by his law;
At last my own release was earned;
I was some time in being burned,
But at the close a Hand came through
The fire above my head, and drew
My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
Sergius, a brother, writes for me
This testimony on the wall--
For me, I have forgot it all."

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2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Earth's suffering was forgotten in the glory of heaven.

It is a notable fact that in all the gospel story Jesus never foretold his death without foretelling his Resurrection. He who suffers for Christ will share his glory. God's own honour is pledged to that.

(iii) For that very reason, a man's eyes must be ever fixed, not on the things that are seen, but on the things that are unseen. The things that are seen, the things of this world, have their day and cease to be; the things that are unseen, the things of heaven, last forever.

There are two ways of looking at life. We can look at it as a slow but inexorable journey away from God. Wordsworth in his Ode on the Intimations of Immortality had the idea that when a child came into this world he had some memory of heaven which the years slowly took away from him.

"Trailing clouds of glory do we come,"

but,

"Shades of the prison house begin to close
About the growing boy."

And in the end the man is earthbound and heaven is forgotten. Thomas Hood wrote with wistful pathos:

"I remember, I remember
The fir-trees dark and high.
I used to think their slender spires
Were close against the sky.
It was a childish ignorance
But now 'tis little joy
To know, I'm farther off from heaven
Than when I was a boy."

If we think only of the things that are visible we are bound to see life that way. But there is another way. The writer to the Hebrews said of Moses: "He endured as seeing him who is invisible." (Heb.11:27). Robert Louis Stevenson tells of an old byreman. Someone was sympathizing with him about his daily work amidst the muck of the byre and asking him how he could go on doing it day in and day out, and the old man answered, "He that has something ayont (beyond) need never weary."

Barclay's Commentary

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

JOY AND JUDGMENT TO COME

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

For we know that if this earthly house of ours, that tent which is the body is pulled down, we have a building which comes from God, a house not made with hands, eternal and in the heavens. For indeed so long as we are as we are we earnestly long to put on our abode which is from heaven, and if indeed we have put it on we shall not be found naked. For, while we are in this tent of the body, we groan, for life weighs us down, for it is not so much that we desire to be stripped of this house, but rather that we desire to put on our heavenly body over it, so that that which is subject to death may be swallowed up by life. He who has designed us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a first instalment of the life to come. So then we are always in good heart, although we know that, while we sojourn here in the body, we are absent from the Lord--for it is by faith we walk and not by sight--but we are in good heart and we are willing rather to depart from the body and to stay with the Lord.

So then it is our one ambition, whether we are present with him or absent from him, to be the kind of people in which he can find pleasure. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one of us may receive the consequences of the thing we did while we were in the body, consequences which will correspond to what each one of us has done, be it good or bad.

There is a very significant progression of thought in this passage, a progression which gives us the very essence of the thought of Paul.

(i) To him it will be a day of joy when he is done with this human body. He regards it as merely a tent, a temporary dwelling place, in which we sojourn till the day comes when it is dissolved and we enter into the real abode of our souls.

We have had occasion before to see how Greek and Roman thinkers despised the body. "The body," they said, "is a tomb." Plotinus could say that he was ashamed that he had a body. Epictetus said of himself. "Thou art a poor soul burdened with a corpse." Seneca wrote, "I am a higher being and born for higher things than to be the slave of my body which I look upon as only a shackle put upon my freedom.... In so detestable a habitation dwells the free soul." Even Jewish thought sometimes had this idea. "For the corruptible body presses down upon the soul and the earthly tabernacle weighs down the mind that muses on many things." (Wis.9:15).

With Paul there is a difference. He is not looking for a Nirvana with the peace of extinction; he is not looking for absorption in the divine; he is not looking for the freedom of a disembodied spirit; he is waiting for the day when God will give him a new body, a spiritual body, in which he will still be able, even in the heavenly places, to serve and to adore God.

Kipling once wrote a poem in which he thought of all the great things that a man would be able to do in the world to come:

"When earth's last picture is painted
And the tubes are twisted and dried,

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When the oldest colours have faded,
And the youngest critic has died,
We shall rest, and, faith, we shall need it--
Lie down for an aeon or two,
Till the Master of All Good Workmen
Shall put us to work anew.
And those that were good shall be happy,
They shall sit in a golden chair
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas
With brushes of comets' hair.
They shall find real saints to draw from,
Magdalene, Peter and Paul,
They shall work for an age at a sitting
And never be tired at all.
And only the Master shall praise them,
And only the Master shall blame;
And no one will work for money
And no one will work for fame;
But each for the joy of the working,
And each in his separate star,
Shall draw the thing as he sees it,
For the God of things as they are."

That was how Paul felt. He saw eternity not as release into permanent inaction, but as the entry into a body in which service could be complete.

(ii) For all his yearning for the life to come, Paul does not despise this life. He is, he says, in good heart. The reason is that even here and now we possess the Holy Spirit of God, and the Holy Spirit is the arrabon (GSN0728) (compare 2Cor.1:22), the first instalment of the life to come. It is Paul's conviction that already the Christian can enjoy the foretaste of the life everlasting. It is given to the Christian to be a citizen of two worlds; and the result is, not that he despises this world, but that he finds it clad with a sheen of glory which is the reflection of the greater glory to come.

(iii) Then comes the note of sternness. Even when Paul was thinking of the life to come, he never forgot that we are on the way not only to glory, but also to judgment. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." The word for judgment seat is bema (GSN0968). Paul may be thinking simply of the tribunal of the Roman magistrate before which he himself had stood, or he may be thinking of the Greek way of justice.

All Greek citizens were liable to serve as judges, or, as we would say, as jurymen. When an Athenian sat in judgment on a case he was given two bronze discs. Each had a cylindrical axis. One axis was hollow and that disc stood for condemnation; one was solid and that disc stood for acquittal. On the bema (GSN0968) there stood two urns. One, of bronze, was called "the decisive urn", for into it the judge dropped the disc which stood for his verdict. The other, of wood, was called "the inoperative urn", for into it the judge dropped the disc which he desired to discard. So at

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2 Corinthians 5:1-10

the end the jury dropped into the bronze urn either the disc that stood for acquittal or the one that stood for condemnation. To an onlooker they looked exactly alike and none could tell the verdict the judges gave. Then the discs were counted and the verdict given.

Even so some day we shall await the verdict of God. When we remember that, life becomes a tremendous and a thrilling thing, for in it we are making or marring a destiny, winning or losing a crown. Time becomes the testing ground of eternity.

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2 Corinthians 5:11-19

THE NEW CREATION

2 Corinthians 5:11-19

So then, it is because we know the fear of the Lord that we keep on trying to persuade men, but to God we are already known through and through, and I hope that in your conscience, too, we will come to be as completely known. We are not trying to give ourselves another testimonial, but we are giving you an opportunity to express your pride in us, so that you may be able to answer those who pride themselves on outward appearances but not in the things of the heart. For, if we have behaved like a madman, it is for the sake of God's work. If we behave like a sensible person, it is for your sake. For it is the love of Christ which controls us, because we have come to this conclusion that one died for all, and that the inevitable conclusion is that all died. And he did die for all in order that those who live should no longer live for their own sakes, but for the sake of him who died and was raised again. The result is that from now on we value no man on the world's standards.

There was a time when we applied our human standards to Christ, but now that is no longer the way in which we know him. The result is that if a man is in Christ he has been created all over again. The old things have passed away, and lo! they have become new. And all things are from God who reconciled us to himself by means of Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation, a ministry whose message is that God, through Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not debiting their sins against them, and has given us the story of this reconciliation to tell.

This passage follows very directly on the one that has gone before. Paul had just spoken of standing at the judgment tribunal of Christ. All his life is lived with that kept in view. It is not so much the terror of Christ he really talks about. It is rather awe and reverence that he means. The Old Testament is full of the thought of a cleansing fear. Job speaks of "the fear of the Lord that is wisdom." (Jb.28:28). "What does the Lord your God require of you?" asks the writer of Deuteronomy, and the first item on his answer is, "to fear the Lord your God." (Deut.10:12). "The fear of the Lord," says Proverbs, "is the beginning of knowledge." (Prov.1:7 compare Prov.9:10). "By the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil." (Prov.16:6). This does not describe the fear of a dog who waits for a whipping or of a cowed child. It is that which keeps even a thoughtless man from desecrating a holy place. It is that which keeps a man from doing things which would break the heart of someone whom he loves.

"The fear of the Lord," said the psalmist, "is clean." (Ps.19:9). There is a cleansing fear without which a man cannot live the life he ought.

Paul is trying to persuade men of his own sincerity. He has no doubt whatever that in the sight of God his hands are clean and his motives pure. but his enemies have cast suspicion on them, and he wishes to demonstrate his sincerity to his Corinthian friends. This is not from any selfish desire to vindicate himself. It is from the knowledge that, if his sincerity is questioned, the impact of his message will be injured. A man's message will always be heard in the context of his character. That is why the preacher and the teacher must be beyond suspicion. We have to avoid, not only evil, but the very appearance of evil lest anything make others think less, not of us, but of the message which we bring.

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2 Corinthians 5:11-19

In 2Cor.5:13 Paul insists that behind all his conduct there has been one motive only--to serve God and to help the Corinthians. More than once Paul was thought to be crazy (Ac.26:24). He was suffering the same misunderstanding as Jesus suffered (Mk.3:21). The real enthusiast always runs the risk of seeming crazy to lukewarm people.

Kipling tells how, on a world tour, General Booth boarded the ship at a certain port. He was seen off by a horde of tambourine-beating Salvationists. The whole thing revolted Kipling's fastidious soul. Later he got to know the General and told him how much he disapproved of this kind of thing. "Young man," said Booth, "if I thought that I could win one more soul for Christ by standing on my hands and beating a tambourine with my feet I would learn to do it."

The real enthusiast does not care if others think he is a fool. If a man follows out the Christian way of generosity, forgiveness and utter loyalty, there will always be worldly-wise people who will bluntly call him crazy. Paul knew that there was a time for calm, sensible conduct, and he knew, too, that there was a time for the conduct which to the world looks mad. He was prepared to follow either for the sake of Christ and of men.

Paul goes on to the moving motive of the whole Christian life. Christ died for all. To Paul the Christian is, in his favourite phrase, in Christ, and therefore the old self of the Christian died in that death and he arose a new man, as new as if he had been freshly created by the hands of God. In this newness of life he has acquired a new set of standards. He no longer judges things by the standards the world uses. There was a time when Paul had judged Christ by human standards and had set out to eliminate the Christian faith from the world. But not now. Now his standards are different. Now the man whose name he had sought to obliterate is to him the most wonderful person in the world, because he had given to him that friendship of God which he had longed for all his life.

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2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

So then we are acting as ambassadors on Christ's behalf, for God is sending you his invitation through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made him who had no acquaintance with sin to be sin for us, that through him we might become the righteousness of God. Because we are trying to help him to win men, we urge you not to have received the offer of the grace of God all to no purpose. (For scripture says, "At an accepted time I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." Lo! Now is the accepted time. Lo! Now is the day of salvation).

The office that Paul claims as his one glory and his one task is that of ambassador for Christ. The Greek he uses (presbeutes, compare GSN4246) is a great word. It had two uses corresponding with the Latin word of which it is a translation (legatus).

(i) Roman provinces were divided into two types. One was under the direct control of the senate, the other under the direct control of the Emperor. The distinction was made on this basis--provinces which were peaceful and had no troops in them were senatorial provinces; provinces which were turbulent and had troops stationed in them were imperial provinces. In the imperial provinces, the man who administered the province on behalf of the Emperor, was the legatus presbeutai. So then, the word in the first place paints a picture of a man who has a direct commission from the Emperor; and Paul regarded himself as commissioned by Jesus Christ for the work of the Church.

(ii) But presbeutes (compare GSN4246) and legatus have an even more interesting meaning. When the Roman senate decided that a country should become a province they sent to it ten legati or presbeutai, that is, envoys, of their own number, who, along with the victorious general, arranged the terms of peace with the vanquished people, determined the boundaries of the new province, drew up a constitution for its new administration, and then returned to submit what they had done for ratification by the senate. They were the men responsible for bringing others into the family of the Roman Empire. So Paul thinks of himself as the man who brings to others the terms of God, whereby they can become citizens of his empire and members of his family.

There is no more responsible position than that of ambassador.

(i) An ambassador of Britain is a Briton in a foreign land. His life is spent among people who usually speak a different language, who have a different tradition and who follow a different way of life. The Christian is always like that. He lives in the world; he takes part in all the life and work of the world; but he is a citizen of heaven. To that extent he is a stranger. The man who is not willing to be different cannot be a Christian at all.

(ii) An ambassador speaks for his own country. When a British ambassador speaks, his voice is the voice of Britain. There are times when the Christian has to speak for Christ. In the decisions and the counsels of the world his must be the voice which brings the message of Christ to the human situation.

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2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

(iii) The honour of a country is in its ambassador's hands. His country is judged by him. His words are listened to, his deeds are watched and people say, "That is the way such-and-such a country speaks and acts." Lightfoot, the great Bishop of Durham, said in an ordination address, "The ambassador, while acting, acts not only as an agent, but as a representative of his sovereign.... The ambassador's duty is not only to deliver a definite message, to carry out a definite policy; but he is obliged to watch opportunities, to study characters, to cast about for expedients, so that he may place it before his hearers in its most attractive form." It is the great responsibility of the ambassador to commend his country to the men amongst whom he is set.

Here is the Christian's proud privilege and almost terrifying responsibility. The honour of Christ and of the Church are in his hands. By his every word and action he can make men think more-or-less of his Church and of his Master.

We have to note Paul's message. "Be reconciled to God." The New Testament never speaks of God being reconciled to men, but always of men being reconciled to God. There is no question of pacifying an angry God. The whole process of salvation takes its beginning from him. It was because God so loved the world that he sent his son. It is not that God is estranged from man but that man is estranged from him. God's message, the message which Paul brought, is an appeal from a loving Father to wandering and estranged children to come home where love is waiting for them.

Paul beseeches them not to accept the offer of the grace of God all to no purpose. There is such a thing--and it is eternity's tragedy--as the frustration of grace. Let us think of the matter in human terms. Suppose that a father sacrifices and toils to give his son every chance, surrounds him with love, plans for his future with care, and does everything humanly possible to equip him for life. And suppose the son feels no debt of gratitude, never feels the obligation to repay by being worthy of all this; and suppose he fails, not because he has not the ability, but because he will not try, because he forgets the love that gave him so much. That is what breaks a father's heart. When God gives men all his grace and they take their own foolish way and frustrate that grace which might have recreated them, once again Christ is crucified and the heart of God is broken.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Corinthians 6:3-10

A BLIZZARD OF TROUBLES

2 Corinthians 6:3-10

We do our work, trying to put an obstacle in no man's way, for we do not wish the ministry to become a laughing stock for critics. But in everything we try to keep on commending ourselves as ministers of God must do--in much endurance, amidst the things which press sore upon us, in the inescapable pains of life, in anxieties, amidst stripes, in prisons, in tumults, in toils, in sleepless nights, in fastings, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned, in the declaration of the truth, in the power of God, with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left, in honour and in dishonour, in ill report and in good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and lo! we live; as chastened, but not killed; as grieved, but always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.

In all the chances and changes of life Paul had only one concern--to show himself a sincere and profitable minister of Jesus Christ. Even as he made that claim, his mind's eye went back across what Chrysostom called "the blizzard of troubles" through which he had come and through which he was still struggling. Every word in this tremendous catalogue, which someone has called "the hymn of the herald of salvation," has its background in Paul's adventurous life.

He begins with one triumphant word of the Christian life--endurance (hupomone, GSN5281). It is untranslatable. It does not describe the frame of mind which can sit down with folded hands and bowed head and let a torrent of troubles sweep over it in passive resignation. It describes the ability to bear things in such a triumphant way that it transfigures them. Chrysostom has a great panegyric on this hupomone (GSN5281). He calls it "the root of all goods, the mother of piety, the fruit that never withers, a fortress that is never taken, a harbour that knows no storms" and "the queen of virtues, the foundation of right actions, peace in war, calm in tempest, security in plots." It is the courageous and triumphant ability to pass the breaking-point and not to break and always to greet the unseen with a cheer. It is the alchemy which transmutes tribulation into strength and glory.

Paul goes on to speak of three groups, each of three things, in which this victorious endurance is practised.

(i) There are the internal conflicts of the Christian life.

(a) The things which press sore upon us. The word he uses is thlipsis (GSN2347) which originally expressed sheer, physical pressure on a man. There are things which weigh down a man's spirit like the sorrows which are a burden on his heart and the disappointments which are like to crush the life out of him. The triumphant endurance can cope with them all.

(b) The inescapable pains of life. The Greek word (anagke, GSN0318) literally means the necessities of life. Certain burdens a man may escape, but others are inescapable. There are certain things which a man must bear. The greatest of these are sorrow, for only the life which has never

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2 Corinthians 6:3-10

known love will never know that, and death which is the lot of every man. The triumphant endurance enables a man to face all that is involved in being a man.

(c) Anxieties. The word Paul uses (stenochoria, GSN4730) literally means a too narrow place. It might be used of an army caught in a narrow, rocky defile with space neither to manoeuvre nor to escape. It might be used of a ship caught in a storm with no room either to ride it or to run before it. There are moments when a man seems to be in a situation in which the walls of life are closing round him. Even then the triumphant endurance makes him able to breathe the spaciousness of heaven.

(ii) There are the external tribulations of life.

(a) Stripes. For Paul the Christian life meant not only spiritual suffering, but also physical suffering. It is the simple fact that if there had not been those who were ready and able to bear the torture of the fire and the wild beasts we would not be Christian today. There are still some for whom it is physical agony to be a Christian; and it is always true that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

(b) Prisons. Clement of Rome tells us that Paul was in prison no fewer than seven times. From Acts we know that before he wrote to the Corinthians he was in prison in Philippi, and afterwards in Jerusalem, in Caesarea and in Rome. The pageant of Christians who were imprisoned stretches from the first to the twentieth century. There have always been those who would abandon their liberty sooner than abandon their faith.

(c) Tumults. Over and over again we have the picture of the Christian facing, not the sternness of the law, but the violence of the mob. John Wesley tells us of what happened to him in Wednesbury when the mob came "pouring down like a flood." "To attempt speaking was vain; for the noise on every side was like the roaring of the sea. So they dragged me along till we came to the town; when, seeing the door of a large house open, I attempted to go in; but a man, catching me by the hair, pulled me back into the middle of the crowd. They made no more stop till they had carried me through the main street, from one end of the town to the other." George Foxe tells us of what happened to him at Tickhill. "I found the priest and most of the chief of the parish together in the chancel. So I went up to them and began to speak, but immediately they fell upon me; the clerk took up the Bible as I was speaking, and struck me on the face with it, so that it gushed out with blood, and I bled exceedingly in the steeple-house.

Then the people cried, 'Let us have him out of the Church'; and when they had got me out they beat me exceedingly, and threw me down, and over a hedge; and afterwards they dragged me through a house into the street, stoning and beating me as they drew me along, so that I was besmeared all over with blood and dirt.... Yet when I was got upon my legs again I declared to them the word of life and shewed them the fruits of their teachers, how they dishonoured Christianity." The mob has often been the enemy of Christianity; but nowadays it is not the violence but the mockery or the amused contempt of the crowd against which the Christian must stand fast.

(iii) There is the effort of the Christian life.

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2 Corinthians 6:3-10

(a) Toils. The word Paul uses (kopos, GSN2873) is in the New Testament almost a technical term for the Christian life. It describes toil to the point of sheer exhaustion, the kind of toil which takes everything of body, mind and spirit that a man has to give. The Christian is the workman of God.

(b) Sleepless nights. Some would be spent in prayer, some in a situation of peril or discomfort where sleep was impossible. At all times Paul was ready to be the unsleeping sentinel of Christ.

(c) Fastings. No doubt what Paul means here is not deliberately chosen fastings, but times when he went hungry for the work's sake. We may well contrast with his spirit the spirit of the man who would not miss a meal to attend the worship of the house of God.

Now Paul turns away from the trials and the tribulations, which endurance enabled him to conquer, to his own God-given equipment for the Christian life. Once again he retains the same arrangement of three groups of three items.

(i) There are the God-given qualities of mind. (a) Purity. The word Paul uses (hagnotes, GSN0054) was defined by the Greeks as "the careful avoidance of all sins which are against the gods; the service of the honour of God as nature demands", as "prudence at its highest tension" and as "freedom from every stain of flesh and spirit." It is in fact the quality which enables a man to enter into the very presence of God.

(b) Knowledge. This kind of knowledge has been defined as "knowledge of the things that must be done." It was the knowledge which issued not in the theologian's fine-spun subtleties but in the actions of the Christian man.

(c) Patience. Usually in the New Testament this word (makrothumia, GSN3115) denotes patience with people, the ability to bear with them even when they are wrong, even when they are cruel and insulting. It is a great word. In First Maccabees it is said (1Macc.8:4) that the Romans conquered the world by "their policy and their patience" and there the word expresses that Roman unconquerableness which would never make peace under defeat. Patience is the quality of a man who may lose a battle but who will never admit defeat in a campaign.

(ii) There are the God-given qualities of heart. (a) Kindness. Kindness (chrestotes, GSN5544) is one of the great New Testament words. It is the very opposite of severity. One great commentator describes it as "the sympathetic kindliness or sweetness of temper which puts others at their ease and shrinks from giving pain." The great example is in Gen.26:17-22 which tells how Isaac would not fight or strive. It is the quality which thinks far more of others than of itself.

(b) The Holy Spirit. Paul knew well that no useful word could be spoken nor any good deed done without the help of the Holy Spirit. But the phrase may well mean not the Holy Spirit, but a spirit of holiness. It may mean that Paul's dominating motive was one which was holy, one which was directed solely towards the honour and service of God.

(c) Unfeigned love. The word Paul uses is agape (GSN0026), which is a characteristic New Testament word. It means unconquerable benevolence. It means that spirit which, no matter what

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anyone else does to it, will never seek anything but the other person's highest good, will never dream of revenge, but will meet all injuries and rebuffs with undefeatable good will.

(iii) There is the God-given equipment for the work of preaching the gospel.

(a) The declaration of the truth. Paul knew that Jesus had not only given him a gospel to proclaim but the strength and the ability to proclaim it. To God he owed both the word and the door of utterance that had been opened for it.

(b) The power of God. To Paul this was everything. It was the only power he had. It was said of Henry the Fifth after the battle of Agincourt, "Neither would he suffer any ditties to be made and sung by the minstrels of his glorious victory, for that he would wholly have the praise and thanks altogether given to God." Paul would never have said in pride, "I did this," but always in humility, "God enabled me to do it."

(c) The weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left. This means the weapons for defence and for attack. The sword or the spear was carried in the right hand and the shield on the left arm; and Paul is saying that God has given him the power to attack his task and to defend himself from his temptations.

Paul completes this lyrical passage with a series of contrasts. He begins with in honour and in dishonour. The word he uses for dishonour is normally used in Greek for loss of rights as a citizen (atimia, GSN0819). Paul says, "I may have lost all the rights and privileges which the world can confer but I am still a citizen of the Kingdom of God." In ill-repute and in good-repute. There are those who criticize his every action and who hate his very name, but his fame with God is sure. Deceivers and yet true. The Greek word (planos, GSN4108) literally means a wandering quack and impostor. That is what others call him but he knows that his message is God's truth. Unknown yet well known. The Jews who slandered him said he was a no-account nobody whom no one had ever heard of, yet to those to whom he had brought Christ he was known with gratitude. Dying, and lo! we live.

Danger was his companion and the prospect of death his comrade, and yet by the grace of God he was triumphantly alive with a life that death could never kill. Chastened, but not killed. Things happened to him that might have chastened any man's spirit but they could not kill the spirit of Paul. Grieved, but always rejoicing. Things happened that might have broken any man's heart but they could not destroy Paul's joy. Poor, yet making many rich. He might seem to be penniless but he brought with him that which would enrich the souls of men. Having nothing, yet possessing all things. He might seem to have nothing, but, having Christ, he had everything that mattered in this world and the next.

Barclay's Commentary 2 Corinthians 6:11-13, 7:2-4

THE ACCENT OF LOVE

2 Corinthians 6:11-13 and 2 Corinthians 7:2-4

My dear Corinthians, we have spoken to you without keeping anything back. Our heart lies wide open to you. If there is any constraint between us, it lies, not in us, but in your hearts. Give me fair exchange. I speak as to children. Do you, too, open wide your hearts to us.... Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one. We have corrupted no one. We have taken advantage of no one. I am not speaking with any intention of condemnation. I have already told you that you are in our hearts, so that I am ready to die with you and to live with you. I have every confidence in you. I know that I can boast much about you. My comfort is complete. I am overflowing with joy amidst all the things that press sore upon me.

We have here taken together 2Cor.6:11-13 and 2Cor.7:2-4, for the moment omitting 2Cor.6:14 to 2Cor.7:1. The reason will become clear when we deal with the latter passage.

Paul is speaking with the accents of purest love. The breaches are healed. The quarrels are all made up and love reigns supreme. The phrase that we have translated "Our heart lies wide open to you," literally means, "Our heart is enlarged." Chrysostom has a fine comment. He says that heat makes all things expand and the warmth of love will always expand a man's heart.

In the King James Version in 2Cor.6:12 we note a translation which is very common in the New Testament and not very fortunate, "Ye are straitened in your own bowels." The word translated bowels is the Greek word *splagchna* (GSN4698). It literally means the upper viscera, the heart, the liver and the lungs. In these organs the seat of the emotions was supposed to lie. The form of expression sounds awkward but it is not really any more curious than our own English form. We speak of a man being melancholy which literally means that he has a black liver. We put the seat of love in the heart, which, after all, is a physical organ. But in English idiom it is more natural to use the word heart than bowels.

Paul here makes a great series of claims. He has wronged no one, he has corrupted no one, he has taken advantage of no one. Towards the end of his life Sir Walter Scott made the great claim, "I have unsettled no man's faith, I have corrupted no man's principles." Thackeray, also towards the end of his life, wrote a prayer in which he prayed that he "might never write a word inconsistent with the love of God, or the love of man, might never propagate his own prejudices or pander to those of others, might always speak the truth with his pen, and might never be actuated by a love of greed."

Only one thing is worse than sinning oneself, and that is teaching another to sin. It is one of the grim truths of life that another must always present a person with his first temptation, must give him the first push into sin, and it is a terrible thing to introduce a younger or a weaker brother to the wrong thing.

Someone tells of an old man who on his death-bed seemed distressed by something. When asked what was the matter he said that, when he was a boy, he and some companions had been playing at

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2 Corinthians 6:11-13, 7:2-4

a cross-roads in the middle of a common. There was a signpost there and it was loose in its socket. They turned it round so that its arms were facing in the wrong directions. And the old man said, "I cannot stop wondering how many people were sent on the wrong road by the thing we did that day."

There can be no regret like the regret of having sent another on the wrong way. It was Paul's proud claim that his guidance and his influence had always been towards the best.

He finishes this passage by telling the Corinthians how complete his comfort is and how overflowing his joy even although at the moment troubles are all around him. Surely there never was a clearer proof that human relationships are the most important thing in life. If a man is happy at home, he can face up to anything outside. If a man is in fellowship with his friends, he can withstand the slings and arrows of fortune with a smile. As the writer of the Proverbs has it, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted ox and hatred with it." (Prov.15:17).

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2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

GET YOU OUT

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Do not allow yourselves to become joined in an alien yoke with unbelievers. What partnership can there be between righteousness and lawlessness? What fellowship can darkness have with light? What concord can there be with Christ and Belial? What share can the believer have with the unbeliever? What agreement can the temple of God have with idols? For you are the temple of the living God, even as God said, "I will dwell in them and I will walk in them, and I will be their God and they will be my people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and separate yourselves," the Lord says, "and, have no contact with impurity, and I will receive you, and I will be a father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me," says the Lord, the ruler of all. So then, since we possess these promises, let us purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit, and let us thus make holiness complete in the fear of God.

We come now to the passage which we omitted previously. There is no doubt that it comes in very awkwardly where it is. Its sternness is at odds with the glad and joyous love of the verses on either side of it.

In the introduction we saw that Paul wrote a letter prior to First Corinthians. In 1Cor.5:9 he says, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men." That letter may be altogether lost. Or it may be that this is a section of it. It could easily happen that, when Paul's letters were being collected, one sheet could get misplaced. It was not until A.D. 90 or thereby that the collection was made, and by that time there may well have been none who knew the proper order. Certainly, in substance, this well suits the letter referred to in 1Cor.5:9.

There are certain Old Testament pictures behind this. Paul begins by urging the Corinthians not to be joined to unbelievers in an alien yoke. Undoubtedly that goes back to the old commandment in Deut.22:10, "You shall not plough with an ox and an ass together." (compare Lev.19:19). The idea is that there are certain things which are fundamentally incompatible and were never meant to be brought together. It is impossible for the purity of the Christian and the pollution of the pagan to run in double harness.

In the demand, "What has the temple of God to do with idols?" Paul's thought is going back to such incidents as Manasseh bringing a graven image into the temple of God (2Kgs.21:1-9), and, in the later days, Josiah utterly destroying such things (2Kgs.23:3ff.). Or he is thinking of such abominations as are described in Eze.8:3-18. Men had sometimes tried to associate the temple of God with idol worship, and the consequences had been terrible.

The whole passage is a rousing summons not to hold any fellowship with unbelievers. It is a challenge to the Corinthians to keep themselves unspotted from the world. It has been well remarked that the very essence of the history of Israel is in the words, "Get thee out!" That was the word of God that came to Abraham as the King James Version has it. "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house" (Gen.12:1). That was the warning that came to

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2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Lot before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Gen.19:12-14). There are things in the world with which the Christian cannot and dare not associate himself.

It is difficult to realize just how many separations Christianity meant for the people who first accepted it.

(i) Often it meant that a man had to give up his trade. Suppose he was a stone mason. What was to happen if his firm received a contract to build a heathen shrine? Suppose he was a tailor. What was to happen if he was instructed to cut and sew garments for priests of the heathen gods? Suppose he was a soldier. At the gate of every camp burned the light upon the altar sacred to the godhead of Caesar. What was to happen if he had to fling his pinch of incense on that altar in token of his worship? Time and time again in the early Church the choice came to a man between the security of his job and his loyalty to Jesus Christ. It is told that a man came to Tertullian. He told him his problem and then he said, "But after all I must live." "Must you?" said Tertullian.

In the early Church a man's Christianity often meant that he had to get out from his job. One of the most famous modern examples of this same thing was F. W. Charrington. He was the heir to a fortune made by brewing. He was passing a tavern one night. There was a woman waiting at the door. A man, obviously her husband, came out, and she was trying to keep him from going back in. With one blow of his fist the man felled her. Charrington started forward and then he looked up. The name above the tavern was his own, and Charrington said, "With that one blow that man did not only knock his wife out, he also knocked me clean out of that business forever." And he gave up the fortune he might have had, rather than touch money earned in such a way.

No man is keeper of another man's conscience. Every man must decide for himself if he can take his trade to Christ and Christ with him to his daily work.

(ii) Often it meant that a man had to give up social life. In the ancient world, as we saw when studying the section on meat offered to idols, many a heathen feast was held in the temple of a god. The invitation would run, "I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Serapis." Even if that were not so, a heathen feast would begin and end with the pouring of a libation, a cup of wine, to the gods. Could a Christian share in that? Or must he get out and say good-bye to the social fellowship which used to mean so much to him?

(iii) Often it meant that a man had to give up family ties. The pain of Christianity in the early years was the way it split families. A wife became a Christian and her husband might drive her from his house. A husband became a Christian and his wife might leave him. Sons and daughters became Christians and might find the door of the home shut and barred in their faces. It was literally true that Christ came not to send peace but a dividing sword upon earth and that men and women had to be prepared to love him more than their nearest and dearest. They had to be prepared to get out even from their homes,

However hard it may be, it will always remain true that there are certain things a man cannot do and be a Christian. There are certain things from which every Christian must get out.

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2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Before we leave this passage, there is one point we may note. In it Paul quotes scripture and his quotation is a mixture of a variety of passages, none quoted accurately, from Lev.26:11-12, Isa.52:11, Eze.20:34, Eze.37:27 and 2Sam.7:14. It is a fact that Paul seldom quotes accurately. Why? We must remember that in his time books were written on papyrus rolls. A book the size of Acts would require a roll about thirty-five feet long, a very unwieldy thing. There were no chapter divisions; they were inserted by Stephen Langton in the thirteenth century. There were no verse divisions; they were inserted by Stephanus, the Paris printer, in the sixteenth century. Finally, there was no such thing as a concordance until the sixteenth century. The result was that Paul did the only sensible thing--he quoted from memory, and so long as he got the substance right he did not worry about the actual wording. It was not the letter of scripture but the message of scripture which mattered to him.

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2 Corinthians 7:5-16

GODLY SORROW AND GODLY JOY

2 Corinthians 7:5-16

For when we arrived in Macedonia we could find no rest for our body, but we were sore pressed on every side. There were wars without and fears within. But he who comforts the lowly comforted us-- I mean God--by the arrival of Titus. We found this comfort not only in his arrival, but in the comfort which he found amongst you, for he brought news of your longing to see me, of your grief for the past situation, of your zeal to show your loyalty to me. The consequence was that my gladness was greater than my troubles. For if I grieved you with the letter I sent you, I am not sorry that I sent it, although, to tell the truth I was sorry; for I see that that letter, if it was only for a time, did grieve you. Now I am glad, not that you were grieved, but that your grief was the way to repentance. It was a godly grief that came to you, so that you have lost nothing through our action, for godly grief produces repentance which leads to salvation and which no man ever regrets. But worldly grief produces death.

Look now! This very thing, this godly grief--see what earnest longing it produced in you, what a desire to set yourselves right, what vexation at what you had done, what fear, what yearning, what zeal, what steps to inflict condign punishment on the man who deserved it! You have shown yourselves pure in this matter. If I did indeed write to you, it was not for the sake of him who committed the wrong, nor for the sake of him who was wronged; it was to make quite clear to you in the sight of God the earnestness you really possessed for us. Because of this we have been comforted. In addition to this comfort which came to us, we rejoiced with still more overflowing joy in the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by the way in which you all treated him. For if I did rather boast about him, I was not put to shame, but just as everything we have said to you was spoken with truth, so too our boast about Titus was proved to be the truth.

And his heart goes out overflowing to you when he remembers what obedience you showed, how you received him with fear and trembling. I am glad that in everything I am in good heart about you.

The connection of this section really goes as far back as 2Cor.2:12-13, for it is there that Paul tells how in Troas he had no rest because he did not know how the Corinthian situation had developed and how he had set out to Macedonia to meet Titus to get the news as quickly as possible. Let us again remember the circumstances. Things had gone wrong in Corinth. In an attempt to mend them Paul had paid a flying visit which only made them worse and nearly broke his heart. After the failure of the visit he had despatched Titus with a letter of quite exceptional sternness and severity. He was so worried about the outcome of the whole unhappy business that he was quite unable to rest at Troas although there was much there that he might have done, so he set out to meet Titus to get the news as quickly as possible. He met Titus somewhere in Macedonia and learned to his overflowing joy that the trouble was over, the breach was healed and all was well. That is the background of events against which this passage must be read and it makes it very rich.

It tells us certain things about Paul's whole method and outlook on rebuke.

(i) He was quite clear that there came a time when rebuke was necessary. It often happens that the man who seeks an easy peace finds in the end nothing but trouble. The man who allows a perilous

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2 Corinthians 7:5-16

situation to develop because he shrinks from dealing with it, the parent who exercises no discipline because he fears unpleasantness, the man who will not grasp the nettle of danger because he wants to find the flower of safety, in the end simply piles up greater trouble for himself. Trouble is like disease. If it is dealt with at the right time, it can often easily be eradicated; if not, it can become an incurable growth.

(ii) Even admitting all that, the last thing Paul wished was to rebuke. He did it only under compulsion and took no pleasure whatever in inflicting pain. There are those who take a sadistic pleasure in seeing someone wince beneath the lash of their tongue, who pride themselves on being candid when they are only being rude and on being blunt when they are only being boorish. It is the simple fact that the rebuke which is given with a certain relish will never prove as effective as the rebuke which is obviously unwillingly dragged out and which a man gives only because he can do no other.

(iii) Further, Paul's sole object in giving rebuke was to enable people to be what they ought to be. By his rebuke he wished the Corinthians to see the real earnestness they possessed for him in spite of their disobedience and their trouble-making. Such a course might for the moment cause pain, but its ultimate object was not the pain; it was not to knock them down, but to lift them up; it was not to discourage them, but to encourage them; it was not simply to eradicate the evil, but to make the good grow.

This passage tells us also of three great human joys.

(i) There breathes through it all the joy of reconciliation, the healed breach and the mended quarrel. We all remember times in childhood when we had done something wrong and there was a barrier between us and our parents. We all know that can still happen between us and those we love. And we all know the flood of relief and the happiness when the barriers are gone and we are at one again with those we love. In the last analysis the man who cherishes bitterness hurts no one more than he hurts himself.

(ii) There is the joy of seeing someone in whom you believe justifying that belief. Paul had given Titus a good character and Titus had gone to meet a very difficult situation. Paul was overjoyed that Titus had justified his confidence in him and proved his words true. Nothing brings so deep a satisfaction as to know that our children in the flesh or in the faith do well. The deepest joy that a son or a daughter or a scholar or a student can bring to parent or teacher is to demonstrate that they are as good as the parent or the teacher believes them to be. Life's sorest tragedy is disappointed hopes and life's greatest joy is hopes come true.

(ii) There is the joy of seeing someone you love welcomed and well-treated. It is a fact of life that kindness shown to those we love moves us even more deeply than kindness shown to ourselves. What is true of us is true of God. That is why we can best show our love of God by loving our fellow men. The thing that delights the heart of God is to see one of his children kindly treated. Inasmuch as we do it to them we do it to him.

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2 Corinthians 7:5-16

This passage also draws one of the most important distinctions in life. It draws the distinction between the godly and the worldly sorrow.

(i) A godly sorrow produces a true repentance, and a true repentance is one which demonstrates its sorrow by its deeds. The Corinthians proved their repentance by doing everything they could to mend the wretched situation that their thoughtless conduct had produced. Now they hated the sin they had committed, and even hated themselves for committing it, and they laboured to atone for it.

(ii) A worldly sorrow is not really sorrow at all in one sense but it is not sorrow for its sin or for the hurt it may have caused others; it is only resentment that it has been found out. If it got the chance to do the same thing again and thought it could escape the consequences, it would do it. A godly sorrow is a sorrow which has come to see the wrongness of the thing it did. It is not just the consequences of the thing it regrets; it hates the thing itself. We must be very careful that our sorrow for sin is not merely sorrow that we have been found out, but sorrow which, seeing the evil of the sinful thing is determined never to do it again and has dedicated the rest of its life to atone, by God's grace, for what it has done.

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2 Corinthians 8:1-15

AN APPEAL FOR GENEROSITY

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Brothers, we want you to know about the grace of God which was given in the Churches of Macedonia. We want you to know that even when they were going through a severe test of their faith when things were pressing sorely on them, their overflowing happiness and their poverty which reached the very depths of destitution combined to overflow into the wealth of their generosity. For, I bear witness, they gave according to their ability, yes, beyond their ability, quite spontaneously, begging us and strongly urging us to give them the privilege of sharing in this service designed for the help of God's dedicated people. It was not only as we hoped that they gave, but, first, by God's will, they gave themselves to the Lord and to us. We were so impressed by this that we have invited Titus, as in your case he began it, so to bring to its completion this act of generosity.

But, just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in all earnestness and in the love which went out from you to come to rest in us--I urge you to excel also in this act of generosity. This is not an order that I am giving you, but I am using the example of the earnestness of others to prove the genuineness of your love. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that it was for your sakes that, though he was rich, he became poor, that you, by his poverty, might become rich. It is my opinion that I give you in this matter. This is to your good, you, who as long ago as last year, were the first not only to do this but to desire to do it. Now complete the action, so that your readiness to set this scheme in hand may be matched by your completing it according to your means. For if readiness to give already exists, to make it fully acceptable a man is called upon to give in proportion to what he has and not in proportion to what he has not. You are not called on to give so that others may have relief while you yourselves are hard pressed. But things will even themselves up. At the present time your abundance must be used to relieve their lack, so that some day their abundance may be used to relieve your lack, so that things may be evened up, just as it stands written, "He who gathered his much had not too much, and he who gathered his little had not too little."

One of the schemes that lay nearest to Paul's heart was the collection that he was organizing for the Church of Jerusalem. This was the Mother Church but she was poor, and it was Paul's desire that all the Gentiles' Churches should remember and help that Church which was their mother in the faith. So here he reminds the Corinthians of their duty and urges them to generosity.

He uses five arguments to appeal to them to give worthily.

(i) He cites the example of others. He tells them how generous the Macedonian Churches had been. They were poor and in trouble but they gave all they had, far more than anyone could have expected. At the Jewish Feast of Purim there is a regulation which says that, however poor a man is, he must find someone poorer than himself and give him a gift. It is not always those who are most wealthy who are most generous; often those who have least to give are the most ready to give. As the common saying has it, "It is the poor who help the poor," because they know what poverty is like.

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2 Corinthians 8:1-15

(ii) He cites the example of Jesus Christ. For Paul the sacrifice of Jesus did not begin on the Cross. It did not even begin with his birth. It began in heaven, when he laid his glory by and consented to come to earth. Paul's challenge to the Christian is, "With that tremendous example of generosity before you, how can you hold back?"

(iii) He cites their own past record. They have been foremost in everything. Can they then lag behind in this? If men were only true to their own highest standards, if we all lived always at our best, what a difference it would make!

(iv) He stresses the necessity of putting fine feeling into fine action. The Corinthians had been the first to feel the appeal of this scheme. But a feeling which remains only a feeling, a pity which remains a pity only of the heart, a fine desire that never turns into a fine deed, is a sadly truncated and frustrated thing. The tragedy of life so often is, not that we have no high impulses, but that we fail to turn them into actions.

(v) He reminds them that life has a strange way of evening things up. Far more often than not we find that it is measured to us with the same measure as we measure to others. Life has a way of repaying bounty with bounty, and the sparing spirit with the sparing spirit.

Paul says a very fine thing about the Macedonians. He says that first of all they gave themselves--and so indeed they did. Two of them stand out above all the others. There was Aristarchus of Thessalonica. He was with Paul on the last journey to Rome (Ac.28:2). Like Luke, he must have come to a great decision. Paul was under arrest and on his way to trial before the Emperor. There was only one way in which Aristarchus could have accompanied him, and that was by enrolling himself as Paul's slave. Aristarchus in the fullest sense gave himself. There was Epaphroditus. When Paul was in prison in the later days, he came to him with a gift from Philippi, and there in prison he fell grievously ill. As Paul said of him, "he nearly died for the work of Christ" (Php.2:26-30).

No gift can be in any real sense a gift unless the giver gives with it a bit of himself. That is why personal giving is always the highest kind, and that is the kind of giving of which Jesus Christ is the supreme example.

The Old Testament quotation with which Paul concludes this passage is from Exo.16:18, which tells how when the Israelites gathered the manna in the wilderness, whether a man gathered little or much, it was enough.

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2 Corinthians 8:16-24

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Thanks be to God who has put into the heart of Titus the same earnestness for you as there is in mine. His earnestness is proved by the fact that he not only welcomed my invitation, but that also, with characteristic earnestness, he is going to you of his own choice. Along with him we send the brother whose praise in the gospel is in all the Churches. Not only does he enjoy universal praise, but he has also been elected by the Churches to be our fellow-traveller in this act of charity which is being administered by us to promote the glory of God and to show your eagerness. We are making arrangements to ensure that no one will criticize us in our handling of the administration of this munificent gift. We aim to produce conduct which is fair not only in the sight of God but also in the sight of men. With them we send our brother whose earnestness we have often proved on many occasions, and who is now even more earnest in this work because of his great confidence in you. If any further questions are asked about Titus--he is my partner and my fellow-worker in all that concerns you. If any further questions are asked about our brothers--they are apostles of the Church, the glory of Christ. Give them unanswerable proof of your love and prove to them that our boasting about you is true. You will be proving it in the face of the Churches.

The great interest of this passage is its intensely practical character. Paul knew he had his enemies and his critics. He knew well that there would be those who would not hesitate to charge him with turning part of the collection to his own use, and so he takes steps to see that it would be impossible to level that charge against him, by ensuring that others will share with him the task of taking it to Jerusalem. Who the two unnamed brothers were no one knows. The first, the brother whose praise is in all the Churches, is usually identified with Luke. The Collect for St. Luke's Day assumes this identification. "Almighty God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the gospel, to be an Evangelist and Physician of the soul; may it please thee that by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed." It was Paul's aim to make clear not only to God but also to men that he was above suspicion.

It is most interesting to note that this same Paul, who could write like a lyric poet and think like a theologian could, when it was necessary, act with the meticulous accuracy of a chartered accountant. He was a big enough man to do the little things and the practical things supremely well.

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2 Corinthians 9:1-5

THE WILLING GIVER

2 Corinthians 9:1-5

It is superfluous for me to write to you about this service designed to help God's dedicated people, for I know your eagerness, about which I have boasted for you to the Macedonians, for I have told them that Achaëa has been ready since last year, and the story of your zeal has kindled the majority of them. But, all the same, I am sending the brothers, so that, in this particular matter, the boast I made of you may not be proved empty, so that you might be all ready, as I said you were. I do this in case the Macedonians should arrive with me and find you unprepared, and, in case, if that should happen, we--not to mention you yourselves--should be ashamed. I think it necessary to invite the brothers to go on ahead of us, and to get your promised bounty in order in good time, so that it should be ready as if you were eager to give and not as if I were forcing it out of you.

As many of the early fathers noted, there is a delightfully human touch in the background of this passage. Paul is dealing with the collection for the saints at Jerusalem. But now it becomes clear that he has been encouraging the Corinthians to generosity by quoting the example of the Macedonians (2Cor.8:1-5), and at the same time encouraging the Macedonians by quoting the Corinthians! And now he is just a little afraid that the Corinthians may let him down! It is typical of Paul and of the greatness of his heart. For the whole point is that he never criticized one Church to another; he praised one to another. No bad standard by which to test a man is whether he delights in retailing the best or the worst about others.

There are at least four ways in which a man may give a gift.

(i) He may give as a duty. He may discharge the claims of generosity but do so as one pays an account or sends a remittance to a tax-collector. It may be done as a grim duty and with such a bad grace that it would be almost better not to do it at all.

(ii) He may give simply to find self-satisfaction. He thinks far more of the pleasant feeling that he has when he makes the gift than of the feelings of the person who receives it. There are people who will give a penny to a beggar rather because of the glow of satisfaction they get than from any real desire to help. Such giving is in essence selfish; people who give like that give to themselves rather than to the recipient.

(iii) He may give from motives of prestige. The real source of such giving is not love but pride. The gift is given not to help but to glorify the giver. In fact the chances are that it would not be given at all if it were not seen and praised. It may even be that the giving is done in order to pile up credit with God--as if any man could put God in his debt.

(iv) None of these ways of giving are wholly bad, for at least the gift is made. But the real way to give is under love's compulsion, to give because one cannot help giving, to give because the sight of a soul in need wakens a desire that cannot be stilled. This is in fact to give in God's way; it was because he so loved the world that he gave his Son.

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2 Corinthians 9:1-5

Paul's great desire is that the gift of the Corinthians should be ready and not have to be collected at the last moment. An old Latin proverb says, "He gives twice who gives quickly." That is always true. The finest gifts are those made, before they are requested. It was while we were yet enemies that Christ died for us. God hears our prayers even before we speak them. And we should be to our fellow men as God has been to us.

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2 Corinthians 9:6-15

THE PRINCIPLES OF GENEROSITY

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Further, there is this--He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. Let each man give as he has decided in his heart. Let him not give as if it hurt him to give or as if it was being forced out of him, for it is the happy giver whom God loves. God can supply you with an overflowing measure of every grace, so that because in all things at all times you have all sufficiency, you may excel in every good work. As it stands written, "He scattered his seed, he gave to the poor; his righteousness remains for ever." And in every point you will be enriched for every kind of generosity, that generosity which, through you, produces thanksgiving to God. For the ministration of this act of voluntary service not only fills up the lacks of God's dedicated people, but it also does something special for God through the many thanksgivings it produces.

Through your generosity the reality of your Christian service will be so signally proved that they will glorify God because of the way in which you obey your creed, which looks to the gospel of Christ, and because of the generous way in which you have shared with them and with all men; and they will pray for you and long for you because of the surpassing grace of God which is upon you. Thanks be to God for the free gift of God he gave to us, the story of which can never be fully told.

This passage gives us an outline of the principles of generous giving.

(i) Paul insists that no man was ever the loser because he was generous. Giving is like sowing seed. The man who sows with a sparing hand cannot hope for anything but a meagre harvest, but the man who sows with a generous hand will in due time reap a generous return. The New Testament is an extremely practical book and one of its great features is that it is never afraid of the reward motive. It never says that goodness is all to no purpose. It never forgets that something new and wonderful enters into the life of the man who accepts God's commands as his law.

But the rewards that the New Testament envisages are never material. It promises not the wealth of things, but the wealth of the heart and of the spirit. What then can a generous man expect?

(a) He will be rich in love. This is a point to which we will return. It is always true that no one likes the mean man and generosity can cover a multitude of other sins. Men will always prefer the warm heart, even though its very warmth may lead it into excesses, to the cold rectitude of the calculating spirit.

(b) He will be rich in friends. "A man that has friends must show himself friendly." An unlovable man can never expect to be loved. The man whose heart runs out to others will always find that the hearts of others run out to him.

(e) He will be rich in help. The day always comes when we need the help which others can give, and, if we have been sparing in our help to them, the likelihood is that they will be sparing in their help to us. The measure we have used to others will determine the measure which is given to us.

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2 Corinthians 9:6-15

(d) He will be rich towards God. Jesus taught us that what we do to others we do for God, and the day will come when every time we opened our heart and hand will stand to our favour, and every time we closed them will be a witness against us.

(ii) Paul insists that it is the happy giver whom God loves. Deut.15:7-11 lays down the duty of generosity to the poor brother, and Deut.15:10 has it, "Your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him." There was a rabbinic saying which said that to receive a friend with a cheerful countenance and to give him nothing is better than to give him everything with a gloomy countenance. Seneca said that to give with doubt and delay is almost worse than not to give at all.

Paul then quotes from Ps.112:3,9--verses which he takes to be a description of the good and generous man. He scatters his seed, that is he sows it not sparingly but generously; he gives to the poor; and his action is to his credit and joy forever. Carlyle tells how, when he was a boy, a beggar came to the door. His parents were out and he was alone in the house. On a boyish impulse he broke into his own savings-bank and gave the beggar all that was in it, and he tells us that never before or since did he know such sheer happiness as came to him in that moment. There is indeed a joy in giving.

(ii) Paul insists that God can give a man both the substance to give and the spirit in which to give it. In 2Cor.9:8 he speaks of the all-sufficiency which God gives us. The word he uses is *autarkeia* (GSN0841). This was a favourite Stoic word. It does not describe the sufficiency of the man who possesses all kinds of things in abundance. It means independence. It describes the state of the man who has directed life not to amassing possessions but to eliminating needs. It describes the man who has taught himself to be content with very little. It is obvious that such a man will be able to give far more to others because he wants so little for himself. It is so often true that we want so much for ourselves that there is nothing left to give to others.

Not only that, it is God who can give us the spirit in which to give. Robert Louis Stevenson's native servants loved him. His boy used to waken him every morning with a cup of tea. On one occasion his usual boy was off duty, and another had taken over. This boy woke him not only with a cup of tea but also with a beautifully cooked omelette. Stevenson thanked him and said, "Great is your forethought." "No, master," said the boy, "great is my love." It is God alone who can put into our hearts the love which is the essence of the generous spirit.

But in this passage Paul does more. If we read into its thought, we see that he holds that giving does wonderful things for three different persons.

(i) It does something for others. (a) It relieves their need. Many a time, when a man was at his wit's end, a gift from someone else has seemed nothing less than a gift from heaven. (b) It restores their faith in their fellow men. It often happens that, when a man is in need, he grows embittered and feels himself neglected. It is then that a gift shows him that love and kindness are not dead. (c) It makes them thank God. A gift in a time of need is something which brings not only our love but also God's love into the lives of others.

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2 Corinthians 9:6-15

(ii) It does something for ourselves. (a) It guarantees our Christian profession. In the case of the Corinthians that was specially important. No doubt the Jerusalem Church, which was almost entirely Jewish, still regarded the Gentiles with suspicion and wondered in its heart of hearts if Christianity could be for them at all. The very fact of the gift of the Gentile Churches must have guaranteed to them the reality of Gentile Christianity. If a man is generous it enables others to see that he has turned his Christianity not only into words but into deeds as well. (b) It wins us both the love and the prayers of others. What is needed in this world more than anything else is something which will link a man to his fellow men. There is nothing so precious as fellowship, and generosity is an essential step on the way to real union between man and man.

(iii) It does something for God. It makes prayers of thanksgiving go up to him. Men see our good deeds and glorify not us but God. It is a tremendous thing that something we can do can turn men's hearts to God, for that means that something we can do can bring joy to him.

Finally, Paul turns the thoughts of the Corinthians to the gift of God in Jesus Christ, a gift whose wonder can never be exhausted and whose story can never be fully told; and, in so doing, he says to them, "Can you, who have been so generously treated by God, be anything else but generous to your fellow men?"

Before we go on to study 2Cor.10-13 of our letter, let us remember what we have already seen in the introduction. There is a most surprising break between 2Cor.9 and 2Cor.10. Up to 2Cor.9 everything seems to be going well. The breach is healed and the quarrel is over. 2Cor.8-9 deal with the collection for the Church at Jerusalem, and, now that that practical matter is dealt with, we might expect Paul to draw to a close. Instead, we find four chapters which are the saddest and the sorest chapters Paul ever wrote. It makes us wonder how they got there.

Twice in 2 Corinthians Paul speaks of a severe letter that he had written, a letter so stern that at one time he almost regretted ever having written it (2Cor.2:4; 2Cor.7:8). That description does not at all fit 1 Corinthians. So we are left with two alternatives--either the severe letter is lost altogether or at least part of it is contained in these 2Cor.10-13. All the likelihood is that 2Cor.10-13 are the severe letter, and that, when Paul's letters were being collected, it was placed here by mistake. To get the right order of things we really ought to read 2Cor.10-13 before we read 2Cor.1-9. We may well believe that we are reading here the letter which it hurt Paul most of all to write, and which was written to try to mend a situation which came near to breaking his heart.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

PAUL BEGINS TO ANSWER HIS CRITICS

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

It is I Paul who call upon you--and I am doing it in the gentleness and the sweet reasonableness of Christ--I, who, as you say, am a poor creature when I am with you, but a man of courage when I am absent. It is my prayer that, when I do come to you, I may not have to be bold with that confidence with which I reckon that I can boldly face some who reckon that we direct our conduct by purely human motives. It is true that we live in a human body, but for all that we do not carry on our campaign with human motives and resources (for the weapons of our campaign are not merely human weapons, but God has made them powerful to destroy fortresses). Our campaign is such that we can destroy plausible fallacies and all lofty-mindedness which raises itself up against the knowledge that God has given, such that we capture every intention and bring it into obedience to Christ, such that we are prepared to punish all disobedience, when your obedience has been fulfilled.

Right at the beginning of this passage are two words which set the whole tone which Paul wishes to use. He speaks of the gentleness and the sweet reasonableness of Christ.

Prautes (GSN4240), gentleness, is an interesting word. Aristotle defined it as the correct mean between being too angry and being never angry at all. It is the quality of the man whose anger is so controlled that he is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time. It describes the man who is never angry at any personal wrong he may receive, but who is capable of righteous anger when he sees others wronged. By using that word Paul is saying at the very beginning of his stern letter that he is not carried away by personal anger, but is speaking with the strong gentleness of Jesus himself

The other word is even more illuminating. Sweet reasonableness is the Greek word epieikeia (GSN1932). The Greeks themselves defined epieikeia (GSN1932) as "that which is just and even better than just." They described it as that quality which must enter in when justice, just because of its generality, is in danger of becoming unjust. There are times when strict justice can actually result in injustice. Sometimes real justice is not to insist on the letter of the law, but to let a higher quality enter into our decisions. The man who has epieikeia (GSN1932) is the man who knows that, in the last analysis, the Christian standard is not justice, but love. By using this word Paul is saying that he is not out for his rights and to insist on the letter of the law; but is going to deal with this situation with that Christlike love which transcends even the purest of human justice.

Now we have come to a section of the letter which is very hard to understand--and for this reason, that we are hearing only one side of the argument. We are hearing only Paul's reply. We do not know accurately what the charges were which the Corinthians levelled against him; we have to deduce them from the answers which Paul gives. But we can at least try to make our deductions.

(i) It is clear that the Corinthians had charged Paul with being bold enough when he was not face to face with them but a pretty poor creature when actually there. They are saying that when he is absent he can write things that he has not the courage to say in their presence. Paul's reply is that he

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2 Corinthians 10:1-6

prays that he may not have occasion to deal with them personally as he knows he is quite capable of doing. Letters are dangerous things. A man will often write with a bitterness and peremptoriness which he would never use to another person's face. Exchange of letters can do a deal of harm which might well have been avoided by a face to face discussion. But Paul's claim is that he would never write anything which he was not prepared to say.

(ii) It is clear that they charged him with arranging his conduct on human motives. Paul's answer is that both his conduct and his power come from God. True, he is a man subject to all the limitations of manhood, but God is his guide and God is his strength. What makes this passage difficult to understand is that Paul uses the word flesh (sarx, GSN4561) in two different senses. (a) He uses it in the ordinary sense of the human body, flesh in its physical sense. "We walk," he says, "in the flesh." That simply means that he is, like anyone else, a human being. (b) But he also uses it in his own characteristic way for that part of human nature which gives a bridgehead to sin, that essential human weakness of life without God. So, he says, "We do not walk after, or according to, the flesh." It is as if he said, "I am a human being with a human body, but I never allow myself to be dominated by purely human motives. I never try to live without God." A man may live in the body and yet be guided by the Spirit of God.

Paul goes on to make two significant points.

(i) He says that he is equipped to deal with and to destroy all the plausible clevernesses of human wisdom and human pride. There is a simplicity which is a weightier argument than the most elaborate human cleverness. Once there was a house party at which Huxley, the great Victorian agnostic, was present. On the Sunday morning it was planned to go to church. Huxley said to a member of the party, "Suppose you don't go to church; suppose you stay at home and tell me why you believe in Jesus." The man said, "But you, with your cleverness, could demolish anything I might say." Huxley said, "I don't want you to argue. I want you just to tell me what this means to you." So the man, in the simplest terms, told from his heart what Christ meant to him. When he was finished, there were tears in the great agnostic's eyes. "I would give my right hand," he said, "if I could only believe that." It was not argument, but the utter simplicity of heartfelt sincerity which got home.

In the last analysis it is not subtle cleverness which is most effective but simple sincerity.

(ii) Paul speaks of bringing every intention into captivity to Christ. Christ has an amazing way of capturing what was pagan and subduing it for his purposes. Max Warren tells of a custom of the natives in New Guinea. At certain times they have ritual songs and dances. They work themselves up into a frenzy and the ritual culminates in what are called "the murder songs," in which they shout before God the names of the people they wish to kill. When the natives became Christian, they retained these customs and that ritual, but in the murder songs, it was no longer the names of the people they hated, but the names of the sins they hated, that they shouted before God and called on him to destroy. An old pagan custom had been captured for Christ. Jesus never wishes to take from us our own qualities and abilities and characteristics. He wishes to take them and to use them for himself.

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His invitation is to come to him with just what we have to offer and he will enable us, to make a finer use of ourselves than ever before.

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2 Corinthians 10:7-18

PAUL CONTINUES TO ANSWER HIS CRITICS

2 Corinthians 10:7-18

Look at what lies in front of you. If anyone confidently believes that he belongs to Christ, let him examine his own case again, because, just as he belongs to Christ, so do we also. If I make what might look like excessive claims about our authority--that authority which the Lord gave us to upbuild you and not to destroy you--I will not be put to shame. And I am going to do just that very thing so that I may not seem, as it were, to be striking terror into you through a series of letters, because, to quote my opponents, "His letters are weighty and strong but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible." Let the man who makes statements such as that consider that, such as we are in speech through letters when we are absent, that very thing we are in deed when we are present.

Far be it from us to include ourselves among or compare ourselves with some people who commend themselves, but when their only standard of measurement is to measure themselves by themselves, and when their comparison does not go beyond comparing themselves with themselves, they are not sensible. As for us, we will not boast beyond our measure, but we will boast according to the measure of the sphere God has apportioned to us as our measure, a sphere which extends as far as you. For we are not overreaching ourselves, as if our sphere did not reach to you, for indeed we were the first to bring the gospel of Christ to you. We do not boast beyond our measure, but we do cherish the hope, that, as your faith increases, we will be given a greater share of honour among you, in a sphere which belongs to us, and which will enable us to preach the gospel to the regions beyond, and not to boast about things which have already been done in someone else's sphere.

Let him who boasts boast in the Lord, for it is not the man who commends himself who is proved to be of sterling quality, but the man whom the Lord commends.

Paul continues to answer his critics; and we are faced with the same problem that we are hearing only one side of the argument and can only deduce what the criticisms were from Paul's reply to them.

(i) It seems clear that at least some of Paul's opponents asserted that he did not belong to Christ in the same way as they did. Perhaps they were still casting up at him the fact that once he had been the arch-persecutor of the Church. Perhaps they claimed special knowledge. Perhaps they claimed a special holiness. In any event they looked down on Paul and glorified themselves and their own relationship to Christ.

Any religion which makes a man look down upon his fellow men and think himself better than they, is no true religion. When revival came to the East African Churches in recent years, one of its features was the public confession of sin. While the natives willingly took part in that confession, Europeans tended to stand aloof, and one of the missionaries wrote, "It is felt that to hold back from it is to refuse to be identified with the fellowship of forgiven sinners. Europeans are often accused of being proud and unwilling to share fellowship in this way." There can be no finer definition of the Church than a fellowship of forgiven sinners. When a man realizes that it is to such a fellowship

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2 Corinthians 10:7-18

he belongs there is no longer any room for pride. The trouble with the arrogant Christian is that he feels rather that Christ belongs to him than that he belongs to Christ.

(ii) It would seem that the Corinthians had actually sunk to taunting Paul about his personal appearance. His bodily presence, they jeered, was weak, and he was no speaker. It may well be that they were right. A description of Paul's personal appearance has come down to us from a very early book called *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, which dates back to about A.D. 200. It is so unflattering that it may well be true. It describes Paul as "a man of little stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows meeting, and with nose somewhat hooked, full of grace, for sometimes he appeared like a man and sometimes he had the face of an angel." A little, balding, bandy-legged man, with a hooked nose and shaggy eyebrows--it is not a very impressive picture, and it may well be that the Corinthians made great play with it.

We might do well to remember that not seldom a great spirit has been lodged in a very humble body. William Wilberforce was responsible for the freeing of the slaves in the British Empire. He was so small and so frail that it seemed that even a strong wind might knock him down. But once Boswell heard him speak in public and afterwards said, "I saw what seemed to me a shrimp mount upon the table, but, as I listened, he grew and grew until the shrimp became a whale." The Corinthians had sunk nearly to the ultimate depths of discourtesy and of unwisdom when they taunted Paul upon his personal appearance.

(iii) It seems that they accused Paul of making boastful claims to authority in a sphere in which his writ did not run. No doubt they said that he might try to play the master in other Churches, but not in Corinth. His blunt answer is that Corinth is well within his sphere for he was the first man to bring them the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul was a Rabbi and it may be that he was thinking of a claim that the Rabbis often used to make. They claimed and received a very special respect. They claimed that respect for a teacher should exceed respect for a parent, for, they said, a parent brings a child into the--life of this world, but a teacher brings a scholar into the life of the world to come. Surely no man had a greater claim to exercise authority in the Church of Corinth than the man who, under God, had been its founder.

(iv) Then Paul levels a charge at them. Ironically he says that he would never dream of comparing himself with those who are forever giving themselves testimonials, and then, with unerring precision, he puts his finger on the spot. They can give themselves testimonials only because their one standard of measurement is themselves and their one standard of comparison is with one another.

They had, as so many people have, the wrong standard of measurement. A girl may think herself a good pianist but let her go and compare herself with Solomon or Moiseiwitsch and she may change her mind. A man may think himself a good golfer but let him compare himself with Cotton or Hogan or Palmer or Nicklaus and he may change his mind. A man may think himself a good preacher but let him compare himself with one of the princes of the pulpit and he may feel that he never wishes to open his mouth in public again.

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2 Corinthians 10:7-18

It is easy enough to say, "I am as good as the next man," and no doubt it is true. But the point is, are we as good as Jesus Christ? He is our true rod of measurement and our proper standard of comparison and when we measure ourselves by him there is no room left for pride. "Self-praise," says Paul, "is no honour." It is not his own but Christ's "Well done!" for which a man must seek.

Before we leave this passage we must look at a phrase which is characteristic of Paul's heart. He wishes to get things straightened out at Corinth because he longs to go on to the regions beyond, where no man has yet carried the story of Christ. W. M. Macgregor used to say that Paul was haunted by the regions beyond. He never saw a ship riding at anchor or moored to the quay but he wished to board her and carry the good news to the regions beyond. He never saw a range of hills blue in the distance but he wished to cross it and to carry the story of Christ to the regions beyond.

Kipling has a poem called "The Explorer" which tells the story of another man who was haunted by the regions beyond.

"There's no sense in going further--it's the edge of
cultivation,'
So they said, and I believed it--broke my land and
sowed my crop--
Built my barns and strung my fences in the little
border station
Tucked away below the foothills where the trails run
out and stop.
Till a voice, as bad as Conscience, rang interminable
changes
On one everlasting Whisper, day and night repeated--
so:
'Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look
behind the ranges--
Something lost behind the ranges. Lost and waiting
for you. Go!'"

That is precisely how Paul felt. It was said of a great evangelist that, as he walked the city streets, he was haunted by the tramp, tramp, tramp of the Christless millions. The man who loves Christ will always be haunted by the thought of the millions who have never known the Christ who means so much to him.

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2 Corinthians 11:1-6

THE PERIL OF SEDUCTION

2 Corinthians 11:1-6

Would that you would bear with me in a little foolishness--but I know that you do bear with me. I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God, for I betrothed you to one husband, I wished to present a pure maiden to Christ. But I am afraid, that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts may be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity which look to Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus, a Jesus whom we did not preach, if you take a different spirit, a spirit which you did not take, if you receive a different gospel, a gospel which you did not receive, you bear it excellently! Well, I reckon that I am in nothing inferior to these super-apostles. I may be quite untrained in speaking, but I am not untrained in knowledge, but, in fact, in everything and in all things we made the knowledge of God clear to you.

All through this section Paul has to adopt methods which are completely distasteful to him. He has to stress his own authority, to boast about himself and to keep comparing himself with those who are seeking to seduce the Corinthian Church; and he does not like it. He apologizes every time he has to speak in such a way, for he was not a man to stand on his dignity. It was said of a great man, "He never remembered his dignity until others forgot it." But Paul knew that it was not really his dignity and honour that were at stake, but the dignity and the honour of Jesus Christ.

He begins by using a vivid picture from Jewish marriage customs. The idea of Israel as the bride of God is common in the Old Testament. "Your Maker," said Isaiah, "is your husband." (Isa.54:5). "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." (Isa.62:5). So it was natural for Paul to use the metaphor of marriage and to think of the Corinthian Church as the bride of Christ.

At a Jewish wedding there were two people called the friends of the bridegroom, one representing the bridegroom and one the bride. They had many duties. They acted as liaisons between the bride and the bridegroom; they carried the invitations to the guests; but they had one particular responsibility, that of guaranteeing the chastity of the bride. That is what is in Paul's thought here. In the marriage of Jesus Christ and the Corinthian Church he is the friend of the bridegroom. It is his responsibility to guarantee the chastity of the bride, and he will do all he can to keep the Corinthian Church pure and a fit bride for Jesus Christ.

There was a Jewish legend current in Paul's time that, in the Garden of Eden, Satan had actually seduced Eve and that Cain was the child of their union. Paul is thinking of that old legend when he fears that the Corinthian Church is being seduced from Christ.

It is clear that there were in Corinth men who were preaching their own version of Christianity and insisting that it was superior to Paul's. It is equally clear that they regarded themselves as very special people--super-apostles, Paul calls them. Ironically Paul says that the Corinthians listen splendidly to them. If they give them such an excellent hearing will they not listen to him?

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2 Corinthians 11:1-6

Then he draws the contrast between these false apostles and himself He is quite untrained in speaking. The word he uses is *idiotes* (GSN2399). This word began by meaning a private individual who took no part in public life. It went on to mean someone with no technical training, what we would call a layman. Paul says that these false but arrogant apostles may be far better equipped orators than he is; they may be the professionals and he the mere amateur in words; they may be the men with the academic qualifications and he the mere layman. But the fact remains, however unskilled he may be in technical oratory, he knows what he is talking about and they do not.

There is a famous story which tells how a company of people were dining together. After dinner it was agreed that each should recite something. A well-known actor rose and, with all the resources of elocution and dramatic art, he declaimed the twenty-third psalm and sat down to tremendous applause. A quiet man followed him. He too began to recite the twenty-third psalm and at first there was rather a titter. But before he had ended there was a stillness that was more eloquent than any applause. When he had spoken the last words there was silence, and then the actor leant across and said, "Sir, I know the psalm, but you know the shepherd."

Paul's opponents might have all the resources of oratory and he might be unskilled in speech; but he knew what he was talking about because he knew the real Christ.

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2 Corinthians 11:7-15

MASQUERADING AS CHRISTIANS

2 Corinthians 11:7-15

Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you should be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you for nothing? I plundered other Churches and took pay from them in order to render service to you. And when I was present with you and when I had been reduced to want I did not squeeze charity out of any man. The brothers who came from Macedonia again supplied my want. In everything I watched that I should not be a burden on you, and I will go on doing so. As Christ's truth is in me, as far as I am concerned this boast will not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I love you. But I do this and I will continue to do it, in order to eliminate the opportunity of those who wish an opportunity to prove themselves the same as we are--and to boast about it. Such men are false apostles. They are crafty workers. They masquerade as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

It is then no great wonder if his servants too masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their deeds deserve.

Here again Paul is meeting a charge that has been levelled against him. This time the charge is clear. It was rankling in the minds of the Corinthian Church that Paul had refused to accept any support from them whatsoever. When he was in want it was the Philippian Church who had supplied his needs (compare Php.4:10-18).

Before we go further with this passage, we must ask, how could Paul maintain this attitude of utter independence with regard to the Corinthian Church and yet accept gifts from the Philippian Church? He was not being inconsistent and the reason was a very practical and excellent one. As far as we know, Paul never accepted a gift from the Church at Philippi when he was in Philippi. He did so only after he had moved on. The reason is clear. So long as he was in any given place he had to be utterly independent, under obligation to no man. It is hardly possible to accept a man's bounty and then condemn him or preach against him. When he was in the middle of the Philippian community Paul could not be beholden to any man. It was different when he had moved on. He was then free to take what the love of the Philippians chose to give, for then it would commit him to no man or party.

It would have been impossible for Paul, when in Corinth, to receive Corinthian support and at the same time maintain the independence which the situation demanded. He was not in the least inconsistent; he was only wise.

Why were the Corinthians so annoyed about his refusal? For one thing, according to the Greek way of thinking, it was beneath a free man's dignity to work with his hands. The dignity of honest toil was forgotten, and the Corinthians did not understand Paul's point of view. For another thing, in the Greek world, teachers were supposed to make money out of teaching. There never was an age in which a man who could talk could make so much money. Augustus, the Roman Emperor, paid Verrius Flaccus, the rhetorician, an annual salary of 100,000 sesterces, which, in present day purchasing power was the equivalent of a quarter of a million pounds. Every town was entitled to grant complete exemption from all civic burdens and taxes to a certain number of teachers of

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2 Corinthians 11:7-15

rhetoric and literature. Paul's independence was something that the Corinthians could not understand.

As for the false apostles, they, too, made Paul's independence a charge against him. They took support all right, and they claimed that the fact that they took it was a proof that they really were apostles. No doubt they maintained that Paul refused to take anything because his teaching was not worth anything. But in their heart of hearts they were afraid that people would see through them, and they wanted to drag Paul down to their own level of acquisitiveness so that his independence would no longer form a contrast to their greed.

Paul accused them of masquerading as apostles of Christ. The Jewish legend was that Satan had once masqueraded as one of the angels who sang praises to God and that it was then that Eve had seen him and been seduced.

It is still true that many masquerade as Christians, some consciously but still more unconsciously. Their Christianity is a superficial dress in which there is no reality. The Synod of the Church in Uganda drew up the following four tests by which a man may examine himself and test the reality of his Christianity.

(i) Do you know salvation through the Cross of Christ?

(ii) Are you growing in the power of the Holy Spirit, in prayer, meditation and the knowledge of God?

(iii) Is there a great desire to spread the Kingdom of God by example, and by preaching and teaching?

(iv) Are you bringing others to Christ by individual searching, by visiting, and by public witness?

With the conscience of others we have nothing to do, but we can test our own Christianity lest our faith also should be not a reality but a masquerade.

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2 Corinthians 11:16-33

THE CREDENTIALS OF AN APOSTLE

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Again I say, let no one think me a fool. But, even if you do, bear with me, even if it is as a fool that you do bear with me, so that I too may boast a little. I am not saying what I am saying as if talk like this was inspired by the Lord, but I am talking with boastful confidence as in foolishness. Since many boast about their human qualifications I too will boast, for you--because you are sensible people--suffer fools gladly. I know that this is true because you suffer it if someone reduces you to abject slavery, if someone devours you, if someone ensnares you, if someone behaves arrogantly to you, if someone strikes you on the face. It is in dishonour that I speak, because of course we are weak! All the same, if anyone makes daring claims--it is in foolishness I am speaking--I too can make them. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? This is madman's raving--I am more so. Here is my record--In toils more exceedingly, in prisons more exceedingly, in stripes beyond measure, in deaths often; at the hands of the Jews five times I have received the forty stripes less one; three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day have I been adrift on the deep. I have lived in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of brigands, in perils which came from my own countrymen, in perils which came from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils upon the sea, in perils among false brethren, in labour and toil, in many a sleepless night, in hunger and in thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Apart altogether from the things I have omitted, there is the strain that is on me every day, my anxiety for all the Churches. Is there anyone's weakness which I do not share? Is there anyone who stumbles and I do not bum with shame? If I must boast, I will boast of the things of my weakness. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he who is blessed forever, knows that I do not lie. In Damascus, Aretas, the king's governor, set a guard upon the city of the Damascenes to arrest me, and I was let down in a basket through an opening through the wall, and escaped out of his hands.

All against his will Paul is forced to produce his credentials as an apostle. He feels that the whole thing is folly, and, when it comes to comparing himself with other people, it seems to him like madness. Nevertheless, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the gospel that he preaches, it has to be done.

It is clear that his opponents were Jewish teachers who claimed to have a gospel and an authority far beyond his. He sketches them in a few lightning strokes, when he speaks about what the Corinthians are willing to endure at their hands. They reduce the Corinthians to abject slavery: This they do by trying to persuade them to submit to circumcision and the thousand and one petty rules and regulations of the Jewish law, and so to abandon the glorious liberty of the gospel of grace. They devour them. The Jewish rabbis at their worst could be shamelessly rapacious. Theoretically they held that a rabbi must take no money for teaching and must win his bread by the work of his hands, but they also taught that it was work of exceptional merit to support a rabbi and that he who did so made sure of a place in the heavenly academy. They behaved arrogantly. They lorded it over the Corinthians.

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2 Corinthians 11:16-33

In point of fact the rabbis demanded a respect greater than that given to parents, and actually claimed that, if a man's father and teacher were both captured by brigands, he must ransom his teacher first, and only then his father. They struck them on the face. This may describe insulting behaviour, or it may well be meant quite literally (compare Ac.23:2). The Corinthians had come to the curious stage of seeing in the very insolence of the Jewish teachers a guarantee of their apostolic authority.

The false teachers have made three claims which Paul asserts that he can equal.

They claim to be Hebrews. This word was specially used of the Jews who still remembered and spoke their ancient Hebrew language in its Aramaic form, which was its form in the time of Paul. There were Jews scattered all over the world, for instance there were one million of them in Alexandria. Many of these Jews of the dispersion had forgotten their native tongue and spoke Greek; and the Jews of Palestine, who had preserved their native tongue, always looked down on them. Quite likely Paul's opponents had been saying, "This Paul is a citizen of Tarsus. He is not like us a pure-bred Palestinian but one of these Greekling Jews." Paul says, "No! I too am one who has never forgotten the purity of his ancestral tongue." They could not claim superiority on that score.

They claim to be Israelites. The word described a Jew as a man who was a member of God's chosen people. The basic sentence of the Jewish creed, the sentence with which every synagogue service opens, runs, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut.6:4). No doubt these hostile Jews were saying, "This Paul never lived in Palestine. He has slipped away out of the chosen people, living in Greek surroundings in Cilicia." Paul says, "No! I am as pure an Israelite as any man. My lineage is the lineage of the people of God." They cannot claim superiority on that point.

They claim to be descendants of Abraham. By that they meant that they were Abraham's direct descendants and therefore heirs to the great promise that God had made to him (Gen.12:1-3). No doubt they claimed that this Paul was not of as pure descent as they. "No!" says Paul. "I am of as pure descent as any man" (Php.3:5-6). They had no claim to superiority here either.

Then Paul sets out his credentials as an apostle, and the only claim he would put forward is the catalogue of his sufferings for Christ. When Mr. Valiant-for-truth was "taken with a summons" and knew that he must go to God, he said, "I am going to my Father's; and though with great difficulty I am got hither yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought his battles who will now be my rewarder." Like Mr. Valiant-for-truth, Paul found his only credentials in his scars.

When we read the catalogue of all that Paul had endured, the one thing that must strike us is how little we know about him. When he wrote this letter, he was in Ephesus. That is to say we have reached only as far as Ac.19; and if we try to check this catalogue of endurance against the narrative of that book, we find that not one quarter of it is there. We see that Paul was an even

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greater man than perhaps we thought, for Acts merely skims the surface of what he did and endured.

Out of this long catalogue we can take only three items.

(i) "Three times," says Paul, "I have been beaten with rods." This was a Roman punishment. The attendants of the magistrates were called the lictors and they were equipped with rods of birch wood with which the guilty criminal was chastised. Three times that had happened to Paul. It should never have happened to him at all, because, under Roman law, it was a crime to scourge a Roman citizen. But, when the mob was violent and the magistrate was weak, Paul, Roman citizen though he was, had suffered this.

(ii) "Five times," says Paul, "I received the forty stripes less one." This was a Jewish punishment. The Jewish law lays down the regulations for such scourging (Deut.25:1-3). The normal penalty was forty stripes, and on no account must that number be exceeded, or the scourger himself was subject to scourging. Therefore they always stopped at thirty-nine. That is why scourging was known as "the forty less one." The detailed regulations for scourging are in the Mishnah, which is the book in which the Jewish traditional law was codified. "They bind his two hands to a pillar on either side, and the minister of the synagogue lays hold on his garments--if they are torn, they are torn, if they are utterly rent, they are utterly rent--so that he bares his chest. A stone is set behind him on which the minister of the synagogue stands with a strap of calf-hide in his hand, doubled and re-doubled, and two other straps that rise and fall thereto.

The handpiece of the strap is one handbreadth long and one handbreadth wide, and its end must reach to his navel (i.e. when the victim is struck on the shoulder the end of the strap must reach the navel). He gives him one third of the stripes in front and two thirds behind, and he may not strike him when he is standing or when he is sitting but only when he is bending down ... and he that smites smites with one hand and with all his might. If he dies under his hand, the scourger is not culpable. But if he gives him one stripe too many, and he dies, he must escape into exile because of him." That is what Paul suffered five times, a scourging so severe that it was liable to kill a man.

(iii) Again and again Paul speaks of the dangers of his travels. It is true that in his time the roads and the sea were safer than they had ever been, but they were still dangerous. On the whole, the ancient peoples did not relish the sea. "How pleasant it is," says Lucretius, "to stand on the shore and watch the poor devils of sailors having a rough time." Seneca writes to a friend, "You can persuade me into almost anything now for I was recently persuaded to travel by sea." Men regarded a sea voyage as taking one's life in one's hands. As for the roads, the brigands were still here. "A man," says Epictetus, "has heard that the road is infested by robbers. He does not dare to venture on it alone, but waits for company--a legate, or a quaestor, or a proconsul--and joining him he passes safely on the road." But there would be no official company "or Paul. "Think," said Seneca, "any day a robber might cut your throat." It was the commonest thing for a traveller to be caught and held to ransom.

If ever a man was an adventurous soul, that man was Paul.

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In addition to all this there was his anxiety for all the Churches. This includes the burden of the daily administration of the Christian communities; but it means more than that. Myers in his poem, St. Paul, makes Paul speak of,

"Desperate tides of the whole great world's anguish
Forced thro' the channels of a single heart."

Paul bore the sorrows and the troubles of his people on his heart.

This passage comes to a strange ending. On the face of it, it would seem that the escape from Damascus was an anti-climax. The incident is referred to in Ac.9:23-25. The wall of Damascus was wide enough to drive a carriage along it. Many of the houses overhung it and it must have been from one of these that Paul was let down. Why does he so directly and definitely mention this incident? It is most likely because it rankled. Paul was the kind of man who would find this clandestine exit from Damascus worse than a scourging. He must have hated with all his great heart to run away as a fugitive in the night. His bitterest humiliation was to fail to look his enemies in the face.

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2 Corinthians 12:1-10

THE THORN AND THE GRACE

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

I must continue to boast. It is not good for me to do so, all the same I will come to visions and revelations given to me by the Lord. I know a man in Christ, who, fourteen years ago--whether it was in the body I do not know; whether it was out of the body I do not know; God knows--was caught up to the third heaven. And I know that this man about whom I am speaking--whether it was with the body or without the body, I do not know; God knows--was caught up to Paradise and heard words which can never be uttered, which it is not lawful for a man to speak. It is about such a man that I will boast. About myself I will not boast, for, if I wish to boast, I will not be such a fool, for I will speak the truth. But I forbear to boast in case anyone forms a judgment about me beyond what he sees in me and hears from me.

And because of the surpassing nature of the revelation granted to me--the reason was that I might not become exalted with pride--there was given to me a stake in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I might not be exalted with pride. Three times I prayed urgently to the Lord about this, beseeching him that it might depart from me. And he said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for power is perfected in weakness." So it is with the greatest gladness that I boast in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may pitch its tent upon me. Therefore I rejoice in weaknesses, in insults, in inescapable things, in persecutions, in straitened circumstances, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

If we have any sensitiveness, we should read this passage with a certain reverence, for in it Paul lays bare his heart and shows us at one and the same time his glory and his pain.

All against his will he is still setting out his credentials, and he tells of an experience at which we can only wonder and which we cannot even try to probe. In the strangest way he seems to stand outside himself and look at himself. "I know a man," he says. The man is himself and yet Paul can look at the man who had this amazing experience with a kind of wondering detachment. For the mystic, the great aim of all religious experience is the vision of God and union with him.

The mystic always has aimed at that moment of wonder when "the seer and the Seen are one." In their traditions the Jews said that four rabbis had had this vision of God. Ben Azai had seen the glory and had died. Ben Soma beheld it and went mad. Acher saw it and "cut up the young plants," that is, in spite of the vision he became a heretic and ruined the garden of truth. Akiba alone ascended in peace and in peace came back. We cannot even guess what happened to Paul. We need not form theories about the number of heavens because of the fact that he speaks of the third heaven. He simply means that his spirit rose to an unsurpassable ecstasy in its nearness to God.

One lovely thing we may note, for it will help a little. The word Paradise comes from a Persian word which means a walled-garden. When a Persian king wished to confer a very special honour on someone specially dear to him, he made him a companion of the garden and gave him the right to walk in the royal gardens with him in intimate companionship. In this experience, as never before and never again, Paul had been the companion of God.

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After the glory came the pain. The King James Version and the Revised Standard Versions speak of the thorn in the flesh. The word (skolops, GSN4647) can mean thorn but more likely it means stake. Sometimes criminals were impaled upon a sharp stake. It was a stake like that that Paul felt was twisting in his body. What was it? Many answers have been given. First we look at those which great men have held but which, in face of the evidence, we must discard.

(i) The thorn has been taken to mean spiritual temptations; the temptation to doubt and to shirk the duties of the apostolic life, and the sting of conscience when temptation conquered. That was Calvin's view.

(ii) It has been taken to mean the opposition and persecution which he had to face, the constant battle with those who tried to undo his work. That was Luther's view.

(iii) It has been taken to mean carnal temptations. When the monks and the hermits shut themselves up in their monasteries and their cells they found that the last instinct that could be tamed was that of sex. They wished to eliminate it but it haunted them. They held that Paul was like that; and this is the common Roman Catholic view to this day.

None of these solutions can be right, for three reasons. (a) The very word "stake" indicates an almost savage pain. (b) The whole picture before us is one of physical suffering. (c) Whatever the thorn was, it was intermittent, for, although it sometimes prostrated Paul, it never kept him wholly from his work. So then let us look at the other suggestions.

(iv) It has been suggested that the thorn was Paul's physical appearance. "His bodily presence is weak" (2Cor.10:10). It has been suggested that he suffered from some disfigurement which made him ugly and hindered his work. But that does not account for the sheer pain that must have been there.

(v) One of the commonest solutions is epilepsy. It is painful and recurrent, and between attacks the sufferer can go about his business. It produced visions and trances such as Paul experienced. It can be repellent; in the ancient world it was attributed to demons. In the ancient world when people saw an epileptic they spat to ward off the evil demon. In Gal.4:14 Paul says that when the Galatians saw his infirmity they did not reject him. The Greek word literally means you did not spit at me. But this theory has consequences which are hard to accept. It would mean that Paul's visions were epileptic trances, and it is hard to believe that the visions which changed the world were due to epileptic attacks.

(vi) The oldest of all theories is that Paul suffered from severe and prostrating headaches. Both Tertullian and Jerome believed that.

(vii) That may well lead us to the truth, for still another theory is that Paul suffered from eye trouble and this would explain the headaches. After the glory on the Damascus Road passed, he was blind (Ac.9:9). It may be that his eyes never recovered again. Paul said of the Galatians that they would have plucked out their eyes and would have given them to him (Gal.4:15). At the end of

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Galatians he writes, "See in what large letters I am writing to you" (Gal.6:11), as if he was describing the great sprawling characters of a man who could hardly see.

(viii) By far the most likely thing is that Paul suffered from chronically recurrent attacks of a certain virulent malarial fever which haunted the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean. The natives of the country, when they wished to harm an enemy, prayed to their gods that he should be "burnt up" with this fever. One who has suffered from it describes the headache that accompanies it as being like "a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead." Another speaks of "the grinding, boring pain in one temple, like the dentist's drill--the phantom wedge driven in between the jaws," and says that when the thing became acute it "reached the extreme point of human endurance." That in truth deserves the description of a thorn in the flesh, and even of a stake in the flesh. The man who endured so many other sufferings had this agony to contend with all the time.

Paul prayed that it might be taken from him, but God answered that prayer as he answers so many prayers--he did not take the thing away but gave Paul strength to bear it. That is how God works. He does not spare us things, but makes us able to conquer them.

To Paul came the promise and the reality of the all-sufficient grace. Now let us see from his life some few of the things for which that grace was sufficient.

(i) It was sufficient for physical weariness. It made him able to go on. John Wesley preached 42,000 sermons. He averaged 4,500 miles a year. He rode 60 to 70 miles a day and preached three sermons a day on an average. When he was 83 he wrote in his diary, "I am a wonder to myself. I am never tired, either with preaching, writing, or travelling." That was the work of the all-sufficient grace.

(ii) It was sufficient for physical pain. It made him able to bear the cruel stake. Once a man went to visit a girl who was in bed dying of an incurable and a most painful disease. He took with him a little book of cheer for those in trouble, a sunny book, a happy book, a laughing book. "Thank you very much," she said, "but I know this book." "Have you read it already?" asked the visitor. The girl answered, "I wrote it." That was the work of the all-sufficient grace.

(iii) It was sufficient for opposition. All his life Paul was up against it and all his life he never gave in. No amount of opposition could break him or make him turn back. That was the work of the all-sufficient grace.

(iv) It made him able, as all this letter shows, to face slander. There is nothing so hard to face as misinterpretation and cruel misjudgment. Once a man flung a pail of water over Archelaus the Macedonian. He said nothing at all. And when a friend asked him how he could bear it so serenely, he said, "He threw the water not on me, but on the man he thought I was." The all-sufficient grace made Paul care not what men thought him to be but what God knew him to be.

It is the glory of the gospel that in our weakness we may find this wondrous grace, for always man's extremity is God's opportunity.

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2 Corinthians 12:11-18

THE DEFENCE DRAWS TO AN END

2 Corinthians 12:11-18

I have become a fool--you forced me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, not by myself. I am in no way inferior to the super-apostles, even if I am nothing. The signs of an apostle have been wrought among you in all endurance, with signs and wonders and deeds of power. In what have you been surpassed by the rest of the churches, except that I have not squeezed charity out of you? Forgive me for this sin. Look you! I am ready to come to you for the third time, and I still will take no charity from you. It is not your money I want, it is you. Children should not have to accumulate money for their parents, but parents for children. Most gladly I will spend and be spent to the uttermost for your lives. If I love you to excess, am I to be loved the less for that? But, suppose you say that I myself was not a burden to you, but that, because I was a crafty character, I snared you by guile.

Of those I sent to you, did I through any of them take advantage of you? I exhorted Titus to go to you, and with him I despatched our brother. Did Titus take any advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? In the same steps?

This passage, in which Paul is coming near to the end of his defence, reads like the words of a man who has put out some tremendous effort and is now weary. It almost seems that Paul is limp with the effort that he has made.

Once again he speaks with distaste of this whole wretched business of self-justification; but the thing has got to be gone through. That he should be discredited might be a small thing, but that his gospel should be rendered ineffective is something that cannot be allowed.

(i) First of all, he claims that he is every bit as good an apostle as his opponents with their claims to be super-apostles. And his claim is based on one thing--the effectiveness of his ministry. When John the Baptist sent his messengers to ask Jesus if he really was the promised one or if they must look for another, Jesus' answer was, "Go back and tell John what is happening" (Lk.7:18-22). When Paul wants to guarantee the reality of the gospel which he preached in Corinth, he makes a list of sins and sinners and then adds the flashing sentence, "And such were some of you" (1Cor.6:9-11). Once Dr. Chalmers was congratulated on a great speech to a crowded assembly. "Yes," he said, "but what did it do?" Effectiveness is the proof of reality.

The reality of a Church is not seen in the splendour of its buildings or the elaborateness of its worship or the wealth of its givings or even the size of its congregations; it is seen in changed lives, and, if there are no changed lives, the essential element of reality is missing. The one standard by which Paul would have his apostleship judged was its ability to bring the life-changing grace of Jesus Christ to men.

(ii) It must have sorely rankled with the Corinthians that Paul would accept nothing from them, for again and again he returns to that charge. Here he lays down again one of the supreme principles of Christian giving. "It is not your money I want," he says, "it is you." The giving which does not give itself is always a poor thing. There are debts that we can discharge by paying money, but there are others in which money is the least of it.

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2 Corinthians 12:11-18

H. L. Gee somewhere tells of a tramp who came begging to a good woman's door. She went to get something to give him and found that she had no change in the house. She went to him and said, "I have not a penny of small change. I need a loaf of bread. Here is a pound note. Go and buy the loaf and bring me back the change and I will give you something." The man executed the commission and returned and she gave him a small coin. He took it with tears in his eyes. "It's not the money," he said, "it's the way you trusted me. No one ever trusted me like that before, and I can't thank you enough." It is easy to say that the woman took a risk that only a soft-hearted fool would take, but she had given that man more than money, she had given him something of herself by giving her trust.

Turgenev tells how one day he was stopped on the street by a beggar. He felt in his pocket; he had absolutely no money with him. Impulsively he stretched out his hand, "My brother," he said, "I can give you nothing but this." The beggar said, "You called me brother; you took my hand; that too is a gift." The comfortable way to discharge one's duty to the Church, to the charities which help our fellow men, to the poor and the needy, is to give a sum of money and have done with it. It is not nothing, but it is far from everything, for in all true giving the giver must give not only his substance but himself.

(iii) It seems that the Corinthians had had one last charge against Paul. They could not say that he had ever taken any advantage of them; not even their malignancy could find any grounds for that. But they seem to have hinted that quite possibly some of the money collected for the poor of Jerusalem had stuck to the fingers of Titus and of Paul's other emissary and that Paul had got his share that way. The really malicious mind will stick at nothing to find a ground of criticism. Paul's loyalty to his friends leaps to defend them. It is not always safe to be the friend of a great man; It is easy to become involved in his troubles. Happy is the man who has supporters whom he can trust as he would trust his own soul. Paul had followers like that. Christ needs them, too.

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2 Corinthians 12:19-21

THE MARKS OF AN UNCHRISTIAN CHURCH

2 Corinthians 12:19-21

You have been thinking for a long time that it is to you that we have been making our defence. It is before God, in Christ, that we speak. All that we have said, beloved, is for your upbuilding, for I am afraid, in case, when I come, I may find you not such as I wish that you should be, and that I should be found by you not such as you wish me to be. I am afraid that, when I come, there may be amongst you strife, envy, outbursts of anger, the factious spirit, slanderings, whisperings, all kinds of conceit and disorder. I am afraid that, when I come, God may humiliate me again in your presence and that I may have to mourn for many of those who sinned before and who have not repented of the impurity and fornication and uncleanness which they committed.

As he comes near the end of his defence one thing strikes Paul. All this citing of his qualifications and all this self apology may look as if he cared a great deal for what men thought of him. Nothing could be further from the truth. So long as Paul knew himself to be right with God, he did not greatly care what men thought, and what he has said must not be misconstrued as an attempt to win their approval. On one occasion Abraham Lincoln and his counsellors had taken an important decision. One of the counsellors said, "Well, Mr. President, I hope that God is on our side." Lincoln answered, "What I am worried about is, not if God is on our side, but if we are on God's side." Paul's supreme aim was to stand right with God no matter what men thought or said.

So he moves on to the visit which he intends to pay to Corinth. Rather grimly he says that he hopes that he will not find them as he would not wish them to be, for, if that happens, they will assuredly find him what they would not wish him to be. There is a certain threat there. He does not want to take stern measures, but, if necessary, he will not shrink from them. Then Paul goes on to list what might be called the marks of the unchristian Church.

There is strife (eris, GSN2054). This is a word of battles. It denotes rivalry and competition, discord about place and prestige. It is the characteristic of the man who has forgotten that only he who humbles himself can be exalted.

There is envy (zelos, GSN2205). This is a great word which has come down in the world. Originally it described a great emotion, that of the man who sees a fine life or a fine action and is moved to emulation. But emulation can so easily become envy, the desire to have what is not ours to have, the spirit which grudges others the possession of anything denied to us. Emulation in fine things is a noble quality; but envy is the characteristic of a mean and little mind.

There are outbursts of anger (thumoi, GSN2372). This does not denote a settled and prolonged wrath. It denotes sudden explosions of passionate anger. It is the kind of anger which Basil described as the intoxication of the soul, that sweeps a man into doing things for which afterwards he is bitterly sorry. The ancients said themselves that such outbursts were more characteristic of beasts than men. The beast cannot control itself; man ought to be able to do so; and when passion runs away with him he is more kin to the unreasoning and undisciplined beast than he is to thinking man.

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2 Corinthians 12:19-21

There is the factious spirit (eritheia). Originally this word simply described work which is done for pay, the work of the day labourer. It went on to describe the work which is done for no other motives than for pay. It describes that utterly selfish and self-centred ambition which has no idea of service and which is in everything for what it can get out of it for itself.

There are slanderings and whisperings (katalaliai (GSN2636) and psithurismoi, GSN5587). The first word describes the open, loud-mouthed attack, the insults flung out in public, the public vilification of some person whose views are different. The second is a much nastier word. It describes the whispering campaign of malicious gossip, the slanderous story murmured in someone's ear, the discreditable tale passed on as a spicy secret. With the first kind of slander a man can at least deal because it is a frontal attack. With the second kind he is often helpless to deal because it is an underground movement which will not face him, and an insidious poisoning of the atmosphere whose source he cannot attack because he does not know it.

There is conceit (phusioseis, GSN5450). Within the Church a man should certainly magnify his office, but, equally certainly, he should never magnify himself. When men see our good deeds, it is not we whom they should glorify but the Father in heaven whom we serve and who has enabled us to do them. There is disorder (akatastasiai, GSN0181). This is the word for tumults, disorders, anarchy. There is one danger which ever besets a Church. A Church is a democracy, but it may become a democracy run mad. A democracy is not a place where every man has a right to do what he likes; it is a place where people enter into a fellowship in which the watchword is not independent isolation but interdependent togetherness.

Finally there are the sins of which even yet some of the recalcitrant Corinthians may not have repented. There is uncleanness (akatharsia, GSN0167). The word means everything which would unfit a man to enter into God's presence. It describes the life muddled with wallowing in the world's ways. Kipling prayed,

"Teach us to rule ourselves alway,
Controlled and cleanly night and day."

Akatharsia (GSN0167) is the very opposite of that clean purity.

There is fornication (porneia, GSN4202). The Corinthians lived in a society which did not regard adultery as a sin and expected a man to take his pleasures where he could. It was so easy to be infected and to relapse into what appealed so much to the lower side of human nature. They must lay hold on that hope which can,

"Purge the soul from sense and sin,
As Christ himself is pure."

There was uncleanness (aselgeia, GSN0766). Here is an untranslatable word. It does not solely mean sexual uncleanness; it is sheer wanton insolence. As Basil defined it, "It is that attitude of the soul which has never borne and never will bear the pain of discipline." It is the insolence that

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2 Corinthians 12:19-21

knows no restraint, that has no sense of the decencies of things, that will dare anything that wanton caprice demands, that is careless of public opinion and its own good name so long as it gets what it wants. Josephus ascribes it to Jezebel who built a temple to Baal in the very city of God itself. The basic Greek sin was hubris (GSN5196), and hubris is that proud insolence which gives neither God nor man his place. Aselgeia (GSN0766) is the insolently selfish spirit, which is lost to honour, and which will take what it wants, where it wants, in shameless disregard of God and man.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

A WARNING, A WISH, A HOPE AND A BLESSING

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

For the third time I am coming to you. Everything will be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. To those who have already sinned and to all others I have already said, and I now say, just as I said it when I was with you on my second visit, now I say it while I am absent, that if I come to you again, I will not spare you. I will take decisive action because you are looking for a proof that Christ really is speaking in me, Christ who is not weak where you are concerned, but who is powerful among you. True, he was crucified in weakness, but he is alive by the power of God. Keep testing yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Keep proving yourselves. Or do you not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you--unless in any way you are rejected? But we pray to God that you should do no evil. It is not that we want a chance to prove our authority. What we do want is that you should do the fine thing even if that means that there will be no opportunity for us to prove our authority.

For we cannot do anything against the truth, but we must do everything for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak while you are strong. For this too we pray--your complete perfecting. The reason why I write these things when I am absent is so that when I am present I may not have to deal sternly with you according to the authority which the Lord gave me to use to build up and not to destroy.

Finally, brothers, farewell! Work your way onwards towards perfection. Accept the exhortation we have offered you. Live in agreement with each other. Be at peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet each other with a holy kiss.

All God's dedicated people send you their greetings.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

In this last chapter of the severe letter Paul finishes with four things.

(i) He finishes with a warning. He is coming again to Corinth and this time there will be no more loose talk and reckless statements. Whatever is said will be witnessed and proved once and for all. To put it in our modern idiom, Paul insists that there must be a show down. The ill situation must drag on no longer. He knew that there comes a time when trouble must be faced.

(ii) He finishes with a wish. It is his wish that they should do the fine thing. If they do, he will never need to exert his authority, and that will be no disappointment to him but a deep and real joy. Paul never wanted to show his authority for the sake of showing it. Everything he did was to build up and not to destroy. Discipline must always be aimed to lift a man up and not to knock him down.

(iii) He finishes with a hope. He has three hopes for the Corinthians. (a) He hopes that they will go onwards to perfection. There can be no standing still in the Christian life. The man who is not advancing is slipping back. The Christian is a man who is ever on the way to God, and therefore

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2 Corinthians 13:1-14

each day, by the grace of Christ, he must be a little more fit to stand God's scrutiny. (b) He hopes that they will listen to the exhortation he has given them. It takes a big man to listen to hard advice. We would often be a great deal better off if we would stop talking about what we want and begin listening to the voices of the wise, and especially to the voice of Jesus Christ. (c) He hopes that they will live in agreement and in peace. No congregation can worship the God of peace in the spirit of bitterness. Men must love each other before their love for God has any reality.

(iv) Finally, he finishes with a blessing. After the severity, the struggle and the debate, there comes the serenity of the benediction. One of the best ways of making peace with our enemies is to pray for them, for no one can hate a man and pray for him at the same time. And so we leave the troubled story of Paul and the Church of Corinth with the benediction ringing in our ears. The way has been hard, but the last word is peace.

Barclay's Commentary

Introduction to Galatians

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

PAUL UNDER ATTACK

Someone has likened the letter to the Galatians to a sword flashing in a great swordsman's hand. Both Paul and his gospel were under attack. If that attack had succeeded, Christianity might have become just another Jewish sect, might have become a thing dependent upon circumcision and on keeping the law, instead of being a thing of grace. It is strange to think that, if Paul's opponents had had their way, the gospel might have been kept for Jews and we might never have had the chance to know the love of Christ.

PAUL'S APOSTLESHIP ATTACKED

It is impossible for a man to possess a vivid personality and a strong character like Paul and not encounter opposition; and equally impossible for a man to lead such a revolution in religious thought as he did and not be attacked. The first attack was on his apostleship. There were many to say that he was no apostle at all.

From their own point of view they were right. In Ac.1:21-22 we have the basic definition of an apostle. Judas the traitor had committed suicide; it was necessary to fill the blank made in the apostolic band. They define the man to be chosen as one who must be "one of these men who were with us during all the time our Lord went in and out amongst us, beginning from the baptism of John, until the day he was taken from us" and "a witness of the Resurrection." To be an apostle a man must have companied with Jesus during his earthly life and have witnessed his Resurrection. That qualification Paul obviously did not fulfil. Further, not so very long ago he had been the arch-persecutor of the Christian Church.

In Gal.1:1 Paul answers that. Proudly he insists that his apostleship is from no human source and that no human hand ordained him to that office, but that he received his call direct from God. Others might have the qualifications demanded when the first blank in the apostolic band was filled; but he had a unique qualification--he had met Christ face to face on the Damascus Road.

INDEPENDENCE AND AGREEMENT

Further, Paul insists that for his message he was dependent on no man. That is why in Gal.1-2 he carefully details his visits to Jerusalem. He is insisting that he is not preaching some second-hand message which he received from a man; he is preaching a message which he received direct from Christ. But Paul was no anarchist. He insisted that, although his message was received in entire independence, it yet had received the full approval of those who were the acknowledged leaders of the Christian Church (Gal.2:6-10). The gospel he preached came direct from God to him; but it was a gospel in full agreement with the faith delivered to the Church.

THE JUDAIZERS

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But that gospel was under attack as well. It was a struggle which had to come and a battle which had to be fought. There were Jews who had accepted Christianity; but they believed that all God's promises and gifts were for Jews alone and that no Gentile could be admitted to these precious privileges. They therefore believed that Christianity was for Jews and Jews alone. If Christianity was God's greatest gift to men, that was all the more reason that none but Jews should be allowed to enjoy it. In a way that was inevitable. There was a type of Jew who arrogantly believed in the idea of the chosen people.

He could say the most terrible things--"God loves only Israel of all the nations he has made." "God will judge Israel with one measure and the Gentiles with another." "The best of the snakes crush; the best of the Gentiles kill." "God created the Gentiles to be fuel for the fires of Hell." This was the spirit which made the law lay it down that it was illegal to help a Gentile mother in her sorest hour, for that would only be to bring another Gentile into the world. When this type of Jew saw Paul bringing the gospel to the despised Gentile, he was appalled and infuriated.

THE LAW

There was a way out of this. If a Gentile wished to become a Christian, let him become a Jew first. What did that mean? It meant that he must be circumcised and take the whole burden of the law upon him. That, for Paul, was the opposite of all that Christianity meant. It meant that a man's salvation was dependent on his ability to keep the law and could be won by his own unaided efforts; whereas, to Paul salvation was entirely a thing of grace. He believed that no man could ever earn the favour of God. All he could do was accept the love God offered him by making an act of faith and flinging himself on his mercy. The Jew would go to God saying, "Look! Here is my circumcision. Here are my works. Give me the salvation I have earned." Paul would say:

"Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy Cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

For him the essential thing was, not what a man could do for God, but what God had done for him.

"But," the Jews argued, "the greatest thing in our national life is the law. God gave that law to Moses and on it our very lives depend." Paul replied, "Wait one moment. Who is the founder of our nation? To whom were the greatest of God's promises given?" Of course, the answer is Abraham.

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"Now," went on Paul, "how was it that Abraham gained the favour of God? He could not have gained it by keeping the law because he lived four hundred and thirty years before the law was given to Moses. He gained it by an act of faith. When God told him to leave his people and go out, Abraham made a sublime act of faith and went, trusting everything to him. It was faith that saved Abraham, not law; and," Paul continues, "it is faith that must save every man, not deeds of the law. The real son of Abraham is not a man racially descended from him but one who, no matter his race, makes the same surrender of faith to God."

THE LAW AND GRACE

If all this be true, one very serious question arises--what then is the place of the law? It cannot be denied that it was given by God; does this emphasis on grace simply wipe it out?

The law has its own place in the scheme of things. First, it tells men what sin is. If there is no law, a man cannot break it and there can be no such thing as sin. Second, and most important, the law really drives a man to the grace of God. The trouble about the law is that because we are sinful men we can never keep it perfectly. Its effect, therefore, is to show a man his weakness and to drive him to a despair in which he sees that there is nothing left but to throw himself on the mercy and the love of God. The law convinces us of our own insufficiency and in the end compels us to admit that the only thing which can save us is the grace of God. In other words the law is an essential stage on the way to that grace.

In this epistle Paul's great theme is the glory of the grace of God and the necessity of realizing that we can never save ourselves.

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Galatians 1:1-5

THE TRUMPET CALL OF THE GOSPEL

Galatians 1:1-5

I, Paul, an apostle--and my apostleship was given to me from no human source and through no man's hand, because it came to me direct from Jesus Christ and from God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead--with all the brothers who are here, write this letter to the Churches of Galatia. May grace and peace be on you from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who, because our God and Father willed it so, gave his life for our sins, to rescue us from this present world with all its evil. Glory be to him for ever and ever. Amen.

To the people of Galatia there had come people saying that Paul was not really an apostle and that they need not listen to what he had to say. They based their belittlement on the fact that he had not been one of the original twelve, that, in fact, he had been the most savage of all persecutors of the Church, and that he held, as it were, no official appointment from the leaders of the Church. Paul's answer was not an argument; it was a statement. He owed his apostleship to no man but to a day on the Damascus Road when he had met Jesus Christ face to face. His office and his task had been given him direct from God.

(i) Paul was certain that God had spoken to him. Leslie Weatherhead tells of a boy who decided to become a minister. He was asked when he had come to that decision and he replied that it was after hearing a certain sermon in his school chapel. He was asked the name of the preacher who had wrought such an effect upon him. His answer was, "I do not know the preacher's name; but I know that God spoke to me that day."

In the last analysis no man can make another a minister or a servant of God. Only God himself can do that. The real test of a Christian is not whether or not he has gone through certain ceremonies and taken certain vows; it is, has he seen Christ face to face? An old Jewish priest called Ebed-Tob said of the office which he held, "It was not my father or my mother who installed me in this place, but the arm of the Mighty King gave it to me."

(ii) The real reason for Paul's ability to toil and to suffer was that he was certain his task had been given him by God. He regarded every effort demanded from him as a God-given task.

It is not only men like Paul who have a task from God; to every man God gives his task. It may be one of which all men will know and which history will remember or it may be one of which no one will ever hear; but in either case it is a task for God. Tagore has a poem like this:

"At midnight the would-be ascetic announced:
'This is the time to give up my home and seek for God. Ah,
who has held me so long in delusion here?'
God whispered. 'I,' but the ears of the man were stopped.
With a baby asleep at her breast lay his wife, peacefully sleeping
on one side of the bed.
The man said, 'Who are ye that have fooled me so long?'"

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Galatians 1:1-5

The voice said again, 'They are God,' but he heard it not.
The baby cried out in its dream, nestling close to its mother.
God commanded, 'Stop, fool, leave not thy home,' but still he heard not.
God sighed and complained, 'Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me'"

Many humble tasks are a divine apostolate. As Burns had it,

To mak'a happy fire-side clime
For weans and wife,
That's the true pathos and sublime
O'human life.

Paul's God-given task was to evangelize a world; to most of us it will simply be to make one or two folk happy in the little circle of those most dear.

Right at the beginning of his letter Paul sums up his wishes and prayers for his friends in two tremendous words.

(i) He wishes them grace. There are two main ideas in this word. The first is that of sheer beauty. The Greek word *charis* (GSN5485) means grace in the theological sense, but it always means beauty and charm; and even when theologically used the idea of charm is never far away from it. If the Christian life has grace in it, it must be a lovely thing. Far too often goodness exists without charm and charm without goodness. It is when goodness and charm unite that the work of grace is seen. The second idea is that of undeserved generosity of a gift, which a man never deserved and could never earn, given to him in the generous love of God. When Paul prays for grace on his friends, it is as if he were saying, "May the beauty of the undeserved love of God be on you, so that it will make your life lovely, too."

(ii) He wishes them peace. Paul was a Jew, and the Jewish word *shalom* (HSN7965) must have been in his mind, even as he wrote the Greek *eirene* (GSN1515). *Shalom* (HSN7965) means far more than the mere absence of trouble. It means everything which is to a man's highest good, everything which will make his mind pure, his will resolute and his heart glad. It is that sense of the love and care of God, which, even if his body is tortured, can keep a man's heart serene.

Finally, Paul sums up in one sentence of infinite meaning the heart and the work of Jesus Christ. "He gave himself... to rescue us." (i) The love of Christ is a love which gave and suffered. (ii) The love of Christ is a love which conquered and achieved. In this life the tragedy of love is that it is so often frustrated; but the love of Christ is backed by an infinite power which nothing can frustrate and which can rescue its loved one from the bondage of sin.

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Galatians 1:6-10

THE SLAVE OF CHRIST

Galatians 1:6-10

I am amazed that you have so quickly deserted him who called you by the grace of Christ, and that you have so soon gone over to a different gospel, a gospel which in point of fact is not another gospel at all. What has really happened is that certain men are upsetting your whole faith and are aiming at reversing the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven were to preach a gospel to you, other than that which you have received, let him be accursed. Is it men's favour I am trying to win, or is it God's? Or am I seeking to curry favour with men? If after all that has happened to me I were still trying to curry favour with men, I would not be bearing the brand; of the slave of Christ.

The basic fact behind this epistle is that Paul's gospel was a gospel of free grace. He believed with all his heart that nothing a man could do could ever earn the love of God; and that therefore all a man could do was fling himself on his mercy in an act of faith. All a man could do was take in wondering gratitude what God offered; the important thing was not what we could do for ourselves but what he had done for us.

It was this gospel of the free grace of God that Paul had preached. After him there came men preaching a Jewish version of Christianity. They declared that, if a man wished to please God, he must be circumcised and then dedicate his life to carrying out all the rules and regulations of the law. Every time a man performed a deed of the law, so they said, that was a credit entry in his account with God. They were teaching that it was necessary for a man to earn the favour of God. To Paul that was utterly impossible.

Paul's opponents declared that he was making religion far too easy and doing so to ingratiate himself with men. In fact that accusation was the reverse of the truth. After all, if religion consists in fulfilling a mass of rules and regulations, it is, at least theoretically, possible to satisfy its demands; but Paul is holding up the Cross and saying, "God loved you like that." Religion becomes a matter, not of satisfying the claims of law, but of trying to meet the obligation of love. A man can satisfy the claims of law, for they have strict and statutory limits; but he can never satisfy the claims of love, for if he gave his loved one the sun, the moon and the stars he still would be left feeling that that was an offering far too small. But all that Paul's Jewish opponents could see was that he had declared that circumcision was no longer necessary and the law no longer relevant.

Paul denied that he was trying to ingratiate himself with men. It was not men he was serving; it was God. It made no difference to him what men said or thought about him; his master was God. And then he brought forward an unanswerable argument. "if," he said, "I were trying to curry favour with men I would not be the slave of Christ." What is in his mind is this--the slave had his master's name and sign stamped on him with a red-hot branding iron; he himself bore on his body the marks of his sufferings, the brand of the slavery of Christ. "If," he said, "I were out to curry favour with men would I have these scars on my body?" The fact that he was marked as he was was the final proof that his aim was to serve Christ and not to please men.

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Galatians 1:6-10

John Gunther tells us of the very early communists in Russia. Many of them had been in prison under the Czarist regime and bore on their bodies the physical marks of what they had suffered; and he tells us that, so far from being ashamed of the marks which disfigured them, they were their greatest pride. We may be convinced that they were misguided and misguiding, but we can not doubt the genuineness of their allegiance to the communist cause.

It is when men see that we are prepared to suffer for the faith which we say we hold that they begin to believe that we really hold it. If our faith costs us nothing, men will value it at nothing.

Barclay's Commentary

Galatians 1:11-17

THE ARRESTING HAND OF GOD

Galatians 1:11-17

As for the gospel that has been preached by me, I want you to know, brothers, that it rests on no human foundation. for, neither did I receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through direct revelation from Jesus Christ. If you want proof of that you heard of the kind of life I once lived when I practised the Jewish faith, a life in which I persecuted the Church of God beyond all bounds and devastated it. I was making strides in the Jewish faith beyond many of my contemporaries in my nation, for I was zealous to excess for the traditions of my fathers. It was then that God who had set me apart for a special task before I was born, and who called me through his grace, decided to reveal his Son through me. that I might tell the good news of him amongst the Gentiles. Thereupon I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was; but I went away to Arabia; and then I went back again to Damascus.

It was Paul's contention that the gospel he preached was no second-hand tale; it had come to him direct from God. That was a big claim to make and it demanded some kind of proof. For that proof Paul had the courage to point to himself and to the radical change in his own life.

(i) He had been a fanatic for the law; and now the dominant centre of his life was grace. This man, who had with passionate intensity tried to earn God's favour, was now content in humble faith to take what he lovingly offered. He had ceased to glory in what he could do for himself; and had begun to glory in what God had done for him.

(ii) He had been the arch-persecutor of the Church. He had "devastated" the Church. The word he uses is the word for utterly sacking a city. He had tried to make a scorched earth of the Church and now his one aim, for which he was prepared to spend himself even to death, was to spread that same Church over all the world.

Every effect must have an adequate cause. When a man is proceeding headlong in one direction and suddenly turns and proceeds headlong in the opposite direction; when he suddenly reverses all his values so that his life turns upside down; some explanation is required. For Paul the explanation was the direct intervention of God. He had laid his hand on his shoulder and arrested him in mid-career. "That," said Paul, "is the kind of effect which only God could produce." It is a notable thing about Paul that he is not afraid to recount the record of his own shame in order to show God's power.

He has two things to say about that intervention.

(i) It was no unpremeditated thing; it was in God's eternal plan. A. J. Gossip tells how Alexander Whyte preached the sermon when he was ordained to his first charge. Whyte's message was that all through time and eternity God had been preparing this man for this congregation and this congregation for this man and, prompt to the minute, he had brought them together.

Barclay's Commentary

Galatians 1:11-17

God sends every man into the world with a part to play in his purpose. It may be a big part or it may be a small part. It may be to do something of which the whole world will know or something of which only a few will ever know. Epictetus 2: 16 says, "Have courage to look up to God and to say, 'Deal with me as thou wilt from now on. I am as one with thee; I am thine; I flinch from nothing so long as thou dost think that it is good. Lead me where thou wilt; put on me what raiment thou wilt. Wouldst thou have me hold office, or eschew it, stay or fly, be rich or poor? For all this I will defend thee before men.'" If a pagan philosopher could give himself so wholly to a God whom he knew so dimly, how much more should we!

(ii) Paul knew himself to be chosen for a task. He thought of himself as chosen not for honour but for service, not for ease but for battles. It is for the hardest campaigns that the general chooses his best soldiers and for the hardest studies that the teacher chooses his best students. Paul knew that he had been saved to serve.

Barclay's Commentary

Galatians 1:18-24

THE WAY OF THE CHOSEN

Galatians 1:18-24

Then, three years after that, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and I stayed with him a fortnight. I saw no other apostle except James, the Lord's brother. As for what I am writing to you--before God I am not lying. Then I went to the districts of Syria and Cilicia. But I remained personally unknown to the Churches of Judaea which are in Christ. The only thing they knew about me was that they were hearing the news--our one-time persecutor is preaching the faith which once he tried to devastate and they found in me cause to glorify God.

When we look at this passage alongside the last section of the preceding one we see just what Paul did when the hand of God arrested him.

(i) First, he went away to Arabia. He went away to be alone and for two reasons. First, he had to think out this tremendous thing that had happened to him. Second, he had to speak with God before he spoke to men.

There are so few who will take the time to face themselves and to face God; and how can a man meet the temptations, stresses and strains of life unless he has thought things out and thought them through?

(ii) Second, he went back to Damascus. That was a courageous thing to do. He had been on the way to Damascus to wipe out the Church when God arrested him and all Damascus knew that. He went back at once to bear his testimony to the people who knew best what he had been.

Kipling has a famous poem called Mulholland's Vow. Mulholland was a cattle-man on a ship. A storm broke out and in the storm the steers broke loose, Mulholland made a bargain with God that, if he saved him from the plunging horns and hooves, he would serve him from that time on. When he got safely to land he proposed to keep his part of the bargain; but his idea was to preach religion where no one knew him. Then came God's command, "Back you go to the cattle-boats and preach my gospel there." God sent him back to the place that he knew and that knew him. Our Christian witness.. like our Christian charity, must begin at home.

(iii) Third, Paul went to Jerusalem. Again he took his life in his hands. His former friends, the Jews, would be out for his blood, because to them he was a renegade. His former victims, the Christians, might well ostracize him, unable to believe that he was a changed man.

Paul had the courage to face his past. We never really get away from our past by running away from it. We can deal with it only by facing it and defeating it.

(iv) Fourth, Paul went to Syria and Cilicia. It was there that Tarsus was. It was there that he had been brought up. There were the friends of his boyhood and his youth. Again he chose the hard way. They would no doubt regard him as quite mad; they would meet him with anger, and, worse, with mockery. But he was quite prepared to be regarded as a fool for the sake of Christ.

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Galatians 1:18-24

In these verses Paul was seeking to defend and prove the independence of his gospel. He got it from no man; he got it from God. He consulted no man; he consulted God. But as he wrote he unconsciously delineated himself as the man who had the courage to witness to his change and preach his gospel in the hardest places of all.

I, Paul, an apostle--and my apostleship was given to me from no human source and through no man's hand, because it came to me direct from Jesus Christ and from God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead--with all the brothers who are here, write this letter to the Churches of Galatia. May grace and peace be on you from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who, because our God and Father willed it so, gave his life for our sins, to rescue us from this present world with all its evil. Glory be to him for ever and ever. Amen.

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Paul's God-given task was to evangelize a world; to most of us it will simply be to make one or two folk happy in the little circle of those most dear.

Right at the beginning of his letter Paul sums up his wishes and prayers for his friends in two tremendous words.

(i) He wishes them grace. There are two main ideas in this word. The first is that of sheer beauty. The Greek word *charis* (GSN5485) means grace in the theological sense, but it always means beauty and charm; and even when theologically used the idea of charm is never far away from it. If the Christian life has grace in it, it must be a lovely thing. Far too often goodness exists without charm and charm without goodness. It is when goodness and charm unite that the work of grace is seen. The second idea is that of undeserved generosity of a gift, which a man never deserved and could never earn, given to him in the generous love of God. When Paul prays for grace on his friends, it is as if he were saying, "May the beauty of the undeserved love of God be on you, so that it will make your life lovely, too."

(ii) He wishes them peace. Paul was a Jew, and the Jewish word *shalom* (HSN7965) must have been in his mind, even as he wrote the Greek *eirene* (GSN1515). *Shalom* (HSN7965) means far more than the mere absence of trouble. It means everything which is to a man's highest good, everything which will make his mind pure, his will resolute and his heart glad. It is that sense of the love and care of God, which, even if his body is tortured, can keep a man's heart serene.

Finally, Paul sums up in one sentence of infinite meaning the heart and the work of Jesus Christ. "He gave himself... to rescue us." (i) The love of Christ is a love which gave and suffered. (ii) The love of Christ is a love which conquered and achieved. In this life the tragedy of love is that it is so often frustrated; but the love of Christ is backed by an infinite power which nothing can frustrate and which can rescue its loved one from the bondage of sin.

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Galatians 2:1-10

THE MAN WHO REFUSED TO BE OVERAWED

Galatians 2:1-10

Fourteen years afterwards I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and I took Titus with me too. It was in consequence of a direct message from God that I went up; and I placed before them the gospel that I am accustomed to preach among the Gentiles. because I did not want to think that the work which I was trying to do, and which I had done, was going to be frustrated. This I did in private conference with those whose reputations stood high in the Church. But not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek. True they tried to circumcise him to please false brothers who had been furtively introduced into our society and who had insinuated themselves into our company to spy out the liberty which we enjoy in Christ Jesus, because they wished to reduce us to their own state of servitude. Not for one hour did we yield in submission to them. We took a stand that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. Now from those who are men of reputation--what they once were makes no difference to me--there is no favouritism with God those men of reputation imparted no fresh knowledge to me; but, on the other hand, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the preaching of the gospel in the non-Jewish world, just as Peter had been in the Jewish world--for he who worked for Peter. to make him the apostle of the Jewish world, worked for me too to make me the apostle to the non-Jewish world--and when they realized the grace that had been given to me, James, Cephas and John, whom all look upon as pillars of the Church, gave pledges of partnership to me and to Barnabas. in complete agreement that we should go to the non-Jewish world, and they to the Jewish world. The one thing which they did enjoin us to do was to remember the poor--the very thing that I myself was eager to do.

In the preceding passage Paul has proved the independence of his gospel; here he is concerned to prove that this independence is not anarchy and that his gospel is not something schismatic and sectarian, but no other than the faith delivered to the Church.

After fourteen years' work he went up to Jerusalem, taking with him Titus, a young friend and henchman, who was a Greek. That visit was by no means easy. Even as he wrote there was agitation in Paul's mind. There is a disorder in the Greek which it is not possible fully to reproduce in English translation. Paul's problem was that he could not say too little or he might seem to be abandoning his principles; and he could not say too much, or it might seem that he was at open variance with the leaders of the Church. The result was that his sentences are broken and disjointed, reflecting his anxiety.

From the beginning the real leaders of the Church accepted his position; but there were others who were out to tame this fiery spirit. There were those, who, as we have seen, accepted Christianity but believed that God never gave any privilege to a man who was not a Jew; and that, therefore, before a man could become a Christian, he must be circumcised and take the whole law upon him. These Judaizers. as they are called, seized on Titus as a test case. There is a battle behind this passage; and it seems likely that the leaders of the Church urged Paul, for the sake of peace, to give in, in the case of Titus. But he stood like a rock. He knew that to yield would be to accept the slavery of the law and to turn his back on the freedom which is in Christ. In the end Paul's

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Galatians 2:1-10

determination won the day. In principle it was accepted that his work lay in the non-Jewish world, and the work of Peter and James among the Jews.

It is to be carefully noted that it is not a question of two different gospels being preached; it is a question of the same gospel being brought to two different spheres by different people specially qualified to do so.

From this picture certain characteristics of Paul emerge clearly.

(i) He was a man who gave authority its due respect. He did not go his own way. He went and talked with the leaders of the Church however much he might differ from them. It is a great and neglected law of life that however right we happen to be there is nothing to be gained by rudeness. There is never any reason why courtesy and determination should not go hand in hand.

(ii) He was a man who refused to be overawed. Repeatedly he mentions the reputation which the leaders and pillars of the Church enjoyed. He respected them and treated them with courtesy; but he remained inflexible. There is such a thing as respect; and there is such a thing as the grovelling, prudential bowing to those whom the world or the Church labels great. Paul was always certain that he was seeking the approval not of men but of God.

(iii) He was a man conscious of a special task. He was convinced that God had given him a task to do and he would let neither opposition from without nor discouragement from within stop him doing it. The man who knows he has a God-given task will always find that he has a God-given strength to carry it out.

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Galatians 2:11-13

THE ESSENTIAL UNITY

Galatians 2:11-13

But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. Before some men arrived from James it was his habit to eat with the Gentiles. When they came he withdrew and separated himself, because he was scared of the circumcision party. The rest of the Jews played the hypocrite along with him, so that even Barnabas was led away along with them by their hypocritical actions.

The trouble was by no means at an end. Part of the life of the early Church was a common meal which they called the Agape (GSN0026) or Love Feast. At this feast the whole congregation came together to enjoy a common meal provided by a pooling of whatever resources they had. For many of the slaves it must have been the only decent meal they had all week; and in a very special way it marked the togetherness of the Christians.

That seems, on the face of it, a lovely thing. But we must remember the rigid exclusiveness of the narrower Jew. He regarded his race as the Chosen People in such a way as involved the rejection of all others. "The Lord is merciful and gracious" (Ps.2:5). "But he is only gracious to Israelites; other nations he will terrify." "The nations are as stubble or straw which shall be burned, or as chaff scattered to the wind." "If a man repents God accepts him, but that applies only to Israel and no other nation." "Love all but hate the heretics." This exclusiveness entered into daily life. A strict Jew was forbidden even to do business with a Gentile; he must not go on a journey with a Gentile; he must neither give hospitality to, nor accept hospitality from, a Gentile.

Here in Antioch arose the tremendous problem, in face of all this could the Jews and the Gentiles sit down together at a common meal? If the old law was to be observed it was obviously impossible. Peter came to Antioch and, at first, disregarding the old taboos in the glory of the new faith, he shared the common meal with Jew and Gentile. Then came certain of the Jewish party from Jerusalem. They used James' name although quite certainly they were not representing his views, and they worked on Peter so much that he withdrew from the common meal. The other Jews withdrew with him and finally even Barnabas was involved in this secession. It was then that Paul spoke with all the intensity of which his passionate nature was capable, for he saw certain things quite clearly.

(i) A church ceases to be Christian if it contains class distinctions. In the presence of God a man is neither Jew nor Gentile, noble nor base, rich nor poor; he is a sinner for whom Christ died. If men share in a common sonship they must be brothers.

(ii) Paul saw that strenuous action was necessary to counteract a drift which had occurred. He did not wait; he struck. It made no difference to him that this drift was connected with the name and conduct of Peter. It was wrong and that was all that mattered to him. A famous name can never justify an infamous action. Paul's action gives us a vivid example of how one strong man by his steadfastness can check a drift away from the right course before it becomes a tidal wave.

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Galatians 2:14-17

THE END OF THE LAW

Galatians 2:14-17

But when I saw that they were straying away from the right path which the gospel lays down, I said to Peter in front of them all, "If you who are a born Jew choose to live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. why are you forcing the Gentiles to live like Jews? We are by nature Jews; we are not Gentile sinners as you would call them; and we know that a man is not put right with God because he does the works which the law lays down, but through faith in Jesus Christ. Now we have accepted this faith in Jesus Christ, so that we might be right with God, and that faith has nothing to do with the works the law lays down, because no man can ever put himself right with God by doing the works the law lays down. Now if in our search to be made right with God through Christ Jesus we too become what you call sinners, are you then going to argue that Christ is the minister of sin? God forbid!"

Here at last the real root of the matter is being reached. A decision is being forced which could not in any event be long delayed. The fact of the matter was that the Jerusalem decision was a compromise, and, like all compromises, it had in it the seeds of trouble. In effect the decision was that the Jews would go on living like Jews, observing circumcision and the law, but that the Gentiles were free from these observances. Clearly, things could not go on like that, because the inevitable result was to produce two grades of Christians and two quite distinct classes in the Church. Paul's argument ran like this. He said to Peter, "You shared table with the Gentiles; you ate as they ate; therefore you approved in principle that there is one way for Jew and Gentile alike. How can you now reverse your decision and want the Gentiles to be circumcised and take the law upon them?" The thing did not make sense to Paul.

Now we must make sure of the meaning of a word. When the Jew used the word sinners of Gentiles he was not thinking of moral qualities; he was thinking of the observance of the law. To take an example--Lev. 11 lays down which animals may and may not be used for food. A man who ate a hare or pork broke these laws and became as inner in this sense of the term. So Peter would answer Paul, "But, if I eat with the Gentiles and eat the things they eat, I become a sinner."

Paul's answer was twofold. First, he said, "We agreed long ago that no amount of observance of the law can make a man right with God. That is a matter of grace. A man cannot earn, but must accept the generous offer of the love of God in Jesus. Therefore the whole business of law is irrelevant." Next he said, "You hold that to forget all this business about rules and regulations will make you a sinner. But that is precisely what Jesus Christ told you to do. He did not tell you to try to earn salvation by eating this animal and not eating that one. He told you to fling yourself without reserve on the grace of God. Are you going to argue, then, that he taught you to become a sinner?" Obviously there could be only one proper conclusion, namely that the old laws were wiped out.

This is the point that had to come. It could not be right for Gentiles to come to God by grace and Jews to come to him by law. For Paul there was only one reality, grace, and it was by way of surrender to that grace that all men must come.

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Galatians 2:14-17

There are two great temptations in the Christian life, and, in a certain sense, the better a man is the more liable he is to them. First, there is the temptation to try to earn God's favour, and second, the temptation to use some little achievement to compare oneself with our fellow men to our advantage and their disadvantage. But the Christianity which has enough of self left in it to think that by its own efforts it can please God and that by its own achievements it can show itself superior to other men is not true Christianity at all.

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Galatians 2:18-21

THE LIFE THAT IS CRUCIFIED AND RISEN

Galatians 2:18-21

If I build up again these very things that I destroyed, I simply succeed in making myself a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. True, I am alive; but it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The life that I am now living, although it is still in the flesh, is a life which is lived in faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to cancel out the grace of God; for if I can get right with God by means of the law, then Christ died quite unnecessarily.

Paul speaks out of the depths of personal experience. For him to re-erect the whole fabric of the law would have been spiritual suicide. He says that through the law he died to the law that he might live to God. What he means is this--he had tried the way of law, he had tried with all the terrible intensity of his hot heart to put himself right with God by a life that sought to obey every single item of that law. He had found that such an attempt produced nothing but a deeper and deeper sense that all he could do could never put him right with God. All the law had done was to show him his own helplessness. Whereupon he had quite suddenly abandoned that way and had cast himself, sinner as he was, on the mercy of God. It was the law which had driven him to God. To go back to the law would simply have entangled him all over again in the sense of estrangement from God. So great was the change that the only way he could describe it was to say that he had been crucified with Christ so that the man he used to be was dead and the living power within him now was Christ himself.

"If I can put myself to rights with God by meticulously obeying the law then what is the need of grace? If I can win my own salvation then why had Christ to die?" Paul was quite sure of one thing--that Jesus Christ had done for him what he could never have done for himself. The one man who re-enacted the experience of Paul was Martin Luther. Luther was a showpiece of discipline and penance, self-denial and self-torture. "If ever," he said, "a man could be saved by monkery that man was I." He had gone to Rome; it was considered to be an act of great merit to climb the Scala Sancta, the great sacred stairway, on hands and knees. He toiled upwards seeking that merit and suddenly there came to him the voice from heaven, "The just shall live by faith." The life at peace with God was not to be attained by this futile, never-ending, ever-defeated effort; it could be had only by casting himself on the love and mercy of God as Jesus Christ revealed them to men.

"Pining souls' come nearer Jesus.
And O come, not doubting thus,
But with faith that trusts more bravely
His huge tenderness for us.
If our love were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;
Arid our lives would be all sunshine,
In the sweetness of our Lord."

When Paul took God at his word, the midnight of law's frustration became the sunshine of grace.

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Galatians 3:1-9

THE GIFT OF GRACE

Galatians 3:1-9

O senseless Galatians, who has put the evil eye on you--you before whose very eyes Jesus Christ was placarded upon his Cross? Tell me this one thing--did you receive the Spirit by doing the works the law lays down, or because you listened and believed? Are you so senseless? After beginning your experience of God in the Spirit, are you now going to try to complete it by making it dependent upon what human nature can do? Is the tremendous experience you had all for nothing--if indeed you are going to let it go for nothing? Did he who generously gave you the Spirit, and who wrought mighty things among you, do so because you produced the deeds the law lays down or because you heard and believed., Was it not with you exactly as it was with Abraham--Abraham trusted God, and it was that which was credited to him as righteousness. So you must realize that it is those who make the venture of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

Scripture foresaw that it would be by faith that God would bring the Gentiles into a right relationship with himself, and told the good news to Abraham before it happened--In you shall all nations be blessed. So, then, it is those who make that same venture of faith who are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Paul uses still another argument to show that it is faith and not works of the law which puts a man right with God. In the early Church converts nearly always received the Holy Spirit in a visible way. The early chapters of Acts show that happening again and again (compare Ac.8:14-17; Ac.10:44). There came to them a new surge of life and power that anyone could see. That experience had happened to the Galatians and had happened, said Paul, not because they had obeyed the regulations of the law, because at that time they had never heard of the law, but because they had heard the good news of the love of God and had responded to it in an act of perfect trust.

The easiest way to grasp an idea is to see it embodied in a person. In a sense, every great word must become flesh. So Paul pointed the Galatians to a man who embodied faith, Abraham. He was the man to whom God had made the great promise that in him all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen.12:3). He was the man whom God had specially chosen as the man who pleased him. Wherein did Abraham specially please God? It was not by doing the works of the law, because at that time the law did not exist; it was by taking God at his word in a great act of faith.

Now the promise of blessedness was made to the descendants of Abraham. On that the Jew relied; he held that simple physical descent from Abraham set him on a different footing with God from other men. Paul declares that to be a true descendant of Abraham is not a matter of flesh and blood; the real descendant is the man who makes the same venture of faith. Therefore, it is not those who seek merit through the law who inherit the promise made to Abraham; but those of every nation who repeat his act of faith in God. It was by an act of faith that the Galatians had begun. Surely they are not going to slip back into legalism--and lose their inheritance.

This passage is full of Greek words with--a history, words which carried an atmosphere and a story with them. In Gal.3:1 Paul speaks about the evil eye. The Greeks had a great fear of a spell cast by the evil eye. Time and again private letters end with some such sentence as this: "Above all

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Galatians 3:1-9

I pray that you may be in health unharmed by the evil eye and faring prosperously" (Milligan, Selections from the Greek Papyri, No. 14).

In the same verse he talks about Jesus Christ being placarded before them upon his Cross. It is the Greek word (prographein, GSN4270) that would be used for putting up a poster. It is actually used for a notice put up by a father to say that he will no longer be responsible for his son's debts; it is also used for putting up the announcement of an auction sale.

In Gal.3:4 Paul talks about beginning their experience in the Spirit and ending it in the flesh. The words he uses are the normal Greek words for beginning and completing a sacrifice. The first one (enarchesthai, GSN1728) is the word for scattering the grains of barley on and around the victim which was the first act of a sacrifice; and the second one (epiteleisthai, GSN2005) is the word used for fully completing the ritual of any sacrifice. By using these two words Paul shows that he looks on the Christian life as a sacrifice to God.

In Gal.3:5 he speaks of God giving generously to the Galatians. The root of this word is the Greek choregia (compare GSN5524). In the ancient days in Greece at the great festivals the great dramatists like Euripides and Sophocles presented their plays; Greek plays all have a chorus; to equip and train a chorus was expensive, and public-spirited Greeks generously offered to defray the entire expenses of the chorus. (That gift is described by the word choregia, compare GSN5524.) Later, in war time, patriotic citizens gave free contributions to the state and choregia was used for this, too. In still later Greek, in the papyri, the word is common in marriage contracts and describes the support that a husband, out of his love, undertakes to give his wife. Choregia underlines the generosity of God, a generosity which is born of love, of which the love of a citizen for his city and of a man for his wife are dim suggestions.

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Galatians 3:10-14

THE CURSE OF THE LAW

Galatians 3:10-14

All who depend on the deeds which the law lays down are under a curse, for it stands written, "Cursed is everyone who does not consistently obey and perform all the things written in the book of the law." It is clear that no one ever gets into a right relationship with God by means of this legalism, because, as the Bible says, "It is the man who is right with God through faith who will live." But the law is not based on faith. And yet the scripture says.. "The man who does these things will have to live by them." Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming accursed for us--for it stands written, "Cursed is every man who is hanged on a tree." And this all happened so that in Christ Abraham's blessing should come to the Gentiles, and so that we might receive the promised Spirit by means of faith.

Paul's argument seeks to drive his opponents into a corner from which there is no escape. "Suppose," he says, "you decide that you are going to try to win God's approval by accepting and obeying the law, what is the, inevitable consequence?" First of all, the man who does that has to stand or fall by his decision; if he chooses the law he has got to live by it. Second, no man ever has succeeded and no man ever will succeed in always keeping the law. Third, if that being so, you are accursed, because scripture itself says (Deut.27:26) that the man who does not keep the whole law is under a curse. Therefore, the inevitable end of trying to get right with God by making the law the principle of life is a curse.

But scripture has another saying, "It is the man who is right with God by faith who will really live" (Hab.2:4). The only way to get into a right relationship with God, and therefore the only way to peace, is the way of faith. But the principle of law and the principle of faith are antithetic; you cannot direct your life by both at one and the same time; you must choose; and the only logical choice is to abandon the way of legalism and to venture upon the way of faith, of taking God at his word and of trusting in his love.

How can we know that this is so? The final guarantor of its truth is Jesus Christ; and to bring this truth to us he had to die upon a Cross. Now, scripture says that every man who is hanged on a tree is accursed (Deut.21:23); and so to free us of the curse of the law, Jesus himself had to become accursed.

Even at his most involved, and here he is involved, one simple yet tremendous fact is never far from the mind and heart of Paul--the Cost of the Christian gospel. He could never forget that the peace, the liberty, the right relationship with God that we possess, cost the life and death of Jesus Christ, for how could men ever have known what God was like unless Jesus Christ had died to tell them of his great love.

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Galatians 3:15-18

THE COVENANT THAT CANNOT BE ALTERED

Galatians 3:15-18

Brothers, I can use only a human analogy. Here is the parallel when a covenant is duly ratified, even if it is only a man's covenant, no one annuls it or adds additional clauses to it. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say, "and to his seeds," as if it were a case of many, but, "and to his seed," as if it were a case of one, and that one is Christ. This is what I mean, the law which came into being four hundred and thirty years later cannot annul the covenant already ratified by God and thus render the promise inoperative. For, if the inheritance is dependent on law, it is no longer dependent on promise; but it was through promise that God conferred his grace on Abraham.

When we read passages like this and the next one, we have to remember that Paul was a trained Rabbi, an expert in the scholastic methods of the Rabbinic academies. He could, and did, use their methods of argument, which would be completely cogent to a Jew, however difficult it may be for us to understand them.

His aim is to show the superiority of the way of grace over the way of law. He begins by showing that the way of grace is older than the way of law. When Abraham made his venture of faith, God made his great promise to him. That is to say. God's promise was consequent upon an act of faith; the law did not come until the time of Moses, four hundred and thirty years later. But--Paul goes on to argue--once a covenant has been duly ratified, you cannot alter it nor add additional clauses to it. Therefore, the later law cannot alter the earlier way of faith. It was faith which set Abraham right with God; and faith is still the only way for a man to get himself right with God.

The Rabbis were very fond of using arguments which depended on the interpretation of single words; they would erect a whole theology on one word. Paul takes one word in the Abraham story and erects an argument upon it. As the King James Version translates Gen.17:7-8, God says to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee" and says of his inheritance, "I will give it unto thee and to thy seed after thee." (Seed is more clearly rendered descendant, as the Revised Standard Version has it.) Paul's argument is that seed is used in the singular and not in the plural; and that, therefore, God's promise points not to a great crowd of people but to one single individual; and--argues Paul--the one person in whom the covenant finds its consummation is Jesus Christ. Therefore, the way to peace with God is the way of faith which Abraham took; and we must repeat that way by looking to Jesus Christ in faith.

Again and again Paul comes back to the same point. The problem of human life is to get into a right relationship with God. So long as we are afraid of him, there can be no peace. How are we to achieve this right relationship? Shall it be by a meticulous and even self-torturing obedience to the law, by performing endless deeds and observing every smallest regulation the law lays down? If we take that way we will be forever in default, for man's imperfection can never fully satisfy God's perfection; but if we abandon this hopeless struggle and bring ourselves and our sin to God, his grace opens its arms to us and we find ourselves at peace with a God who is no longer judge but father. Paul's argument is that this is what happened to Abraham. It was on that basis that God's

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Galatians 3:15-18

covenant with Abraham was made; and nothing that came in later can change that covenant any more than anything can alter a will that has already been ratified and signed.

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Galatians 3:19-22

SHUT UP UNDER SIN

Galatians 3:19-22

Why, then, have the law at all? The law was added to the situation to define what transgressions are, until the seed should come, to whom the promise, which still holds good, had been made. That law was enacted by angels and came by means of a mediator. Now there can be no such thing as a mediator of one; and God is one. Is, then, the law contrary to the promises of God? God forbid! If a law which was able to give life had been given, then indeed right relationship with God would have come through the law. But the words of scripture shut up everything under the power of sin, for the very reason that the promise should be given to those who believe through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is one of the most difficult passages Paul ever wrote, so difficult that there are almost three hundred different interpretations of it! Let us begin by remembering that Paul is still seeking to demonstrate the superiority of the way of grace and faith over the way of law. He makes four points about the law.

(i) Why introduce the law at all? It was introduced, as Paul puts it, for the sake of transgressions. What he means is that where there is no law there is no sin. A man cannot be condemned for doing wrong if he did not know that it was wrong. Therefore the function of the law is to define sin. But, while the law can and does define sin, it can do nothing whatever to cure it. It is like a doctor who is an expert in diagnosis but who is helpless to clear up the trouble which he has diagnosed.

(ii) The law was not given direct by God. In the old story in Exo.20 it was given direct to Moses; but in the days of Paul the Rabbis were so impressed by the holiness and the remoteness of God that they believed that it was quite impossible for him to deal direct with men; therefore they introduced the idea that the law was given first to angels and then by the angels to Moses (compare Ac.7:53; Heb.2:2). Here Paul is using the Rabbinic thoughts of his time. The law is at a double remove from God, given first to angels, and then to a mediator; and the mediator is Moses. Compared with the promise, which was given directly by God, the law is a second-hand thing.

(iii) Now we come to that extraordinarily difficult sentence--"There can be no such thing as a mediator of one; and God is one." What is Paul's thought here? An agreement founded on law always involves two people, the person who gives it and the person who accepts it; and it depends on both sides keeping it. That was the position of those who put their trust in the law. Break the law and the whole agreement was undone. But a promise depends on only one person. The way of grace depends entirely on God; it is his promise. Man can do nothing to alter that. He may sin, but the love and the grace of God stand unchanged. To Paul it was the weakness of the law that it depended on two persons, the law-giver and the law-keeper; and man had wrecked it. Grace is entirely of God; man can not undo it; and surely it is better to depend on the grace of the unchanging God than on the hopeless efforts of helpless men.

(iv) Is, then, the law antithetic to grace? Logically Paul should answer, "Yes" but, in fact, he answers, "No." He says that scripture has shut up everyone under sin. He is thinking of Deut.27:26

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Galatians 3:19-22

where it is said that everyone who does not conform to the words of the law is cursed. In fact, that means everyone, because no one ever has, or ever will, perfectly keep the law. What, then, is the consequence of the law? It is to drive everyone to seek grace, because it has proved man's helplessness. This is a thought that Paul will soon develop in the next chapter; here he only suggests it. Let a man try to get into a right relationship with God via the law. He will find he cannot do it and will be driven to see that all he can do is to accept the wonderful grace of which Jesus Christ came to tell men.

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Galatians 3:23-29

THE COMING OF FAITH

Galatians 3:23-29

Before faith came we were under guard under the power of the law, shut up and waiting for the day when faith would be revealed. So that the law was really our tutor to bring us to Christ so that we might get into a right relationship with God by means of faith. But now that faith has come we are no longer under a tutor; for you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free man, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are the seed of Abraham, and heirs according to promise.

Paul is still thinking of the essential part that the law did play in the plan of God. In the Greek world there was a household servant called the paidagogos (GSN3807). He was not the schoolmaster. He was usually an old and trusted slave who had been long in the family and whose character was high. He was in charge of the child's moral welfare and it was his duty to see that he acquired the qualities essential to true manhood. He had one particular duty; every day he had to take the child to and from school. He had nothing to do with the actual teaching of the child, but it was his duty to take him in safety to the school and deliver him to the teacher. That--said Paul--was like the function of the law. It was there to lead a man to Christ. It could not take him into Christ's presence, but it could take him into a position where he himself might enter. It was the function of the law to bring a man to Christ by showing him that by himself he was utterly unable to keep it. But once a man had come to Christ he no longer needed the law, for now he was dependent not on law but on grace.

"As many of you," says Paul, "who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." There are two vivid pictures here. Baptism was a Jewish rite. If a man wished to accept the Jewish faith he had to do three things. He had to be circumcised, to offer sacrifice and to be baptized. Ceremonial washing to cleanse from defilement was very common in Jewish practice (compare Lev.11-15).

The details of Jewish baptism were as follows: The man to be baptized cut his hair and his nails; he undressed completely; the baptismal bath had to contain 40 seahs, that is 2 hogsheads, of water. Every part of the body had to be touched with the water. He made confession of his faith before three men who were called fatherly of baptism. While still in the water, parts of the law were read to him, words of encouragement were addressed to him, and benedictions were pronounced upon him. When he emerged he was a member of the Jewish faith; it was through baptism that he entered into that faith.

By Christian baptism a man entered into Christ. The early Christians looked on baptism as something which produced a real union with Christ. Of course, in a missionary situation where men were coming direct from heathenism, baptism was for the most part adult baptism and the adult would necessarily have an experience a child could not have. But just as really as the Jewish convert was united with the Jewish faith, the Christian convert was united with Christ (compare Rom.6:3ff.; Col.2:12). Baptism was no mere outward form; it was a real union with Christ.

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Galatians 3:23-29

Paul goes on to say that they had put on Christ. There may be here a reference to a custom which certainly existed later. The candidate for baptism was clothed in pure white robes, symbolic of the new life into which he entered. Just as the initiate put on his new white robe, his life was clothed with Christ.

The result is that in the Church there was no difference between any of the members; they had all become sons of God. In Gal.3:28 Paul says that the distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free man, male and female is wiped out. There is something of very great interest here. In the Jewish morning prayer, which Paul must all his pre-Christian life have used, the Jew thanks God that "Thou hast not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman." Paul takes that prayer and reverses it. The old distinctions were gone; all were one in Christ.

We have already seen (Gal.3:16) that Paul interprets the promises made to Abraham as specially finding their fulfilment in Christ; and, if we are one with Christ, we, too, inherit the promises--and this great privilege comes not by a legalistic keeping of the law, but by an act of faith in the free grace of God.

Only one thing can wipe out the ever sharpening distinctions and separations between man and man; when all are debtors to God's grace and all are in Christ, only then will all be one. It is not the force of man but the love of God which alone can unite a disunited world.

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Galatians 4:1-7

THE DAYS OF CHILDHOOD

Galatians 4:1-7

This is what I mean--so long as the heir is an infant there is no difference between him and a slave, although he is owner of everything, but he is under the control of stewards and overseers until the day which his father has fixed arrives. It is just the same with us. When we were infants we were in subjection to the elementary knowledge which this world can supply. But when the fulness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that he might redeem those who were subject to the law. so that we might be adopted as sons. Because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!" The consequence is that you are no longer a slave but a son; and if a son. an heir because God made you so.

In the ancient world the process of growing up was much more definite than it is with us.

(i) In the Jewish world, on the first Sabbath after a boy had passed his twelfth birthday, his father took him to the Synagogue, where he became A Son of the Law. The father thereupon uttered a benediction, "Blessed be thou, O God, who has taken from me the responsibility for this boy." The boy prayed a prayer in which he said, "O my God and God of my fathers! On this solemn and sacred day, which marks my passage from boyhood to manhood, I humbly raise my eyes unto thee, and declare with sincerity and truth, that henceforth I will keep thy commandments, and undertake and bear the responsibility of mine actions towards thee." There was a clear dividing line in the boy's life; almost overnight he became a man.

(ii) In Greece a boy was under his father's care from seven until he was eighteen. He then became what was called an ephebos, which may be translated "cadet," and for two years he was under the direction of the state. The Athenians were divided into ten phratiriai, or clans. Before a lad became an ephebos, at a festival called the Apatouria, he was received into the clan; and at a ceremonial act his long hair was cut off and offered to the gods. Once again, growing up was quite a definite process.

(iii) Under Roman law the year at which a boy grew up was not definitely fixed, but it was always between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. At a sacred festival in the family called the Liberalia he took off the toga praetexta, which was a toga with a narrow purple band at the foot of it and put on the toga virilis, which was a plain toga which adults wore. He was then conducted by his friends and relations down to the forum and formally introduced to public life. It was essentially a religious ceremony. And once again there was a quite definite day on which the lad attained manhood. There was a Roman custom that on the day a boy or girl grew up, the boy offered his ball, and the girl her doll, to Apollo to show that they had put away childish things.

When a boy was an infant in the eyes of the law, he might be the owner of a vast property but he could take no legal decision; he was not in control of his own life; everything was done and directed for him; and, therefore, for all practical purposes he had no more freedom than if he were a slave; but when he became a man he entered into his full inheritance.

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Galatians 4:1-7

So--Paul argues--in the childhood of the world, the law held sway. But the law was only elementary knowledge. To describe it Paul uses the word *stoicheia* (GSN4747). A *stoicheion* was originally a line of things; for instance, it can mean a file of soldiers. But it came to mean the ABC, and then any elementary knowledge.

It has another meaning which some would see here the elements of which the world is composed, and in particular, the stars. The ancient world was haunted by a belief in astrology. If a man was born under a certain star his fate, they believed, was settled. Men lived under the tyranny of the stars and longed for release. Some scholars think that Paul is saying that at one time the Galatians had been tyrannised by their belief in the baleful influence of the stars. But the whole passage seems to make it necessary to take *stoicheia* (GSN4747) in the sense of rudimentary knowledge.

Paul says that when the Galatians--and indeed all men--were mere children, they were under the tyranny of the law; then, when everything was ready, Christ came and released men from that tyranny. So now men are no longer slaves of the law; they have become sons and have entered into their inheritance. The childhood which belonged to the law should be past; the freedom of manhood has come.

The proof that we are sons comes from the instinctive cry of the heart. In man's deepest need he cries, "Father!" to God. Paul uses the double phrase, "Abba! Father!" *Abba* (GSN0005) is the Aramaic word for Father. It must have been often on Jesus' lips, and its sound was so sacred that men kept it in the original tongue. This instinctive cry of man's heart Paul believes to be the work of the Holy Spirit. If our hearts so cry, we know that we are sons, and all the inheritance of grace is ours.

For Paul, he who governed his life by slavery to the law was still a child; he who had learned the way of grace had become a mature man in the Christian faith.

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Galatians 4:8-11

PROGRESS IN REVERSE

Galatians 4:8-11

There was a time when you did not know God, and when you were slaves to gods who are no gods at all; but now that you know God or rather now that God knows you--how can you turn back again to the weak and poverty-stricken elementary things, for it is to them that you wish to be enslaved all over again? You meticulously observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest all the labour I spent on you is to go for nothing.

Paul is still basing on the conception that the law is an elementary stage in religion, and that the mature man is he who takes his stand on grace. The law was all right in the old days when they did not know any better. But now they have come to know God and his grace. Then Paul corrects himself--man cannot by his own efforts know God; God of his grace reveals himself to man. We can never seek God unless he has already found us. So Paul demands, "Are you now going back to a stage that you should have left behind long ago?"

He calls the elementary things, the religion based on law, weak antipoverty-stricken. (i) It is weak because it is helpless. It can define sin; it can convict a man of sin; but it can neither find for him forgiveness for past sin nor strength to conquer future sin. (ii) It is poverty-stricken in comparison with the splendour of grace. By its very nature the law can deal with only one situation. For every fresh situation man needs a fresh law; but the wonder of grace is that it is poikilos (GSN4164), which means variegated, many-coloured. That is to say, there is no possible situation in life which grace cannot match; it is sufficient for all things.

One of the features of Jewish law was its observance of special times. In this passage the days are the Sabbaths of each week; the months are the new moons; the seasons are the great annual feasts like the Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles; the years are the Sabbatic years, that is, every seventh. The failure of a religion which is dependent on special occasions is that almost inevitably it divides days into sacred and secular; and the further almost inevitable step is that when a man has meticulously observed the sacred days he is liable to think that he has discharged his duty to God.

Although that was the religion of legalism, it was very far from being the prophetic religion. It has been said that, "The ancient Hebrew people had no word in their language to correspond to the word 'religion' as it is commonly used today. The whole of life as they saw it came from God, and was subject to his law and governance. There could be no separate part of it in their thought labelled 'religion.'"

"Jesus Christ did not say, 'I am come that they may have religion,' but, 'I am come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'" To make religion a thing of special times is to make it an external thing. For the real Christian every day is God's day.

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Galatians 4:8-11

It was Paul's fear that men who had once known the splendour of grace would slip back to legalism, and that men who had once lived in the presence of God would shut him up to special days.

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Galatians 4:12-20

LOVE'S APPEAL

Galatians 4:12-20

Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, because I became as you are. I have no complaints against the way that once you treated me. You know that it was because I was ill that I first preached the gospel to you. It must have been a temptation to you to do so, but you did not look on me with contempt or turn with loathing from me, but you received me as if I were an angel of God, as you would have received Christ Jesus. I once had cause to congratulate you. Where has that cause gone to? I am prepared to give evidence in your favour that you would have dug out your eyes and given them to me. So then have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth? It is not for any honourable reason that these other people pay court to you, but because they wish to put the barriers up so that you will have to pay court to them. It is always a fine thing to be zealous in a fine affair, and that not only when I am actually present with you.

My little children, for whom I suffer the birth-pangs all over again, until you have taken the form of Christ, I wish I could be with you now! I wish that I had not to talk like this to you, because I am worried about you.

Paul makes not a theological but a personal appeal. He reminds them that for their sake he had become a Gentile; he had cut adrift from the traditions in which he had been brought up and become what they are; and his appeal is that they should not seek to become Jews but might become like himself.

Here we have a reference to Paul's "thorn in the flesh." It was through illness that first he came to them. We discuss this thorn more fully when dealing with 2Cor.12:7. It has been held to be the persecution which he suffered, the temptations of the flesh, which he is said never to have succeeded in suppressing; his physical appearance, which the Corinthians regarded as contemptible (2Cor.10:10). The oldest tradition is that it was violent and prostrating headaches. From this passage itself there emerge two indications.

The Galatians would have given him their eyes if they could have done so. It has been suggested that Paul's eyes always troubled him because he had been dazzled so much on the Damascus Road that ever afterwards he could see only dimly and painfully.

The word translated you did not turn from me with loathing literally means you did not spit at me. In the ancient world it was the custom for a man to spit when he met an epileptic in order to avert the influence of the evil spirit which was believed to be resident in the sufferer; so it has been suggested that Paul was an epileptic.

If we can find out just when Paul came to Galatia, it may be possible to deduce why he came. It is possible that Ac.13:13-14 describe that coming. That passage presents a problem. Paul and Barnabas and Mark had come from Cyprus to the mainland. They came to Perga in Pamphylia; there Mark left them; and then they proceeded straight to Antioch in Pisidia, which is in the province of Galatia. Why did Paul not preach in Pamphylia? It was a populous district. Why did he choose to go to Antioch in Pisidia? The road that led there, up into the central plateau, was one of

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Galatians 4:12-20

the most difficult and dangerous in the world. That is perhaps why Mark went home. Why, then, this sudden flight from Pamphylia? The reason may well be that, since Pamphylia and the coastal plain were districts where malarial fever raged, Paul contracted this sickness and his only remedy would be to seek the highlands of Galatia, so that he arrived amongst the Galatians a sick man. Now this malaria recurs and is accompanied by a prostrating headache which has been likened to "a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead." It may well have been that it was this prostrating pain which was Paul's thorn in the flesh and which was torturing him when first he came to Galatia.

He talks about those who were sedulously paying court to the Galatians; he means those who were seeking to persuade them to adopt Jewish ways. If they were successful, the Galatians would in turn have to pay humble court to them to be allowed in order to be circumcised and enter the Jewish nation. Their sole purpose paid court to the Galatians, but they only did so to get control of the Galatians and reduce them to subjection to themselves and to the law.

In the end Paul uses a vivid metaphor. His bringing the Galatians to Christ cost him pain like a mother's travail; and now he has to go through it all again. Christ is in them, as it were in embryo; he has to bring them to birth.

No one can fail to see the deep affection of the last words. My little children--diminutives in Latin and Greek always express deep affection. John often uses this expression but Paul uses it nowhere else; his heart is running over. We do well to note that Paul did not scold with bitter words; he yearned over his straying children. It was said of Florence Allshorn, famous missionary and teacher, that if she had cause to rebuke any of her students she did so, as it were, with her arm around them. The accent of love will penetrate where the tones of anger will never find a way.

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Galatians 4:21-5:1

AN OLD STORY AND A NEW MEANING

Galatians 4:21-5:1

Tell me this--you who want to be subject to the law, you listen to it being read to you, don't you? Well, then, it stands written in it that Abraham had two sons; one was the son of the slave girl and one was the son of the free woman. But the son of the slave girl was born in the ordinary human way, whereas the son of the free woman was born through a promise. Now these things are an allegory. For these two women stand for two covenants. One of these covenants--the one which originated on Mount Sinai--bears children who are destined for slavery--and that one is represented by Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai, which is in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem; for she is a slave and so are her children. But the Jerusalem which is above is free and she is our mother.

For it stands written, "Rejoice, O barren one, who never bore a child; break forth into a shout of joy, O you who know not the pangs of bearing a child; for the children of her who was left alone are more than those of her who had a husband." But we, brothers, are in the same position as Isaac; we are children of promise. But in the old days the child who was born in the ordinary human way persecuted the child who was born in the spiritual way; and exactly the same thing happens now. But what does the scripture say? "Cast out the slave girl and her son, for the son of the slave girl must not inherit with the son of the free woman." So we, brothers, are children not of the slave girl but of the free woman. It is for this freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand, therefore, in it and do not get yourselves involved all over again in a slavish yoke.

When we seek to interpret a passage like this we must remember that for the devout and scholarly Jew, and especially for the Rabbis, scripture had more than one meaning; and the literal meaning was often regarded as the least important. For the Jewish Rabbis a passage of scripture had four meanings. (i) Peshat, its simple or literal meaning. (ii) Remaz, its suggested meaning. (iii) Derush, the meaning deduced by investigation. (iv) Sod, the allegorical meaning. The first letters of these four words--P-R-D-S--are the consonants of the word Paradise--and when a man had succeeded in penetrating into these four different meanings he reached the joy of paradise!

It is to be noted that the summit of all meanings was the allegorical meaning. It therefore often happened that the Rabbis would take a simple bit of historical narrative from the Old Testament and read into it inner meanings which often appear to us fantastic but which were very convincing to the people of their day. Paul was a trained Rabbi; and that is what he is doing here. He takes the story involving Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac (Gen.16-17, Gen.21), which in the Old Testament is a straightforward narrative and he allegorises it to illustrate his point.

The outline of the story is as follows: Abraham and Sarah were far advanced in years and Sarah had no child. She did what any wife would have done in those patriarchal times and sent Abraham in to her slave girl, Hagar, to see if she could bear a child on her behalf. Hagar had a son called Ishmael. In the meantime God had come and promised that Sarah would have a child, which was so difficult to believe that it appeared impossible to Abraham and Sarah; but in due time Isaac was born. That is to say, Ishmael was born of the ordinary human impulses of the flesh; Isaac was born because of God's promise; and Sarah was a free woman, while Hagar was a slave girl. From the

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Galatians 4:21-5:1

beginning Hagar had been inclined to triumph over Sarah, because barrenness was a sore shame to a woman; there was an atmosphere charged with trouble.

Later Sarah found Ishmael "mocking" (King James Version) Isaac--this Paul equates with persecution--and insisted that Hagar should be cast out, so that the child of the slave girl should not share the inheritance with her freeborn son. Further, Arabia was regarded as the land of slaves where the descendants of Hagar dwelt.

Paul takes that old story and allegorises it. Hagar stands for the old covenant of the law, made on Mount Sinai, which is in fact in Arabia, the land of Hagar's descendants. Hagar herself was a slave and all her children were born into slavery; and that covenant whose basis is the law turns men into slaves of the law. Hagar's child was born from merely human impulses; and legalism is the best that man can do. On the other hand Sarah stands for the new covenant in Jesus Christ, God's new way of dealing with men not by law but by grace. Her child was born free and according to God's promise--and all his descendants must be free. As the child of the slave girl persecuted the child of the free woman, the children of law now persecute the children of grace and promise. But as in the end the child of the slave girl was cast out and had no share in the inheritance, so in the end those who are legalists will be cast out from God and have no share in the inheritance of grace.

Strange as all this may seem to us, it enshrines one great truth. The man who makes law the principle of his life is in the position of a slave; whereas the man who makes grace the principle of his life is free, for, as a great saint put it, the Christian's maxim is, "Love God and do what you like." It is the power of that love, and not the constraint of law, that will keep us right; for love is always more powerful than law.

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Galatians 5:1-12

THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Galatians 5:1-12

Look now it is I, Paul, who am speaking to you I tell you that if you get yourself circumcised Christ is no good to you. Again I give my word to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is under obligation to keep the whole law. You who seek to get yourselves right with God by means of legalism have got yourself into a position in which you have rendered ineffective all that Christ did for you. You have fallen from grace. For it is by the Spirit and by faith that we eagerly expect the hope of being right with God. For in Jesus Christ it is not of the slightest importance whether a man is circumcised or uncircumcised. What does matter is faith which works through love. You were running well. Who put up a road-block to stop you obeying the truth? The persuasion which is being exercised on you just now is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in you in the Lord; I am sure that you will take no other view. He who is upsetting you--whoever he is--will bear his own judgment. As for me, brothers, if I am still preaching that circumcision is necessary, why am I still being persecuted? So the stumbling-block of the Cross is removed, is it? I wish that those who are upsetting you would get themselves not only circumcised but castrated!

It was Paul's position that the way of grace and the way of law were mutually exclusive. The way of law makes salvation dependent on human achievement; the man who takes the way of grace simply casts himself and his sin upon the mercy of God. Paul went on to argue that if you accepted circumcision, that is to say, if you accepted one part of the law, logically you had to accept the whole law.

Suppose a man desires to become a naturalized subject of a country and carefully carries out all the rules and regulations of that country as they affect naturalization. He cannot stop there but is bound to accept all the other rules and regulations as well. So Paul argued that if a man were circumcised he had put himself under an obligation to the whole law to which circumcision was the introduction; and, if he took that way, he had automatically turned his back on the way of grace, and, as far as he was concerned, Christ might never have died.

To Paul all that mattered was faith which works through love. That is just another way of saying that the essence of Christianity is not law but a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. The Christian's faith is founded not on a book but on a person; its dynamic is not obedience to any law but love to Jesus Christ.

Once, the Galatians had known that, but now they were turning back to the law. "A little leaven," said Paul, "leavens the whole lump." For the Jew leaven nearly always stood for evil influence. What Paul is saying is, "This legalistic movement may not have gone very far yet, but you must root it out before it destroys your whole religion."

Paul ends with a very blunt saying. Galatia was near Phrygia and the great worship of that part of the world was of Cybele. It was the practice that priests and really devout worshippers of Cybele mutilated themselves by castration. Paul says, "If you go on in this way, of which circumcision is

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Galatians 5:1-12

the beginning, you might as well end up by castrating yourselves like these heathen priests." It is a grim illustration at which a polite society raises its eyebrows, but it would be intensely real to the Galatians who knew all about the priests of Cybele.

Barclay's Commentary

Galatians 5:13-15

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

Galatians 5:13-15

As for you, brothers, it was for freedom that you were called, only you must not use this freedom as a bridgehead through which the worst side of human nature can invade you, but in love you must serve one another; for the whole law stands complete in one word, in the sentence, "You must love your neighbour as yourself." But if you snap at one another, and devour one another, you must watch that you do not end up by wiping each other out.

With this paragraph Paul's letter changes its emphasis. Up to this point it has been theological; now it becomes intensely ethical. Paul had a characteristically practical mind. Even when he has been scaling the highest heights of thought he always ends a letter on a practical note. To him a theology was not the slightest use unless it could be lived out. In Romans he wrote one of the world's great theological treatises, and then, quite suddenly, in Rom.12 the theology came down to earth and issued in the most practical advice. Vincent Taylor once said, "The test of a good theologian is, can he write a tract?" That is to say, after his flights of thought can he reduce it all to something that the ordinary man can understand and do? Paul always triumphantly satisfies that test, just as here the whole matter is brought to the acid test of daily living.

His theology always ran one danger. When he declared that the end of the reign of law had come and that the reign of grace had arrived, it was always possible for someone to say, "That, then, means that I can do what I like; all the restraints are lifted and I can follow my inclinations wherever they lead me. Law is gone and grace ensures forgiveness anyway." But to the end of the day there remained for Paul two obligations. (i) One he does not mention here but it is implicit in all his thinking. It is the obligation to God. If God loved us like that then the love of Christ constrains us. I cannot soil a life which God paid for with his own life. (ii) There is the obligation to our fellow men. We are free, but our freedom loves its neighbour as itself.

The names of the different forms of government are suggestive. Monarchy is government by one, and began in the interests of efficiency, for government by committees has always had its drawbacks. Oligarchy means government by the few and can be justified by arguing that only the few are fit to govern. Aristocracy means government by the best, but best is left to be defined. Plutocracy means government by the wealthy and is justified by the claim that those who have the biggest stake in the country have a logical right to rule it. Democracy means government of the people, by the people, for the people. Christianity is the only true democracy, because in a Christian state everyone would think as much of his neighbour as he does of himself. Christian freedom is not licence, for the simple but tremendous reason that the Christian is not a man who has become free to sin, but a man, who, by the grace of God, has become free not to sin.

Paul adds a grim bit of advice. "Unless," he says, "you solve the problem of living together you will make life impossible." Selfishness in the end does not exalt a man; it destroys him.

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Galatians 5:16-21

THE EVIL THINGS

Galatians 5:16-21

I tell you, let your walk and conversation be dominated by the Spirit, and don't let the desires of the lower side of your nature have their way. For the desires of the lower side of human nature are the very reverse of the desires of the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are the very reverse of those of the lower side of human nature, for these are fundamentally opposed to each other, so that you cannot do whatever you like. The deeds of the lower side of human nature are obvious fornication, impurity, wantonness, idolatry, witchcraft, enmity, strife, jealousy, uncontrolled temper, self-seeking, dissension, heretical division, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and all that is like these things, I warn you, as I have warned you before, that those who do things like that will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

No man was ever more conscious of the tension in human nature than Paul. As the soldier in Studdert Kennedy's poem said;

I'm a man and a man's a mixture
Right down from his very birth;
For part of him comes from heaven,
And part of him comes from earth.

For Paul it was essential that Christian freedom should mean not freedom to indulge the lower side of human nature, but freedom to walk in the life of the Spirit. He gives us a catalogue of evil things. Every word he uses has a picture behind it.

Fornication; it has been said, and said truly, that the one completely new virtue Christianity brought into the world was chastity. Christianity came into a world where sexual immorality was not only condoned, but was regarded as essential to the ordinary working of life.

Impurity; the word that Paul uses (akatharsia, GSN0167) is interesting. It can be used for the pus of an unclean wound, for a tree that has never been pruned, for material which has never been sifted. In its positive form (katharos (GSN2513), an adjective meaning pure) it is commonly used in housing contracts to describe a house that is left clean and in good condition. But its most suggestive use is that katharos (GSN2513) is used of that ceremonial cleanness which entitles a man to approach his gods. Impurity, then, is that which makes a man unfit to come before God, the soiling of life with the things which separate us from him.

Wantonness; this word (aselgeia, GSN0766) is translated licentiousness in the Revised Standard Version (Mk.7:22; 2Cor.12:21; Gal.5:19; Eph.4:19; 1Pet.4:3; Jd.4; Rom.13:13 and 2Pet.2:18). It has been defined as "readiness for any pleasure." The man who practises it has been said to know no restraint, but to do whatever caprice and wanton insolence may suggest. Josephus ascribed it to Jezebel when she built a temple to Baal in Jerusalem. The idea is that of a man who is so far gone in desire that he has ceased to care what people say or think.

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Galatians 5:16-21

Idolatry; this means the worship of gods which the hands of men have made. It is the sin in which material things have taken the place of God.

Witchcraft; this literally means the use of drugs. It can mean the beneficent use of drugs by a doctor; but it can also mean poisoning, and it came to be very specially connected with the use of drugs for sorcery, of which the ancient world was full.

Enmity; the idea is that of the man who is characteristically hostile to his fellow men; it is the precise opposite of the Christian virtue of love for the brethren and for all men.

Strife; originally this word had mainly to do with the rivalry for prizes. It can even be used in a good sense in that connection, but much more commonly it means the rivalry which has found its outcome in quarrellings and wrangling.

Jealousy; this word (zelos, GSN2205, from which our word zeal comes) was originally a good word. It meant emulation, the desire to attain to nobility when we see it. But it degenerated; came to mean the desire to have what someone else has, wrong desire for what is not for us.

Uncontrolled temper ; the word Paul uses means bursts of temper. It describes not an anger which lasts but anger which flames out and then dies.

Self-seeking; this word has a very illuminating history. It is eritheia (GSN2052) and originally meant the work of a hired labourer (erithos). So it came to mean work done for pay. It went on to mean canvassing for political or public office, and it describes the man who wants office, not from any motives of service. but for what he can get out of it.

Dissension; literally the word means a standing apart. After one of his great victories Nelson attributed it to the fact that he had the happiness to command a band of brothers. Dissension describes a society in which the very opposite is the case, where the members fly apart instead of coming together.

Heretical division; this might be described as crystallized dissension. The word is hairesis (GSN0139), from which comes our word heresy. Hairesis was not originally a bad word at all. It comes from a root which means to choose, and it was used for a philosopher's school of followers or for any band of people who shared a common belief. The tragedy of life is that people who hold different views very often finish up by disliking, not each others' views, but each other. It should be possible to differ with a man and yet remain friends.

Envy; this word (phthonos, GSN5355), is a mean word. Euripides called it "the greatest of all diseases among men." The essence of it is that it does not describe the spirit which desires, nobly or ignobly, to have what someone else has: it describes the spirit which grudges the fact that the other person has these things at all. It does not so much want the things for itself; it merely wants to take them from the other. The Stoics defined it as "grief at someone else's good." Basil called it "grief at

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Galatians 5:16-21

your neighbours good fortune." It is the quality, not so much of the jealous, but rather of the embittered mind.

Drunkenness; in the ancient world this was not a common vice. The Greeks drank more wine than they did milk; even children drank wine. But they drank it in the proportion of three parts of water to two of wine. Greek and Christian alike would have condemned drunkenness as a thing which turned a man into a beast.

Carousing; this word (komos) has an interesting history. A komos was a band of friends who accompanied a victor of the games after his victory. They danced and laughed and sang his praises. It also described the bands of the devotees of Bacchus, god of wine. It describes what in regency England would have been called a rout. It means unrestrained revelry. enjoyment that has degenerated into licence.

When we get to the root meaning of these words, we see that life has not changed so very much.

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Galatians 5:22-26

THE LOVELY THINGS

Galatians 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, self-control. There is no law which condemns thing; like that. Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified their own unregenerate selves ;hong with all their passions and their desires.

If we are living in the Spirit let us also keep step with the Spirit. Don't become seekers after empty reputation; don't provoke each other: don't envy each other.

As in the previous verses Paul set out the evil things characteristic of the flesh, so now he sets out the lovely things which are the fruit of the Spirit. Again it is worth while to look at each word separately.

Love; the New Testament word for love is agape (GSN0026). This is not a word which classical Greek uses commonly. In Greek there are four words for love. (a) Eros (compare GSN2037) means the love of a man for a maid; it is the love which has passion in it. It is never used in the New Testament at all. (b) Philia (GSN5373) is the warm love which we feel for our nearest and our dearest; it is a thing of the heart. (c) Storge (compare GSN0794) rather means affection and is specially used of the love of parents and children. (d) Agape (GSN0026), the Christian word, means unconquerable benevolence. It means that no matter what a man may do to us by way of insult or injury or humiliation we will never seek anything else but his highest good. It is therefore a feeling of the mind as much as of the heart; it concerns the will as much as the emotions. It describes the deliberate effort--which we can make only with the help of God--never to seek anything but the best even for those who seek the worst for us.

Joy; the Greek is chara (GSN5479), and the characteristic of this word is that it most often describes that joy which has a basis in religion (compare Ps.30:11; Rom.14:17; Rom.15:13; Php.1:4; Php.1:25). It is not the joy that comes from earthly things, still less from triumphing over someone else in competition. It is a joy whose foundation is God.

Peace; in contemporary colloquial Greek this word (eirene, GSN1515) had two interesting usages. It was used of the serenity which a country enjoyed under the just and beneficent government of a good emperor; and it was used of the good order of a town or village. Villages had an official who was called the superintendent of the village's eirene (GSN1515), the keeper of the public peace. Usually in the New Testament eirene (GSN1515) stands for the Hebrew shalom (GSN7965) and means not just freedom from trouble but everything that makes for a man's highest good. Here it means that tranquillity of heart which derives from the all-pervading consciousness that our times are in the hands of God. It is interesting to note that Chara and Eirene both became very common Christian names in the Church.

Makrothumia (GSN3115); this is a great word. The writer of First Maccabees (1Macc.8:4) says that it was by makrothumia (GSN3115) that the Romans became masters of the world, and by that

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he means the Roman persistence which would never make peace with an enemy even in defeat, a kind of conquering patience. Generally speaking the word is not used of patience in regard to things or events but in regard to people. Chrysostom said that it is the grace of the man who could revenge himself and does not, the man who is slow to wrath. The most illuminating thing about it is that it is commonly used in the New Testament of the attitude of God towards men (Rom.2:4; Rom.9:22; 1Tim.1:16; 1Pet.3:20). If God had been a man, he would have wiped out this world long ago; but he has that patience which bears with all our sinning and will not cast us off. In our dealings with our fellow men we must reproduce this loving, forbearing, forgiving, patient attitude of God towards ourselves.

Kindness and goodness are closely connected words. For kindness the word is *chrestotes* (GSN5544). It, too, is commonly translated goodness. The Rheims version of 2Cor.6:6 translates it sweetness. It is a lovely word. Plutarch says that it has a far wider place than justice. Old wine is called *chrestos* (GSN5543), mellow. Christ's yoke is called *chrestos* (GSN5543) (Matt.11:30), that is, it does not chafe. The whole idea of the word is a goodness which is kind. The word Paul uses for goodness (*agathosune*, GSN0019) is a peculiarly Bible word and does not occur in secular Greek (Rom.15:14; Eph.5:9; 2Th.1:11). It is the widest word for goodness; it is defined as "virtue equipped at every point." What is the difference? *Agathosune* (GSN0019) might, and could, rebuke and discipline; *chrestotes* (GSN5544) can only help.

Trench says that Jesus showed *agathosune* (GSN0019) when he cleansed the Temple and drove out those who were making it a bazaar; but he showed *chrestotes* (GSN5544) when he was kind to the sinning woman who anointed his feet. The Christian needs that goodness which at one and the same time can be kind and strong.

Fidelity; this word (*pistis*, GSN4102) is common in secular Greek for trustworthiness. It is the characteristic of the man who is reliable.

Gentleness; *praotes* (GSN4236) is the most untranslatable of words. In the New Testament it has three main meanings. (a) It means being submissive to the will of God (Matt.5:5; Matt.11:29; Matt.21:5). (b) It means being teachable, being not too proud to learn (Jas.1:21). (c) Most often of all it means being considerate (1Cor.4:21; 2Cor.10:1; Eph.4:2). Aristotle defined *praotes* (GSN4236) as the mean between excessive anger and excessive angerlessness, the quality of the man who is always angry at the right time and never at the wrong time. What throws most light on its meaning is that the adjective *praus* (GSN4239) is used of an animal that has been tamed and brought under control; and so the word speaks of that self-control which Christ alone can give.

Self-control; the word is *egkrateia* (GSN1466) which Plato uses of self-mastery. It is the spirit which has mastered its desires and its love of pleasure. It is used of the athlete's discipline of his body (1Cor.9:25) and of the Christian's mastery of sex (1Cor.7:9). Secular Greek uses it of the virtue of an Emperor who never lets his private interests influence the government of his people. It is the virtue which makes a man so master of himself that he is fit to be the servant of others.

It was Paul's belief and experience that the Christian died with Christ and rose again to a life, new and clean, in which the evil things of the old self were gone and the lovely things of the Spirit had come to fruition.

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Galatians 6:1-5

BURDEN-BEARING

Galatians 6:1-5

Brothers, if a man is caught out in some moral slip-up, you whose lives are dominated by the Spirit must correct such a man with the spirit of gentleness, and, as you do it, you must think about yourselves, in case you too should be tempted. Carry one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For, if anyone thinks of himself as important while he is of no importance, he is deceiving himself with the fancies of his mind. Let every man test his own work, and then any ground of boasting that he has will be in regard to himself and not in comparison with others. For each man must carry his own pack.

Paul knew the problems that arise in any Christian society. The best of men slip up. The word Paul uses (paraptoma, GSN3900) does not mean a deliberate sin; but a slip as might come to a man on an icy road or a dangerous path. Now, the danger of those who are really trying to live the Christian life is that they are apt to judge the sins of others hardly. There is an element of hardness in many a good man. There are many good people to whom you could not go and sob out a story of failure and defeat; they would be bleakly unsympathetic. But Paul says that, if a man does make a slip, the real Christian duty is to get him on his feet again. The word he uses for to correct is used for executing a repair and also for the work of a surgeon in removing some growth from a man's body or in setting a broken limb. The whole atmosphere of the word lays the stress not on punishment but on cure; the correction is thought of not as a penalty but as an amendment. And Paul goes on to say that when we see a man fall into a fault we do well to say, "There but for the grace of God go I."

He goes on to rebuke conceit and gives a recipe whereby it may well be avoided. We are to compare our achievement not with the work of our neighbours but with what our best would have been. When we do that, there can never be any cause for conceit.

Twice in this passage Paul speaks about bearing burdens. There is a kind of burden which comes to a man from the chances and the changes of life; it is fulfilling the law of Christ to help everyone who has such a burden to carry. But there is also a burden which a man must bear himself. The word Paul uses is the word for a soldier's pack. There is a duty which none can do for us and a task for which we must be personally responsible.

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Galatians 6:6-10

KEEPING IT UP

Galatians 6:6-10

He who is being instructed in the word must share in all good things with him who is giving instruction. Don't deceive yourselves; no one can make a fool of God; whatever a man sows this he will also reap. He who sows to his own lower nature will from that nature reap a blighted harvest. He who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap life eternal. Don't get tired of doing the fine thing, for, when the proper time comes, we will reap so long as we don't relax our efforts. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are members of the household of the faith.

Here Paul becomes intensely practical.

The Christian Church had its teachers. In those days the Church was a really sharing institution. No Christian could bear to have too much while others had too little. So Paul says, "If a man is teaching you the eternal truths, the least you can do is share with him such material things as you possess."

He goes on to state a grim truth. He insists that life holds the scales with an even balance. If a man allows the lower side of his nature to dominate him, in the end he can expect nothing but a harvest of trouble. But if he keeps on walking the high way and doing the fine thing, in the end God will repay.

Christianity never took the threat out of life. The Greeks believed in Nemesis; they believed that, when a man did a wrong thing, immediately Nemesis was on his trail and sooner or later caught up. All Greek tragedy is a sermon on the text, "The doer shall suffer." What we do not sufficiently remember is this--it is blessedly true that God can and does forgive men for their sins, but not even he can wipe out the consequence of sin. If a man sins against his body, soon or late he will pay in ruined health--even if he is forgiven. If a man sins against his loved ones, soon or late hearts will be broken even if he is forgiven. John B. Gough, the great temperance orator, who had lived a reckless early life, used to declare in warning, "The scars remain." And Origen, the great Christian scholar and a universalist, believed that, although all men would be saved, even then the marks of sin would remain. We cannot trade on the forgiveness of God. There is a moral law in the universe. If a man breaks it he may be forgiven, but, nonetheless, he breaks it at his peril.

Paul finishes by reminding his friends that sometimes the duty of generosity may be irksome, but no man who ever cast his bread upon the waters found that it did not return some day to him.

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Galatians 6:11-18

THE CLOSING WORDS

Galatians 6:11-18

See in what large letters I am writing in my own handwriting. Those who wish to make a pretentious display from the merely human point of view are trying to compel you to get yourselves circumcised, but their real object is to avoid persecution because of the Cross of Christ. For those who advocate circumcision do not themselves keep the law, but they wish you to get yourselves circumcised that they may boast about the way in which you are observing the outward and the human rituals. God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. To be circumcised is of no importance, and to be uncircumcised makes no difference. What does matter is to be re-created. May peace and mercy be upon all who shall walk by this standard and on the Israel of God. For the future, let no one trouble me for I bear the brands of Jesus in my body.

Brothers, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. So let it be.

Ordinarily Paul added only his signature to the letter which the scribe wrote to his dictation; but in this case his heart is running over with such love and anxiety for the Galatians that he writes this whole last paragraph. "See," he says, "in what large letters I am writing in my own handwriting." The large letters may be due to three things. (a) This paragraph may be written large because of its importance, as if it were printed in heavy type. (b) It may be written large because Paul was unused to wielding a pen and it was the best that he could do. (c) It may be that Paul's eyes were weak, or that the blinding headache was on him, and all he could produce was the large sprawling handwriting of a man who can hardly see.

He comes back to the centre of the matter. Those who wanted the Galatians to get themselves circumcised did so for three reasons. (a) It would save them from persecution. The Romans recognized the Jewish religion and officially allowed Jews to practise it. Circumcision was the unanswerable mark of a Jew; and so these people saw in it a passport to safety should persecution arise. Circumcision would keep them safe from the hatred of the Jews and the law of Rome alike. (b) In the last analysis, by circumcision and by keeping the rules and regulations of the law, they were trying to put on a show that would win the approval of God. Paul, however, was quite certain that nothing that man could do could win salvation; so once again, pointing them to the Cross, he summons them to cease trying to earn salvation and to trust to the grace which loved them like that. (c) Those who desired the Galatians to be circumcised did not themselves keep all the law. No man could.

But they wanted to boast about the Galatians as their latest trophies. They wanted to glory in their power over people whom they had reduced to their own legalistic slavery. So Paul once again lays it down with all the intensity of which he is capable that circumcision and uncircumcision do not matter; what does matter is that act of faith in Christ which opens a new life to a man.

"I bear," said Paul, "the brands of Jesus in my body." There are two possible meanings of this. (a) The stigmata have always fascinated men. It is told of Francis of Assisi that once as he fasted on a lonely mountain top he seemed to see the love of God crucified on a Cross that stretched across the

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Galatians 6:11-18

whole horizon and as he saw it a sword of grief and pity pierced his heart. Slowly the vision faded and Francis relaxed; and then, they say, he looked down and lo! the marks of the nails were in his hands and he bore them to the end of his days. Whether it is truth or legend we cannot tell, for there are more things in this world than our matter-of-fact philosophy dreams of; and some think that Paul had so really passed through an experience of crucifixion with his Lord that he, too, bore the print of the nails in his hands. (b) Often a master branded his slaves with a mark that showed them to be his.

Most likely what Paul means is that the scars of the things he had suffered for Christ are the brands which show him to be Christ's slave. In the end it is not his apostolic authority that he uses as a basis of appeal; it is the wounds he sustained for Christ's sake. Like Mr. Valiant-for-Truth Paul said, "My marks and scars I carry with me to be my witness to him who will now be my rewarder."

After the storm and stress and intensity of the letter comes the peace of the benediction. Paul has argued and rebuked and cajoled but his last word is GRACE, for him the only word that really mattered.

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Introduction to Ephesians

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

THE SUPREME LETTER

By common consent the Letter to the Ephesians ranks very high in the devotional and theological literature of the Christian Church. It has been called "The Queen of the Epistles"--and rightly so. Many would hold that it is indeed the highest reach of New Testament thought. When John Knox was very near his end, the book that was most often read to him was John Calvin's Sermons on the Letter to the Ephesians. Coleridge said of Ephesians that it was "the divinest composition of man." He went on: "It embraces first, those doctrines peculiar to Christianity, and, then, those precepts common with it in natural religion." Ephesians clearly has a place all its own in the Pauline correspondence.

And yet there are certain very real problems connected with it. These problems are not the product of the minds of over-critical scholars, but are plain for all to see. When, however, these problems are solved, Ephesians becomes a greater letter than ever and shines with an even more radiant light.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE WRITING OF EPHESIANS

Before we turn to the doubtful things, let us set down the certainties. First, Ephesians was clearly written when Paul was in prison. He calls himself "a prisoner for Christ" (Eph.3:1); it is as "a prisoner for the Lord" that he beseeches them (Eph.4:1); he is "an ambassador in chains" (Eph.6:20). It was in prison, and very near to the end, that Paul wrote Ephesians.

Second, Ephesians has clearly a close connection with Colossians. It would seem that Tychicus was the bearer of both these letters. In Colossians Paul says that Tychicus will tell them all about his affairs (Col.4:7); and in Ephesians he says that Tychicus will give them all information (Eph.6:21). Further, there is a close resemblance between the substance of the two letters, so close that more than 55 verses in the two letters are verbatim the same. Either, as Coleridge held, Colossians is what might be called "the overflow" of Ephesians, or Ephesians is a greater version of Colossians. We shall in the end come to see that it is this resemblance which gives us the clue to the unique place of Ephesians among the letters of Paul.

THE PROBLEM

So, then, it is certain that Ephesians was written when Paul was in prison for the faith and that it has in some way the closest possible connection with Colossians. The problem emerges when we begin to examine the question of to whom Ephesians was written.

In the ancient days letters were written on rolls of papyrus. When finished, they were tied with thread, and, if they were specially private or important, the knots in the thread were then sealed. But it was seldom that any address was written on them, for the very simple reason that, for the ordinary individual, there was no postal system. There was a government post, but it was available only for official and imperial correspondence and not for the ordinary person. Letters in those days

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were delivered by hand and therefore no address was necessary. So the titles of the New Testament letters are not part of the original letters at all. They were inserted afterwards when the letters were collected and published for all the Church to read.

When we study Ephesians closely, we find it in the last degree unlikely that it was written to the church at Ephesus. There are internal reasons for arriving at that conclusion.

(a) The letter was written to Gentiles. The recipients were "Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise" (Eph.2:11). Paul urges them "no longer to live as the Gentiles do" (Eph.4:17). The fact that they were Gentiles did not of itself mean that the letter could not have been written to Ephesus; but it is a fact to note.

(b) Ephesians is the most impersonal letter Paul ever wrote. It is entirely without personal greetings and without the intimate personal messages of which the other letters are so full. That is doubly surprising when we remember that Paul spent longer in Ephesus than in any other city, no less than three years (Ac.20:31). Further, there is no more intimate and affectionate passage in the whole New Testament than Ac.20:17-35 where we have Paul's farewell talk to the elders of Ephesus, before he left Miletus on his last journey. It is very difficult to believe in face of all this that Paul would have sent a letter to Ephesus which was so impersonal.

(c) The indication of the letter is that Paul and the recipients did not know each other personally and that their knowledge of each other came by hearsay. In Eph.1:15 Paul writes: "Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus." The loyalty of the people to whom he was writing was something which had come to him by information and not by experience. In Eph.3:2 he writes to them: "Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you." That is to say: "If you have heard that God gave me the special task and office of being the apostle to Gentiles such as you." The Church's knowledge of Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles was something of which they have heard, but not something which they knew by personal contact with him. So, then, within itself the letter bears signs that it does not fit the close and personal relationship which Paul had with the Church at Ephesus.

These facts might be explained; but there is one external fact which settles the matter. In Eph.1:1 none of the great early manuscripts of the Greek New Testament contain the words in Ephesus. They all read: "Paul...to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus." And we know, from the way in which they comment on it, that that was the form in which the early Greek fathers knew the text.

WAS PAUL THE AUTHOR?

Some scholars have gone on to find still another difficulty in Ephesians. They have doubted whether Paul was the author of the letter at all. On what grounds do they base their doubts?

They say that the vocabulary, is different from the vocabulary of Paul; and it is true that there are some seventy words in Ephesians which are not found in any other letter written by Paul. That need

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not trouble us, for the fact is that in Ephesians Paul was saying things which he had never said before. He was travelling a road of thought along which he had not before travelled; and naturally he needed new words to express new thoughts. It would be ridiculous to demand that a man with a mind like Paul's should never add to his vocabulary and should always express himself in the same way.

They say that the style is not the style of Paul. It is true-- we can see it even in the English, let alone in the Greek--that the style of Ephesians is different from that of the other letters. The other letters are all written to meet a definite situation. But, as A. H. McNeile has said, Ephesians is "a theological tract, or rather a religious mediation." Even the use of language is different. Moffatt puts it this way--generally speaking, Paul's language pours out like a torrent; but in Ephesians we have "a slow, bright stream, flowing steadily along, which brims its high banks." The length of the sentences in Ephesians is astonishing. In the Greek Eph.1:3-14; Eph.1:15-23; Eph.2:1-9; Eph.3:1-7 are each one long, meandering sentence. McNeile very beautifully and rightly calls Ephesians "a poem in prose." All this is very unlike Paul's normal style.

What is to be said to this? There is first the general fact that no great writer always writes in the same style. Shakespeare can produce the very different styles of Hamlet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Taming of the Shrew, and the Sonnets. Any great stylist--and Paul was a great stylist--writes in a style to fit his aim and his circumstances at the time of writing. It is bad criticism to say that Paul did not write Ephesians simply because he has evolved a new vocabulary and a new style.

But there is more. Let us remember how Paul wrote most of his letters. He wrote them in the midst of a busy ministry, when, for the most part, he was on the road. He wrote them to meet a demanding problem which had to be dealt with at the moment. That is to say, in most of his letters Paul was writing against time. Now let us remember that Paul, if he wrote Ephesians, wrote it when he was in prison. That is to say, he had all the time in the world to write it. Is it any wonder that the style of Ephesians; is not the style of the earlier letters?

Moreover, this difference in style, this meditative, poetical quality is most apparent in Eph.1-3, and they are one long prayer, culminating in a great doxology. There is in fact nothing like this in all Paul's letters. This is the language of lyrical prayer, not the language of argument or controversy or rebuke.

The differences are far from proving that Ephesians is not by Paul.

THE THOUGHT OF THE EPISTLE

Certain scholars wish to go on to say that the thought of Ephesians is beyond the thought of any of the other letters of Paul. Let us see what that thought is. We have seen that Ephesians is intimately connected with Colossians whose central thought is the all-sufficiency, of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col.2:3); all the fulness of God dwelt in him (Col.1:19); in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily (Col.2:9); he alone is necessary and sufficient for man's salvation (Col.1:14). The whole thought of Colossians is based on the complete sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

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The thought of Ephesians is a development of that conception. It is summarized in two verses of the first chapter, in which Paul speaks of God as, "having made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (Eph.1:9-10).

The key thought of Ephesians is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ. In nature as it is without Christ there is nothing but disunity and disharmony; it is "red in tooth and claw." Man's dominion has broken the social union which should exist between man and the beasts; man is divided from man; class from class; nation from nation; ideology from ideology; Gentile from Jew. What is true of the world of outer nature is true of human nature. In every man there is a tension; every man is a walking civil war, torn between the desire for good and the desire for evil; he hates his sins and loves them at one and the same time. According to both Greek and Jewish thought in the time of Paul, this disharmony extends even to the heavenly places. A cosmic battle is raging between the powers of evil and the powers of good; between God and the demons. Worst of all there is disharmony between God and man. Man, who was meant to be in fellowship with God, is estranged from him.

So, then, in this world without Christ, there is nothing but disunity. That disunity is not God's purpose but it can become a unity only when all things are united in Christ. As E. F. Scott has it: "The innumerable broken strands were to be brought together in Christ, knotted again into one, as they had been in the beginning." The central thought of Ephesians is the realization of the disunity in the universe and the conviction that it can become unity only when everything is united in Christ.

THE ORIGIN OF PAUL'S THOUGHT

How did Paul arrive at this great conception of the unity of all things in Jesus Christ? Most likely he came to it in two ways. It is surely the inevitable outcome of his conviction, stated so vividly in Colossians, that Christ is all-sufficient. But it may well be that there was something else which moved Paul's mind in this direction. He was a Roman citizen and proud of it. In his journeys Paul had seen a great deal of the Roman Empire, and now he was in Rome, the imperial city. In the Roman Empire a new unity had come to the world. The pax Romana, the Roman peace, was a very real thing. Kingdoms and states and countries, which had struggled and warred with each other, were gathered into a new unity in the Empire which was Rome. It may well be that in his imprisonment Paul saw with new eyes how all this unity centred in Rome; and it may well have seemed to him a symbol of how all things must centre in Christ, if a disunited nature and world and humanity were ever to be gathered into a unity.

Surely, so far from being a conception that was beyond his thinking, all Paul's thinking and experience would lead him precisely to that.

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

It is in Eph.1-3 that Paul deals with this conception of the unity in Christ. In the second three chapters he has much to say of the place of the Church in God's plan to bring about that unity. It is here that Paul strikes out one of his greatest phrases. The Church is the Body of Christ. The Church

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is to be hands to do Christ's work, feet to run upon his errands, a mouth to speak for him. So, then, we have a double thesis in Ephesians. First, Christ is God's instrument of reconciliation. Second, the Church is Christ's instrument of reconciliation. The Church must bring Christ to the world; and it is within the Church that all the middle walls of separation must be broken down. It is through the Church that the unity of all the discordant elements must be achieved. As E. F. Scott has it: "The Church stands for that purpose of world-wide reconciliation for which Christ appeared, and in all their intercourse with one another Christians must seek to realize this formative idea of the Church."

WHO BUT PAUL?

This is the thought of Ephesians. As we have seen, there are some who, thinking of the vocabulary and the style and the thought of this letter, cannot believe that Paul wrote it. E. J. Goodspeed, the American scholar, has put forward an interesting--but unconvincing--theory. The probability is that it was in Ephesus about the year A.D. 90 that the letters of Paul were first collected and sent out to the Church at large. It is Goodspeed's theory that the man responsible for that collection, some disciple of Paul, wrote Ephesians as a kind of introduction to the whole collection. Surely that theory breaks down on one salient fact. Any imitation is inferior to the original. But so far from being inferior Ephesians might well be said to be the greatest of all the Pauline letters. If Paul did not write it himself, we have to postulate as its writer someone who was possibly greater than Paul. E. F.

Scott very relevantly demands: "Can we believe that in the Church of Paul's day there was an unknown teacher of this supreme excellence? The natural assumption is surely that an epistle so like the work of Paul at his best was written by no other man than by Paul himself." No man ever had a greater vision of Christ than this which sees in Christ the one centre in whom all the disunities of life are gathered into one. No man ever had a greater vision of the Church than this which sees in the Church God's instrument in that world-wide reconciliation. And we may well believe that no man other than Paul could rise to a vision like that.

THE DESTINATION OF EPHESIANS

We must now return to the problem which earlier we left unsolved. If Ephesians was not written to Ephesus--to what church was it written?

The oldest suggestion is that it was written to Laodicea. In Col.4:16 Paul writes: "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea." That sentence makes certain that a letter had gone from Paul to the church at Laodicea. We possess no such letter amongst Paul's letters as they stand. Marcion was one of the first people to make a collection of Paul's letters, just about the middle of the second century, and he actually calls Ephesians the Letter to the Laodiceans. So from very early times there must have been a feeling in the Church that Ephesians was actually sent in the first instance to Laodicea.

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If we accept that interesting and attractive suggestion, we still have to explain how the letter lost its individual address to Laodicea and came to be connected with Ephesus. There could be two explanations.

It may be that, when Paul died, the church at Ephesus knew that the church at Laodicea possessed a wonderful letter from Paul; and wrote to Laodicea asking for a copy. A copy may have been made and sent off, omitting only the words in Laodicea in the first verse, and leaving a blank as the earliest manuscripts have a blank there. Almost thirty years later the letters of Paul were collected for general publication. Now Laodicea was in a district which was notorious for earthquakes, and it may well have been that all its archives were destroyed; and that, therefore, when the collection was made, the only copy of the Letter to the Laodiceans was that which survived in Ephesus. That letter may then have come to be known as the Letter to the Ephesians, because it was in Ephesus that the only extant copy survived.

The second suggested explanation was propounded by Harnack, the great German scholar. In the later days the church in Laodicea sadly fell from grace. In the Revelation there is a letter to Laodicea which makes sad reading (Rev.3:14-22). In that letter the church of Laodicea is unsparingly condemned by the Risen Christ, so much so that he says to her in that vivid phrase: "I will spew you out of my mouth" (Rev.3:16). Now in the ancient world there was a custom called *damnatio memoriae*, the condemnation of a man's memory. A man might have rendered many a signal service to the state, for which his name might occur in books, in the state annals, in inscriptions and on memorials. But if such a man ended in some base act, some utter wreck of honour, his memory was condemned. His name was erased from all books, obliterated from all inscriptions, chiselled out of all memorials.

Harnack thinks it possible that the church of Laodicea underwent a *damnatio memoriae* so that her very name was obliterated from the Christian records. If that were so, then the copies of the Letter to Laodicea would have no address at all; and when the collection was made at Ephesus, the name of Ephesus might well have become attached to it.

THE CIRCULAR LETTER

Both these suggestions are possible but still another suggestion is far more likely. We believe that Ephesians was not in fact written to any one church, but was a circular letter to all Paul's Asian churches. Let us look again at Col.4:16. He writes: "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church at Laodicea; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea." Paul does not say that the Colossians must read the epistle to Laodicea; they must read the epistle from Laodicea. It is as if Paul said: "There is a letter circulating; at the present moment it has reached Laodicea; when it is sent on to you from Laodicea be sure to read it." That sounds very like as if there was a letter circulating among the Asian churches, and we believe that letter was Ephesians.

THE QUINTESSENCE OF PAUL

If this be so, Ephesians is Paul's supreme letter. We have seen that Ephesians and Colossians are very close to each other. We believe that what happened was that Paul wrote Colossians to deal

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with a definite situation, an outbreak of heresy. In so doing he stumbled on his great expression of the all-sufficiency of Christ. He said to himself: "This is something that I must get across to all men." So he took the matter he had used in Colossians, removed all the local and temporary and controversial aspects, and wrote a new letter to tell all men of the all-sufficient Christ. Ephesians, as we see it, is the one letter Paul sent to all the eastern churches to tell them that the destined unity of all men and of all things could never be found except in Christ, and to tell them of the supreme task of the Church that of being Christ's instrument in the universal reconciliation of man to man and of man to God. That is why Ephesians is the Queen of the Epistles.

EPHESIANS

In Ephesians Paul's argument is very closely woven together. It often proceeds in long complicated sentences which are difficult to unravel. If we are really to grasp his meaning, there are passages where it will be better to read the letter, first in fairly long sections and then break down these sections into shorter passages for detailed study.

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Ephesians 1:1-14

THE PURPOSE OF GOD

Ephesians 1:1-14

This is a letter from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God, to God's consecrated people who live in Ephesus and who are faithful in Jesus Christ. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings which are only to be found in heaven, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and blameless before him. He determined in his love before time began to adopt us to himself through Jesus Christ, in the good purpose of his will, so that all might praise the glory of the generous gift which he freely gave us in the Beloved. For it is in him that we have a deliverance which cost his life; in him we have received the forgiveness of sins, which only the wealth of his grace could give, a grace which he gave us in abundant supply, and which conferred on us all wisdom and all sound sense. This happened because he made known to us the once hidden, but now revealed, secret of his will, for so it was his good pleasure to do.

This secret was a purpose which he formed in his own mind before time began, so that the periods of time should be controlled and administered until they reached their full development, a development in which all things, in heaven and upon earth, are gathered into one in Jesus Christ. It was in Christ, in whom our portion in this scheme was also assigned to us, that it was determined, by the decision of him who controls everything according to the purpose of his will, that we, who were the first to set our hopes upon the coming of the Anointed One of God, should become the means whereby his glory should be praised.

And it was in Christ that it was determined that you, too, should become the means whereby God's glory is praised, after you had heard the word which brings the truth, the good news of your salvation that good news, in which, after you had come to believe, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit, who had been promised to you, the Spirit who is the foretaste and guarantee of all that one day we will inherit, until we enter into that complete redemption which brings complete possession.

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Ephesians 1:1-2

GREETINGS TO GOD'S PEOPLE

Ephesians 1:1-2

This is a letter from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God, to God's consecrated people who live in Ephesus and who are faithful in Jesus Christ. Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul begins his letter with the only two claim's to fame which he possessed. (i) He is an apostle of Christ. When Paul said that there were three things in his mind. (a) He meant that he belonged to Christ. His life was not his own to do with as he liked; he was the possession of Jesus Christ, and he must always live as Jesus Christ wanted him to live. (b) He meant that he was sent out by Jesus Christ. The word apostolos (GSN0652) comes from the verb apostellein (GSN0649), which means to send out. It can be used, for instance, of a naval squadron sent out on an expedition; it can be used of an ambassador sent out by his native country. It describes a man who is sent out with some special task to do. The Christian all through life sees himself as a member of the task force of Christ. He is a man with a mission, the mission of serving Christ within this world. (c) He meant that any power he possessed as a delegated power. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews.

In matters of religion the Sanhedrin had authority over every Jew throughout the world. When the Sanhedrin came to a decision, that decision was given to an apostolos (GSN0652) to convey it to the persons whom it concerned and to see that it was carried out. When such an apostolos (GSN0652) went out, behind him and in him lay the authority of the Sanhedrin, whose representative he was. The Christian is the representative of Christ within the world, but he is not left to carry out that task in his own strength and power; the strength and power of Jesus Christ are with him.

(ii) Paul goes on to say that he is an apostle through the will of God. The accent in his voice here is not that of pride but of sheer amazement. To the end of the day Paul was amazed that God could have chosen a man like him to do his work.

"How Thou canst think so well of us,
And be the God Thou art,
Is darkness to my intellect,
But sunshine to my heart."

A Christian must never be filled with pride in any task that God gives him to do; he must be filled with wonder that God thought him worthy of a share in his work.

Paul goes on to address his letter to the people who live in Ephesus and who are faithful in Jesus Christ. The Christian is a man who always lives a double life. Paul's friends were people who lived in Ephesus and in Christ. Every Christian has a human address and a divine address; and that is precisely the secret of the Christian life. Alister MacLean tells of a lady in the West Highlands who lived a hard life, yet one of perpetual serenity. When asked the secret of it, she answered: "My

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Ephesians 1:1-2

secret is to sail the seas, and always to keep my heart in port." Wherever the Christian is, he is still in Christ.

Paul begins with his usual greeting. "Grace to you," he says, "and peace." Here are the two great words of the Christian faith.

Grace has always two main ideas in it. The Greek word is charis (GSN5485) which could mean charm. There must be a certain loveliness in the Christian life. A Christianity which is unattractive is no real Christianity. Grace always describes a gift; and a gift which it would have been impossible for a man to procure for himself, and which he never earned and in no way deserved. Whenever we mention the word grace, we must think of the sheer loveliness of the Christian life and the sheer undeserved generosity of the heart of God.

When we think of the word peace In connection with the Christian life we must be careful. In Greek the word is eirene (GSN1515), but it translates the Hebrew word shalowm (HSN7965). In the Bible peace is never a purely negative word; it never describes simply the absence of trouble. Shalowm (HSN7965) means everything which makes for a man's highest good. Christian peace is something quite independent of outward circumstances. A man might live in ease and luxury and on the fat of the land, he might have the finest of houses and the biggest of bank accounts, and yet not have peace; on the other hand, a man might be starving in prison, or dying at the stake, or living a life from which all comfort had fled, and be at perfect peace. The explanation is that there is only one source of peace in all the world, and that is doing the will of God. When we are doing something which we know we ought not to do or are evading something that we know we ought to do, there is always a haunting dispeace at the back of our minds; but if we are doing something very difficult, even something we do not want to do, so long as we know that it is the right thing there is a certain contentment in our hearts. "In his will is our peace."

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Ephesians 1:3-4

THE CHOSEN OF GOD

Ephesians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings which are only to be found in heaven, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and blameless before him.

In the Greek the long passage from Eph.1:3-14 is one sentence. It is so long and complicated because it represents not so much a reasoned statement as a lyrical song of praise. Paul's mind goes on and on, not because he is thinking in logical stages, but because gift after gift and wonder after wonder from God pass before his eyes. To understand it we must break it up and take it in short sections.

In this section Paul is thinking of the Christians as the chosen people of God, and his mind runs along three lines.

(i) He thinks of the fact of God's choice. Paul never thought of himself as having chosen to do God's work. He always thought of God as having chosen him. Jesus said to his disciples: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn.15:16). Here precisely lies the wonder. It would not be so wonderful that man should choose God; the wonder is that God should choose man.

(ii) Paul thinks of the bounty of God's choice. God chose us to bless us with the blessings which are to be found only in heaven. There are certain things which a man can discover for himself; but there are others which are beyond his obtaining. A man by himself can acquire a certain skill, can achieve a certain position, can amass a certain amount of this world's goods; but by himself he can never attain to goodness or to peace of mind. God chose us to give us those things which he alone can give.

(iii) Paul thinks of the purpose of God's choice. God chose us that we should be holy and blameless. Here are two great words. Holy is the Greek word *hagios* (GSN0040), which always has in it the idea of difference and of separation. A temple is holy because it is different from other buildings; a priest is holy because he is different from ordinary men; a victim is holy because it is different from other animals; God is supremely holy because he is different from men; the Sabbath is holy because it is different from other days. So, then, God chose the Christian that he should be different from other men.

Here is the challenge that the modern Church has been very slow to face. In the early Church the Christian never had any doubt that he must be different from the world; he, in fact, knew that he must be so different that the probability was that the world would kill him and the certainty was that the world would hate him. But the tendency in the modern Church has been to play down the difference between the Church and the world. We have, in effect, often said to people: "So long as you live a decent, respectable life, it is quite all right to become a Church member and to call yourself a Christian. You don't need to be so very different from other people." In fact a Christian should be identifiable in the world.

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Ephesians 1:3-4

It must always be remembered that this difference on which Christ insists is not one which takes a man out of the world; it makes him different within the world. It should be possible to identify the Christian in the school, the shop, the factory, the office, the hospital ward, everywhere. And the difference is that the Christian behaves not as any human laws compel him to do but as the law of Christ compels him to do. A Christian teacher is out to satisfy the regulations not of an education authority or a headmaster but of Christ; and that will almost certainly mean a very different attitude to the pupils under his charge. A Christian workman is out to satisfy the regulations not of a Trades Union but of Jesus Christ; and that will certainly make him a very different kind of workman, which may well end in him being so different that he is expelled from his union. A Christian doctor will never regard a sick person as a case, but always as a person.

A Christian employer will be concerned with far more than the payment of minimum wages or the creation of minimum working conditions. It is the simple fact of the matter that if enough Christians became hagios (GSN0040), different, they would revolutionize society.

Blameless is the Greek word amomos (GSN0299). Its interest lies in the fact that it is a sacrificial word. Under Jewish law before an animal could be offered as a sacrifice it must be inspected, and if any blemish was found it must be rejected as unfit for an offering to God. Only the best was fit to offer to God. Amomos (GSN0299) thinks of the whole man as an offering to God. It thinks of taking every part of our life, work, pleasure, sport, home life, personal relationships, and making them all such that they can be offered to God. This word does not mean that the Christian must be respectable; it means that he must be perfect. To say that the Christian must be amomos (GSN0299) is to banish contentment with second bests; it means that the Christian standard is nothing less than perfection.

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Ephesians 1:5-6

THE PLAN OF GOD

Ephesians 1:5-6

He determined in his love before time began to adopt us to himself through Jesus Christ, in the good purpose of his will, so that all might praise the glory of the generous gift which he freely gave us in the Beloved.

In this passage Paul speaks to us of the plan of God. One of the pictures that he more than once uses of what God does for men is that of adoption (compare Rom.8:23; Gal.4:5). God adopted us as sons into his family.

In the ancient world, where Roman law prevailed, this would be an even more meaningful picture than it is to us. For there the family was based on what was called the patria potestas, the father's power. A father had absolute power over his children so long as he and they lived. He could sell his child as a slave or even kill him. Dion Cassius tells us that "the law of the Romans gives a father absolute authority over his son, and that for the son's whole life. It gives him authority, if he so chooses, to imprison him, to scourge him, to make him work on his estate as a slave in fetters, even to kill him.

That right still continues to exist even if the son is old enough to play an active part in political affairs, even if he has been judged worthy to occupy the magistrate's office, and even if he is held in honour by all men." It is quite true that, when a father was judging his son, he was supposed to call the adult male members of the family into consultation, but it was not necessary that he should do so.

There are actual instances of a father condemning his son to death. Sallust (The Catiline Conspiracy, 39) tells how Aulus Fulvius joined the rebel Catiline. He was arrested on the journey and brought back. And his father ordered that he should be put to death. The father did this on his own private authority, giving as his reason that "he had begotten him, not for Catiline against his country, but for his country against Catiline."

Under Roman law a child could not possess anything; and any inheritance willed to him, or any gift given to him, became the property of his father. It did not matter how old the son was, or to what honours and responsibility he had risen, he was absolutely in his father's power.

In circumstances like that it is obvious that adoption was a very serious step. It was, however, not uncommon, for children were often adopted to ensure that some family should not become extinct. The ritual of adoption must have been very impressive. It was carried out by a symbolic sale in which copper and scales were used. Twice the real father sold his son, and twice he symbolically bought him back; finally he sold him a third time, and at the third sale he did not buy him back. After this the adopting father had to go to the praetor, one of the principal Roman magistrates, and plead the case for the adoption. Only after all this had been gone through was the adoption complete.

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Ephesians 1:5-6

When the adoption was complete it was complete indeed. The person who had been adopted had all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family and completely lost all rights in his old family. In the eyes of the law he was a new person. So new was he that even all debts and obligations connected with his previous family were abolished as if they had never existed.

That is what Paul says that God has done for us. We were absolutely in the power of sin and of the world; God, through Jesus, took us out of that power into his; and that adoption wipes out the past and makes us new.

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Ephesians 1:7-8

THE GIFTS OF GOD

Ephesians 1:7-8

For it is in him that we have a deliverance which cost his life; in him we have received the forgiveness of sins, which only the wealth of his grace could give, a grace which he gave us in abundant supply, and which conferred on us all wisdom and all sound sense.

In this short section we come face to face with three of the great conceptions of the Christian faith.

(i) There is deliverance. The word used is *apolutrosis* (GSN0629). It comes from the verb *lutroun* (GSN3083), which means to ransom. It is the word used for ransoming a man who is a prisoner of war or a slave; for freeing a man from the penalty of death; for God's deliverance of the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt; for God's continual rescuing of his people in the time of their trouble. In every case the conception is the delivering of a man from a situation from which he was powerless to liberate himself or from a penalty which he himself could never have paid.

So, then, first of all Paul says that God delivered men from a situation from which they could never have delivered themselves. That is precisely what Christianity did do for men. When Christianity came into this world men were haunted by the sense of their own powerlessness. They knew the wrongness of the life which they were living; and also that they were powerless to do anything about it.

Seneca is full of this kind of feeling of helpless frustration. Men, he said, were overwhelmingly conscious of their inefficiency in necessary things. He said of himself that he was a *homo non tolerabilis*, a man not to be tolerated. Men, he said with a kind of despair, love their vices and hate them at the same time. What men need, he cried, is a hand let down to lift them up. The highest thinkers in the pagan world knew that they were in the grip of something from which they were helpless to deliver themselves. They needed liberation.

It was just that liberation which Jesus Christ brought. It is still true that he can liberate men from helpless slavery to the things which attract and disgust them at one and the same time. To put it at its simplest, Jesus can still make bad men good.

(ii) There is forgiveness. The ancient world was haunted by the sense of sin. It might well be said that the whole Old Testament is an expansion of the saying, "The soul that sins shall die" (Eze.18:4). Men were conscious of their own guilt and stood in terror of their god or gods. It is sometimes said that the Greeks had no sense of sin. Nothing could be further from the truth. "Men," said Hesiod, "delight their souls in cherishing that which is their bane." All the plays of Aeschylus are founded on one text--"The doer shall suffer." Once a man had done an evil thing Nemesis was on his heels; and punishment followed sin as certainly as night followed day. As Shakespeare had it in Richard the Third,

"My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,

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And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain."

If there was one thing which men knew it was the sense of sin and the dread of God. Jesus changed all that. He taught men, not of the hate, but of the love of God. Because Jesus came into the world, men, even in their sin, discovered God's love.

(iii) There is wisdom and sound sense. The two words in Greek are sophia (GSN4678) and phronesis (GSN5428), and Christ brought both of them to us. This is very interesting. The Greeks wrote much about these two words; if a man had both, he was perfectly equipped for life.

Aristotle defined sophia (GSN4678) as knowledge of the most precious things. Cicero defined it as knowledge of things both human and divine. Sophia (GSN4678) was a thing of the searching intellect. Sophia (GSN4678) was the answer to the eternal problems of life and death, and God and man, and time and eternity.

Aristotle defined phronesis (GSN5428) as the knowledge of human affairs and of the things in which planning is necessary. Plutarch defined it as practical knowledge of the things which concern us. Cicero defined it as knowledge of the things which are to be sought and the things which are to be avoided. Plato defined it as the disposition of mind which enables us to judge what things are to be done and what things are not to be done. In other words, phronesis (GSN5428) is the sound sense which enables men to meet and to solve the practical problems of everyday life and living.

It is Paul's claim that Jesus brought us sophia (GSN4678), the intellectual knowledge which satisfies the mind, and phronesis (GSN5428), the practical knowledge which enables us to handle the day to day problems of practical life and living. There is a certain completeness in the Christian character. There is a type of person who is at home in the study, who moves familiarly amidst the theological and philosophical problems, and who is yet helpless and impractical in the ordinary everyday affairs of life. There is another kind of person who claims that he is a practical man, so engaged with the business of living that he has no time to concern himself with the ultimate things. In the light of the gifts of God through Christ, both of these characters are imperfect. Christ brings to us the solution of the problems both of eternity and time.

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Ephesians 1:9-10

THE GOAL OF HISTORY

Ephesians 1:9-10

This happened because he made known to us the once hidden but now revealed secret of his will, for so it was his good pleasure to do. The secret was a purpose which he formed in his own mind before time began, so that the periods of time should be controlled and administered until they reached their full development, a development in which all things, in heaven and upon earth, are gathered into one in Jesus Christ.

It is now that Paul is really getting to grips with his subject. He says, as the King James Version has it, that God has made known to us "the mystery of his will." The New Testament uses the word mystery, in a special sense. It is not something mysterious in the sense that it is hard to understand. It is something which has long been kept secret and has now been revealed, but is still incomprehensible to the person who has not been initiated into its meaning.

Let us take an example. Suppose someone who knew nothing whatever about Christianity was brought into a Communion service. To him it would be a complete mystery; he would not understand in the least what was going on. But to a man who knows the story and the meaning of the Last Supper, the whole service has a meaning which is quite clear. So in the New Testament sense a mystery is something which is hidden to the heathen but clear to the Christian.

What for Paul was the mystery of the will of God? It was that the gospel was open to the Gentiles too. In Jesus God has revealed that his love and care, his grace and mercy, are meant, not only for the Jews, but for all the world.

Now Paul, in one sentence, drops his great thought. Up till now men had been living in a divided world. There was division between the beasts and men. There was division between the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the barbarian. All over the world there was strife and tension. Jesus came into the world to wipe out the divisions. That for Paul was the secret of God. It was God's purpose that all the many different strands and all the warring elements in this world should be gathered into one in Jesus Christ.

Here we have another tremendous thought. Paul says that all history has been a working out of this process. He says that through all the ages there has been an arranging and an administering of things that this day of unity should come. The word which Paul uses for this preparation is intensely interesting. It is *oikonomia* (GSN3622), which literally means household management. The *oikonomos* (GSN3623) was the steward who saw to it that the family affairs ran smoothly.

It is the Christian conviction that history is the working out of the will of God. That is by no means what every historian or thinker has been able to see. Oscar Wilde in one of his epigrams said: "You give the criminal calendar of Europe to your children under the name of history." G. N. Clark, in his inaugural lecture at Cambridge, said: "There is no secret and no plan in history to be discovered. I do not believe that any future consummation could make sense of all the irrationalities of preceding ages. If it could not explain them, still less could it justify them." In the introduction to

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Ephesians 1:9-10

A History of Europe, H. A. L. Fisher writes: "One intellectual excitement, however, has been denied to me. Men wiser and more learned than I have discovered in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me.

I can see only one emergency following another, as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalizations, only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen." Andre Maurois says: "The universe is indifferent. Who created it? Why are we here on this puny mud-heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I am quite convinced that no one has the least idea."

It so happens that we are living in an age in which men have lost their faith in any purpose for this world. But it is the faith of the Christian that in this world God's purpose is being worked out; and it is the conviction of Paul that that purpose is that one day all things and all men should be one family in Christ. As Paul sees it, that mystery was not even grasped until Jesus came and now it is the great task of the Church to work out God's purpose of unity, revealed in Jesus Christ.

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Ephesians 1:11-14

JEW AND GENTILE

Ephesians 1:11-14

It was in Christ, in whom our portion in this scheme was also assigned to us, that it was determined, by the decision of him who controls everything according to the purpose of his good will, that we, who were the first to set our hopes upon the coming of the Anointed One of God, should become the means whereby his glory should be praised. And it was in Christ that it was determined that you too should become the means whereby God's glory is praised, after you had heard the word which brings the truth, the good news of your salvation--that good news in which after you had believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit, who had been promised to you, the Spirit who is the foretaste and guarantee of all that one day we will inherit, until we enter into that complete redemption which brings complete possession.

Here is Paul's first example of the new unity which Christ brings. When he speaks of us he means his own nation, the Jews; when he speaks of you he means the Gentiles to whom he is writing; and when in the very last sentence he uses *we*, it is of Jews and Gentiles together that he is thinking.

First of all, Paul speaks of the Jews. They, too, had their portion assigned to them in the plan of God. They were the first to believe in the coming of the Anointed One of God. All through their history they had dreamed of and expected the Messiah. Their part in the scheme of things was to be the nation from whom God's chosen one should come.

Adam Smith, the great economist, argued that the whole pattern of life was founded on what he called the division of labour. He meant that life can only go on when each man has a job and does that job, and when the results of all the jobs are pooled and become the common stock. The shoemaker makes shoes; the baker makes bread; the tailor makes clothes; each has his own job, and each sticks to his own job; and when each efficiently carries out his job the total good of the whole community follows.

What is true of individuals is true also of nations. Each nation has its part in God's scheme of things. The Greeks taught men what beauty of thought and form is. The Romans taught men law and the science of government and administration. The Jews taught men religion. The Jews were the people who were so prepared that from them God's Messiah should come.

That is not to say that God did not prepare other people too. All over the world God had been preparing men and nations so that their mind would be ready to receive the message of Christianity when it came. But the great privilege of the Jewish nation was that they were the first to expect the coming of the Anointed One of God into the world.

Then Paul turns to the Gentiles. In their development he sees two stages.

(i) They received the word; to them the Christian preachers brought the Christian message. That word was two things. First, it was the word of truth; it brought them the truth about God and about

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Ephesians 1:11-14

the world in which they lived and about themselves. Second, it was good news; it was the message of the love and of the grace of God.

(ii) They were sealed with the Holy Spirit. In the ancient world--it is a custom still followed--when a sack, or a crate, or a package was despatched, it was sealed with a seal, in order to indicate from where it had come and to whom it belonged. The possession of the Holy Spirit is the seal which shows that a man belongs to God. The Holy Spirit both shows us God's will and enables us to do it.

Here Paul says a great thing about the Holy Spirit. He calls the Holy Spirit, as the King James Version has it, the earnest of our redemption. The Greek word is arrabon (GSN0728). The arrabon was a regular feature of the Greek business world. It was a part of the purchase price of anything, paid in advance as a guarantee that the rest would in due time be paid. There are many Greek commercial documents still extant in which the word occurs. A woman sells a cow and receives so many drachmae as arrabon (GSN0728). Some dancing girls are engaged for a public entertainment and are paid so much in advance. What Paul is saying is that the experience of the Holy Spirit which we have in this world is a foretaste of the blessedness of heaven; and it is the guarantee that some day we will enter into full possession of the blessedness of God.

The highest experiences of Christian peace and joy which this world can afford are only faint foretastes of the joy into which we will one day enter. It is as if God had given us enough to whet our appetites for more and enough to make us certain that some day he will give us all.

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Ephesians 1:15-23

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Ephesians 1:15-23 (Part 1)

It is because I have heard of your faith in Jesus Christ, and your love to all God's consecrated people, that I never cease to give thanks for you, as I remember you in my prayers. It is the aim of my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit which brings you new revelation, as you come to know him more and more fully. It is the aim of my prayers that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what hope his calling has brought to you, what wealth of glory there is in our inheritance among the saints,. what surpassing greatness there is in his power to us who believe with a belief which was wrought by the might of his strength, that power which wrought in Christ to raise him from among the dead, and to set him at God's right hand in the heavenly places, above every rule and authority and power and lordship. above every dignity which is held in honour, not only in this age, but also in the age to come.

God subjected all things to him, and he gave him as head above all to the Church, which is his body. the Church which is his complement on earth, the Church which belongs to him who is filling all things in all places.

The supremely important part, the second great step in Paul's argument, lies at the very end of this passage; but there are certain things we must note in the verses which go before.

Here there is set out before us in a perfect summary the characteristics of a true Church. Paul has heard of their faith in Christ and their love to all God's consecrated people. The two things which must characterize any true Church are loyalty to Christ and love to men.

There is a loyalty to Christ which does not issue in love to men. The monks and the hermits had a loyalty to Christ which made them abandon the ordinary activities of life in order to live alone in the desert places. The heresy hunters of the Spanish Inquisition and of many another age had a loyalty to Christ which made them persecute those who thought differently from them. Before Jesus came the Pharisees had a loyalty to God which made them contemptuous of those whom they thought less loyal than themselves.

The true Christian loves Christ and loves his fellow men. More than that, he knows that he cannot show his love to Christ in any other way than by showing his love to his fellow men. However orthodox a Church is, however pure its theology, and however noble its worship and its liturgy, it is not a true Church in the real sense of the term unless it is characterized by love for its fellow men. There are Churches which seldom make any public pronouncement which is not based on censorious criticism. They may be orthodox, but they are not Christian. The true Church is marked by a double love--love for Christ and love for men.

F. W. Boreham quotes a passage from Robert Buchanan's *Shadow of the Sword*, in which Buchanan describes the Chapel of Hate. "It stood on a bleak and barren moor in Brittany a hundred years ago. It was in ruins; the walls were black and stained with the slime of centuries; around the crumbling altar nettles and rank weeds grew breast high; whilst black mists, charged with rain,

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brooded night and day about the gloomy scene. Over the doorway of the chapel, but half-obliterated, was its name. It was dedicated to Our Lady of Hate. 'Hither,' says Buchanan, 'in hours of passion and pain, came men and women to cry curses on their enemies--the maiden on her false lover, the lover on his false mistress, the husband on his false wife--praying, one and all, that Our Lady of Hate might hearken, and that the hated one might die within the year.'" And then the novelist adds: "So bright and so deep had the gentle Christian light shone within their minds!"

A chapel of hate is a grim conception; and yet--are we always so very far away from it? We hate the liberals or the radicals; we hate the fundamentalists or the obscurantists; we hate the man whose theology is different from our own; we hate the Roman Catholic or the Protestant as the case may be. We make pronouncements which are characterized, not by Christian charity, but by a kind of condemning bitterness. We would do well to remember every now and then that love of Christ and love of our fellow men cannot exist without each other. Our tragedy is that it is so often true, as Swift once said: "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another."

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Ephesians 1:15-23

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

Ephesians 1:15-23 (Part 2)

In this passage we see what Paul asks for a Church which he loves and which is doing well.

(i) He prays for the Spirit of Wisdom. The word he uses for wisdom is sophia (GSN4678), and we have already seen that sophia (GSN4678) is the wisdom of the deep things of God. He prays that the Church may be led deeper and deeper into the knowledge of the eternal truths. If ever that is to happen, certain things are necessary.

(a) It is necessary that we should have a thinking people. Boswell tells us that Goldsmith once said: "As I take my shoes from the shoemaker, and my coat from the tailor, so I take my religion from the priest." There are many who are like that; and yet religion is nothing unless it is a personal discovery. As Plato had it long ago: "The unexamined life is the life not worth living," and the unexamined religion is the religion not worth having. It is an obligation for a thinking man to think his way to God.

(b) It is necessary that we should have a teaching ministry. William Chillingworth said: "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants." That is true; but so often we would not think so. The exposition of scripture from the pulpit is a first necessity of religious awakening.

(c) It is necessary that we should have a readjusted sense of proportion. It is one of the strange facts of Church life that in Church courts, such as sessions and presbyteries, and even General Assemblies, a score of hours might be given to the discussion of mundane problems of administration for every one given to the discussion of the eternal verities of God.

(ii) Paul prays for a fuller revelation and a fuller knowledge of God. For the Christian growth in knowledge and in grace is essential. Any man who follows a profession knows that he dare not stop studying. No doctor thinks that he has finished learning when he leaves the classrooms of his university. He knows that week by week, and almost day by day, new techniques and treatments are being discovered; and if he wishes to continue to be of service to those in illness and in pain, he must keep up with them. It is so with the Christian. The Christian life could be described as getting to know God better every day. A friendship which does not grow closer with the years tends to vanish with the years. And it is so with us and God.

(iii) He prays for a new realization of the Christian hope. It is almost a characteristic of the age in which we live that it is an age of despair. Thomas Hardy wrote in *Tess*: "Sometimes I think that the worlds are like apples on our stubborn tree. Some of them splendid and some of them blighted." Then comes the question: "On which kind do we live--a splendid one or a blighted one?" And *Tess*' answer is: "A blighted one." Between the wars Sir Philip Gibbs wrote: "If I smell poison gas in Edgeware Road, I am not going to put on a gas mask or go to a gas-proof room. I am going out to take a good sniff of it, for I shall know that the game is up." H. G. Wells once wrote grimly: "Man, who began in a cave behind a windbreak, will end in the disease-soaked ruins of a slum." On every side the voice of the pessimist sounds; it was never more necessary to sound the trumpet-call of

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Christian hope. If the Christian message is true, the world is on the way not to dissolution but to consummation.

(iv) He prays for a new realization of the power of God. For Paul the supreme proof of that power was the resurrection. It proved that God's purpose cannot be stopped by any action of men. In a world which looks chaotic, it is well to realize that God is still in control.

(v) Paul finishes by speaking of the conquest of Christ in a sphere which does not mean so much to us today. As the King James Version has it, God has raised Jesus Christ "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named." In Paul's day men strongly believed both in demons and in angels; and these words which Paul uses are the titles of different grades of angels. He is saying that there is not a being in heaven or on earth to whom Jesus Christ is not superior. In essence Paul's prayer is that men should realize the greatness of the Saviour God has given to them.

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Ephesians 1:15-23

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 1:15-23 (Part 3)

We come to the last two verses of this chapter, and in them Paul has one of the most adventurous and most uplifting thoughts that any man has ever had. He calls the Church by its greatest title--the body of Christ.

In order to understand what Paul means, let us go back to the basic thought of his letter. As it stands, this world is a complete disunity. There is disunity between Jew and Gentile, between Greek and barbarian; there is disunity between different men within the same nation; there is disunity within every man, for in every man the good strives with the evil; there is disunity between man and the beasts; and, above all, there is disunity between man and God. It was Paul's thesis that Jesus died to bring all the discordant elements in this universe into one, to wipe out the separations, to reconcile man to man and to reconcile man to God. Jesus Christ was above all things God's instrument of reconciliation.

It was to bring all things and all men into one family that Christ died. But, clearly, that unity does not as yet exist. Let us take a human analogy. Suppose a great doctor discovers a cure for cancer. Once that cure is found it is there. But before it can become available for everyone, it must be taken out to the world. Doctors and surgeons must know about it and be trained to use it. The cure is there but one man cannot take it out to all the world; a corps of doctors must be the agents whereby it arrives at all the world's sufferers. That precisely is what the Church is to Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus that all men and all nations can become one; but before that can happen they must know about Jesus Christ. And it is the task of the Church to bring that about.

Christ is the head; the Church is the body. The head must have a body through which it can work. The Church is quite literally hands to do Christ's work, feet to run upon his errands, a voice to speak his words.

In the very last phrase of the chapter Paul has two tremendous thoughts. The Church, he says, is the complement of Christ. Just as the ideas of the mind cannot become effective without the work of the body, the tremendous glory which Christ brought to this world cannot be made effective without the work of the Church. Paul goes on to say that Jesus is bit by bit filling all things in all places; and that filling is being worked out by the Church. This is one of the most tremendous thoughts in all Christianity. It means nothing less than that God's plan for one world is in the hands of the Church.

An illustration which is old and hackneyed perfectly sums up this great truth. There is a legend which tells how Jesus went back to heaven after his time on earth. Even in heaven he bore upon him the marks of the Cross. The angels were talking to him and Gabriel said: "Master, you must have suffered terribly for men down there." "I did," said Jesus. "And," said Gabriel, "do they all know about how you loved them and what you did for them?" "O no," said Jesus, "not yet. Just now only a few people in Palestine know." "What have you done," said Gabriel, "to let everyone know about it?" Jesus said: "I have asked Peter and James and John and a few others to make it the

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business of their lives to tell others about me, and the others still others, and yet others, until the farthest man on the widest circle knows what I have done." Gabriel looked very doubtful, for he knew well what poor stuff men were made of.

"Yes," he said, "but what if Peter and James and John grow tired? What if the people who come after them forget? What if away down in the twentieth century people just don't tell others about you? Haven't you made any other plans?" And Jesus answered: "I haven't made any other plans. I'm counting on them." To say that the Church is the Body means that Jesus is counting on us.

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Ephesians 2:1-10

THE CHRISTLESS LIFE AND THE GRACE OF GOD

Ephesians 2:1-10

When you were dead in your sins and trespasses, those sins and trespasses in which once you walked, living life in the way in which this present age of this world lives it, living life as the ruler of the power of the air dictates it, that spirit who now operates in the children of disobedience--and once all we too lived the same kind of life as these children of disobedience do, a life in which we were at the mercy of the desires of our lower nature, a life in which we followed the wishes of our lower nature and of our own designs, a life in which, so far as human nature goes, we deserved nothing but the wrath of God, as the others do--although we were all like that, I say, God, because he is rich in mercy, and because of his great love with which he has loved us, made us alive in Christ Jesus, even when we were dead in trespasses (it is by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Christ, and gave us a seat in the heavenly places with Christ, because of what Christ Jesus did for us.

This he did so that in the age to come the surpassing riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus might be demonstrated. For it is by grace appropriated by faith that you have been saved. You had nothing to do with this. It was God's gift to you. It was not the result of works, for it was God's design that no one should be able to boast. For we are his work, created in Christ Jesus for good works, works which God prepared beforehand that we might walk in them.

In this passage Paul's thought flows on regardless of the rules of grammar; he begins sentences and never finishes them; he begins with one construction and halfway through he glides into another. That is because this is far more a lyric of the love of God than a careful theological exposition. The song of the nightingale is not to be analysed by the laws of musical composition. The lark sings for the joy of singing. That is what Paul is doing here. He is pouring out his heart, and the claims of grammar have to give way to the wonder of grace.

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Ephesians 2:1-3

LIFE WITHOUT CHRIST

Ephesians 2:1-3 (Part 1)

When you were dead in your sins and trespasses, those sins and trespasses in which you once walked, living life in the way this present age lives it, living life as the ruler of the power of the air dictates it, that spirit who now operates in the children of disobedience--and once all we too lived the same kind of life as these children of disobedience do, a life in which we were at the mercy of the desires of our lower nature, a life in which we followed the wishes of our lower nature and of our own designs, a life in which, as far as human nature goes, we deserved nothing but the wrath of God, as the others do.

When Paul speaks of you, he is speaking of the Gentiles; when he speaks of us he is speaking of the Jews, his fellow countrymen. In this passage he shows how terrible the Christless life was for Gentile and for Jew alike.

(i) He says that that life was lived in sins and trespasses. The words he uses are interesting. The word for sin is hamartia (GSN0266); and hamartia (GSN0266) is a shooting word. It literally means a miss. A man shoots his arrow at the target; the arrow misses; that is hamartia (GSN0266). Sin is the failure to hit the target of life. That is precisely why sin is so universal.

We commonly have a wrong idea of sin. We would readily agree that the robber, murderer, the razor-slasher, the drunkard, the gangster are sinners, but, since most of us are respectable citizens, in our heart of hearts we think that sin has not very much to do with us. We would probably rather resent being called hell-deserving sinners. But hamartia (GSN0266) brings us face to face with what sin is, the failure to be what we ought to be and could be.

Is a man as good a husband as he might be? Does he try to make life easier for his wife? Does he inflict his moods on his family? Is a woman as good a wife as she might be? Does she really take an interest in her husband's work and try to understand his problems and his worries? Are we as good parents as we might be? Do we discipline and train our children as we ought, or do we often shirk the issue? As our children grow older, do we come nearer to them, or do they drift away until conversation is often difficult and we and they are practically strangers? Are we as good sons and daughters as we might be? Do we ever even try to say thank you for what has been done for us? Do we ever see the hurt look in our parents' eyes and know that we put it there? Are we as good workmen as we could be? Is every working hour filled with our most conscientious work and is every task done as well as we could possibly do it?

When we realize what sin is, we come to see that it is not something which theologians have invented. It is something with which life is permeated. It is the failure in any sphere of life to be what we ought to be and could be.

The other word Paul uses, translated trespasses is paraptoma (GSN3900). This literally means a slip or a fall. It is used for a man losing the way and straying from the right road; it is used for a man failing to grasp and slipping away from the truth. Trespass, is taking the wrong road when we

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Ephesians 2:1-3

could take the right one; it is missing the truth that we should have known. Therefore it is the failure to reach the goal we ought to have reached.

Are we in life where we ought to be? Have we reached the goal of efficiency and skill that our gifts might have enabled us to reach? Have we reached the goal of service to others that we might have reached? Have we reached the goal of goodness to which we might have attained?

The central idea of sin is failure, failure to hit the target, failure to hold to the road, failure to make life what it was capable of becoming; and that definition includes every one of us.

Barclay's Commentary Ephesians 2:1-3

DEATH IN LIFE

Ephesians 2:1-3 (Part 2)

Paul speaks about people being dead in sins. What did he mean? Some have taken it to mean that without Christ men live in a state of sin which in the life to come produces the death of the soul. But Paul is not talking about the life to come; he is talking about this present life. There are three directions in which the effect of sin is deadly.

(i) Sin kills innocence. No one is precisely the same after he has sinned. The psychologists tell us that we never forget anything.

It may not be in our conscious memory, but everything we ever did or saw or heard is buried in our subconscious memories. The result is that sin leaves a permanent effect on a man.

In Du Maurier's novel *Trilby* there is an example of that. For the first time in his life Little Billee has taken part in a drunken debauch and has himself been drunk. "And when, after some forty-eight hours or so, he had quite slept off the fumes of that memorable Christmas debauch, he found that a sad thing had happened to him, and a strange! It was as though a tarnishing breath had swept over the reminiscent mirror of his mind and left a little film behind it, so that no past thing he wished to see therein was reflected with quite the same pristine clearness. As though the keen, quick, razor edge of his power to reach and re-evolve the by-gone charm and glamour and essence of things had been blunted and coarsened. As though the bloom of that special joy, the gift he had of recalling past emotions and sensations and situations, and making them actual once more by a mere effort of will, had been brushed away.

And he never recovered the full use of that most precious faculty, the boon of youth and happy childhood, and which he had once possessed, without knowing it, in such singular and exceptional completeness.

The experience of sin had left a kind of tarnishing film on his mind and things could never be quite the same again. If we stain a garment or a carpet, we may send it to be cleaned, but it is never again quite the same. Sin does something to a man; it kills innocence; and innocence, once lost, can never be recovered.

(ii) Sin kills ideals. In the lives of so many there is a kind of tragic process. At first a man regards some wrong thing with horror; the second stage comes when he is tempted into doing it, but even as he does it, he is still unhappy and ill at ease and very conscious that it is wrong; the third stage is when he has done the thing so often that he does it without a qualm. Each sin makes the next sin easier. Wordsworth in the *Intimations of Immortality* wrote:

"The youth, who daily from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;

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Ephesians 2:1-3

At length the man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day."

Sin is a kind of suicide, for it kills the ideals which make life worth while.

(iii) In the end sin kills the will. At first a man engages in some forbidden pleasure because he wants to do so; in the end he engages in it because he cannot help doing so. Once a thing becomes a habit it is not far from being a necessity. When a man has allowed some habit, some indulgence, some forbidden practice to master him, he becomes its slave. As the old saying has it. "Sow an act and reap a habit; sow a habit and reap a character; sow a character and reap a destiny."

There is a certain murderous power in sin. It kills innocence; sin may be forgiven but its effect remains. As Origen had it: "The scars remain." Sin kills ideals; men begin to do without a qualm the thing which once they regarded with horror. Sin kills the will; the thing so grips a man that he cannot break free.

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Ephesians 2:1-3

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTLESS LIFE

Ephesians 2:1-3 (Part 3)

In this passage Paul makes a kind of list of the characteristics of life without Christ.

(i) It is life lived in the way this present age lives it. That is to say, it is life lived on the world's standards and with the world's values. Christianity demands forgiveness, but the ancient writers said it was a sign of weakness to have the power to avenge oneself for injury and not to do so. Christianity demands love even to our enemies, but Plutarch said that the sign of a good man was that he was useful to his friends and terrible to his enemies. Christianity demands service, but the world cannot understand the missionary for instance, who goes away to some foreign land to teach in a school or heal in a hospital for a quarter of the salary he or she might obtain at home in some secular service. The essence of the world's standard is that it sets self in the centre, the essence of the Christian standard is that it sets Christ and others in the centre.

The essence of the worldly man is, as someone has said, that "he knows the price of everything and the value of nothing." The world's motive is profit. the Christian's dynamic is the desire to serve.

(ii) It is life lived under the dictates of the prince of the air. Here again we are at something which was very real in the days of Paul but which is not so real to us. The ancient world believed strenuously in demons. They believed that the air was so crowded with these demons that there was not room to insert a pinpoint between them. Pythagoras said: "The whole air is full of Spirits." Philo said: "There are spirits flying everywhere through the air." "The air is the house of the disembodied spirits." These demons were not all bad, but many were, out to propagate evil, to frustrate the purposes of God and to ruin the souls of men. The man who is under their domination has taken sides against God.

(iii) It is a life characterized by disobedience. God has many ways of revealing his will to men. He does so by conscience, the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking within us; he does so by giving to men the wisdom and the commandments of his book; he does so through the advice of good and godly men. But the man who lives the Christless life takes his own way of things, even when he knows what God's way is.

(iv) It is a life which is at the mercy of desire. The word for desire is *epithumia* (GSN1939) which characteristically means desire for the wrong and the forbidden thing. To succumb to that is inevitably to come to disaster.

One of the tragedies of the nineteenth century was the career of Oscar Wilde. He had a brilliant mind, and won the highest academic honours; he was a scintillating writer, and won the highest rewards in literature; he had all the charm in the world and was a man whose instinct it was to be kind; yet he fell to temptation and came to prison and disgrace. When he was suffering for his fall, he wrote his book *De Profundis* and in it he said: "The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease.... Tired of being on the heights I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the

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sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on.

I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace."

Desire is a bad master, and to be at the mercy of desire is to be a slave. And desire is not simply a fleshly thing; it is the craving for any forbidden thing.

(v) It is the life which follows what the King James Version calls the desires of our flesh. We must be careful to understand what Paul means by the sins of the flesh. He means far more than sexual sins. In Gal.5:19-21 Paul lists the sins of the flesh. True, he starts with adultery and fornication, but he goes on to idolatry, hatred, wrath, strife, envyings, seditions, heresies. The flesh is that part of our nature which gives sin a bridgehead and a point of attack.

The meaning of "the flesh" will vary from person to person. One man's weakness may be in his body and his risk may be sexual sin; another's may be in spiritual things and his risk in pride; another's may be in earthly things and his risk unworthy ambition; another's sin may be in his temper and his risk in envyings and strife. All these are sins of the flesh. Let no man think that, because he has escaped the grosser sins of the body, he has avoided the sins of the flesh. The flesh is anything in us which gives sin its chance; it is human nature without God. To live according to the dictates of the flesh is simply to live in such a way, that our lower nature, the worse part of us, dominates our lives.

(vi) It is life which is deserving only of the wrath of God. Many a man's life is embittered because he feels that he has never had what his talents and his work deserve; but in the sight of God no man deserves anything but condemnation. It is only his love in Christ which has forgiven men who deserved nothing but punishment from him, men who had grieved his love and broken his law.

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Ephesians 2:4-10

THE WORK OF CHRIST

Ephesians 2:4-10 (Part 1)

Although we were all like that, I say, God, because he is rich in mercy and because of his great love with which he has loved us, made us alive in Jesus Christ, even when we were dead in trespasses (it is by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Christ, and gave us a seat in the heavenly places with Christ, because of what Christ Jesus did for us. This he did so that in the age to come the surpassing riches of his grace in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus might be demonstrated. For it is by grace appropriated by faith that you have been saved. You had nothing to do with this. It was God's gift to you. It was not the result of works, for it was God's design that no one should be able to boast. For we are his work, created in Christ Jesus for good works, works which God prepared beforehand that we might walk in them.

Paul had begun by saying that, as we are, we are dead in sins and trespasses; now he says that God in his love and mercy has made us alive in Jesus Christ. What exactly did he mean by that? We saw that there were three things involved in being dead in sins and trespasses. Jesus has something to do about each of them.

(i) We saw that sin kills innocence. Not even Jesus can give a man back his lost innocence, for not even Jesus can put back the clock; but what he can do is take away the sense of guilt which the lost innocence necessarily brings with it.

The first thing sin does is create a feeling of estrangement between us and God. Whenever a man realizes that he has sinned, he is oppressed with the feeling that he dare not approach God. When Isaiah received his vision of God, his first reaction was to say: "Woe is me! for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa.6:5). When Peter realized who Jesus was, his first reaction was: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk.5:8).

Jesus begins by taking that sense of estrangement away. He came to tell us that no matter what we are like the door is open to the presence of God. Suppose there was a son who did some shameful thing and then ran away, because he was sure that there was no use in going home, because the door was bound to be shut. Then suppose someone came with the news that the door was still open and a welcome was waiting at home. What a difference that news would make! It was just that kind of news that Jesus brought. He came to take away the sense of estrangement and of guilt, by telling us that God wants us just as we are.

(ii) We saw that sin killed the ideals by which men live. Jesus reawakens the ideal in the heart of man.

The story is told of a negro engineer in a river ferry-boat in America. His boat was old and he did not worry over much about it; the engines were begrimed and ill-cared for. This engineer was soundly converted. The first thing he did was to go back to his ferry-boat and polish his engines until every part of the machinery shone like a mirror. One of the regular passengers commented on

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the change. "What have you been up to?" he asked the engineer. "What set you cleaning and polishing these old engines of yours?" "Sir," answered the engineer, "I've got a glory." That is what Christ does for a man. He gives him a glory.

It is told that in the congregation in Edinburgh to which George Matheson came there was an old woman who lived in a cellar in filthy conditions. After some months of Matheson's ministry, communion time came round. When the elder called at this old woman's cellar with the cards, he found that she had gone. He tracked her down. He found her in an attic room. She was very poor and there were no luxuries, but the attic was as light and airy and clean as the cellar had been dark and dismal and dirty. "I see you've changed your house," he said to her. "Ay," she said, "I have. You canna hear George Matheson preach and live in a cellar." The Christian message had rekindled the ideal.

As the old hymn has it:

"Deep in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore."

The grace of Jesus Christ rekindles the ideals which repeated failing to sin has extinguished. And by that very rekindling, life is set climbing again.

(iii) Greater than anything else, Jesus Christ revives and restores the lost will. We saw that the deadly thing about sin was that it slowly but surely destroyed a man's will and that the indulgence which had begun as a pleasure became a necessity. Jesus recreates the will.

That in fact is always what love does. The effect of a great love is always a cleansing thing. When a person really and truly falls in love, his love compels him to goodness. He loves the loved one so much that the love of his sins is broken.

That is what Christ does for us. When we love him, that love recreates and restores our will towards goodness. As the hymn has it:

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free."

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Ephesians 2:4-10

THE WORK AND THE WORKS OF GRACE

Ephesians 2:4-10 (Part 2)

Paul closes this passage with a great exposition of that paradox which always lies at the heart of his view of the gospel. That paradox has two arms.

(i) Paul insists that it is by grace that we are saved. We have not earned salvation nor could we have earned it. It is the gift of God and our part is simply to accept it. Paul's point of view is undeniably true; and for two reasons.

(a) God is perfection; and, therefore, only perfection is good enough for him. Man by his very nature cannot bring perfection to God; and so, if ever man is to win his way to God, it must always be God who gives and man who takes.

(b) God is love; sin is therefore a crime, not against law, but against love. Now it is possible to make atonement for a broken law, but it is impossible to make atonement for a broken heart; and sin is not so much breaking God's law as it is breaking God's heart. Let us take a crude and imperfect analogy. Suppose a motorist by careless driving kills a child. He is arrested, tried, found guilty, sentenced to a term of imprisonment and/or to a fine. After he has paid the fine and served the imprisonment, as far as the law is concerned, the whole matter is over. But it is very different in relation to the mother whose child he killed. He can never put things right with her by serving a term of imprisonment and paying a fine. The only thing which can restore his relationship to her is an act of free forgiveness on her part. That is the way we are to God. It is not God's laws against which we have sinned; it is against his heart. And therefore only an act of free forgiveness of the grace of God can put us back into the right relationship with him.

(ii) That is to say that works have nothing to do with earning salvation. It is neither right nor possible to leave the teaching of Paul here--and yet that is where it is so often left. Paul goes on to say that we are recreated by God for good works. Here is the Pauline paradox. All the good works in the world cannot put us right with God; but there is something radically wrong with the Christianity which does not issue in good works.

There is nothing mysterious about this. It is simply an inevitable law of love. If someone fine loves us, we know that we do not and cannot deserve that love. At the same time we know with utter conviction that we must spend all life in trying to be worthy of it.

That is our relationship to God. Good works can never earn salvation; but there is something radically wrong if salvation does not produce good works. It is not that our good works put God in our debt; rather that God's love lays on us the obligation to try throughout all life to be worthy of it.

We know what God wants us to do; God has prepared long beforehand the kind of life He wants us to live, and has told us about it in his book and through his son. We cannot earn God's love; but

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we can and must show how grateful we are for it, by seeking with our whole hearts to live the kind of life which will bring joy to God's heart.

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Ephesians 2:11-22

B.C. AND A.D.

Ephesians 2:11-22

So then remember, that once, as far as human descent goes, you were Gentiles; you were called the uncircumcision by those who laid claim to that circumcision which is a physical thing, and a thing produced by men's hands. Remember that at that time you had no hope of a Messiah; you were aliens from the society of Israel, and strangers from the covenants on which the promises were based; you had no hope; you were in the world without God. But, as things now are, because of what Christ Jesus has done, you who were once far off have been brought near, at the price of the blood of Christ. For it is he who is our peace; it is he who made both Jew and Gentile into one, and who broke down the middle wall of the barrier between, and destroyed the enmity by coming in the flesh, and wiped out the law of commandments with all its decrees.

This he did that in himself he might make the two into one new man, by making peace between them, and that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the Cross, after he had slain the enmity between them by what he did. So he came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and peace to them who were near, because, through him, we both have the right of entry into the presence of the Father, for we come in the one Spirit. So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners resident in a land that is not their own, but you are fellow citizens with God's consecrated people and members of the family of God. It is on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles that you have been built up; and the corner stone is Christ himself. All the building that is going on is being fitted together in him, and it will go on growing until it becomes a holy temple in the Lord, a temple into which you too are built as part, that you may become the dwelling place of God, through the work of the Spirit.

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Ephesians 2:11-12

BEFORE CHRIST CAME

Ephesians 2:11-12 (Part 1)

So then remember, that once, as far as human descent goes, you were Gentiles; you were called the uncircumcision by those who laid claim to that circumcision which is a physical thing, and a thing produced by men's hands. Remember that at that time you had no hope of a Messiah; you were aliens from the society of Israel, and strangers from the covenants on which the promises were based, you had no hope: you were in the world without God.

Paul speaks of the condition of the Gentiles before Christ came. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, but he never forgot the unique place of the Jews in the design and the revelation of God. Here he is drawing the contrast between the life of the Gentile and of the Jew.

(i) The Gentiles were called the uncircumcision by those who laid claim to that circumcision which is a physical and man-made thing. This was the first of the great divisions. The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. They said that the Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of Hell; that God loved only Israel of all the nations that he had made; that the best of the serpents crushed, the best of the Gentiles killed. It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile woman in childbirth, for that would be to bring another Gentile into the world. The barrier between Jew and Gentile was absolute. If a Jew married a Gentile, the funeral of that Jew was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death; even to go into a Gentile house rendered a Jew unclean. Before Christ the barriers were up; after Christ the barriers were down.

(ii) The Gentiles had no hope of a Messiah. The King James Version has it that they were without Christ. That is a perfectly possible translation; but the word Christos (GSN5547) is not primarily a proper name although it has become one. It is an adjective meaning the anointed one. Kings on their coronation were anointed; and thus Christos (GSN5547), the literal Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah (HSN4886), came to mean the Anointed One of God, the expected King whom God would send into the world to vindicate his own and to bring in the golden age. Even in their bitterest days the Jews never doubted that that Messiah would come. But the Gentiles had no such hope.

See the result of that difference. For the Jew history was always going somewhere; no matter what the present was like, the future was glorious; the Jewish view of history was essentially optimistic. On the other hand, for the Gentile history was going nowhere. To the Stoics history was cyclic. They believed that it went on for three thousand years; then came a conflagration in which the whole universe was consumed in flames; then the whole process began all over again, and the same events and the same people exactly repeated themselves. To the Gentile history was a progress to nowhere; to the Jew history was a march to God. To the Gentile life was not worth living; to the Jew it was the way to greater life. With the coming of Christ the Gentile entered into that new view of history in which a man is always on the way to God.

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Ephesians 2:11-12

HOPELESS AND HELPLESS

Ephesians 2:11-12 (Part 2)

(iii) The Gentiles were aliens from the society of Israel. What does that mean? The name for the people of Israel was *hagios laos* (GSN2992), the holy people. We have seen that the basic meaning of *hagios* (GSN0040) is different. In what sense were the people of Israel different from other peoples? In the sense that their only king was God. Other nations might be governed by democracy or aristocracy; Israel was a theocracy. Their governor was God. After his triumphs, the people came to Gideon and offered him the throne of Israel. Gideon's answer was: "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you" (Judg.8:23). When the Psalmist sang: "I will extol thee, my God and king" (Ps.145:1) he meant it literally.

To be an Israelite was to be a member of the society of God; it was to have a citizenship which was divine. Clearly life was going to be completely different for any nation which had a consciousness of destiny like that. It is told that when Pericles, the greatest of the Athenians, was walking forward to address the Athenian assembly, he used to say to himself: "Pericles, remember that you are an Athenian and that you talk to Athenians." For the Jew it was possible to say: "Remember that you are a citizen of God, and that you speak to the people of God." There is no consciousness of greatness in all the world like that.

(iv) The Gentiles were strangers from the covenants on which the promises were based. What does that mean? Israel was supremely the covenant people. What does that mean? The Jews believed that God had approached their nation with a special offer. "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God" (Exo.6:7). This covenant relationship involved not only privilege, but also obligation. It involved the keeping of the law. Exo.24:1-8 gives us a dramatic picture of how the Jewish people accepted the covenant and its conditions--"All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exo.24:3,7).

If God's design had ever to be worked out, it must be worked out through a nation. God's choice of Israel was not favouritism, for it was choice not for special honour but for special responsibility. But it gave to the Jews the unique consciousness of being the people of God. Paul could not forget, because it was a fact of history, that the Jews were uniquely the instrument in God's hand.

(v) The Gentiles were without hope and without God. People often speak of the Greeks as being the sunniest people in history; but there was such a thing as the Greek melancholy. At the back of things there was a kind of essential despair.

Even as far back as Homer that is so. In the Iliad (6: 146-149) Glaucus and Diomedes meet in single combat. Before they close in fight, Diomedes wishes to know the lineage of Glaucus, and Glaucus replies: "Why enquirest thou of my generation? Even as are the generations of leaves such are those likewise of men; the leaves that be the wind scattereth upon the earth, and the forest buddeth and putteth forth more again, when the season of spring is at hand, so of the generations of men one putteth forth and another ceaseth." The Greek could say:

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"We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish"

But he could not triumphantly add:

"But nought changeth Thee."

Theognis could write:

"I rejoice and disport me on my youth; long enough beneath the
earth shall I lie, bereft of life, voiceless as a stone, and shall
leave the sunlight which I loved; good man though I am, then
shall I see nothing more."

"Rejoice, O my soul, in thy youth; soon shall other men be in life,
and I shall be black earth in death."

"No mortal is happy of all on whom the sun looks down."

In the Homeric Hymns the assembly of Olympus is charmed by the Muses who sing "of the
deathless gifts of the gods and the sorrows of men, even all that they endure by the will of the
immortals, living heedless and helpless, nor can they find a cure for death, nor a defence against old
age."

In Sophocles we find some of the loveliest and the saddest lines in all history.

"Youth's beauty fades, and manhood's glory fades.
Faith dies and unfaith blossoms as a flower;
Nor ever wilt thou find upon the open streets of men.
Or secret places of the heart's own love,
One wind blows true for ever."

It was true that the Gentile was without hope because he was without God. Israel had always had
the radiant hope in God which burned clearly and inextinguishably even in her darkest and most
terrible days; but in his heart the Gentile knew only despair, before Christ came to give him hope.

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Ephesians 2:13-18

THE END OF BARRIERS

Ephesians 2:13-18 (Part 1)

But as things now are, because of what Christ Jesus has done, you who were once far off have been brought near, at the price of the blood of Christ. For it is he who is our peace; it is he who made both Jew and Gentile into one, and who broke down the middle wall of the barrier between, and destroyed the enmity by coming in the flesh, and wiped out the law of commandments with all its decrees. This he did that in himself he might make the two into one new man, by making peace between them, and that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the Cross, after he had slain the enmity by what he did. So he came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and peace to them who were near, because, through him, we both have the right of entry into the presence of the Father, for we come in the one Spirit.

We have already seen how the Jew hated and despised the Gentile. Now Paul uses two pictures, which would be specially vivid to a Jew, to show how that hatred is killed and a new unity has come.

He says that those who were far off have been brought near. Isaiah had heard God say: "Peace, peace to the far, and to the near" (Isa.57:19). When the Rabbis spoke about accepting a convert into Judaism, they said that he had been brought near. For instance, the Jewish Rabbinic writers tell how a Gentile woman came to Rabbi Eliezer. She confessed that she was a sinner and asked to be admitted to the Jewish faith. "Rabbi," she said, "bring me near." The Rabbi refused. The door was shut in her face; but now the door was open. Those who had been far from God were brought near, and the door was shut to no one.

Paul uses an even more vivid picture. He says that the middle wall of the barrier between has been torn down.

This is a picture from the Temple. The Temple consisted of a series of courts, each one a little higher than the one that went before, with the Temple itself in the inmost of the courts. First there was the Court of the Gentiles; then the Court of the Women; then the Court of the Israelites; then the Court of the Priests; and finally the Holy Place itself.

Only into the first of them could a Gentile come. Between it and the Court of the Women there was a wall, or rather a kind of screen of marble, beautifully wrought, and let into it at intervals were tablets which announced that if a Gentile proceeded any farther he was liable to instant death. Josephus, in his description of the Temple, says: "When you went through these first cloisters unto the second court of the Temple, there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits. Its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek and some in Roman letters that no foreigner should go within the sanctuary" (The Wars of the Jews, 5, 5, 2). In another description he says of the second court of the Temple: "This was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death" (The Antiquities of the Jews, 15, 11, 5).

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In 1871 one of these prohibiting tablets was actually discovered, and the inscription on it reads:

"Let no one of any other nation come within the fence and barrier around the Holy Place.

Whosoever will be taken doing so will himself be responsible for the fact that his death will ensue."

Paul well knew that barrier, for his arrest at Jerusalem, which led to his final imprisonment and death, was due to the fact that he had been wrongly accused of bringing Trophimus, an Ephesian Gentile, into the Temple beyond the barrier (Ac.21:28-29). So then the intervening wall with its barrier shut the Gentile out from the presence of God.

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Ephesians 2:13-18

THE EXCLUSIVENESS OF CHRISTLESS HUMAN NATURE

Ephesians 2:13-18 (Part 2)

It is not to be thought that the Jews were the only people who put up the barriers and shut people out. The ancient world was full of barriers. There was a time, more than four hundred years before this, when Greece was threatened with invasion by the Persians. It was the golden age of the city state. Greece was made up of famous cities--Athens, Thebes, Corinth and the rest and it very nearly encountered disaster because the cities refused to cooperate to meet the common threat. "The danger lay," T. R. Glover wrote, "in every generation, in the same fact of single cities, furious for independence at all costs."

Cicero could write much later: "As the Greeks say, all men are divided into two classes--Greeks and barbarians." The Greek called any man a barbarian who could not speak Greek; and they despised him and put up the barriers against him. When Aristotle is discussing bestiality, he says: "It is found most frequently among barbarians," and by barbarians he simply meant non-Greeks. He talks of "the remote tribes of barbarians belonging to the bestial class." The most vital form of Greek religion was the Mystery Religions, and from many of them the barbarian was excluded. Livy writes: "The Greeks wage a truceless war against people of other races, against barbarians." Plato said that the barbarians are "our enemies by nature."

This problem of the barriers is by no means confined to the ancient world. Rita Snowden quotes two very relevant sayings. Father Taylor of Boston used to say: "There is just enough room in the world for all the people in it, but there is no room for the fences which separate them." Sir Philip Gibbs in *The Cross of Peace* wrote: "The problem of fences has grown to be one of the most acute that the world must face. Today there are all sorts of zig-zag and criss-crossing separating fences running through the races and people of the world. Modern progress has made the world a neighbourhood: God has given us the task of making it a brotherhood. In these days of dividing walls of race and class and creed we must shake the earth anew with the message of the all-inclusive Christ, in whom there is neither bond nor free, Jew nor Greek, Scythian nor barbarian, but all are one."

The ancient world had its barriers. So, too, has our modern world. In any Christless society there can be nothing but middle walls of partition.

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Ephesians 2:13-18

THE UNITY IN CHRIST

Ephesians 2:13-18 (Part 3)

So Paul goes on to say that in Christ these barriers are down. How did Christ destroy them?

(i) Paul says of Jesus, "He is our peace." What did he mean by that? Let us use a human analogy. Suppose two people have a difference and go to law about it; and the experts in the law draw up a document, which states the rights of the case, and ask the two conflicting parties to come together on the basis of that document. All the chances are that the breach will remain unhealed, for peace is seldom made on the basis of a legal document. But suppose that someone whom both of these conflicting parties love comes and talks to them, there is every chance that peace will be made. When two parties are at variance, the surest way to bring them together is through someone whom they both love.

That is what Christ does. He is our peace. It is in a common love of him that people come to love each other. That peace is won at the price of his blood, for the great awakener of love is the Cross. The sight of that Cross awakens in the hearts of men of all nations love for Christ, and only when they all love Christ will they love each other. It is not in treaties and leagues to produce peace. There can be peace only in Jesus Christ.

(ii) Paul says of Jesus that he wiped out the law of the commandments with all its decrees. What does that mean? The Jews believed that only by keeping the Jewish law was a man good and able to attain to the friendship and fellowship of God. That law had been worked out into thousands and thousands of commandments and decrees. Hands had to be washed in a certain way; dishes had to be cleaned in a certain way; there was page after page about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath day; this and that and the next sacrifice had to be offered in connection with this and that and the next occasion in life. The only people who fully kept the Jewish law were the Pharisees and there were only six thousand of them. A religion based on all kinds of rules and regulations, about sacred rituals and sacrifices and days, can never be a universal religion. But, as Paul said elsewhere, "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom.10:4). Jesus ended legalism as a principle of religion.

In its place he put love to God and love to men. Jesus came to tell men that they cannot earn God's approbation by a keeping of the ceremonial law but must accept the forgiveness and fellowship which God in mercy freely offers them. A religion based on love can at once be a universal religion.

Rita Snowden tells a story of the war. In France some soldiers with their sergeant brought the body of a dead comrade to a French cemetery to have him buried. The priest told them gently that he was bound to ask if their comrade had been a baptized adherent of the Roman Catholic Church. They said that they did not know. The priest said that he was very sorry but in that case he could not permit burial in his churchyard. So the soldiers took their comrade sadly and buried him just outside the fence. The next day they came back to see that the grave was all right and to their

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astonishment could not find it. Search as they might they could find no trace of the freshly dug soil. As they were about to leave in bewilderment the priest came up.

He told them that his heart had been troubled because of his refusal to allow their dead comrade to be buried in the churchyard; so, early in the morning, he had risen from his bed and with his own hands had moved the fence to include the body of the soldier who had died for France.

That is what love can do. The rules and the regulations put up the fence; but love moved it. Jesus removed the fences between man and man because he abolished all religion founded on rules and regulations and brought to men a religion whose foundation is love.

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Ephesians 2:13-18

THE GIFTS OF THE UNITY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 2:13-18 (Part 4)

Paul goes on to tell of the priceless gifts which come with the new unity in Christ.

(i) He made both Jew and Gentile into one new man.

In Greek there are two words for new. There is *neos* (GSN3501) which is new simply in point of time; a thing which is *neos* (GSN3501) has come into existence recently, but there may well have been thousands of the same thing in existence before. A pencil produced in the factory this week is *neos* (GSN3501), but there already exist millions exactly like it. There is *kainos* (GSN2537) which means new in point of quality. A thing which is *kainos* (GSN2537) is new in the sense that it brings into the world a new quality of thing which did not exist before.

The word that Paul uses here is, *kainos* (GSN2537); he says that Jesus brings together Jew and Gentile and from them both produces one new kind of person. This is very interesting and very significant; it is not that Jesus makes all the Jews into Gentiles, or all the Gentiles into Jews; he produces a new kind of person out of both, although they remain Gentiles and Jews. Chrysostom, famous preacher of the early Church, says that it is as if one should melt down a statue of silver and a statue of lead, and the two should come out gold.

The unity which Jesus achieves is not achieved by blotting out all racial characteristics; it is achieved by making all men of all nations into Christians. It may well be that we have something to learn here. The tendency has always been when we send missionaries abroad to produce people who wear English clothes and speak the English language. There are indeed some missionary churches who would have all their congregations worship with the one liturgy used in the churches at home. It is not Jesus' purpose, however, that we should turn all men into one nation, but that there should be Christian Indians and Christian Africans whose unity lies in their Christianity. The oneness in Christ is in Christ and not in any external change.

(ii) He reconciled both to God. The word Paul uses (*apokatallassein*, GSN0604) is the word used of bringing together friends who have been estranged. The work of Jesus is to show all men that God is their friend and that, therefore, they must be friends with each other. Reconciliation with God involves and necessitates reconciliation with man.

(iii) Through Jesus both Jew and Gentile have the right of access to God. The word Paul uses for access is *prosagoge* (GSN4318) and it is a word of many pictures. It is the word used of bringing a sacrifice to God; it is the word used of bringing men into the presence of God that they may be consecrated to his service; it is the word used for introducing a speaker or an ambassador into a national assembly; and above all it is the word used for introducing a person into the presence of a king. There was in fact at the Persian royal court an official called the *prosagogeus* whose function was to introduce people who desired an audience with the king. It is a priceless boon to have the right to go to some lovely and wise and saintly person at any time; to have the right to break in

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upon him, to take our troubles, our problems, our loneliness, our sorrow to him. That is exactly the right that Jesus gives us in regard to God.

The unity in Christ produces Christians whose Christianity transcends all their local and racial difference; it produces men who are friends with each other because they are friends with God; it produces men who are one because they meet in the presence of God to whom they all have access.

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Ephesians 2:19-22

THE FAMILY AND THE DWELLING-PLACE OF GOD

Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners resident in a land that is not their own, but you are fellow citizens with God's consecrated people and members of the family of God. It is on the foundation of the prophets and apostles that you have been built up; and the corner stone is Christ himself. All the building that is going on is being fitted together in him, and it will go on growing until it becomes a holy temple in the Lord, a temple into which you too are built as part, that you may become the dwelling-place of God, through the work of the Spirit.

Paul uses two illuminating pictures. He says that the Gentiles are no longer foreigners but full members of the family of God.

Paul uses the word *xenos* (GSN3581) for foreigner. In every Greek city there were *xenoi* (GSN3581) and their life was not easy. One wrote home: "It is better for you to be in your own homes, whatever they may be like, than to be in a strange land." The foreigner was always regarded with suspicion and dislike. Paul uses the word *paroikos* (GSN3941) for sojourner. The *paroikos* (GSN3941) was one step further on. He was a resident alien, a man who had taken up residence in a place but who had never become a naturalized citizen; he paid a tax for the privilege of existing in a land which was not his own. Both the *xenos* (GSN3581) and the *paroikos* (GSN3941) were always on the fringe.

So Paul says to the Gentiles: "You are no longer among God's people on sufferance. You are full members of the family of God." We may put this very simply; it is through Jesus that we are at home with God.

A. B. Davidson tells how he was in lodgings in a strange city. He was lonely. He used to walk the streets at evening time. Sometimes through an uncurtained window he would see a family sitting round the table or the fire in happy fellowship; then the curtain would be drawn and he would feel shut out, and lonely in the dark.

That is what cannot happen in the family of God. And that is what should never happen in a church. Through Jesus there is a place for all men in the family of God. Men may put up their barriers; churches may keep their Communion tables for their own members. God never does; it is the tragedy of the Church that it is so often more exclusive than God.

The second picture Paul uses is that of a building. He thinks of every church as the part of a great building and of every Christian as a stone built into the Church. Of the whole Church the corner stone is Christ; and the corner stone is what holds everything together.

Paul thinks of this building going on and on, with each part of the building being fitted into Christ. Think of a great cathedral. Down among the foundations there may be a Saxon crypt; on some of the doorways or the windows there may be a Norman arch; one part may be Early English

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Ephesians 2:19-22

and another Decorated and another Gothic; some may have been added in our own day. There are all kinds of architecture; but the building is a unity because through it all it has been used for the worship of God and for meeting with Jesus Christ.

That is what the Church should be like. Its unity comes not from organization, or ritual, or liturgy; it comes from Christ. Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia, Where Christ is, there is the Church. The Church will realize her unity only when she realizes that she does not exist to propagate the point of view of any body of men, but to provide a home where the Spirit of Christ can dwell and where all men who love Christ can meet in that Spirit.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 3:1-13

PRISON AND PRIVILEGES

Ephesians 3:1-13

It is for this cause that I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake of you Gentiles--you must have heard of the share that God gave me in dispensing his grace to you, because God's secret was made known to me by direct revelation, as I have just been writing to you, and you can read again what I have just written, if you wish to know what I understand of the meaning of that secret which Christ brought, a secret which was not revealed to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his consecrated apostles and prophets by the work of the Spirit. The secret is that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the same body, fellow-sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ, through the good news of which I was made a servant through the free gift of the grace of God, which was given to me according to the working of his power.

It is to me, who am less than the least of all God's consecrated people, that this privilege has been given the privilege of preaching to the Gentiles the wealth of Christ, the full story of which no man can ever tell, the privileges of enlightening all men as to what is the meaning of that secret, which was hidden from all eternity, in the God who created all things. It was kept secret up till now in order that now the many-coloured wisdom of God should be made known through the Church to the rulers and powers in the heavenly places: and all this happened and will happen in accordance with the eternal design which he purposed in Jesus Christ, through whom we have a free and confident right of approach to him through faith in him. I therefore pray that you will not lose heart because of my afflictions on your behalf. for these afflictions are your glory. :elines

To understand the connection of thought in this passage it has to be noted that Eph.3:2-13 are one long parenthesis. The for this cause of Eph.3:14 takes up again and resumes the for this cause of Eph.3:1. Someone has spoken of Paul's habit of "going off at a word." A single word or idea can send his thoughts off at a tangent. When he speaks of himself as "the prisoner of Christ," it makes him think of the universal love of God and of his part in bringing that love to the Gentiles. In Eph.3:2-13 his thoughts go off on that track; and in Eph.3:14 he comes back to what he meant to say when he began.

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Ephesians 3:1-7

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

Ephesians 3:1-7 (Part 1)

It is for this cause that I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake of you Gentiles you must have heard of the share that God gave me in dispensing his grace to you, because God's secret was made known to me by direct revelation. as I have just been writing to you, and you can read again what I have just written, if you wish to know what I understand of the meaning of that secret which Christ brought, a secret which was not revealed to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his consecrated apostles and prophets by the work of the Spirit. The secret is that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the same body, fellow-sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ, through the good news of which I was made a servant through the free gift of the grace of God, which was given to me according to the working of his power.

When Paul wrote this letter he was in prison in Rome awaiting trial before Nero, waiting for the Jewish prosecutors to come with their bleak faces and their envenomed hatred and their malicious charges. In prison Paul had certain privileges, for he was allowed to stay in a house which he himself had rented and his friends were allowed access to him; but night and day he was still a prisoner chained to the wrist of the Roman soldier who was his guard and whose duty it was to see that Paul would never escape.

In these circumstances Paul calls himself "the prisoner of Christ." Here is another vivid instance of the fact that the Christian has always a double life and a double address. Any ordinary person would have said that Paul was the prisoner of the Roman government; and so he was. But Paul never thought of himself as the prisoner of Rome; he always thought of himself as the prisoner of Christ.

One's point of view makes all the difference in the world. There is a famous story of the days when Sir Christopher Wren was building St. Paul's Cathedral. On one occasion he was making a tour of the work in progress. He came upon a man at work and asked him: "What are you doing?" The man said: "I am cutting this stone to a certain size and shape." He came to a second man and asked him what he was doing. The man said: "I am earning so much money at my work." He came to a third man at work and asked him what he was doing. The man paused for a moment, straightened himself and answered: "I am helping Sir Christopher Wren build St. Paul's Cathedral."

If a man is in prison for some great cause he may either grumblingly regard himself as an ill-used creature, or he may radiantly regard himself as the standard-bearer of some great cause. The one regards his prison as a penance; the other regards it as a privilege. When we are undergoing hardship, unpopularity, material loss for the sake of Christian principles we may either regard ourselves as the victims of men or as the champions of Christ. Paul is our example; he regarded himself, not as the prisoner of Nero, but as the prisoner of Christ.

In this section Paul returns to the thought which is at the very heart of this letter. Into his life had come the revelation of the great secret of God. That secret was that the love and mercy and grace of God were meant not for the Jews alone but for all mankind. When Paul had met Christ on the

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Ephesians 3:1-7

Damascus road there had come to him a sudden flash of revelation. It was to the Gentiles that God had sent him "to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and a place among who are sanctified by faith in me" (Ac.26:18).

This was a completely new discovery. The basic sin of the ancient world was contempt. The Jews despised the Gentiles as worthless in the sight of God. At worst they existed only to be annihilated, "The nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste" (Isa.60:12). At best they existed to be the slaves of Israel; "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours; they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over and they shall fall down unto thee" (Isa.45:14).

To minds which could think like that it was incredible that the grace and the glory of God were for the Gentiles. The Greek despised the barbarians--and to the Greek all other nations were barbarians. As Celsus said when he was attacking the Christians, "the barbarians may have some gift for discovering truth, but it takes a Greek to understand."

This racial contempt did not end with the ancient world. In the sixteenth century Complaynt o Scotland, it is written: "Euere nation reputis vthers nations to be barbarianes, quhen there twa natours and complexions ar contrar till vtheris." In the Mercantile Marine Magazine of 1858 there is a recommendation to the effect that the term barbarian should not be applied to British subjects in Chinese official documents. (These two illustrations are taken from *The Stranger at the Gate*, by T. J. Haarhoff.)

But in the ancient world the barriers were complete. No one had ever dreamed that God's privileges were for all people. It was Paul who made that discovery. That is why he is so tremendously important--for, had there been no Paul it is conceivable that there would have been no world-wide Christianity and that we would not be Christians today.

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Ephesians 3:1-7

THE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF PAUL

Ephesians 3:1-7 (Part 2)

When Paul thought of this secret which had been revealed to him, he thought of himself in certain ways.

(i) He regarded himself as the recipient of a new revelation. Paul never thought of himself as having discovered the universal love of God; he thought of God having revealed it to him. There is a sense in which truth and beauty are always given by God.

It is told that once Sir. Arthur Sullivan was at a performance of H.M.S. Pinafore. When that lovely duet "Ah! Leave me not to pine alone" had been sung, Sullivan turned to the friend sitting beside him and said, "Did I really write that?"

One of the great examples of poetical music of words is Coleridge's Kubla Khan. Coleridge fell asleep reading a book in which were the words: "Here Kubla Khan commanded a place to be built and a stately garden thereunto." He dreamed the poem and when he awoke he had nothing to do but write it down.

When a scientist makes a great discovery, over and over again what happens is that he thinks and thinks, and experiments and experiments; and comes to a dead end. Then quite suddenly the solution to his problem flashes upon him. It is given to him--by God.

Paul would never have claimed to be the first man to discover the universality of the love of God; he would have said that God told him the secret which had not been previously revealed to any man.

(ii) He regarded himself as the transmitter of grace. When Paul meets the leaders of the Church to talk over with them his mission to the Gentiles, he talks about the gospel of the uncircumcision being committed to him and of "the grace that was given to me" (Gal.2:7,9): When he writes to the Romans, he speaks of "the grace given me by God" (Rom.15:15). Paul saw his task as that of being a channel of God's grace to men. It is one of the great facts of the Christian life that we have been given the precious things of Christianity in order to share them with others. It is one of the great warnings of the Christian life that if we keep them to ourselves we lose them.

(iii) He regarded himself as having the dignity of service. Paul says that he was made a servant by the free gift of the grace of God. He did not think of his service as a wearisome duty but as a radiant privilege. It is often astonishingly difficult to persuade people to serve the Church. To teach for God, to sing for God, to administer affairs for God, to speak for God, to visit those in poverty and distress for God, to give of our time and our talent and our substance for God, should not be counted a duty to be coerced out of us; it is a privilege which we should be glad to accept.

(iv) Paul regarded himself as a sufferer for Christ. He did not expect the way of service to be easy; he did not expect the way of loyalty to be trouble-free. Unamuno, the great Spanish mystic,

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Ephesians 3:1-7

used to say, "May God deny you peace, and give you glory." F. R. Maltby used to say that Jesus promised his disciples three things--that "they would be absurdly happy, completely fearless, and in constant trouble." When the knights of chivalry came to the court of King Arthur and to the society of the Round Table, they came asking for dangers to face and dragons to conquer. To suffer for Christ is not a penalty; it is our glory, for it is to share in the sufferings of Christ himself and an opportunity to demonstrate the reality of our loyalty to him.

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Ephesians 3:8-13

THE PRIVILEGE WHICH MAKES A MAN HUMBLE

Ephesians 3:8-13 (Part 1)

It is to me, who am less than the least of all God's consecrated people. that this privilege has been given the privilege of preaching to the Gentiles the wealth of Christ, the full story of which no man can ever tell; the privilege of enlightening all men as to what is the meaning of that secret, which was hidden from all eternity, in the God who created all things. it was kept secret up till now in order that now the many-coloured wisdom of God should be made known through the Church to the rulers and powers in the heavenly places; and all this happened and will happen in accordance with the eternal design which he purposed in Jesus Christ, through whom we have a free and confident approach to him through faith in him. I therefore pray that you will not lose heart because of my afflictions on your behalf. for these afflictions are your glory.

Paul saw himself as a man who had been given a double privilege. He had been given the privilege of discovering the secret that it was God's will that all men should be gathered into his love. And he had been given the privilege of making this secret known to the Church and of being the instrument by which God's grace went out to the Gentiles. But that consciousness of privilege did not make Paul proud; it made him intensely humble. He was amazed that this great privilege had been given to him who, as he saw it, was less than the least of God's people.

If ever we are privileged to preach or to teach the message of the love of God or to do anything for Jesus Christ, we must always remember that our greatness lies not in ourselves but in our task and in our message. Toscanini was one of the greatest orchestral conductors in the world. Once when he was talking to an orchestra when he was preparing to play one of Beethoven's symphonies with them he said: "Gentlemen, I am nothing; you are nothing; Beethoven is everything." He knew well that his duty was not to draw attention to himself or to his orchestra but to obliterate himself and his orchestra and let Beethoven flow through.

Leslie Weatherhead tells of a talk he had with a public schoolboy who had decided to enter the ministry of the Church. He asked him when he had come to his decision, and the lad said he had been moved to make it after a certain service in the school chapel. Weatherhead very naturally asked who the preacher had been, and the lad answered that he had no idea; he only knew that Jesus Christ had spoken to him that morning. That was true preaching.

The tragic fact is that there are so many who are more concerned with their own prestige than with the prestige of Jesus Christ; and who are more concerned that they should be noticed than that Christ should be seen.

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Ephesians 3:8-13

THE PLAN AND THE WISDOM OF GOD

Ephesians 3:8-13 (Part 2)

There are still other things in this passage which we must note.

(i) Paul reminds us that the ingathering of all men was part of the eternal purpose of God. That is something which we would do well to remember. Sometimes the history of Christianity can be presented in such a way that it sounds as if the gospel went out to the Gentiles only because the Jews would not receive it. Paul here reminds us that the salvation of the Gentiles is not an afterthought of God; the bringing of all men into his love was part of God's eternal design.

(ii) Paul uses a great word to describe the grace of God. He calls it *polupoikilos* (GSN4182), which means many-coloured. The idea in this word is that the grace of God will match with any situation which life may bring to us. There is nothing of light or of dark, of sunshine or of shadow, for which it is not triumphantly adequate.

(iii) Again Paul returns to one of his favourite thoughts. In Jesus we have a free approach to God. It sometimes happens that a friend of ours knows some very distinguished person. We ourselves would never have any right to enter into that person's presence; but in our friend's company we have the right of entry. That is what Jesus does for us with God. In his presence there is an open door to God's presence.

(iv) Paul finishes with a prayer that his friends may not be discouraged by his imprisonment. Perhaps they might think that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles will be greatly hindered because the champion of the Gentiles is in prison. Paul reminds them that the afflictions through which he is going are for their good.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 3:14-21

PAUL'S EARNEST PRAYER

Ephesians 3:14-21

It is for this cause that I bow my knees in prayer before the Father, of whose fatherhood all heavenly and earthly fatherhood is a copy, that, according to the wealth of his glory, he may grant to you to be strengthened in the inner man, so that Christ through faith may take up his permanent residence in your hearts. I pray that you may have your root and your foundation in love, so that, with all God's consecrated people, you may have the strength fully to grasp the meaning of the breadth and length and depth and height of Christ's love, and to know the love of Christ which is beyond all knowledge, that you may be filled until you reach the fullness of God himself.

To him that is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power which works in us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen.

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Ephesians 3:14-17

THE GOD WHO IS FATHER

Ephesians 3:14-17 (Part 1)

It is for this cause that I bow my knees in prayer before the Father, of whose fatherhood all heavenly and earthly fatherhood is a copy, that, according to the wealth of his glory, he may grant to you to be strengthened in the inner man. so that Christ through faith may take up his permanent residence in your hearts.

It is here that Paul begins again the sentence which he began in Eph.3:1 and from which he was deflected. It is for this cause begins Paul. What is the cause which makes him pray? We are back again at the basic idea of the letter. Paul has painted his great picture of the Church. This world is a disintegrated chaos; there is division everywhere, between nation and nation, between man and man, within a man's inner life. It is God's design that all the discordant elements should be brought into one in Jesus Christ. But that cannot be done unless the Church carries the message of Christ and of the love of God to every man. It is for that cause that Paul prays. He is praying that the people within the Church may be such that the whole Church will be the body of Christ.

We must note the word used for Paul's attitude in prayer. "I bow my knees," he says, "in prayer to God." That means even more than that he kneels; it means that he prostrates himself. The ordinary Jewish attitude of prayer was standing, with the hands stretched out and the palms upwards. Paul's prayer for the Church is so intense that he prostrates himself before God in an agony of entreaty.

His prayer is to God the Father. It is interesting to note the different things which Paul says in this letter about God as Father, for from them we get a clearer idea of what was in his mind when he spoke of the fatherhood of God.

(i) God is the Father of Jesus (Eph.1:2-3; Eph.1:17; Eph.6:23). It is not true to say that Jesus was the first person to call God Father. The Greeks called Zeus the father of gods and men; the Romans called their chief god Jupiter, which means Deus Pater, God the Father. But there are two closely interrelated words which have a certain similarity and yet a wide difference in their meaning.

There is paternity. Paternity means fatherhood in the purely physical sense of the term. It can be used of a fatherhood in which the father never even sees the child.

On the other hand there is fatherhood. Fatherhood describes the most intimate relationship of love and of fellowship and of care.

When men used the word father of God before Jesus came, they used it much more in the sense of paternity. They meant that the gods were responsible for the creation of men. There was in the word none of the love and intimacy which Jesus put into it. The centre of the Christian conception of God is that he is like Jesus, that he is as kind, as loving, as merciful as Jesus was. It was always in terms of Jesus that Paul thought of God.

(ii) God is the Father to whom we have access (Eph.2:18; Eph.3:12).

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Ephesians 3:14-17

The essence of the Old Testament is that God was the person to whom access was forbidden. When Manoah, who was to be the father of Samson, realized who his visitor had been, he said: "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (Judg. 13:22). In the Jewish worship of the Temple the Holy of Holies was held to be the dwelling-place of God and into it only the High Priest might enter, and that only on one day of the year. the Day of Atonement.

The centre of Christian belief is the approachability of God. H. L. Gee tells a story. There was a little boy whose father was promoted to the exalted rank of brigadier. When the little lad heard the news, he was silent for a moment, and then said, "Do you think he will mind if I still call him daddy?" The essence of the Christian faith is unrestricted access to the presence of God.

(iii) God is the Father of glory, the glorious Father (Eph. 1:17). Here is the necessary other side of the matter. If we simply spoke about the accessibility of God, it would be easy to sentimentalize the love of God, and that is exactly what some people do. But the Christian faith rejoices in the wonder of the accessibility of God without ever forgetting his holiness and his glory. God welcomes the sinner, but not if he wishes to trade on God's love in order to remain a sinner. God is holy and those who seek his friendship must be holy too.

(iv) God is the Father of all (Eph. 4:6). No man, no Church, no nation has exclusive possession of God; that is the mistake which the Jews made. The fatherhood of God extends to all men, and that means that we must love and respect one another.

(v) God is the Father to whom thanks must be given (Eph. 5:20). The fatherhood of God implies the debt of man. It is wrong to think of God as helping us only in the great moments of life. Because God's gifts come to us so regularly we tend to forget that they are gifts. The Christian should never forget that he owes, not only the salvation of his soul, but also life and breath and all things to God.

(vi) God is the pattern of all true fatherhood. That lays a tremendous responsibility on all human fathers. G. K. Chesterton remembered his father only vaguely but his memories were precious. He tells us that in his childhood he possessed a toy theatre in which all the characters were cut-outs in cardboard. One of them was a man with a golden key. He never could remember what the man with the golden key stood for but in his own mind he always connected his father with him, a man with a golden key opening up all kinds of wonderful things.

We teach our children to call God father, and the only conception of fatherhood they can have is that which we give them. Human fatherhood should be moulded on the fatherhood of God.

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Ephesians 3:14-17

THE STRENGTHENING OF CHRIST

Ephesians 3:14-17 (Part 2)

Paul prays that his people may be strengthened in the inner man. What did he mean? The inner man was a phrase by which the Greeks understood three things.

(a) There was a man's reason. It was Paul's prayer that Jesus Christ should strengthen the reason of his friends. He wanted them to be better able to discern between what was right and what was wrong. He wanted Christ to give them the wisdom which would keep life pure and safe.

(b) There was the conscience. It was Paul's prayer that the conscience of his people should ever become more sensitive. It is possible to disregard conscience so long that in the end it becomes dulled. Paul prayed that Jesus should keep our consciences tender and on the alert.

(c) There was the will. So often we know what is right, and mean to do it, but our will is not strong enough to back our knowledge and to carry out our intentions. As John Drinkwater wrote:

"Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
Grant us the strength to labour as we know,
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,
To strike the blow.

Knowledge we ask not, knowledge Thou hast lent,
But, Lord, the will--there lies our deepest need,
Grant us the power to build, above the high intent,
The deed. the deed!"

The inner man is the reason, the conscience, the will.

The strengthening of the inner man comes when Christ takes up his permanent residence in the man. The word Paul uses for Christ dwelling in our hearts is the Greek *katoikein* (GSN2730) which is the word used for permanent, as opposed to temporary, residence. Henry Lyte wrote as one of the verses of Abide with me:

"Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word,
But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples. Lord,
Familiar, condescending, patient, free,
Come, not to sojourn, but abide with me."

The secret of strength is the presence of Christ within our lives. Christ will gladly come into a man's life--but he will never force his way in. He must await our invitation to bring us his strength.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 3:18-21

THE INFINITE LOVE OF CHRIST

Ephesians 3:18-21

I pray that you may have your root and your foundation in love, so that, with all God's consecrated people, you may have the strength fully to grasp the meaning of the breadth and length and depth and height of Christ's love, and to know the love of Christ which is beyond all knowledge, that you may be filled until you reach the fullness of God himself.

To him that is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power which works in us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul prays that the Christian may be able to grasp the meaning of the breadth, depth, length and height of the love of Christ. It is as if Paul invited us to look at the universe to the limitless sky above, to the limitless horizons on every side, to the depth of the earth and of the seas beneath us, and said, "The love of Christ is as vast as that."

It is not likely that Paul had any more definite thought in his mind than the sheer vastness of the love of Christ. But many people have taken this picture and have read meanings, some of them very beautiful, into it. One ancient commentator sees the Cross as the symbol of this love. The upper arm of the Cross points up; the lower arm points down; and the crossing arms point out to the widest horizons. Jerome said that the love of Christ reaches up to include the holy angels; that it reaches down to include even the evil spirits in hell; that in its length it covers the men who are striving on the upward way; and in its breadth it covers the men who are wandering away from Christ.

If we wish to work this out we might say that in the breadth of its sweep, the love of Christ includes every man of every kind in every age in every world; in the length to which it would go, the love of Christ accepted even the Cross; in its depth it descended to experience even death; in its height, he still loves us in heaven, where he ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb.7:25). No man is outside the love of Christ; no place is out with its reach.

Then Paul comes back again to the thought which dominates this epistle. Where is that love to be experienced? We experience it with all God's consecrated people. That is to say, we find it in the fellowship of the Church. John Wesley's saying was true, "God knows nothing of solitary religion." "No man," he said, "ever went to heaven alone." The Church may have its faults; church members may be very far from what they ought to be; but in the fellowship of the Church we find the love of God.

Paul ends with a doxology and an ascription of praise. God can do for us more than we can dream of, and he does it for us in the Church and in Christ.

Once again, before we leave this chapter, let us think of Paul's glorious picture of the Church. This world is not what it was meant to be; it is torn in sunder by opposing forces and by hatred and

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Ephesians 3:18-21

strife. Nation is against nation, man is against man, class is against class. Within a man's own self the fight rages between the evil and the good. It is God's design that all men and all nations should become one in Christ. To achieve this end Christ needs the Church to go out and tell men of his love and of his mercy. And the Church cannot do that, until its members, joined together in fellowship, experience the limitless love of Christ.

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Ephesians 4:1-10

THE SECOND PART OF THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

With this chapter the second part of the letter begins. In Eph. 1-3 Paul has dealt with the great and eternal truths of the Christian faith, and with the function of the Church in the plan of God. Now he begins to sketch what each member of the Church must be if the Church is to carry out her part in that plan.

Before we begin this chapter, let us again remind ourselves that the central thought of the letter is that Jesus has brought to a disunited world the way to unity. This way is through faith in him and it is the Church's task to proclaim this message to all the world. And now Paul turns to the character the Christian must have if the Church is to fulfil her great task of being Christ's instrument of universal reconciliation between man and man, and man and God within the world.

WORTHY OF OUR CALLING

Ephesians 4:1-10

So then, I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to behave yourselves in a way that is worthy of the calling with which you are called. I urge you to behave with all humility, and gentleness, and patience. I urge you to bear with one another in love. I urge you eagerly to preserve that unity which the Holy Spirit can bring by binding things together in peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called with one hope of your calling. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all. To each one of you grace has been given, as it has been measured out to you by the free gift of Christ. Therefore scripture says, "He ascended into the height, and brought his captive band of prisoners, and gave gifts to men." (When it says that "he ascended." what else can it mean than that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same person as he who ascended above all the heavens, that he might fill all things with his presence.)

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Ephesians 4:1-3

THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

Ephesians 4:1-3 (Part 1)

So then, I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to behave yourselves in a way that is worthy of the calling with which you are called. I urge you to behave with all humility, and gentleness, and patience. I urge you to bear with one another in love. I urge you eagerly to preserve that unity which the Holy Spirit can bring by binding things together in peace.

When a man enters into any society, he takes upon himself the obligation to live a certain kind of life; and if he fails in that obligation, he hinders the aims of his society and brings discredit on its name. Here Paul paints the picture of the kind of life that a man must live when he enters the fellowship of the Christian Church.

The first three verses shine like jewels. Here we have five of the great basic words of the Christian faith.

(i) First, and foremost, there is humility. The Greek is tapeinophrosune (GSN5012), and this is actually a word which the Christian faith coined. In Greek there is no word for humility which has not some suggestion of meanness attaching to it. Later Basil was to describe it as "the gem casket of all the virtues"; but before Christianity humility was not counted as a virtue at all. The ancient world looked on humility as a thing to be despised.

The Greek had an adjective for humble, which is closely connected with this noun--the adjective tapeinos (GSN5011). A word is always known by the company it keeps and this word keeps ignoble company. It is used in company with the Greek adjectives which mean slavish (andrapodotes, doulikos, doulouprepes), ignoble (agenes), of no repute (adoxos), cringing (chamaizelos, which is the adjective which describes a plant which trails along the ground). In the days before Jesus humility was looked on as a cowering, cringing, servile, ignoble quality; and yet Christianity sets it in the very forefront of the virtues. Whence then comes this Christian humility, and what does it involve

(a) Christian humility comes from self-knowledge. Bernard said of it, "It is the virtue by which a man becomes conscious of his own unworthiness. in consequence of the truest knowledge of himself."

To face oneself is the most humiliating thing in the world. Most of us dramatize ourselves. Somewhere there is a story of a man who before he went to sleep at night dreamed his waking dreams. He would see himself as the hero of some thrilling rescue from the sea or from the flames; he would see himself as an orator holding a vast audience spell-bound; he would see himself walking to the wicket in a Test Match at Lord's and scoring a century; he would see himself in some international football match dazzling the crowd with his skill; always he was the centre of the picture. Most of us are essentially like that. And true humility comes when we face ourselves and see our weakness, our selfishness, our failure in work and in personal relationships and in achievement.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:1-3

(b) Christian humility comes from setting life beside the life of Christ and in the light of the demands of God.

God is perfection and to satisfy perfection is impossible. So long as we compare ourselves with second bests, we may come out of the comparison well. It is when we compare ourselves with perfection that we see our failure. A girl may think herself a very fine pianist until she hears one of the world's outstanding performers. A man may think himself a good golfer until he sees one of the world's masters in action. A man may think himself something of a scholar until he picks up one of the books of the great old scholars of encyclopaedic knowledge. A man may think himself a fine preacher until he listens to one of the princes of the pulpit.

Self-satisfaction depends on the standard with which we compare ourselves. If we compare ourselves with our neighbour, we may well emerge very satisfactorily from the comparison. But the Christian standard is Jesus Christ and the demands of God's perfection--and against that standard there is no room for pride.

(c) There is another way of putting this. R. C. Trench said that humility comes from the constant sense of our own creatureliness. We are in absolute dependence on God. As the hymn has it:

"'Tis Thou preservest me from death
And dangers every hour;
I cannot draw another breath
Unless Thou give me power.
My health, my friends, and parents dear
To me by God are given;
I have not any blessing here
But what is sent from heaven."

We are creatures, and for the creature there can be nothing but humility in the presence of the creator.

Christian humility is based on the sight of self, the vision of Christ, and the realization of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:1-3

THE CHRISTIAN GENTLEMAN

Ephesians 4:1-3 (Part 2)

(ii) The second of the great Christian virtues is what the King James Version calls meekness and what we have translated gentleness. The Greek noun is praotes (GSN4236), the adjective praus (GSN4239), and these are beyond translation by any single English word. Praus has two main lines of meanings.

(a) Aristotle, the great Greek thinker and teacher, has much to say about praotes (GSN4236). It was his custom to define every virtue as the mean between two extremes. On one side there was excess of some quality, on the other defect; and in between there was exactly its right proportion. Aristotle defines praotes (GSN4236) as the mean between being too angry and never being angry at all. The man who is praus (GSN4239) is the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time. To put that in another way, the man who is praus (GSN4239) is the man who is kindled by indignation at the wrongs and the sufferings of others, but is never moved to anger by the wrongs and the insults he himself has to bear. So, then, the man who is (as in the King James Version), meek is the man who is always angry at the right time but never angry at the wrong time.

(b) There is another fact which will illumine the meaning of this word. Praus (GSN4239) is the Greek for an animal which has been trained and domesticated until it is completely under control. Therefore the man who is praus (GSN4239) is the man who has every instinct and every passion under perfect control. It would not be right to say that such a man is entirely self-controlled, for such self-control is beyond human power, but it would be right to say that such a man is God-controlled.

Here then is the second great characteristic of the true member of the Church. He is the man who is so God-controlled that he is always angry at the right time but never angry at the wrong time.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:1-3

THE UNDEFEATABLE PATIENCE

Ephesians 4:1-3 (Part 3)

(iii) The third great quality of the Christian is what the King James Version calls long-suffering. The Greek is makrothumia (GSN3115). This word has two main directions of meaning.

(a) It describes the spirit which will never give in and which, because it endures to the end, will reap the reward. Its meaning can best be seen from the fact that a Jewish writer used it to describe what he called "the Roman persistency which would never make peace under defeat." In their great days the Romans were unconquerable; they might lose a battle, they might even lose a campaign, but they could not conceive of losing a war. In the greatest disaster it never occurred to them to admit defeat. Christian patience is the spirit which never admits defeat, which will not be broken by any misfortune or suffering, by any disappointment or discouragement, but which persists to the end.

(b) But makrothumia (GSN3115) has an even more characteristic meaning than that. It is the characteristic Greek word for patience with men. Chrysostom defined it as the spirit which has the power to take revenge but never does so. Lightfoot defined it as the spirit which refuses to retaliate. To take a very imperfect analogy--it is often possible to see a puppy and a very large dog together. The puppy yaps at the big dog, worries him, bites him, and all the time the big dog, who could annihilate the puppy with one snap of his teeth, bears the puppy's impertinence with a forbearing dignity. Makrothumia (GSN3115) is the spirit which bears insult and injury without bitterness and without complaint. It is the spirit which can suffer unpleasant people with graciousness and fools without irritation.

The thing which best of all gives its meaning is that the New Testament repeatedly uses it of God. Paul asks the impenitent sinner if he despises the patience of God (Rom.2:4). Paul speaks of the perfect patience of Jesus to him (1Tim.1:16). Peter speaks of God's patience waiting in the days of Noah (1Pet.3:20). He says that the forbearance of our Lord is our salvation (2Pet.3:15). If God had been a man, he would long since in sheer irritation have wiped the world out for its disobedience. The Christian must have the patience towards his fellow men which God has shown to him.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:1-3

THE CHRISTIAN LOVE

Ephesians 4:1-3 (Part 4)

(iv) The fourth great Christian quality is love. Christian love was something so new that the Christian writers had to invent a new word for it; or, at least, they had to employ a very unusual Greek word--agape (GSN0026).

In Greek there are four words for love. There is eros (compare GSN2037), which is the love between a man and a maid and which involves sexual passion. There is philia (GSN5373) which is the warm affection which exists between those who are very near and very dear to each other. There is storge (compare GSN0794) which is characteristically the word for family affection. And there is agape (GSN0026), which the King James Version translates sometimes love and sometimes charity.

The real meaning of agape (GSN0026) is unconquerable benevolence. If we regard a person with agape (GSN0026), it means that nothing that he can do will make us seek anything but his highest good. Though he injure us and insult us, we will never feel anything but kindness towards him. That quite clearly means that this Christian love is not an emotional thing. This agape (GSN0026) is a thing, not only of the emotions, but also of the will. It is the ability to retain unconquerable good will to the unlovely and the unlovable, towards those who do not love us, and even towards those whom we do not like. Agape (GSN0026) is that quality of mind and heart which compels a Christian never to feel any bitterness, never to feel any desire for revenge, but always to seek the highest good of every man no matter what he may be.

(v) These four great virtues of the Christian life--humility, gentleness, patience, love--issue in a fifth, peace. It is Paul's advice and urgent request that the people to whom he is writing should eagerly preserve "the sacred oneness" which should characterize the true Church.

Peace may be defined as right relationships between man and man. This oneness, this peace, these right relationships can be preserved only in one way. Every one of the four great Christian virtues depends on the obliteration of self. So long as self is at the centre of things, this oneness can never fully exist. In a society where self predominates, men cannot be other than a disintegrated collection of individualistic and warring units. But when self dies and Christ springs to life within our hearts. then comes the peace, the oneness, which is the great hall-mark of the true Church.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:4-6

THE BASIS OF UNITY

Ephesians 4:4-6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called with one hope of your calling. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.

Paul goes on to set down the basis on which Christian unity is founded.

(i) There is one body. Christ is the head and the Church is the body. No brain can work through a body which is split into fragments. Unless there is a coordinated oneness in the body, the designs of the head are frustrated. The oneness of the Church is essential for the work of Christ. That does not need to be a mechanical oneness of administration and of human organization; but it does need to be a oneness founded on a common love of Christ and of every part for the other.

(ii) There is one Spirit. The word *pneuma* (GSN4151) in Greek means both spirit and breath; it is in fact the usual word for breath. Unless the breath be in the body, the body is dead; and the vitalizing breath of the body of the Church is the Spirit of Christ. There can be no Church without the Spirit; and there can be no receiving of the Spirit without prayerful waiting for him.

(iii) There is one hope in our calling. We are all proceeding towards the same goal. This is the great secret of the unity of Christians. Our methods, our organization, even some of our beliefs may be different; but we are all striving towards the one goal of a world redeemed in Christ.

(iv) There is one Lord. The nearest approach to a creed which the early Church possessed was the short sentence: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Php.2:11). As Paul saw it, it was God's dream that there should come a day when all men would make this confession. The word used for Lord is *kurios* (GSN2962). Its two usages in ordinary Greek show us something of what Paul meant. It was used for master in contra-distinction to servant or slave; and it was the regular designation of the Roman Emperor. Christians are joined together because they are all in the possession and in the service of the one Master and King.

(v) There is one faith. Paul did not mean that there is one creed. Very seldom indeed does the word faith mean a creed in the New Testament. By faith the New Testament nearly always means the complete commitment of the Christian to Jesus Christ. Paul means that all Christians are bound together because they have made a common act of complete surrender to the love of Jesus Christ. They may describe their act of surrender in different terms; but, however they describe it, that surrender is the one thing common to all of them.

(vi) There is one baptism. In the early Church baptism was usually adult baptism, because men and women were coming direct from heathenism into the Christian faith. Therefore, before anything else, baptism was a public confession of faith. There was only one way for a Roman soldier to join the army; he had to take the oath that he would be true for ever to his emperor.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:4-6

Similarly, there was only one way to enter the Christian Church--the way of public confession of Jesus Christ.

(vii) There is one God. See what Paul says about the God in whom we believe.

He is the Father of all; in that phrase is enshrined the love of God. The greatest thing about the Christian God, is not that he is king, not that he is judge, but that he is Father. The Christian idea of God begins in love.

He is above all; in that phrase is enshrined the control of God. No matter what things may look like God is in control. There may be floods; but "The Lord sits enthroned over the flood" (Ps.29:10).

He is through all; in that phrase is enshrined the providence of God. God did not create the world and set it going as a man might wind up a clockwork toy and leave it to run down. God is all through his world, guiding, sustaining, loving.

He is in all; in that phrase is enshrined the presence of God in all life. It may be that Paul took the germ of this idea from, the Stoics. The Stoics believed that God was a fire purer than any earthly fire; and they believed that what gave a man life was that a spark of that fire which was God came and dwelt in his body. It was Paul's belief that in everything there is God.

It is the Christian belief that we live in a God-created, God-controlled, God-sustained, God-filled world.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:7-10

THE GIFTS OF GRACE

Ephesians 4:7-10

To each one of you grace has been given, as it has been measured out to you by the free gift of Christ. Therefore scripture says, "He ascended into the height and brought his captive band of prisoners, and gave gifts to men." (When it says that "he ascended," what else can it mean than that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same person as he who ascended above all the heavens, that he might fill all things with his presence.)

Paul turns to another aspect of his subject. He has been talking about the qualities of the members of Christ's Church; now he is going to talk of their functions in the Church. He begins by laying down what was for him an essential truth--that every good thing a man has is the gift of the grace of Christ.

"And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone."

To make his point about Christ the giver of gifts, Paul quotes, with a very significant difference, from Ps.68:18. This Psalm describes a king's conquering return. He ascends on high; that is to say, he climbs the steep road of Mount Zion into the streets of the Holy City. He brings in his captive band of prisoners; that is to say, he marches through the streets with his prisoners in chains behind him to demonstrate his conquering power. Now comes the difference. The Psalm speaks next about the conqueror receiving gifts. Paul changes it to read, "gave gifts to men."

In the Old Testament the conquering king demanded and received gifts from men: in the New Testament the conqueror Christ offers and gives gifts to men. That is the essential difference between the two Testaments. In the Old Testament a jealous God insists on tribute from men; in the New Testament a loving God pours out his love to men. That indeed is the good news.

Then, as so often, Paul's mind goes off at a word. He has used the word ascended, and that makes him think of Jesus. And it makes him say a very wonderful thing. Jesus descended into this world when he entered it as a man; Jesus ascended from this world when he left it to return to his glory. Paul's great thought is that the Christ who ascended and the Christ who descended are one and the same person. What does that mean? It means that the Christ of glory is the same as the Jesus who trod this earth; still he loves all men; still he seeks the sinner; still he heals the sufferer; still he comforts the sorrowing; still he is the friend of outcast men and women. As the Scottish paraphrase has it:

"Though now ascended up on high,
He bends on earth a brother's eye;
Partaker of the human name,
He knows the frailty of our frame.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:7-10

Our fellow sufferer yet retains
A fellow-feeling of our pains;
And still remembers in the skies
His tears, His agonies and cries.
In every pang that rends the heart
The Man of sorrows has a part:
He sympathizes with our grief,
And to the sufferer sends relief."

The ascended Christ is still the lover of the souls of men.

Still another thought strikes Paul. Jesus ascended up on high. But he did not ascend up on high to leave the world; he ascended up on high to fill the world with his presence. When Jesus was here in the flesh, he could only be in one place at one time; he was under all the limitations of the body; but when he laid this body aside and returned to glory, he was liberated from the limitations of the body and was able then to be everywhere in all the world through his Spirit. To Paul the ascension of Jesus meant not a Christ-deserted but a Christ-filled world.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:11-13

THE OFFICE-BEARERS OF THE CHURCH

Ephesians 4:11-13 (Part 1)

And he gave to the Church some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers. This he did that God's consecrated people should be fully equipped, that the work of service might go on, and that the body of Christ should be built up. And this is to go on until we all arrive at complete unity in faith in and knowledge of God. until we reach perfect manhood, until we reach a stature which can be measured by the fullness of Christ.

There is a special interest in this passage because it gives us a picture of the organization and the administration of the early Church. In the early Church there were three kinds of office-bearers. There were a few whose writ and authority ran throughout the whole Church. There were many whose ministry was not confined to one place but who carried out a wandering ministry, going wherever the Spirit moved them. There were some whose ministry was a local ministry confined to the one congregation and the one place.

(i) The apostles were those whose authority ran throughout the whole Church. The apostles included more than the Twelve. Barnabas was an apostle (Ac.14:4, Ac.14:14). James, the brother of our Lord, was an apostle (1Cor.15:7; Gal.1:19). Silvanus was an apostle (1Th.2:6). Andronicus and Junias were apostles (Rom.16:7).

For an apostle there were two great qualifications. First, he must have seen Jesus. When Paul is claiming his own rights in face of the opposition of Corinth, he demands: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1Cor.9:1). Second, an apostle had to be a witness of the Resurrection and of the Risen Lord. When the eleven met to elect a successor to Judas the traitor, he had to be one who had companied with them throughout the earthly life of Jesus and a witness of the Resurrection (Ac.1:21-22).

In a sense the apostles were bound to die out, because before so very long those who had actually seen Jesus and who had actually witnessed the Resurrection, would pass from this world. But, in another and still greater sense, the qualification remains. He who would teach Christ must know Christ; and he who would bring the power of Christ to others must have experienced Christ's risen power.

(ii) There were the prophets. The prophets did not so much fore-tell the future as forth-tell the will of God. In forth-telling the will of God, they necessarily to some extent fore-told the future, because they announced the consequences which would follow if men disobeyed that will.

The prophets were wanderers throughout the Church. Their message was held to be not the result of thought and study but the direct result of the Holy Spirit. They had no homes and no families and no means of support. They went from church to church proclaiming the will of God as God had told it to them.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:11-13

The prophets before long vanished from the Church. There were three reasons why they did so.

(a) In times of persecution the prophets were the first to suffer; They had no means of concealment and were the first to die for the faith. (b) The prophets became a problem. As the Church grew local organization developed. Each congregation began to grow into an organization which had its permanent minister and its local administration. Before long the settled ministry began to resent the intrusion of these wandering prophets, who often disturbed their congregations. The inevitable result was that bit by bit the prophets faded out. (c) The office of prophet was singularly liable to abuse. These prophetic wanderers had considerable prestige. Some of them abused their office and made it an excuse for living a very comfortable life at the expense of the congregations whom they visited. The earliest book of church administration is the Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, which dates back to just after A.D.

100. In it both the prestige and the suspicion of the prophets is clearly seen. The order for the sacrament is given and the prayers to be used are set out; and then comes the instruction that the prophet is to be allowed to celebrate the sacrament as he will. But there are certain other regulations. It is laid down that a wandering prophet may stay one or two days with a congregation, but if he wishes to stay three days he is a false prophet; it is laid down that if any wandering prophet in a moment of alleged inspiration demands money or a meal, he is a false prophet.

(iii) There were the evangelists. The evangelists, too, were wanderers. They corresponded to what we would call missionaries. Paul writes to Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist" (2Tim.4:5). They were the bringers of the good news. They had not the prestige and authority of the apostles who had seen the Lord; they had not the influence of the Spirit-inspired prophets; they were the rank and file missionaries of the Church who took the good news to a world which had never heard it.

(iv) There were the pastors and teachers. It would seem that this double phrase describes one set of people. In one sense they had the most important task in the whole Church: They were not wanderers but were settled and permanent in the work of one congregation. They had a triple function.

(a) They were teachers. In the early Church there were few books. Printing was not to be invented for almost another fourteen hundred years. Every book had to be written by hand and a book the size of the New Testament would cost as much as a whole year's wages for a working man. That meant that the story of Jesus had mainly to be transmitted by word of mouth. The story of Jesus was told long before it was written down; and these teachers had the tremendous responsibility of being the repositories of the gospel story. It was their function to know and to pass on the story of the life of Jesus.

(b) The people who came into the Church were coming straight from heathenism; they knew literally nothing about Christianity, except that Jesus Christ had laid hold upon their hearts. Therefore these teachers had to open out the Christian faith to them. They had to explain the great doctrines of the Christian faith. It is to them that we owe it that the Christian faith remained pure and was not distorted as it was handed down.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:11-13

(c) These teachers were also pastors. Pastor is the Latin word for a shepherd. At this time the Christian Church was no more than a little island in a sea of paganism. The people who came into it were only one remove from their heathen lives; they were in constant danger of relapsing into heathenism; and the duty of the pastor was to shepherd his flock and keep them safe.

The word is an ancient and an honourable one. As far back as Homeric times Agamemnon the king was called the Shepherd of the People. Jesus had called himself the Good Shepherd (Jn.10:11,14). The writer to the Hebrews called Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep (Heb.13:20). Peter called Jesus the shepherd of men's souls (1Pet.2:25). He called him the Chief Shepherd (1Pet.5:4). Jesus had commanded Peter to tend his sheep (Jn.21:16). Paul had warned the elders of Ephesus that they must guard the flock whom God had committed to their care (Ac.20:28). Peter had exhorted the elders to tend the flock of God (1Pet.5:2).

The picture of the shepherd is indelibly written on the New Testament. He was the man who cared for the flock and led the sheep into safe places; he was the man who sought the sheep when they wandered away and, if need be, died to save them. The shepherd of the flock of God is the man who bears God's people on his heart, who feeds them with the truth, who seeks them when they stray away, and who defends them from all that would hurt their faith. And the duty is laid on every Christian that he should be a shepherd to all his brethren.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:11-13

THE AIM OF THE OFFICE-BEARER

Ephesians 4:11-13 (Part 2)

After Paul has named the different kinds of office-bearers within the Church, he goes on to speak of their aim and of what they must try to do.

Their aim is that the members of the Church should be fully equipped. The word Paul uses for equipped is interesting. It is *katartismos* (GSN2677), which comes from the verb *katartizein* (GSN2675). The word is used in surgery for setting a broken limb or for putting a joint back into its place. In politics it is used for bringing together opposing factions so that government can go on. In the New Testament it is used of mending nets (Mk.1:19), and of disciplining an offender until he is fit to take his place again within the fellowship of the Church (Gal.6:1). The basic idea of the word is that of putting a thing into the condition in which it ought to be. It is the function of the office-bearers of the Church to see that the members of the Church are so educated, so guided, so cared for, so sought out when they go astray, that they become what they ought to be.

Their aim is that the work of service may go on. The word used for service is *diakonia* (GSN1248); and the main idea which lies behind this word is that of practical service. The office-bearer is not to be a man who simply talks on matters of theology and of Church law; he is in office to see that practical service of God's poor and lonely people goes on.

Their aim is to see to it that the body of Christ is built up. Always the work of the office-bearer is construction, not destruction. His aim is never to make trouble, but always to see that trouble does not rear its head; always to strengthen, and never to loosen, the fabric of the Church.

The office-bearer has even greater aims. These may be said to be his immediate aims; but beyond them he has still greater aims.

His aim is that the members of the Church should arrive at perfect unity. He must never allow parties to form in the Church nor do anything which would cause differences in it. By precept and example he must seek to draw the members of the Church into a closer unity every day.

His aim is that the members of the Church should reach perfect manhood. The Church can never be content that her members should live decent, respectable lives; her aim must be that they should be examples of perfect Christian manhood and womanhood.

So Paul ends with an aim without peer. The aim of the Church is that her members should reach a stature which can be measured by the fullness of Christ. The aim of the Church is nothing less than to produce men and women who have in them the reflection of Jesus Christ himself. During the Crimean War Florence Nightingale was passing one night down a hospital ward. She paused to bend over the bed of a sorely wounded soldier. As she looked down, the wounded lad looked up and said: "You're Christ to me." A saint has been defined as "someone in whom Christ lives again." That is what the true Church member ought to be.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:14-16

GROWING INTO CHRIST

Ephesians 4:14-16

All this must be done so that we should no longer be infants in the faith, wave-tossed and blown hither and thither by every wind of teaching, by the clever trickery of men, by cunning cleverness designed to make us take a wandering way. Instead of that it is all designed to make us cherish the truth in love, and to make us grow in all things into him who is the head--it is Christ I mean. It is from Christ that the whole body is fitted and united together, by means of all the joints which supply its needs, according as each part performs the share of the task allotted to it. It is from him that the body grows and builds itself up in love.

In every Church there are certain members who must be protected. There are those who are like children, they are dominated by a desire for novelty and the mercy of the latest fashion in religion. It is the lesson of history that popular fashions in religion come and go but the Church continues for ever. The solid food of religion is always to be found within the Church.

In every Church there are certain people who have to be guarded against. Paul speaks of the clever trickery of men; the word he uses (kubēia, GSN2940) means skill in manipulating the dice. There are always those who by ingenious arguments seek to lure people away from their faith. It is one of the characteristics of our age that people talk about religion more than they have done for many years; and the Christian, especially the young Christian, has often to meet the clever arguments of those who are against the Church and against God.

There is only one way to avoid being blown about by the latest religious fashion and to avoid being seduced by the specious arguments of clever men, and that is by continual growth into Christ.

Paul uses still another picture. He says that a body is only healthy and efficient when every part is thoroughly coordinated. Paul says that the Church is like that; and the Church can be like that only when Christ is really the head and when every member is moving under his control, just as every part of a healthy body is obedient to the brain.

The only thing which can keep the individual Christian solid in the faith and secure against seduction, the only thing which can keep the Church healthy and efficient, is an intimate connection with Jesus Christ who is the head and the directing mind of the body.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:17-24

THE THINGS WHICH MUST BE ABANDONED

Ephesians 4:17-24

I say this and I solemnly lay it upon you in the Lord--you must no longer live the kind of life the Gentiles live, for their minds are concerned with empty things; their understandings are darkened; they are strangers from the life God gives, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the petrifying of their hearts. They have come to a stage when they are past feeling, and in their shameless wantonness they have abandoned themselves to every kind of unclean conduct in the insatiable lust of their desires. But that is not the way that you have learned Christ, if indeed you have really listened to him, and have been taught in him, as the true teaching in Jesus is. You must stop living in your former way of life. You must put off your old manhood, which is perishing, as deceitful desires are bound to make it do. You must be renewed in the spirit of your minds. You must put on the new manhood, created after God's pattern, in righteousness and in true holiness.

Paul appeals to his converts to leave their old way of life and to turn to Christ's. In this passage he picks out what he considers the essential characteristics of heathen life. The heathen are concerned with empty things which do not matter; their minds are darkened because of their ignorance. Then comes the salient word; their hearts are petrified.

The word which Paul uses for the petrifying of their hearts is grim and terrible. It is porosis (GSN4457). Porosis comes from poros, which originally meant a stone that was harder than marble. It came to have certain medical uses. It was used for the chalk stone which can form in the joints and completely paralyse action. It was used of the callus that forms where a bone has been broken and re-set, a callus which is harder than the bone itself. Finally the word came to mean the loss of all power of sensation; it described something which had become so hardened, so petrified that it had no power to feel at all.

That is what Paul says the heathen life is like. It has become so hardened that it has lost the power of feeling. In the Epistle to a Young Friend, Robert Burns wrote about sin:

"I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard of concealing:
But och! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling!"

The terror of sin is its petrifying effect. The process of sin is quite discernible. No man becomes a great sinner all at once. At first he regards sin with horror. When he sins, there enters into his heart remorse and regret. But if he continues to sin there comes a time when he loses all sensation and can do the most shameful things without any feeling at all. His conscience is petrified.

Paul uses two other terrible Greek words to describe the heathen way of life. He says that they have abandoned themselves to every kind of unclean conduct in the insatiable lust of their desires; and that they have done so in their shameless wantonness.

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Ephesians 4:17-24

The word for shameless wantonness is aselgeia (GSN0766). It is defined by Plato as "impudence"; and by another writer as "preparedness for every pleasure." It is defined by Basil as "a disposition of the soul incapable of bearing the pain of discipline." The great characteristic of aselgeia (GSN0766) is this--the bad man usually tries to hide his sin; but the man who has aselgeia (GSN0766) in his soul does not care how much he shocks public opinion so long as he can gratify his desires. Sin can get such a grip of a man that he is lost to decency and shame. He is like a drug taker who first takes the drug in secret, but comes to a stage when he openly pleads for the drug on which he has become dependent. A man can become such a slave of liquor that he does not care who sees him drunk. A man can let his sexual desires so master him that he does not care who sees him satisfy them.

The Christless man does all this in the insatiable lust of his desires. The word is pleonexia (GSN4124), another terrible word, which the Greeks defined as "arrogant greediness," as "the accursed love of possessing," as "the unlawful desire for the things which belong to others." It has been defined as the spirit in which a man is always ready to sacrifice his neighbour to his own desires. Pleonexia (GSN4124) is the irresistible desire to have what we have no right to possess. It might issue in the theft of material things; it might issue in the spirit which tramples on other people to get its own way; it might issue in sexual sin.

In the heathen world, Paul saw three terrible things. He saw men's hearts so petrified that they were not even aware that they were sinning; he saw men so dominated by sin that shame was lost and decency forgotten; he saw men so much at the mercy of their desires that they did not care whose life they injured and whose innocence they destroyed so long as these desires were satisfied. These are exactly the sins of the Christless world today, sins that can be seen invading life at every point and stalking the streets of every great city.

Paul urges his converts to have done with that kind of life. He uses a vivid way of speaking. He says: "Put off your old way of life as you would put off an old suit of clothes; clothe yourself in a new way; put off your sins, and put on the righteousness and the holiness which God can give you."

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:25-32

THINGS WHICH MUST BE BANISHED FROM LIFE

Ephesians 4:25-32 (Part 1)

So then strip yourselves of falsehood, and let each of you speak the truth with his neighbour, because we are all members of the same body. Be angry--but be angry in such a way that your anger is not a sin. Do not let the sun set on your wrath, and do not give the devil any opportunity. Let him who was a thief steal no more; rather let him take to hard work, and to producing good with his hands, in order that he may be able to share with the man who is in need. Do not allow any foul word to issue from your mouth; but let your words be good, designed for necessary edification, that they may bring benefit to those who hear them. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you are sealed until the day of your redemption comes. Let all bitterness, all outbreaks of passion, all long-lived anger, all loud talking, all insulting language be removed from you with all evil. Show yourselves kind to one another, merciful, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul has just been saying that when a man becomes a Christian, he must put off his old life as a man puts off a coat for which he has no further use. Here he speaks of the things which must be banished from the Christian life.

(i) There must be no more falsehood. There is more than one kind of lie in this world.

There is the lie of speech, sometimes deliberate and sometimes almost unconscious. Dr. Johnson has an interesting bit of advice in regard to the bringing up of children. "Accustom your children constantly to this (the telling of the truth); if a thing happened at one window, and they, when relating it, say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them; you do not know where deviation from truth will end.... It is more from carelessness about truth than from intentional lying, that there is so much falsehood in the world." Truth demands a deliberate effort.

There is also the lie of silence, and maybe it is even commoner. Andre Maurois, in a memorable phrase, speaks of "the menace of things unsaid." It may be that in some discussion a man by his silence gives approval to some course of action which he knows is wrong. It may be that a man withholds warning or rebuke when he knows quite well he should have given it.

Paul gives the reason for telling the truth. It is because we are all members of the same body. We can live in safety only because the senses and the nerves pass true messages to the brain. If they took to passing false messages, if, for instance, they told the brain that something was cool and touchable when in fact it was hot and burning, life would very soon come to an end. A body can function healthily only when each part of it passes true messages to the brain. If then we are all bound into one body, that body can function properly only when we speak the truth.

(ii) There must be anger in the Christian life, but it must be the right kind of anger. Bad temper and irritability are without defence; but there is an anger without which the world would be a poorer place. The world would have lost much without the blazing anger of Wilberforce against the slave trade or of Shaftesbury against the labour conditions of the nineteenth century.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:25-32

There was a certain rugged bluntness about Dr. Johnson. When he thought a thing was wrong, he said so with force. When he was about to publish the Tour to the Hebrides, Hannah More asked him to mitigate some of its asperities. She tells that his answer was that "he would not cut off his claws, nor make his tiger a cat, to please anybody." There is a place for the tiger in life; and when the tiger becomes a tabby cat, something is lost.

There were times when Jesus was terribly and majestically angry. He was angry when the scribes and Pharisees were watching to see if he would heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day (Mk.3:5). It was not their criticism of himself at which he was angry; he was angry that their rigid orthodoxy desired to impose unnecessary suffering on a fellow creature. He was angry when he made a whip and drove the changers of money and the sellers of victims from the Temple courts (Jn.2:13-17).

F. W. Robertson of Brighton tells in one of his letters that he bit his lips until they bled when he met on the street a certain man whom he knew to be luring a pure young girl to destruction. John Wesley said: "Give me a hundred men who fear nothing but God, and who hate nothing but sin, and who know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, and I will shake the world."

The anger which is selfish and uncontrolled is a sinful and hurtful thing, which must be banished from the Christian life. But the selfless anger which is disciplined into the service of Christ and of our fellow men is one of the great dynamic forces of the world.

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Ephesians 4:25-32

THINGS WHICH MUST BE BANISHED FROM LIFE

Ephesians 4:25-32 (Part 2)

(iii) Paul goes on to say that the Christian must never let the sun set upon his wrath. Plutarch tells us that the disciples of Pythagoras had a rule of their society, that if, during the day, anger had made them speak insultingly to each other, before the sun set they shook hands and kissed each other and were reconciled. There was a Jewish Rabbi whose prayer it was that he might never go to sleep with any bitter thought against a brother man within his mind.

Paul's advice is sound, because the longer we postpone mending a quarrel, the less likely we are ever to mend it. If there is trouble between us and anyone else, if there is trouble in a Church or a fellowship or any society where men meet, the only way to deal with it is at once. The longer it is left to flourish, the more bitter it will grow. If we have been in the wrong, we must pray to God to give us grace to admit that it was so; and even if we have been right, we must pray to God to give us the graciousness which will enable us to take the first step to put matters right.

Along with this phrase Paul puts another command. The Greek can equally well mean two things. It can mean: "Don't give the devil his opportunity." An unhealed breach is a magnificent opportunity for the devil to sow dissension. Many a time a Church has been torn into factions because two people quarrelled and let the sun set upon their wrath. But there is another meaning which this phrase can have. The word for devil in Greek is diabolos (GSN1228); but diabolos is also the normal Greek for a slanderer. Luther, for instance, took this to mean: "Give the slanderer no place in your life." It may well be that this is the true meaning of what Paul wishes to say. No one in this world can do more damage than the slanderous tale-bearer. As Coleridge wrote in *Christabel*:

"Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth,"

There are reputations murdered over the teacups every day; and when a man sees a tale-bearer coming, he would do well to shut the door in his face.

(iv) The man who was a thief must become an honest workman. This was necessary advice, for in the ancient world thieving was rampant. It was very common in two places, at the docks and above all in the public baths. The public baths were the clubs of the time; and stealing the belongings of the bathers was one of the commonest crimes in any Greek city.

The interesting thing about this saying is the reason Paul gives for being an honest workman. He does not say: "Become an honest workman so that you may support yourself." He says: "Become an honest workman so that you may have something to give away to those who are poorer than yourself." Here is a new idea and a new ideal--that of working in order to give away.

James Agate, tells of a letter from Arnold Bennett, the famous novelist, to a less fortunate writer. Bennett was an ambitious and in many ways a worldly man; but in this letter to a fellow writer

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Ephesians 4:25-32

whom he hardly knew, he says: "I have just been looking at my bankbook; and I find that I have a hundred pounds which I don't need; I am sending you a cheque herewith for that amount."

In modern society no man has overmuch to give away but we do well to remember the Christian ideal is that we work, not to amass things, but to be able, if need be, to give them away.

(v) Paul forbids all foul-mouthed speaking; and then goes on to put the same thing positively. The Christian should be characterized by words which help his fellow men. As Moffatt translates it, Eliphaz the Temanite paid Job a tremendous compliment. "Your words," he said, "have kept men on their feet" (Jb.4:4). Such are the words that every Christian ought to speak.

(vi) Paul urges us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the guide of life. When we act contrary to the counsel of our parents when we are young, we hurt them. Similarly, to act contrary to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is to grieve the Spirit and to hurt the heart of God, the Father, who, through the Spirit, sent his word to us.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 4:25-32

THINGS WHICH MUST BE BANISHED FROM LIFE

Ephesians 4:25-32 (Part 3)

Paul ends this chapter with a list of things which must go from life.

(a) There is bitterness (pikria, GSN4088). The Greeks defined this word as long-standing resentment, as the spirit which refuses to be reconciled. So many of us have a way of nursing our wrath to keep it warm, of brooding over the insults and the injuries which we have received. Every Christian might well pray that God would teach him how to forget.

(b) There are outbreaks of passion (thumos, GSN2372) and long-lived anger (orge, GSN3709). The Greeks defined thumos (GSN2372) as the kind of anger which is like the flame which comes from straw; it quickly blazes up and just as quickly subsides. On the other hand, they described orge as anger which has become habitual. To the Christian the burst of temper and the long-lived anger are both alike forbidden.

(c) There is loud talking and insulting language. A certain famous preacher tells how his wife used to advise him, "In the pulpit, keep your voice down." Whenever, in any discussion or argument, we become aware that our voice is raised, it is time to stop. The Jews spoke about what they called "the sin of insult," and maintained that God does not hold him guiltless who speaks insultingly to his brother man.

Lear said of Cordelia:

"Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman."

It would save a great deal of heartbreak in this world if we simply learned to keep our voices down and if, when we had nothing good to say to a person, we did not say anything at all. The argument which has to be supported in a shout is no argument; and the dispute which has to be conducted in insults is not an argument but a brawl.

So Paul comes to the summing up of his advice. He tells us to be kind (chrestos, GSN5543). The Greeks defined this quality as the disposition of mind which thinks as much of its neighbours affairs as it does of its own. Kindness has learned the secret of looking outwards all the time, and not inwards. He tells us to forgive others as God forgave us. So, in one sentence, Paul lays down the law of personal relationships--that we should treat others as Jesus Christ has treated us.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 5:1-8

THE IMITATION OF GOD

Ephesians 5:1-8 (Part 1)

You must become imitators of God, as well loved children imitate their father. You must live in love, as Christ loved you, and gave himself to God as a sacrifice and an offering, a sacrifice which was the odour of a sweet savour to God. Let no one even mention fornication and unclean living and insatiable desire among you--it does not befit God's consecrated people to talk about things like that. Let no one even mention shameful conduct. Let there be no foolish talking and graceless jesting among you for these things are not fitting for people like you. But rather let your talk be a gracious thanksgiving to God. You know this and you are well aware of it, that no fornicator, no unclean liver, no one who gives rein to insatiate desire--which is idolatry has any share in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words. It is because of these vices that the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. Don't become partners with them.

Paul sets before his Christian people the highest standard in all the world; he tells them they must be imitators of God. Later Clement of Alexandria was to say daringly that the true Christian wise man practises being God. When Paul talked of imitation he was using language which the wise men of Greece could understand. Mimesis, imitation, was a main part in the training of an orator. The teachers of rhetoric declared that the learning of oratory depended on three things--theory, imitation and practice. The main part of their training was the study and the imitation of the masters who had gone before. It is as if Paul said: "If you were to train to be an orator, you would be told to imitate the masters of speech. Since you are training in life, you must imitate the Lord of all good life."

Above all the Christian must imitate the love and the forgiveness of God. Paul uses a typical Old Testament phrase, "odour of a sweet savour," which goes back to a very old idea, as old as sacrifice itself. When a sacrifice was offered on an altar, the odour of the burning meat went up to heaven and the god to whom the sacrifice was offered was supposed to feast upon that odour. A sacrifice which had the odour of a sweet savour was specially pleasing and specially acceptable to the god to whom it was offered.

Paul takes the old phrase which time had hallowed--it occurs almost fifty times in the Old Testament and uses it of the sacrifice that Jesus brought to God. The sacrifice of Jesus was well-pleasing to God.

What was that sacrifice? It was a life of perfect obedience to God and of perfect love to men, an obedience so absolute and a love so infinite that they accepted the Cross. What Paul says is: "Imitate God. And you can do so only by loving men with the same sacrificial love with which Jesus loved them and forgiving them in love as God has done."

Paul goes on to another matter. It has been said that chastity was the one new virtue which Christianity introduced into the world. It is certainly true that the ancient world regarded sexual immorality so lightly that it was no sin at all. It was the expected thing that a man should have a mistress. In places like Corinth the great temples were staffed by hundreds of priestesses who were sacred prostitutes and whose earnings went to the upkeep of the Temple.

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Ephesians 5:1-8

In his speech Pro Caelio Cicero pleads: "If there is anyone who thinks that young men should be absolutely forbidden the love of courtesans, he is indeed extremely severe. I am not able to deny the principle that he states. But he is at variance not only with the licence of what our own age allows but also with the customs and concessions of our ancestors. When indeed was this not done? When did anyone ever find fault with it? When was such permission denied? When was it that that which is now lawful was not lawful?"

The Greeks said that Solon was the first person to allow the introduction of prostitutes into Athens and then the building of brothels; and with the profits of the new trade a new Temple was built to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Nothing could show the Greek point of view better than the fact that they saw nothing wrong in building a temple to the gods with the proceeds of prostitution.

When Paul set this stress on moral purity, he was erecting a standard which the ordinary heathen had never dreamed of. That is why he pleads with them so earnestly and lays down his laws of purity with such stringency. We must remember the kind of society from which these Christian converts had come and the kind of society with which they were encompassed. There is nothing in all history like the moral miracle which Christianity wrought.

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Ephesians 5:1-8

JESTING ABOUT SIN

Ephesians 5:1-8 (Part 2)

We must note two other warnings which Paul gives.

(i) He says that these shameful sins are not even to be talked about. The Persians had a rule, so Herodotus tells us, by which "it was not even allowed to speak such things as it was not allowed to do." To jest about a thing or to make it a frequent subject of conversation is to introduce it into the mind and to bring nearer the actual doing of it. Paul warns that some things are not safe even to talk or to jest about. It is a grim commentary on human nature that many a book and many a play and many a film has had success simply because it dealt with forbidden and ugly things.

(ii) He says that his converts must not allow themselves to be deceived with empty words. What does he mean? There were voices in the ancient world, even in the Christian Church, which taught men to think lightly of bodily sin.

In the ancient world there was a line of thought called Gnosticism. Gnosticism began from the contention that spirit alone is good and that matter is always evil. If that be so, it follows that only spirit is to be valued and that matter must be utterly despised. Now a man is composed of two parts; he is body and spirit. According to this point of view only his spirit matters; his body is of no importance whatsoever. Therefore, some at least of the Gnostics went on to argue, it does not matter what a man does with his body. It will make no difference if he gluts its desires. Bodily and sexual sin were of no importance because they were of the body and not of the spirit.

Christianity met such teaching with the contention that body and soul are equally important. God is the creator of both, Jesus Christ for ever sanctified human flesh by taking it upon himself, the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and Christianity is concerned with the salvation of the whole man, body, soul and spirit.

(iii) That attack came from outside the Church; but an even more dangerous attack came from inside. There were those in the Church who perverted the doctrine of grace.

We hear the undertones of Paul's argument with them in Rom.6. Their argument ran like this. "Do you say that God's grace is the greatest thing in all the world?" "Yes." "Do you say that God's grace is wide enough to cover every sin?" "Yes." "Then let us go on sinning, for God's grace can wipe out every sin. In fact the more we sin the more chances God's grace will get to operate."

Christianity met that argument by insisting that grace was not only a privilege and a gift; it was a responsibility and an obligation. It was true that God's love could and would forgive; but the very fact that God loves us lays on us the obligation to deserve that love as best we can.

The gravest disservice any man can do to a fellow man is to make him think lightly of sin. Paul pleaded with his converts not to be deceived with empty words which took the horror from the idea of sin.

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Ephesians 5:9-14

THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Ephesians 5:9-14

For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. You must behave as children of the light, for the fruit of light consists in all benevolence and righteousness and truth. You must decide what is well-pleasing to the Lord. You must take no share in the barren works of the dark. Rather you must expose them, for it is a shameful thing even to speak about the hidden things which are done in secret by such men. Whatever is exposed to the light is illuminated. And everything which is illuminated becomes light. That is why it says: "Wake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will shine upon you."

Paul saw the heathen life as life in the dark; and the Christian life as life in the light. So vividly does he wish to put this that he does not say the heathen are children of the dark and the Christians children of the light; he says the heathen are dark and the Christians are light. He has certain things to say about the light which Jesus Christ brings to men.

(i) The light produces good fruit. It produces benevolence, righteousness and truth. Benevolence (agathosune, GSN0019) is a certain generosity of spirit. The Greeks themselves defined righteousness (dikaiosune, GSN1343) as "giving to men and to God that which is their due." Truth (aletheia, GSN0225) is not in New Testament thought simply an intellectual thing to be grasped with the mind; it is moral truth, not only something to be known but something to be done. The light which Christ brings makes us useful citizens of this world; it makes us men and women who never fail in duty, human or divine; it makes us strong to do that which we know is true.

(ii) The light enables us to discriminate between that which is well-pleasing and that which is not pleasing to God. It is in the light of Christ that all motives and all actions must be tested. In the bazaars of the east the shops are often simply little covered enclosures with no windows. A man might wish to buy a piece of silk or an article of beaten brass. Before he buys it he takes it out to the street and holds it up to the sun, so that the light might reveal any flaws which happen to be in it. It is the Christian's duty to expose every action, every decision, every motive to the light of Christ.

(iii) The light exposes that which is evil. The best way to rid the world of any evil is to drag it into the light. So long as the thing is being done in secret, it goes on; but when it is taken into the light of day, it dies a natural death. The surest way to cleanse the depths of our own hearts and the practices of any society in which we happen to be involved is to expose them to the light of Christ.

(iv) Finally, Paul says: "Everything which is illuminated becomes light." What he seems to mean is that light has in itself a cleansing quality. In our own generation we know that many a disease has been conquered simply by letting the sunlight in. The light of Christ is like that. We must never think of the light of Christ as only condemnatory; it is a healing thing too.

Paul finishes this passage with a quotation in poetry. In Moffatt's translation it runs:

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 5:9-14

"Wake up, O sleeper, and rise from the dead;
So Christ will shine upon you."

Paul introduces the quotation as if everybody knew it, but no one now knows where it came from. There are certain interesting suggestions.

Almost certainly, being in poetry, it is a fragment of an early Christian hymn. It may well have been part of a baptismal hymn. In the early Church nearly all baptisms were of adults, confessing their faith as they came out of heathenism into Christianity. Perhaps these were the lines which were sung as they arose from the water, to symbolize the passage from the dark sleep of paganism to the awakened life of the Christian way.

Again, it has been suggested that these lines are part of a hymn, which was supposed to give the summons of the archangel when the last trumpet sounded over the earth. Then would be the great awakening when men rose from the sleep of death to receive the eternal life of Christ.

These things are speculations, but it seems certain that when we read these lines, we are reading a fragment of one of the first hymns the Christian Church ever sang.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 5:15-21

THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Ephesians 5:15-21

Be very careful how you live. Do not live like unwise men, but like wise men. Use your time with all economy for these are evil days. That is the reason why you must not be senseless, but you must understand what the will of God is. Do not get drunk with wine--that is profligacy--but be filled with the Spirit. Speak to each other in psalms and hymns and songs the Spirit teaches you. Let the words and the music of your praise to God come from your heart. Give thanks for all things at all times to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be subject to one another because you reverence Christ.

Paul's general appeal finishes with an exhortation to his converts to live like wise men. The times in which they are living are evil; they must rescue as much time as they can from the evil uses of the world.

He goes on to draw a contrast between a pagan gathering and a Christian gathering. The pagan gathering is apt to be a debauch. It is significant that we still use the word symposium for a discussion of a subject by a number of people; the Greek word *sumposion* (GSN4849) literally means a drinking-party. Once A. C. Welch was preaching on this text: "Be filled with the Spirit." He began with one sudden sentence: "You've got to fill a man with something." The heathen found his happiness in filling himself with wine and with worldly pleasures; the Christian found his happiness in being filled with the Spirit.

From this passage we can gather certain facts about the Christian gatherings in the early days.

(i) The early Church was a singing Church. Its characteristic was psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; it had a happiness which made men sing.

(ii) The early Church was a thankful Church. The instinct was to give thanks for all things and in all places and at all times. Chrysostom, great preacher of the Church of a later day, had the curious thought that a Christian could give thanks even for Hell, because Hell was a warning to keep him in the right way. The early Church was a thankful Church because its members were still dazzled with the wonder that God's love had stooped to save them; and it was a thankful Church because its members had such a consciousness that they were in the hands of God.

(iii) The early Church was a Church where men honoured and respected each other. Paul says that the reason for this mutual honour and respect was that they revered Christ. They saw each other not in the light of their professions or social standing but in the light of Christ; and therefore they saw the dignity of every man.

Barclay's Commentary

Ephesians 5:22-33

THE PRECIOUS BOND

Ephesians 5:22-33 (Part 1)

Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord; for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church, though there is this great difference, that Christ is the Saviour of the whole body. But, even allowing for this difference, even as the Church is subject to Christ, so wives must be subject to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for the Church, that by the washing of water he might purify her and consecrate her as she made confession of her faith, that he might make the Church to stand in his presence in all her glory, without any spot which soils, or any wrinkle which disfigures, or any such imperfection, but that she might be consecrated and blameless. So ought husbands to love their wives, to love them as they love their own bodies. He who loves his wife really loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh; rather he nourishes it and cherishes it. So Christ loves the Church because we are parts of his body. For this cause a man will leave his father and his mother and will cleave to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a symbol which is very great--I mean when it is seen as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church. However that may be, let each and every one of you love his wife as he loves himself, and let the wife reverence her husband.

No one reading this passage in the twentieth century can fully realize how great it is. Throughout the years the Christian view of marriage has come to be widely accepted. It still is recognised as the ideal by the majority even in these permissive days. Even where practice has fallen short of that ideal, it has always been in the minds and hearts of men who live in a Christian situation. Marriage is regarded as the perfect union of body, mind and spirit between a man and a woman. But things were very different when Paul wrote. In this passage Paul is setting forth an ideal which shone with a radiant purity in an immoral world.

Let us look briefly at the situation against which Paul wrote this passage.

The Jews had a low view of women. In his morning prayer there was a sentence in which a Jewish man gave thanks that God had not made him "a Gentile, a slave or a woman." In Jewish law a woman was not a person, but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely her husband's possession to do with as he willed.

In theory the Jew had the highest ideal of marriage. The Rabbis had their sayings. "Every Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder or adultery." "The very altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth." But the fact was that by Paul's day, divorce had become tragically easy.

The law of divorce is summarized in Deut.24:1. "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house." Obviously everything turns on the interpretation of some indecency. The stricter Rabbis, headed by the famous Shammai, held that the phrase meant adultery and adultery alone, and declared that even if a wife was as

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Ephesians 5:22-33

mischievous as Jezebel a husband might not divorce her except for adultery. The more liberal Rabbis, headed by the equally famous Hillel, interpreted the phrase in the widest possible way. They said that it meant that a man might divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner by putting too much salt in his food, if she walked in public with her head uncovered, if she talked with men in the streets, if she spoke disrespectfully of her husband's parents in her husband's hearing, if she was a brawling woman, if she was troublesome or quarrelsome. A certain Rabbi Akiba interpreted the phrase if she finds no favour in his eyes to mean that a husband might divorce his wife if he found a woman whom he considered more attractive. It is easy to see which school of thought would predominate.

Two facts in Jewish law made the matter worse. First, the wife had no rights of divorce at all, unless her husband became a leper or an apostate or engaged in a disgusting trade. Broadly speaking, a husband, under Jewish law, could divorce his wife for any cause; a wife could divorce her husband for no cause. Second, the process of divorce was disastrously easy. The Mosaic law said that a man who wished a divorce had to hand his wife a bill of divorcement which said, "Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt." All a man had to do was to hand that bill of divorcement, correctly written out by a Rabbi, to his wife in the presence of two witnesses and the divorce was complete. The only other condition was that the woman's dowry must be returned.

At the time of Christ's coming the marriage bond was in peril even among the Jews, so much so that the very institution of marriage was threatened since Jewish girls were refusing to marry because their position as wife was so uncertain.

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THE PRECIOUS BOND

Ephesians 5:22-33 (Part 2)

The situation was worse in the Greek world. Prostitution was an essential part of Greek life. Demosthenes had laid it down as the accepted rule of life: "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs." The woman of the respectable classes in Greece led a completely secluded life. She took no part in public life; she never appeared on the streets alone; she never even appeared at meals or at social occasions; she had her own apartments and none but her husband might enter into them. It was the aim that, as Xenophon had it, "she might see as little as possible, hear as little as possible and ask as little as possible."

The Greek respectable woman was brought up in such a way that companionship and fellowship in marriage was impossible. Socrates said: "Is there anyone to whom you entrust more serious matters than to your wife--and is there anyone to whom you talk less?" Verus was the imperial colleague of the great Marcus Aurelius. He was blamed by his wife for associating with other women, and his answer was that she must remember that the name of wife was a title of dignity but not of pleasure. The Greek expected his wife to run his home, to care for his legitimate children, but he found his pleasure and his companionship elsewhere.

To make matters worse, there was no legal procedure of divorce in Greece. As someone has put it, divorce was by nothing else than caprice. The one security that the wife had was that her dowry must be returned. Home and family life were near to being extinct and fidelity was completely nonexistent.

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Ephesians 5:22-33

THE PRECIOUS BOND

Ephesians 5:22-33 (Part 3)

In Rome the matter was still worse; its degeneracy was tragic. For the first five hundred years of the Roman Republic there had been not one single case of divorce. The first recorded divorce was that of Spurius Carvilius Ruga in 234 B.C. But at the time of Paul, Roman family life was wrecked. Seneca writes that women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married. In Rome the Romans did not commonly date their years by numbers; they called them by the names of the consuls; Seneca says that women dated the years by the names of their husbands. Martial tells of a woman who had had ten husbands; Juvenal tells of one who had had eight husbands in five years; Jerome declares it to be true that in Rome there was a woman who was married to her twenty-third husband and she herself was his twenty-first wife. We find a Roman Emperor Augustus demanding that her husband should divorce the lady Livia when she was with child that he might himself marry her.

We find even Cicero, in his old age, putting away his wife Terentia that he might marry a young heiress, whose trustee he was, that he might enter into her estate in order to pay his debts.

That is not to say that there was no such thing as fidelity. Suetonius tells of a Roman lady called Mallonia who committed suicide rather than submit to the favours of Tiberius the Emperor. But it is not too much to say that the whole atmosphere was adulterous. The marriage bond was on the way to complete breakdown.

It is against this background that Paul writes. When he wrote this lovely passage he was not stating the view that every man held. He was calling men and women to a new purity and a new fellowship in the married life. It is impossible to exaggerate the cleansing effect that Christianity had on home life in the ancient world and the benefits it brought to women.

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THE GROWTH OF PAUL'S THOUGHT

Ephesians 5:22-33 (Part 4)

In this passage we find Paul's real thought on marriage. There are things which Paul wrote about marriage which puzzle us and may make us wish that he had never written them. The unfortunate thing is that it is these things which are so often quoted as Paul's view of marriage.

One of the strangest chapters is 1Cor.7. He is talking about marriage and about the relationships between men and women. The blunt truth is that Paul's teaching is that marriage is permissible merely in order to avoid something worse. "Because of the temptation to immorality," he writes, "each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1Cor.7:2). He allows that a widow may marry again but it would be better if she remained single (1Cor.7:39-40). He would prefer the unmarried and the widows not to marry. "But if they cannot exercise self control they should marry; for it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1Cor.7:9).

There was a reason why Paul wrote like that. It was because he hourly expected the Second Coming of Jesus. It was therefore his conviction that no one should undertake any earthly ties whatsoever, but that all should concentrate on using the short time which remained in preparing for the coming of their Lord. "The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife" (1Cor.7:32-33).

Between I Corinthians and Ephesians there is a space of perhaps nine years. In these nine years Paul had realized that the Second Coming was not to be so soon as he had thought, that in fact he and his people were living, not in a temporary situation, but in a more or less permanent situation. And it is in Ephesians that we find Paul's true teaching on marriage, that Christian marriage is the most precious relationship in life, whose only parallel is the relationship between Christ and the Church.

It is just possible that the Corinthians passage was coloured by Paul's personal experience. It would seem that in his days as a zealous Jew, he was a member of the Sanhedrin. When he is telling of his conduct towards the Christians, he says: "I cast my vote against them" (Ac.26:10). It would also seem that one of the qualifications for membership of the Sanhedrin was marriage, and that therefore Paul must have been a married man. He never mentions his wife. Why? It may well be that it was because she turned against him when he became a Christian. It may be that when he wrote I Corinthians Paul was speaking out of a situation in which, not only did he expect the immediate coming of Christ, but in which he had also found his own marriage one of his greatest problems and sorest heartbreaks; so that he saw marriage as a handicap for the Christian.

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Ephesians 5:22-33

THE BASIS OF LOVE

Ephesians 5:22-33 (Part 5)

Sometimes the emphasis of this passage is entirely misplaced; and it is read as if its essence was the subordination of wife to husband. The single phrase, "The husband is the head of the wife," is quoted in isolation. But the basis of the passage is not control; it is love. Paul says certain things about the love that a husband must bear his wife.

(i) It must be a sacrificial love. He must love her as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for the Church. It must never be a selfish love. Christ loved the Church, not that the Church might do things for him, but that he might do things for the Church. Chrysostom has a wonderful expansion of this passage: "Hast thou seen the measure of obedience? Hear also the measure of love. Wouldst thou that thy wife shouldst obey thee as the Church doth Christ? Have care thyself for her as Christ for the Church. And if it be needful that thou shouldst give thy life for her, or be cut to pieces a thousand times, or endure anything whatever, refuse it not.... He brought the Church to his feet by his great care, not by threats nor fear nor any such thing; so do thou conduct thyself towards thy wife."

The husband is head of the wife--true, Paul said that; but he also said that the husband must love the wife as Christ loved the Church, with a love which never exercises a tyranny of control but which is ready to make any sacrifice for her good.

(ii) It must be a purifying love. Christ cleansed and consecrated the Church by the washing of water on the day when each member of the Church took his confession of faith. It may well be that Paul has in mind a Greek custom. One of the Greek marriage customs was that before the bride was taken to her marriage she was bathed in the water of a stream sacred to some god or goddess. In Athens, for instance, the bride was bathed in the waters of the Callirhoe, which was sacred to the goddess Athene. It is of baptism that Paul is thinking. By the washing of baptism and by the confession of faith, Christ sought to make for himself a Church, cleansed and consecrated, until there was neither soiling spot nor disfiguring wrinkle upon it. Any love which drags a person down is false. Any love which coarsens instead of refining the character, which necessitates deceit, which weakens the moral fibre, is not love. Real love is the great purifier of life.

(iii) It must be a caring love. A man must love his wife as he loves his own body. Real love loves not to extract service, nor to ensure that its own physical comfort is attended to, it cherishes the one it loves. There is something far wrong when a man regards his wife, consciously or unconsciously, as simply the one who cooks his meals and washes his clothes and cleans his house and trains his children.

(iv) It is an unbreakable love. For the sake of this love a man leaves father and mother and cleaves to his wife. They become one flesh. He is as united to her as the members of the body are united to each other; and would no more think of separating from her than of tearing his own body apart. Here indeed was an ideal in an age when men and women changed partners with as little thought as they changed clothes.

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(v) The whole relationship is in the Lord. In the Christian home Jesus is an ever-remembered, though an unseen, guest. In Christian marriage there are not two partners, but three--and the third is Christ.

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Ephesians 6:1-4

CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Ephesians 6:1-4 (Part 1)

Children, obey your parents as Christian children should. Honour your father and your mother for this is the first commandment to which a promise is attached that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers. do not move your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and the admonition of the Lord.

If the Christian faith did much for women, it did even more for children. In Roman civilization contemporary with Paul there existed certain features which made life perilous for the child.

(i) There was the Roman *patria potestas*, the father's power. Under the *patria potestas* a Roman father had absolute power over his family. He could sell them as slaves, he could make them work in his fields even in chains, he could punish as he liked and could even inflict the death penalty. Further, the power of the Roman father extended over the child's whole life, so long as the father lived. A Roman son never came of age. Even when he was a grown man, even if he were a magistrate of the city, even if the state had crowned him with well-deserved honours. he remained within his father's absolute power. "The great mistake," writes Becker, "consisted in the Roman father considering the power which Nature imposes as a duty on the elders. of guiding and protecting a child during infancy, as extending over his freedom, involving his life and death, and continuing over his entire existence." It is true that the father's power was seldom carried to its limits, because public opinion would not have allowed it, but the fact remains that in the time of Paul the child was absolutely in his father's power.

(ii) There was the custom of child exposure. When a child was born, it was placed before its father's feet, and, if the father stooped and lifted the child, that meant that he acknowledged it and wished it to be kept. If he turned and walked away, it meant that he refused to acknowledge it and the child could quite literally be thrown out.

There is a letter whose date is 1 B.C. from a man called Hilarion to his wife Alis. He has gone to Alexandria and he writes home on domestic affairs:

"Hilarion to Alis his wife heartiest greetings, and to my dear Berous and Apollonarion. Know that we tire still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the little child, and, as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If-- good luck to you!--you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out. You told Aphrodisias to tell me: 'Do not forget me.' How can I forget you? I beg you therefore not to worry."

It is a strange letter, so full of affection and yet so callous towards the child who may be born.

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Ephesians 6:1-4

A Roman baby always ran the risk of being repudiated and exposed. In the time of Paul that risk was even greater. We have seen how the marriage bond had collapsed and how men and women changed their partners with bewildering rapidity. Under such circumstances a child was a misfortune. So few children were born that the Roman government actually passed legislation that the amount of any legacy that a childless couple could receive was limited. Unwanted children were commonly left in the Roman forum. There they became the property of anyone who cared to pick them up. They were collected at nights by people who nourished them in order to sell them as slaves or to stock the brothels of Rome.

(iii) Ancient civilization was merciless to the sickly or deformed child. Seneca writes, "We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown." The child who was a weakling or imperfectly formed had little hope of survival.

It was against this situation that Paul wrote his advice to children and parents. If ever we are asked what good Christianity has done to the world, we need but point to the change effected in the status of women and of children.

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Ephesians 6:1-4

CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Ephesians 6:1-4 (Part 2)

Paul lays on children that they should obey the commandment and honour their parents. He says this is the first commandment. He probably means that it was the first commandment which the Christian child was taught to memorize. The honour Paul demands is not the honour of mere lip service. The way to honour parents is to obey them, to respect them, and never to cause them pain.

Paul sees that there is another side to the question. He tells fathers that they must not provoke their children to wrath. Bengel, considering why this command is so definitely addressed to fathers, says that mothers have a kind of divine patience but "fathers are more liable to be carried away by wrath."

It is a strange thing that Paul repeats this injunction even more fully in Col.3:21. "Fathers," he says, "do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Bengel says that the plague of youth is a "broken spirit," discouraged by continuous criticism and rebuke and too strict discipline. David Smith thinks that Paul wrote out of bitter personal experience. He writes: "There is here a quivering note of personal emotion, and it seems as though the heart of the aged captive had been reverting to the past and recalling the loveless years of his own childhood. Nurtured in the austere atmosphere of traditional orthodoxy, he had experienced scant tenderness and much severity, and had known that `plague of youth, a broken spirit.'"

There are three ways in which we can do injustice to our children.

(i) We can forget that things do change and that the customs of one generation are not the customs of another. Elinor Mordaunt tells how once she stopped her little daughter from doing something by saying, "I was never allowed to do that when I was your age." And the child answered, "But you must remember, mother, that you were then, and I'm now."

(ii) We can exercise such a control that it is an insult to our upbringing of our children. To keep a child too long in leading-strings is simply to say that we do not trust him which is simply to say that we have no confidence in the way in which we have trained him. It is better to make the mistake of too much trust than of too much control.

(iii) We can forget the duty of encouragement. Luther's father was very strict, strict to the point of cruelty. Luther used to say: "Spare the rod and spoil the child--that is true; but beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well." Benjamin West tells how he became a painter. One day his mother went out leaving him in charge of his little sister Sally. In his mother's absence he discovered some bottles of coloured ink and began to paint Sally's portrait. In doing so he made a considerable mess of things with ink blots all over. His mother came back. She saw the mess but said nothing. She picked up the piece of paper and saw the drawing. "Why," she said, "It's Sally!" and she stooped and kissed him. Ever after Benjamin West used to say: "My mother's kiss made me a painter." Encouragement did more than rebuke could ever do. Anna Buchan tells how her grandmother had a favourite phrase even when she was very old: "Never daunton youth."

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Ephesians 6:1-4

As Paul sees it, children must honour their parents and parents must never discourage their children.

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Ephesians 6:5-9

MASTERS AND SLAVES

Ephesians 6:5-9 (Part 1)

Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as you would Christ himself. Do not work only when you are being watched. Do not work only to satisfy men. But work as the slave of Christ, doing God's will heartily. Let your service be given with good-will, as to Christ and not to men. Be well assured that each of us, whether he is slave or free, will be rewarded by the Lord for whatever good we have done. And you masters, act in the same way towards your slaves. Have done with threats. For you well know that they and you have a Master in heaven, and with him there is no respect of persons.

When Paul wrote to slaves in the Christian Church he must have been writing to a very large number.

It has been computed that in the Roman Empire there were 60,000,000 slaves. In Paul's day a kind of terrible idleness had fallen on the citizens of Rome. Rome was the mistress of the world, and therefore it was beneath the dignity of a Roman citizen to work. Practically all work was done by slaves. Even doctors and teachers, even the closest friends of the Emperors, their secretaries who dealt with letters and appeals and finance, were slaves.

Often there were bonds of the deepest loyalty and affection between master and slave. Pliny writes to a friend that he is deeply affected because some of his well-loved slaves have died. He has two consolations, although they are not enough to comfort his grief. "I have always very readily manumitted my slaves (for their death does not seem altogether untimely, if they have lived long enough to receive their freedom); the other, that I have allowed them to make a kind of will, which I observe as rigidly as if it were good in law." There the kindly master speaks.

But basically the life of the slave was grim and terrible. In law he was not a person but a thing. Aristotle lays it down that there can never be friendship between master and slave, for they have nothing in common; "for a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave." Varro, writing on agriculture, divides agricultural instruments into three classes --the articulate, the inarticulate and the mute. The articulate comprises the slaves; the inarticulate the cattle; and the mute the vehicles. The slave is no better than a beast who happens to be able to talk. Cato gives advice to a man taking over a farm. He must go over it and throw out everything that is past its work; and old slaves too must be thrown out on the scrap heap to starve. When a slave is ill it is sheer extravagance to issue him with normal rations.

The law was quite clear. Gaius, the Roman lawyer, in the Institutes lays it down: "We may note that it is universally accepted that the master possesses the power of life and death over the slave." If the slave ran away, at best he was branded on the forehead with the letter F for fugitivus, which means runaway, at worst he was killed. The terror of the slave was that he was absolutely at the caprice of his master. Augustus crucified a slave because he killed a pet quail. Vedio Pollio flung a slave still living to the savage lampreys in his fish pond because he dropped and broke a crystal

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Ephesians 6:5-9

goblet. Juvenal tells of a Roman matron who ordered a slave to be killed for no other reason than that she lost her temper with him.

When her husband protested, she said: "You call a slave a man, do you? He has done no wrong, you say? Be it so; it is my will and my command; let my will be the voucher for the deed." The slaves who were maids to their mistresses often had their hair torn out and their cheeks torn with their mistresses' nails. Juvenal tells of the master "who delights in the sound of a cruel flogging thinking it sweeter than any siren's song," or "who revels in clanking chains," or, "who summons a torturer and brands the slave because a couple of towels are lost." A Roman writer lays it down: "Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought. knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law."

It is against this terrible background that Paul's advice to slaves has to be read.

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Ephesians 6:5-9

MASTERS AND SLAVES

Ephesians 6:5-9 (Part 2)

Paul's advice to slaves provides us with the gospel of the Christian workman.

(i) He does not tell them to rebel; he tells them to be Christian where they are. The great message of Christianity to every man is that it is where God has set us that we must live out the Christian life. The circumstances may be all against us, but that only makes the challenge greater. Christianity does not offer us escape from circumstances; it offers us conquest of circumstances.

(ii) He tells the slaves that work must not be done well only when the overseer's eye is on them, it must be done in the awareness that God's eye is on them. Every single piece of work the Christian produces must be good enough to show to God. The problem that the world has always faced and that it faces acutely today is basically not economic but religious. We will never make men good workmen by bettering conditions or heightening rewards. It is a Christian duty to see to these things; but in themselves they will never produce good work. Still less will we produce good work by increasing oversight and multiplying punishments. The secret of good workmanship is to do it for God.

Paul has a word for the master of men, too. He must remember that although he is master of men, he is still the servant of God. He too must remember that all he does is done in the sight of God. Above all he must remember that the day comes when he and those over whom he is set will stand before God; and then the ranks of the world will no longer be relevant.

The problem of work would be solved if men and masters alike would take their orders from God.

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Ephesians 6:10-20

THE ARMOUR OF GOD

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his strength. Put on the armour of God. so that you may be able to stand against the devices of the devil. It is not with blood and flesh you have to wrestle, but against powers and against authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against malicious spiritual forces in the heavenly places. Because of this you must take the armour of God that you may be able to stand against them in the evil day, and that you may be able to stand fast, after you have done all things which are your duty. Stand with truth as a belt about your waist. Put on righteousness as a breastplate. Have your feet shod with readiness to preach the gospel of peace. In all things take faith as a shield for with it you will be able to quench the flaming darts of the evil one. Put on the helmet of salvation. Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Keep praying in the Spirit at every crisis with every kind of prayer and entreaty to God. To that end be sleepless in your persevering prayer for all God's consecrated people. Pray for me that I may be allowed to speak with open mouth, and boldly to make known the secret of the gospel, for which I am an envoy in a chain. Pray that I may have freedom to declare it, as I ought to speak.

As Paul takes leave of his people he thinks of the greatness of the struggle which lies before them. Undoubtedly life was much more terrifying for the ancient people than it is for us today. They believed implicitly in evil spirits, who filled the air and were determined to work men harm. The words which Paul uses, powers, authorities, world-rulers, are all names for different classes of these evil spirits. To him the whole universe was a battleground. The Christian had not only to contend with the attacks of men; he had to contend with the attacks of spiritual forces which were fighting against God. We may not take Paul's actual language literally; but our experience will tell us that there is an active power of evil in the world.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said: "You know the Caledonian Railway Station in Edinburgh? One cold, east windy morning, I met Satan there." We do not know what actually befell Stevenson but we recognize the experience; we have all felt the force of that evil influence which seeks to make us sin.

Paul suddenly sees a picture ready-made. All this time he was chained by the wrist to a Roman soldier. Night and day a soldier was there to ensure that he would not escape. Paul was literally an envoy in a chain. Now he was the kind of man who could get alongside anyone; and beyond doubt he had talked often to the soldiers who were compelled to be so near him. As he writes, the soldier's armour suggests a picture to him. The Christian too has his armour; and part by part Paul takes the armour of the Roman soldier and translates it into Christian terms.

There is the belt of truth. It was the belt which girt in the soldier's tunic and from which his sword hung and which gave him freedom of movement. Others may guess and grope; the Christian moves freely and quickly because he knows the truth.

There is the breastplate of righteousness. When a man is clothed in righteousness he is impregnable. Words are no defence against accusations but a good life is. Once a man accused Plato of certain crimes. "Well then," said Plato, "we must live in such a way as to prove that his

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Ephesians 6:10-20

accusations are a lie." The only way to meet the accusations against Christianity is to show how good a Christian can be.

There are the sandals. Sandals were the sign of one equipped and ready to move. The sign of the Christian is that he is eager to be on the way to share the gospel with others who have not heard it.

There is the shield. The word Paul uses is not that for the comparatively small round shield; it is that for the great oblong shield which the heavily armed warrior wore. One of the most dangerous weapons in ancient warfare was the fiery dart. It was a dart tipped with tow dipped in pitch. The pitch-soaked tow was set alight and the dart was thrown. The great oblong shield was made of two sections of wood, glued together. When the shield was presented to the dart, the dart sank into the wood and the flame was put out. Faith can deal with the darts of temptation. With Paul, faith is always complete trust in Christ. When we walk close with Christ, we are safe from temptation.

There is salvation for a helmet. Salvation is not something which looks back only. The salvation which is in Christ gives us forgiveness for the sins of the past and strength to conquer sin in the days to come.

There is the sword; and the sword is the word of God. The word of God is at once our weapon of defence against sin and our weapon of attack against the sins of the world. Cromwell's Ironsides fought with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other. We can never win God's battles without God's book.

Finally, Paul comes to the greatest weapon of all--and that is prayer. We note three things that he says about prayer. (a) It must be constant. Our tendency is so often to pray only in the great crises of life; but it is from daily prayer that the Christian will find daily strength. (b) It must be intense. Limp prayer never got a man anywhere. Prayer demands the concentration of every faculty upon God. (c) It must be unselfish. The Jews had a saying, "Let a man unite himself with the community in his prayers." I think that often our prayers are too much for ourselves and too little for others. We must learn to pray as much for others and with others as for ourselves.

Finally, Paul asks for the prayers of his friends for himself. And he asks not for comfort or for peace but that he may yet be allowed to proclaim God's secret, that his love is for all men. We do well to remember that every Christian leader and every Christian preacher needs his people to uphold his hands in prayer.

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Ephesians 6:21-24

THE FINAL BLESSING

Ephesians 6:21-24

Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will provide you with all information, that you too may know how things are going with me, how I do. That is the very reason that I sent him to you, that you may know my affairs and that he may encourage your hearts.

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love the Lord Jesus with a love which defies death.

As we have seen, the letter to the Ephesians was an encyclical letter and the bearer from church to church was Tychicus. Unlike most of his letters, Ephesians gives us no personal information about Paul, except that he was in prison; but Tychicus, as he went from church to church., would tell how Paul was faring and would convey a message of personal encouragement.

Paul finishes with a blessing and in it all the great words come again. The peace which was a man's highest good, the faith which was complete resting in Christ, the grace which was the lovely free gift of God these things Paul calls down from God upon his friends. Above all he prays for love that they may know the love of God, that they may love men as God loves them, and that they may love Jesus Christ with an undying love.

Barclay's Commentary

Introduction to Philippians

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

We are fortunate in one thing in our study of Philippians--there are practically no critical problems involved; for no reputable New Testament critic has ever doubted its genuineness. We can accept Philippians as undoubtedly an authentic letter of Paul.

PHILIPPI

When Paul chose a place wherein to preach the gospel, he always did so with the eye of a strategist. He always chose one which was not only important in itself but was also the key point of a whole area. To this day many of Paul's preaching-centres are still great road centres and railway junctions. Such was Philippi which had at least three great claims to distinction.

(i) In the neighbourhood there were gold and silver mines, which had been worked as far back as the time of the Phoenicians. It is true that by the time of the Christian era they had become exhausted, but they had made Philippi a great commercial centre of the ancient world.

(ii) The city had been founded by Philip, father of Alexander the Great, and it is his name that it bears. It was founded on the site of an ancient city called Krenides, a name which means The Wells or Fountains. Philip had founded Philippi in 368 B.C. because there was no more strategic site in all Europe. There is a range of hills which divides Europe from Asia, east from west and just at Philippi that chain of hills dips into a pass so that the city commanded the road from Europe to Asia, since the road must go through the pass. This was the reason that one of the great battles of history was fought at Philippi; for it was here that Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius, and thereby decided the future of the Roman Empire.

(iii) Not very long after, Philippi attained the dignity of a Roman Colony. The Roman Colonies were amazing institutions. They were not colonies in the sense of being outposts of civilization in unexplored parts of the world. They had begun by having a military significance. It was the custom of Rome to send out parties of veteran soldiers, who had served their time and been granted citizenship, to settle in strategic road centres. Usually these parties consisted of three hundred veterans with their wives and children. These colonies were the focal points of the great Roman road systems which were so engineered that reinforcements could speedily be sent from one colony to another. They were founded to keep the peace and to command the strategic centres in Rome's far-flung Empire. At first they had been founded in Italy; but soon they were scattered throughout the whole Empire, as the Empire grew.

In later days the title of colony was given by the government to any city which it wished to honour for faithful service.

Wherever they were, these colonies were little fragments of Rome and their pride in their Roman citizenship was their dominating characteristic. The Roman language was spoken; Roman dress was worn; Roman customs were observed; their magistrates had Roman titles, and carried out the same ceremonies as were carried out in Rome itself. They were stubbornly and unalterably Roman and would never have dreamt of becoming assimilated to the people amidst whom they were set. We can hear the Roman pride breathing through the charge against Paul and Silas in Ac.16:20-21:

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Introduction to Philippians

"These men are Jews, and they are trying to teach and to introduce laws and customs which it is not right for us to observe--for we are Romans."

"You are a colony of heaven" (King James Version), Paul wrote to the Philippian Church (Php.3:20). Just as the Roman colonist never forgot in any environment that he was a Roman, so they must never forget in any society that they were Christians. Nowhere were men prouder of being Roman citizens than in these colonies; and such was Philippi.

PAUL AND PHILIPPI

It was on the second missionary journey, about the year A.D. 52, that Paul first came to Philippi. Urged on by the vision of the man of Macedonia with his appeal to come over and help us, Paul had sailed from Alexandrian Troas in Asia Minor. He had landed at Neapolis in Europe, and thence made his way to Philippi.

The story of Paul's stay in Philippi is told in Ac.16; and an interesting story it is. It centres round three people--Lydia, the seller of purple; the demented slave-girl, used by her masters to tell fortunes; and the Roman jailor. It is an extraordinary cross-section of ancient life. These three people were of different nationalities. Lydia was an Asiatic, and her name may well be not a proper name at all but simply "the Lydian lady." The slave-girl was a native Greek. The jailor was a Roman citizen. The whole Empire was being gathered into the Christian Church. But not only were these three of different nationalities; they came from very different grades of society. Lydia was a dealer in purple, one of the most costly substances in the ancient world, and was the equivalent of a merchant prince. The girl was a slave, and, therefore, in the eyes of the law not a person at all, but a living tool. The jailor was a Roman citizen, member of the sturdy Roman middle-class from which the civil service was drawn.

In these three the top, the bottom and middle of society are all represented. No chapter in the Bible shows so well the all-embracing faith which Jesus Christ brought to men.

PERSECUTION

Paul had to leave Philippi after a storm of persecution and an illegal imprisonment. That persecution was inherited by the Philippian Church. He tells them that they have shared in his bonds and in his defence of the gospel (Php.1:7). He bids them not to fear their adversaries for they are going through what he himself has gone through and is now enduring (Php.1:28-30).

TRUE FRIENDSHIP

There had grown up between Paul and the Philippian Church a bond of friendship closer than that which existed between him and any other Church. It was his proud boast that he had never taken help from any man or from any Church, and that, with his own two hands, he had satisfied his needs. It was from the Philippians alone that he had agreed to accept a gift. Soon after he left them and moved on to Thessalonica, they sent him a present (Php.4:16). When he moved on and arrived in Corinth by way of Athens, they alone again remembered him with their gifts (2Cor.11:9). "My brethren whom I love and long for," he calls them, "my joy and crown in the Lord" (Php.4:1).

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THE OCCASION OF THE WRITING OF THE LETTER

When Paul wrote this letter he was in prison in Rome, and he wrote it with certain definite objects.

(i) It is a letter of thanks. The years have passed; it is now A.D. 63 or 64 and once again the Philippians have sent him a gift (Php.4:10-11).

(ii) It has to do with Epaphroditus. It seems that the Philippians had sent him not only as a bearer of their gift, but that he might stay with Paul and be his personal servant. But Epaphroditus had fallen ill. He was sick for home; and he was worried because he knew that the people at home were worried about him. Paul sent him home, but he had the unhappy feeling that the people in Philippi might think Epaphroditus a quilter, so he goes out of his way to give him a testimonial: "Receive him with all joy, and honour such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ" (Php.2:29-30). There is something very moving in the sight of Paul, himself in prison and awaiting death, seeking to make things easier for Epaphroditus, when he was unexpectedly and unwillingly compelled to go home. Here is the peak of Christian courtesy.

(iii) It is a letter of encouragement to the Philippians in the trials which they are going through (Php.1:28-30).

(iv) It is an appeal for unity. It is from that, that there rises the great passage which speaks of the selfless humility of Jesus Christ (Php.2:1-11). In the Church at Philippi there were two women who had quarrelled and were endangering the peace (Php.4:2); and there were false teachers who were seeking to lure the Philippians from the true path (Php.3:2). This letter is an appeal to maintain the unity of the Church.

THE PROBLEM

It is just here that the problem of Philippians arises. At Php.3:2 there is an extraordinary break in the letter. Up to Php.3:1 everything is serenity and the letter seems to be drawing gently to its close; then without warning comes the outburst: "Beware of dogs; beware of evil workers; beware of the concision." There is no connection with what goes before. Further, Php.3:1 looks like the end. "Finally, my brethren," says Paul, "rejoice in the Lord" and having said finally he begins all over again! (That, of course, is not an unknown phenomenon in preaching).

Because of this break many scholars think that Philippians, as we possess it, is not one letter but two letters put together. They regard Php.3:2-21 and Php.4:1-3 as a letter of thanks and warning sent quite early after the arrival of Epaphroditus in Rome; and they regard Php.1-2; Php.3:1 and Php.4:4-23 as a letter written a good deal later, and sent with Epaphroditus when he had to go home. That is perfectly possible. We know that Paul almost certainly did, in fact, write more than one letter to Philippi, for Polycarp, in his letter to the Philippian Church, says of him, "when he was absent he wrote letters to you."

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Introduction to Philippians

THE EXPLANATION

And yet it seems to us that there is no good reason for splitting this letter into two. The sudden break between Php.3:1 and Php.3:2 can be otherwise explained in one of two ways.

(i) As Paul was writing, fresh news may have come of trouble at Philippi; and there and then he may have interrupted his line of thought to deal with it.

(ii) The simplest explanation is this. Philippians is a personal letter and a personal letter is never logically ordered like a treatise. In such a letter we put things down as they come into our heads; we chat on paper with our friends; and an association of ideas which may be clear enough to us may not be so obvious to anyone else. The sudden change of subject here is just the kind of thing which might occur in any such letter.

THE LOVELY LETTER

For many of us Philippians is the loveliest letter Paul ever wrote. It has been called by two titles. It has been called The Epistle of excellent Things--and so indeed it is; and it has been called The Epistle of Joy. Again and again the words joy and rejoice recur. "Rejoice," writes Paul, "again I will say rejoice," even in prison directing the hearts of his friends--and ours--to the joy that no man can take from us.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 1:1-2

A FRIEND TO HIS FRIENDS

Philippians 1:1-2 (Part 1)

Paul and Timothy, slaves of Jesus Christ, write this letter to all those in Philippi who are consecrated to God because of their relationship to Jesus Christ, together with the overseers and the deacons.

Grace be to you and peace from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The opening sentence sets the tone of the whole letter. It is characteristically a letter from a friend to his friends. With the exception of the letter to the Thessalonians and the little personal note to Philemon, Paul begins every letter with a statement of his apostleship; he begins, for instance, the letter to the Romans: "Paul a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle" (compare 1Cor.1:1; 2Cor.1:1; Gal.1:1; Eph.1:1; Col.1:1). In the other letters he begins with a statement of his official position, why he has the right to write, and why the recipients have the duty to listen; but not when he writes to the Philippians. There is no need; he knows that they will listen, and listen lovingly. Of all his Churches, the Church at Philippi was the one to which Paul was closest; and he writes, not as an apostle to members of his Church, but as a friend to his friends.

Nonetheless, Paul does lay claim to one title. He claims to be the servant (doulos, GSN1401) of Christ, as the King James and Revised Standard Versions have it; but *doulos* (GSN1401) is more than servant, it is slave. A servant is free to come and go; but a slave is the possession of his master for ever. When Paul calls himself the slave of Jesus Christ, he does three things. (i) He lays it down that he is the absolute possession of Christ. Christ has loved him and bought him with a price (1Cor.6:20), and he can never belong to anyone else. (ii) He lays it down that he owes an absolute obedience to Christ. The slave has no will of his own; his master's will must be his. So Paul has no will but Christ's, and no obedience but to his Saviour and Lord. (iii) In the Old Testament the regular title of the prophets is the servants of God (Am.3:7; Jer.7:25). That is the title which is given to Moses, to Joshua and to David (Josh.1:2; Judg.2:8; Ps.78:70; Ps.89:3; Ps.89:20). In fact, the highest of all titles of honour is servant of God; and when Paul takes this title, he humbly places himself in the succession of the prophets and of the great ones of God. The Christian's slavery to Jesus Christ is no cringing subjection. As the Latin tag has it: *Illi servire est regnare*, to be his slave is to be a king.

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Philippians 1:1-2

THE CHRISTIAN DISTINCTION

Philippians 1:1-2 (Part 2)

The letter is addressed, as the Revised Standard Version has it, to all the saints in Christ Jesus. The word translated saint is hagios, (GSN0040); and saint is a misleading translation. To modern ears it paints a picture of almost unworldly piety. Its connection is rather with stained glass windows than with the market-place. Although it is easy to see the meaning of hagios (GSN0040) it is hard to translate it.

Hagios (GSN0040), and its Hebrew equivalent qadowsh (HSN6918), are usually translated holy. In Hebrew thought, if a thing is described as holy, the basic idea is that it is different from other things; it is in some sense set apart. The better to understand this, let us look at how holy is actually used in the Old Testament. When the regulations regarding the priesthood are being laid down, it is written: "They shall be holy to their God" (Lev.21:6). The priests were to be different from other men, for they were set apart for a special function. The tithe was the tenth part of all produce which was to be set apart for God, and it is laid down: "The tenth shall be holy to the Lord, because it is the Lord's" (Lev.27:30,32). The tithe was different from other things which could be used as food. The central part of the Temple was the Holy Place (Exo.26:33); it was different from all other places. The word was specially used of the Jewish nation itself. The Jews were a holy nation (Exo.19:6).

They were holy unto the Lord; God had severed them from other nations that they might be his (Lev.20:26); it was they of all nations on the face of the earth whom God had specially known (Am.3:2). The Jews were different from all other nations, for they had a special place in the purpose of God.

But they refused to play the part which God meant them to play; when his Son came into the world, they failed to recognize him, and rejected and crucified him. The privileges and the responsibilities they should have had were taken away from the nation of Israel and given to the Church, which became the new Israel, the real people of God. Therefore, just as the Jews had once been hagios (GSN0040), holy, different, so now the Christians must be hagios (GSN0040); the Christians are the holy ones, the different ones, the saints. Thus Paul in his pre-Christian days was a notorious persecutor of the saints, the hagioi (GSN0040) (Ac.9:13); Peter goes to visit the saints, the hagioi (GSN0040), at Lydda (Ac.9:32).

To say that the Christians are the saints means, therefore, that the Christians are different from other people. Wherein does that difference lie?

Paul addresses his people as saints in Christ Jesus. No one can read his letters without seeing how often the phrases in Christ, in Christ Jesus, in the Lord occur. In Christ Jesus occurs 48 times, in Christ 34 times, and in the Lord 50 times. Clearly this was for Paul the very essence of Christianity. What did he mean? Marvin R. Vincent says that when Paul spoke of the Christian being in Christ, he meant that the Christian lives in Christ as a bird in the air, a fish in the water, the roots of a tree in the soil. What makes the Christian different is that he is always and everywhere conscious of the encircling presence of Jesus Christ.

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Philippians 1:1-2

When Paul speaks of the saints in Christ Jesus, he means those who are different from other people and who are consecrated to God because of their special relationship to Jesus Christ--and that is what every Christian should be.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 1:1-2

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE GREETING

Philippians 1:1-2 (Part 3)

Paul's greeting to his friends is: Grace be to you and peace, from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ (compare Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:3; 2Cor.1:2; Gal.1:3; Eph.1:2; Col.1:2; 1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:2; Phm.3).

When Paul put together these two great words, grace and peace, (charis, GSN5485, and eirene, GSN1515), he was doing something very wonderful. He was taking the normal greeting phrases of two great nations and moulding them into one. Charis (GSN5485) is the greeting with which Greek letters always began and eirene (GSN1515) the greeting with which Jews met each other. Each of these words had its own flavour and each was deepened by the new meaning which Christianity poured into it.

Charis (GSN5485) is a lovely word; the basic ideas in it are joy and pleasure, brightness and beauty; it is, in fact, connected with the English word charm. But with Jesus Christ there comes a new beauty to add to the beauty that was there. And that beauty is born of a new relationship to God. With Christ life becomes lovely because man is no longer the victim of God's law but the child of his love.

Eirene (GSN1515) is a comprehensive word. We translate it peace; but it never means a negative peace, never simply the absence of trouble. It means total well-being, everything that makes for a man's highest good.

It may well be connected with the Greek word eirein (GSN1515), which means to join, to weave together. And this peace has always got to do with personal relationships, a man's relationship to himself, to his fellow-men, and to God. It is always the peace that is born of reconciliation.

So, when Paul prays for grace and peace on his people he is praying that they should have the joy of knowing God as Father and the peace of being reconciled to God, to men, and to themselves--and that grace and peace can come only through Jesus Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 1:3-11

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

(i) THE CHRISTIAN JOY

Philippians 1:3-11 (Part 1)

In all my remembrance of you I thank my God for you, and always in every one of my prayers, I pray for you with joy, because you have been in partnership with me for the furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now, and of this I am confident, that he who began a good work in you will complete it so that you may be ready for the day of Jesus Christ. And it is right for me to feel like this about you, because I have you in my heart, because all of you are partners in grace with me, both in my hands, and in my defence and confirmation of the gospel. God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the very compassion of Christ Jesus.

And this I pray, that your love for each other may continue to abound more and more in all fulness of knowledge and in all sensitiveness of perception, that you may test the things which differ, that you may be yourselves pure and that you may cause no other to stumble, in preparation for the day of Christ, because you have been filled with the fruit which the righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ produces, and which issues in glory and praise to God.

It is a lovely thing when, as Ellicott puts it, remembrance and gratitude are bound up together. In our personal relationships it is a great thing to have nothing but happy memories; and that was how Paul was with the Christians at Philippi. To remember brought no regrets, only happiness.

In this passage there are set out the marks of the Christian life.

There is Christian joy. It is with joy that Paul prays for his friends. The Letter to the Philippians has been called The Epistle of Joy. Bengel in his terse Latin commented: "Summa epistolae gaudeo--gaudete." "The whole point of the letter is I do rejoice; do you rejoice." Let us look at the picture of Christian joy which this letter paints.

(i) In Php.1:4 there is the joy of Christian prayer, the joy of bringing those we love to the mercy seat of God.

George Raindrop in his book No Common Task tells how a nurse once taught a man to pray and in doing so changed his whole life, until a dull, disgruntled and dispirited creature became a man of joy. Much of the nurse's work was done with her hands, and she used her hands as a scheme of prayer. Each finger stood for someone. Her thumb was nearest to her, and it reminded her to pray for those who were closest to her. The second finger was used for pointing and it stood for all her teachers in school and in the hospital. The third finger was the tallest and it stood for the V.I.P.s, the leaders in every sphere of life. The fourth finger was the weakest, as every pianist knows, and it stood for those who were in trouble and in pain. The little finger was the smallest and the least important and to the nurse it stood for herself.

There must always be a deep joy and peace in bringing our loved ones and others to God in prayer.

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Philippians 1:3-11

(ii) There is the joy that Jesus Christ is preached (Php.1:18). When a man enjoys a great blessing surely his first instinct must be to share it; and there is joy in thinking of the gospel being preached all over the world, so that another and another and another is brought within the love of Christ.

(iii) There is the joy of faith (Php.1:25). If Christianity does not make a man happy, it will not make him anything at all. There is a certain type of Christianity which is a tortured affair. The Psalmist said, "They looked to him and were radiant." When Moses came down from the mountain top his face shone. Christianity is the faith of the happy heart and the shining face

(iv) There is the joy of seeing Christians in fellowship together (Php.2:2). As the Psalmist sang (Ps.133:1):

Behold how good a thing it is,
And how becoming well,
Together such as brethren are
In unity to dwell!

There is peace for no one where there are broken human relationships and strife between man and man. There is no lovelier sight than a family linked in love to each other or a Church whose members are one with each other because they are one in Christ Jesus their Lord.

(v) There is the joy of suffering for Christ (Php.2:17). In the hour of his martyrdom in the flames Polycarp prayed, "I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast judged me worthy of this hour." To suffer for Christ is a privilege, for it is an opportunity to demonstrate beyond mistake where our loyalty lies and to share in the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God.

(vi) There is the joy of news of the loved one (Php.2:28). Life is full of separations, and there is always joy when news comes to us of those loved ones from whom we are temporarily separated. A great Scottish preacher once spoke of the joy that man can give with a postage stamp. It is worth remembering how easily we can bring joy to those who love us and how easily we can bring anxiety, by keeping in touch or failing to keep in touch with them.

(vii) There is the joy of Christian hospitality (Php.2:29). There is the home of the shut door and there is the home of the open door. The shut door is the door of selfishness; the open door is the door of Christian welcome and Christian love. It is a great thing to have a door from which the stranger and the one in trouble know that they will never be turned away.

(viii) There is the joy of the man in Christ (Php.3:1; Php.4:1). We have already seen that to be in Christ to live in his presence as the bird lives in the air, the fish in the sea, and the roots of the trees in the soil. It is human nature to be happy when we are with the person whom we love; and Christ is the lover from whom nothing in time or eternity can ever separate us.

(ix) There is the joy of the man who has won one soul for Christ (Php.4:1). The Philippians are Paul's joy and crown, for he was the means of bringing them to Jesus Christ. It is the joy of the

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Philippians 1:3-11

parent, the teacher, the preacher to bring others, especially the child, into the love of Jesus Christ. Surely he who enjoys a great privilege cannot rest content until he shares it with his family and his friends. For the Christian evangelism is not a duty; it is a joy.

(x) There is the joy in a gift (Php.4:10). This joy does not lie so much in the gift itself, as in being remembered and realizing that some one cares. This is a joy that we could bring to others far oftener than we do.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 1:3-11

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

(ii) THE CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE

Philippians 1:3-11 (Part 2)

In Php.1:6 Paul says that he is confident that God who has begun a good work in the Philippians will complete it so that they will be ready for the day of Christ. There is a picture here in the Greek which it is not possible to reproduce in translation. The point is that the words Paul uses for to begin (enarchesthai, GSN1728) and for to complete (epitelein, GSN2005) are technical terms for the beginning and the ending of a sacrifice. .

There was an initial ritual in connection with a Greek sacrifice. A torch was lit from the fire on the altar and then dipped into a bowl of water to cleanse it with its sacred flame; and with the purified water the victim and the people were sprinkled to make them holy and clean. Then followed what was known as the euphemia (GSN2162), the sacred silence, in which the worshipper was meant to make his prayers to his god. Finally a basket of barley was brought, and some grains of the barley were scattered on the victim, and on the ground round about it. These actions were the beginning of the sacrifice, and the technical term for making this beginning was the verb enarchesthai (GSN1728) which Paul uses here. The verb used for completing the whole ritual of sacrifice was the verb epitelein (GSN2005) which Paul uses here for to complete. Paul's whole sentence moves in an atmosphere of sacrifice.

Paul is seeing the life of every Christian as a sacrifice ready to be offered to Jesus Christ. It is the same picture as he draws when he urges the Romans to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Rom.12:1).

On the day when Christ comes it will be like the coming of a king. On such a day the king's subjects are bound to present him with gifts to mark their loyalty and to show their love. The only gift Jesus Christ desires from us is ourselves. So, then, a man's supreme task is to make his life fit to offer to him. Only the grace of God can enable us to do that.

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Philippians 1:3-11

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

(iii) The CHRISTIAN PARTNERSHIP

Philippians 1:3-11 (Part 3)

In this passage the idea of Christian partnership is strongly stressed. There are certain things which Christians share.

(i) Christians are partners in grace. They are people who owe a common debt to the grace of God.

(ii) Christians are partners in the work of the gospel. Christians do not only share a gift; they also share a task; and that task is the furtherance of the gospel. Paul uses two words to express the work of Christians for the sake of the gospel; he speaks of the defence and the confirmation of the gospel. The defence (apologia, GSN0627) of the gospel means its defence against the attacks which come from outside. The Christian has to be ready to be a defender of the faith and to give a reason for the hope that is in him. The confirmation (bebaiosis, GSN0951) of the gospel is the building up of its strength from within, the edifying of Christians. The Christian must further the gospel by defending it against the attacks of its enemies and by building up the faith and devotion of its friends.

(iii) Christians are partners in suffering for the gospel. Whenever the Christian is called upon to suffer for the sake of the gospel, he must find strength and comfort in the memory that he is one of a great fellowship in every age and every generation and every land who have suffered for Christ rather than deny their faith.

(iv) Christians are partners with Christ. In Php.1:8 Paul has a very vivid saying. The literal translation is, "I yearn for you all with the bowels of Jesus Christ." The Greek word for bowels is *splagchna* (GSN4698). The *splagchna* were the upper intestines, the heart, the liver, and the lungs. These the Greeks believed to be the seat of the emotions and the affections. So Paul is saying: "I yearn for you with the very compassion of Jesus Christ himself. I love you as Jesus loves you." The love which Paul feels towards his Christian friends is nothing other than the love of Christ himself. J. B. Lightfoot, writing on this passage says, "The believer has no yearnings apart from his Lord; his pulse beats with the pulse of Christ; his heart throbs with the heart of Christ." When we are really one with Jesus, his love goes out through us to our fellow-men whom he loves and for whom he died. The Christian is a partner in the love of Christ.

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Philippians 1:3-11

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

(iv) THE CHRISTIAN PROGRESS AND THE CHRISTIAN GOAL

Philippians 1:3-11 (Part 4)

It was Paul's prayer for his people that their love would grow greater every day (Php.1:9-10). That love, which was not merely a sentimental thing, was to grow in knowledge and in sensitive perception so that they would be more and more able to distinguish between right and wrong. Love is always the way to knowledge. If we love any subject, we want to learn more about it; if we love any person, we want to learn more about him; if we love Jesus, we will want to learn more about him and about his truth.

Love is always sensitive to the mind and the heart of the one it loves. If it blindly and blunderingly hurts the feelings of the one it claims to love, it is not love at all. If we really love Jesus, we will be sensitive to his will and his desires; the more we love him; the more we will instinctively shrink from what is evil and desire what is right. The word Paul uses for testing the things that differ is dokimazein (GSN1381), which is the word used for testing metal to see that it is genuine. Real love is not blind; it will enable us always to see the difference between the false and the true.

So, then, the Christian will become himself pure and will cause no other to stumble. The word used for pure is interesting. It is eilikrines (GSN1506). The Greeks suggested two possible derivations, each of which has a vivid picture. It may come from eile, sunshine, and krinein (GSN2919), to judge, and may describe that which is able to stand the test of the sunshine, without any flaw appearing. On that basis the word means that the Christian character can stand any light that is turned upon it. The other possibility is that eilikrines (GSN1506) is derived from eilein which means to whirl round and round as in a sieve and so to sift until every impurity is extracted. On that basis the Christian character is cleansed of all evil until it is altogether pure.

But the Christian is not pure; he is also aproskopos (GSN0677), he never causes any other person to stumble. There are people who are themselves faultless, but who are so austere that they drive people away from Christianity. The Christian is himself pure, but his love and gentleness are such that he attracts others to the Christian way and never repels them from it.

Finally, Paul sets down the Christian aim. This is to live such a life that the glory and the praise are given to God. Christian goodness is not meant to win credit for a man himself; it is meant to win praise for God. The Christian knows, and witnesses, that he is what he is, not by his own unaided efforts, but only by the grace of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 1:12-14

THE BONDS DESTROY THE BARRIERS

Philippians 1:12-14

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has resulted rather in the advancement of the gospel, because it has been demonstrated to the whole Praetorian Guard and to all the others that my imprisonment is borne for Christ's sake and in Christ's strength; and the result is that through my bonds more of the brothers have found confidence in the Lord the more exceedingly to dare fearlessly to speak the word of God.

Paul was a prisoner but so far from his imprisonment ending his missionary activity it actually expanded it for himself and for others. In fact, the bonds destroyed the barriers. The word Paul uses for the advancement of the gospel is a vivid word. It is *prokope*, (GSN4297); the word which is specially used for the progress of an army or an expedition. It is the noun from the verb *prokoptein* (GSN4298), which means to cut down in advance. It is the verb which is used for cutting away the trees and the undergrowth, and removing the barriers which would hinder the progress of an army. Paul's imprisonment, so far from shutting the door, opened the door to new spheres of work and activity, into which he would never otherwise have penetrated.

Paul, seeing that there was no justice for him in Palestine, had appealed to Caesar, as every Roman citizen had the right to do. In due time he had been despatched to Rome under military escort, and, when he had arrived there, he had been handed over to "the captain of the guard" and allowed to live by himself under the care of a soldier who was his guard (Ac.28:16). Ultimately, although still under guard, he had been allowed to have his own hired lodging (Ac.28:30), which was open to all who cared to come to see him.

In the King James Version we read that Paul said his bonds were manifest in all the palace. The word translated palace is *praitorion* (GSN4232) which can mean either a place or a body of people. When it has the meaning of a place, it has three meanings. (i) Originally it meant a general's headquarters in camp, the tent from which he gave his orders and directed his campaign. (ii) From that it very naturally moved on to mean a general's residence; it could, therefore, mean the Emperor's residence, that is, his palace, although examples of this usage are very rare. (iii) By another natural extension it came to mean a large house or villa, the residence of some wealthy or influential man. Here *praitorion* (GSN4232) cannot have any of these meanings, for it is clear that Paul stayed in his own hired lodging and it does not make sense that his hired lodging was in the Emperor's palace.

So we turn to the other meaning of *praitorion* (GSN4232), a body of people. In this usage it means the Praetorian Guard, or very much more rarely, the barracks where the Praetorian Guard were quartered. The second of these meanings we can leave on one side, for Paul would not likely have a hired lodging in a Roman barracks.

The Praetorian Guard were the Imperial Guard of Rome. They had been instituted by Augustus and were a body of ten thousand picked troops. Augustus had kept them dispersed throughout Rome and the neighbouring towns. Tiberius had concentrated them in Rome in a specially built and

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Philippians 1:12-14

fortified camp. Vitellius had increased their number to sixteen thousand. They served for twelve, and later for sixteen, years. At the close of their term they received the citizenship and a grant of more than L250. Latterly they became very nearly the Emperor's private bodyguard; and in the end they became very much a problem. They were concentrated in Rome, and there came a time when the Praetorian Guard became nothing less than king-makers; for inevitably it was their nominee who was made Emperor every time, since they could impose their will by force, if need be, upon the populace. It was to the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, their commanding officer, that Paul was handed over when he arrived in Rome.

Paul repeatedly refers to himself as a prisoner or as being in bonds. He tells the Roman Christians that, although he had done no wrong, he was delivered a prisoner (desmios, GSN1198) into the hands of the Romans (Ac.28:17). In Philippians he repeatedly speaks of his imprisonment (Php.1:7; Php.1:13-14). In Colossians he speaks of being in bonds for the sake of Christ, and bids the Colossians to remember his bonds (Col.4:3; Col.4:18). In Philemon he calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and speaks of the bonds of the gospel (Phm.9,13). In Ephesians he again calls himself the prisoner for Jesus Christ (Eph.3:1).

There are two passages in which these bonds are more closely defined. In Ac.28:20 he speaks of himself as being bound with this chain; and he uses the same word (halusis, GSN0254) in Eph.6:20, when he speaks of himself as an ambassador in chains. It is in this word halusis (GSN0254) that we find our key. The halusis (GSN0254) was the short length of chain by which the wrist of a prisoner was bound to the wrist of the soldier who was his guard, so that escape was impossible. The situation was this. Paul had been delivered to the captain of the Praetorian Guard, to await trial before the Emperor. He had been allowed to arrange a private lodging for himself; but night and day in that private lodging there was a soldier to guard him, a soldier to whom he was chained by his halusis (GSN0254) all the time. There would, of course, be a rota of guardsmen assigned to this duty; and in the two years one by one the guardsmen of the Imperial Guard would be on duty with Paul.

What a chance was there! These soldiers would hear Paul preach and talk to his friends. Is there any doubt that in the long hours Paul would open up a discussion about Jesus with the soldier to whose wrist he was chained?

His imprisonment had opened the way for preaching the gospel to the finest regiment in the Roman army. No wonder he declared that his imprisonment had actually been for the furtherance of the gospel. All the Praetorian Guard knew why Paul was in prison; many of them were touched for Christ; and the very sight of this gave to the brethren at Philippi fresh courage to preach the gospel and to witness for Christ.

Paul's bonds had removed the barriers and given him access to the flower of the Roman army, and his bonds had been the medicine of courage to the brethren at Philippi.

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Philippians 1:15-18

THE ALL-IMPORTANT PROCLAMATION

Philippians 1:15-18

Some in their preaching of Christ are actuated by envy and strife; some by goodwill. The one preach from love, because they know that I am lying here for the defence of the gospel; the other proclaim Christ for their own partisan purposes, not with pure motives, but thinking to make my bonds gall me all the more. What then? The only result is that in every way, whether as a cloak for other purposes, or whether in truth, Christ is proclaimed. And in this I rejoice--yes, and I will rejoice.

Here indeed the great heart of Paul is speaking. His imprisonment has been an incentive to preaching. That incentive worked in two ways. There were those who loved him; and, when they saw him lying in prison, they redoubled their efforts to spread the gospel, so that it would lose nothing because of Paul's imprisonment. They knew that the best way to delight his heart was to see that the work did not suffer because of his unavoidable absence. But others were moved by what Paul calls *eritheia* (GSN2052) and preached for their own partisan motives. *Eritheia* (GSN2052) is an interesting word. Originally it simply meant working for pay. But the man who works solely for pay works from a low motive. He is out solely to benefit himself. The word, therefore, came to describe a careerist, out for office to magnify himself; and so it came to be connected with politics and to mean canvassing for office.

It came to describe self-seeking and selfish ambition, which was out to advance itself and did not care to what methods it stooped to attain its ends. So there were those who preached the harder now that Paul was in prison, for his imprisonment seemed to present them with a heaven-sent opportunity to advance their own influence and prestige and lessen his.

There is a lesson for us here. Paul knew nothing of personal jealousy or of personal resentment. So long as Jesus Christ was preached, he did not care who received the credit and the prestige. He did not care what other preachers said about him, or how unfriendly they were to him, or how contemptuous they were of him, or how they tried to steal a march upon him. All that mattered was that Christ was preached. All too often we resent it when someone else gains a prominence or a credit which we do not. All too often we regard a man as an enemy because he has expressed some criticism of us or of our methods. All too often we think a man can do no good because he does not do things in our way. All too often the intellectuals have no truck with the evangelicals, and the evangelicals impugn the faith of the intellectuals.

All too often those who believe in the evangelism of education have no use for the evangelism of decision, and those who practise the evangelism of decision have no use for those who feel that some other approach will have more lasting effects. Paul is the great example. He lifted the matter beyond all personalities; all that mattered was that Christ was preached.

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Philippians 1:19-20

THE HAPPY ENDING

Philippians 1:19-20

For I know that this will result in my salvation, because of your prayer for me, and because of the generous help the Holy Spirit of Christ gives to me, for it is my eager expectation and my hope that I shall never on any occasion be shamed into silence, but that on every occasion, even as now, I shall speak with all boldness of speech, so that Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death.

It is Paul's conviction that the situation in which he finds himself will result in his salvation. Even his imprisonment, and even the almost hostile preaching of his personal enemies, will in the end turn out to his salvation. What does he mean by his salvation? The word is *soteria* (GSN4991), and here there are three possible meanings.

(i) It may mean safety, in which case Paul will be saying that he is quite sure that the matter will end in his release. But that can hardly be the meaning here, since Paul goes on to say that he cannot be sure whether he will live or die.

(ii) It may mean his salvation in heaven. In that case Paul would be saying that his conduct in the opportunity which this situation provides will be his witness in the day of judgment. There is a great truth here. In any situation of opportunity or challenge, a man is acting not only for time, but also for eternity. A man's reaction to every situation in time is a witness for or against him in eternity.

(iii) But *soteria* (GSN4991) may have a wider meaning than either of these. It can mean health, general well-being. Paul may well be saying that all that is happening to him in this very difficult situation is the best thing for him both in time and in eternity. "God put me in this situation; and God means it, with all its problems and its difficulties, to make for my happiness and usefulness in time, and for my joy and peace in eternity."

In this situation Paul knows that he has two great supports. (i) He has the support of the prayers of his friends. One of the loveliest things in Paul's letters is the way in which he asks again and again for his friends' prayers. "Brethren," he writes to the Thessalonians, "pray for us." "Finally, brethren," he writes, "pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph" (1Th.5:25; 2Th.3:1-2). He says to the Corinthians "You must help us by prayer." (2Cor.1:11). He writes that he is sure that through Philemon's prayers he will be given back to his friends (Phm.22). Before he sets out on his perilous journey to Jerusalem, he writes to the Church at Rome asking for their prayers (Rom.15:30-32).

Paul was never too big a man to remember that he needed the prayers of his friends. He never talked to people as if he could do everything and they could do nothing; he always remembered that neither he, nor they, could do anything without the help of God. There is something to be remembered here. When people are in sorrow, one of their greatest comforts is the awareness that others are bearing them to the throne of grace. When they have to face some back-breaking effort

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Philippians 1:19-20

or some heart-breaking decision, there is new strength in remembering that others are remembering them before God. When they go into new places and are far from home, it is an upholding thing to know that the prayers of those who love them are crossing continents to bring them before the throne of grace. We cannot call a man our friend unless we pray for him.

(ii) Paul knows that he has the support of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus that he will be with us to the end of the world.

In all this situation Paul has one expectation and one hope. The word he uses for expectation is very vivid and unusual; no one uses it before Paul and he may well have coined it himself. It is *apokaradokia* (GSN0603). *Apo* (GSN0575) means "away from," *kara*, "the head," *dokein* (GSN1380) "to look"; and *apokaradokia* (GSN0603) means the eager, intense look, which turns away from everything else to fix on the one object of desire. Paul's hope is that he will never be shamed into silence, either by cowardice or a feeling of ineffectiveness. Paul is certain that in Christ he will find courage never to be ashamed of the gospel; and that through Christ his labours will be made effective for all men to see. J. B. Lightfoot writes, "The right of free speech is the badge, the privilege, of the servant of Christ." To speak the truth with boldness is not only the privilege of the servant of Christ; it is also his duty.

So, then, if Paul courageously and effectively seizes his opportunity, Christ will be glorified in him. It does not matter how things go with him. If he dies, his will be the martyr's crown; if he lives, his will be the privilege still to preach and to witness for Christ. As Ellicott nobly puts it, Paul is saying, "My body will be the theatre in which Christ's glory is displayed." Here is the terrible responsibility of the Christian. Once we have chosen Christ, by our life and conduct we bring either glory or shame to him. A leader is judged by his followers; and Christ is judged by us.

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Philippians 1:21-26

IN LIFE AND IN DEATH

Philippians 1:21-26

For living is Christ to me, and death is gain. And yet--what if the continuance of my life in the flesh would produce more fruit for me? What I am to choose is not mine to declare. I am caught between two desires, for I have my desire to strike camp and to be with Christ, which is far better; but for your sake it is more essential for me to remain in this life. And I am confidently certain of this, that I will remain, and I will be with you and beside you all to help you along the road, and to increase the joy of your faith, so that you may have still further grounds for boasting in Christ because of me, when once again I come to visit you.

Since Paul was in prison awaiting trial, he had to face the fact that it was quite uncertain whether he would live or die; and to him it made no difference.

"Living," he says, in his great phrase, "is Christ to me." For Paul, Christ had been the beginning of life, for on that day on the Damascus road it was as if he had begun life all over again. Christ had been the continuing of life; there had never been a day when Paul had not lived in his presence, and in the frightening moments Christ had been there to bid him be of good cheer (Ac.18:9-10). Christ was the end of life, for it was towards his eternal presence that life ever led. Christ was the inspiration of life; he was the dynamic of life. To Paul, Christ had given the task of life, for it was he who had made him an apostle and sent him out as the evangelist of the Gentiles. To him Christ had given the strength for life, for it was Christ's all-sufficient grace that was made perfect in Paul's weakness. For him Christ was the reward of life, for to Paul the only worthwhile reward was closer fellowship with his Lord. If Christ were to be taken out of life, for Paul there would be nothing left.

"For me," said Paul, "death is gain". Death was entrance into Christ's nearer presence. There are passages in which Paul seems to regard death as a sleep, from which all men at some future general resurrection shall be wakened (1Cor.16:51-52; 1Th.4:14,16); but at the moment when its breath was on him Paul thought of death not as a falling asleep but as an immediate entry into the presence of his Lord. If we believe in Jesus Christ, death for us is union and reunion, union with him and reunion with those whom we have loved and lost awhile.

The result was that Paul was swayed between two desires. "I am caught," he says, "between two desires." As the Revised Standard Version has it: "I am hard pressed between the two." The word he uses is *sunechomai* (GSN4912), the word which would be used of a traveller in a narrow defile, with a wall of rock on either hand, unable to turn aside and able only to go straight on. For himself he desired to depart and to be with Christ; for the sake of his friends and of what he could do with them and for them he desired to be left in this life. Then comes the thought that the choice is not his but God's.

"My desire is to depart," says Paul, and the phrase is very vivid. The word he uses for to depart is *analuein* (GSN0360).

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Philippians 1:21-26

(i) It is the word for striking camp, loosening the tent ropes, pulling up the tent pins and moving on. Death is a moving on. It is said that in the terrible days of the war, when the Royal Air Force stood between Britain and destruction and the lives of its pilots were being sacrificially spent, they never spoke of a pilot as having been killed but always as having been "posted to another station." Each day is a day's march nearer home, until in the end camp in this world is for ever struck and exchanged for permanent residence in the world of glory.

(ii) It is the word for loosening the mooring ropes, pulling up the anchors and setting sail. Death is a setting sail, a departure on that voyage which leads to the everlasting haven and to God.

(iii) It is the word for solving problems. Death brings life's solutions. There is some place where all earth's questions will be answered and where those who have waited will in the end understand.

It is Paul's conviction that, he will "remain and continue with them. There is a word-play in the Greek that can not be reproduced in the English. The word for to remain is menein (GSN3306); and that for to continue is paramenein (GSN3887). Lightfoot suggests the translation bide and abide. That keeps the word-play, but does not give the meaning. The point is this; menein (GSN3306) simply means to remain with; but paramenein (GSN3887) (para, GSN3844, is the Greek for beside) means to wait beside a person ever ready to help. Paul's desire to live is not for his own sake, but for the sake of those whom he can continue to help.

So, then, if Paul is spared to come and see them again they will have in him grounds to boast in Jesus Christ. That is to say, they will be able to look at him and see in him a shining example of how, through Christ, a man can face the worst erect and unafraid. It is the duty of every Christian so to trust that men will be able to see what Christ can do for the man who has given his life to him.

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Philippians 1:27-30

CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM

Philippians 1:27-30

One thing you must see to whatever happens--live a life that is worthy of a citizen of the Kingdom and of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you, or whether I go away and hear how things go with you, the news will be that you are standing fast, united in one spirit, fighting with one soul the battle of the gospel's faith, and that you are not put into fluttering alarm by any of your adversaries. For your steadfastness is a proof to them that they are doomed to defeat, while you are destined for salvation--and that from God. For to you has been given the privilege of doing something for Christ--the privilege of not only believing in him, but also of suffering for him, for you have the same struggle as that in which you have seen me engaged, and which now you hear that I am undergoing.

One thing is essential--no matter what happens either to them or to Paul the Philippians must live worthily of their faith and profession. Paul chooses his words very carefully. The King James Version has it: "Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." Nowadays this is misleading. To us conversation means talk; but it is derived from the Latin word *conversari*, which means to conduct oneself. In the seventeenth century a person's conversation was not only his way of speaking to other people; it was his whole behaviour. The phrase means: "Let your behaviour be worthy of those who are pledged to Christ."

But on this occasion Paul uses a word which he very seldom uses in order to express his meaning. The word he would normally use for to conduct oneself in the ordinary affairs of life is *peripatein* (GSN4043), which literally means to walk about; here he uses *politeuesthai* (GSN4176), which means to be a citizen. Paul was writing from the very centre of the Roman Empire, from Rome itself; it was the fact that he was a Roman citizen that had brought him there. Philippi was a Roman colony; and Roman colonies were little bits of Rome planted throughout the world, where the citizens never forgot that they were Romans, spoke the Latin language, wore the Latin dress, called their magistrates by the Latin names, however far they might be from Rome. So what Paul is saying is, "You and I know full well the privileges and the responsibilities of being a Roman citizen. You know full well how even in Philippi, so many miles from Rome, you must still live and act as a Roman does."

Well then, remember that you have an even higher duty than that. Wherever you are you must live as befits a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

What does Paul expect from them? He expects them to stand fast. The world is full of Christians on the retreat, who, when things grow difficult, play down their Christianity. The true Christian stands fast, unashamed in any company. He expects unity; they are to be bound together in one spirit like a band of brothers. Let the world quarrel; Christians must be one. He expects a certain unconquerability. Often evil seems invincible; but the Christian must never abandon hope or give up the struggle. He expects a cool, calm courage. In times of crisis others may be nervous and afraid; the Christian will be still serene, master of himself and of the situation.

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Philippians 1:27-30

If they can be like that, they will set such an example that the pagans will be disgusted with their own way of life, will realize that the Christians have something they do not possess, and will seek for very self-preservation to share it.

Paul does not suggest that this will be easy. When Christianity first came to Philippi, they saw him fight his own battle. They saw him scourged and imprisoned for the faith (Ac.16:19). They know what he is now going through. But let them remember that a general chooses his best soldiers for the hardest tasks, and that it is an honour to suffer for Christ. There is a tale of a veteran French soldier who came in a desperate situation upon a young recruit trembling with fear. "Come, son," said the veteran, "and you and I will do something fine for France." So Paul says to the Philippians: "For you and for me the battle is on; let us do something fine for Christ."

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 2:1-4

THE CAUSES OF DISUNITY

Philippians 2:1-4 (Part 1)

If the fact that you are in Christ has any power to influence you, if love has any persuasive power to move you, if you really are sharing in the Holy Spirit, if you can feel compassion and pity, complete my joy, for my desire is that you should be in full agreement, loving the same things, joined together in soul, your minds set on the one thing. Do nothing in a spirit of selfish ambition, and in a search for empty glory, but in humility let each consider the other better than himself Do not be always concentrating each on your own interests, but let each be equally concerned for the interests of others.

The one danger which threatened the Philippian church was that of disunity. There is a sense in which that is the danger of every healthy church. It is when people are really in earnest and their beliefs really matter to them, that they are apt to get up against each other. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide. It is against that danger Paul wishes to safeguard his friends.

In Php.2:3-4 he gives us the three great causes of disunity.

There is selfish ambition. There is always the danger that people should work not to advance the work but to advance themselves. It is extraordinary how time and again the great princes of the Church almost fled from office in the agony of the sense of their own unworthiness.

Ambrose was one of the great figures of the early Church. A great scholar, he was the Roman governor of the province of Liguria and Aemilia, and he governed with such loving care that the people regarded him as a father. The bishop of the district died and the question of his successor arose. In the midst of the discussion, suddenly a little child's voice arose: "Ambrose--bishop! Ambrose--bishop!" The whole crowd took up the cry. To Ambrose it was unthinkable. He fled by night to avoid the high office the Church was offering him; and it was only the direct intervention and command of the Emperor which made him agree to become bishop of Milan.

When John Knox publicly from the pulpit in St. Andrews summoned him to the ministry, John Knox was appalled. In his own History of the Reformation he writes: "Thereat the said John, abashed, burst forth in most abundant tears, and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behaviour, from that day until the day that he was compelled to present himself in the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart. No man saw in him any sign of mirth, nor yet had he pleasure to accompany any man, for many days together."

Far from being filled with ambition, the great men were filled with a sense of their own inadequacy for high office.

There is the desire for personal prestige. Prestige is for many people an even greater temptation than wealth. To be admired and respected, to have a platform seat, to have one's opinion sought, to be known by name and appearance, even to be flattered, are for many people most desirable things.

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Philippians 2:1-4

But the aim of the Christian ought to be not self-display, but self-obliteration. He should do good deeds, not that men may glorify him, but that they may glorify his Father in heaven. The Christian should desire to focus men's eyes not upon himself but on God.

There is concentration on self. If a man is for ever concerned first and foremost with his own interests, he is bound to collide with others. If for him life is a competition whose prizes he must win, he will always think of other human beings as enemies or at least as opponents who must be pushed out of the way. Concentration on self inevitably means elimination of others; and the object of life becomes not to help others up but to push them down.

Barclay's Commentary Philippians 2:1-4

THE CURE OF DISUNITY

Philippians 2:1-4 (Part 2)

In face of this danger of disunity Paul sets down five considerations which ought to prevent disharmony.

(i) The fact that we are all in Christ should keep us in unity. No man can walk in disunity with his fellow-men and in unity with Christ. If he has Christ as the companion of his way, he is inevitably the companion of every wayfarer. A man's relationships with his fellow-men are no bad indication of his relationship with Jesus Christ.

(ii) The power of Christian love should keep us in unity. Christian love is that unconquered good-will which never knows bitterness and never seeks anything but the good of others. It is not a mere reaction of the heart, as human love is; it is a victory of the will, achieved by the help of Jesus Christ. It does not mean loving only those who love us; or those whom we like; or those who are lovable. It means an unconquerable good-will even to those who hate us, to those whom we do not like, to those who are unlovely. This is the very essence of the Christian life; and it affects us in time and in eternity. Richard Tatlock in *In My Father's House* writes: "Hell is the eternal condition of those who have made relationship with God and their fellows an impossibility through lives which have destroyed love.... Heaven, on the other hand, is the eternal condition of those who have found real life in relationships-through-love with God and their fellows."

(iii) The fact that they share in the Holy Spirit should keep Christians from disunity. The Holy Spirit binds man to God and man to man. It is the Spirit who enables us to live that life of love, which is the life of God; if a man lives in disunity with his fellow-men, he thereby shows that the gift of the Spirit is not his.

(iv) The existence of human compassion should keep men from disunity. As Aristotle had it long ago, men were never meant to be snarling wolves but to live in fellowship together. Disunity breaks the very structure of life.

(v) Paul's last appeal is the personal one. There can be no happiness for him so long as he knows that there is disunity in the Church which is dear to him. If they would complete his joy, let them complete their fellowship. It is not with a threat that Paul speaks to the Christians of Philippi but with the appeal of love, which ought ever to be the accent of the pastor, as it was the accent of his Lord.

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Philippians 2:5-11

TRUE GODHEAD AND TRUE MANHOOD

Philippians 2:5-11 (Part 1)

Have within yourselves the same disposition of mind as was in Christ Jesus, for he was by nature in the very form of God, yet he did not regard existence in equality with God as something to be snatched at, but he emptied himself, and took the very form of a slave, and became like men. And when he came in appearance as a man for all to recognise, he became obedient even to the extent of accepting death, even the death of a cross. And for that reason God exalted him, and granted to him the name which is above every name, in order that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things upon the earth, and things below the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

In many ways this is the greatest and most moving passage Paul ever wrote about Jesus. It states a favourite thought of his. The essence of it is in the simple statement Paul made to the Corinthians that, although Jesus was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor (2Cor.8:9). Here that simple idea is stated with a fulness which is without parallel. Paul is pleading with the Philippians to live in harmony, to lay aside their discords, to shed their personal ambitions and their pride and their desire for prominence and prestige, and to have in their hearts that humble, selfless desire to serve, which was the essence of the life of Christ. His final and unanswerable appeal is to point to the example of Jesus Christ.

This is a passage which we must try fully to understand, because it has so much in it to awaken our minds to thought and our hearts to wonder. To this end we must look closely at some of its great Greek words.

Greek is a far richer language than English. Where English has one word to express an idea, Greek has often two or three or more. In one sense these words are synonyms, but they never mean entirely the same thing; they always have some special flavour. That is particularly so of this passage. Every word is chosen by Paul with meticulous care to show two things--the reality of the manhood and the reality of the godhead of Jesus Christ. Let us take the phrases one by one. We will set them down both in the King James Version and in our own translation, and then try to penetrate to the essential meaning behind them.

Php.2:6: Being in the form of God; he was by nature in the very form of God. Two words are most carefully chosen to show the unchangeable godhead of Jesus Christ. The word which the King James Version translates being is from the Greek verb huparchein (GSN5225) which is not the common Greek word for "being." It describes that which a man is in his very essence and which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same. So Paul begins by saying that Jesus was essentially and unalterably God.

He goes on to say that Jesus was in the form of God. There are two Greek words for form, morphe (GSN3444) and schema (GSN4976). They must both be translated form, because there is no other English equivalent, but they do not mean the same thing. Morphe (GSN3444) is the essential form which never alters; schema (GSN4976) is the outward form which changes from

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time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. For instance, the morphe (GSN3444) of any human being is humanity and this never changes; but his schema (GSN4976) is continually changing. A baby, a child, a boy, a youth, a man of middle age, an old man always have the morphe (GSN3444) of humanity, but the outward schema (GSN4976) changes all the time. Roses, daffodils, tulips, chrysanthemums, primroses, dahlias, lupins all have the one morphe (GSN3444) of flowers; but their schema (GSN4976) is different. Aspirin, penicillin, cascara, magnesia all have the one morphe (GSN3444) of drugs; but their schema (GSN4976) is different.

The morphe (GSN3444) never alters; the schema (GSN4976) continually does. The word Paul uses for Jesus being in the form of God is morphe (GSN3444); that is to say, his unchangeable being is divine. However his outward schema (GSN4976) might alter, he remained in essence divine.

Jesus did not think it robbery to be equal with God; he did not regard existence in equality with God as something to be snatched at. The word used for robbery, which we have translated a thing to be snatched at, is harpagmos (GSN0725) which comes from a verb meaning to snatch, or to clutch. The phrase can mean one of two things, both of which are at heart the same. (a) It can mean that Jesus did not need to snatch at equality with God, because he had it as a right. (b) It can mean that he did not clutch at equality with God, as if to hug it jealously to himself, but laid it willingly down for the sake of men. However we take this, it once again stresses the essential godhead of Jesus.

Php.2:7: He emptied himself, he made himself of no reputation. The Greek is the verb kenoun (GSN2758) which means literally to empty. It can be used of removing things from a container, until the container is empty; of pouring something out, until there is nothing left. Here Paul uses the most vivid possible word to make clear the sacrifice of the Incarnation. The glory of divinity Jesus gave up willingly in order to become man. He emptied himself of his deity to take upon himself his humanity. It is useless to ask how; we can only stand in awe at the sight of him, who is almighty God, hungry and weary and in tears. Here in the last reach of human language is the great saving truth that he who was rich for our sakes became poor.

He took upon him the form of a servant; he took the very form of a slave. The word used for form is morphe (GSN3444), which we have seen means the essential form. Paul means that when Jesus became man it was no play-acting but reality. He was not like the Greek gods, who sometimes, so the stories ran, became men but kept their divine privileges. Jesus truly became man. But there is something more here. He was made in the likeness of men; he became like men. The word which the King James Version translates made and which we have translated became is a part of the Greek verb ginesthai (GSN1096). This verb describes a state which is not a permanent state. The idea is that of becoming, and it describes a changing phase which is completely real but which passes. That is to say, the manhood of Jesus was not permanent; it was utterly real, but it passed.

Php.2:8: He was found in fashion as a man; he came in appearance as a man for all to recognise. Paul makes the same point. The word the King James Version has translated fashion and which we have translated appearance is schema (GSN4976), and we have seen that this indicates a form which alters.

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Php.2:6-8 form a very short passage; but there is no passage in the New Testament which so movingly sets out the utter reality of the godhead and the manhood of Jesus and makes so vivid the sacrifice that he made when he laid aside his godhead and took manhood upon him. How it happened, we cannot tell, but it is the mystery of a love so great that, although we can never fully understand it, we can blessedly experience it and adore it.

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Philippians 2:5-11

HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION

Philippians 2:5-11 (Part 2)

It is always to be remembered that when Paul thought and spoke about Jesus, his interest and his intention were never primarily intellectual and speculative; they were always practical. To him theology and action were always bound together. Any system of thought must necessarily become a way of life. In many ways this passage is one of the greatest reaches of theological thought in the New Testament, but its aim was to persuade the Philippians to live a life in which disunity, discord, and personal ambition had no place.

So, then, Paul says of Jesus that he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross. The great characteristics of Jesus' life were humility, obedience, and self-renunciation. He did not desire to dominate men but only to serve them; he did not desire his own way but only God's way; he did not desire to exalt himself but only to renounce all his glory for the sake of men. Again and again the New Testament is sure that only the man who humbles himself will be exalted (Matt.23:12; Lk.14:11; Lk.18:14). If humility, obedience, and self-renunciation were the supreme characteristics of the life of Jesus, they must also be the hall-marks of the Christian. Selfishness, self-seeking and self-display destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with each other.

But the self-renunciation of Jesus Christ brought him the greater glory. It made certain that some day, soon or late, every living creature in all the universe, in heaven, in earth and even in hell, would worship him. It is to be carefully noted whence that worship comes. It comes from love. Jesus won the hearts of men, not by blasting them with power, but by showing them a love they could not resist. At the sight of this person who laid his glory by for men and loved them to the extent of dying for them on a cross, men's hearts are melted and their resistance is broken down. When men worship Jesus Christ, they fall at his feet in wondering love. They do not say "I cannot resist a might like that," but, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all." Worship is founded, not on fear, but on love.

Further, Paul says that, as a consequence of his sacrificial love, God gave Jesus the name which is above every name. One of the common biblical ideas is the giving of a new name to mark a new stage in a man's life. Abram became Abraham when he received the promise of God (Gen.17:5). Jacob became Israel when God entered into the new relationship with him (Gen.32:28). The promise of the Risen Christ to both Pergamos and to Philadelphia is the promise of a new name (Rev.2:17; Rev.3:12).

What then is the new name given to Jesus Christ? We cannot be quite certain what exactly was in Paul's mind, but most likely the new name is Lord.

The great title by which Jesus came to be known in the early Church was kurios (GSN2962), Lord, which has an illuminating history. (i) It began by meaning master or owner. (ii) It became the official title of the Roman Emperors. (iii) It became the title of the heathen gods. (iv) It was the word by which the Hebrew Jehovah was translated in the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures.

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So, then, when Jesus was called kurios (GSN2962), Lord, it meant that he was the Master and the Owner of all life; he was the King of kings; he was the Lord in a way in which the heathen gods and the dumb idols could never be; he was nothing less than divine.

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Philippians 2:5-11

ALL FOR GOD

Philippians 2:5-11 (Part 3)

Php.2:11 is one of the most important verses in the New Testament. In it we read that the aim of God, is a day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. These four words were the first creed that the Christian Church ever had. To be a Christian was to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (compare Rom.10:9). This was a simple creed, yet all-embracing. Perhaps we would do well to go back to it. Later men tried to define more closely what it meant and argued and quarrelled about it, calling each other heretics and fools. But it is still true that if man can say, "For me Jesus Christ is Lord," he is a Christian. If he can say that, he means that for him Jesus Christ is unique and that he is prepared to give him an obedience he is prepared to give no one else. He may not be able to put into words who and what he believes Jesus to be; but, so long as there is in his heart this wondering love and in his life this unquestioning obedience, he is a Christian, because Christianity consists less in the mind's understanding than it does in the heart's love.

So we come to the end of this passage; and, when we come to its end, we come back to its beginning. The day will come when men will call Jesus Lord, but they will do so to the glory of God the Father. The whole aim of Jesus is not his own glory but God's. Paul is clear about the lonely and ultimate supremacy of God. In the first letter to the Corinthians he writes that in the end the Son himself shall be subject to him who put all things under him (1Cor.15:28). Jesus draws men to himself that he may draw them to God. In the Philippian Church there were men whose aim was to gratify a selfish ambition; the aim of Jesus was to serve others, no matter what depths of self-renunciation that service might involve. In the Philippian Church there were those whose aim was to focus men's eyes upon themselves; the aim of Jesus was to focus men's eyes upon God.

So the follower of Christ must think always, not of himself but of others, not of his own glory but of the glory of God.

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Philippians 2:12-18

COOPERATION IN SALVATION

Philippians 2:12-18 (Part 1)

So then, my beloved, just as at all times you obeyed not only as in my presence, but much more, as things now are, in my absence, carry to its perfect conclusion the work of your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God, who, that he may carry out his own good pleasure, brings to effect in you both the initial willing and the effective action. Do all things without murmurings and questionings, that you may show yourselves blameless and pure, the spotless children of God in a warped and twisted generation, in which you appear like lights in the world, as you hold forth the word which is life, so that on the day of Christ it may be my proud claim that I have not run for nothing and that I have not toiled for nothing. But if my own life is to be poured out on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and I do rejoice with you all. So also do you rejoice, and share my rejoicing.

Paul's appeal to the Philippians is more than an appeal to live in unity in a given situation; it is an appeal to live a life which will lead to the salvation of God in time and in eternity.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the work of salvation more succinctly stated. As the Revised Standard Version has it in Php.2:12-13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God's at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." As always with Paul, the words are meticulously chosen.

Work out your own salvation; the word he uses for work out is *katargazesthai* (GSN2716), which always has the idea of bringing to completion. It is as if Paul says: "Don't stop halfway; go on until the work of salvation is fully wrought out in you." No Christian should be satisfied with anything less than the total benefits of the gospel.

"For God is at work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The word Paul uses for work and do is the same, the verb *energein* (GSN1754). There are two significant things about it; it is always used of the action of God, and it is always used of effective action. God's action cannot be frustrated, nor can it remain half-finished; it must be fully effective.

As we have said, this passage gives a perfect statement of the work of salvation.

(i) Salvation is of God. (a) It is God that works in us the desire to be saved. It is true that "our hearts are restless till they rest in him," and it is also true that "we could not even begin to seek him unless he had already found us." The desire for the salvation of God is not kindled by any human emotion but by God himself. The beginning of the process of salvation is awakened by God. (b) The continuance of that process is dependent on God. Without his help there can be no progress in goodness; without his help no sin can be conquered and no virtue achieved. (c) The end of the process of salvation is with God, for its end is friendship with God, in which we are his and he is ours. The work of salvation is begun, continued and ended in God.

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Philippians 2:12-18

(ii) There is another side to this. Salvation is of man. "Work out your own salvation," Paul demands. Without man's cooperation, even God is helpless. The fact is that any gift or any benefit has to be received. A man may be ill and the doctor able to prescribe the drugs that will cure him; but the man will not be cured until he takes them and he may stubbornly refuse all persuasion to take them. It is so with salvation. The offer of God is there; without it there can be no such thing as salvation. But no man can ever receive salvation unless he answers God's appeal and takes what he offers.

There can be no salvation without God, but what God offers man must take. It is never God who withholds salvation; it is always man who deprives himself of it.

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Philippians 2:12-18

THE SIGNS OF SALVATION

Philippians 2:12-18 (Part 2)

When we examine the chain of thought in this passage, we see that Paul sets down five signs of salvation, as we may call them.

(i) There is the sign of effective action. The Christian must give continual evidence in his daily life that he is indeed working out his own salvation; day by day it must be more fully accomplished. The great tragedy of so many of us is that we are never really any further on. We continue to be victims of the same habits and slaves of the same temptations, and guilty of the same failures. But the truly Christian life must be a continual progress, for it is a journey towards God.

(ii) There is the sign of fear and trembling. This is not the fear and trembling of the slave cringing before his master; nor fear and trembling at the prospect of punishment. It comes from two things. It comes, first, from a sense of our own creatureliness and our own powerlessness to deal with life triumphantly. That is to say, it is not the fear and trembling which drives us to hide from God, but rather the fear and trembling which drives us to seek God, in the certainty that without his help we cannot effectively face life. It comes, second, from a horror of grieving God. When we really love a person, we are not afraid of what he may do to us; we are afraid of what we may do to him. The Christian's great fear is of crucifying Christ again.

(iii) There is the sign of serenity and certainty. The Christian will do all things without murmurings and questionings. The word which Paul uses for murmurings (*goggusmos*, GSN1112) is unusual. In the Greek of the sacred writers it has a special connection. It is the word used of the rebellious murmurings of the children of Israel in their desert journey. The people murmured against Moses (Exo.15:24; Exo.16:2; Num.16:41). *Goggusmos* (GSN1112)--pronounced *gongusomos*--is an onomatopoeic word. It describes the low, threatening, discontented muttering of a mob who distrust their leaders and are on the verge of an uprising. The word Paul uses for questionings is *dialogismos* (GSN1261) which describes useless, and sometimes ill-natured, disputing and doubting. In the Christian life there is the serenity and the certainty of perfect certainty and perfect trust.

(iv) There is the sign of purity. Christians, as the Revised Standard Version has it, are to be blameless and innocent and without blemish. Each of these words makes its contribution to the idea of Christian purity.

(a) The word translated blameless is *amemptos* (GSN0273) and expresses what the Christian is to the world. His life is of such purity that none can find anything in it with which to find fault. It is often said in courts of law that the proceedings must not only be just but must be seen to be just. The Christian must not only be pure, but the purity of his life must be seen by all.

(b) The word translated innocent is *akeraios* (GSN0185), and expresses what the Christian is in himself. *Akeraios* (GSN0185) literally means unmixed, unadulterated. It is used, for instance, of wine or milk which is not mixed with water and of metal which has no alloy in it. When used of

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Philippians 2:12-18

people, it implies motives which are unmixed. Christian purity must issue in a complete sincerity of thought and character.

(c) The word which is translated without blemish is amomos (GSN0299) and describes what the Christian is in the sight of God. This word is specially used in connection with sacrifices that are fit to be offered on the altar of God. The Christian life must be such that it can be offered like an unblemished sacrifice to God.

Christian purity is blameless in the sight of the world, sincere within itself, and fit to stand the scrutiny of God.

(v) There is the sign of missionary endeavour. The Christian offers to all the word of life, that is to say, the word which gives life. This Christian missionary endeavour has two aspects: (a) It is the proclamation of the offer of the gospel in words which are clear and unmistakable. (b) It is the witness of a life that is absolutely straight in a world which is warped and twisted. It is the offer of light in a world which is dark. Christians are to be lights in the world. The word used for lights (phosteres, GSN5458) is the same as is used in the creation story of the lights (the sun and the moon) which God set in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth (Gen.1:14-18). The Christian offers and demonstrates straightness in a twisted world and light in a dark world.

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Philippians 2:12-18

THE PICTURES OF PAUL

Philippians 2:12-18 (Part 3)

This passage concludes with two vivid pictures, which are typical of Paul's way of thinking.

(i) He longs for the Christian progress of the Philippians so that at the end of the day he may have the joy of knowing that he has not run or laboured in vain. The word he uses for to labour is *kopian* (GSN2872). There are two possible pictures in it. (a) It may paint a picture of the most exacting toil. *Kopian* (GSN2872) means to labour to the point of utter exhaustion. (b) It may be that *kopian* (GSN2872) describes the toil of the athlete's training and that what Paul is saying is that he prays that all the discipline of training that he imposed upon himself may not go for nothing.

One of the features of Paul's writing is his love of pictures from the life of the athlete. And there is little wonder. In every Greek city the gymnasium was far more than a physical training-ground. It was in the gymnasium that Socrates often discussed the eternal problems; it was in the gymnasium that the philosophers and the sophists and the wandering teachers and preachers often found their audience. In any Greek city the gymnasium was not only the physical training-ground but also the intellectual club of the city. In the Greek world there were the great Isthmian Games at Corinth, the great Pan-Ionian Games at Ephesus, and, greatest of all, the Olympic Games, held every four years. The Greek cities were often at variance and frequently at war; but when the Olympic Games came round, no matter what dispute was raging, a month's truce was declared that there might be a contest in fellowship between them.

Not only did the athletes come, but the historians and the poets came to give readings of their latest works, and the sculptors, whose names are immortal, came to make statues of the winners.

There can be little doubt that, in Corinth and in Ephesus, Paul had been a spectator of these games. Where there were crowds of men, Paul would be there to seek to win them for Christ. But, apart from the preaching, there was something about these athletic contests which found an answer in the heart of Paul. He knew the contests of the boxers (1Cor.9:26). He knew the foot-race, most famous of all the contests. He had seen the herald summoning the racers to the starting-line (1Cor.9:27); he had seen the runners press along the course to the goal (Php.3:14); he had seen the judge awarding the prize at the end of the race (2Tim.4:8); he knew of the victor's laurel crown and of his exultation (1Cor.9:24; Php.4:1). He knew the rigorous discipline of training which the athlete must undertake, and the strict regulations which must be observed (1Tim.4:7-8; 2Tim.2:5).

So his prayer is that he may not be like an athlete whose training and effort have gone for nothing. For him the greatest prize in life was to know that through him others had come to know and to love and to serve Jesus Christ.

(ii) But in Php.2:17 Paul has another picture. He had a special gift for speaking in language that people could understand. Again and again he took his pictures from the ordinary affairs of the people to whom he was speaking. He has already taken a picture from the games; now he takes one from heathen sacrifice. One of the commonest kinds of heathen sacrifice was a libation, which was a cup of wine poured out as an offering to the gods. For instance, every heathen meal began and

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Philippians 2:12-18

ended with such a libation, as a kind of grace before and after meat. Paul here looks upon the faith and service of the Philippians as a sacrifice to God. He knows that his death may not be very far away, for he is writing in prison and awaiting trial. So he says, as the Revised Standard Version has it, that he is quite ready "to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering" of their faith. In other words what he is saying to the Philippians is: "Your Christian fidelity and loyalty are already a sacrifice to God; and if death for Christ should come to me, I am willing and glad that my life should be poured out like a libation on the altar on which your sacrifice is being made."

Paul was perfectly willing to make his life a sacrifice to God; and, if that happened, to him it would be all joy, and he calls on them not to mourn at the prospect but rather to rejoice. To him every call to sacrifice and to toil was a call to his love for Christ, and therefore he met it not with regret and complaint but with joy.

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Philippians 2:19-24

THE FAITHFUL HENCHMAN

Philippians 2:19-24

I hope in the Lord Jesus soon to send Timothy to you, that I may find out how things are going with you and take heart. I have no one with a mind equal to his, for he is the kind of man who will genuinely care for your affairs; for all men are concerned with their own interests, and not with the interests of Jesus Christ. You know his tried and tested character, and you know that, as a child serves a father, so he has shared my service in the work of the gospel. So then, I hope to send him, as soon as I see how things go with me. But I am confident in the Lord that I myself too will soon come to you.

Since Paul cannot himself come to Philippi, it is his intention to send Timothy as his representative. There was no one so close to him as Timothy was. We know very little detail about Timothy but the record of his service with Paul shows his fidelity.

He was a native either of Derbe or of Lystra. His mother Eunice was a Jewess and his grandmother's name was Lois. His father was a Greek and the fact that he was not circumcised would seem to show that he was educated in Greek ways (Ac.16:1; 2Tim.1:5). We cannot tell how or when he was converted to Christianity, but on his second missionary journey Paul met him and saw in him one whom he could clearly use in the service of Jesus Christ.

From that time Paul and Timothy were very close. Paul could speak of him as his child in the Lord (1Cor.4:17). He was with Paul in Philippi (Ac.16); he was with him in Thessalonica and Berea (Ac.17:1-14); he was with him in Corinth and in Ephesus (Ac.18:5; Ac.19:21-22); and he was with him in prison in Rome (Col.1:1; Php.1:1). He was associated with Paul in the writing of no fewer than five of his letters--1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Corinthians, Colossians and Philippians; and when Paul wrote to Rome Timothy was joined with him in sending greetings (Rom.16:21).

Timothy's great use was that, whenever Paul wished for information from some Church or wished to send advice or encouragement or rebuke and could not go himself, it was he whom he sent. So Timothy was sent to Thessalonica (1Th.3:6); to Corinth (1Cor.4:17; 1Cor.16:10-11); to Philippi. In the end Timothy, too, was a prisoner for Christ's sake (Heb.13:23).

Timothy's great value was that he was always willing to go anywhere; and in his hands a message was as safe as if Paul had delivered it himself. Others might be consumed with selfish ambition; but Timothy's one desire was to serve Paul and Jesus Christ. He is the patron saint of all those who are quite content with the second place, so long as they can serve.

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Philippians 2:25-30

THE COURTESY OF PAUL

Philippians 2:25-30

I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and fellow-worker, and fellow-soldier, your messenger and the servant of my need, because he is longing for you all, and he is very distressed because you heard that he had been ill, so ill that he nearly died. But God had pity on him, and not on him only, but on me too, that I might not have grief upon grief. So, then, I send him to you with the more despatch, that, when you see him, you may be glad again, and that I may be less grieved. Welcome him in the Lord with all joy, and hold such men in honour, because he came near to death because of his work for Christ, hazarding his life, that he might fill up that part of your service to me which you were personally unable to supply.

There is a dramatic story behind this. When the Philippians heard that Paul was in prison, their warm hearts were moved to action. They sent a gift to him by the hand of Epaphroditus. What they could not personally do, because distance prevented them, they delegated to Epaphroditus to do for them. Not only did they intend him to be the bearer of their gift; they also intended him to stay in Rome and be Paul's personal servant and attendant. Clearly Epaphroditus was a brave man, for any one who proposed to offer himself as the personal attendant of a man awaiting trial on a capital charge was laying himself open to the very considerable risk of becoming involved in the same charge. In truth, Epaphroditus risked his life to serve Paul.

In Rome Epaphroditus fell ill, perhaps with the notorious Roman fever which sometimes swept the city like a scourge, and was near to death. He knew that news of his illness had filtered back to Philippi, and he was worried because he knew that his friends there would be worried about him. God in his mercy spared the life of Epaphroditus and so spared Paul yet more sorrow. But Paul knew that it was time that Epaphroditus went back home, and in all probability he was the bearer of this letter.

But there was a problem. The Philippian Church had sent Epaphroditus to stay with Paul, and if he came back home, there would not be lacking those who said that he was a quitter. Here Paul gives him a tremendous testimonial, which will silence any possible criticism of his return.

In this testimonial every word is carefully chosen. Epaphroditus was his brother, his fellow-worker, and his fellow-soldier. As Lightfoot puts it, Epaphroditus was one with Paul in sympathy, one with him in work, one with him in danger. He in truth had stood in the firing-line. Then Paul goes on to call him your messenger and the servant of my need. It is impossible to supply the flavour of these words in translation.

The word Paul uses for messenger is apostolos (GSN0652). Apostolos literally means anyone who is sent out on an errand, but Christian usage had ennobled it and by using it Paul by implication ranks Epaphroditus with himself and all the apostles of Christ.

The word he uses for servant is leitourgos (GSN3011). In secular Greek this was a magnificent word. In the ancient days in the Greek cities there were men who, because they loved their city so

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much, at their own expense undertook certain great civic duties. It might be to defray the expenses of an embassy, or the cost of putting on one of the dramas of the great poets, or of training the athletes who would represent the city in the games, or of fitting out a warship and paying a crew to serve in the navy of the state. These men were the supreme benefactors of the state and they were known as leitourgoi (GSN3011).

Paul takes the great Christian word apostolos (GSN0652) and the great Greek word leitourgos (GSN3011), and applies them to Epaphroditus. "Give a man like that a welcome home," he says. "Hold him in honour for he hazarded his life for Christ."

Paul is making it easy for Epaphroditus to go home. There is something very wonderful here. It is touching to think of Paul, himself in the very shadow of death, in prison and awaiting judgment, showing such Christian consideration for Epaphroditus. He was facing death, and yet it mattered to him that Epaphroditus should not meet with embarrassment when he went home. Paul was a true Christian in his attitude to others; for he was never so immersed in his own troubles that he had no time to think of the troubles of his friends.

There is a word in this passage which later had a famous usage. The King James Version speaks of Epaphroditus not regarding his life; the Revised Standard Version uses risking his life; we have translated it hazarding his life. The word is the verb paraboleuesthai (GSN3851); it is a gambler's word and means to stake everything on a turn of the dice. Paul is saying that for the sake of Jesus Christ Epaphroditus gambled his life. In the days of the Early Church there was an association of men and women called the parabolani, the gamblers. It was their aim to visit the prisoners and the sick, especially those who were ill with dangerous and infectious diseases. In A.D. 252 plague broke out in Carthage; the heathen threw out the bodies of their dead and fled in terror. Cyprian, the Christian bishop, gathered his congregation together and set them to burying the dead and nursing the sick in that plague-stricken city; and by so doing they saved the city, at the risk of their lives, from destruction and desolation.

There should be in the Christian an almost reckless courage which makes him ready to gamble with his life to serve Christ and men.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 3:1

THE INDESTRUCTIBLE JOY

Philippians 3:1

As for what remains, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble to me to write the same things to you, and for you it is safe.

Paul sets down two very important things.

(i) He sets down what we might call the indestructibility of Christian joy. He must have felt that he had been setting a high challenge before the Philippian Church. For them there was the possibility of the same kind of persecution, and even the same kind of death, as threatened himself. From one point of view it looked as if Christianity was a grim job. But in it and beyond it all there was joy. "Your joy," said Jesus, "no one will take from you" (Jn.16:22).

There is a certain indestructibility in Christian joy; and it is so, because Christian joy is in the Lord. Its basis is that the Christian lives for ever in the presence of Jesus Christ. He can lose all things, and he can lose all people, but he can never lose Christ. And, therefore, even in circumstances where joy would seem to be impossible and there seem to be nothing but pain and discomfort, Christian joy remains, because not all the threats and terrors and discomforts of life can separate the Christian from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord (Rom.8:35-39).

In 1756 a letter came to John Wesley from a father who had a prodigal son. When the revival swept England the son was in York jail. "It pleased God," wrote the father, "not to cut him off in his sins. He gave him time to repent; and not only so, but a heart to repent." The lad was condemned to death for his misdeeds; and the father's letter goes on: "His peace increased daily, till on Saturday, the day he was to die, he came out of the condemned-room, clothed in his shroud, and went into the cart. As he went on, the cheerfulness and composure of his countenance were amazing to all the spectators." The lad had found a joy which not even the scaffold could take away.

It often happens that men can stand the great sorrows and the great trials of life but are undone by what are almost minor inconveniences. But this Christian joy enables a man to accept even them with a smile. John Nelson was one of Wesley's most famous early preachers. He and Wesley carried out a mission in Cornwall, near Land's End, and Nelson tells about it. "All that time, Mr. Wesley and I lay on the floor: he had my greatcoat for a pillow, and I had Burkitt's notes on the New Testament for mine. After being here near three weeks, one morning about three o'clock Mr. Wesley turned over, and, finding me awake, clapped me on the side, saying: 'Brother Nelson, let us be of good cheer: I have one whole side yet, for the skin is off but on one side!'" They had little enough even to eat. One morning Wesley had preached with great effect: "As we returned, Mr. Wesley stopped his horse to pick the blackberries, saying: 'Brother Nelson, we ought to be thankful that there are plenty blackberries; for this is the best country I ever saw for getting a stomach, but the worst I ever saw for getting food!'" Christian joy made Wesley able to accept the great blows of life, and also to greet the lesser discomforts with a jest. If the Christian really walks with Christ, he walks with joy.

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Philippians 3:1

(ii) Here also Paul sets down what we might call the necessity of repetition. He says that he proposes to write things to them that he has written before. This is interesting, for it must mean that Paul had written other letters to the Philippians which have not survived. This is nothing to be surprised at. Paul was writing letters from A.D. 48 to A.D. 64, sixteen years, but we possess only thirteen. Unless there were long periods when he never put pen to paper there must have been many more letters which are now lost.

Like any good teacher, Paul was never afraid of repetition. It may well be that one of our faults is our desire for novelty. The great saving truths of Christianity do not change; and we cannot hear them too often. We do not tire of the foods which are the essentials of life. We expect to eat bread and to drink water every day; and we must listen again and again to the truth which is the bread and the water of life. No teacher must find it a trouble to go over and over again the great basic truths of the Christian faith; for that is the way to ensure the safety of his hearers. We may enjoy the "fancy things" at meat times, but it is the basic foods on which we live. Preaching and teaching and studying the side-issues may be attractive, and these have their place, but the fundamental truths can neither be spoken nor heard too often for the safety of our souls.

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Philippians 3:2-3

THE EVIL TEACHERS

Philippians 3:2-3 (Part 1)

Be on your guard against the dogs; be on your guard against the evil workers; be on your guard against the party of mutilation; for we are the truly circumcised, we who worship in the Spirit of God; we whose proud boast is in Jesus Christ, we who place no confidence in merely human things.

Quite suddenly Paul's accent changes to that of warning. Wherever he taught, the Jews followed him and tried to undo his teaching. It was the teaching of Paul that we are saved by grace alone, that salvation is the free gift of God, that we can never earn it but can only humbly and adoringly accept what God has offered to us; and, further, that the offer of God is to all men of all nations and that none is excluded. It was the teaching of these Jews that, if a man wished to be saved, he must earn credit in the sight of God by countless deeds of the law; and, further that salvation belonged to the Jews and to no one else, and that, before God could have any use for him, a man must be circumcised and, as it were, become a Jew. Here Paul rounds upon these Jewish teachers who were seeking to undo his work. He calls them three things, carefully chosen to throw their claims back upon themselves.

(i) "Beware of the dogs," he says. With us the dog is a well-loved animal, but it was not so in the East in the time of Jesus. The dogs were the pariah dogs, roaming the streets, sometimes in packs, hunting amidst the garbage dumps and snapping and snarling at all whom they met. J. B. Lightfoot speaks of "the dogs which prowl about eastern cities, without a home and without an owner, feeding on the refuse and filth of the streets, quarrelling among themselves, and attacking the passer-by."

In the Bible the dog always stands for that than which nothing can be lower. When Saul is seeking to take his life, David's demand is: "After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! after a flea!" (1Sam.24:14, compare 2Kgs.8:13; Ps.22:16,20). In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, part of the torture of Lazarus is that the street dogs annoy him by licking his sores (Lk.16:21). In Deuteronomy the Law brings together the price of a dog and the hire of a whore, and declares that neither must be offered to God (Deut.23:18). In Revelation the word dog stands for those who are so impure that they are debarred from the Holy City (Rev.22:15). That which is holy must never be given to dogs (Matt.7:6). It is the same in Greek thought; the dog stands for everything that is shamelessly unclean.

It was by this name that the Jews called the Gentiles. There is a Rabbinic saying, "The nations of the world are like dogs." So this is Paul's answer to the Jewish teachers. He says to them, "In your proud self-righteousness, you call other men dogs; but it is you who are dogs, because you shamelessly pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ." He takes the very name the Jewish teachers would have applied to the impure and to the Gentiles and flings it back at themselves. A man must always have a care that he is not himself guilty of the sins of which he accuses others.

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Philippians 3:2-3

(ii) He calls them evil workers, workers of evil things. The Jews would be quite sure that they were workers of righteousness. It was their view that to keep the Law's countless rules and regulations was to work righteousness. But Paul was certain that the only kind of righteousness there is comes from casting oneself freely upon the grace of God. The effect of their teaching was to take men further away from God instead of to bring them nearer to him. They thought they were working good, but in fact they were working evil. Every teacher must be more anxious to listen to God than to propagate his own opinions or he, too, will run the risk of being a worker of evil, even when he thinks that he is a worker of righteousness.

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Philippians 3:2-3

THE ONLY TRUE CIRCUMCISION

Philippians 3:2-3 (Part 2)

(iii) Lastly, he calls them, the party of mutilation. There is a pun in the Greek which is not transferable to English. There are two Greek verbs which are very like each other. Peritemnein (GSN4059) means to circumcise; katatemein means to mutilate, as in Lev.21:5, which describes forbidden self-mutilation, such as castration. Paul says, "You Jews think that you are circumcised; in point of fact, you are only mutilated."

What is the point of this? According to Jewish belief, circumcision was ordained upon Israel as sign and symbol that they were the people with whom God had entered into a special relationship. The story of the beginning of that sign is in Gen.17:9-10. When God entered into his special covenant with Abraham, circumcision was laid down as its eternal sign. Now, circumcision is only a sign in the flesh, something done to a man's body. But if a man is to be in special relationship with God, something far more is needed than a mark in his body. He must have a certain kind of mind and heart and character. This is where at least some of the Jews made the mistake. They regarded circumcision in itself as being enough to set them apart specially for God. Long, long before this, the great teachers and the great prophets had seen that circumcision of the flesh is by itself not nearly enough and that there was needed a spiritual circumcision.

In Leviticus the sacred law-giver says that the uncircumcised hearts of Israel must be humbled to accept the punishment of God (Lev.26:41). The summons of the writer of Deuteronomy is: "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn" (Deut.10:16). He says that the Lord will circumcise their hearts to make them love him (Deut.30:6). Jeremiah speaks of the uncircumcised ear, the ear that will not hear the word of God (Jer.6:10). The writer of Exodus speaks of uncircumcised lips (Exo.6:12).

So what Paul says is, "If you have nothing to show but circumcision of the flesh, you are not really circumcised--you are only mutilated. Real circumcision is devotion of heart and mind and life to God."

Therefore, says Paul, it is the Christians who are the truly circumcised. They are circumcised, not with the outward mark in the flesh, but with that inner circumcision of which the great law-givers and teachers and prophets spoke. What then are the signs of that real circumcision? Paul sets out three.

(i) We worship in the Spirit of God; or, we worship God in the Spirit. Christian worship is not a thing of ritual or of the observation of details of the Law; it is a thing of the heart. It is perfectly possible for a man to go through an elaborate liturgy and yet have a heart that is far away from God. It is perfectly possible for him to observe all the outward observances of religion and yet have hatred and bitterness and pride in his heart. The true Christian worships God, not with outward forms and observances, but with the true devotion and the real sincerity of his heart. His worship is love of God and service of men.

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Philippians 3:2-3

(ii) Our only boast is in Jesus Christ. The only boast of the Christian is not in what he has done for himself but in what Christ has done for him. His only pride is that he is a man for whom Christ died.

In the Cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of Time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

(iii) We place no confidence in merely human things. The Jew placed his confidence in the physical badge of circumcision and in the performance of the duties of the Law. The Christian places his confidence only in the mercy of God and in the love of Jesus Christ. The Jew in essence trusted himself ; the Christian in essence trusts God.

The real circumcision is not a mark in the flesh; it is that true worship, that true glory, and that true confidence in the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

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Philippians 3:4-7

THE PRIVILEGES OF PAUL

Philippians 3:4-7 (Part 1)

And yet it remains true that I have every ground of confidence from the human point of view. If anyone has reason to think that he has grounds for confidence in his human heritage and attainments, I have more. I was circumcised when I was eight days old: I am of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin: I am a Hebrew, born of Hebrew parents. As far as the Law goes, I was a Pharisee: as for zeal, I was a persecutor of the Churches: as for the righteousness which is in the Law, I was beyond blame. But such things as I could humanly reckon as profits, I came to the conclusion were all loss for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Paul has just attacked the Jewish teachers and insisted that it is the Christians, not the Jews, who are the truly circumcised and covenant people. His opponents might have attempted to say, "But you are a Christian and do not know what you are talking about; you do not know what it is to be a Jew." So Paul sets out his credentials, not in order to boast but to show that he had enjoyed every privilege which a Jew could enjoy and had risen to every attainment to which a Jew could rise. He knew what it was to be a Jew in the highest sense of the term, and had deliberately abandoned it all for the sake of Jesus Christ. Every phrase in this catalogue of Paul's privileges has its special meaning; let us look at each one.

(i) He had been circumcised when he was eight days old. It had been the commandment of God to Abraham: "He that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you" (Gen.17:12); and that commandment had been repeated as a permanent law of Israel (Lev.12:3). By this claim Paul makes it clear that he is not an Ishmaelite, for the Ishmaelites were circumcised in their thirteenth year (Gen.17:25), nor a proselyte who had come late into the Jewish faith and been circumcised in manhood. He stresses the fact that he had been born into the Jewish faith and had known its privileges and observed its ceremonies since his birth.

(ii) He was of the race of Israel. When the Jews wished to stress their special relationship to God in its most unique sense it was the word Israelite that they used. Israel was the name which had been specially given to Jacob by God after his wrestling with him (Gen.32:28). It was to Israel that they in the most special sense traced their heritage. In point of fact the Ishmaelites could trace their descent to Abraham, for Ishmael was Abraham's son by Hagar; the Edomites could trace their descent to Isaac, for Esau, the founder of the Edomite nation, was Isaac's son; but it was the Israelites alone who could trace their descent to Jacob, whom God had called by the name of Israel. By calling himself an Israelite, Paul stressed the absolute purity of his descent.

(iii) He was of the tribe of Benjamin. That is to say, he was not only an Israelite; he belonged to the elite of Israel. The tribe of Benjamin had a special place in the aristocracy of Israel. Benjamin was the child of Rachel, the well-loved wife of Jacob, and of all the twelve patriarchs he alone had been born in the Promised Land (Gen.35:17-18). It was from the tribe of Benjamin that the first king of Israel had come (1Sam.9:1-2), and it was no doubt from that very king that Paul had been given his original name of Saul. When, under Rehoboam, the kingdom had been split up, ten of the tribes went off with Jeroboam and Benjamin was the only tribe which remained faithful with Judah

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Philippians 3:4-7

(1Kgs.12:21). When they returned from the exile, it was from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah that the nucleus of the reborn nation was formed (Ezr.4:1). The tribe of Benjamin had the place of honour in Israel's battle-line, so that the battle-cry of Israel was: "After thee, O Benjamin!" (Judg.5:14; Hos.5:8).

The great feast of Purim, which was observed every year with such rejoicing, commemorated the deliverance of which the Book of Esther tells, and the central figure of that story was Mordecai, a Benjaminite. When Paul stated that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, it was a claim that he was not simply an Israelite but that he belonged to the highest aristocracy of Israel. It would be the equivalent in England of saying that he came over with the Normans or in America that he traced his descent to the Pilgrim fathers.

So, then, Paul claims that from his birth he was a God-fearing, Law-observing Jew; that his lineage was as pure as Jewish lineage could be; and that he belonged to the most aristocratic tribe of the Jews.

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Philippians 3:4-7

THE ATTAINMENTS OF PAUL

Philippians 3:4-7 (Part 2)

So far Paul has been stating the privileges which came to him by birth; now he goes on to state his achievements in the Jewish faith.

(i) He was a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents. This is not the same as to say that he was a true Israelite. The point is this. The history of the Jews had dispersed them all over the world. In every town and in every city and in every country there were Jews. There were tens of thousands of them in Rome; and in Alexandria there were more than a million. They stubbornly refused to be assimilated to the nations amongst whom they lived; they retained faithfully their own religion and their own customs and their own laws. But it frequently happened that they forgot their own language. They became Greek-speaking of necessity because they lived and moved in a Greek environment. A Hebrew was a Jew who was not only of pure racial descent but who had deliberately, and often laboriously, retained the Hebrew tongue. Such a Jew would speak the language of the country in which he lived but also the Hebrew which was his ancestral language.

Paul claims not only to be a pure-blooded Jew but one who still spoke Hebrew. He had been born in the Gentile city of Tarsus, but he had come to Jerusalem to be educated at the feet of Gamaliel (Ac.22:3) and was able, for instance, when the time came, to speak to the mob in Jerusalem in their own tongue (Ac.21:40).

(ii) As far as the Law went, he was a trained Pharisee. This is a claim that Paul makes more than once (Ac.22:3; Ac.23:6; Ac.26:5). There were not very many Pharisees, never more than six thousand, but they were the spiritual athletes of Judaism. Their very name means The Separated Ones. They had separated themselves off from all common life and from all common tasks in order to make it the one aim of their lives to keep every smallest detail of the Law. Paul claims that not only was he a Jew who had retained his ancestral religion, but he had also devoted his whole life to its most rigorous observance. No man knew better from personal experience what Jewish religion was at its highest and most demanding.

(iii) As far as zeal went, he had been a persecutor of the Church. To a Jew zeal was the greatest quality in the religious life. Phinehas had saved the people from the wrath of God, and been given an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God (Num.25:11-13). It is the cry of the Psalmist: "Zeal for thy house has consumed me." (Ps.69:9). A burning zeal for God was the hall-mark of Jewish religion. Paul had been so zealous a Jew that he had tried to wipe out the opponents of Judaism. That was a thing which he never forgot. Again and again he speaks of it (Ac.22:2-21; Ac.26:4-23; 1Cor.15:8-10; Gal.1:13). He was never ashamed to confess his shame and to tell men that once he had hated the Christ whom now he loved and sought to obliterate the Church which now he served. It is Paul's claim that he knew Judaism at its most intense and even fanatical heat.

(iv) As for the righteousness which the Law could produce, he was blameless. The word is amemptos (GSN0273), and J. B. Lightfoot remarks that the verb memphesthai (GSN3201), from

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Philippians 3:4-7

which it comes, means to blame for sins of omission. Paul claims that there was no demand of the Law which he did not fulfil.

So Paul states his attainments. He was so loyal a Jew that he had never lost the Hebrew speech; he was not only a religious Jew, he was a member of their strictest and the most self-disciplined sect; he had had in his heart a burning zeal for what he had thought was the cause of God; and he had a record in Judaism in which no man could mark a fault.

All these things Paul might have claimed to set down on the credit side of the balance; but when he met Christ, he wrote them off as nothing more than bad debts. The things that he had believed to be his glories were in fact quite useless. All human achievement had to be laid aside, in order that he might accept the free grace of Christ. He had to divest himself of every human claim of honour that he might accept in complete humility the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

So Paul proves to these Jews that he has the right to speak. He is not condemning Judaism from the outside. He had experienced it at its highest point; and he knew that it was nothing compared with the joy which Christ had given. He knew that the only way to peace was to abandon the way of human achievement and accept the way of grace.

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Philippians 3:8-9

THE WORTHLESSNESS OF THE LAW AND THE VALUE OF CHRIST

Philippians 3:8-9

Yes, and I still count all things loss, because of the all-surpassing value of what it means to know Jesus Christ, my Lord. For his sake I have had to undergo a total abandonment of all things, and I count them as nothing better than filth fit for the refuse heap, that I may make Christ my own, and that it may be clear to all that I am in him, not because of any righteousness of my own, that righteousness whose source is the Law, but because of the righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, the righteousness whose source is God and whose basis is faith.

Paul has just said that he came to the conclusion that all his Jewish privileges and attainments were nothing but a total loss. But, it might be argued, that was a snap decision, perhaps later to be regretted and reversed. So here he says, "I came to that conclusion--and I still think so. It was not a decision made in a moment of impulse, but one by which I still stand fast."

In this passage the key-word is righteousness. *Dikaiousune* (GSN1343) is always difficult to translate in Paul's letters. The trouble is not that of seeing its meaning; the trouble is that of finding one English word which covers all it includes. Let us then try to see what Paul thinks about when he speaks about righteousness.

The great basic problem of life is to find fellowship with God and to be at peace and in friendship with him. The way to that fellowship is through righteousness, through the kind of life and spirit and attitude to himself which God desires. Because of that, righteousness nearly always for Paul has the meaning of a right relationship with God. Remembering that, we try to paraphrase this passage and to set down, not so much what Paul says, as what was in his mind.

He says, "All my life I have been trying to get into a right relationship with God. I tried to find it by strict adherence to the Jewish Law; but I found the Law and all its ways worse than useless to achieve that end. I found it no better than *skubala* (GSN4657)." *Skubala* has two meanings. In common language it was popularly derived from *kusi* (compare GSN2965) *ballomena* (GSN0906), which means that which is thrown to the dogs; and in medical language it means excrement, (dung, as the King James Version translates it). So, then, Paul is saying, "I found the Law and all its ways of no more use than the refuse thrown on the garbage heap to help me to get into a right relationship with God. So I gave up trying to create a goodness of my own; I came to God in humble faith, as Jesus told me to do, and I found that fellowship I had sought so long."

Paul had discovered that a right relationship with God is based not on Law but on faith in Jesus Christ. It is not achieved by any man but given by God; not won by works but accepted in trust.

So he says, "Out of my experience I tell you that the Jewish way is wrong and futile. You will never get into a right relationship with God by your own efforts in keeping the Law. You can get into a right relationship with God only by taking Jesus Christ at his word, and by accepting what God himself offers to you."

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Philippians 3:8-9

The basic thought of this passage is the uselessness of Law and the sufficiency of knowing Christ and accepting the offer of God's grace. The very language Paul uses to describe the Law-- excrement--shows the utter disgust for the Law which his own frustrated efforts to live by it had brought him; and the joy that shines through the passage shows how triumphantly adequate he found the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 3:10-11

WHAT IT MEANS TO KNOW CHRIST

Philippians 3:10-11

My object is to know him, and I mean by that, to know the power of his Resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, while I continue to be made like him in his death, if by any chance I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Paul has already spoken of the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ. To that thought he now returns and defines more closely what he means. It is important to note the verb which he uses for to know. It is part of the verb ginoskein (GSN1097), which almost always indicates personal knowledge. It is not simply intellectual knowledge, the knowledge of certain facts or even principles. It is the personal experience of another person. We may see the depth of this word from a fact of Old Testament usage. The Old Testament uses to know of sexual intercourse. "Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bore Cain" (Gen.4:1). In Hebrew the verb is yada' (HSN3045) and in Greek it is translated by ginoskein (GSN1097). This verb indicates the most intimate knowledge of another person. It is not Paul's aim to know about Christ, but personally to know him. To know Christ means for him certain things.

(i) It means to know the power of his Resurrection. For Paul the Resurrection was not simply a past event in history, however amazing. It was not simply something which had happened to Jesus, however important it was for him. It was a dynamic power which operated in the life of the individual Christian. We cannot know everything that Paul meant by this phrase; but the Resurrection of Christ is the great dynamic in at least three different directions.

(a) It is the guarantee of the importance of this life and of this body in which we live. It was in the body that Christ rose and it is this body which he sanctifies (1Cor.6:13ff.).

(b) It is the guarantee of the life to come (Rom.8:11; 1Cor.15:14ff.). Because he lives, we shall live also; his victory is our victory.

(c) It is the guarantee that in life and in death and beyond death the presence of the Risen Lord is always with us. It is the proof that his promise to be with us always to the end of the world is true.

The Resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that this life is worth living and that the physical body is sacred; it is the guarantee that death is not the end of life and that there is a world beyond; it is the guarantee that nothing in life or in death can separate us from him.

(ii) It means to know the fellowship of his sufferings. Again and again Paul returns to the thought that when the Christian has to suffer, he is in some strange way sharing the very suffering of Christ and is even filling up that suffering (2Cor.1:5; 2Cor.4:10-11; Gal.6:17; Col.1:24). To suffer for the faith is not a penalty, it is a privilege, for thereby we share the very work of Christ.

(iii) It means to be so united with Christ that day by day we come more to share in his death, so that finally we share in his Resurrection. To know Christ means that we share the way he walked;

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Philippians 3:10-11

we share the Cross he bore; we share the death he died; and finally we share the life he lives for evermore.

To know Christ is not to be skilled in any theoretical or theological knowledge; it is to know him with such intimacy that in the end we are as united with him as we are with those whom we love on earth and that, as we share their experiences, so we also share his.

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Philippians 3:12-16

PRESSING ON

Philippians 3:12-16

Not that I have already obtained this. or that I am already all complete but I press on to try to grasp that for which I have been grasped by Jesus Christ. Brothers, I do not count myself to have obtained; but this one thing I do--forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching out for the things which are in front, I press on towards the goal, in order that I may win the prize which God's upward calling in Christ Jesus is offering to me.

Let all of you who have graduated in the school of Christ have the same attitude of mind to life. And if anyone is otherwise minded in any way, this too God will reveal to him. Only we must always walk according to that standard which we have already reached.

Vital to the understanding of this passage is the correct interpretation of the Greek word *teleios* (GSN5046) which occurs twice, rendered by the Revised Standard Version as Perfect in Php.3:12 and as mature in Php.3:15. *Teleios* (GSN5046) in Greek has a variety of interrelated meanings. In by far the most of them it does not signify what we might call abstract perfection but a kind of functional perfection, adequacy for some given purpose. It means full-grown in contradistinction to undeveloped; for example, it is used of a full-grown man as opposed to an undeveloped youth. It is used to mean mature in mind and therefore means one who is qualified in a subject as opposed to a mere teamer. When it is used of offerings, it means without blemish and fit to offer God. When it is used of Christians, it often means baptized persons who are full members of the Church, as opposed to those who are still under instruction. In the days of the early Church it is quite often used to describe martyrs.

A martyr is said to be perfected by the sword, and the day of his death is said to be the day of his perfecting. The idea is that a man's Christian maturity cannot go beyond martyrdom.

So when Paul uses the word in Php.3:12, he is saying that he is not by any means a complete Christian but is for ever pressing on. Then he uses two vivid pictures.

(i) He says that he is trying to grasp that for which he has been grasped by Christ. That is a wonderful thought. Paul felt that when Christ stopped him on the Damascus Road, he had a vision and a purpose for Paul; and Paul felt that all his life he was bound to press on, lest he fail Jesus and frustrate his dream. Every man is grasped by Christ for some purpose; and, therefore, every man should all his life press on so that he may grasp that purpose for which Christ grasped him.

(ii) To that end Paul says two things. He is forgetting the things which are behind. That is to say, he will never glory in any of his achievements or use them as an excuse for relaxation. In effect Paul is saying that the Christian must forget all that he has done and remember only what he has still to do. In the Christian life there is no room for a person who desires to rest upon his laurels. He is also reaching out for the things which are in front. The word he uses for reaching out (*epekteinomenos*, GSN1901) is very vivid and is used of a racer going hard for the tape. It describes him with eyes for nothing but the goal. It describes the man who is going flat out for the

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Philippians 3:12-16

finish. So Paul says that in the Christian life we must forget every past achievement and remember only the goal which lies ahead.

There is no doubt that Paul is here speaking to the antinomians. They were those who denied that there was any law at all in the Christian life. They declared that they were within the grace of God and that, therefore, it did not matter what they did; God would forgive. No further discipline and no further effort were necessary. Paul is insisting that to the end of the day the Christian life is the life of an athlete pressing onwards to a goal which is always in front.

In Php.3:15 he again uses *teleios* (GSN5046) and says that this must be the attitude of those who are *teleios* (GSN5046). What he means is: "Anyone who has come to be mature in the faith and knows what Christianity is must recognize the discipline and the effort and the agony of the Christian life." He may perhaps think differently, but, if he is an honest man, God will make it plain to him that he must never relax his effort or lower his standards but must press towards the goal, until the end.

As Paul saw it, the Christian is the athlete of Christ.

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Philippians 3:17-21

DWELLER ON EARTH BUT CITIZEN OF HEAVEN

Philippians 3:17-21

Brothers, unite in imitating me, and keep your gaze on those who live, as you have seen us as an example. For there are many who behave in such a way--I have often spoken to you about them, and I do so now with tears--that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ. Their end is destruction: their god is their belly; that in which they glory is their shame. Men whose whole minds are earthbound! But our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, for he will refashion the body which we have in this state of our humiliation and make it like his own glorious body, by the working of that power of his whereby he is able to subject all things to himself.

Few preachers would dare to make the appeal with which Paul begins this section. J. B. Lightfoot translates it: "Vie with each other in imitating me." Most preachers begin with the serious handicap that they have to say, not, "Do as I do," but, "Do as I say." Paul could say not only, "Listen to my words," but also, "Follow my example." It is worth noting in the passing that Bengel, one of the greatest interpreters of scripture who ever lived, translates this in a different way: "Become fellow-imitators with me in imitating Jesus Christ," but it is far more likely--as nearly all other interpreters are agreed--that Paul was able to invite his friends, not simply to listen to him, but also to imitate him.

There were in the Church at Philippi men whose conduct was an open scandal and who, by their lives, showed themselves to be the enemies of the Cross of Christ. Who they were is not certain. But it is quite certain that they lived gluttonous and immoral lives and used their so-called Christianity to justify themselves. We can only guess who they may have been.

They may have been Gnostics. The Gnostics were heretics who tried to intellectualize Christianity and make a kind of philosophy out of it. They began with the principle that from the beginning of time there had always been two realities--spirit and matter. Spirit, they said, is altogether good; and matter is altogether evil. It is because the world was created out of this flawed matter that sin and evil are in it. If then, matter is essentially evil, the body is essentially evil and will remain evil whatever you do with it. Therefore, do what you like with it; since it is evil anyhow it makes no difference what you do with it. So these Gnostics taught that gluttony and adultery and homosexuality and drunkenness were of no importance because they affect only the body which is of no importance.

There was another party of Gnostics who held a different kind of doctrine. They argued that a man could not be called complete until he had experienced everything that life had to offer, both good and bad. Therefore, they said, it was a man's duty to plumb the depths of sin just as much as to scale the heights of virtue.

Within the Church there were two sets of people to whom these accusations might apply. There were those who distorted the principle of Christian liberty. They said that in Christianity all law was gone and that the Christian had liberty to do what he liked. They turned Christian liberty into

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Philippians 3:17-21

unchristian licence and gloried in giving their passions full play. There were those who distorted the Christian doctrine of grace. They said that, since grace was wide enough to cover every sin, a man could sin as he liked and not worry; it would make no difference to the all-forgiving love of God.

So the people whom Paul attacks may have been the clever Gnostics who produced specious arguments to justify their sinning or they may have been misguided Christians who twisted the loveliest things into justification for the ugliest sins.

Whoever they were, Paul reminds them of one great truth: "Our citizenship," he says, "is in heaven." Here was a picture the Philippians could understand. Philippi was a Roman colony. Here and there at strategic military centres the Romans set down their colonies. In such places the citizens were mostly soldiers who had served their time--twenty-one years--and who had been rewarded with full citizenship. The great characteristic of these colonies was that, wherever they were, they remained fragments of Rome. Roman dress was worn; Roman magistrates governed; the Latin tongue was spoken; Roman justice was administered; Roman morals were observed. Even in the ends of the earth they remained unshakeably Roman. Paul says to the Philippians, "Just as the Roman colonists never forget that they belong to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship."

Paul finishes with the Christian hope. The Christian awaits the coming of Christ, at which everything will be changed. Here the King James Version is dangerously misleading. In Php.3:21 it speaks about our vile body. In modern speech that would mean that the body is an utterly evil and horrible thing; but vile in sixteenth-century English still retained the meaning of its derivation from the Latin word vilis which in fact means nothing worse than cheap, valueless. As we are just now, our bodies are subject to change and decay, illness and death, the bodies of a state of humiliation compared with the glorious state of the Risen Christ; but the day will come when we will lay aside this mortal body which we now possess and become like Jesus Christ himself. The hope of the Christian is that the day will come when his humanity will be changed into nothing less than the divinity of Christ, and when the necessary lowliness of mortality will be changed into the essential splendour of deathless life.

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Philippians 4:1

GREAT THINGS IN THE LORD

Philippians 4:1

So, then, my brothers, whom I love and yearn for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

Through this passage breathes the warmth of Paul's affection for his Philippian friends. He loves them and yearns for them. They are his joy and his crown. Those whom he had brought to Christ are his greatest joy when the shadows are closing about him. Any teacher knows what a thrill it is to point at some person who has done well and to be able to say: "That was one of my boys."

There are vivid pictures behind the word when Paul says that the Philippians are his crown. There are two words for crown in Greek, and they have different backgrounds. There is diadema (GSN1238), which means the royal crown, the crown of kingship. And there is stephanos (GSN4735), the word used here, which itself has two backgrounds. (i) It was the crown of the victorious athlete at the Greek games. It was made of wild olive leaves, interwoven with green parsley, and bay leaves. To win that crown was the peak of the athlete's ambition. (ii) It was the crown with which guests were crowned when they sat at a banquet, at some time of great joy. It is as if Paul said that the Philippians were the crown of all his toil; it is as if he said that at the final banquet of God they were his festal crown. There is no joy in the world like bringing another soul to Jesus Christ.

Three times in Php.4:1-4 the words in the Lord occur. There are three great commands which Paul gives in the Lord.

(i) The Philippians are to stand fast in the Lord. Only with Jesus Christ can a man resist the seductions of temptation and the weakness of cowardice. The word Paul uses for stand fast (stekete, GSN4739) is the word which would be used for a soldier standing fast in the shock of battle, with the enemy surging down upon him. We know very well that there are some people in whose company it is easy to do the wrong thing and there are some in whose company it is easy to resist the wrong thing. Sometimes when we look back and remember some time when we took the wrong turning or fell to temptation or shamed ourselves, we say wistfully, thinking of someone whom we love: "If only he had been there, it would never have happened." Our only safety against temptation is to be in the Lord, always feeling his presence around us and about us.

In vain the surge's angry shock,
In vain the drifting sands:
Unharm'd upon the eternal Rock
The eternal City stands.

The Church and the individual Christian can stand fast only when they stand in Christ.

(ii) Paul bids Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. There can be no unity unless it is in Christ. In ordinary human affairs it repeatedly happens that the most diverse people are held

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Philippians 4:1

together because they all give allegiance to a great leader. Their loyalty to each other depends entirely on their loyalty to him. Take the leader away, and the whole group would disintegrate into isolated and often warring units. Men can never really love each other until they love Christ. The brotherhood of man is impossible without the lordship of Christ.

(iii) Paul bids the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. The one thing all men need to learn about joy is that it has nothing to do with material things or with a man's outward circumstances. It is the simple fact of human experience that a man living in the lap of luxury can be wretched and a man in the depths of poverty can overflow with joy. A man upon whom life has apparently inflicted no blows at all can be gloomily or peevishly discontented and a man upon whom life has inflicted every possible blow can be serenely joyful.

In his rectorial address to the students of St. Andrews University, J. M. Barrie quoted the immortal letter which Captain Scott of the Antarctic wrote to him, when the chill breath of death was already on his expedition: "We are pegging out in a very comfortless spot.... We are in a desperate state--feet frozen, etc., no fuel, and a long way from food, but it would do your heart good to be in our tent, to hear our songs and our cheery conversation." The secret is this--that happiness depends not on things or on places, but always on persons. If we are with the right person, nothing else matters; and if we are not with the right person, nothing can make up for that absence. The Christian is in the Lord, the greatest of all friends; nothing can separate the Christian from his presence and so nothing can take away his joy.

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Philippians 4:2-3

HEALING THE BREACHES

Philippians 4:2-3

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you too, true comrade in my work, help these women, because they toiled with me in the gospel, together with Clement, and my other fellow labourers, whose names are in the book of life.

This is a passage about which we would very much like to know more. There is obvious drama behind it, heartbreak and great deeds, but of the dramatis personae we can only guess. First of all, there are certain problems to be settled in regard to the names. The King James Version speaks of Euodias and Syntyche. Syntyche is a woman's name, and Euodias would be a man's name. There was an ancient conjecture that Euodias and Syntyche were the Philippian jailor and his wife (Ac.16:25-34): that they had become leading figures in the Church at Philippi, and that they had quarrelled. But it is certain that the name is not Euodias but Euodia, as indeed the Revised Version, Moffatt, And the Revised Standard Version all print it; and Euodia is a woman's name. Therefore, Euodia and Syntyche were two women who had quarrelled.

It may well have been that they were women in whose homes two of the house congregations of Philippi met. It is very interesting to see women playing so leading a part in the affairs of one of the early congregations for in Greece women remained very much in the background. It was the aim of the Greeks that a respectable woman should "see as little, hear as little and ask as little as possible." A respectable woman never appeared on the street alone; she had her own apartments in the house and never joined the male members of the family even for meals. Least of all had she any part in public life. But Philippi was in Macedonia, and in Macedonia things were very different. There women had a freedom and a place which they had nowhere in the rest of Greece.

We can see this even in the narrative in Acts of Paul's work in Macedonia. In Philippi Paul's first contact was with the meeting for prayer by a riverside, and he spoke to the women who resorted there (Ac.16:13). Lydia was obviously a leading figure in Philippi (Ac.16:14). In Thessalonica many of the chief women were won for Christianity, and the same happened in Berea (Ac.17:4,12). The evidence of inscriptions points the same way. A wife erects a tomb for herself and for her husband out of their joint earnings, so she must have been in business. We even find monuments erected to women by public bodies. We know that in many of the Pauline Churches (for example, in Corinth), women had to be content with a very subordinate place. But it is well worth remembering, when we are thinking of the place of women in the early Church and of Paul's attitude to them, that in the Macedonian Churches they clearly had a leading place.

There is another matter of doubt here. In this passage someone is addressed who is called in the Revised Standard Version true yokefellow. It is just barely possible that yokefellow is a proper name--Suzugos (GSN4805). The word for true is gnesios (GSN1103), which means genuine. And there may be a pun here. Paul may be saying: "I ask you, Sunzugos--and you are rightly named--to help." If suzugos (GSN4805) is not a proper name, no one knows who is being addressed. All kinds of suggestions have been made. It has been suggested that the yokefellow is Paul's wife, that he is the husband of Euodia or Syntyche called on to help his wife mend the quarrel, that it is

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Philippians 4:2-3

Lydia, that it is Timothy, that it is Silas, that it is the minister of the Philippian Church. Maybe the best suggestion is that the referent, is to Epaphroditus, the bearer of the letter, and that Paul is entrusting him not only with the letter, but also with the task of making peace at Philippi. Of the Clement named we know nothing.

There was later a famous Clement who was bishop of Rome and who may have known Paul, but it was a common name.

There are two things to be noted.

(i) It is significant that when there was a quarrel at Philippi, Paul mobilized the whole resources of the Church to mend it. He thought no effort too great to maintain the peace of the Church. A quarrelling Church is no Church at all, for it is one from which Christ has been shut out. No man can be at peace with God and at variance with his fellow-men.

(ii) It is a grim thought that all we know about Euodia and Syntyche is that they were two women who had quarrelled! It makes us think. Suppose our life was to be summed up in one sentence, what would that sentence be? Clement goes down to history as the peacemaker; Euodia and Syntyche go down as the breakers of the peace. Suppose we were to go down to history with one thing known about us, what would that one thing be?

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Philippians 4:4-5

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Philippians 4:4-5

Rejoice in the Lord at all times. I will say it again--Rejoice! Let your gracious gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Paul sets before the Philippians two great qualities of the Christian life.

(i) The first is the quality of joy. "Rejoice ... I will say it again--Rejoice!" It is as if having said, "Rejoice!" there flashed into his mind a picture of all that was to come. He himself was lying in prison with almost certain death awaiting him; the Philippians were setting out on the Christian way, and dark days, dangers and persecutions inevitably lay ahead. So Paul says, "I know what I'm saying. I've thought of everything that can possibly happen. And still I say it--Rejoice!" Christian joy is independent of all things on earth because it has its source in the continual presence of Christ. Two lovers are always happy when they are together, no matter where they are. The Christian can never lose his joy because he can never lose Christ.

(ii) Paul goes on, as the King James Version has it: "Let your moderation be known to all men." The word (*epieikeia*, GSN1932) translated moderation is one of the most untranslatable of all Greek words. The difficulty can be seen by the number of translations given of it. Wycliffe translates it patience; Tyndale, softness; Crammer, softness; The Geneva Bible, the patient mind; the Rheims Bible, modesty; the English Revised Version, forbearance (in the margin gentleness); Moffatt, forbearance; Weymouth, the forbearing spirit; the New English Bible, magnanimity. C. Kingsley Williams has: "Let all the world know that you will meet a man half-way."

The Greeks themselves explained this word as "justice and something better than justice." They said that *epieikeia* (GSN1932) ought to come in when strict justice became unjust because of its generality. There may be individual instances where a perfectly just law becomes unjust or where justice is not the same thing as equity. A man has the quality of *epieikeia* (GSN1932) if he knows when not to apply the strict letter of the law, when to relax justice and introduce mercy.

Let us take a simple example which meets every teacher almost every day. Here are two students. We correct their examination papers. We apply justice and find that one has eighty per cent and the other fifty per cent. But we go a little further and find that the man who got eighty per cent has been able to do his work in ideal conditions with books, leisure and peace to study, while the man who got fifty per cent is from a poor home and has inadequate equipment, or has been ill, or has recently come through some time of sorrow or strain. In justice this man deserves fifty per cent and no more; but *epieikeia* (GSN1932) will value his paper far higher than that.

Epieikeia (GSN1932) is the quality of the man who knows that regulations are not the last word and knows when not to apply the letter of the law. A kirk session may sit with the book of practice and procedure on the table in front of it and take every one of its decisions in strict accordance with the law of the Church; but there are times when the Christian treatment of some situation demands that that book of practice and procedure should not be regarded as the last word.

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Philippians 4:4-5

The Christian, as Paul sees it, is the man who knows that there is something beyond justice. When the woman taken in adultery was brought before him, Jesus could have applied the letter of the Law according to which she should have been stoned to death; but he went beyond justice. As far as justice goes, there is not one of us who deserves anything other than the condemnation of God, but he goes far beyond justice. Paul lays it down that the mark of a Christian in his personal relationships with his fellow-men must be that he knows when to insist on justice and when to remember that there is something beyond justice.

Why should a man be like this? Why should he have this joy and gracious gentleness in his life? Because, says Paul, the Lord is at hand. If we remember the coming triumph of Christ, we can never lose our hope and our joy. If we remember that life is short, we will not wish to enforce the stern justice which so often divides men but will wish to deal with men in love, as we hope that God will deal with us. Justice is human, but *epieikeia* (GSN1932) is divine.

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Philippians 4:6-7

THE PEACE OF BELIEVING PRAYER

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not worry about anything; but in everything with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all human thought, will stand sentinel over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

For the Philippians life was bound to be a worrying thing. Even to be a human being and so to be vulnerable to all the chances and the changes of this mortal life is in itself a worrying thing; and in the Early Church, to the normal worry of the human situation there was added the worry of being a Christian which meant taking one's life in one's hands. Paul's solution is prayer. As M. R. Vincent puts it: "Peace is the fruit of believing prayer." In this passage there is in brief compass a whole philosophy of prayer.

(i) Paul stresses that we can take everything to God in prayer. As it has been beautifully put: "There is nothing too great for God's power; and nothing too small for his fatherly care." A child may take anything, great or small, to a parent, sure that whatever happens to him is of interest there, his little triumphs and disappointments, his passing cuts and bruises; we may in exactly the same way take anything to God, sure of his interest and concern.

(ii) We can bring our prayers, our supplications and our requests to God; we can pray for ourselves. We can pray for forgiveness for the past, for the things we need in the present, and for help and guidance for the future. We can take our own past and present and future into the presence of God. We can pray for others. We can commend to God's care those near and far who are within our memories and our hearts.

(iii) Paul lays it down that "thanksgiving must be the universal accompaniment of prayer." The Christian must feel, as it has been put, that all his life he is, "as it were, suspended between past and present blessings." Every prayer must surely include thanks for the great privilege of prayer itself. Paul insists that we must give thanks in everything, in sorrows and in joys alike. That implies two things. It implies gratitude and also perfect submission to the will of God. It is only when we are fully convinced that God is working all things together for good that we can really feel to him the perfect gratitude which believing prayer demands.

When we pray, we must always remember three things. We must remember the love of God, which ever desires only what is best for us. We must remember the wisdom of God, which alone knows what is best for us. We must remember the power of God, which alone can bring to pass that which is best for us. He who prays with a perfect trust in the love, wisdom and power of God will find God's peace.

The result of believing prayer is that the peace of God will stand like a sentinel on guard upon our hearts. The word that Paul uses (phrourein, GSN5432) is the military word for standing on guard. That peace of God, says Paul, as the Revised Standard Version has it, passes all understanding. That does not mean that the peace of God is such a mystery that man's mind cannot understand it,

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although that also is true. It means that the peace of God is so precious that man's mind, with all its skill and all its knowledge, can never produce it. It can never be of man's contriving; it is only of God's giving. The way to peace is in prayer to entrust ourselves and all whom we hold dear to the loving hands of God.

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Philippians 4:8-9

TRUE COUNTRIES OF THE MIND

Philippians 4:8-9 (Part 1)

Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things have the dignity of holiness on them, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are winsome, whatever things are fair-spoken, if there are any things which men count excellence, and if there are any things which bring men praise, think of the value of these things. Practise these things which you have teamed and received, and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

The human mind will always set itself on something and Paul wished to be quite sure that the Philippians would set their minds on the right things. This is something of the utmost importance, because it is a law of life that, if a man thinks of something often enough, he will come to the stage when he cannot stop thinking about it. His thoughts will be quite literally in a groove out of which he cannot jerk them. It is, therefore, of the first importance that a man should set his thoughts upon the fine things and here Paul makes a list of them.

There are the things which are true. Many things in this world are deceptive and illusory, promising what they can never perform, offering a specious peace and happiness which they can never supply. A man should always set his thoughts on the things which will not let him down.

There are the things which are, as the King James Version has it, honest. This is an archaic use of honest in the sense of honourable, as the Revised Standard Version translates it. The King James Version suggests in the margin venerable. The English Revised Version has honourable and suggests in the margin reverend Moffatt has worthy.

It can be seen from all this that the Greek (*semnos*, GSN4586) is difficult to translate. It is the word which is characteristically used of the gods and of the temples of the gods. When used to describe a man, it describes a person who, as it has been said, moves throughout the world as if it were the temple of God. Matthew Arnold suggested the translation nobly serious. But the word really describes that which has the dignity of holiness upon it. There are things in this world which are flippant and cheap and attractive to the light-minded; but it is on the things which are serious and dignified that the Christian will set his mind.

There are the things which are just. The word is *dikaios* (GSN1342), and the Greeks defined the man who is *dikaios* (GSN1342) as he who gives to gods and men what is their due. In other words, *dikaios* (GSN1342) is the word of duty faced and duty done. There are those who set their minds on pleasure, comfort and easy ways. The Christian's thoughts are on duty to man and duty to God.

There are the things which are pure. The word is *hagnos* (GSN0053) and describes what is morally undefiled. When it is used ceremonially, it describes that which has been so cleansed that it is fit to be brought into the presence of God and used in his service. This world is full of things which are sordid and shabby and soiled and smutty. Many a man gets his mind into such a state that it soils everything of which it thinks. The Christian's mind is set on the things which are pure; his thoughts are so clean that they can stand even the scrutiny of God.

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Philippians 4:8-9

There are the things which the King James Version and the Revised Standard call lovely. Moffatt translates attractive. Winsome is the best translation of all. The Greek is *prospiles* (GSN4375), and it might be paraphrased as that which calls forth love. There are those whose minds are so set on vengeance and punishment that they call forth bitterness and fear in others. There are those whose minds are so set on criticism and rebuke that they call forth resentment in others. The mind of the Christian is set on the lovely things--kindness, sympathy, forbearance--so he is a winsome person, whom to see is to love.

There are the things which are, as the King James Version has it, of good report. In the margin the English Revised Version suggests gracious. Moffatt has high-toned. The Revised Standard Version has gracious. C. Kingsley Williams has whatever has a good name. It is not easy to get at the meaning of this word (*euphema*, GSN2163). It literally means fair-speaking, but it was specially connected with the holy silence at the beginning of a sacrifice in the presence of the gods. It might not be going too far to say that it describes the things which are fit for God to hear. There are far too many ugly words and false words and impure words in this world. On the lips and in the mind of the Christian there should be only words which are fit for God to hear.

Paul goes on, if there be any virtue. Both Moffatt and the Revised Standard Version use excellence instead of virtue. The word is *arete* (GSN0703). The odd fact is that, although *arete* (GSN0703) was one of the great classical words, Paul usually seems deliberately to avoid it and this is the only time it occurs in his writings. In classical thought it described every kind of excellence. It could describe the excellence of the ground in a field, the excellence of a tool for its purpose, the physical excellence of an animal, the excellence of the courage of a soldier, and the virtue of a man. Lightfoot suggests that with this word Paul calls in as an ally all that was excellent in the pagan background of his friends. It is as if he were saying, "If the old pagan idea of excellence, in which you were brought up, has any influence over you--think of that. Think of your past life at its very highest, to spur you on to the new heights of the Christian way." The world has its impurities and its degradations but it has also its nobilities and its chivalries, and it is of the high things that the Christian must think.

Finally Paul says, if there be any praise. In one sense it is true that the Christian never thinks of the praise of men, but in another sense it is true that every good man is uplifted by the praise of good men. So Paul says that the Christian will live in such a way that he will neither conceitedly desire nor foolishly despise the praise of men.

Barclay's Commentary Philippians 4:8-9

THE TRUE TEACHING AND THE TRUE GOD

Philippians 4:8-9 (Part 2)

In this passage Paul lays down the way of true teaching.

He speaks of the things which the Philippians have learned. These are the things in which he personally instructed them. This stands for the personal interpretation of the gospel which Paul brought to them. He speaks of the things which the Philippians have received. The word is *paralambanein* (GSN3880) which characteristically means to accept a fixed tradition. This then stands for the accepted teaching of the Church which Paul had handed on to them.

From these two words we learn that teaching consists of two things. It consists of handing on to men the accepted body of truth and doctrine which the whole Church holds; and it consists of illuminating that body of doctrine by the personal interpretation and instruction of the teacher. If we would teach or preach we must know the accepted body of the Church's doctrine; and then we must pass it through our own minds and hand it on to others, both in its own simplicity and in the significances which our own experiences and our own thinking have given to it.

Paul goes further than that. He tells the Philippians to copy what they have heard and seen in himself. Tragically few teachers and preachers can speak like that; and yet it remains true that personal example is an essential part of teaching. The teacher must demonstrate in action the truth which he expresses in words.

Finally, Paul tells his Philippian friends that, if they faithfully do all this, the God of peace will be with them. It is of great interest to study Paul's titles for God.

(i) He is the God of peace. This, in fact, is his favourite title for God (Rom.16:20; 1Cor.14:33; 1Th.5:23). To a Jew peace was never merely a negative thing, never merely the absence of trouble. It was everything which makes for a man's highest good. Only in the friendship of God can a man find life as it was meant to be. But also to a Jew this peace issued specially in right relationships. It is only by the grace of God that we can enter into a right relationship with him and with our fellow-men. The God of peace is able to make life what it was meant to be by enabling us to enter into fellowship with himself and with our fellow-men.

(ii) He is the God of hope (Rom.15:13). Belief in God is the only thing which can keep a man from the ultimate despair. Only the sense of the grace of God can keep him from despairing about himself; and only the sense of the over-ruling providence of God can keep him from despairing about the world. The Psalmist sang: "Why are you cast down, O my soul?... Hope in God: for I shall again praise him, my help and my God" (Ps.42:11; Ps.43:5). F. W. Faber wrote:

For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

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The hope of the Christian is indestructible because it is founded on the eternal God.

(iii) He is the God of patience, of comfort, and of consolation (Rom.15:5; 2Cor.1:3). Here we have two great words. Patience is in Greek hupomone (GSN5281), which never means simply the ability to sit down and bear things but the ability to rise up and conquer them. God is he who gives us the power to use any experience to lend greatness and glory to life. God is, he in whom we learn to use joy and sorrow, success and failure, achievement and disappointment alike, to enrich and to ennoble life, to make us more useful to others and to bring us nearer to himself. Consolation and comfort are the same Greek word paraklesis (GSN3874). Paraklesis is far more than soothing sympathy; it is encouragement. It is the help which not only puts an arm round a man but sends him out to face the world; it not only wipes away the tears but enables him to face the world with steady eyes. Paraklesis (GSN3874) is comfort and strength combined.

God is he in whom any situation becomes our glory and in whom a man finds strength to go on gallantly when life has fallen in.

(iv) He is the God of love and peace (2Cor.13:11). Here we are at the heart of the matter. Behind everything is that love of God which will never let us go, which bears with all our sinning, which will never cast us off, which never sentimentally weakens but always manfully strengthens a man for the battle of life.

Peace, hope, patience, comfort, love--these were the things which Paul found in God. Indeed "our sufficiency is from God" (2Cor.3:5).

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Philippians 4:10-13

THE SECRET OF TRUE CONTENT

Philippians 4:10-13

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that now at length you have made your thoughtfulness for me to blossom again. That was a matter indeed about which you were always thoughtful, but you had no opportunity. Not that I speak as if I were in a state of want, for I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am. I know both how to live in the humblest circumstances, and how to have far more than enough, In everything and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of being hungry, of having more than enough and of having less than enough. I can do all things through him who infuses strength into me.

As the letter draws to an end Paul generously expresses his gratitude for the gift which the Philippians had sent to him. He knew that he had always been much in their thoughts, but circumstances had up till now given them no opportunity to show their mindfulness of him.

It was not that he was dissatisfied with his own state, for he had learned the gift of content. Paul uses one of the great words of pagan ethics (autarkes, GSN0842), which means entirely self-sufficient. Autarkeia (GSN0842), self-sufficiency, was the highest aim of Stoic ethics; by it the Stoics meant a state of mind in which a man was absolutely independent of all things and of all people. They proposed to reach that state by a certain pathway of the mind.

(i) They proposed to eliminate all desire. The Stoics rightly believed that contentment did not consist in possessing much but in wanting little, "If you want to make a man happy," they said, "add not to his possessions, but take away from his desires." Socrates was once asked who was the wealthiest man. He answered: "He who is content with least, for autarkeia (GSN0842) is nature's wealth." The Stoics believed that the only way to content was to abolish all desire until a man had come to a stage when nothing and no one were essential to him.

(ii) They proposed to eliminate all emotion until a man had come to a stage when he did not care what happened either to himself or to anyone else. Epictetus says. "Begin with a cup or a household utensil; if it breaks, say, 'I don't care.' Go on to a horse or pet dog; if anything happens to it, say, 'I don't care.' Go on to yourself, and if you are hurt or injured in any way, say, 'I don't care.' If you go on long enough, and if you try hard enough, you will come to a stage when you can watch your nearest and dearest suffer and die, and say, 'I don't care.'" The Stoic aim was to abolish every feeling of the human heart.

(iii) This was to be done by a deliberate act of will which saw in everything the will of God. The Stoic believed that literally nothing could happen which was not the will of God. However painful it might be, however disastrous it might seem, it was God's will. It was, therefore, useless to struggle against it; a man must steel himself into accepting everything.

In order to achieve content, the Stoics abolished all desires and eliminated all emotions. Love was rooted out of life and caring was forbidden. As T. R. Glover said, "The Stoics made of the heart a desert, and called it a peace."

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Philippians 4:10-13

We see at once the difference between the Stoics and Paul. The Stoic said, "I will learn content by a deliberate act of my own will." Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who infuses his strength into me." For the Stoic contentment was a human achievement; for Paul it was a divine gift. The Stoic was self-sufficient; but Paul was God-sufficient. Stoicism failed because it was inhuman; Christianity succeeded because it was rooted in the divine. Paul could face anything, because in every situation he had Christ; the man who walks with Christ can cope with anything.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 4:14-20

THE VALUE OF THE GIFT

Philippians 4:14-20

All the same, I am most grateful to you for your readiness to share the burden of my troubles. You too, know, Philippians, that in the beginning of the. gospel, when I left Macedonia, no Church entered into partnership with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone, for in Thessalonica not merely once but twice you sent to help my need. It is not that I am looking for the gift; but I am looking for the fruit which increases to your credit. I have enough and more than enough of everything. I am fully supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts which came from you, the odour of a sweet savour, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God will gloriously supply every need of yours according to his wealth in Jesus Christ. Glory be to our God and Father for ever and ever. Amen.

The generosity of the Philippian Church to Paul went back a long way. In Ac.16-17 we read how he preached the gospel in Philippi and then moved on to Thessalonica and Berea. As far back as that, the Philippian Church had given practical proof of its love for him. He was in a unique position in regard to the Philippians; from no other Church had he ever accepted any gift or help. It was in fact that very circumstance which annoyed the Corinthians (2Cor.11:7-12).

Paul says a fine thing. He says, "It is not that I desire a present from you for my own sake, although your gift touches my heart and makes me very glad. I don't need anything, for I have more than enough. But I am glad that you gave me a gift for your own sake, for your kindness will stand greatly to your credit in the sight of God." Their generosity made him glad, not for his own sake but for theirs. Then he uses words which turn the gift of the Philippians into a sacrifice to God. "The odour of a sweet savour," he calls it. That was a regular Old Testament phrase for a sacrifice which was acceptable to God. It is as if the smell of the sacrifice was sweet in the nostrils of God (Gen.8:21; Lev.1:9,13,17). Paul's joy in the gift is not in what it did for him, but in what it did for them. It was not that he did not value the gift for its own sake; but his greatest joy was that it and the love which prompted it were dear to God.

In a last sentence, Paul lays it down that no gift ever made any man the poorer. The wealth of God is open to those who love him and love their fellow-men. He who gives makes himself richer, for his own gift opens to him the gifts of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Philippians 4:21-23

GREETINGS

Philippians 4:21-23

Greet in Christ Jesus every one of God's dedicated people. The brothers who are with me send you their greetings, especially those of Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

The letter comes to the end with greetings. In this final section there is one intensely interesting phrase. Paul sends special greetings from the Christian brothers who are of Caesar's household. It is important to understand this phrase rightly. It does not mean those who are of Caesar's kith and kin. Caesar's household was the regular phrase for what we would call the Imperial Civil Service; it had members all over the world. The palace officials, the secretaries, the people who had charge of the imperial revenues, those who were responsible for the day-to-day administration of the empire, all these were Caesar's household. It is of the greatest interest to note that even as early as this Christianity had penetrated into the very centre of the Roman government. There is hardly any sentence which shows more how Christianity had infiltrated even into the highest positions in the empire.

It was to be another three hundred years before Christianity became the religion of the empire, but already the first signs of the ultimate triumph of Christ were to be seen. The crucified Galilean carpenter had already begun to rule those who ruled the greatest empire in the world.

And so the letter ends: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." The Philippians had sent their gifts to Paul. He had only one gift to send to them--his blessing. But what greater gift can we give to any man than to remember him in our prayers?

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Introduction to Colossians

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

THE TOWNS OF THE LYCUS VALLEY

About one hundred miles from Ephesus, in the valley of the River Lycus, near where it joins the Maeander, there once stood three important cities--Laodicaea, Hierapolis and Colosse. Originally they had been Phrygian cities but now they were part of the Roman province of Asia. They stood almost within sight of each other. Hierapolis and Laodicaea stood on either side of the valley with the River Lycus flowing between, only six miles apart and in full view of each other; Colosse straddled the river twelve miles farther up.

The Lycus Valley had two remarkable characteristics.

(i) It was notorious for earthquakes. Strabo describes it by the curious adjective *euseistos*, which in English means good for earthquakes. More than once Laodicaea had been destroyed by an earthquake, but she was a city so rich and so independent that she had risen from the ruins without the financial help which the Roman government had offered. As the John who wrote the Revelation was to say of her, in her own eyes she was rich and had need of nothing (Rev.3:17).

(ii) The waters of the River Lycus and of its tributaries were impregnated with chalk. This chalk gathered and all over the countryside built up the most amazing natural formations. Lightfoot writes in description of that area: "Ancient monuments are buried; fertile land is overlaid; rivers beds choked up and streams diverted; fantastic grottoes and cascades and archways of stone are formed, by this strange, capricious power, at once destructive and creative, working silently throughout the ages. Fatal to vegetation, these incrustations spread like a stony shroud over the ground. Gleaming like glaciers on the hillside, they attract the eye of the traveller at a distance of twenty miles, and form a singularly striking feature in scenery of more than common beauty and impressiveness."

A WEALTHY AREA

In spite of these things this was a wealthy area and famous for two closely allied trades. Volcanic ground is always fertile; and what was not covered by the chalky incrustations was magnificent pasture land. On these pastures there were great flocks of sheep and the area was perhaps the greatest centre of the woollen industry in the world. Laodicaea was specially famous for the production of garments of the finest quality. The allied trade was dyeing. There was some quality in those chalky waters which made them specially suitable for dyeing cloth, and Colosse was so famous for this trade that a certain dye was called by its name.

So, then, these three cities stood in a district of considerable geographical interest and of great commercial prosperity.

THE UNIMPORTANT CITY

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Introduction to Colossians

Originally the three cities had been of equal importance, but, as the years went on, their ways parted. Laodicaea became the political centre of the district and the financial headquarters of the whole area, a city of splendid prosperity. Hierapolis became a great trade-centre and a notable spa. In that volcanic area there were many chasms in the ground from which came hot vapours and springs, famous for their medicinal quality; and people came in their thousands to Hierapolis to bathe and to drink the waters.

Colosse at one time was as great as the other two. Behind her rose the Cadmus range of mountains and she commanded the roads to the mountain passes. Both Xerxes and Cyrus had halted there with their invading armies, and Herodotus had called her "a great city of Phrygia." But for some reason the glory departed. How great that departure was can be seen from the fact that Hierapolis and Laodicaea are both to this day clearly discernible because the ruins of some great buildings still stand; but there is not a stone to show where Colosse stood and her site can only be guessed at. Even when Paul wrote Colosse was a small town; and Lightfoot says that she was the most unimportant town to which Paul ever wrote a letter.

The fact remains that in this town of Colosse there had arisen a heresy which, if it had been allowed to develop unchecked, might well have been the ruination of the Christian faith.

THE JEWS IN PHRYGIA

One other fact must be added to complete the picture. These three cities stood in an area in which there were many Jews. Many years before, Antiochus the Great had transported two thousand Jewish families from Babylon and Mesopotamia into the regions of Lydia and Phrygia. These Jews had prospered and, as always happens in such a case, more of their fellow-countrymen had come into the area to share their prosperity. So many came that the stricter Jews of Palestine lamented the number of Jews who left the rigours of their ancestral land for "the wines and baths of Phrygia."

The number of Jews who resided there can be seen from the following historical incident. Laodicaea, as we have seen, was the administrative centre of the district. In the year 62 B.C., Flaccus was the Roman governor resident there. He sought to put a stop to the practice of the Jews of sending money out of the province to pay the Temple tax. He did so by placing an embargo on the export of currency; and in his own part of the province alone he seized as contraband no less than twenty pounds of gold which was meant for the Temple at Jerusalem. That amount of gold would represent the Temple tax of no fewer than 11,000 people. Since women and children were exempt from the tax and since many Jews would successfully evade the capture of their money, we may well put the Jewish population as high as almost 50,000.

THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE

The Christian Church at Colosse was one which Paul had not himself founded and which he had never visited. He classes the Colossians and the Laodiceans with those who had never seen his face in the flesh (Col.2:1). But no doubt the founding of the Church sprang from his directing. During his three years in Ephesus the whole province of Asia was evangelized, so that all its inhabitants, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord (Ac.19:10). Colosse was about one

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hundred miles from Ephesus and it was no doubt in that campaign of expansion that the Colossian Church was founded. We do not know who its founder was; but it may well have been Epaphras, who is described as Paul's fellow-servant and the faithful minister of the Colossian Church and who is later connected also with Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col.1:7; Col.4:12-13). If Epaphras was not the founder of the Christian Church there, he was certainly the minister in charge of the area.

A GENTILE CHURCH

It is clear that the Colossian Church was mainly Gentile. The phrase estranged and hostile in mind (Col.1:21) is the kind of phrase which Paul regularly uses of those who had once been strangers to the covenant of promise. In Col.1:27 he speaks of making known the mystery of Christ among the Gentiles, when the reference is clearly to the Colossians themselves. In Col.3:5-7 he gives a list of their sins before they became Christians, and these are characteristically Gentile sins. We may confidently conclude that the membership of the Church at Colosse was largely composed of Gentiles.

THE THREAT TO THE CHURCH

It must have been Epaphras who brought to Paul, in prison in Rome, news of the situation which was developing in Colosse. Much of the news that he brought was good. Paul is grateful for news of their faith in Christ and their love of the saints (Col.1:4). He rejoices at the Christian fruit which they are producing (Col.1:6). Epaphras has brought him news of their love in the Spirit (Col.1:8). He is glad when he hears of their order and steadfastness in the faith (Col.2:5). There was trouble at Colosse certainly; but it had not yet become an epidemic. Paul believed that prevention was better than cure; and in this letter he is grasping this evil before it has time to spread.

THE HERESY AT COLOSSE

What the heresy was which was threatening the life of the Church at Colosse no one can tell for sure. "The Colossian Heresy" is one of the great problems of New Testament scholarship. All we can do is to go to the letter itself, list the characteristics we find indicated there and then see if we can find any general heretical tendency to fit the list.

(i) It was clearly a heresy which attacked the total adequacy and the unique supremacy of Christ. No Pauline letter has such a lofty view of Jesus Christ or such insistence on his completeness and finality. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God; in him all fullness dwells (Col.1:15,19). In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge (Col.2:2). In him dwells the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form (Col.2:9).

(ii) Paul goes out of his way to stress the part that Christ played in creation. By him all things were created (Col.1:16); in him all things cohere (Col.1:17). The Son was the Father's instrument in the creation of the universe.

(iii) At the same time he goes out of his way to stress the real humanity of Christ. It was in the body of his flesh that he did his redeeming work (Col.1:22). The fullness of the Godhead dwells in

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him somatikos (GSN4984), in bodily form (Col.2:9). For all his deity Jesus Christ was truly human flesh and blood.

(iv) There seems to have been an astrological element in this heresy. In Col.2:8, as the King James Version has it, he says that they were walking after the rudiments of this world, and in Col.2:20 that they ought to be dead to the rudiments of this world. The word translated rudiments is stoicheia (GSN4747), which has two meanings.

(a) Its basic meaning is a row of things; it can, for instance, be used for a file of soldiers. But one of its commonest meanings is the A B C, the letters of the alphabet, set out, as it were, in a row. From that it develops the meaning of the elements of any subject, the rudiments. It is in that sense that the King James Version takes it; and, if that is the correct sense, Paul means that the Colossians are slipping back to an elementary kind of Christianity when they ought to be going on to maturity.

(b) We think that the second meaning is more likely. Stoicheia (GSN4747) can mean the elemental spirits of the world, and especially the spirits of the stars and planets. The ancient world was dominated by thought of the influence of the stars; and even the greatest and the wisest men would not act without consulting them. It believed that all things were in the grip of an iron fatalism settled by the stars; and the science of astrology professed to provide men with the secret knowledge which would rid them of their slavery to the elemental spirits. It is most likely that the Colossian false teachers were teaching that it needed something more than Jesus Christ to rid men of their subjection to these elemental spirits.

(v) This heresy made much of the powers of demonic spirits. There are frequent references to principalities or authorities, which are Paul's names for these spirits (Col.1:16; Col.2:10; Col.2:15). The ancient world believed implicitly in demonic powers. The air was full of them. Every natural force--the wind, the thunder, the lightning, the rain--had its demonic superintendent. Every place, every tree, every river, every lake had its spirit. They were in one sense intermediaries to God and in another sense barriers to him, for the vast majority of them were hostile to men. The ancient world lived in a demon-haunted universe. The Colossian false teachers were clearly saying that something more than Jesus Christ was needed to defeat the power of the demons.

(vi) There was clearly what we might call a philosophical element in this heresy. The heretics are out to spoil men with philosophy and empty deceit (Col.2:8). Clearly the Colossian heretics were saying that the simplicities of the gospel needed a far more elaborate and recondite knowledge added to them.

(vii) There was a tendency in this heresy to insist on the observance of special days and rituals--festivals, new moons and sabbaths (Col.2:16).

(viii) Clearly there was a would-be ascetic element in this heresy. It laid down laws about food and drink (Col.2:16). Its slogans were: "Touch not; taste not; handle not" (Col.2:21). It was a heresy which was out to limit Christian freedom by insistence on all kinds of legalistic ordinances.

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(ix) Equally this heresy had at least sometimes an antinomian streak in it. It tended to make men careless of the chastity which the Christian should have and to make him think lightly of the bodily sins (Col.3:5-8).

(x) Apparently this heresy gave at least some place to the worship of angels (Col.2:18). Beside the demons it introduced angelic intermediaries between man and God.

(xi) Lastly, there seems to have been in this heresy something which can only be called spiritual and intellectual snobbery. In Col.1:28 Paul lays down his aim; it is to warn every man; to teach every man in all wisdom; and to present every man mature in Jesus Christ. We see how the phrase every man is reiterated and how the aim is to make him mature in all wisdom. The clear implication is that the heretics limited the gospel to some chosen few and introduced a spiritual and intellectual aristocracy into the wide welcome of the Christian faith.

THE Gnostic HERESY

Was there then any general heretical tendency of thought which would include all this? There was what was called Gnosticism. Gnosticism began with two basic assumptions about matter. First, it believed that spirit alone was good and that matter was essentially evil. Second, it believed that matter was eternal; and that the universe was not created out of nothing--which is orthodox belief--but out of this flawed matter. Now this basic belief had certain inevitable consequences.

(i) It had an effect on the doctrine of creation. If God was spirit, then he was altogether good and could not possibly work with this evil matter. Therefore God was not the creator of the world. He put out a series of emanations, each of which was a little more distant from God until at the end of the series there was an emanation so distant that it could handle matter; and it was this emanation which created the world. The Gnostics went further. Since each emanation was more distant from God. It was also more ignorant of him. As the series went on that ignorance turned to hostility. So the emanations most distant from God were at once ignorant of him and hostile to him. It followed that he who created the world was at once completely ignorant of, and utterly hostile to, the true God. It was to meet that Gnostic doctrine of creation that Paul insisted that the agent of God in creation was not some ignorant and hostile power, but the Son who perfectly knew and loved the Father.

(ii) It had its effect on the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ. If matter was altogether evil and if Jesus was the Son of God, then Jesus could not have had a flesh and blood body--so the Gnostic argued. He must have been a kind of spiritual phantom. So the Gnostic romances say that when Jesus walked, he left no footprints on the ground. This, of course, completely removed Jesus from humanity and made it impossible for him to be the Saviour of men. It was to meet this Gnostic doctrine that Paul insisted on the flesh and blood body of Jesus and insisted that Jesus saved men in the body of his flesh.

(iii) It had its effect on the ethical approach to life. If matter was evil, then it followed that our bodies were evil. If our bodies were evil, one of two consequences followed. (a) We must starve and beat and deny the body; we must practise a rigid asceticism in which the body was kept under,

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and in which its every need and desire were refused. (b) It was possible to take precisely the opposite point of view. If the body was evil, it did not matter what a man did with it; spirit was all that mattered. Therefore a man could sate the body's desires and it would make no difference.

Gnosticism could, therefore, issue in asceticism, with all kinds of laws and restrictions; or, it could issue in anti-nomianism, in which any immorality was justified. And we can see precisely both these tendencies at work in the false teachers at Colosse.

(iv) One thing followed from all this--Gnosticism was a highly intellectual way of life and thought. There was this long series of emanations between a man and God; man must fight his way up a long ladder to get to God. In order to do that he would need all kinds of secret knowledge and esoteric Teaching and hidden passwords. If he was to practise a rigid asceticism, he would need to know the rules; and so rigid would his asceticism be that it would be impossible for him to embark on the ordinary activities of life. The Gnostics were, therefore, quite clear that the higher reaches of religion were open only to the chosen few. This conviction of the necessity of belonging to an intellectual religious aristocracy precisely suits the situation at Colosse.

(v) There remains one thing to fit into this picture. It is quite obvious that there was a Jewish element in the false teaching threatening the Church at Colosse. The festivals and the new moons and the sabbaths were characteristically Jewish; the laws about food and drink were essentially Jewish levitical laws. Where then did the Jews come in? It is a strange thing that many Jews were sympathetic to Gnosticism. They knew all about angels and demons and spirits. But, above all, they said, "We know quite well that it takes special knowledge to reach God. We know quite well that Jesus and his gospel are far too simple--and that special knowledge is to be found nowhere else than in the Jewish law. It is our ritual and ceremonial law which is indeed the special knowledge which enables a man to reach God." The result was that there was not infrequently a strange alliance between Gnosticism and Judaism; and it is just such an alliance that we find in Colosse, where, as we have seen, there were many Jews.

It is clear that the false teachers of Colosse were tinged with Gnostic heresy. They were trying to turn Christianity into a philosophy and a theosophy, and, if they had been successful, the Christian faith would have been destroyed.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE LETTER

One question remains. Many scholars do not believe that Paul wrote this letter at all. They have three reasons.

(i) They say that in Colossians there are many words and phrases which do not appear in any other of Paul's letters. That is perfectly true. But it does not prove anything. We cannot demand that a man should always write in the same way and with the same vocabulary. In Colossians we may well believe that Paul had new things to say and found new ways to say them.

(ii) They say that the development of Gnostic thought was, in fact, much later than the time of Paul so that, if the Colossian heresy was connected with Gnosticism, the letter is necessarily later

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than Paul. It is true that the great written Gnostic systems are later. But the idea of two worlds and the idea of the evil of matter are deeply woven into both Jewish and Greek thought. There is nothing in Colossians which cannot be explained by long-standing Gnostic tendencies in ancient thought, although it is true that the systematization of Gnosticism came later.

(iii) They say that the view of Christ in Colossians is far in advance of any of the letters certainly written by Paul. There are two answers to that.

First, Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ. In Colosse a new situation met him and out of these unsearchable riches he drew new answers to meet it. It is true that the Christology of Colossians is an advance on anything in the earlier letters of Paul; but that is far from saying that Paul did not write it, unless we are willing to argue that his thought remained for ever static. It is true to say that a man thinks out the implications of his faith only as circumstances compel him to do so; and in face of a new set of circumstances Paul thought out new implications of Christ.

Second, the germ of all Paul's thought about Christ in Colossians does, in fact, exist in one of his earlier letters. In 1Cor.8:6 he writes of one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things and through whom we exist. In that phrase is the essence of all he says in Colossians. The seed was there in his mind, ready to blossom when a new climate and new circumstances called it into growth.

We need not hesitate to accept Colossians as a letter written by Paul.

THE GREAT LETTER

It remains a strange and wonderful fact that Paul wrote the letter which contains the highest reach of his thought to so unimportant a town as Colosse then was. But in doing so he checked a tendency, which, had it been allowed to develop, would have wrecked Asian Christianity and might well have done irreparable damage to the faith of the whole Church.

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Colossians 1:1

CHRISTIAN GREETINGS

Colossians 1:1

This is a letter from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and from Timothy, the brother, to the dedicated people of God and faithful brothers in Christ who are in Colosse.

A dedicated Christian cannot write a single sentence without making clear the great beliefs which underlie all his thought. Paul had never actually been in Colosse and so he has to begin by making clear what right he has to send a letter to the Colossians. He does that in one word; he is an apostle. The word apostolos (GSN0652) literally means one who is sent out. Paul's right to speak is that he has been sent out by God to be his ambassador to the Gentiles. Moreover, he is an apostle by the will of God. That office is not something which he has earned or achieved; it is something which has been given him by God. "You did not choose me," said Jesus, "but I chose you" (Jn.15:16). Here, right at the outset of the letter, is the whole doctrine of grace. A man is not what he has made himself, but what God has made him.

With himself Paul associates Timothy; and he gives him a lovely title. He calls him the brother, a title which is given to Quartus (Rom.16:23); to Sosthenes (1Cor.1:1); to Apollos (1Cor.16:12). The fundamental necessity for Christian service and for Christian office is brotherliness.

Premanand, highborn Indian who became a Christian, tells in his autobiography of Father E. F. Brown of the Oxford Mission in Calcutta. E. F. Brown was every man's friend; but he was specially the friend of the hackney carriage drivers, the carters, the tram conductors, the menial servants, and the hundreds of poor street boys. Later in his life, when he was travelling about India, Premanand would often meet people who had stayed in Calcutta, and they would always ask for E. F. Brown, saying, "Is that friend of the Calcutta street boys still alive, who used to walk arm-in-arm with the poor?" Sir Henry Lunn tells how his father used to describe his grandfather: "He was a friend of the poor without patronage, and of the rich without subservience."

To use our modern idiom, the first necessity for Christian service is the ability to "get alongside" all kinds of people. Timothy is not described as the preacher, the teacher, the theologian, the administrator, but as the brother. He who walks in aloofness can never be a real servant of Jesus Christ.

Another interesting and significant fact is that this opening address is to God's dedicated people and to the faithful brothers in Colosse. In the matter of opening addresses Paul's custom changed. In his earlier letters he always addressed the letter to the Church. I and 2 Thessalonians, I and 2 Corinthians and Galatians are all addressed to the Church of the district to which they are sent. But beginning with Romans his letters are all addressed to God's dedicated people in such and such a place. It is so in Romans, Colossians, Philippians and Ephesians. As Paul grew older, he came more and more to see what matters is individual people. The Church is not a kind of abstract entity; it is individual men and women and children. As the years went on, Paul began to see the Church in terms of individuals hence this style of greeting.

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Colossians 1:1

The opening, greeting closes with a most significant placing of two things side by side. He writes to the Christians who are in Colosse and who are in Christ. A Christian always moves in two spheres. He is in a certain place in this world; but he is also in Christ. He lives in two dimensions. He lives in this world whose duties he does not treat lightly; but above and beyond that he lives in Christ. In this world he may move from place to place; but wherever he is, he is in Christ. That is why outward circumstances make little difference to the Christian; his peace and his joy are not dependent on them. That is why he will do any job with all his heart. It may be menial, unpleasant, painful, it may be far less distinguished than he might expect to have; its rewards may be small and its praise non-existent; nevertheless the Christian will do it diligently, uncomplainingly and cheerfully, for he is in Christ and does all things as to the Lord.

We are all in our own Colosse, but we are all in Christ, and it is Christ who sets the tone of our living.

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Colossians 1:2-8

THE DOUBLE COMMITMENT

Colossians 1:2-8 (Part 1)

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for you in our prayers; for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love you have to all God's dedicated people, because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven. Of that hope you have already heard in the true word of the gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world it is bearing fruit and increasing, just as it did among you too, from that day on which you heard and knew the grace of God as it truly is, as you teamed it from Epaphras, my beloved fellow-bondman, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and who has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Here we are presented with the essence of the Christian life. The fact which delights Paul's heart and for which he gives God thanks is that he has been told that the Colossians are showing two great qualities in their lives, faith in Christ and love for their fellow-men.

These are the two sides of the Christian life. The Christian must have faith; he must know what he believes. But he must also have love for men; he must turn that belief into action. It is not enough simply to have faith, for there can be an orthodoxy which knows no love. It is not enough only to have love for men, for without real belief that love can become mere sentimentality. The Christian has a double commitment--he is committed to Jesus Christ and he is committed to his fellow-men. Faith in Christ and love to men are the twin pillars of the Christian life.

That faith and love depend on the hope that is laid up in heaven. What exactly does Paul mean? Is he asking the Colossians to show faith in Christ and love for men only for the hope of some reward that is going to come to them some day? Is this "pie in the sky"? There is something much deeper than that here.

Think of it this way. Loyalty to Christ may involve a man in all kinds of loss and pain and suffering. There may be many things to which he has to say goodbye. The way of love may seem to many to be the way of a fool. Why spend life in selfless service? Why not use it "to get on" as the world counts getting on? Why not push the weaker brother out of the way? The answer is--because of the hope that is set before us.

As C. F. D. Moule puts it, that hope is the certainty that, in spite of the world's ways, God's way of love has the last word. As James Russell Lowell put it in "The Present Crisis," the hope is that:

Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet 'tis truth alone is strong...
Truth for ever on the scaffold, Wrong for ever on the throne;
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

The Christian hope is that God's way is the best way and that the only real peace, the only real joy, the only true and lasting reward are to be found in it. Loyalty to Christ may bring trouble here--

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Colossians 1:2-8

but that is not the last word. The world may laugh contemptuously at the folly of the way of love-- but the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man. The Christian hope is the confidence that it is better to stake one's life on God than to believe the world.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 1:2-8

THE ESSENCE OF THE GOSPEL

Colossians 1:2-8 (Part 2)

Col.1:6-8 are a kind of summary of what the gospel is and does. Paul has much to say of the hope, to which the Colossians have already listened and which they have already accepted.

(i) The gospel is good news of God. Its message is of a God who is a Friend and Lover of the souls of men. First and foremost, the gospel sets us in a right relationship with God.

(ii) The gospel is truth. All previous religions could be entitled "guesses about God." The Christian gospel gives a man not guesses but certainties about God.

(iii) The gospel is universal. It is for all the world. It is not confined to any one race or nation, nor to any one class or condition. Very few things in this world are open to all men. A man's mental calibre decides the studies he can undertake. A man's social class decides the circle amidst which he will move. A man's material wealth determines the possessions he can amass. A man's particular gifts decide the things he can do. But the message of the gospel is open without exception to all men.

(iv) The gospel is productive. It bears fruit and increases. It is the plain fact of history and experience that the gospel has power to change individual men and the society in which men live. It can change the sinner into a good man and can slowly take the selfishness and the cruelty out of society so that all men may have the chance God would wish them to have.

(v) The gospel tells of grace. It is not so much the message of what God demands as of what he offers. It tells not so much of his demand from men as of his gift to men.

(vi) The gospel is humanly transmitted. It was Epaphras who brought it to the Colossians. There must be a human channel through which the gospel can come to men. And this is where we come in. The possession of the good news of the gospel involves the obligation to share it. That which is divinely given must be humanly passed on. Jesus Christ needs us to be the hands and feet and lips which will bring his gospel to those who have never heard it.

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Colossians 1:9-11

THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER'S REQUEST

Colossians 1:9-11 (Part 1)

That, in fact, is why, from the day we heard about it, we do not cease to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of his will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may conduct yourselves worthily of the Lord, and in such a way as to be altogether pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the fuller knowledge of God. May you continue to be strengthened with all strength according to his glorious power, so that you may possess all fortitude and patience with joy.

It is a very precious thing to hear the prayers of a saint for his friends; and that is what we hear in this passage. It may well be said that this passage teaches us more about the essence of prayer's request than almost any other in the New Testament. From it we learn, as C. F. D. Moule has said, that prayer makes two great requests. It asks for the discernment of God's will and then for the power to perform that will.

(i) Prayer begins by asking that we may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of the will of God. Its great object is to know the will of God. We are trying not so much to make God listen to us as to make ourselves listen to him; we are trying not to persuade God to do what we want, but to find out what he wants us to do. It so often happens that in prayer we are really saying, "Thy will be changed," when we ought to be saying, "Thy will be done." The first object of prayer is not so much to speak to God as to listen to him.

(ii) This knowledge of God must be translated into our human situation. We pray for spiritual wisdom and understanding. Spiritual wisdom is *sophia* (GSN4678), which we could describe as knowledge of first principles. Understanding is *sunesis* (GSN4907), which is what the Greeks sometimes described as critical knowledge, meaning the ability to apply first principles to any given situation which may arise in life. So when Paul prays that his friends may have wisdom and understanding, he is praying that they may understand the great truths of Christianity and may be able to apply them to the tasks and decisions which meet them in everyday living. A man may quite easily be a master of theology and a failure in living; able to write and talk about the eternal truths and yet helpless to apply them to the things which meet him every day. The Christian must know what Christianity means, not in a vacuum but in the business of living.

(iii) This knowledge of God's will, and this wisdom and understanding, must issue in right conduct. Paul prays that his friends may conduct themselves in such a way as to please God. There is nothing in this world so practical as prayer. It is not escape from reality. Prayer and action go hand in hand. We pray not in order to escape life but in order to be better able to meet it.

(iv) To do this we need power. Therefore, Paul prays that his friends may be strengthened with the power of God. The great problem in life is not to know what to do but to do it. For the most part, we are well aware in any given situation what we ought to do; our problem is to put that knowledge into action. What we need is power; and that we receive in prayer. If God merely told us

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Colossians 1:9-11

what his will was, that might well be a frustrating situation; but he not only tells us his will, he also enables us to perform it.

Knowledge we ask not, knowledge thou hast lent,
But Lord--the will, there lies our deepest need.
Grant us to build above the high intent--
The deed--the deed.

Through prayer we reach the greatest gift in all the world--knowledge plus power.

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Colossians 1:9-11

THE THREE GREAT GIFTS

Colossians 1:9-11 (Part 2)

What we might call the asking part of Paul's prayer ends with a prayer for three great qualities. He prays that his Colossian friends may possess all fortitude, patience and joy.

Fortitude and patience are two great Greek words which often keep company. Fortitude is hupomone (GSN5281) and patience is makrothumia (GSN3115). There is a distinction between these two words. It would not be true to say that Greek always rigidly observes this distinction, but it is there when the words occur together.

Hupomone (GSN5281) is translated patience in the King James Version. But it does not mean patience in the sense of simply bowing the head and letting the tide of events flow over one. It means not only the ability to bear things, but the ability, in bearing them, to turn them into glory. It is a conquering patience. Hupomone (GSN5281) is the ability to deal triumphantly with anything that life can do to us.

Makrothumia (GSN3115) is usually translated long-suffering in the King James Version. Its basic meaning is patience with people. It is the quality of mind and heart which enables a man so to bear with people that their unpleasantness and maliciousness and cruelty will never drive him to bitterness, that their unteachableness will never drive him to despair, that their folly will never drive him to irritation, and that their unloveliness will never alter his love. Makrothumia (GSN3115) is the spirit which never loses patience with, belief in, and hope for men.

So Paul prays for hupomone (GSN5281), the fortitude which no situation can defeat, and makrothumia (GSN3115), the patience which no person can defeat. He prays that the Christian may be such that no circumstances will defeat his strength and no human being defeat his love. The Christian's fortitude in events and patience with people must be indestructible.

Added to all this there is joy. The Christian way is not a grim struggle with events and with people; it is a radiant and sunny-hearted attitude to life. The Christian joy is joy in any circumstances. As C. F. D. Moule puts it: "If joy is not rooted in the soil of suffering, it is shallow." It is easy to be joyful when things go well, but the Christian radiance is something which not all the shadows of life can quench.

So the Christian prayer is: "Make me, O Lord, victorious over every circumstance; make me patient with every person; and withal give me the joy which no circumstance and no man will ever take from me."

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Colossians 1:12-14

PRAYER'S GREAT THANKSGIVING

Colossians 1:12-14

May you give thanks to the Father, who enabled us to obtain our share of the inheritance of God's dedicated people in the Kingdom of light; for he rescued us from the power of darkness, and brought us over into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

Paul turns to grateful thanksgiving for the benefits which the Christian has received in Christ. There are two key ideas here.

(i) God has given to the Colossians a share in the inheritance of God's dedicated people. There is in this whole passage a very close correspondence with Paul's words in Acts when he told Agrippa that the work God had given him was: "To open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in God" (Ac.26:18). The first privilege is that there has been given to the Gentiles a share in the inheritance of the chosen people of God. The Jews had always been God's chosen people, but now the door has been opened to all men.

(ii) The second key idea lies in the phrase which says, as the Revised Standard Version has it, that God has transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, or, as we have translated it, that God has brought us over into the kingdom of his beloved son. The word which Paul uses for to transfer or to bring over is the Greek verb *methistemi* (GSN3179). This is a word with a special use. In the ancient world, when one empire won a victory over another, it was the custom to take the population of the defeated country and transfer it lock, stock and barrel to the conqueror's land. Thus the people of the northern kingdom were taken away to Assyria, and the people of the southern kingdom were taken away to Babylon. So Paul says that God has transferred the Christian to his own kingdom. That was not only a transference but a rescue; and it meant four great things.

(a) It meant a transference from darkness to light. Without God men grope and stumble as if walking in the dark. They know not what to do; they know not where they are going. Life is lived in the shadows of doubt and in the darkness of ignorance. When Bilney the martyr read that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, he said that it was like the dawn breaking on a dark night. In Jesus Christ, God has given us a light by which to live and by which to die.

(b) It meant a transference from slavery to freedom. It was redemption, and that was the word used for the emancipation of a slave and for the buying back of something which was in the power of someone else. Without God men are slaves to their fears, to their sins and slaves to their own helplessness. In Jesus Christ there is liberation.

(c) It meant a transference from condemnation to forgiveness. Man in his sin deserves nothing but the condemnation of God; but through the work of Jesus Christ he discovers God's love and forgiveness. He knows now that he is no longer a condemned criminal at God's judgment seat, but a lost son for whom the way home is always open.

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Colossians 1:12-14

(d) It meant a transference from the power of Satan to the power of God Through Jesus Christ man is liberated from the grip of Satan and is able to become a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Just as an earthly conqueror transferred the citizens of the land he had conquered to a new land, so God in his triumphant love transfers men from the realm of sin and darkness into the realm of holiness and light.

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Colossians 1:15-23

THE TOTAL ADEQUACY OF JESUS CHRIST

Colossians 1:15-23 (Part 1)

He is the image of the invisible God, begotten before all creation, because by him all things were created, in heaven and upon earth, the things which are visible and the things which are invisible, whether thrones or lordships or powers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things cohere. He is the head of the body, that is, of the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that he might be supreme in all things. For in him God in all his fullness was pleased to take up his abode, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, when he had made peace through the blood of his Cross. This was done for all things, whether on the earth or in the heavens.

And you, who were once estranged and hostile in your minds, in the midst of evil deeds, he has now reconciled in the body of his flesh, through his death, in order to present you before him consecrated, unblemished, irreproachable, if only you remain grounded and stablished in the faith, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you have heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, have been made a servant.

This is a passage of such difficulty and of such importance that we shall have to spend considerable time on it. We shall divide what we must say about it into certain sections and we begin with the situation which gave it birth and with the whole view of Christ which Paul sets out in the letter.

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Colossians 1:15-23

1. THE MISTAKEN THINKERS

Colossians 1:15-23 (Part 2)

It is one of the facts of the human mind that a man thinks only as much as he has to. It is not until a man finds his faith opposed and attacked that he really begins to think out its implications. It is not until the Church is confronted with some dangerous heresy that she begins to realize the riches of orthodoxy. It is characteristic of Christianity that it can always produce new riches to meet a new situation.

When Paul wrote Colossians, he was not writing in a vacuum. He was writing, as we have already seen in the introduction, to meet a very definite situation. There was a tendency of thought in the early Church called Gnosticism. Its devotees were called Gnostics, which more or less means the intellectual ones. These men were dissatisfied with what they considered the rude simplicity of Christianity and wished to turn it into a philosophy and to align it with the other philosophies which held the field at that time. The Gnostics began with the basic assumption that matter was altogether evil and spirit altogether good. They further held that matter was eternal and that it was out of this evil matter that the world was created. The Christian, to use the technical phrase, believes in creation out of nothing; the Gnostic believed in creation out of evil matter.

Now God was spirit and if spirit was altogether good and matter essentially evil, it followed, as the Gnostic saw it, that the true God could not touch matter and, therefore, could not himself be the agent of creation. So the Gnostics believed that God put forth a series of emanations, each a little further away from God until at last there was one so distant from God, that it could handle matter and create the world.

The Gnostics went further. As the emanations went further and further from God, they became more and more ignorant of him. And in the very distant emanations there was not only ignorance of God, but also hostility to him. The Gnostics came to the conclusion that the emanation who created the world was both ignorant of and hostile to the true God; and sometimes they identified that emanation with the God of the Old Testament.

This has certain logical consequences.

(i) As the Gnostics saw it, the creator was not God but someone hostile to him; and the world was not God's world but that of a power hostile to him. That is why Paul insists that God did create the world, and that his agent in creation was no ignorant and hostile emanation but Jesus Christ, his Son (Col.1:16).

(ii) As the Gnostics saw it, Jesus Christ was by no means unique. We have seen how they postulated a whole series of emanations between the world and God. They insisted that Jesus was merely one of these emanations. He might stand high in the series; he might even stand highest; but he was only one of many. Paul meets this by insisting that in Jesus Christ all fullness dwells (Col.1:19); that in him there is the fullness of the godhead in bodily form (Col.2:9). One of the supreme objects of Colossians is to insist that Jesus is utterly unique and that in him there is the whole of God.

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(iii) As the Gnostics saw it, this had another consequence with regard to Jesus. If matter was altogether evil, it followed that the body was altogether evil. It followed further that he who was the revelation of God, could not have had a real body. He could have been nothing more than a spiritual phantom in bodily form. The Gnostics completely denied the real manhood of Jesus. In their own writings they, for instance, set it down that when Jesus walked, he left no footprints on the ground. That is why Paul uses such startling phraseology in Colossians. He speaks of Jesus reconciling man to God in his body of flesh (Col.1:22); he says that the fullness of the godhead dwelt in him bodily. In opposition to the Gnostics, Paul insisted on the flesh and blood manhood of Jesus.

(iv) The task of man is to find his way to God. As the Gnostics saw it, that way was barred. Between this world and God there was this vast series of emanations. Before the soul could rise to God, it had to get past the barrier of each of these emanations. To pass each barrier special knowledge and special passwords were needed; it was these passwords and that knowledge that the Gnostics claimed to give. This meant two things.

(a) It meant that salvation was intellectual knowledge. To meet that Paul insists that salvation is not knowledge; it is redemption and the forgiveness of sins. The Gnostic teachers held that the so-called simple truths of the gospel were not nearly enough. To find its way to God the soul needed far more than that; it needed the elaborate knowledge and the secret passwords which Gnosticism alone could give. So Paul insists that nothing more is needed than the saving truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

(b) If salvation depended on this elaborate knowledge, it was clearly not for every man but only for the intellectual. So the Gnostics divided mankind into the spiritual and the earthly; and only the spiritual could be truly saved. Full salvation was beyond the scope of the ordinary man. It is with that in mind that Paul wrote the great verse Col.1:28. It was his aim to warn every man and to teach every man, and so to present every man mature in Christ Jesus. Against a salvation possible for only a limited intellectual minority, Paul presents a gospel which is for every man, however simple and unlettered or however wise and learned he may be.

These, then, were the great Gnostic doctrines; and all the time we are studying this passage, and indeed the whole letter, we must have them in our mind, for only against them does Paul's language become intelligible and relevant.

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Colossians 1:15-23

II. WHAT JESUS CHRIST IS IN HIMSELF

Colossians 1:15-23 (Part 3)

In this passage Paul says two great things about Jesus, both of which are in answer to the Gnostics. The Gnostics had said that Jesus was merely one among many intermediaries and that, however great he might be, he was only a partial revelation of God.

(i) Paul says that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col.1:15). Here he uses a word and a picture which would waken all kinds of memories in the minds of those who heard it. The word is *eikon* (GSN1504), and image is its correct translation. Now, as Lightfoot points out, an image can be two things which merge into each other. It can be a representation; but a representation, if it is perfect enough, can become a manifestation. When Paul uses this word, he lays it down that Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God. To see what God is like, we must look at Jesus. He perfectly represents God to men in a form which they can see and know and understand. But it is what is behind this word that is of entrancing interest.

(a) The Old Testament and the inter-testamental books have a great deal to say about Wisdom. In Proverbs the great passages on Wisdom are in Prov.2 and Prov.8. There Wisdom is said to be co-eternal with God and to have been with God when he created the world. Now in the Wis.7:26, *eikon* (GSN1504) is used of Wisdom; Wisdom is the image of the goodness of God. It is as if Paul turned to the Jews and said, "All your lives you have been thinking and dreaming and writing about this divine Wisdom, which is as old as God, which made the world and which gives wisdom to men. In Jesus Christ this Wisdom has come to men in bodily form for all to see." Jesus is the fulfilment of the dreams of Jewish thought.

(b) The Greeks were haunted by the thought of the Logos (GSN3056), the word, the reason of God. It was that Logos which created the world, which put sense into the universe, which kept the stars in their courses, which made this a dependable world, which put a thinking mind into man. This very word *eikon* (GSN1504) is used again and again by Philo of the Logos of God. "He calls the invisible and divine Logos, which only the mind can perceive, the image (*eikon*, GSN1504) of God" (Philo: Concerning the Creator of the World: 8). It is as if Paul said to the Greeks: "For the last six hundred years you have dreamed and thought and written about the reason, the mind, the word, the Logos of God; you called it God's *eikon* (GSN1504); in Jesus Christ that Logos has come plain for all to see. Your dreams and philosophies are all come true in him."

(c) In these connections of the word *eikon* (GSN1504) we have been moving in the highest realms of thought, where only the philosophers can move familiarly. But there are two much simpler connections which would immediately flash across the minds of those who heard or read this for the first time. Their minds would at once go back to the creation story. There the old story tells of the culminating act of creation. "God said, Let us make man in our image.... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Gen.1:26-27). Here indeed is illumination. Man was made that he might be nothing less than the *eikon* (GSN1504) of God, for the word in the Genesis story is the same. That is what man was meant to be, but sin came in and man never achieved his destiny. By using this word of Jesus, Paul in effect says, "Look at this

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Jesus. He shows you not only what God is; he also shows you what man was meant to be. Here is manhood as God designed it.

Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God and the perfect manifestation of man." There is in Jesus Christ the revelation of godhead and the revelation of manhood.

(d) But we come at last to something much simpler than any of these things. And there is no doubt that many of the simpler of Paul's readers would think of this. Even if they knew nothing of the Wisdom Literature and nothing of Philo and nothing of the Genesis story they would know this.

Eikon (GSN1504)--sometimes in its diminutive form eikonion--was the word which was used for a portrait in Greek. There is a papyrus letter from a soldier lad called Apion to his father Epimachus. Near the end he writes: "I send you a little portrait (eikonion) of myself painted by Euctemon." It is the nearest equivalent in ancient Greek to our word photograph. But this word had still another use. When a legal document was drawn up, such as a receipt or an IOU, it always included a description of the chief characteristics and distinguishing marks of the contracting parties, so that there could be no mistake. The Greek word for such a description is eikon (GSN1504). The eikon (GSN1504), therefore, was a kind of brief summary of the personal characteristics and distinguishing marks of the contracting parties. So, then, to the very simplest Paul is saying, "You know how if you enter into a legal agreement, there is included an eikon (GSN1504), a description by which you may be recognized.

Jesus is the portrait of God. In him you see the personal characteristics and the distinguishing marks of God. If you want to see what God is like, look at Jesus."

(ii) The other word Paul uses is in Col.1:19. He says that Jesus is the pleroma (GSN4138) of God. Pleroma (GSN4138) means fullness, completeness. This is the word which is needed to complete the picture. Jesus is not simply a sketch of God or a summary and more than a lifeless portrait of him. In him there is nothing left out; he is the full revelation of God, and nothing more is necessary.

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Colossians 1:15-23

III. WHAT JESUS CHRIST IS TO CREATION

Colossians 1:15-23 (Part 4)

We will remember that according to the Gnostics the work of creation was carried out by an inferior god, ignorant of and hostile to the true God. It is Paul's teaching that God's agent in creation is the Son and in this passage he has four things to say of the Son in regard to creation.

(i) He is the firstborn of all creation (Col.1:15). We must be very careful to attach the right meaning to this phrase. As it stands in English it might well mean the Son was the first person to be created, but in Hebrew and Greek thought the word firstborn (prototokos, GSN4416) has only very indirectly a time significance. There are two things to note. Firstborn is very commonly a title of honour. Israel, for instance, as a nation is the firstborn son of God (Exo.4:22). The meaning is that the nation of Israel is the most favoured child of God. Second, we must note that firstborn is a title of the Messiah. In Ps.89:27, as the Jews themselves interpreted it, the promise regarding the Messiah is "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Clearly firstborn is not used in a time sense at all, but in the sense of special honour. So when Paul says of the Son that he is the firstborn of all creation, he means that the highest honour which creation holds belongs to him.

If we wish to keep the time sense and the honour sense combined, we may translate the phrase: "He was begotten before all creation."

(ii) It was by the Son that all things were created (Col.1:16). This is true of things in heaven and things in earth, of things seen and unseen. The Jews themselves, and even more the Gnostics, had a highly-developed system of angels. With the Gnostics that was only to be expected with their long series of intermediaries between man and God. Thrones, lordships, powers and authorities were different grades of angels having their places in different spheres of the seven heavens. Paul dismisses them all with complete indifference. He is in effect saying to the Gnostics, "You give a great place in your thinking to angels. You rate Jesus Christ merely as one of them. So far from that, he created them." Paul lays it down that the agent of God in creation is no inferior, ignorant and hostile secondary god, but the Son himself.

(iii) It was for the Son that all things were created (Col.1:17). The Son is not only the agent of creation, he is also the goat of creation. That is to say, creation was created to be his and that in its worship and its love he might find his honour and his joy.

(iv) Paul uses the strange phrase: "In him all things hold together." This means that not only is the Son the agent of creation in the beginning and the goat of creation in the end, but between the beginning and the end, during time as we know it, it is he who holds the world together. That is to say, all the laws by which this world is order and not chaos are an expression of the mind of the Son. The law of gravity and the rest, the laws by which the universe hangs together, are not only scientific laws but also divine.

So, then, the Son is the beginning of creation, and the end of creation, and the power who holds creation together, the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Final Goal of the world.

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IV. WHAT JESUS CHRIST IS TO THE CHURCH

Colossians 1:15-23 (Part 5)

Paul sets out in verse 18 what Jesus Christ is to the Church; and he distinguishes four great facts in that relationship.

(i) He is the head of the body, that is, of the Church. The Church is the body of Christ, that is, the organism through which he acts and which shares all his experiences. But, humanly speaking, the body is the servant of the head and is powerless without it. So Jesus Christ is the guiding spirit of the Church; it is at his bidding that the Church must live and move. Without him the Church cannot think the truth, cannot act correctly, cannot decide its direction. There are two things combined here. There is the idea of privilege. It is the privilege of the Church to be the instrument through which Christ works. There is the idea of warning. If a man neglects or abuses his body, he can make it unfit to be the servant of the great purposes of his mind; so by indisciplined and careless living the Church can unfit herself to be the instrument of Christ, who is her head.

(ii) He is the beginning of the Church. The Greek word for beginning is *arche* (GSN0746), which means beginning in a double sense. It means not only first in the sense of time, as, for instance, A is the beginning of the alphabet and I is the beginning of the series of numbers. It means first in the sense of the source from which something came, the moving power which set something in operation. We will see more clearly what Paul is getting at, if we remember what he has just said. The world is the creation of Christ; and the Church is the new creation of Christ.

She is his new creation
By water and the word.

Christ is the, source of the Church's life and being and the director of her continued activity.

(iii) He is the firstborn from among the dead. Here Paul comes back to the event which was at the centre of all the thinking and belief and experience of the Early Church--the Resurrection. Christ is not merely someone who lived and died and of whom we read and learn. He is someone who, because of his Resurrection, is alive for evermore and whom we meet and experience, not a dead hero nor a past founder, but a living presence.

(iv) The result of all this is that he has the supremacy in all things. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is his title to supreme lordship. By his Resurrection he has shown that he has conquered every opposing power and that there is nothing in life or in death which can bind him.

So there are four great facts about Jesus Christ in his relationship to the Church, which now we can put in order. He is the living Lord; he is the source and origin of the Church; he is the constant director of the Church; and he is the Lord of all, by virtue of his victory over death.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 1:15-23

V. WHAT JESUS CHRIST IS TO ALL THINGS

Colossians 1:15-23 (Part 6)

In Col.1:19-20 Paul sets down certain great truths about the work of Christ for the whole universe.

(i) The object of his coming was reconciliation. He came to heal the breach and bridge the chasm between God and man. We must note one thing quite clearly and always retain it in our memories. The initiative in reconciliation was with God. The New Testament never talks of God being reconciled to men, but always of men being reconciled to God. God's attitude to men was love, and it was never anything else. Sometimes a theology is preached which implies that something that Jesus did changed God's attitude from wrath into love. There is no justification in the New Testament for any such view. It was God who began the whole process of salvation. It was because God so loved the world that he sent his Son. His one object in sending his Son into this world was to woo men back to himself and, as Paul puts it, to reconcile all things to himself.

(ii) The medium of reconciliation was the blood of the Cross. The dynamic of reconciliation was the death of Jesus Christ. What does Paul mean? He means exactly what he said in Rom.8:32: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" In the death of Jesus, God is saying to us, "I love you like that. I love you enough to see my Son suffer and die for you." The Cross is the proof that there is no length to which the love of God will refuse to go in order to win men's hearts; and a love like that demands an answering love. If the Cross will not waken love in men's hearts, nothing will.

(iii) We must note that Paul says that in Christ God was reconciling all things to himself. The Greek is a neuter (*panta*, GSN3956). The point is that the reconciliation of God extends not only to all persons but to all creation, animate and inanimate. The vision of Paul was a universe in which not only the people but the very things were redeemed. This is an amazing thought. There is no doubt that Paul was thinking of the Gnostics. We will remember that they, regarding matter as essentially and incurably evil, therefore regarded the world as evil. But, as Paul sees it, the world is not evil. It is God's world and shares in the universal reconciliation.

There is a lesson and a warning here. Too often in Christianity there has been suspicion of the world. "Earth is a desert drear." We remember the story of the Puritan. Someone said to him, as they walked along the road, "That's a lovely flower". And the Puritan answered, "I have learned to call nothing lovely in this lost and sinful world." So far from being Christian, that attitude is in fact heresy. It was the very attitude of the Gnostic heretics who threatened to destroy the faith. This is God's world and it is a redeemed world, for in some amazing way God in Christ was reconciling the whole universe of men and living creatures and even inanimate things to himself.

(iv) The passage ends with a curious little phrase. Paul says that this reconciliation extended not only to things on earth but also to things in heaven. How was it that any reconciliation was necessary for heavenly things? This has exercised the ingenuity of many commentators; let us look at some of the explanations.

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Colossians 1:15-23

(a) It has been suggested that even the heavenly places and the angels there were under sin and needed to be reconciled to God. In Job we read: "His angels he charges with error" (Jb.4:18). "The heavens are not clean in his sight" (Jb.15:15). So it is suggested that even the angelic beings needed the reconciliation of the Cross.

(b) Origen, the great universalist, thought that the phrase referred to the devil and his angels and he believed that in the end even they would be reconciled to God through the work of Jesus Christ.

(c) It has been suggested that when Paul said that the reconciling work of Christ extended to all things in earth and in heaven, he did not mean anything definite but was simply using a magnificent and sonorous phrase in which the complete adequacy of the reconciling work of Christ was set out.

(d) The most interesting suggestion was made by Theodoret and followed by Erasmus. It was that the point is not that the heavenly angels were reconciled to God, but that they were reconciled to men. The suggestion is that the angels were angry with men for what they had done to God and wished to destroy them; and the work of Christ took away their wrath when they saw how much God still loved men.

However these things may be, this much is certain, God's aim was to reconcile men to himself in Jesus Christ, the medium by which he did so was the death of Christ which proved that there were no limits to his love, and that reconciliation extends to all the universe, earth and heaven alike.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 1:15-23

VI. THE AIM AND OBLIGATION OF RECONCILIATION

Colossians 1:15-23 (Part 7)

In Col.1:21-23 are set out the aim and the obligation of reconciliation.

(i) The aim of reconciliation is holiness. Christ carried out his sacrificial work of reconciliation in order to present us to God consecrated and irreproachable. It is easy to twist the idea of the love of God and to say, "Well, if God loves me like this and wishes nothing but reconciliation, sin does not matter. I can do what I like and God will still love me." The reverse is true. The fact that a man is loved does not give him carte blanche to do as he likes; it lays upon him the greatest obligation in the world, the obligation of being worthy of that love. In one sense the love of God makes things easy, for it takes away our fear of him and assures us that we are no longer criminals at the bar of judgment, certain of nothing but condemnation. But in another sense it makes things agonizingly and almost impossibly difficult, for it lays upon us this ultimate obligation of seeking to be worthy of that love.

(ii) Reconciliation has another kind of obligation, that of standing fast in the faith and never abandoning the hope of the gospel. Reconciliation demands that through sunshine and through shadow we should never lose confidence in the love of God. Out of the wonder of reconciliation are born the strength of unshakable loyalty and the radiance of unconquerable hope.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 1:24-29

THE PRIVILEGE AND THE TASK

Colossians 1:24-29

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and in my flesh, for the sake of his body, I fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. By his body, I mean the Church, of which I was made a servant, according to the office which God gave me to exercise for your sakes. That office is to make the word of God fully known, that secret which has remained hidden throughout all the ages and the generations, but which has now been made manifest to God's dedicated people; for God desired to make known to them how great was the glorious wealth among the Gentiles of this secret now revealed, and that secret is, Christ in you, your glorious hope. It is that Christ whom we proclaim, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. That is the end for which I toil, striving with his energy, which works mightily within me.

Paul begins this passage with a daring thought. He thinks of the sufferings through which he is passing as completing the sufferings of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus died to save his Church; but the Church must be upbuilt and extended; it must be kept strong and pure and true; therefore, anyone who serves the Church by widening her borders, establishing her faith, saving her from errors, is doing the work of Christ. And if such service involves suffering and sacrifice, that affliction is filling up and sharing the very suffering of Christ. To suffer in the service of Christ is not a penalty but a privilege, for it is sharing in his work.

Paul sets out the very essence of the task which has been given him by God. That task was to bring to men a new discovery, a secret kept throughout the ages and the generations and now revealed. This was that the glorious hope of the gospel was not only for the Jews but for all men everywhere. Paul's great contribution to the Christian faith was that he took Christ to the Gentiles and destroyed for ever the idea that God's love and mercy were the property of any one people or any one nation. That is why Paul is in a special sense our saint and our apostle. Had it not been for him Christianity might have become nothing wider than a new Judaism, and we and all other Gentiles might never have received it.

So Paul sets down his great aim. It is to warn every man, and to teach every man, and to present every man complete in Christ.

The Jew would never have agreed that God had any use for every man; he would have refused to accept that he was the God of the Gentiles. This idea would have seemed incredible and even blasphemous. The Gnostic would never have agreed that every man could be warned and taught and presented complete to God. He believed that the knowledge necessary for salvation was so involved and difficult that it must be the possession of the spiritual aristocracy and the chosen few. E. J. Goodspeed quotes a passage from Walter Lipman's Preface to *Morals*: "As yet no teacher has ever appeared who was wise enough to know how to teach his wisdom to all mankind. In fact, the great teachers have attempted nothing so utopian. They were quite well aware how difficult for most men is wisdom, and they have confessed frankly that the perfect life was for the select few."

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Colossians 1:24-29

It is arguable, in fact, that the very idea of teaching the highest wisdom to all men is the recent notion of a humanitarian and romantically democratic age, and that it is quite foreign to the thought of all great teachers." It has always been the case that men have openly or tacitly agreed that wisdom is not for every one.

The fact is that the only thing in this world which is for every man is Christ. It is not every man who can be a thinker. There are gifts which are not granted to every man. Not every man can master every craft, or even every game. There are those who are colour-blind and to whom the loveliness of art means nothing. There are those who are tone-deaf and for whom the glory of music does not exist. Not every man can be a writer or a student or a preacher or a singer. Even human love at its highest is not granted to all men. There are gifts a man will never possess; there are privileges a man will never enjoy; there are heights of this world's attainment which a man will never scale; but to every man there is open the good news of the gospel, the love of God in Christ Jesus and the trans-forming power which can bring holiness into life.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 2:1

LOVE'S STRUGGLE

Colossians 2:1

I want you to know how great a struggle I am going through for you, and for the people of Laodicea, and for all those who have never seen me face to face.

Here is a brief lifting of the curtain and a poignant glimpse into Paul's heart. He is going through a struggle for these Christians whom he had never seen but whom he loved.

He associates the Laodiceans with the Colossians, and speaks of all those who had never seen his face. He is thinking of the Christians in that group of three towns in the Lycus valley, Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colosse and picturing them in his mind's eye.

The word he uses for struggle is a vivid word; it is *agon* (GSN0073), from which comes our own word *agony*. Paul is fighting a hard battle for his friends. We must remember that, when he wrote this letter, he was in prison in Rome, awaiting judgment and almost certain condemnation. What then was his struggle?

(i) It was a struggle in prayer. He must have longed to go to Colosse himself. He must have longed to face the false teachers and deal with their arguments and recall those who were straying from the truth. But he was in prison. There had come a time when there was nothing left to do but to pray; what he could not do himself, he must leave to God. So Paul wrestled in prayer for those whom he could not see. When time and distance and circumstance separate us from those whom we long to help, there is always one way left to help them and that is the way of prayer.

(ii) It may well be that there was another struggle going on in Paul's mind. He was a human being with all a man's natural problems. He was in prison, awaiting trial before Nero, and the issue was almost certainly death. It would have been easy to play the coward and abandon the truth for the sake of safety. Paul well knew that such a desertion would be disastrous in its consequences. If the young Churches knew that Paul had denied Christ, the heart would be taken from them and it would be the end of Christianity for many. His struggle was not for himself alone; it was also for those whose eyes were fixed upon him as their leader and father in the faith. We do well to remember that in any situation there are those who are watching us; and that our action will either confirm or destroy their faith. Our struggle is never for ourselves alone; always the honour of Christ is in our hands and the faith of others in our keeping.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 2:2-7

THE MARKS OF THE FAITHFUL CHURCH (i)

Colossians 2:2-7 (Part 1)

My struggle is that their hearts may be encouraged, that they may be united together in love, that they may come to all the wealth of the assured ability to take the right decision in any situation, to the knowledge of that truth which only God's own may know, I mean of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge.

I say this so that no one may lead you into error by false reasoning with persuasive arguments. For, even if I am absent from you in the body, I am with you in spirit, happy when I see you maintaining your ranks and the solid bulwark of your faith in Christ.

So, then, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, live your life in him. Continue to remain firmly rooted, and go on being built up in him. Continue to be established more and more firmly in the faith, as you were taught it, and to overflow with thanksgiving.

Here is Paul's prayer for the Church, and in it we distinguish the great marks which should distinguish a living and faithful Church.

(i) It should be a Church of courageous hearts. Paul prays that their hearts may be encouraged. The word which he uses is *parakalein* (GSN3870). Sometimes that word means to comfort, sometimes to exhort, but always at the back of it there is the idea of enabling a person to meet some difficult situation with confidence and with gallantry. One of the Greek historians uses it in a most interesting and suggestive way. There was a Greek regiment which had lost heart and was utterly dejected. The general sent a leader to talk to it to such purpose that courage was reborn and a body of dispirited men became fit again for heroic action. That is what *parakalein* (GSN3870) means here. It is Paul's prayer that the Church may be filled with that courage which can cope with any situation.

(ii) It should be a Church in which the members are knit together in love. Without love there is no real Church. Methods of Church government and ritual are not what matter. These things change from time to time and from place to place. The one mark which distinguishes a true Church is love for God and for the brethren. When love dies, the Church dies.

(iii) It should be a church equipped with every kind of wisdom. Paul here uses three words for wisdom.

(a) In Col.2:2 he uses *sunesis* (GSN4907), which the Revised Standard Version translates understandingly. We have already seen that *sunesis* (GSN4907) is what we might call critical knowledge. it is the ability to assess any situation and decide what practical course of action is necessary within it. A real Church will have the practical knowledge of what to do whenever action is called for.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 2:2-7

(b) He says that in Jesus are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom is sophia (GSN4678) and knowledge is gnosis (GSN1108). These two words do not simply repeat each other; there is a difference between them. Gnosis (GSN1108) is the power, almost intuitive and instinctive, to grasp the truth when we see it and hear it. But sophia (GSN4678) is the power to confirm and to commend the truth with wise and intelligent argument, once it has been intuitively grasped. Gnosis (GSN1108) is that by which a man grasps the truth; sophia (GSN4678) is that by which a man is enabled to give a reason for the hope that is in him.

So, then, the real Church will have the clear-sighted wisdom which can act for the best in any given situation; the wisdom which can instinctively recognize and grasp the truth when it sees it; and the wisdom which can make the truth intelligible to the thinking mind, and persuasively commend it to others.

All this wisdom, says Paul, is hidden in Christ. The word he uses for hidden is apokruphos (GSN0614). His very use of that word is a blow aimed at the Gnostics. Apokruphos (GSN0614) means hidden from the common gaze, and therefore secret. We have seen that the Gnostics believed that a great mass of elaborate knowledge was necessary for salvation. That knowledge they set down in their books which they called apokruphos (GSN0614) because they were barred to the ordinary man. By using this one word Paul is saying, "You Gnostics have your wisdom hidden from ordinary people; we too have our knowledge, but it is not hidden in unintelligible books; it is hidden in Christ and therefore open to all men everywhere." The truth of Christianity is not a secret which is hidden but a secret which is revealed.

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Colossians 2:2-7

THE MARKS OF THE FAITHFUL CHURCH (ii)

Colossians 2:2-7 (Part 2)

(iv) The true Church must have the power to resist seductive teaching. It must be such that men cannot beguile it with enticing words. Enticing words translates the Greek word *pithanologia* (GSN4086). This was a word of the law-courts; it was the word used for the persuasive power of a lawyer's arguments, which could enable the criminal to escape his just punishment. The true Church should have such a grip of the truth that it is unmoved by seductive arguments.

(v) The true Church should have in it a soldier's discipline. As the Revised Standard Version has it, Paul is glad to hear of the order and of the firmness of the faith of the Colossians. These two words present a vivid picture, for they are both military words. The word translated order is *taxis* (GSN5010), which means a rank or an ordered arrangement. The Church should be like an ordered army, with every man in his appointed place, ready and willing to obey the word of command. The word translated firmness is *stereoma* (GSN4733), which means a solid bulwark, an immovable phalanx. It describes an army set out in an unbreakable square, solidly immovable against the shock of the enemy's charge. Within the Church there should be disciplined order and strong steadiness, like the order and steadiness of a trained and disciplined body of troops.

(vi) In the true Church life must be in Christ. Its members must walk in Christ; their whole lives must be lived in his conscious presence. They must be rooted and built in him. There are two pictures here. The word used for rooted is the word which would be used of a tree with its roots deep in the soil. The word used for built is the word which would be used of a house erected on a firm foundation. Just as the great tree is deep-rooted in the soil and draws its nourishment from it, so the Christian is rooted in Christ, the source of his life and strength. Just as the house stands fast because it is built on strong foundations, so the Christian life is resistant to any storm because it is founded on the strength of Christ. Christ is alike the source of the Christian's life and the foundation of his stability.

(vii) The true Church holds fast to the faith which it has received. It never forgets the teaching about Christ which it has been taught. This does not mean a frozen orthodoxy in which all adventure of thought is heresy. We have only to remember how in Colossians Paul strikes out new lines in his thinking about Jesus Christ to see how far that was from his intention. But it does mean that there are certain beliefs which remain the foundation and do not change. Paul might travel down new pathways of thought but he always began and ended with the unchanging and unchangeable truth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

(viii) The distinguishing mark of the true Church is an abounding and overflowing gratitude. Thanksgiving is the constant and characteristic note of the Christian life. As J. B. Lightfoot put it: "Thanksgiving is the end of all human conduct, whether observed in words or works." The one concern of the Christian is to tell in words and to show in life his gratitude for all that God has done for him in nature and in grace. Epictetus was not a Christian, but that little, old, lame slave who became one of the great moral teachers of paganism, wrote: "What else can I, a lame old man, do but sing hymns to God? If, indeed, I were a nightingale, I would be singing as a nightingale; if a

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Colossians 2:2-7

swan, as a swan. But, as it is, I am a rational being, therefore I must be singing hymns of praise to God. This is my task; I do it, and will not desert this post, as long as it may be given me to fill it; and I exhort You to join with me in this same song." (Epictetus, Discourses 1. 1 6.21).
The Christian will always praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 2:8-23

ADDITIONS TO CHRIST

Colossians 2:8-23

Beware lest there will be anyone who will carry you off as his spoil, by insisting on the necessity of a so-called philosophy, which is, in fact, an empty delusion, a philosophy which has been handed down by human tradition, and which is concerned with the elements of this world, and not with Christ; for in him there dwells the fullness of the divine nature; and you have found this fullness in him who is the head of every power and authority. In him you have been circumcised with a circumcision not made by man's hands, a circumcision which consists in putting off the whole of that part of you which is dominated by sinful human nature, which you were able to do by the circumcision which belongs to Christ. You were buried with him in the act of baptism, and in that act you were raised with him through your faith in the effective working of God, who raised him from the dead. God made you alive with him, when you were dead in your sins and were still uncircumcised Gentiles.

He forgave you all your sins, and wiped out the charge-list which set out all your self-admitted debts, a charge-list which was based on the ordinances of the law and was in direct opposition to you. He nailed it to his Cross and put it right out of sight. He stripped the powers and authorities of all their power and publicly put them to shame, and, through the Cross, led them captive in his triumphal train.

Let no one take you to task in matters of food or drink, or with regard to yearly festivals and monthly new moons and weekly sabbaths. These are only the shadow of things to come; the real substance belongs to Christ. Let no one rob you of your prize by walking in ostentatious humility in the worship of angels, making a parade of the things he has seen, vainly inflated with pride because he is dominated by his sinful human nature and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, supplied and held together by the joints and muscles, increases with the increase which only God can give.

If you died with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you continue to submit yourselves to their rules and regulations, as if you were still living in a world without God? "Handle not! Taste not! Touch not!" are their slogans. These are rules which are humanly taught and humanly imposed, and they are rules which deal with things which are destined for decay as soon as they are used. These things have a reputation for wisdom, with their self-imposed devotion and their flaunting humility and their stern treatment of the body, but they have no kind of value in remedying the indulgence of sinful human nature.

There can be no doubt that for us this is one of the most difficult passages Paul ever wrote. For those who heard or read it for the first time it would be crystal clear. The trouble is that it is packed from beginning to end with allusions to the false teaching which was threatening to wreck the Colossian Church. We do not know precisely what that teaching was.

Therefore the allusions are obscure and we can only guess. But every sentence and every phrase would go straight home to the minds and the hearts of the Colossians.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 2:8-23

It is so difficult that we propose to treat it in a slightly different way from our usual practice. We have set it out as a whole, in what is more of a paraphrase than a translation. We will take out its leading ideas, for it is possible to see the main lines of the false teaching which was troubling Colosse; and then, after we have looked at it as a whole, we shall examine it in more detail in shorter sections.

One thing clear is that the false teacher wished the Colossians to accept what can only be called additions to Christ. They were teaching that Jesus Christ himself is not sufficient; that he was not unique; that he was one among many manifestations of God; and that it was necessary to know and to serve other divine powers in addition to him. We can distinguish five additions to Christ which these false teachers wished to make.

(i) They wished to teach men an additional philosophy (Col.2:8). As they saw it, the simple truth preached by Jesus and preserved in the gospel was not enough. It had to be filled out by an elaborate system of pseudo-philosophical thought which was far too difficult for the simple and which only the intellectual could understand.

(ii) They wished men to accept a system of astrology (Col.2:8). As we shall see, there is a doubt about the meaning but we think it most likely that the elements of the world were the elemental spirits of the universe, especially of the stars and the planets. It was the teaching of these false teachers that men were still under these influences and needed a special knowledge, beyond that which Jesus could give, to be liberated from them.

(iii) They wished to impose circumcision on Christians (Col.2:11). Faith was not enough; circumcision had to be added. A badge in the flesh was to take the place of, or at least be an addition to, an attitude of the heart.

(iv) They wished to lay down ascetic, rules and regulations (Col.2:16, Col.2:20-23). They wished to introduce all kinds of rules and regulations about what a man might eat and drink and about what days he must observe as festivals and fasts. All the old Jewish regulations--and more--were to be brought back.

(v) They wished to introduce the worship of angels (Col.2:18). They were teaching that Jesus was only one of many intermediaries between God and man and that all these intermediaries must receive their worship.

It can be seen that here there is a mixture of Gnosticism and Judaism. The intellectual knowledge and the astrology come direct from Gnosticism; the asceticism and the rules and regulations from Judaism. What happened was this. We have seen that the Gnostics believed that all kinds of special knowledge, beyond the gospel, was needed for salvation. There were Jews who joined forces with the Gnostics and declared that the special knowledge required was none other than the knowledge which Judaism could give. This explains why the teaching of the Colossians' false teachers combined the beliefs of Gnosticism with the practices of Judaism.

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Colossians 2:8-23

The one thing certain is that the false teachers taught that Jesus Christ and his teaching and work were not in themselves sufficient for salvation. Let us now take the passage section by section.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 2:8-10

TRADITIONS AND THE STARS

Colossians 2:8-10

Beware lest there will be anyone who will carry you off as his spoil, by insisting on the necessity of a so-called philosophy, which is, in fact, an empty delusion, a philosophy which has been handed down by human tradition, and which is concerned with the elements of this world and not with Christ; for in him there dwells the fullness of the divine nature; and you have found this fullness in him who is the head of every power and authority.

Paul begins by drawing a vivid picture of the false teachers. He speaks of anyone who will carry you off as his spoil. The word is *sulagogein* (GSN4812) and could be used of a slave-dealer carrying away the people of a conquered nation into slavery. To Paul it was an amazing and a tragic thing that men who had been liberated (Col. 1:12-14), could contemplate submitting themselves to a new and disastrous slavery.

These men offer a philosophy which they declare is necessary in addition to the teaching of Christ and the words of the gospel.

(i) It is a philosophy which has been handed down by human tradition. The Gnostics were in the habit of claiming that their special teaching was teaching which had been told by word of mouth by Jesus, sometimes to Mary, sometimes to Matthew, and sometimes to Peter. They did, in fact, say that there were things which Jesus never told the crowd and communicated only to the chosen few. The charge Paul makes against these teachers is that their teaching is a human thing; it has no basis in Scripture. It is a product of the human mind; and not a message of the Word of God. To speak like this is not to drift into fundamentalism or submit to a tyranny of the written word, but to hold that no teaching can be Christian teaching which is at variance with the basic truths of Scripture and with the Word of God.

(ii) It is a philosophy which has to do with the elements of this world. This is a much-discussed phrase of which the meaning is still in doubt. The word for elements is *stoicheia* (GSN4747), and *stoicheia* has two meanings.

(a) It means literally things which are set out in a row. It is, for instance, the word for a file of soldiers. But one of its commonest meanings is the letters of the alphabet, no doubt because they form a series which can be set out in a row. Because *stoicheia* (GSN4747) can mean the letters of the alphabet, it can also very commonly mean elementary instruction in any subject. We still speak of learning the A B C of a subject, when we mean taking the first steps in it. It is possible that this is the meaning here. Paul may be saying, "These false teachers claim that they are giving you knowledge which is very advanced and very profound. In point of fact it is knowledge which is uninstructed and rudimentary because at the best it is knowledge of the human mind. The real knowledge, the real fullness of God, is in Jesus Christ.

If you listen to these false teachers, so far from receiving deep spiritual knowledge, you are simply slipping back into rudimentary instruction which you should have left behind long ago."

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Colossians 2:8-10

(b) Stoicheia (GSN4747) has a second meaning. It means the elemental spirits of the world, and especially the spirits of the stars and planets. There are still people today who take astrology seriously. They wear signs of the zodiac charms and read newspaper columns which tell what is forecast for them in the stars. But it is almost impossible for us to realize how dominated the ancient world was by the idea of the influence of the elemental spirits and the stars. Astrology was then, as someone has said, the queen of the sciences. Even men so great as Julius Caesar and Augustus, so cynical as Tiberius, so level-headed as Vespasian would take no step without consulting the stars. Alexander the Great believed implicitly in the influence of the stars. Men and women believed that their whole lives were fixed by them.

If a man was born under a fortunate star all was well; if he was born under an unlucky star, he could not look for happiness; if any undertaking was to have a chance of success, the stars must be observed. Men were the slaves of the stars.

There was one possibility of escape. If men knew the right pass-words and the right formulae, they might escape from this fatalistic influence of the stars; and a great part of the secret teaching of Gnosticism and of kindred faiths and philosophies was knowledge which claimed to give the devotee escape from the power of the stars; and in all probability that was what the false teachers of Colosse were offering. They were saying, "Jesus Christ is all very well, he can do much for you; but he cannot enable you to escape from your subjection to the stars. We alone have the secret knowledge which can enable you to do that." Paul, sufficiently the child of his age to believe in these elemental spirits, answers: "You need nothing but Christ to overcome any power in the universe; for in him is nothing less than the fullness of God and he is the head of every power and authority, for he created them."

The Gnostic teachers offered an additional philosophy; Paul insisted on the triumphant adequacy of Christ to overcome any power in any part of the universe. You cannot at one and the same time believe in the power of Christ and the influence of the stars.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 2:11-12

THE REAL AND THE UNREAL CIRCUMCISION

Colossians 2:11-12

In him you have been circumcised with a circumcision not made by man's hands, a circumcision which consists in putting off the whole of that part of you which is dominated by sinful human nature, which you were able to do by the circumcision which belongs to Christ. You were buried with him in the act of baptism and in that act you were raised with him through your faith in the effective working of God, who raised him from the dead.

The false teachers were demanding that Gentile Christians should be circumcised for circumcision was the badge of God's chosen people. God, they argued, had said to Abraham, "This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you, and your descendants after you; Every male among you shall be circumcised" (Gen.17:10).

All through the history of Israel there had been two views of circumcision. There was the view of those who said that in itself it was enough to put a man right with God. It did not matter whether an Israelite was a good man or a bad man; all that mattered was that he was an Israelite and that he had been circumcised.

But the great spiritual leaders of Israel and the great prophets took a very different view. They insisted that circumcision was only the outward mark of a man who was inwardly dedicated to God. They used the very word in an adventurous sense. They talked of uncircumcised lips (Exo.6:12), of a heart which was circumcised or uncircumcised (Lev.26:41; Eze.44:7,9; Deut.30:6); of the uncircumcised ear (Jer.6:10). To them being circumcised did not mean having a certain operation carried out on a man's flesh but having a change effected in his life. Circumcision was, indeed, the badge of a person dedicated to God; but the dedication lay not in the cutting of the flesh but in the excision from his life of everything which was against the will of God.

That was the answer of the prophets centuries before; and that was still Paul's answer to the false teachers. He said to them, "You demand circumcision; but you must remember that circumcision does not mean simply the removal of the foreskin from a man's body; it means the putting off of that whole part of his human nature which sets him at variance with God." Then he went on: "Any priest can circumcise a man's foreskin; only Christ can bring about that spiritual circumcision which means cutting away from a man's life everything which keeps him from being God's obedient child."

Paul goes further. For him this was not theory but fact. "That very act," he said, "has already happened to you in baptism." When we think of his view of baptism we must remember three things. In the early Church, as today in the mission field and even in the Church extension areas, men were coming straight out of heathenism into Christianity. They were knowingly and deliberately leaving one way of life for another; and making in the act of baptism a conscious decision. This was of course, before the days of infant baptism which did not and could not come until the Christian family had become a reality.

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Colossians 2:11-12

Baptism in the time of Paul was three things. It was adult baptism; it was instructed baptism; and, wherever possible, it was baptism by total immersion. Therefore the symbolism of baptism was manifest. As the waters closed over the man's head, it was as if he died; as he rose up again from the water, it was as if he rose to new life. Part of him was dead and gone for ever; he was a new man risen to a new life.

But, it must be noted, that symbolism could become a reality only under one condition. It could become real only when a man believed intensely in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It could only happen when a man believed in the effective working of God which had raised Jesus Christ from the dead and could do the same for him. Baptism for the Christian was in truth a dying and a rising again, because he believed that Christ had died and risen again and that he was sharing the experience of his Lord.

"You speak about circumcision," said Paul. "The only true circumcision is when a man dies and rises with Christ in baptism, in such a way that it is not part of his body which is cut away but his whole sinful self which is destroyed, and he is filled with newness of life and the very holiness of God."

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 2:13-15

TRIUMPHANT FORGIVENESS

Colossians 2:13-15

God made you alive with Christ, when you were dead in your sins and were still uncircumcised Gentiles. He forgave you all your sins and wiped out the charge-list which set out all your self-admitted debts, a charge-list which was based on the ordinances of the law and which was in direct opposition to you. He nailed it to his Cross and put it right out of sight. He stripped the powers and authorities of all their power and publicly put them to shame and, through the Cross, led them captive in his triumphal train.

Almost all great teachers have thought in pictures; and here Paul uses a series of vivid pictures to show what God in Christ has done for men. The intention is to show that Christ has done all that can be done and all that need be done, and that there is no need to bring in any other intermediaries for the full salvation of men. There are three main pictures here.

(i) Men were dead in their sins. They had no more power than dead men either to overcome sin or to atone for it. Jesus Christ by his work has liberated men both from the power and from the consequences of sin. He has given them a life so new that it can only be said that he has raised them from the dead. Further, it was the old belief that only the Jews were dear to God, but this saving power of Christ has come even to the uncircumcised Gentile. The work of Christ is a work of power, because it put life into dead men; it is a work of grace, because it reached out to those who had no reason to expect the benefits of God.

(ii) But the picture becomes even more vivid. As the King James Version has it, Jesus Christ blotted out the handwriting of ordinances which was against us; as we have translated it, he wiped out the charge-list which set out all our self-admitted debts, a charge-list based on the ordinances of the law. There are two Greek words here on which the whole picture depends.

(a) The word for handwriting or charge-list is cheirographon (GSN5498). It literally means an autograph; but its technical meaning--a meaning which everyone would understand--was a note of hand signed by a debtor acknowledging his indebtedness. It was almost exactly what we call an I.O.U. Men's sins had piled up a vast list of debts to God and it could be said that men definitely acknowledged that debt. More than once the Old Testament shows the children of Israel hearing and accepting the laws of God and calling down curses on themselves should they fail to keep them (Exo.24:3; Deut.27:14-26). In the New Testament we find the picture of the Gentiles as having, not the written law of God which the Jews had, but the unwritten law in their hearts and the voice of conscience speaking within (Rom.2:14-15). Men were in debt to God because of their sins and they knew it. There was a self-confessed indictment against them, a charge-list which, as it were, they themselves had signed and admitted as accurate.

(b) The word for wiping out is the Greek verb exaleiphein (GSN1813). To understand that word is to understand the amazing mercy of God. The substance on which ancient documents were written was either papyrus, a kind of paper made of the pith of the bulrush, or vellum, a substance made of the skins of animals. Both were fairly expensive and certainly could not be wasted.

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Colossians 2:13-15

Ancient ink had no acid in it; it lay on the surface of the paper and did not, as modern ink usually does, bite into it. Sometimes a scribe, to save paper, used papyrus or vellum that had already been written upon. When he did that, he took a sponge and wiped the writing out. Because it was only on the surface of the paper, the ink could be wiped out as if it had never been. God, in his amazing mercy, banished the record of our sins so completely that it was as if it had never been; not a trace remained.

(c) Paul goes on. God took that indictment and nailed it to the Cross of Christ. It used to be said that in the ancient world when a law or an ordinance was cancelled, it was fastened to a board and a nail was driven clean through it. But it is doubtful if that was the case and if that is the picture here. Rather it is this--on the Cross of Christ the indictment that was against us was itself crucified. It was executed and put clean out of the way, so that it might never be seen again. Paul seems to have searched human activity to find a series of pictures which would show how completely God in his mercy destroyed the condemnation that was against us.

Here indeed is grace. And that new era of grace is further underlined in another rather obscure phrase. The charge-list had been based on the ordinances of the law. Before Christ came men were under law and they broke it because no man can perfectly keep it. But now law is banished and grace has come. Man is no longer a criminal who has broken the law and is at the mercy of God's judgment; he is a son who was lost and can now come home to be wrapped around with the grace of God.

(iii) One other great picture flashes on the screen of Paul's mind. Jesus has stripped the powers and authorities and made them his captives. As we have seen, the ancient world believed in all kinds of angels and in all kinds of elemental spirits. Many of these spirits were out to ruin men. It was they who were responsible for demon-possession and the like. They were hostile to men. Jesus conquered them for ever. He stripped them; the word used is the word for stripping the weapons and the armour from a defeated foe. Once and for all Jesus broke their power. He put them to open shame and led them captive in his triumphant train. The picture is that of the triumph of a Roman general. When a Roman general had won a really notable victory, he was allowed to march his victorious armies through the streets of Rome and behind him followed the kings and the leaders and the peoples he had vanquished. They were openly branded as his spoils. Paul thinks of Jesus as a conqueror enjoying a kind of cosmic triumph, and in his triumphal procession are the powers of evil, beaten for ever, for every one to see.

In these vivid pictures Paul sets out the total adequacy of the work of Christ. Sin is forgiven and evil is conquered; what more is necessary? There is nothing that Gnostic knowledge and Gnostic intermediaries can do for men--Christ has done it all already.

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Colossians 2:16-23

RETROGRESSION

Colossians 2:16-23

Let no one take you to task in matters of food or drink, or with regard to yearly festivals and monthly new moons and weekly sabbaths. These are only the shadow of things to come; the real substance belongs to Christ. Let no one rob you of your prize by walking in ostentatious humility in the worship of angels, making a parade of the things which he has seen, vainly inflated with pride because he is dominated by his sinful human nature and not holding fast to the head, from which the whole body, supplied and held together by the joints and muscles, increases with the increase which God alone can give.

If you died with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you continue to submit yourselves to their rules and regulations, as if you were still living in a world without God? "Handle not! Taste not! Touch not!" are their slogans. These are rules which are humanly taught and humanly imposed, and they are rules which deal with things which are destined for decay as soon as they are used. These things have a reputation for wisdom, with their self-imposed devotion and their flaunting humility and their stern treatment of the body, but they have no kind of value in remedying the indulgences of sinful human nature.

This passage has certain basic Gnostic ideas intertwined all through it. In it Paul is warning the Colossians not to adopt certain Gnostic practices, on the grounds that to do so would be not progress but rather retrogression in the faith. Behind it lie four Gnostic practices.

(i) There is Gnostic asceticism (Col.2:16 and Col.2:21). There is the teaching which involves a whole host of regulations about what can and can not be eaten and drunk. In other words there is a return to all the food laws of the Jews, with their lists of things clean and unclean. As we have seen, the Gnostics considered all matter to be essentially evil. If matter is evil, then the body is evil. If the body is evil, two opposite conclusions may be drawn. (a) If the body is essentially evil, it does not matter what we do with it. Being evil it can be used or abused in any way, and it makes no difference. (b) If the body is evil, it must be kept down; it must be beaten and starved and its every impulse chained down. That is to say, Gnosticism could issue either in complete immorality or in rigid asceticism. It is the rigid asceticism with which Paul is dealing here.

In effect he says, "Have nothing to do with people who identify religion with laws about what you may or may not eat or drink." Jesus himself had said that it made no difference what a man ate or drank (Matt.15:10-20; Mk.7:14-23). Peter had to learn to cease to talk about clean and unclean foods (Ac.10). Paul uses an almost crude phrase which repeats in different words what Jesus had already said. He says, "These things perish as they are used" (Col.2:22). He means exactly what Jesus did when he said that food and drink are eaten and digested, and then excreted from the body, and flushed away down the drain (Matt.15:17; Mk.7:19). Food and drink are so unimportant that they are destined for decay as soon as they are eaten. The Gnostics wished to make religion a thing of regulations about eating and drinking; and there are still those who are more concerned with rules about food than about the charity of the gospel.

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Colossians 2:16-23

(ii) There is the Gnostic and the Jewish observation of days (Col.2:16). They observed yearly feasts and monthly new moons and weekly sabbaths. They drew out lists of days which specially belonged to God, on which certain things must be done and certain things must not be done. They identified religion with ritual.

Paul's criticism of this stress on days is quite clear and logical. He says, "You have been rescued from all this tyranny of legal rules. Why do you want to enslave yourself all over again? Why do you want to go back to Jewish legalism and abandon Christian freedom?" The spirit which makes Christianity a thing of regulations is by no means dead yet.

(iii) There are the Gnostic special visions. The King James Version in Col.2:18 speaks of the false teacher "intruding into those things which he hath not seen." That is a mistranslation. The correct translation should be "making a parade of the things which he has seen." The Gnostic prided himself upon special visions of secret things which were not open to the eyes of ordinary men and women. No one will deny the visions of the mystics, but there is always danger when a man begins to think that he has attained a height of holiness which enables him to see what common men--as he calls them--cannot see; and the danger is that men will so often see, not what God sends them, but what they want to see.

(iv) There is the worship of angels (Col.2:18,20). As we have seen, the Jews had a highly-developed doctrine of angels and the Gnostics believed in all kinds of intermediaries. They worshipped these, while the Christian knows that worship must be kept for God and for Jesus Christ.

Paul makes four criticisms of all this.

(i) He says that this kind of thing is only a shadow of truth; the real truth is in Christ (Col.2:17). That is to say, a religion which is founded on eating and drinking certain kinds of food and drink and abstaining from others, a religion which is founded on Sabbath observance and the like, is only a shadow of real religion; real religion is fellowship with Christ.

(ii) He says that there is such a thing as a false humility (Col.2:18,23). When they talked of the worship of angels, both the Gnostics and the Jews would have justified it by saying that God is so great and high and holy that we can never have direct access to him and must be content to pray to the angels. But the great truth that Christianity preaches is, in fact, exactly that the way to God is open to the humblest and the simplest person.

(iii) He says that this can lead to sinful pride (Col.2:18,23). The man who is meticulous in his observance of special days, who keeps all the food laws and who practises ascetic abstinence is in very grave danger of thinking himself specially good and of looking down on other people. And it is a basic truth of Christianity that no man who thinks himself good is really good, least of all the man who thinks himself better than other people.

(iv) He says that this is a return to unchristian slavery instead of Christian freedom (Col.2:20) and that in any event, it does not free a man from fleshly lusts but only keeps them on the leash

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Colossians 2:16-23

(Col.2:23). Christian freedom comes not from restraining desires by rules and regulations but from the death of evil desires and the springing to life of good desires by virtue of Christ being in the Christian and the Christian in Christ.

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Colossians 3:1-4

THE RISEN LIFE

Colossians 3:1-4 (Part 1)

If then you were raised with Christ, set your hearts on the things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Have a mind all of whose thoughts are fixed on the things which are above, not upon the things on earth. For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Whenever Christ, your life, shall appear, then you too shall appear with him in glory.

The point Paul is making here is this. In baptism the Christian dies and rises again. As the waters close over him, it is as if he was buried in death; as he emerges from the waters, it is like being resurrected to a new life. Now, if that is so, the Christian must rise from baptism a different man. Wherein is the difference? It lies in the fact that now the thoughts of the Christian must be set on the things which are above. He can no longer be concerned with the trivial passing things of earth; he must be totally concerned with the eternal verities of heaven.

We must note carefully what Paul means by that. He is certainly not pleading for an other-worldliness in which the Christian withdraws himself from all the work and activities of this world and does nothing but contemplate eternity. Immediately after this Paul goes on to lay down a series of ethical principles which make it quite clear that he expects the Christian to go on with the work of this world and to maintain all its normal relationships. But there will be this difference--from now on the Christian will view everything against the background of eternity and no longer live as if this world was all that mattered.

This will obviously give him a new set of values. Things which the world thought important, he will no longer worry about. Ambitions which dominated the world, will be powerless to touch him. He will go on using the things of the world but he will use them in a new way. He will, for instance, set giving above getting, serving above ruling, forgiving above avenging. The Christian's standard of values will be God's not men's.

And how is this to be accomplished? The life of the Christian is hid with Christ in God. There are at least two vivid pictures here.

(i) We have seen repeatedly that the early Christians regarded baptism as a dying and a rising again. When a man was dead and buried, the Greeks very commonly spoke of him as being hidden in the earth; but the Christian had died a spiritual death in baptism and he is not hidden in the earth, but hidden in Christ. It was the experience of the early Christians that the very act of baptism wrapped a man round with Christ.

(ii) There may well be a word play here which a Greek would recognize at once. The false teachers called their books of so-called wisdom apokruphoi (GSN0614), the books that were hidden from all except from those who were initiated. Now the word which Paul uses to say that our lives are hidden with Christ in God is part of the verb apokruptein (GSN0613), from which the adjective apokruphos (GSN0614) comes. Undoubtedly the one word would suggest the other. It is as if Paul

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Colossians 3:1-4

said, "For you the treasures of wisdom are hidden in your secret books; for us Christ is the treasury of wisdom and we are hidden in him."

There is still another thought here. The life of the Christian is hidden with Christ in God. That which is hidden is concealed; the world cannot recognize the Christian. But Paul goes on: "The day is coming when Christ will return in glory and then the Christian, whom no one recognized, will share that glory and it will be plain for all to see." In a sense Paul is saying--and saying truly--that some day the verdicts of eternity will reverse the verdicts of time and the judgments of God will overturn the judgments of men.

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Colossians 3:1-4

CHRIST OUR LIFE

Colossians Col.3:1-4 (Part 2)

In Col.3:4 Paul gives to Christ one of the great titles of devotion. He calls him Christ our life. Here is a thought which was very dear to the heart of Paul. When he was writing to the Philippians, he said, "For me to live is Christ" (Php.1:21). Years before, when he was writing to the Galatians, he had said, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal.2:20). As Paul saw it, to the Christian Christ is the most important thing in life; more, he is life.

This is the kind of peak of devotion which we can only dimly understand and only haltingly and imperfectly express. Sometimes we say of a man, "Music is his life--Sport is his life--He lives for his work." Such a man finds life and all that it means in music, in sport, in work, as the case may be. For the Christian, Christ is his life.

And here we come back to where this passage started--that is precisely why the Christian sets his mind and heart on the things which are above and not on the things of this world. He judges everything in the light of the Cross and in the light of the love which gave itself for him. In the light of that Cross the world's wealth and ambitions and activities are seen at their true value; and, the Christian is enabled to set his whole heart on the things which are above.

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Colossians 3:5-9a

THE THINGS WHICH LIE BEHIND

Colossians 3:5-9a (Part 1)

So, then, put to death these parts of you which are earthly-- fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, the desire to get more than you ought--for this is idol worship; and because of these things the wrath of God comes upon those who are disobedient. It was amongst these things that you once spent your lives; when you lived among them; but now you must divest yourselves of all these things--anger, temper, malice, slander, foul talk which issues from your mouth. Do not lie to one another.

Here this letter makes the change that Paul's letters always make; after the theology comes the ethical demand. Paul could think more deeply than any man who ever tried to express the Christian faith; he could travel along uncharted pathways of thought; he could scale the heights of the human mind, where even the best equipped theologian finds it hard to follow him; but always at the end of his letters he turns to the practical consequences of it all. He always ends with an uncompromising and crystal clear statement of the ethical demands of Christianity in the situation in which his friends are at the moment.

Paul begins with a vivid demand. The New Testament never hesitates to demand with a certain violence the complete elimination of everything which is against God. The King James Version translates the first part of this section: "Mortify your members which are upon earth." In seventeenth-century English that was clear enough: but it has lost its force in modern language. Nowadays to mortify the flesh means rather to practise ascetic discipline and self-denial. And that is not enough. What Paul is saying is, "Put to death every part of your self which is against God and keeps you from fulfilling his will." He uses the same line of thought in Rom.8:13: "If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live." It is exactly the same line of thought as that of Jesus when he demanded that a man should cut off a hand or a foot, or tear out an eye when it was leading him into sin (Matt.5:29-30).

We may put this in more modern language, as C. F. D. Moule expresses it. The Christian must kill self-centredness and regard as dead all private desires and ambitions. There must be in his life a radical transformation of the will and a radical shift of the centre. Everything which would keep him from fully obeying God and fully surrendering to Christ must be surgically excised.

Paul goes on to list some of the things which the Colossians must cut right out of life.

Fornication and uncleanness must go. Chastity was the one completely new virtue which Christianity brought into the world. In the ancient world sexual relationships before marriage and outside marriage were the normal and accepted practice. The sexual appetite was regarded as a thing to be gratified, not to be controlled. That is an attitude which is not unfamiliar today, although often it is supported by specious arguments. In his autobiography, *Memory to Memory*, Sir Arnold Lunn has a chapter on Cyril Joad, the well-known philosopher, whom he knew well. In his pre-Christian days Joad could write: "Birth control (he meant the use of contraceptives) increases the

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Colossians 3:5-9a

possibilities of human pleasure. In enabling the pleasures of sex to be tasted without its penalties it has removed the most formidable deterrent not only to regular but to irregular sexual intercourse... The average clergyman is shocked and outraged by the prospect of shameless, harmless and unlimited pleasure which birth control offers to the young, and, if he can stop it, he will." Towards the end of his life Joad came back to religion and returned to the family of the Church; but it was not without a struggle, and it was the insistence of the Christian Church on sexual purity which kept him so long from making the final decision. "It's a big step," he said, "and I can't persuade myself that the very severe attitude to sex which the Church thinks it necessary to adopt is really justified." The Christian ethic insists on chastity, regarding the physical relationship between the sexes as something so precious that indiscriminate use of it in the end spoils it.

There was passion and evil desire. There is a kind of person who is the slave of his passions (palkos) and who is driven by the desire for the wrong things (epithumia, GSN1939).

There is the sin which the Revised Standard Version calls covetousness (pleonexia, GSN4124). Pleonexia is one of the ugliest of sins but while it is quite clear what it means, it is by no means so easy to find a single word to translate it. It comes from two Greek words; the first half of the word is from pleon (GSN4119) which means "more" and the second half is from echein (GSN2192) which means to have. Pleonexia (GSN4124) is basically the desire to have more. The Greeks themselves defined it as insatiate desire and said that you might as easily satisfy it as you might fill with water a bowl with a hole in it. They defined it as the sinful desire for what belongs to others. It has been described as ruthless self-seeking. Its basic idea is the desire for that which a man has no right to have. It is, therefore, a sin with a very wide range. If it is the desire for money, it leads to theft. If it is the desire for prestige, it leads to evil ambition. If it is the desire for power, it leads to sadistic tyranny. If it is the desire for a person, it leads to sexual sin. C. F. D. Moule well describes it as "the opposite of the desire to give."

Such a desire, says Paul, is idolatry. How can that be? The essence of idolatry is the desire to get. A man sets up an idol and worships it because he desires to get something from it. To quote C. F. D. Moule, "idolatry is an attempt to use God for man's purposes, rather than to give oneself to God's service." The essence of idolatry is, in fact, the desire to have more. Or to come at it another way, the man whose life is dominated by the desire to get things has set up things in the place of God--and that precisely is idolatry.

Upon all such things the wrath of God must fall. The wrath of God is simply the rule of the universe that a man will sow what he reaps and that no one ever escapes the consequences of his sin. The wrath of God and the moral order of the universe are one and the same thing.

Barclay's Commentary Colossians 3:5-9a

THE THINGS WHICH MUST BE LEFT BEHIND

Colossians 3:5-9a (Part 2)

In Col.3:8 Paul says that there are certain things of which the Colossians must strip themselves. The word he uses is the word for putting off clothes. There is here a picture from the life of the early Christian. When the Christian was baptized, he put off his old clothes when he went down into the water and when he emerged he put on a new and pure white robe. He divested himself of one kind of life and put on another. In this passage Paul speaks of the things of which the Christian must divest himself, and in Col.3:12 he will continue the picture and speak of the things which the Christian must put on. Let us look at these things one by one.

The Christian must put off anger and temper. The two words are orge (GSN3709) and thumos (GSN2372), and the difference between them is this. Thumos (GSN2372) is a blaze of sudden anger which is quickly kindled and just as quickly dies. The Greeks likened it to a fire amongst straw, which quickly blazed and just as quickly burned itself out. Orge (GSN3709) is anger which has become inveterate; it is long-lasting, slow-burning anger, which refuses to be pacified and nurses its wrath to keep it warm. For the Christian the burst of temper and the long-lasting anger are alike forbidden.

There is malice. The word we have so translated is kakia (GSN2549); it is a difficult word to translate, for it really means that viciousness of mind from which all the individual vices spring. It is all-pervading evil.

Christians must put off slander and foul talk and they must not lie to one another. The word for slander is blasphemia (GSN0988), which the King James Version translates blasphemy. Blasphemia is insulting and slanderous speaking in general; when that insulting speech is directed against God, it becomes blasphemy. In this context it is much more likely that what is forbidden is slanderous talk against one's fellow-men. The word we have translated foul talk is aischrologia (GSN0148); it could well mean obscene language. These last three forbidden things have all to do with speech. And when we turn them into positive commands instead of negative prohibitions, we find three laws for Christian speech.

(i) Christian speech must be kind. All slanderous and malicious talking is forbidden. The old advice still stands which says that before we repeat anything about anyone we should ask three questions: "Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?" The New Testament is unsparing in its condemnation of the gossiping tongues which poison truth.

(ii) Christian speech must be pure. There can never have been a time in history when so much filthy language is used as today. And the tragedy is that many people have become so habituated to unclean talk that they are unaware that they are using it. The Christian should never forget that he will give account for every idle word he speaks.

(iii) Christian speech must be true. Dr. Johnson believed that there are far more falsehoods told unaware than deliberately; and he believed that a child should be checked when he deviates in the

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Colossians 3:5-9a

smallest detail from the truth. It is easy to distort the truth; an alteration in the tone of voice or an eloquent look will do it; and there are silences which can be as false and misleading as any words.

Christian speech must be kind and pure and honest to all men and in all places.

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Colossians 3:9b-13

THE UNIVERSALITY OF CHRISTIANITY

Colossians 3:9b-13 (Part 1)

Strip off the old self with all its activities. Put on the new self, which is ever freshly renewed until it reaches fullness of knowledge, in the likeness of its creator. In it there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free man, but Christ is all in all. So then, as the chosen of God, dedicated and beloved, clothe yourself with a heart of pity, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Bear with one another, and, if anyone has a ground of complaint against someone else, forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive each other.

When a man becomes a Christian, there ought to be a complete change in his personality. He puts off his old self and puts on a new self, just as the candidate for baptism puts off his old clothes and puts on the new white robe. We very often evade the truth on which the New Testament insists, that a Christianity which does not change a man is most imperfect. Further, this change is progressive. This new creation is a continual renewal. It makes a man grow continually in grace and knowledge until he reaches that which he was meant to be--manhood in the image of God.

One of the great effects of Christianity is that it destroys the barriers. In it there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free man. The ancient world was full of barriers. The Greek looked down on the barbarian; and to the Greek any man who did not speak Greek was a barbarian, which literally means a man who says "bar-bar." The Greek was the aristocrat of the ancient world and he knew it. The Jew looked down on every other nation. He belonged to God's chosen people and the other nations were fit only to be fuel for the fires of hell. The Scythian was notorious as the lowest of the barbarians; more barbarian than the barbarians, the Greeks called him; little short of being a wild beast, Josephus calls him. He was proverbially the savage, who terrorized the civilized world with his bestial atrocities. The slave was not even classified in ancient law as a human being; he was merely a living tool, with no rights of his own.

His master could thrash or brand or maim or even kill him at his caprice; he had not even the right of marriage. There could be no fellowship in the ancient world between a slave and a free man.

In Christ all these barriers were broken down. J. B. Lightfoot reminds us that one of the greatest tributes paid to Christianity was paid not by a theologian but by a master linguist. Max Miller was one of the great experts of the science of language. In the ancient world no one was interested in foreign languages, apart from Greek. The Greeks were the scholars and they would never have deigned to study a barbarian tongue. The science of language is a new science and the desire to know other languages a new desire. Max Muller wrote: "Not till that word barbarian was struck out of the dictionary of mankind, and replaced by brother, not till the right of all nations of the world to be classed as members of one genus or kind was recognized, can we look even for the first beginnings of our science of language... This change was effected by Christianity." It was Christianity which drew men together sufficiently to make them wish to know each other's languages.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 3:9b-13

T. K. Abbott points out how this passage shows in summary fashion the barriers which Christianity destroyed.

(i) It destroyed the barriers which came from birth and nationality. Different nations, who either despised or hated each other, were drawn into the one family of the Christian Church. Men of different nationalities, who would have leaped at each other's throats, sat in peace beside each other at the Table of the Lord.

(ii) It destroyed the barriers which came from ceremonial and ritual. Circumcised and uncircumcised were drawn together in the one fellowship. To a Jew a man of any other nation was unclean; when he became a Christian, every man of every nation became a brother.

(iii) It destroyed the barriers between the cultured and the uncultured. The Scythian was the ignorant barbarian of the ancient world; the Greek was the aristocrat of learning. The uncultured and the cultured came together in the Christian Church. The greatest scholar in the world and the simplest son of toil can sit in perfect fellowship in the Church of Christ.

(iv) It destroyed the barrier between class and class. The slave and the free man came together in the Church. More than that, in the Early Church it could, and did, happen that the slave was the leader of the Church and the master the humble member. In the presence of God the social distinctions of the world become irrelevant.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 3:9b-13

THE GARMENTS OF CHRISTIAN GRACE

Colossians 3:9b-13 (Part 2)

Paul moves on to give his list of the great graces with which the Colossians must clothe themselves. Before we study the list in detail, we must note two very significant things.

(i) Paul begins by addressing the Colossians as chosen of God, dedicated and beloved. The significant thing is that every one of these three words originally belonged, as it were, to the Jews. They were the chosen people; they were the dedicated nation, they were the beloved of God. Paul takes these three precious words which had once been the possession of Israel and gives them to the Gentiles. Thereby he shows that God's love and grace have gone out to the ends of the earth, and that there is no "most favoured nation" clause in his economy.

(ii) It is most significant to note that every one of the graces listed has to do with personal relationships between man and man. There is no mention of virtues like efficiency or cleverness, not even of diligence or industry--not that these things are unimportant. But the great basic Christian virtues are those which govern human relationships. Christianity is community. It has on its divine side the amazing gift of peace with God and on its human side the triumphant solution of the problem of living together.

Paul begins with a heart of pity. If there was one thing the ancient world needed it was mercy. The sufferings of animals were nothing to it. The maimed and the sickly went to the wall. There was no provision for the aged. The treatment of the idiot and the simple-minded was unfeeling. Christianity brought mercy into this world. It is not too much to say that everything that has been done for the aged, the sick, the weak in body and in mind, the animal, the child, the woman has been done under the inspiration of Christianity.

There is kindness (chrestotes, GSN5544). Trench calls this a lovely word for a lovely quality. The ancient writers defined chrestotes (GSN5544) as the virtue of the man whose neighbours good is as dear to him as his own. Josephus uses it as a description of Isaac, the man who dug wells and gave them to others because he would not fight about them (Gen.26:17-25). It is used of wine which has grown mellow with age and lost its harshness. It is the word used when Jesus said, "My yoke is easy." (Matt.11:30). Goodness by itself can be stern; but chrestotes (GSN5544) is the goodness which is kind, that type of goodness which Jesus used to the sinning woman who anointed his feet (Lk.7:37-50). No doubt Simon the Pharisee was a good man; but Jesus was more than good, he was chrestos (GSN5543). The Rheims version translates it benignity. The Christian is marked by a goodness which is a kindly thing.

There is humility (tapeinophrosune, GSN5012). It has often been said that humility was a virtue created by Christianity. In classical Greek there is no word for humility which has, not some tinge of servility; but Christian humility is not a cringing thing. It is based on two things. First, on the divine side, it is based on the awareness of the creatureliness of humanity. God is the Creator, man the creature, and in the presence of the Creator the creature cannot feel anything else but humility.

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Colossians 3:9b-13

Second, on the human side, it is based on the belief that all men are the sons of God; and there is no room for arrogance when we are living among men and women who are all of royal lineage.

There is gentleness (praotes, GSN4236). Long ago Aristotle had defined praotes as the happy mean between too much and too little anger. The man who has praotes (GSN4236) is the man who is so self-controlled, because he is God-controlled, that he is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time. He has at one and the same time the strength and the sweetness of true gentleness.

There is patience (makrothumia, GSN3115). This is the spirit which never loses its patience with its fellow-men. Their foolishness and their unteachability never drive it to cynicism or despair; their insults and their ill-treatment never drive it to bitterness or wrath. Human patience is a reflection of the divine patience which bears with all our sinning and never casts us off.

There is the forbearing and the forgiving spirit. The Christian forbears and forgives; and he does so because a forgiven man must always be forgiving. As God forgave him, so he must forgive others, for only the forgiving can be forgiven.

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Colossians 3:14-17

THE PERFECT BOND

Colossians 3:14-17

On top of all these things, clothe yourselves with love which is the perfect bond; and let the peace of God be the decider of all things within your hearts, for it is to that peace you were called, so that you might be united in one body. May the word of Christ dwell richly in you with all wisdom. Continue to teach and to admonish each other with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you may be doing in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

To the virtues and the graces Paul adds one more--what he calls the perfect bond of love. Love is the binding power which holds the whole Christian body together. The tendency of any body of people is sooner or later to fly apart; love is the one bond which will hold them together in unbreakable fellowship.

Then Paul uses a vivid picture. "Let the peace of God be the decider of all things within your heart." Literally what he says is, "Let the peace of God be the umpire in your heart." He uses a verb from the athletic arena; it is the word that is used of the umpire who settled things in any matter of dispute. If the peace of Jesus Christ is the umpire in any man's heart, then, when feelings clash and we are pulled in two directions at the same time, the decision of Christ will keep us in the way of love and the Church will remain the one body it is meant to be. The way to right action is to appoint Jesus Christ as the arbiter between the conflicting emotions in our hearts; and if we accept his decisions, we cannot go wrong.

It is interesting to see that from the beginning the Church was a singing Church. It inherited that from the Jews, for Philo tells us that often they would spend the whole night in hymns and songs. One of the earliest descriptions of a Church service we possess is that of Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia, who sent a report of the activities of the Christians to Trajan, the Roman Emperor, in which he said, "They meet at dawn to sing a hymn to Christ as God." The gratitude of the Church has always gone up to God in praise and song.

Finally, Paul gives the great principle for living that everything we do or say should be done and said in the name of Jesus. One of the best tests of any action is: "Can we do it, calling upon the name of Jesus? Can we do it, asking for his help?" One of the best tests of any word is: "Can we speak it and in the same breath name the name of Jesus? Can we speak it, remembering that he will hear?" If a man brings every word and deed to the test of the presence of Jesus Christ, he will not go wrong.

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Colossians 3:18-4:1

THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE CHRISTIAN

Colossians 3:18-4:1 (Part 1)

Wives, be submissive to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not treat them harshly.

Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing in the Lord. Fathers, do not irritate your children, that they may not lose heart.

Slaves, obey in all things those who are your human masters, not only when you are watched, like those whose only desire is to please men, but in sincerity of heart, reverencing the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it heartily, as if you were doing it for the Lord and not for men; and never forget that you will receive from the Lord your just recompense, even your share in the inheritance. Show yourselves the slaves of the Lord Christ. He who does wrong will be paid back for the wrong that he has done, and there is no respect of persons.

Masters, on your part provide for your slaves treatment which is just and equitable, and remember that you too have a master in heaven.

Here the ethical part of the letter becomes more and more practical. Paul turns to the working out of Christianity in the everyday relationships of life and living. Before we begin to study the passage in some detail, we must note two great general principles which lie behind it and determine all its demands.

(i) The Christian ethic is an ethic of reciprocal obligation. It is never an ethic on which all the duties are on one side. As Paul saw it, husbands have as great an obligation as wives; parents have just as binding a duty as children; masters have their responsibilities as much as slaves.

This was an entirely new thing. Let us take the cases one by one and look at them in the light of this new principle.

Under Jewish law a woman was a thing, the possession of her husband, just as much as his house or his flocks or his material goods. She had no legal rights whatever. For instance, under Jewish law, a husband could divorce his wife for any cause, while a wife had no rights whatever in the initiation of divorce; and the only grounds on which a divorce might be awarded her were if her husband developed leprosy, became an apostate or ravished a virgin. In Greek society a respectable woman lived a life of entire seclusion. She never appeared on the streets alone, not even to go marketing. She lived in the women's apartments and did not join her menfolk even for meals. From her there was demanded complete servitude and chastity; but her husband could go out as much as he chose and could enter into as many relationships outside marriage as he liked without incurring any stigma. Under both Jewish and Greek laws and custom all the privileges belonged to the husband and all the duties to the wife.

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Colossians 3:18-4:1

In the ancient world children were very much under the domination of their parents. The supreme example was the Roman Patria Potestas, the law of the father's power. Under it a parent could do anything he liked with his child. He could sell him into slavery; he could make him work like a labourer on his farm; he had even the right to condemn his child to death and to carry out the execution. All the privileges and rights belonged to the parent and all the duties to the child.

Most of all this was the case in slavery. The slave was a thing in the eyes of the law. There was no such thing as a code of working conditions. When the slave was past his work, he could be thrown out to die. He had not even the right to marry, and if he cohabited and there was a child, the child belonged to the master, just as the lambs of the flock belonged to the shepherd. Once again all the rights belonged to the master and all the duties to the slave.

The Christian ethic is one of mutual obligation, in which the rights and the obligations rest with every man. It is an ethic of mutual responsibility; and, therefore, it becomes an ethic where the thought of privilege and rights falls into the background and where the thought of duty and obligation becomes paramount. The whole direction of the Christian ethic is not to ask: "What do others owe to me?" but, "What do I owe to others?"

(ii) The really new thing about the Christian ethic of personal relationships is that all relationships are in the Lord. The whole of the Christian life is lived in Christ. In any home the tone of personal relationships must be dictated by the awareness that Jesus Christ is an unseen but ever-present guest. In any parent-child relationship the dominating thought must be the Fatherhood of God; and we must try to treat our children as God treats his sons and daughters. The thing which settles any master and servant relationship is that both are servants of the one Master, Jesus Christ. The new thing about personal relationships in Christianity is that Jesus Christ is introduced into them all.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 3:18-4:1

THE MUTUAL OBLIGATION

Colossians 3:18-4:1 (Part 2)

Let us look briefly at each of these three spheres of human relationships.

(i) The wife is to be submissive to her husband; but the husband is to love his wife and to treat her with all kindness. The practical effect of the marriage laws and customs of ancient times was that the husband became an unquestioned dictator and the wife little more than a servant to bring up his children and to minister to his needs. The fundamental effect of this Christian teaching is that marriage becomes a partnership. It becomes something which is entered into not merely for the convenience of the husband, but in order that both husband and wife may find a new joy and a new completeness in each other. Any marriage in which everything is done for the convenience of one of the partners and where the other exists simply to gratify the needs and desires of the first, is not a Christian marriage.

(ii) The Christian ethic lays down the duty of the child to respect the parental relationship. But there is always a problem in the relationship of parent and child. If the parent is too easy-going, the child will grow up undisciplined and unfit to face life. But there is a contrary danger. The more conscientious a parent is, the more he is likely always to be correcting and rebuking the child. Simply because he wishes the child to do well, he is always on his top.

We remember, for instance, the tragic question of Mary Lamb, whose mind was ultimately unhinged: "Why is it that I never seem to be able to do anything to please my mother?" We remember the poignant statement of John Newton: "I know that my father loved me--but he did not seem to wish me to see it." There is a certain kind of constant criticism which is the product of misguided love.

The danger of all this is that the child may become discouraged. Bengel speaks of "the plague of youth, a broken spirit (*Fractus animus pestis iuventutis*).\" It is one of the tragic facts of religious history that Luther's father was so stern to him that Luther all his days found it difficult to pray: "Our Father." The word father in his mind stood for nothing but severity. The duty of the parent is discipline, but it is also encouragement. Luther himself said, "Spare the rod and spoil the child. It is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he does well."

Sir Arnold Lunn, in *Memory to Memory*, quotes an incident about Field-Marshal Montgomery from a book by M. E. Clifton James. Montgomery was famous as a disciplinarian--but there was another side to him. Clifton James was his official "double" and was studying him during a rehearsal for D-Day. "Within a few yards of where I was standing, a very young soldier, still looking sea-sick from his voyage, came struggling along gamely trying to keep up with his comrades in front. I could imagine that, feeling as he did, his rifle and equipment must have been like a ton weight. His heavy boots dragged in the sand, but I could see that he was fighting hard to conceal his distress. Just when he got level with us he tripped up and fell flat on his face. Half sobbing, he heaved himself up and began to march off dazedly in the wrong direction. Monty went

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Colossians 3:18-4:1

straight up to him and with a quick, friendly smile turned him round. 'This way, sonny. You're doing well--very well.

But don't lose touch with the chap in front of you.' When the youngster realized who it was that had given him friendly help, his expression of dumb adoration was a study." It was just because Montgomery combined discipline and encouragement that a private in the Eighth Army felt himself as good as a colonel in any other army.

The better a parent is the more he must avoid the danger of discouraging his child, for he must give discipline and encouragement in equal parts.

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Colossians 3:18-4:1

THE CHRISTIAN WORKMAN AND THE CHRISTIAN MASTER

Colossians 3:18-4:1 (Part 3)

(iii) Paul then turns to the greatest problem of all--the relationship between slave and master. It will be noted that this section is far longer than the other two; and its length may well be due to long talks which Paul had with the runaway slave, Onesimus, whom later he was to send back to his master Philemon.

Paul says things which must have amazed both sides.

He insists that the slave must be a conscientious workman. He is in effect saying that his Christianity must make him a better and more efficient slave. Christianity never in this world offers escape from hard work; it makes a man able to work still harder. Nor does it offer a man escape from difficult situations; it enables him to meet these situations better.

The slave must not be content with eye-service; he must not work only when the overseer's eye is upon him. He must not be the kind of servant, who, as C. F. D. Moule puts it, does not dust behind the ornaments or sweep below the wardrobe. He must remember that he will receive his inheritance. Here was an amazing thing. Under Roman law a slave could not possess any property whatsoever and here he is being promised nothing less than the inheritance of God. He must remember that the time will come when the balance is adjusted and evil-doing will find its punishment and faithful diligence its reward.

The master must treat the slave not like a thing, but like a person, with justice and with the equity which goes beyond justice.

How is it to be done? The answer is important, for in it there is the whole Christian doctrine of work.

The workman must do everything as if he was doing it for Christ. We do not work for pay or for ambition or to satisfy an earthly master; we work so that we can take every task and offer it to Christ. All work is done for God so that his world may go on and his men and women have the things they need for life and living.

The master must remember that he too has a Master--Christ in heaven. He is answerable to God, just as his workmen are answerable to him. No master can say, "This is my business and I will do what I like with it." He must say, "This is God's business. He has put me in charge of it. I am responsible to him." The Christian doctrine of work is that master and man alike are working for God, and that, therefore, the real rewards of work are not assessable in earthly coin, but will some day be given--or withheld--by God.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 4:2-4

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRAYER

Colossians 4:2-4

Persevere in prayer. Be vigilant in your prayer, and let thanksgiving always be a part of it. And at the same time pray for us, that God may open for us a door for the word, that we may speak the secret of Christ now revealed to his own people, that secret for which I am in bonds, that I may make it manifest to all, as I ought to speak.

Paul would never write a letter without urging the duty and the privilege of prayer on his friends.

He tells them to persevere in prayer. Even for the best of us, there come times when prayer seems to be unavailing and to penetrate no farther than the walls of the room in which we pray. At such a time the remedy is not to stop but to go on praying; for in the man who prays spiritual dryness cannot last.

He tells them to be vigilant in prayer. Literally the Greek means to be wakeful. The phrase could well mean that Paul is telling them not to go to sleep when they pray. Maybe he was thinking of the time on the Mount of Transfiguration when the disciples fell asleep and only when they were awake again saw the glory (Lk.9:32). Or maybe he was thinking of that time in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus prayed and his disciples slept (Matt.26:40). It is true that at the end of a hard day sleep often comes upon us when we try to pray. And even oftener there is in our prayers a kind of tiredness. At such a time we should not try to be long: God will understand the single sentence uttered in the manner of a child too tired to stay awake.

Paul asks their prayers for himself. We must note carefully exactly what it is for which Paul asks. He asks their prayer not so much for himself as for his work. There were many things for which Paul might have asked them to pray--release from prison, a successful outcome to his coming trial, a little rest and peace at the last. But he asks them to pray only that there may be given to him strength and opportunity to do the work which God had sent him into the world to do. When we pray for ourselves and for others, we should not ask release from any task, but rather strength to complete the task which has been given us to do. Prayer should always be for power and seldom for release; for not release but conquest must be the keynote of the Christian life.

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Colossians 4:5-6

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE WORLD

Colossians 4:5-6

Behave yourselves wisely to those who are outside the Church. Buy up every possible opportunity. Let your speech always be with gracious charm, seasoned with the salt of wit, so that you will know the right answer to give in every case.

Here are three brief instructions for the life of the Christian in the world.

(i) The Christian must behave himself with wisdom and with tact towards those who are outside the Church. He must of necessity be a missionary; but he must know when and when not to speak to others about his religion and theirs. He must never give the impression of superiority and of censorious criticism. Few people have ever been argued into Christianity. The Christian, therefore, must remember that it is not so much by his words as by his life that he will attract people to, or repel them from, Christianity. On the Christian there is laid the great responsibility of showing men Christ in his daily life.

(ii) The Christian must be a man on the outlook for opportunity. He must buy up every opportunity possible to work for Christ and to serve men. Daily life and work are continually offering men opportunities to witness for Christ and to influence people for him--but there are so many who avoid the opportunities instead of embracing them. The Church is constantly offering its members the opportunity to teach, to sing, to visit, to work for the good of the Christian congregation--and there are so many who deliberately refuse these opportunities instead of accepting them. The Christian should always be on the outlook for the opportunity to serve Christ and his fellow-men.

(iii) The Christian must have charm and wit in his speech so that he may know how to give the right answer in every case. Here is an interesting injunction. It is all too true that Christianity in the minds of many is connected with a kind of sanctimonious dullness and an outlook in which laughter is almost a heresy. As C. F. D. Moule says, this is "a warning not to confuse loyal godliness with graceless insipidity." The Christian must commend his message with the charm and the wit which were in Jesus himself. There is too much of the Christianity which stodgily depresses a man and too little of the Christianity which scintillates with life.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 4:7-11

FAITHFUL COMPANIONS

Colossians 4:7-11

Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant and my fellow-slave in Christ, will inform you all about how things are going with me. I send him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about what is happening to me and that he may encourage your hearts. Along with him I send Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of yourselves. They will inform you about all that has been happening here. Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner, greets you, and Mark, Barnabas' cousin. (I have given you instructions about him; if he comes to you, give him a welcome.) Jesus, who is called Justus, sends you greetings. These were all converts from the Jewish faith. These alone are my fellow-workers in the work of the Kingdom, men who have been a comfort to me.

The list of names at the end of this chapter is a list of heroes of the faith. We must remember the circumstances. Paul was in prison awaiting trial and it is always dangerous to be a prisoner's friend, for it is so easy to become involved in the same fate as the prisoner himself. It took courage to visit Paul in his imprisonment and to show that one was on the same side. Let us collect what we know of these men.

There was Tychicus. He came from the Roman province of Asia and was most likely the representative of his Church to carry its offering to the poor Christians of Jerusalem (Ac.20:4). To him also was entrusted the duty of bearing to its various destinations the letter we know as the letter to the Ephesians (Eph.6:21). There is one rather interesting thing here. Paul writes that Tychicus will tell them all about how things are going with him. This shows how much was left to word of mouth and never set down in Paul's letters at all. In the nature of things the letters could not be very long and they dealt with the problems of faith and conduct which were threatening the Churches. The personal details were left to the bearer of the letter to tell. Tychicus, then, we can describe as the personal envoy of Paul.

There was Onesimus. Paul's way of mentioning him is full of lovely courtesy. Onesimus was the runaway slave who had somehow reached Rome and Paul was sending him back to his master Philemon. But he does not call him a runaway slave; he calls him a faithful and beloved brother. When Paul had anything to say about a man, he always said the best that he could.

There was Aristarchus. He was a Macedonian from Thessalonica (Ac.20:4). We get only fleeting glimpses of Aristarchus but from these glimpses one thing emerges--he was clearly a good man to have about in a tight corner. He was there when the people of Ephesus rioted in the Temple of Diana and was so much in the forefront that he was captured by the mob (Ac.19:29). He was there when Paul set sail a prisoner for Rome (Ac.27:2). It may well be that he had actually enrolled himself as Paul's slave in order that he might be allowed to make the last journey with him. And now he is here in Rome, Paul's fellow-prisoner. Clearly Aristarchus was a man who was always on the spot when things were at their grimmest. Whenever Paul was in bad trouble Aristarchus was there. The glimpses we have are enough to indicate a really good companion.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 4:7-11

There was Mark. Of all the characters in the Early Church he had had the most surprising career. He was so close a friend that Peter could call him his son (1Pet.5:13); and we know that when he wrote his gospel, it was the preaching material of Peter that he was setting down. On the first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas had taken Mark with them to be their secretary (Ac.13:5); but in the middle of the journey, when things got difficult, Mark quit and went home (Ac.13:13). It was long before Paul could forgive that. When they were about to set out on the second missionary journey, Barnabas once more wished to take Mark with them. But Paul refused to take the quitter again, and on this issue he and Barnabas parted company and never worked together again (Ac.15:36-40). Tradition says that Mark went as a missionary to Egypt and founded the Church at Alexandria.

What happened in the interim we do not know; but we do know that he was with Paul in his last imprisonment who had once again come to look on him as a most useful man to have around (Phm.24; 2Tim.4:11). Mark was the man who redeemed himself Here in this brief reference there is an echo of the old, unhappy story. Paul instructs the Church at Colosse to receive Mark and to give him a welcome if he should come. Why does he do that? Doubtless because his Churches looked with suspicion on the man whom Paul had once dismissed as useless for the service of Christ. And now Paul, with his habitual courtesy and thoughtfulness, is making sure that Mark's past will not stand in his way by giving him full approval as one of his trusted friends. The end of Mark's career is a tribute at one and the same time to Mark and to Paul.

Of Jesus, who was called Justus, we know nothing but his name.

These were Paul's helps and comforters. We know that it was but a cool welcome that the Jews in Rome gave him (Ac.28:17-29); but there were men with him in Rome whose loyalty must have warmed his heart.

Barclay's Commentary

Colossians 4:12-15

MORE NAMES OF HONOUR

Colossians 4:12-15

Epaphras, one of yourselves, the slave of Jesus Christ, greets you. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand mature and fully assured in the faith, engaged in doing the will of God. I bear him witness that he has toiled greatly for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, and so does Demas. Greet the brothers in Laodicea and Nymphas and the Church in their house.

So this honour-roll of Christian workers goes on.

There was Epaphras. He must have been the minister of the Church at Colosse (Col.1:7). This passage would seem to mean that he was, in fact, the overseer of the Churches in the group of three towns, Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colosse. He was a servant of God who prayed and toiled for the people over whom God had set him.

There was Luke the beloved physician, who was with Paul to the end (2Tim.4:11). Was he a doctor, who gave up what might have been a lucrative career in order to tend Paul's thorn in the flesh and to preach Christ?

There was Demas. It is significant that Demas' name is the only one to which some comment of praise and appreciation is not attached. He is Demas and nothing more. There is a story behind the brief references to Demas in the letters of Paul. In Phm.24 he is grouped with the men who are described as Paul's fellow-labourers. Here in Col.4:14 he is simply Demas. And in the last mention of him (in 2Tim.4:10) he is Demas who has forsaken Paul because he loved this present world. Surely here we have the faint outlines of a study in degeneration, loss of enthusiasm and failure in the faith. Here is one of the men who refused to be remade by Christ.

There was Nymphas (the Revised Standard Version has the feminine, Nympha) and the Church of the brothers at Laodicea which met in his house. We must remember that there was no such thing as a special Church building until the third century. Up to that time the Christian congregations met in the houses of those who were the leaders of the Church. There was the Church which met in the house of Aquila and Prisca in Rome and Ephesus (Rom.16:5; 1Cor.16:19). There was the Church which met in the house of Philemon (Phm.2). In the early days, Church and home were identical: and it is still true that every Christian home should also be a Church of Jesus Christ.

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Colossians 4:16

THE MYSTERY OF THE LAODICAEAN LETTER

Colossians 4:16

When this letter has been read among you, see to it that it is also read in the Church of the Laodiceans, and see to it that you read the letter which is on the way to you from Laodicea.

Here is one of the mysteries of Paul's correspondence. The letter to Colosse has to be sent on to Laodicea. And, says Paul, a letter is on the way from Laodicea to Colosse. What was this Laodicean letter? There are four possibilities.

(i) It may have been a special letter to the Church at Laodicea. If so, it is lost, although, as we shall shortly see, an alleged letter to Laodicea still exists. It is certain that Paul must have written more letters than we possess. We have only thirteen Pauline letters, covering roughly fifteen years. Many letters of his must have been lost, and it may be that the letter to Laodicea was such a one.

(ii) It may be the letter we know as Ephesians. It is well-nigh certain that Ephesians was not written to the Church at Ephesus but was an encyclical letter meant to circulate among all the Churches of Asia. It may be that this encyclical had reached Laodicea and was now on the way to Colosse.

(iii) It may actually be the letter to Philemon. That is a real possibility as we try to show in our study of that letter.

(iv) For many centuries there has been in existence an alleged letter of Paul to the Church at Laodicea. As we have it, it is in Latin; but the Latin is such that it has every sign of being a literal translation of a Greek original. This letter is actually included in the Codex Fuldensis of the Latin New Testament which belonged to Victor of Capua and which goes back to the sixth century. This alleged Laodicean letter can be traced even further back. It was mentioned by Jerome in the fifth century, but Jerome himself said that it was a forgery and that most people agreed that it was not authentic. The letter runs as follows:

Paul an apostle, not by men neither through any man, but through Jesus Christ, to the brothers who are at Laodicea. Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank Christ in every one of my prayers that you remain steadfast in him, and that you persevere in his works, awaiting his promise on the day of judgment. Let not the empty words of certain men seduce you, words of men who try to persuade you that you should turn away from the truth of the gospel which is preached by me... (There follows a verse where the text is uncertain).

And now my bonds which I suffer in Christ are plain for all to see; in them I delight and joy. And this will result for me in everlasting

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salvation, a result which will be brought about by your prayers, and by the help of the Holy Spirit, whether by my life or by my death. For me to live is to be in Christ, and to die is joy. And may he in his mercy bring this very thing to pass in you, that you may have the same love, and that you may be of the one mind.

Therefore, my best-beloved, as you have heard in my presence, so hold to these things and do them in fear of God, and then there will be to you life for eternity; for it is God who works in you. And do without wavering whatever you do.

As for what remains, best-beloved, rejoice in Christ; beware of those who are sordid in their desire for gain. Let all your prayers be made known before God; and be you inn in the mind of Christ.

Do the things which are pure, and true, and modest, and just, and lovely.

Hold fast what you have heard and received into your heart; and you will have peace.

The saints salute you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Cause that this letter be read to the Colossians, and that the letter of the Colossians be read to you.

Such is the alleged letter of Paul to the Laodiceans. It is clearly made up mainly of phrases taken from Philippians with the opening introduction taken from Galatians. There can be little doubt that it was the creation of some pious writer who read in Colossians that there had been a letter to Laodicea and who proceeded to compose what he thought such a letter should be. Very few people would accept this ancient letter to the Laodiceans as a genuine letter of Paul.

We cannot explain the mystery of this letter to the Church at Laodicea. The most commonly accepted explanation is that the reference is to the circular letter which we know as Ephesians; but the suggestion put forward in our study of Philemon is even more romantic and very attractive.

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Colossians 4:17-18

THE CLOSING BLESSING

Colossians 4:17-18

And say to Archippus, "See that you complete that piece of service which you have received from the Lord to do." Here is my greeting in the handwriting of myself, Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you.

The letter closes with an urgent spur to Archippus to be true to a special task which has been given to him. It may be that we can never tell what that task was; it may be that our study of Philemon throws light upon it. For the moment we must leave it at that.

To write his letters Paul used a secretary. We know, for instance, that the penman who did the writing of Romans was called Tertius (Rom.16:22). It was Paul's custom at the end of a letter to write his signature and his blessing with his own hand--and here he does just that.

"Remember my bonds," he says. Again and again in this series of letters Paul refers to his bonds (Eph.3:1; Eph.4:1; Eph.6:20; Phm.9). There is no self-pity and no sentimental plea for sympathy. Paul finishes his letter to the Galatians: "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal.6:17). Of course, there is pathos. Alford comments movingly: "When we read of his chains we should not forget that they moved over the paper as he wrote (his signature). His hand was chained to the soldier that kept him." But Paul's references to his sufferings are not pleas for sympathy; they are his claims to authority, the guarantees of his right to speak. It is as if he said, "This is not a letter from someone who does not know what the service of Christ means or someone who is asking others to do what he is not prepared to do himself. It is a letter from one who has himself suffered and sacrificed for Christ. My only right to speak is that I too have carried the Cross of Christ."

And so the letter comes to its inevitable end. The end of every one of Paul's letters is grace. He always ended by commending others to that grace which he himself had found sufficient for all things.

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Introduction to Thessalonians

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS

PAUL COMES TO MACEDONIA

For anyone who can read between the lines the story of Paul's coming to Macedonia is one of the most dramatic in the book of Acts. Luke, with supreme economy of words, tells it in Ac.16:6-10. Short as that narrative is, it gives the impression of a chain of circumstances inescapably culminating in one supreme event. Paul had passed through Phrygia and Galatia and ahead of him lay the Hellespont. To the left lay the teeming province of Asia, to the right stretched the great province of Bithynia; but the Spirit would allow him to enter neither. There was something driving him relentlessly on to the Aegean Sea. So he came to Alexandrian Troas, still uncertain where he ought to go; and then there came to him a vision in the night of a man who cried, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." Paul set sail, and for the first time the gospel came to Europe.

ONE WORLD

At that moment Paul must have seen much more than a continent for Christ. It was in Macedonia that he landed; and Macedonia was the kingdom of Alexander the Great, who had conquered the world and wept because there were no more worlds left to conquer. But Alexander was much more than a military conqueror. He was almost the first universalist. He was more a missionary than a soldier; and he dreamed of one world dominated and enlightened by the culture of Greece. Even so great a thinker as Aristotle had said that it was a plain duty to treat Greeks as free men and orientals as slaves; but Alexander declared that he had been sent by God "to unite, to pacify and to reconcile the whole world." Deliberately he had said that it was his aim "to marry the East to the West." He had dreamed of an Empire in which there was neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free (Col.3:11). It is hard to see how Alexander could have failed to be in Paul's thoughts. Paul left from Alexandrian Troas which was called after Alexander; he came to Macedonia which was Alexander's original kingdom; he worked at Philippi which was called after Philip, Alexander's father; he went on to Thessalonica which was called after Alexander's half-sister. The whole territory was saturated with memories of Alexander; and Paul must surely have thought, not of a country nor of a continent, but of a world for Christ.

PAUL COMES TO THESSALONICA

This sense of the wide-stretching arms of Christianity must have been accentuated when Paul came to Thessalonica. It was a great city. Its original name was Thermal, which means The Hot Springs, and it gave its name to the Thermaic Gulf on which it stood. Six hundred years ago Herodotus had described it as a great city. It has always been a famous harbour. It was there that Xerxes the Persian had his naval base when he invaded Europe; and even in Roman times it was one of the world's great dockyards. In 315 B.C. Cassander had rebuilt the city and renamed it Thessalonica, the name of his wife, who was a daughter of Philip of Macedon and a half-sister of Alexander the Great. It was a free city; that is to say it had never suffered the indignity of having Roman troops quartered within it. It had its own popular assembly and its own magistrates. Its

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population rose to 200,000 and for a time it was a question whether it or Constantinople would be recognized as the capital of the world.

Even today, under the name Salonika, it has 70,000 inhabitants.

But the supreme importance of Thessalonica lay in this--it straddled the Via Egnatia, the Egnatian Road, which stretched from Dyrrachium on the Adriatic to Constantinople on the Bosphorus and thence away to Asia Minor and the East. Its main street was part of the very road which linked Rome with the East. East and West converged on Thessalonica; it was said to be "in the lap of the Roman Empire." Trade poured into her from East and West, so that it was said, "So long as nature does not change, Thessalonica will remain wealthy and prosperous."

It is impossible to overstress the importance of the arrival of Christianity in Thessalonica. If Christianity was settled there, it was bound to spread East along the Egnatian Road until all Asia was conquered and West until it stormed even the city of Rome. The coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was crucial in the making of it into a world religion.

PAUL'S STAY AT THESSALONICA

The story of Paul's stay at Thessalonica is in Ac.17:1-10. Now, for Paul, what happened at Thessalonica was of supreme importance. He preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths (Ac.17:2) which means that his stay there could not have been much more than three weeks in length. He had such tremendous success that the Jews were enraged and raised so much trouble that Paul had to be smuggled out, in peril of his life, to Beroea. The same thing happened in Beroea (Ac.17:10-12) and Paul had to leave Timothy and Silas behind and make his escape to Athens. What exercised his mind was this. He had been in Thessalonica only three weeks. Was it possible to make such an impression on a place in three weeks' time that Christianity was planted so deeply that it could never again be uprooted? If so, it was by no means an idle dream that the Roman Empire might yet be won for Christ.

Or was it necessary to settle down and work for months, even years, before an impression could be made? In that event, no man could even dimly foresee when Christianity would penetrate all over the world. Thessalonica was a test case; and Paul was torn with anxiety to know how it would turn out.

NEWS FROM THESSALONICA

So anxious was Paul that, when Timothy joined him at Athens, he sent him back to Thessalonica to get the information without which he could not rest (1Th.3:1-2,5; 1Th.2:17). What news did Timothy bring back? There was good news. The affection of the Thessalonians for Paul was as strong as ever; and they were standing fast in the faith (1Th.2:14; 1Th.3:4-6; 1Th.4:9-10). They were indeed "his glory and Ws joy" (1Th.2:20). But there was worrying news.

(i) The preaching of the Second Coming had produced an unhealthy situation in which people had stopped working and had abandoned all ordinary pursuits to await the Second Coming with a kind of hysterical expectancy. So Paul tells them to be quiet and to get on with their work (1Th.4:11).

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(ii) They were worried about what was to happen to those who died before the Second Coming arrived. Paul explains that those who fall asleep in Jesus will miss none of the glory (1Th.4:13-18).

(iii) There was a tendency to despise all lawful authority; the argumentative Greek was always in danger of producing a democracy run mad (1Th.5:12-14).

(iv) There was the ever-present danger that they would relapse into immorality. It was hard to unlearn the point of view of generations and to escape the contagion of the heathen world (1Th.4:3-8).

(v) There was at least a section who slandered Paul. They hinted that he preached the gospel for what he could get out of it (1Th.2:5,9); and that he was something of a dictator (1Th.2:6-7,11).

(vi) There was a certain amount of division in the Church (1Th.4:9; 1Th.5:13).

These were the problems with which Paul had to deal; and they show that human nature has not changed so very much.

WHY TWO LETTERS?

We must ask why there are two letters. They are, very much alike and they must have been written within weeks, perhaps days of each other. The second letter was written mainly to clear up a misconception about the Second Coming. The first letter insists that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, and urges watchfulness (1Th.5:2; 1Th.5:6). But this produced the unhealthy situation where men did nothing but watch and wait; and in the second letter Paul explains what signs must come first before the Second Coming should come (2Th.2:3-12). The Thessalonians had got their ideas about the Second Coming out of proportion. As so often happens to a preacher, Paul's preaching had been misunderstood, and certain phrases had been taken out of context and over-emphasized; and the second letter seeks to put things back in their proper balance and to correct the thoughts of the excited Thessalonians regarding the Second Coming.

Of course, Paul takes occasion in the second letter to repeat and to stress much of the good advice and rebuke he had given in the first, but its main aim is to tell them certain things which will calm their hysteria and make them wait, not in excited idleness, but in patient and diligent attendance to the day's work. In these two letters we see Paul solving the day to day problems which arose in the expanding Church.

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1 Thessalonians 1

LOVE'S INTRODUCTION

1 Thessalonians 1

Paul and Silas and Timothy send this letter to the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be to you and peace.

Always we thank God for you all and always we remember you in our prayers. We never cease to remember the work inspired by your faith, the labour prompted by your love and the endurance founded on your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before God who is also our Father. For we know, brothers beloved by God, how you were chosen. We know that our good news did not come to you with words only, but with power and with the Holy Spirit and with much conviction, just as you know what we showed ourselves to be to you for your sakes. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for although you received the word in much affliction, yet you received it with the joy of the Holy Spirit so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord went forth from you like a trumpet, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but the story of your faith towards God has gone forth in every place, so that we had no need to say anything about it.

For the people amongst whom we were could tell us your story, and how we entered into you and how you turned from idols towards God, to serve the living and true God and to await the coming of his Son from heaven, even Jesus whom he raised from among the dead, and who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Paul sends this letter to the church of the Thessalonians which is in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. God was the very atmosphere in which the Church lived and moved and had its being. Just as the air is in us and we are in the air and cannot live without it, so the true Church is in God and God is in the true Church and there is no true life for the Church without God. Further, the God in whom the Church lives is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, therefore, the Church does not shiver in the icy fear of a God who is a tyrant but basks in the sunshine of a God who is love.

In this opening chapter we see Paul at his most winsome. In a short time he was going to deal out warning and rebuke; but he begins with unmixed praise. Even when he rebuked, it was never his aim to discourage but always to uplift. In every man there is something fine, and often the best way to rid him of the lower things is to praise the higher things. The best way to eradicate his faults is to praise his virtues so that they will flower all the more; every man reacts better to encouragement than he does to rebuke. It is told that once the Duke of Wellington's cook gave notice and left him. He was asked why he had left so honourable and well-paid a position. His answer was, "When the dinner is good, the Duke never praises me and when it is bad, he never blames me; it was just not worth while." Encouragement was lacking. Paul, like a good psychologist and with true Christian tact, begins with praise even when he means to move on to rebuke.

In 1Th.1:3 Paul picks out three great ingredients of the Christian life.

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1 Thessalonians 1

(i) There is work which is inspired by faith. Nothing tells us more about a man than the way in which he works. He may work in fear of the whip; he may work for hope of gain; he may work from a grim sense of duty; or he may work inspired by faith. His faith is that this is his task given him by God and that he is working in the last analysis not for men but for God. Someone has said that the sign of true consecration is when a man can find glory in drudgery.

(ii) There is the labour which is prompted by love. Bernard Newman tells how once he stayed in a Bulgarian peasant's house. All the time he was there the daughter was stitching away at a dress. He said to her, "Don't you ever get tired of that eternal sewing?" "O no!" she said, "you see this is my wedding dress." Work done for love always has a glory.

(iii) There is the endurance which is founded on hope. When Alexander the Great was setting out on his campaigns, he divided all his possessions among his friends. Someone said, "But you are keeping nothing for yourself." "O yes, I am," he said. "I have kept my hopes." A man can endure anything so long as he has hope, for then he is walking not to the night, but to the dawn.

In 1Th.1:4 Paul speaks of the Thessalonians as brothers beloved by God. The phrase beloved by God was a phrase which the Jews applied only to supremely great men like Moses and Solomon, and to the nation of Israel itself. Now the greatest privilege of the greatest men of God's chosen people has been extended to the humblest of the Gentiles.

1Th.1:8 speaks of the faith of the Thessalonians sounding forth like a trumpet; the word could also mean crashing out like a roll of thunder. There is something tremendous about the sheer defiance of early Christianity. When all prudence would have dictated a way of life that would escape notice and so avoid danger and persecution, the Christians blazoned forth their faith. They were never ashamed to show whose they were and whom they sought to serve.

In 1Th.1:9-10 two words are used which are characteristic of the Christian life. The Thessalonians served God and waited on the coming of Christ. The Christian is called upon to serve in the world and to wait for glory. The loyal service and the patient waiting were the necessary preludes to the glory of heaven.

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

PAUL ON HIS DEFENCE

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

You yourselves know, brothers, that our coming among you was not to no effect; but after we had--as you know--already undergone suffering and ill-treatment at Philippi, we were bold in our God to tell you the good news of God, and a sore struggle we had. Our appeal to you did not proceed from any delusion, nor from impure motives, nor was it calculated to deceive; but as we have been deemed worthy by God to be entrusted with the good news, so we speak, not as if we were seeking to please men, but rather as if we were seeking to please God, who tests our hearts. At no time, as you know, did we use flattering words; at no time did we use our message as a pretext for greed; God is our witness at no time did we seek reputation from men, either from you or from others, although we might well have claimed a place of weight, as apostles of Christ. But we showed ourselves gentle among you, treating you as a nurse cherishes her children.

Yearning for you like this, we wanted to share with you, not only the good news of God, but even our very lives, because you had become very dear to us. For, brothers, you remember our labour and toil. It was while we were working night and day, so as not to be a burden to any of you, that we proclaimed the good news of God to you. You are our witnesses and so is God. How reverently and righteously and blamelessly we behaved to you who believed. As you know, as a father his children we exhorted and encouraged and solemnly charged each one of you to walk worthily of God who calls you to his Kingdom and his glory.

Beneath the surface of this passage run the slanders which Paul's opponents at Thessalonica attached to him.

(i) 1Th.2:2 refers to the imprisonment and abuse that he had received at Philippi (Ac.16:16-40). There were, no doubt, those in Thessalonica who said that this man Paul had a police record, that he was nothing less than a criminal on the run from justice and that obviously no one should listen to a man like that. A really malignant mind will twist anything into a slander.

(ii) 1Th.2:3 has behind it no fewer than three charges.

(a) It was being said that Paul's preaching came from sheer delusion. A really original man will always run the risk of being called mad. Festus thought that Paul was mad in later days (Ac.26:24). There was a time when Jesus' friends came and tried to take him home because they thought that he was mad (Mk.3:21). The Christian standards can be so different from the standards of the world that he who follows them with a single mind and a burning enthusiasm can appear to other men to be off his head.

(b) It was being said that Paul's preaching sprang from impure motives. The word used for impurity (akatharsia, GSN0167) often has to do with sexual impurity. There was one Christian custom which the heathen often and deliberately misinterpreted; that was the kiss of peace (1Th.5:26). When the Christians spoke of the Love Feast and the kiss of peace, it was not difficult for an evil mind to read into these phrases what was never there. The trouble often is that a mind itself nasty will see nastiness everywhere.

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1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

(c) It was being said that Paul's preaching was guilefully aimed at deluding others. The propagandists of Hitler Germany discovered that if a lie is repeated often enough and loudly enough it will in the end be accepted as the truth. That was the charge which was levelled at Paul.

(iii) 1Th.2:4 indicates that Paul was accused of seeking to please men rather than to please God. No doubt that rose from the fact that he preached the liberty of the gospel and the freedom of grace as against the slavery of legalism. There are always people who do not think that they are being religious unless they are being unhappy; and any man who preaches a gospel of joy will find his slanderers, which is exactly what happened to Jesus.

(iv) 1Th.2:5 and 1Th.2:9 both indicate that there were those who said that Paul was in this business of preaching the gospel for what he could get out of it. The word used for flattery (kolakeia, GSN2850) always describes the flattery whose motive is gain. The trouble in the early Church was that there were people who did attempt to cash in on their Christianity. The first Christian book of order is called The Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, and in it there are some illuminating instructions. "Let every apostle that cometh unto you be received as the Lord. And he shall stay one day and, if need be, the next also, but if he stay three days he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goeth forth, let him take nothing save bread, till he reach his lodging. But if he ask money, he is a false prophet." "No prophet that ordereth a table in the Spirit shall eat of it, else he is a false prophet." "If he that cometh is a passer-by, succour him as far as you can.

But he shall not abide with you longer than two or three days unless there be necessity. But if he be minded to settle among you and be a craftsman, let him work and eat. But if he has no trade, according to your understanding, provide that he shall not live idle among you, being a Christian. But if he will not do this, he is a Christmonger: of such men beware." (Didache, chapters 11 and 12). The date of The Didache is about A.D. 100. Even the Early Church knew the perennial problem of those who traded on charity.

(v) 1Th.2:6 indicates that Paul was accused of seeking personal prestige. It is the preacher's constant danger that he should seek to display himself and not the message. In 1Th.1:5 there is a suggestive thing. Paul does not say, "I came to you." He says, "Our gospel came to you." The man was lost in his message.

(vi) 1Th.2:7 indicates that Paul was charged with being something of a dictator. His gentleness was that of a wise father. His was the love which knew how to be firm. To him Christian love was no easy sentimental thing; he knew that men needed discipline, not for their punishment but for the good of their souls.

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1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

THE SINS OF THE JEWS

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

And for this, too, we thank God, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but--as in truth it is--as the word of God, who also works in you who believe. For, brothers, you became imitators of the Churches of God which are in Judaea in Christ Jesus, for you too suffered the same things at the hands of your own fellow-countrymen as they did at the hands of the Jews; for they killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and they persecuted us, and they do not please God, and they are up against all men, and they try to stop us speaking to the Gentiles that they may be saved; and all this they keep on doing that they may complete the catalogue of their sins. But wrath to the uttermost has come upon them.

To the Thessalonians the Christian faith had brought not peace but trouble. Their new-found loyalty had involved them in persecution. Paul's method of encouraging them is very interesting. It is in effect to say to them,

"Brothers, we are treading
Where the saints have trod."

Their persecution was a badge of honour which entitled them to rank with the picked regiments of the army of Christ.

But the great interest of this passage is that in 1Th.2:15-16 Paul draws up a kind of catalogue of the errors and the sins of the Jews.

(i) They killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets. When God's messengers came to them they eliminated them. One of the grim things about the gospel narrative is the intensity with which the leaders of the Jews sought to get rid of Jesus before he could do any more damage. But no man ever rendered a message inoperative by slaying the messenger who brought it. Someone tells of a missionary who went to a primitive tribe. He had to use primitive methods to get his message across; so he had a chart painted which showed the progress to heaven of the man who accepted Christ and the descent to hell of the man who rejected him. The message disturbed the tribe. They did not want it to be true. So they burned the chart and, having done so, thought all was well! A man may refuse to listen to the message of Jesus Christ but he cannot eliminate it from the structure of the universe.

(ii) They persecuted the Christians. Even although they themselves refused to accept the message of Christ, they might have allowed others to listen to it and, if they wished, to accept it. Let a man always remember that there are more ways to heaven than one; and let him keep himself from intolerance.

(iii) They did not try to please God. The Church's trouble has often been that it has clung to a man-made religion instead of a God-given faith. The question men have too often asked is, "What

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1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

do I think?" instead of, "What does God say?" It is not our puny logic that matters; it is God's revelation.

(iv) They were up against all men. In the ancient world the Jews were, in fact, accused of "hatred of the human race." Their sin was the sin of arrogance. They regarded themselves as the Chosen People, as indeed they were. But they regarded themselves as chosen for privilege and never dreamed that they were chosen for service. Their aim was that some day the world should serve them, not that at all times they should serve the world. The man who thinks only of his own rights and privileges will always be up against other men--and, what is more serious, he will be up against God.

(v) They wished to keep the offer of God's love exclusively to themselves and did not wish the Gentiles to have any share in his grace. Someone has summed up the exclusive attitude in four bitter lines of verse,

"We are God's chosen few;
All others will be dammed.
There is no room in heaven for you;
We can't have heaven crammed."

There is something fundamentally wrong with a religion which shuts a man off from his fellow-men. If a man really loves God that love must run over into love for his fellow-men. So far from wanting to hug his privileges to himself, he will be filled with a passion to share them.

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1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

OUR GLORY AND OUR JOY

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

But, brothers, when we had been separated from you--in presence but not in heart--for a short time, we were the more exceedingly eager with a great desire to see your face. So we wished to come to you--I Paul longed for it once and again--but Satan blocked our way. For who is our hope or our joy or the crown in which we boast? Is it not even you, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For you are our glory and our joy.

First Thessalonians has been called "a classic of friendship," and here is a passage where Paul's deep affection for his friends breathes through his words. Across the centuries we can still feel the throb of love in these sentences.

Paul uses two interesting pictures in this passage.

(i) He speaks of Satan blocking his way when he desired to come to Thessalonica. The word he uses (egkoptein, GSN1465) is the technical word for putting up a road-block calculated to stop an expedition on the march. It is Satan's work to throw obstacles into the Christian's way--and it is our work to surmount them.

(ii) He speaks of the Thessalonians being his crown. In Greek there are two words for crown. The one is diadema (GSN1238) which is used almost exclusively for the royal crown. The other is stephanos (GSN4735) which is used almost exclusively for the victor's crown in some contest and especially for the athlete's crown of victory in the games. It is stephanos (GSN4735) that Paul uses here. The only prize in life that he really valued was to see his converts living well.

W. M. Macgregor used to quote the saying of John when he was thinking of the students whom he had taught, "No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth." (3Jn.4). Paul would have said amen to that. The glory of any teacher lies in his students; and should the day come when they have left him far behind the glory is still greater. A man's greatest glory lies in those whom he has set or helped on the path to Christ.

Anne Ross Cousin turned into verse the thoughts of Samuel Rutherford as he lay in prison in Aberdeen. In one verse she pictures him thinking of his old congregation in Anwoth:

"Fair Anwoth on the Solway
To me thou still art dear;
Even from the verge of heaven
I drop for thee a tear.
O! if one soul from Anwoth
Shall meet me at God's right hand,
My heaven will be two heavens
In Immanuel's land."

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1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

Nothing that we can do can bring us credit in the sight of God; but at the last the stars in a man's crown will be those whom he led nearer to Jesus Christ.

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1 Thessalonians 3:1-10

THE PASTOR AND HIS FLOCK

1 Thessalonians 3:1-10

So, when we could not stand it any longer, we made up our minds to be left all alone in Athens, and we sent Timothy our brother and God's servant in the good news of Christ, to strengthen you and encourage you about your faith, to see that none of you is beguiled into leaving the faith because of these afflictions, for you yourselves know that that is the very work that God has appointed us to do. For, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we Christians always suffer for our faith--as indeed it has turned out as you well know. So then, no longer able to stand it, I sent to find out how your faith is doing, in case the tempter had put you to the test and our labour should turn out to be all for nothing.

But now that Timothy has come back to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and has told us that you always think kindly of us and that you always yearn to see us--just as we yearn to see you--because of this we have been encouraged, brothers, by you through your faith in all our straits and in all our afflictions, and because now life for us is indeed worth living if you stand fast in the Lord, what thanks can we return to God for you for all the joy with which we rejoice because of you before God, while night and day we keep on praying with all the intensity of our hearts to see your face and to fill up the gaps in your faith?

In this passage there breathes the very essence of the spirit of the pastor.

(i) There is affection. We can never affect or win people unless we begin, quite simply, by liking them. It was Carlyle who said of London, "There are three and a half million people in this city--mostly fools!" The man who begins by despising men or by disliking them can never go on to save them.

(ii) There is anxiety. When a man has put the best of himself into anything, when he has launched anything from a liner to a pamphlet, he is anxious until he knows how the work of his hands and of his brain will weather the storms. If that is true of things, it is still more poignantly true of people. When a parent has trained a child with love and sacrifice, he is anxious when that child is launched out on the difficulties and dangers of life in the world. When a teacher has taught a child and put something of himself into that teaching, he is anxious to see how that training will stand the test of life. When a minister has received a young person into the Church, after years of training in Sunday School and in Bible Class and latterly in the First Communicants' Class, in confirmation class, he is anxious to know how he will fulfil the duties and the obligations of Church membership. Supremely it is so with Jesus Christ.

He staked so much on men and loved them with such a sacrificial love that he anxiously watches and waits to see how they will use that love. A man must stand awed and humbled when he remembers how in earth and in heaven there are those who are bearing him on their hearts and watching how he fares.

(iii) There is help. When Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica it was not nearly so much to inspect the Church there as it was to help it. It should be the great aim of every parent, every teacher and every preacher, not so much to criticize and condemn those in his charge for their faults and

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1 Thessalonians 3:1-10

mistakes but to save them from these faults and mistakes. The Christian attitude to the sinner and the struggler must never be that of condemnation but always that of help.

(iv) There is joy. Paul was glad that his converts were standing fast. He had the joy of one who had created something which would stand the tests of time. There is no joy like that of the parent who can point to a child who has done well.

(v) There is prayer. Paul carried his people on his heart to God's mercy seat. We will never know from how much sin we have been saved and how much temptation we have conquered all because someone prayed for us. It is told that once a servant-girl became a member of a Church. She was asked what Christian work she did. She said that she had not the opportunity to do much because her duties were so constant but, she said, "When I go to bed I take the morning newspaper to my bed with me; and I read the notices of the births and I pray for all the little babies; and I read the notices of marriage and I pray that those who have been married may be happy; and I read the announcements of death and I pray that the sorrowing may be comforted." No man can ever tell what tides of grace flowed from her attic bedroom. When we can serve people no other way, when, like Paul, we are unwillingly separated from them, there is one thing we can still do--we can pray for them.

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1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

ALL IS OF GOD

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

May he who is our God and Father and the Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you. May the Lord increase you and make you to abound in love to each other and to all men, even as we do towards you, in order that he may strengthen your hearts so that you may be blameless in holiness before the God who is our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

It is in a simple passage like this that the instinctive turn of Paul's mind is best seen. For him everything was of God.

(i) He prays to God to open a way for him whereby he may come to Thessalonica. It was to God that he turned for guidance in the ordinary day to day problems of life. One of the great mistakes of life is to turn to God only in the overpowering emergencies and the shattering crises.

I remember once talking to three young men who had just completed a yachting expedition up the west coast of Scotland. One said to me, "You know, when we are at home we hardly ever listen to the weather forecasts, but when we were on that yacht we listened to them with all our ears." It is quite possible to do without the weather forecasts when life is comfortably safe; it is essential to listen when life might depend on them.

We are apt to try to do the same with God. In ordinary things we disregard him, thinking that we can manage well enough by ourselves; in the emergency we clutch at him, knowing that we cannot get through without him. It was not so with Paul. Even in an ordinary routine thing like a journey from Athens to Thessalonica it was to God that he looked for guidance. We use him to try to achieve a God-rescued life; Paul companied with him to achieve a God-directed life.

(ii) He prays to God that he will enable the Thessalonians to fulfil the law of love in their daily lives. We often wonder why the Christian life is so difficult, especially in the ordinary everyday relationships. The answer may very well be that we are trying to live it by ourselves. The man who goes out in the morning without prayer is, in effect, saying, "I can quite well tackle today on my own." The man who lays himself to rest without speaking to God, is, in effect, saying, "I can bear on my own whatever consequences today has brought." John Buchan once described an atheist as "a man who has no invisible means of support." It may well be that our failure to live the Christian life well is due to our trying to live it without the help of God--which is an impossible assignment.

(iii) Paul prays to God for the ultimate safety. At this time his mind was full of thoughts of the Second Coming of Christ when men would stand before the judgment seat of God. It was his prayer that God would so preserve his people in righteousness that on that day they would not be ashamed. The only way to prepare to meet God is to live daily with him. The shock of that day will be not for those who have so lived that they have become God's friends but for those who meet him as a terrible stranger.

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

THE SUMMONS TO PURITY

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you have received instructions from us as to how you must behave to please God, even so you do behave, that you may go on from more to more. For you know what orders we gave you through the Lord Jesus; for this is God's will for you, that you should live consecrated lives, I mean, that you should keep yourselves from fornication, that each of you should know how to possess his own body in consecration and in honour, not in the passion of lustful desire, like the Gentiles who do not know God, that in this kind of thing you should not transgress against your brother or try to take advantage of him. For of all these things the Lord is the avenger, as we have already told you and testified to you. For God did not call us to impurity but to consecration. Therefore he who rejects this instruction does not reject a man, but rejects the God who gives his holy Spirit to us.

It may seem strange that Paul should go to such lengths to inculcate sexual purity in a Christian congregation; but two things have to be remembered. First, the Thessalonians had only newly come into the Christian faith and they had come from a society in which chastity was an unknown virtue; they were still in the midst of such a society and the infection of it was playing upon them all the time. It would be exceedingly difficult for them to unlearn what they had for all their lives accepted as natural. Second, there never was an age in history when marriage vows were so disregarded and divorce so disastrously easy. The phrase which we have translated "that each of you should possess his own body in consecration and in honour" could be translated, "that each of you may possess his own wife in consecration and in honour."

Amongst the Jews marriage was theoretically held in the highest esteem. It was said that a Jew must die rather than commit murder, idolatry or adultery. But, in fact, divorce was tragically easy. The Deuteronomic law laid it down that a man could divorce his wife if he found "some uncleanness" or "some matter of shame" in her. The difficulty was in defining what was a "matter of shame." The stricter Rabbis confined that to adultery alone; but there was a laxer teaching which widened its scope to include matters like spoiling the dinner by putting too much salt in the food; going about in public with her head uncovered; talking with men in the streets; speaking disrespectfully of her husband's parents in his presence; being a brawling woman (which was defined as a woman whose voice could be heard in the next house). It was only to be expected that the laxer view prevailed.

In Rome for the first five hundred and twenty years of the Republic there had not been a single divorce; but now under the Empire, as it has been put, divorce was a matter of caprice. As Seneca said, "Women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married." In Rome the years were identified by the names of the consuls; but it was said that fashionable ladies identified the years by the names of their husbands. Juvenal quotes an instance of a woman who had eight husbands in five years. Morality was dead.

In Greece immorality had always been quite blatant. Long ago Demosthenes had written: "We keep prostitutes for pleasure; we keep mistresses for the day-to-day needs of the body; we keep

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our homes." So long as a man supported his wife and family there was no shame whatsoever in extra-marital relationships.

It was to men and women who had come out of a society like that that Paul wrote this paragraph. What may seem to many the merest commonplace of Christian living was to them startlingly new. One thing Christianity did was to lay down a completely new code in regard to the relationship of men and women; it is the champion of purity and the guardian of the home. This can not be affirmed too plainly in our own day which again has seen a pronounced shift in standards of sexual behaviour.

In a book entitled What I Believe, a symposium of the basic beliefs of a selection of well-known men and women, Kingsley Martin writes: "Once women are emancipated and begin to earn their own living and are able to decide for themselves whether or not they have children, marriage customs are inevitably revised. 'Contraception,' a well-known economist once said to me, 'is the most important event since the discovery of fire.' Basically he was right, for it fundamentally alters the relations of the sexes, on which family life is built. The result in our day is a new sexual code; the old 'morality' which winked at male promiscuity but punished female infidelity with a life-time of disgrace, or even, in some puritanical cultures, with a cruel death, has disappeared. The new code tends to make it the accepted thing that men and women can live together as they will, but to demand marriage of them if they decide to have children."

The new morality is only the old immorality brought up-to-date. There is a clamant necessity in Britain, as there was in Thessalonica, to place before men and women the uncompromising demands of Christian morality, "for God did not call us to impurity but to consecration."

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1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

THE NECESSITY OF THE DAY'S WORK

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

You do not need that I should write to you about brotherly love; for you yourselves are taught of God to love one another. Indeed you do this very thing to all the brothers who are in the whole of Macedonia. But we do urge you, brothers, to go on to more and more, and to aim at keeping calm and minding your own business. We urge you to work with your hands, as we instructed you to do, so that your behaviour may seem to those outside the Church a lovely thing and so that you may need no one to support you.

This passage begins with praise but it ends in warning; and with the warning we come to the immediate situation behind the letter. Paul urged the Thessalonians to keep calm, to mind their own business and to go on working with their hands. The preaching of the Second Coming had produced an odd and awkward situation in Thessalonica. Many of the Thessalonians had given up their daily work and were standing about in excited groups, upsetting themselves and everybody else, while they waited for the Second Coming to arrive. Ordinary life had been disrupted; the problem of making a living had been abandoned; and Paul's advice was preeminently practical.

(i) He told them, in effect, that the best way in which Jesus Christ could come upon them was that he should find them quietly, efficiently and diligently doing their daily job. Principal Rainy used to say, "Today I must lecture; tomorrow I must attend a committee meeting; on Sunday I must preach; some day I must die. Well then, let us do as well as we can each thing as it comes to us." The thought that Christ will some day come, that life as we know it will end, is not a reason for stopping work; it is a reason for working all the harder and more faithfully. It is not hysterical and useless waiting but quiet and useful work which will be a man's passport to the Kingdom.

(ii) He told them that, whatever happened, they must commend Christianity to the outsider by the diligence and the beauty of their lives. To go on as they were doing, to allow their so-called Christianity to turn them into useless citizens, was simply to bring Christianity into discredit. Paul here touched on a tremendous truth. A tree is known by its fruits; and a religion is known by the kind of men it produces. The only way to demonstrate that Christianity is the best of all faiths is to show that it produces the best of all men. When we Christians show that our Christianity makes us better workmen, truer friends, kinder men and women, then we are really preaching. The outside world may never come into church to hear a sermon but it sees us every day outside church; and it is our lives which must be the sermons to win men for Christ.

(iii) He told them that they must aim at independence and never become spongers on charity. The effect of the conduct of the Thessalonians was that others had to support them. There is a certain paradox in Christianity. It is the Christian's duty to help others, for many, through no fault of their own, cannot attain that independence; but it is also the Christian's duty to help himself. There will be in the Christian a lovely charity which delights to give and a proud independence which seems to take so long as his own two hands can supply his needs.

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

CONCERNING THOSE WHO ARE ASLEEP

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We do not wish you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who are asleep, because we do not wish you to sorrow as the rest of people do because they have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we can be sure that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For we tell you this, not by our own authority but by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who survive until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not take precedence over those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven, with a shout of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God; and the dead who are in Christ will rise first, and then we who are alive, who survive, will be caught up by the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And so we shall be always with the Lord. So then encourage one another with these words.

The idea of the Second Coming had brought another problem to the people of Thessalonica. They were expecting it very soon; they fully expected to be themselves alive when it came but they were worried about those Christians who had died. They could not be sure that those who had already died would share the glory of that day which was so soon to come. Paul's answer is that there will be one glory for those who have died and those who survive.

He tells them that they must not sorrow as those who have no hope. In face of death the pagan world stood in despair. They met it with grim resignation and bleak hopelessness. Aeschylus wrote, "Once a man dies there is no resurrection." Theocritus wrote, "There is hope for those who are alive, but those who have died are without hope." Catullus wrote, "When once our brief light sets, there is one perpetual night through which we must sleep." On their tombstones grim epitaphs were carved. "I was not; I became; I am not; I care not." One of the most pathetic papyrus letters that has come down to us is a letter of sympathy which runs like this. "Irene to Taonnophris and Philo, good comfort. I was as sorry and wept over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things whatsoever were fitting, I did, and all mine, Epaphroditus and Thermouthion and Philion and Apollonius and Plantas. But nevertheless against such things one can do nothing. Therefore comfort ye one another."

Paul lays down a great principle. The man who has lived and died in Christ is still in Christ even in death and will rise in him. Between Christ and the man who loves him there is a relationship which nothing can break, a relationship which overpasses death. Because Christ died and rose again, so the man who is one with Christ will rise again.

The picture Paul draws of the day when Christ will come is poetry, an attempt to describe what is indescribable. At the Second Coming Christ will descend from heaven to earth. He will utter the word of command and thereupon the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God will waken the dead, then the dead and the living alike will be caught up in the chariots of the clouds to meet Christ; and thereafter they will be forever with their Lord. We are not meant to take with crude and insensitive literalism what is a seer's vision. It is not the details which are important. What is

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

important is that in life and in death the Christian is in Christ and that is a union which nothing can break.

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1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

You have no need, brothers, that anything should be written to you about the times and seasons; for you yourselves well know that, as a thief in the night, so the day of the Lord comes. When they are saying, "All is well; all is safe," then sudden destruction comes upon them, just as the labour pains come on a woman who is with child, and very certainly they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in the dark. You are not in a situation in which the day, like a thief, can surprise you. For you are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to night or darkness. So then, let us not sleep, as the rest of men do, but let us be watchful and sober.

For those who sleep at night; and those who get drunk get drunk at night; but, as for us, because we belong to the day, let us be sober and let us put on the breastplate of faith and love, and let us take for a helmet the hope of salvation, because God did not appoint us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, so that, whether we wake or whether we sleep, we may live with him. So then encourage each other and build up one another--as indeed you are doing.

We shall not fully understand the New Testament pictures of the Second Coming unless we remember that they have an Old Testament background. In the Old Testament the conception of the Day of the Lord is very common; and all the pictures and apparatus which belong to the Day of the Lord have been attached to the Second Coming. To the Jew all time was divided into two ages. There was this present age which was wholly and incurably bad. There was the age to come which would be the golden age of God. In between there was the Day of the Lord which would be a terrible day. It would be a day in which one world was shattered and another was born.

Many of the most terrible pictures in the Old Testament are of the Day of the Lord (Isa.22:5; Isa.13:9; Zeph.1:14-16; Am.5:18; Jer.30:7; Mal.4:1; Jl.2:31). Its main characteristics were as follows. (i) It would come suddenly and unexpectedly. (ii) It would involve a cosmic upheaval in which the universe was shaken to its very foundations. (iii) It would be a time of judgment.

Very naturally the New Testament writers to all intents and purposes identified the Day of the Lord with the day of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We will do well to remember that these are what we might call stock pictures. They are not meant to be taken literally. They are pictorial visions of what would happen when God broke into time.

Naturally men were anxious to know when that day would come. Jesus himself had bluntly said that no man knew when that day or hour would be, that even he did not know and only God knew (Mk.13:32; compare Matt.24:36; Ac.1:7). But that did not stop people speculating about it, as indeed they still do, although it is surely almost blasphemous that men should seek for knowledge which was denied even to Jesus. To these speculations Paul has two things to say.

He repeats that the coming of the day will be sudden. It will come like a thief in the night. But he also insists that that is no reason why a man should be caught unawares. It is only the man who lives in the dark and whose deeds are evil who will be caught unprepared. The Christian lives in the

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1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

light and no matter when that day comes, if he is watchful and sober, it will find him ready. Waking or sleeping, the Christian is living already with Christ and is therefore always prepared.

No man knows when God's call will come for him and there are certain things that cannot be left until the last moment. It is too late to prepare for an examination when the examination paper is before you. It is too late to make the house secure when the storm has burst. When Queen Mary of Orange was dying, her chaplain wished to read to her. She answered, "I have not left this matter till this hour." It was similar with an old Scotsman to whom someone offered comforting sayings near the end. The old man's reply was, "Ah theekit (thatched) ma hoose when the weather was warm." If a call comes suddenly, it need not find us unprepared. The man who has lived all his life with Christ is never unprepared to enter his nearer presence.

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1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

ADVICE TO A CHURCH

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

We ask you, brothers, to give due recognition to those who labour among you and to those who preside over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to hold them very highly in love because of the work that they are doing.

Be at peace among yourselves. We urge you brothers, warn the lazy, comfort the fearful, cling to the weak, be patient with all. See that no one pays back evil for evil. Always pursue the good for each other and for all. Always rejoice. Never stop praying. In everything give thanks. For this is God's will in Christ Jesus for you. Don't quench the gifts of the Spirit, don't make light Of manifestations of the gift of prophecy. Test everything, hold fast to the fine thing. Keep yourselves well away from every kind of evil.

Paul comes to an end with a chain of jewels of good advice. He sets them out in the most summary way but every one is such that every Christian should ponder it.

Respect your leaders, says Paul; and the reason for the respect is the work that they are doing. It is not a question of personal prestige; it is the task which makes a man great and it is the service he is doing which is his badge of honour.

Live at peace. It is impossible that the gospel of love should be preached in an atmosphere poisoned by hate. Better far that a man should quit a congregation in which he is unhappy and in which he makes others unhappy and find one where he may be at peace.

1Th.5:14 picks out those who need special care and attention. The word used for lazy originally described a soldier who had left the ranks. The phrase really means "Warn the quitters." The fearful are literally those whose souls are small. In every community there is the faint-hearted brother who instinctively fears the worst but in every community there should be Christians who, being brave, help others to be brave. "Cling to the weak" is a lovely piece of advice. Instead of letting the weak brother drift away and finally vanish altogether, the Christian community should make a deliberate attempt to grapple him to the Church in such a way that he cannot escape. It should forge bonds of fellowship and persuasion to hold on to the man who is likely to stray away. To be patient with all is perhaps hardest of all, for the last lesson most of us learn is to suffer fools gladly.

Don't take revenge, says Paul. Even if a man seeks our evil we must conquer him by seeking his good.

1Th.5:16-18 give us three marks of a genuine Church. (i) It is a happy Church. There is in it that atmosphere of joy which makes its members feel that they are bathed in sunshine. True Christianity is an exhilarating and not a depressing thing. (ii) It is a praying Church. Maybe our Church's prayers would be more effective if we remembered that "they pray best together who also pray alone." (iii) It is a thankful Church. There is always something for which to give thanks; even on

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1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

the darkest day there are blessings to count. We must remember that if we face the sun the shadows will fall behind us but if we turn our backs on the sun all the shadows will be in front.

In 1Th.5:19-20 Paul warns the Thessalonians not to despise spiritual gifts. The prophets were really the equivalent of our modern preachers. It was they who brought the message of God to the congregation. Paul is really saying, "If a man has anything to say, don't stop him saying it."

1Th.5:21-22 describe the constant duty of the Christian. He must use Christ as touchstone by which to test all things; and even when it is hard he must keep on doing the fine thing and hold himself aloof from every kind of evil.

When a Church lives up to Paul's advice, it will indeed shine like a light in a dark place; it will have joy within itself and power to win others.

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1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

THE GRACE OF CHRIST BE WITH YOU

1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

May the God of peace himself consecrate you through and through; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept complete so that you will be blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. You can rely on him who calls you--and he will do this very thing.

Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I adjure you by the Lord that this letter should be read to all the brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

At the end of his letter Paul commends his friends to God in body, soul and spirit. But there is one very lovely saying here. "Brothers," said Paul, "pray for us." It is a wonderful thing that the greatest saint of them all should feel that he was strengthened by the prayers of the humblest Christians. Once his friends came to congratulate a great statesman who had been elected to the highest office his country could offer him. He said, "Don't give me your congratulations, but give me your prayers." For Paul prayer was a golden chain in which he prayed for others and others prayed for him.

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Introduction to Thessalonians

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS

PAUL COMES TO MACEDONIA

For anyone who can read between the lines the story of Paul's coming to Macedonia is one of the most dramatic in the book of Acts. Luke, with supreme economy of words, tells it in Ac.16:6-10. Short as that narrative is, it gives the impression of a chain of circumstances inescapably culminating in one supreme event. Paul had passed through Phrygia and Galatia and ahead of him lay the Hellespont. To the left lay the teeming province of Asia, to the right stretched the great province of Bithynia; but the Spirit would allow him to enter neither. There was something driving him relentlessly on to the Aegean Sea. So he came to Alexandrian Troas, still uncertain where he ought to go; and then there came to him a vision in the night of a man who cried, "Come over into Macedonia and help us." Paul set sail, and for the first time the gospel came to Europe.

ONE WORLD

At that moment Paul must have seen much more than a continent for Christ. It was in Macedonia that he landed; and Macedonia was the kingdom of Alexander the Great, who had conquered the world and wept because there were no more worlds left to conquer. But Alexander was much more than a military conqueror. He was almost the first universalist. He was more a missionary than a soldier; and he dreamed of one world dominated and enlightened by the culture of Greece. Even so great a thinker as Aristotle had said that it was a plain duty to treat Greeks as free men and orientals as slaves; but Alexander declared that he had been sent by God "to unite, to pacify and to reconcile the whole world." Deliberately he had said that it was his aim "to marry the East to the West." He had dreamed of an Empire in which there was neither Greek nor Jew, barbarian or Scythian, bond or free (Col.3:11). It is hard to see how Alexander could have failed to be in Paul's thoughts. Paul left from Alexandrian Troas which was called after Alexander; he came to Macedonia which was Alexander's original kingdom; he worked at Philippi which was called after Philip, Alexander's father; he went on to Thessalonica which was called after Alexander's half-sister. The whole territory was saturated with memories of Alexander; and Paul must surely have thought, not of a country nor of a continent, but of a world for Christ.

PAUL COMES TO THESSALONICA

This sense of the wide-stretching arms of Christianity must have been accentuated when Paul came to Thessalonica. It was a great city. Its original name was Thermal, which means The Hot Springs, and it gave its name to the Thermaic Gulf on which it stood. Six hundred years ago Herodotus had described it as a great city. It has always been a famous harbour. It was there that Xerxes the Persian had his naval base when he invaded Europe; and even in Roman times it was one of the world's great dockyards. In 315 B.C. Cassander had rebuilt the city and renamed it Thessalonica, the name of his wife, who was a daughter of Philip of Macedon and a half-sister of Alexander the Great. It was a free city; that is to say it had never suffered the indignity of having Roman troops quartered within it. It had its own popular assembly and its own magistrates. Its

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population rose to 200,000 and for a time it was a question whether it or Constantinople would be recognized as the capital of the world.

Even today, under the name Salonika, it has 70,000 inhabitants.

But the supreme importance of Thessalonica lay in this--it straddled the Via Egnatia, the Egnatian Road, which stretched from Dyrrachium on the Adriatic to Constantinople on the Bosphorus and thence away to Asia Minor and the East. Its main street was part of the very road which linked Rome with the East. East and West converged on Thessalonica; it was said to be "in the lap of the Roman Empire." Trade poured into her from East and West, so that it was said, "So long as nature does not change, Thessalonica will remain wealthy and prosperous."

It is impossible to overstress the importance of the arrival of Christianity in Thessalonica. If Christianity was settled there, it was bound to spread East along the Egnatian Road until all Asia was conquered and West until it stormed even the city of Rome. The coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was crucial in the making of it into a world religion.

PAUL'S STAY AT THESSALONICA

The story of Paul's stay at Thessalonica is in Ac.17:1-10. Now, for Paul, what happened at Thessalonica was of supreme importance. He preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths (Ac.17:2) which means that his stay there could not have been much more than three weeks in length. He had such tremendous success that the Jews were enraged and raised so much trouble that Paul had to be smuggled out, in peril of his life, to Beroea. The same thing happened in Beroea (Ac.17:10-12) and Paul had to leave Timothy and Silas behind and make his escape to Athens. What exercised his mind was this. He had been in Thessalonica only three weeks. Was it possible to make such an impression on a place in three weeks' time that Christianity was planted so deeply that it could never again be uprooted? If so, it was by no means an idle dream that the Roman Empire might yet be won for Christ.

Or was it necessary to settle down and work for months, even years, before an impression could be made? In that event, no man could even dimly foresee when Christianity would penetrate all over the world. Thessalonica was a test case; and Paul was torn with anxiety to know how it would turn out.

NEWS FROM THESSALONICA

So anxious was Paul that, when Timothy joined him at Athens, he sent him back to Thessalonica to get the information without which he could not rest (1Th.3:1-2,5; 1Th.2:17). What news did Timothy bring back? There was good news. The affection of the Thessalonians for Paul was as strong as ever; and they were standing fast in the faith (1Th.2:14; 1Th.3:4-6; 1Th.4:9-10). They were indeed "his glory and Ws joy" (1Th.2:20). But there was worrying news.

(i) The preaching of the Second Coming had produced an unhealthy situation in which people had stopped working and had abandoned all ordinary pursuits to await the Second Coming with a kind of hysterical expectancy. So Paul tells them to be quiet and to get on with their work (1Th.4:11).

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(ii) They were worried about what was to happen to those who died before the Second Coming arrived. Paul explains that those who fall asleep in Jesus will miss none of the glory (1Th.4:13-18).

(iii) There was a tendency to despise all lawful authority; the argumentative Greek was always in danger of producing a democracy run mad (1Th.5:12-14).

(iv) There was the ever-present danger that they would relapse into immorality. It was hard to unlearn the point of view of generations and to escape the contagion of the heathen world (1Th.4:3-8).

(v) There was at least a section who slandered Paul. They hinted that he preached the gospel for what he could get out of it (1Th.2:5,9); and that he was something of a dictator (1Th.2:6-7,11).

(vi) There was a certain amount of division in the Church (1Th.4:9; 1Th.5:13).

These were the problems with which Paul had to deal; and they show that human nature has not changed so very much.

WHY TWO LETTERS?

We must ask why there are two letters. They are, very much alike and they must have been written within weeks, perhaps days of each other. The second letter was written mainly to clear up a misconception about the Second Coming. The first letter insists that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, and urges watchfulness (1Th.5:2; 1Th.5:6). But this produced the unhealthy situation where men did nothing but watch and wait; and in the second letter Paul explains what signs must come first before the Second Coming should come (2Th.2:3-12). The Thessalonians had got their ideas about the Second Coming out of proportion. As so often happens to a preacher, Paul's preaching had been misunderstood, and certain phrases had been taken out of context and over-emphasized; and the second letter seeks to put things back in their proper balance and to correct the thoughts of the excited Thessalonians regarding the Second Coming.

Of course, Paul takes occasion in the second letter to repeat and to stress much of the good advice and rebuke he had given in the first, but its main aim is to tell them certain things which will calm their hysteria and make them wait, not in excited idleness, but in patient and diligent attendance to the day's work. In these two letters we see Paul solving the day to day problems which arose in the expanding Church.

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2 Thessalonians 1

LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS

2 Thessalonians 1

Paul and Silas and Timothy send this letter to the Church of the Thessalonians which is in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers, we ought always to thank God for you, as it is fitting, because your faith is on the increase, and because the love of each one of you all for each other grows ever greater, so that we ourselves are telling proudly about you in the Churches of God, about your constancy and faith amidst all the persecutions and afflictions which you endure--which indeed is proof positive that the judgment of God was right that you should be deemed worthy of the Kingdom of God for the sake of which you are suffering. And just that judgment is, if indeed it is right in God's sight, as it is, to recompense affliction to those who afflict you and relief with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with the power of his angels in a flame of fire when he renders a just recompense to those who do not recognize God and who do not obey the good news of our Lord Jesus.

These are such men that they will pay the penalty of eternal destruction which will banish them forever from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his strength, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all those who believed--because our testimony to you was believed--on that day. To this end we also always pray for you, that our God may deem you worthy of the call that came to you and that he may by his power bring to completion every resolve after goodness and every work that faith inspires, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in it, according to the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is all the wisdom of the wise leader in this opening passage. It seems that the Thessalonians had sent a message to Paul full of self-doubtings. They had been timorously afraid that their faith was not going to stand the test and that--in the expressive modern phrase--they were not going to make the grade. Paul's answer was not to push them further into the slough of despond by pessimistically agreeing with them but to pick out their virtues and achievements in such a way that these despondent, frightened Christians might square their shoulders and say, "Well, if Paul thinks that of us we'll make a fight of it yet."

"Blessed are those," said Mark Rutherford, "who heal us of our self-despisings," and Paul did just that for the Thessalonian Church. He knew that often judicious praise can do what indiscriminate criticism cannot do and that wise praise never makes a man rest upon his laurels but fills him with the desire to do still better.

There are three things which Paul picked out as being the marks of a vital Church.

(i) A faith which is strong. It is the mark of the advancing Christian that he grows surer of Jesus Christ every day. The faith which may begin as an hypothesis ends as a certainty. James Agate once said, "My mind is not like a bed which has to be made and remade. There are some things of which I am absolutely sure." The Christian comes to that stage when to the thrill of Christian experience he adds the discipline of Christian thought.

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(ii) A love which is increasing. A growing Church is one which grows greater in service. A man may begin serving his fellowmen as a duty which his Christian faith lays upon him; he will end by doing it because in it he finds his greatest joy. The life of service opens up the great discovery that unselfishness and happiness go hand in hand.

(iii) A constancy which endures. The word Paul uses is a magnificent word. It is *hupomone* (GSN5281) which is usually translated endurance but does not mean the ability passively to bear anything that may descend upon us. It has been described as "a masculine constancy under trial" and describes the spirit which not only endures the circumstances in which it finds itself but masters them. It accepts the blows of life but in accepting them transforms them into stepping stones to new achievement.

Paul's uplifting message ends with the most uplifting vision of all. It ends with what we might call the reciprocal glory. When Christ comes he will be glorified in his saints and admired in those who have believed. Here we have the breath-taking truth that our glory is Christ and Christ's glory is ourselves. The glory of Christ is in those who through him have learned to endure and to conquer, and so to shine like lights in a dark place. A teacher's glory lies in the scholars he produces; a parent's in the children he rears not only for living but for life; a master's in his disciples; and to us is given the tremendous privilege and responsibility that Christ's glory can lie in us. We may bring discredit or we may bring glory to the Master whose we are and whom we seek to serve. Can any privileged responsibility be greater than that?

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2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

THE LAWLESS ONE

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Brothers, in regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and in regard to our being gathered to him, we ask you not to be readily shaken in your mind and not to get into a state of nervous excitement because of any statement purporting to come from us either in the Spirit or by word of mouth or by a letter and alleging that the Day of the Lord is here. Let no one deceive you in any way. The Day of the Lord will not come unless there comes first The Rebellion against God, and unless there be revealed The Man of Sin, The Son of Perdition, the one who opposes himself to and exalts himself against everyone who is called God or made an object of worship so that he attempts to take his seat in the very temple of God and proclaims that he himself is God. Don't you remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? As for the present, you know the power which restrains him so that he may be revealed in his own time. For the secret of lawlessness is even now in operation.

But The Man of Sin will appear only when the one who restrains him is removed from the scene. And then The Lawless One will be revealed and the Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of his mouth and will render him ineffective by his appearance and his coming. The coming of The Lawless One is for those who are doomed. He will come according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and wonders which issue from falsehood, and with all wicked deceit. They are doomed because they did not receive the love of truth that they might be saved. For this cause God sends them a deceiving energy in order that they might believe in a lie so that all who have not believed but have consented to that principle of unrighteousness may be judged.

This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult passages in the whole New Testament; and it is so because it is using terms and thinking in pictures which were perfectly familiar to those to whom Paul was speaking but which are utterly strange to us.

The general picture is this. Paul was telling the Thessalonians that they must give up their nervous, hysterical waiting for the Second Coming. He denied that he had ever said that the Day of the Lord had come. That was a misinterpretation of his words which must not be attributed to him; and he told them that before the Day of the Lord could come much had still to happen.

First there would come an age of rebellion against God; into this world there had already come a secret evil power which was working in the world and on men to bring this time of rebellion. Somewhere there was being kept one who was as much the incarnation of evil as Jesus was the incarnation of God. He was The Man of Sin, The Son of Perdition, The Lawless One. In time the power which was restraining him would be removed from the scene; and then this devil incarnate would come. When he came, he would gather his own people to him just as Jesus Christ had gathered his. Those who had refused to accept Christ were waiting to accept him. Then would come a last battle in which Christ would utterly destroy The Lawless One; Christ's people would be gathered to him and the wicked men who had accepted The Lawless One as their master would be destroyed.

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2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

We have to remember one thing. Almost all the Eastern faiths believed in a power of evil as they believed in a power of good; and believed, too, in a kind of battle between God and this power of evil. For instance, the Babylonians had a story that Tiamat, the dragon, had rebelled against Marduk, the creator, and had in the final battle been destroyed. Paul was dealing in a set of ideas which were common property. The Jews, too, had that idea. They called the Satanic power Belial or, more correctly, Beliar. When the Jews wished to describe a man as utterly bad they called him a son of Beliar (Deut.13:13; 1Kgs.21:10,13; 2Sam.22:5). In 2Cor.6:15 Paul uses this term as the opposite of God. This evil incarnate was the antithesis of God. The Christians took this over, later than Paul, under the title Antichrist (1Jn.2:18,22; 1Jn.4:3).

Obviously such a power cannot go on existing for ever in the universe; and there was widespread belief in a final battle in which God would triumph and this force of anti-God would be finally destroyed. That is the picture with which Paul is working.

What was the restraining force which was still keeping The Lawless One under control? No one can answer that question with certainty. Most likely Paul meant the Roman Empire. Time and again he himself was to be saved from the fury of the mob by the justice of the Roman magistrate. Rome was the restraining power which kept the world from insane anarchy. But the day would come when that power would be removed--and then would be chaos.

So then Paul pictures a growing rebellion against God, the emergence of one who was the devil incarnate as Christ had been God incarnate, a final struggle and the ultimate triumph of God.

When this incarnate evil came into the world there would be some who would accept him as master, those who had refused Christ; and they along with their evil master would find final defeat and terrible judgment.

However remote these pictures may be from us they nevertheless have certain permanent truth in them.

(i) There is a force of evil in the world. Even if he could not logically prove that there was a devil many a man would say, "I know there is because I have met him." We hide our heads in the sand if we deny that there is an evil power at work amongst men.

(ii) God is in control. Things may seem to be crashing to chaos but in some strange way even the chaos is in God's control.

(iii) The ultimate triumph of God is sure. In the end nothing can stand against him. The Lawless One may have his day but there comes a time when God says, "Thus far and no farther." And so the great question is, "On what side are you? In the struggle at the heart of the universe are you for God--or Satan?"

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2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

GOD'S DEMAND AND OUR EFFORT

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

We ought always to give thanks for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved by the consecration of the Holy Spirit and by faith in the truth. For this he called you by the good news which we brought that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand fast and hold on to the traditions which you were taught either by word of mouth or through our letter.

May the Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and who gave us, by his grace, eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and make you strong OR every good deed and word.

In this passage there is a kind of synopsis of the Christian life.

(i) It begins with God's call. We could never even begin to seek God unless he had already found us. The whole initiative is with him; the ground and the moving cause of the whole matter is his seeking love.

(ii) It develops in our effort. The Christian is not called to dream, but to fight; not to stand still, but to climb. He is called not only to the greatest privilege but also to the greatest task in the world.

(iii) This effort is helped continually by two things. (a) It is helped by the teaching, guidance and example of godly men. God speaks to us through those to whom he has already spoken. "A saint," as someone has said, "is a person who makes it easier for others to believe in God." And there are some who help us, not by anything they say or write, but simply by being what they are, men whom to meet is to meet God. (b) It is helped by God himself. We are never left to fight and toil alone. He who gives us the task also gives us the strength to do it; more, he actually does it with us. We are not thrown into the battle to meet it with the puny resources we can bring to it. At the back of us and beside us there is God. When Paul was up against it in Corinth, he had a vision by night in which the Lord said to him, "Do not be afraid...for I am with You" (Ac.18:9-10). They that are for us are always more than they that are against us.

(iv) This call and this effort are designed to produce two things. (a) They are designed to produce consecration on earth. Literally in Greek a thing which is consecrated is set apart for God. They are meant to set us apart in such a way that God can use us for his service. The result is that a man's life no longer belongs to him to do with it as he likes; it belongs to God for him to use as he likes. (b) They are designed to produce salvation in heaven. The Christian life does not end with time; its goal is eternity. The Christian can regard his present affliction as a light thing in comparison with the glory that shall be. As Christina Rossetti wrote:

"Does the road wind uphill all the way?"

"Yes, to the very end."

"Will the day's journey take the whole long day?"

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2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

`From morn to night, my friend.'

`But is there for the night a resting-place?'

`A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.'

`May not the darkness hide it from my face?'

`You cannot miss that inn.'

`Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?'

`Those who have gone before.'

`Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?'

`They will not keep you waiting at that door.'

`Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?'

`Of labour you shall find the sum.'

`Will there be beds for me and all who seek?'

`Yes, beds for all who come.'"

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2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

A FINAL WORD

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Finally, brothers, keep on praying for us, that the word of God may run its race and receive its crown of glory--as it does in your case-- and that we may be saved from these wicked and evil men, for the faith is not for everyone. You can rely on the Lord who will make you steady and who will guard you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you both do and will do what we command you to do. May the Lord direct your hearts so that you may feel the love of God and display the endurance which Christ can give.

Once again Paul comes to the end of a letter with the request that his people should pray for him (compare 1Th.5:25; Rom.15:30ff.; Phm.22). There is something deeply moving in the thought of this giant among men asking for the prayers of the Thessalonians who so well recognized their own weakness. Nowhere is Paul's humility more clear to see. And the fact that he, as it were, threw himself on their hearts must have done much to bind even his opponents to him, because it is very difficult to dislike a man who asks you to pray for him.

But in spite of his love for and trust in men Paul was a realist. The faith, he said, is not for everyone. We can be certain that he said it not cynically but sorrowfully. Once again we see the tremendous responsibility of free-will. We can use it to open our hearts and we can use it to shut them. Faith's appeal is not selective, it goes out to every man; but the heart of man can refuse to respond.

In the last verse of this passage we see what we might call the inward and the outward characteristics of the Christian. The inward characteristic is the awareness of the love of God, the deep awareness that we cannot drift beyond his care, the sense that the everlasting arms are underneath us. One of the basic needs of life is security and we find that need met in the consciousness of the unchanging love of God. The outward characteristic is the endurance which Christ can give. We live in a world where there are more nervous breakdowns than at any time in history. It is a sign that more and more people have the feeling that they cannot cope with life. The outward characteristic of the Christian is that when others break he stands erect and when others collapse he shoulders his burden and goes on. With the love of God in his heart and the strength of Christ in his life a man can face anything.

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2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

DISCIPLINE IN BROTHERLY LOVE

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Brothers, we command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, keep yourselves from every brother who behaves like a truant from duty and who does not conduct himself in accordance with the teaching which they received from us, for you yourselves know that you must imitate us because we never played the truant from work when we were among you nor did we eat bread which we had received from you without paying for it, but in labour and toil we kept on working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you. It is not that we had not the right to claim support from you, but we kept at work that we might give ourselves to you as an example for you to imitate, for when we were with you we used to give you this order, "If a man refuses to work, neither let him eat." For we hear that there are some amongst you whose behaviour is that of truants from work, who are busy in nothing except in being busybodies.

To such we give orders and exhort them in the Lord Jesus Christ that they should quietly go on working and so eat their bread. Brothers, don't grow tired of doing the fine thing. If anyone does not obey the word we send to you through this letter, mark him; don't associate with him that he may be shamed. Don't reckon him as an enemy, but give him advice as a brother.

May the Lord of peace himself give you peace always and everywhere. The Lord be with you all.

Here is the greeting of me Paul in my own hand-writing, which is the sign of genuineness in every letter. This is how I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Here Paul is dealing, as he had to deal in the previous letter, with the situation produced by those who took the wrong attitude to the Second Coming. There were those in Thessalonica who had given up their work and had abandoned the routine claims of every day to wait about in excited idleness for Christ to come. Paul uses a vivid word to describe them. Twice he uses the adverb ataktos (GSN0813) and once the verb ataktein (GSN0812). The word means to play truant. It occurs, for instance, in the papyri, in an apprentice's contract in which the father agrees that his son must make good any days on which he plays truant. The Thessalonians in their excited idleness were truants from work.

To bring them to their senses Paul quotes his own example. All his life he was a man who worked with his hands. The Jew glorified work. "He who does not teach his son a trade," they said, "teaches him to steal." Paul was a trained Rabbi; but the Jewish law laid it down that a Rabbi must take no pay for teaching. He must have a trade and must satisfy his daily needs with the work of his hands. So we find Rabbis who were bakers, barbers, carpenters, masons and who followed all kinds of trades. The Jews believed in the dignity of honest toil; and they were sure that a scholar lost something when he became so academic and so withdrawn from life that he forgot how to work with his hands. Paul quotes a saying, "If a man refuses to work, neither let him eat." It is the refusal to work that is important. This has nothing to do with the unfortunate man who, through no fault of his own, can find no work to do.

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2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

This has been called "the golden rule of work." Deissmann has the happy thought that, when Paul said this, "he was probably borrowing a bit of good old workshop morality, a maxim coined perhaps by some industrious workman as he forbade his lazy apprentice to sit down to dinner."

In this we have the example of Jesus himself. He was the carpenter of Nazareth and legend has it that he made the best ox-yokes in all Palestine and that men came from all over the country to buy them. A tree is known by its fruits and a man is known by his work. Once a man was negotiating to buy a house and bought it without even seeing it. He was asked why he took such a risk; his answer was, "I know the man who built that house and he builds his Christianity in with the bricks." The Christian should be a more conscientious workman than anyone else.

Paul disliked the busybody intensely. There may be greater sins than gossip but there is none which does more damage in the Church. A man who is doing his own work with his whole strength will have enough to do without being maliciously interested in the affairs of others.

Paul commands that those who disregard his instructions must be dealt with by the community. But they are to be dealt with not as enemies but as brothers. The discipline given by a man who contemptuously looks down upon the sinner and speaks to hurt may terrify and wound but it seldom amends. It is more likely to produce resentment than reformation. When Christian discipline is necessary it is to be given as by a brother to a brother, not in anger, still less in contempt but always in love.

At the end Paul adds his autograph to authenticate his letter. "Look," he says, "this is what my handwriting is like. Mark it, so that you will know it again." And then, with the truth expounded, with praise and rebuke lovingly intermingled, he commends the Thessalonian Church to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Introduction to Timothy & Titus

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS TO TIMOTHY AND TITUS

PERSONAL LETTERS

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus have always been regarded as forming a separate group of letters, different from the other letters of Paul. The most obvious difference is that they, along with the little letter to Philemon, are written to persons, whereas all other Pauline letters are written to Churches. The Muratorian Canon, which was the earliest official list of New Testament books, says that they were written "from personal feeling and affection." They are private rather than public letters.

ECCLESIASTICAL LETTERS

But it very soon began to be seen that, though these are personal and private letters, they have a significance and a relevance far beyond the immediate. In 1Tim.3:15 their aim is set down. They are written to Timothy "that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God." So, then, it came to be seen that these letters have not only a personal significance, but also what one might call an ecclesiastical significance. The Muratorian Canon says of them that, though they are personal letters written out of personal affection, "they are still hallowed in the respect of the Catholic Church, and in the arrangement of ecclesiastical discipline." Tertullian said that Paul wrote "two letters to Timothy and one to Titus, which were composed concerning the state of the Church (de ecclesiastico statu)." It is not then surprising that the first name given to them was Pontifical Letters, that is, written by the pontifex, the priest, the controller of the Church.

PASTORAL LETTERS

Bit by bit they came to acquire the name by which they are still known--The Pastoral Epistles. In writing of I Timothy Thomas Aquinas, as long ago as 1274, said, "This letter is as it were a pastoral rule which the Apostle delivered to Timothy." In his introduction to the second letter, he writes, "In the first letter he gives Timothy instructions concerning ecclesiastical order; in this second letter he deals with a pastoral care which should be so great that it will even accept martyrdom for the sake of the care of the flock." But this title, The Pastoral Epistles, really became affixed to these letters in 1726 when a great scholar, Paul Anton by name, gave a series of famous lectures on them under that title.

These letters then deal with the care and organization of the flock of God; they tell men how to behave within the household of God; they give instructions as to how God's house should be administered, as to what kind of people the leaders and pastors of the Church should be, and as to how the threats which endanger the purity of Christian faith and life should be dealt with.

THE GROWING CHURCH

The supreme interest of these letters is that we get in them a picture of the infant Church. In those early days it was an island in a sea of paganism. The people in it were only one remove from their

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heathen origin. It would have been so easy for them to relapse into the pagan standards from which they had come; the tarnishing atmosphere was all around. It is most significant that missionaries tell us that of all letters the Pastoral Epistles speak most directly to the situation of the younger Churches. The situation with which they deal is being re-enacted in India, in Africa, in China every day. They can never lose their interest because in them we see, as nowhere else, the problems which continually beset the growing Church.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PASTORALS

From the beginning these letters have presented problems to New Testament scholars. There are many who have felt that, as they stand, they cannot have come directly from the hand and pen of Paul. That this is no new feeling may be seen from the fact that Marcion, who, although he was a heretic, was the first man to draw up a list of New Testament books, did not include them among Paul's letters. Let us then see what makes people doubt their direct Pauline authorship.

In them we are confronted with the picture of a Church with a fairly highly developed ecclesiastical organization. There are elders (1Tim.5:17-19; Tit.1:5-6); there are bishops, superintendents or overseers (1Tim.3:1-7; Tit.1:7-16); there are deacons (1Tim.3:8-13). From 1Tim.5:17-18 we learn that by that time elders were even salaried officials. The elders that rule well are to be counted worthy of a double pay and the Church is urged to remember that the labourer is worthy of his hire. There is at least the beginning of the order of widows who became so prominent later on in the early Church (1Tim.5:3-16). There is clearly here a quite elaborate structure within the Church, too elaborate some would claim for the early days in which Paul lived and worked.

THE DAYS OF CREEDS

It is even claimed that in these letters we can see the days of creeds emerging. The word faith changed its meaning. In the earliest days it is always faith in a person; it is the most intimate possible personal connection of love and trust and obedience with Jesus Christ. In later days it became faith in a creed; it became the acceptance of certain doctrines. It is said that in the Pastoral Epistles we can see this change emerging.

In the later days men will come who will depart from the faith and give heed to doctrines of devils (1Tim.4:1). A good servant of Jesus Christ must be nourished in the words of faith and good doctrine (1Tim.4:6). The heretics are men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith (2Tim.3:8). The duty of Titus is to rebuke men that they may be sound in the faith (Tit.1:13).

This comes out very particularly in an expression peculiar to the Pastorals. Timothy is urged to keep hold of "the truth that has been entrusted to you" (2Tim.1:14). The word for that has been entrusted is *paratheke* (GSN3866). *Paratheke* means a deposit which has been entrusted to a banker or someone else for safe-keeping. It is essentially something which must be handed back or handed on absolutely unchanged. That is to say the stress is on orthodoxy. Instead of being a close, personal relationship to Jesus Christ, as it was in the thrilling and throbbing days of the early

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Church, faith has become the acceptance of a creed. It is even held that in the Pastorals we have echoes of the earliest creeds.

"God was manifested in the flesh;
Vindicated in the Spirit;
Seen by angels;
Preached among the nations;
Believed on in the world;
Taken up in glory" (1Tim.3:16).

That indeed sounds like the fragment of a creed to be recited.

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel" (2Tim.2:8).

That sounds like a reminder of a sentence from an accepted creed.

Within the Pastorals there undoubtedly are indications that the day of insistence on acceptance of a creed has begun, and that the days of the first thrilling personal discovery of Christ are beginning to fade.

A DANGEROUS HERESY

It is clear that in the forefront of the situation against which the Pastoral Epistles were written there was a dangerous heresy which was threatening the welfare of the Christian Church. If we can distinguish the various characteristic features of that heresy, we may be able to go on to identify it.

It was characterized by speculative intellectualism. It produced questions (1Tim.1:4); those involved in it doted about questions (1Tim.6:4); it dealt in foolish and unlearned questions (2Tim.2:23); its foolish questions are to be avoided (Tit.3:9). The word used in each case for questions is *ekzesis* (compare GSN1567 and GSN2214), which means speculative discussion. This heresy was obviously one which was a play-ground of the intellectuals, or rather the pseudo-intellectuals of the Church.

It was characterized by pride. The heretic is proud, although in reality he knows nothing (1Tim.6:4). There are indications that these intellectuals set themselves on a plane above the ordinary Christian; in fact they may well have said that complete salvation was outside the grasp of the ordinary man and open only to them. At times the Pastoral Epistles stress the word *all* in a most significant way. The grace of God, which brings salvation, has appeared to all men (Tit.2:11). It is God's will that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1Tim.2:4). The intellectuals tried to make the greatest blessings of Christianity the exclusive possession of a chosen few; and in contradistinction the true faith stresses the all-embracing love of God.

There were within that heresy two opposite tendencies. There was a tendency to asceticism. The heretics tried to lay down special food laws, forgetting that everything God has made is good

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(1Tim.4:4-5). They listed many things as impure, forgetting that to the pure all things are pure (Tit.1:15). It is not impossible that they regarded sex as something unclean and belittled marriage, and even tried to persuade those who were married to renounce it, for in Tit.2:4 the simple duties of the married life are stressed as being binding on the Christian.

But this heresy also issued in immorality. The heretics even invaded private houses and led away weak and foolish women in evil desires (2Tim.3:6). They professed to know God, but denied him by their deeds (Tit.1:16). They were out to impose upon people and to make money out of their false teaching. To them gain was godliness (1Tim.6:5); they taught and deceived for base gain (Tit.1:11).

On the one hand this heresy issued in an unchristian asceticism, and on the other it produced an equally unchristian immorality.

It was characterized, too, by words and tales and genealogies. It was full of godless chatter and useless controversies (1Tim.6:20). It produced endless genealogies (1Tim.1:4; Tit.3:9). It produced myths and fables (1Tim.1:4; Tit.1:14).

It was at least in some way and to some extent tied up with Jewish legalism. Amongst its devotees were those of the circumcision (Tit.1:10). The aim of the heretics was to be teachers of the law (1Tim.1:7). It pressed on men Jewish fables and the commandments of men (Tit.1:14).

Finally, these heretics denied the resurrection of the body. They said that any resurrection that a man was going to experience had been experienced already (2Tim.2:18). This is probably a reference to those who held that the only resurrection the Christian experienced was a spiritual one when he died with Christ and rose again with him in the experience of baptism (Rom.6:4).

THE BEGINNINGS OF GNOSTICISM

Is there any heresy which fits all this material? There is, and its name is Gnosticism. The basic thought of Gnosticism was that all matter is essentially evil and spirit alone is good. That basic belief had certain consequences.

The Gnostic believed that matter is as eternal as God; and that when God created the world he had to use this essentially evil matter. That meant that to them God could not be the direct creator of the world. In order to touch this flawed matter he had to send out a series of emanations--they called them aeons--each one more and more distant from himself until at last there came an emanation or aeon so distant that it could deal with matter and create the world. Between man and God there stretched a series of these emanations, each with his name and genealogy. So Gnosticism literally had endless fables and endless genealogies. If a man was ever to get to God, he must, as it were, ascend this ladder of emanations; and to do that he needed a very special kind of knowledge including all kinds of passwords to get him past each stage. Only a person of the highest intellectual calibre could hope to acquire this knowledge and know these passwords and so get to God.

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Further, if matter was altogether evil, the body was altogether evil. From that, two opposite possible consequences sprang. Either the body must be held down so that a rigorous asceticism resulted, in which the needs of the body were as far as possible eliminated and its instincts, especially the sex instinct, as far as possible destroyed; or it could be held that, since it was evil, it did not matter what was done with the body and its instincts and desires could be given full rein. The Gnostic therefore became either an ascetic or a man to whom morality had ceased to have any relevance at all.

Still further, if the body was evil, clearly there could be no such thing as its resurrection. It was not the resurrection of the body but its destruction to which the Gnostic looked forward.

All this fits accurately the situation of the Pastoral Epistles. In Gnosticism we see the intellectualism, the intellectual arrogance, the fables and the genealogies, the asceticism and the immorality, the refusal to contemplate the possibility of a bodily resurrection, which were part and parcel of the heresy against which the Pastoral Epistles were written.

One element in the heresy has not yet been fitted into place--the Judaism and the legalism of which the Pastoral Epistles speak. That too finds its place. Sometimes Gnosticism and Judaism joined hands. We have already said that the Gnostics insisted that to climb the ladder to God a very special knowledge was necessary; and that some of them insisted that for the good life a strict asceticism was essential. It was the claim of certain of the Jews that it was precisely the Jewish law and the Jewish food regulations which provided that special knowledge and necessary asceticism; and so there were times when Judaism and Gnosticism went hand in hand.

It is quite clear that the heresy at the back of the Pastoral Epistles was Gnosticism. Some have used that fact to try to prove that Paul could have had nothing to do with the writing of them, because, they say, Gnosticism did not emerge until much later than Paul. It is quite true that the great formal systems of Gnosticism, connected with such names as Valentinus and Basilides, did not arise until the second century; but these great figures only systematized what was already there. The basic ideas of Gnosticism were there in the atmosphere which surrounded the early Church, even in the days of Paul. It is easy to see their attraction, and also to see that, if they had been allowed to flourish unchecked, they could have turned Christianity into a speculative philosophy and wrecked it. In facing Gnosticism, the Church was facing one of the gravest dangers which ever threatened the Christian faith.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE PASTORALS

The most impressive argument against the direct Pauline origin of the Pastorals is a fact which is quite clear in the Greek but not so clear in any English translation. The total number of words in the Pastoral Epistles is 902, of which 54 are proper names; and of these 902 words, no fewer than 306 never occur in any other of Paul's letters. That is to say more than a third of the words in the Pastoral Epistles are totally absent from Paul's other letters. In fact 175 words in the Pastoral Epistles occur nowhere else in the New Testament at all; although it is only fair to say that there are 50 words in the Pastoral Epistles which occur in Paul's other letters and nowhere else in the New Testament.

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Further, when the other letters of Paul and the Pastorals say the same thing they say it in different ways, using different words and different turns of speech to express the same idea.

Again, many of Paul's favourite words are absent entirely from the Pastoral Epistles. The words for the cross (stauros, GSN4716) and to crucify (stauroun, GSN4717) occur 27 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals. Eleutheria (GSN1657) and the kindred words which have to do with freedom occur 29 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals. Huios (GSN5207), "son," and huiiothesia (GSN5206), "adoption," occur 46 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals.

Moreover, Greek has many more of those little words called particles and enclitics than English has. Sometimes they indicate little more than a tone of voice; every Greek sentence is joined to its predecessor by one of them; and they are often virtually untranslatable. Of these particles and enclitics there are 112 which Paul uses altogether 932 times in his other letters that never occur in the Pastorals.

There is clearly something which has to be explained here. The vocabulary and the style make it hard to believe that Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles in the same sense as he wrote his other letters.

PAUL'S ACTIVITIES IN THE PASTORALS

But perhaps the most obvious difficulty of the Pastorals is that they show Paul engaged in activities for which there is no room in his life as we know it from the book of Acts. He has clearly conducted a mission in Crete (Tit.1:5). And he proposes to spend a winter in Nicopolis, which is in Epirus (Tit.3:12). In Paul's life as we know it that particular mission and that particular winter just cannot be fitted in. But it may well be that just here we have stumbled on the solution to the problem.

WAS PAUL RELEASED FROM HIS ROMAN IMPRISONMENT?

Let us sum up. We have seen that the Church organization of the Pastorals is more elaborate than in any other Pauline letter. We have seen that the stress on orthodoxy sounds like second or third generation Christianity, when the thrill of the new discovery is wearing off and the Church is on the way to becoming an institution. We have seen that Paul is depicted as carrying out a mission or missions which cannot be fitted into the scheme of his life as we have it in Acts. But Acts leaves it quite uncertain what happened to Paul in Rome. It ends by telling us that he lived for two whole years in a kind of semi-captivity, preaching the gospel without hindrance (Ac.28:30-31). But it does not tell us how that captivity ended, whether in Paul's release or his execution.

It is true that the general assumption is that it ended in his condemnation and death; but there is a by no means negligible stream of tradition which tells that it ended in his release, his liberty for two or three further years, his reimprisonment and his final execution about the year A.D. 67.

Let us look at this question, for it is of the greatest interest.

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First, it is clear that when Paul was in prison in Rome, he did not regard release as impossible; in fact, it looks as if he expected it. When he wrote to the Philippians, he said that he was sending Timothy to them, and goes on, "And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also" (Php.2:24). When he wrote to Philemon, sending back the runaway Onesimus, he says, "At the same time prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be granted to you" (Phm.22). Clearly he was prepared for release, whether or not it ever came.

Second, let us remember a plan that was very dear to Paul's heart. Before he went to Jerusalem on that journey on which he was arrested, he wrote to the Church at Rome, and in that letter he is planning a visit to Spain. "I hope to see you in passing," he writes, "as I go to Spain." "I shall go on by way of you," he writes, "to Spain" (Rom.15:24,28). Was that visit ever paid?

Clement of Rome, when he wrote to the Church at Corinth about A.D. 90, said of Paul that he preached the gospel in the East and in the West; that he instructed the whole world (that is, the Roman Empire) in righteousness; and that he went to the extremity (terma, the terminus) of the West, before his martyrdom. What did Clement mean by the extremity of the West? There are many who argue that he meant nothing more than Rome. Now it is true that someone writing away in the East in Asia Minor would probably think of Rome as the extremity, of the West. But Clement was writing from Rome; and it is difficult to see that for anyone in Rome the extremity of the West could be anything else but Spain. It certainly seems that Clement believed that Paul reached Spain.

The greatest of all the early Church historians was Eusebius. In his account of Paul's life he writes: "Luke who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, brought his history to a close at this point, after stating that Paul had spent two whole years at Rome as a prisoner at large, and preached the word of God without constraint. Thus, after he had made his defence, it is said that the Apostle was sent again on the ministry of preaching, and that on coming to the same city a second time he suffered martyrdom" (Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History, 2.22.2). Eusebius has nothing to say about Spain, but he did know the story that Paul had been released from his first Roman imprisonment.

The Muratorian Canon, that first list of New Testament books, describes Luke's scheme in writing Acts: "Luke related to Theophilus events of which he was an eye-witness, as also, in a separate place, he evidently declares the martyrdom of Peter (he probably refers to Lk.22:31-32); but omits the journey of Paul from Rome to Spain."

In the fifth century, two of the great Christian fathers are definite about this journey. Chrysostom in his sermon on 2Tim.4:20 says: "Saint Paul after his residence in Rome departed to Spain." Jerome in his Catalogue of Writers says that Paul "was dismissed by Nero that he might preach Christ's gospel in the West."

Beyond doubt a stream of tradition held that Paul journeyed to Spain.

This is a matter on which we will have to come to our own decision. The one thing which makes us doubt the historicity of that tradition is that in Spain itself there is not and never was any tradition that Paul had worked and preached there, no stories about him, no places connected with his name. It would be indeed strange if the memory of such a visit had become totally obliterated. It

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could well be that the whole story of Paul's release and journey to the west arose simply as a deduction from his expressed intention to visit Spain (Rom. 15). Most New Testament scholars do not think that Paul was released from his imprisonment; the general consensus of opinion is that his only release was by death.

PAUL AND THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

What then shall we say of Paul's connection with these letters? If we can accept the tradition of his release, and of his return to preaching and teaching, and of his death as late as A.D. 67, we might well believe that as they stand they came from his hand. But, if we cannot believe that--and the evidence is on the whole against it--are we to say that they have no connection with Paul at all?

We must remember that the ancient world did not think of these things as we do. It would see nothing wrong in issuing a letter under the name of a great teacher, if it was sure that the letter said the things which that teacher would say under the same circumstances. To the ancient world it was natural and seemly that a disciple should write in his master's name. No one would have seen anything wrong in one of Paul's disciples meeting a new and threatening situation with a letter under Paul's name. To regard that as forgery is to misunderstand the mind of the ancient world. Are we then to swing completely to the other extreme and say that some disciple of his issued these letters in Paul's name years after he was dead, and at a time when the Church was much more highly organized than ever it was during his lifetime?

As we see it, the answer is no. It is incredible that any disciple would put into Paul's mouth a claim to be the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15); his tendency would be to stress Paul's holiness, not to talk about his sin. It is incredible that anyone writing in the name of Paul would give Timothy the homely advice to drink a little wine for the sake of his health (1 Tim. 5:23). The whole of 2 Tim. 4 is so personal and so full of intimate, loving details that no one but Paul could have written it.

Wherein lies the solution? It may well be that something like this happened. It is quite obvious that many letters of Paul went lost. Apart from his great public letters, he must have had a continuous private correspondence; and of that we possess only the little letter to Philemon. It may well be that in the later days there were some fragments of Paul's correspondence in the possession of some Christian teacher. This teacher saw the Church of his day and his locality in Ephesus threatened on every side. It was threatened with heresy from without and from within. It was threatened with a fall away from its own high standards of purity and truth. The quality of its members and the standard of its office-bearers were degenerating. He had in his possession little letters of Paul which said exactly the things that should be said, but, as they stood, they were too short and too fragmentary to publish.

So he amplified them and made them supremely relevant to the contemporary situation and sent them out to the Church.

In the Pastoral Epistles we are still hearing the voice of Paul, and often hearing it speak with a unique personal intimacy; but we think that the form of the letters is due to a Christian teacher who summoned the help of Paul when the Church of the day needed the guidance which only he could give.

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1 Timothy 1:1-2

THE ROYAL COMMAND

1 Timothy 1:1-2 (Part 1)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the royal command of God, our Saviour, and of Jesus Christ, our Hope, writes this letter to Timothy, his true child in the faith. Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Never a man magnified his office as Paul did. He did not magnify it in pride; he magnified it in wonder that God had chosen him for a task like that. Twice in the opening words of this letter he lays down the greatness of his privilege.

(i) First, he calls himself an apostle of Christ Jesus. Apostle is the Greek word *apostolos* (GSN0652), from the verb *apostellein* (GSN0649) which means to send out; an *apostolos* (GSN0652) was one who was sent out. As far back as Herodotus it means an envoy, an ambassador, one who is sent out to represent his country and his king. Paul always regarded himself as the envoy and ambassador of Christ. And, in truth, that is the office of every Christian. It is the first duty of every ambassador to form a liaison between the country to which he is sent and the country from which he has come. He is the connecting link. And the first duty of every Christian is to be a connecting link between his fellow-men and Jesus Christ.

(ii) Secondly, he says that he is an apostle by the royal command of God. The word he uses is *epitage* (GSN2003). This is the word Greek uses for the injunctions which some inviolable law lays on a man; for the royal command which comes to a man from the king; and above all for the instructions which come to a man either directly or by some oracle from God. For instance, a man in an inscription dedicates an altar to the goddess Cybele, *kat'* (GSN2596) *epitagen* (GSN2003), in accordance with the command of the goddess, which, he tells us, had come to him in a dream. Paul thought of himself as a man holding the king's commission.

If any man can arrive at this consciousness of being despatched by God, a new splendour enters into life. However humble his part may be in it, he is on royal service.

"Life can never be dull again
When once we've thrown our windows open wide
And seen the mighty world that lies outside,
And whispered to ourselves this wondrous thing,
'We're wanted for the business of the King!'"

It is always a privilege to do even the most menial things for someone whom we love and respect and admire. All his life the Christian is on the business of the King.

Paul goes on to give to God and to Jesus two great titles.

He speaks of God, our Saviour. This is a new way of speaking. We do not find this title for God in any of Paul's earlier letters. There are two backgrounds from which it comes.

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1 Timothy 1:1-2

(a) It comes from an Old Testament background. It is Moses' charge against Israel that Jeshurun "forsook God who made him, and scoffed at the Rock of his Salvation" (Deut.32:15). The Psalmist sings of how the good man will receive righteousness from the God of his salvation (Ps.24:5). It is Mary's song, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Lk.1:46-47). When Paul called God Saviour, he was going back to an idea which had always been dear to Israel.

(b) There is a pagan background. It so happened that just at this time the title soter (GSN4990), Saviour, was much in use. Men had always used it. In the old days the Romans had called Scipio, their great general, "our hope and our salvation." But at this very time it was the title which the Greeks gave to Aesculapius, the god of healing. And it was one of the titles which Nero, the Roman Emperor, had taken to himself. So in this opening sentence Paul is taking the title which was much on the lips of a seeking and a wistful world and giving it to the only person to whom it belonged by right.

We must never forget that Paul called God Saviour. It is possible to take a quite wrong idea of the Atonement. Sometimes people speak of it in a way which indicates that something Jesus did pacified the anger of God. The idea they give is that God was bent on our destruction and that somehow his wrath was turned to love by Jesus. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any support for that. It was because God so loved the world that he sent Jesus into the world (Jn.3:16). God is Saviour. We must never think or preach or teach of a God who had to be pacified and persuaded into loving us, for everything begins from his love.

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1 Timothy 1:1-2

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

1 Timothy 1:1-2 (Part 2)

Paul uses a title which was to become one of the great titles of Jesus--"Christ Jesus, our hope." Long ago the Psalmist had demanded of himself: "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" And he had answered: "Hope in God" (Ps.43:5). Paul himself speaks of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col.1:27). John speaks of the dazzling prospect which confronted the Christian, the prospect of being like Christ; and goes on to say: "Every one who thus hopes purifies himself as he is pure" (1Jn.3:2-3).

In the early Church this was to become one of the most precious titles of Christ. Ignatius of Antioch, when on his way to execution in Rome, writes to the Church in Ephesus: "Be of good cheer in God the Father and in Jesus Christ our common hope" (Ignatius: To the Ephesians 21: 2). Polycarp writes: "Let us therefore persevere in our hope and the earnest of our righteousness, who is Jesus Christ" (Epistle of Polycarp 8).

(i) Men found in Christ the hope of moral victory and of self-conquest. The ancient world knew its sin. Epictetus had spoken wistfully of "our weakness in necessary things." Seneca had said that "we hate our vices and love them at the same time." He said, "We have not stood bravely enough by our good resolutions; despite our will and resistance we have lost our innocence. Nor is it only that we have acted amiss; we shall do so to the end." Persius, the Roman poet, wrote poignantly: "Let the guilty see virtue, and pine that they have lost her for ever." Persius talks of "filthy Natta benumbed by vice." The ancient world knew its moral helplessness only too well; and Christ came, not only telling men what was right, but giving them the power to do it. Christ gave to men who had lost it the hope of moral victory instead of defeat.

(ii) Men found in Christ the hope of victory over circumstances. Christianity came into the world in an age of the most terrible personal insecurity. When Tacitus, the Roman historian, came to write the history of that very age in which the Christian Church came into being, he began by saying, "I am entering upon the history of a period rich in disaster, gloomy with wars, rent with seditions; nay, savage in its very hours of peace. Four emperors perished by the sword; there were three civil wars; there were more with foreigners, and some had the character of both at once ... Rome wasted by fires; its oldest temples burned; the very capitol set in flames by Roman hands; the defilement of sacred rites; adultery in high places; the sea crowded with exiles; island rocks drenched with murder; yet wilder was the frenzy in Rome; nobility, wealth, the refusal of office, its acceptance, everything was a crime, and virtue was the surest way to ruin. Nor were the rewards of the informers less odious than their deeds.

One found his spoils in a priesthood or a consulate; another in a provincial governorship, another behind the throne. All was one delirium of hate and terror; slaves were bribed to betray their masters, freedmen their patrons; and he who had no foe was betrayed by his friend." (Tacitus: Histories 1, 2). As Gilbert Murray said, the whole age was suffering from "the failure of nerve." Men were longing for some ring-wall of defence against "the advancing chaos of the world." It was Christ who in such times gave men the strength to live, and the courage, if need be, to die. In the

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1 Timothy 1:1-2

certainty that nothing on earth could separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus, men found victory over the terrors of the age.

(iii) Men found in Christ the hope of victory over death. They found in him, at one and the same time, strength for mortal things and the immortal hope. Christ, our hope, was--and still should be--the battle-cry of the Church.

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1 Timothy 1:1-2

TIMOTHY, MY SON

1 Timothy 1:1-2 (Part 3)

It is to Timothy that this letter is sent, and Paul was never able to speak of him without affection in his voice.

Timothy was a native of Lystra in the province of Galatia. It was a Roman colony; it called itself "the most brilliant colony of Lystra," but in reality it was a little place at the ends of the civilized earth. Its importance was that there was a Roman garrison quartered there to keep control of the wild tribes of the Isaurian mountains which lay beyond. It was on the first missionary journey that Paul and Barnabas arrived there (Ac.14:8-21). At that time there is no mention of Timothy; but it has been suggested that, when Paul was in Lystra, he found a lodging in Timothy's home, in view of the fact that he knew well the faith and devotion of Timothy's mother Eunice and of his grandmother Lois (2Tim.1:5).

On that first visit Timothy must have been very young, but the Christian faith laid hold upon him, and Paul became his hero. It was at Paul's visit to Lystra on the second missionary journey that life began for Timothy (Ac.16:1-3). Young as he was, he had become one of the ornaments of the Christian Church in Lystra. There was such a charm and enthusiasm in the lad that all men spoke well of him. To Paul, he seemed the very man to be his assistant. Maybe even then he had dreams that this lad was the very person to train to take up his work when his day was over.

Timothy was the child of a mixed marriage; his mother was a Jewess, and his father a Greek (Ac.16:1). Paul circumcised him. It was not that Paul was a slave of the law, or that he saw in circumcision any special virtue; but he knew well that if Timothy was to work amongst the Jews, there would be an initial prejudice against him if he was uncircumcised, and so he took this step as a practical measure to increase Timothy's usefulness as an evangelist.

From that time forward Timothy was Paul's constant companion. He was left behind at Beroea with Silas when Paul escaped to Athens, and later joined him there (Ac.17:14-15, Ac.18:5). He was sent as Paul's emissary to Macedonia (Ac.19:22). He was there when the collection from the Churches was being taken to Jerusalem (Ac.20:4). He was with Paul in Corinth when Paul wrote his letter to Rome (Rom.16:21). He was Paul's emissary to Corinth when there was trouble in that unruly Church (1Cor.4:17; 1Cor.16:10). He was with Paul when he wrote 2 Corinthians (2Cor.1:1; 2Cor.1:19). It was Timothy whom Paul sent to see how things were going in Thessalonica and he was with Paul when he wrote his letter to that Church (1Th.1:1; 1Th.3:2,6). He was with Paul in prison when he wrote to Philippi, and Paul was planning to send him to Philippi as his representative (Php.1:1; Php.2:19). He was with Paul when he wrote to the Church at Colossae and to Philemon (Col.1:1; Phm.1).

Constantly Timothy was by Paul's side, and when Paul had a difficult job to do Timothy was the man sent to do it.

Over and over again Paul's voice vibrates with affection when he speaks of Timothy. When he is sending him to that sadly divided Church at Corinth, he writes: "I have sent to you Timothy, my

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1 Timothy 1:1-2

beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (1Cor.4:17). When he is planning to send him to Philippi, he writes: "I have no one like him.... As a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (Php.2:20,22). Here he calls him "his true son." The word that he uses for "true" is gnesios (GSN1103). It has two meanings. It was the normal word for a legitimate child in contradistinction to illegitimate. It was the word for genuine, as opposed to counterfeit.

Timothy was the man whom Paul could trust and could send anywhere, knowing that he would go. Happy indeed is the leader who possesses a lieutenant like that. Timothy is our example of how we should serve in the faith. Christ and his Church need servants like that.

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1 Timothy 1:1-2

GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE

1 Timothy 1:1-2 (Part 4)

Paul always began his letters with a blessing (Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:3; 2Cor.1:2; Gal.1:3; Eph.1:2; Php.1:2; Col.1:2; 1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:2; Phm.3). In all these other letters only Grace and Peace occur. It is only in the letters to Timothy that Mercy is used (2Tim.1:2; Tit.1:4). Let us look at these three great words.

(i) In Grace there are always three dominant ideas.

(a) In classical Greek the word means outward grace or favour, beauty, winsomeness, sweetness. Usually, although not always, it is applied to persons. The English word charm comes near to expressing its meaning. Grace is characteristically a lovely and a winsome thing.

(b) In the New Testament there is always the idea of sheer generosity. Grace is something unearned and undeserved. It is opposed to that which is a debt. Paul says that if it is a case of earning things, the reward is not a matter of grace, but of debt (Rom.4:4). It is opposed to works. Paul says that God's election of his chosen people is not the consequence of works, but of grace (Rom.11:6).

(c) In the New Testament there is always the idea of sheer universality. Again and again Paul uses the word grace in connection with the reception of the Gentiles into the family of God. He thanks God for the grace given to the Corinthians in Jesus Christ (1Cor.1:4). He talks of the grace of God bestowed on the Churches of Macedonia (2Cor.8:1). He talks of the Galatians being called into the grace of Christ (Gal.1:6). The hope which came to the Thessalonians came through grace (2Th.2:16). It was God's grace which made Paul an apostle to the Gentiles (1Cor.15:10). It was by the grace of God that he moved amongst the Corinthians (2Cor.1:12). It was by grace that God called him and separated him from his mother's womb (Gal.1:15). It is the grace given to him by God which enables him to write boldly to the Church at Rome (Rom.15:15). To Paul the great demonstration of the grace of God was the reception of the Gentiles into the Church and his apostleship to them.

Grace is a lovely thing; it is a free thing; and it is a universal thing. As F. J. Hort wrote so beautifully: "Grace is a comprehensive word, gathering up all that may be supposed to be expressed in the smile of a heavenly king, looking down upon his people."

(ii) Peace was the normal Jewish word of greeting, and, in Hebrew thought, it expresses, not simply the negative absence of trouble, but "the most comprehensive form of well-being." It is everything which makes for a man's highest good. It is the state a man is in when he is within the love of God. F. J. Hort writes: "Peace is the antithesis to every kind of conflict and war and molestation, to enmity without and distraction within."

"Bowed down beneath a load of sin,
By Satan sorely pressed,

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By war without and fears within,
I come to thee for rest."

(iii) Mercy is the new word in the apostolic blessing. In Greek the word is *eleos* (GSN1656), and in Hebrew *chesed* (HSN2617). Now *chesed* is the word which is often in the Old Testament translated loving-kindness; and when Paul prayed for mercy on Timothy, he is saying, to put it very simply, "Timothy, may God be good to you." But there is more to it than that. *Chesed* (HSN2617) is used in the Psalms no fewer than one hundred and twenty-seven times. And time and time again it has the meaning of help in time of need. It denotes, as Parry puts it, "God's active intervention to help." As Hort puts it, "It is the coming down of the Most High to help the helpless." In Ps.40:11 the Psalmist rejoices, "Thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness ever preserve me." In Ps.57:3 he says, "He will send from heaven and save me..."

God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness." In Ps.86:14-16 he thinks of the forces of the evil men which are arrayed against him, and comforts himself with the thought that God is "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." It is by God's abundant mercy that he has given us the living hope of the resurrection (1Pet.1:3). The Gentiles should glorify God for that mercy which has rescued them from sin and hopelessness (Rom.15:9). God's mercy is God active to save. It may well be that Paul added Mercy to his two usual words, Grace and Peace, because Timothy was up against it and he wanted in one word to tell him that the Most High was the help of the helpless.

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1 Timothy 1:3-7

ERROR AND HERESY

1 Timothy 1:3-7 (Part 1)

I am writing to you now to reinforce the plea that I already made to you, when I urged you to stay in Ephesus while I went to Macedonia, that you might pass on the order to some of the people there, not to teach erroneous novelties, nor to give their attention to idle tales and endless genealogies, which only succeed in producing empty speculations rather than the effective administration of God's people, which should be based on faith. The instruction which I gave you is designed to produce love which issues from a pure heart, a good conscience and an undissembling faith. But some of these people of whom I am talking have never even tried to find the right road, and have turned aside out of it to empty and useless discussions, in their claim to become teachers of the law, although they do not know what they are talking about, nor do they realize the real meaning of the things about which they dogmatize.

It is clear that at the back of the Pastoral Epistles there is some heresy which is endangering the Church. Right at the beginning it will be well to try to see what this heresy is. We will therefore collect the facts about it now.

This very passage brings us face to face with two of its great characteristics. It dealt in idle tales and endless genealogies. These two things were not peculiar to this heresy but were deeply engrained in the thought of the ancient world.

First, the idle tales. One of the characteristics of the ancient world was that the poets and even the historians loved to work out romantic and fictitious tales about the foundation of cities and of families. They would tell how some god came to earth and founded the city or took in marriage some mortal maid and founded a family. The ancient world was full of stories like that.

Second, the endless genealogies. The ancient world had a passion for genealogies. We can see that even in the Old Testament with its chapters of names and in the New Testament with the genealogies of Jesus with which Matthew and Luke begin their gospels. A man like Alexander the Great had a completely artificial pedigree constructed in which he traced his lineage back on the one side to Achilles and Andromache and on the other to Perseus and Hercules.

It would be the easiest thing in the world for Christianity to get lost in endless and fabulous stories about origins and in elaborate and imaginary genealogies. That was a danger which was inherent in the situation in which Christian thought was developing.

It was peculiarly threatening from two directions.

It was threatening from the Jewish direction. To the Jews there was no book in the world like the Old Testament. Their scholars spent a lifetime studying it and expounding it. In the Old Testament many chapters and many sections are long genealogies; and one of the favourite occupations of the Jewish scholars was to construct an imaginary and edifying biography for every name in the list! A man could go on for ever doing that; and it may be that that was what was partly in Paul's mind. He

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may be saying, "When you ought to be working at the Christian life, you are working out imaginary biographies and genealogies. You are wasting your time on elegant fripperies, when you should be getting down to life and living." This may be a warning to us never to allow Christian thinking to get lost in speculations which do not matter.

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1 Timothy 1:3-7

THE SPECULATIONS OF THE GREEKS

1 Timothy 1:3-7 (Part 2)

But this danger came with an even greater threat from the Greek side. At this time in history there was developing a Greek line of thought which came to be known as Gnosticism. We find it specially in the background of the Pastoral Epistles, the Letter to the Colossians and the Fourth Gospel.

Gnosticism was entirely speculative. It began with the problem of the origin of sin and of suffering. If God is altogether good, he could not have created them. How then did they get into the world? The Gnostic answer was that creation was not creation out of nothing; before time began matter existed. They believed that this matter was essentially imperfect, an evil thing; and out of this essentially evil matter the world was created.

No sooner had they got this length than they ran into another difficulty. If matter is essentially evil and God is essentially good, God could not himself have touched this matter. So they began another set of speculations. They said that God put out an emanation, and that this emanation put out another emanation, and the second emanation put out a third emanation and so on and on until there came into being an emanation so distant from God that he could handle matter; and that it was not God but this emanation who created the world.

They went further. They held that each successive emanation knew less about God so that there came a stage in the series of emanations when the emanations were completely ignorant of him and, more, there was a final stage when the emanations were not only ignorant of God but actively hostile to him. So they arrived at the thought that the god who created the world was quite ignorant of and hostile to the true God. Later on they went even further and identified the God of the Old Testament with this creating god, and the God of the New Testament with the true God.

They further provided each one of the emanations with a complete biography. And so they built up an elaborate mythology of gods and emanations, each with his story and his biography and his genealogy. There is no doubt that the ancient world was riddled with that kind of thinking; and that it even entered the Church itself. It made Jesus merely the greatest of the emanations, the one closest to God. It classed him as the highest link in the endless chain between God and man.

This Gnostic line of thought had certain characteristics which appear all through the Pastoral Epistles as the characteristics of those whose heresies were threatening the Church and the purity of the faith.

(i) Gnosticism was obviously highly speculative, and it was therefore intensely intellectually snobbish. It believed that all this intellectual speculation was quite beyond the mental grasp of ordinary people and was for a chosen few, the elite of the Church. So Timothy is warned against "godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1Tim.6:20). He is warned against a religion of speculative questions instead of humble faith (1Tim.1:4). He is warned against the man who is proud of his intellect but really knows nothing and dotes about questions and strifes

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of words (1Tim.6:4). He is told to shun "godless chatter," for they can produce only ungodliness (2Tim.2:16). He is told to avoid "stupid, senseless controversies" which in the end can only engender strife (2Tim.2:23). Further, the Pastoral Epistles go out of their way to stress the fact that this idea of an intellectual aristocracy is quite wrong, for God's love is universal.

God wants all men to be saved and all men to come to a knowledge of the truth (1Tim.2:4). God is the Saviour of all men, especially those who believe (1Tim.4:10). The Christian Church would have nothing to do with any kind of faith which was founded on intellectual speculation and set up an arrogant intellectual aristocracy.

(ii) Gnosticism was concerned with this long series of emanations. It gave to each of them a biography and a pedigree and an importance in the chain between God and men. These gnostics were concerned with "endless genealogies" (1Tim.1:4). They went in for "godless and silly myths" about them (1Tim.4:7). They turned their ears away from the truth to myths (2Tim.4:4). They dealt in fables like the Jewish myths (Tit.1:14). Worst of all, they thought in terms of two gods and of Jesus as one of a whole series of mediators between God and man; whereas "there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1Tim.2:5). There is only one King of ages, immortal, invisible, there is only one God (1Tim.1:17). Christianity had to repudiate a religion which took their unique place from God and from Jesus Christ.

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1 Timothy 1:3-7

THE ETHICS OF HERESY

1 Timothy 1:3-7 (Part 3)

The danger of Gnosticism was not only intellectual. It had serious moral and ethical consequences. We must remember that its basic belief was that matter was essentially evil and spirit alone was good. That issued in two opposite results.

(i) If matter is evil, the body is evil; and the body must be despised and held down. Therefore Gnosticism could and did issue in a rigid asceticism. It forbade men to marry, for the instincts of the body were to be suppressed. It laid down strict food laws, for the needs of the body must as far as possible be eliminated. So the Pastorals speak of those who forbid to marry and who command to abstain from meats (1Tim.4:3). The answer to these people is that everything which God has created is good and is to be received with thanksgiving (1Tim.4:4). The Gnostic looked on creation as an evil thing, the work of an evil god; the Christian looks on creation as a noble thing, the gift of a good God. The Christian lives in a world where all things are pure; the Gnostic lived in a world where all things were defiled (Tit.1:15).

(ii) But Gnosticism could issue in precisely the opposite ethical belief. If the body is evil, it does not matter what a man does with it. Therefore, let him sate his appetites. These things are of no importance, therefore a man can use his body in the most licentious way and it makes no difference. So the Pastorals speak of those who lead away weak women until they are laden with sin and the victims of all kinds of lusts (2Tim.3:6). Such men profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds (Tit.1:16). They used their religious beliefs as an excuse for immorality.

(iii) Gnosticism had still another consequence. The Christian believes in the resurrection of the body. That is not to say that he ever believed that we are resurrected with this mortal, human body; but he always believed that after resurrection from the dead a man would have a spiritual body, provided by God. Paul discusses this whole question in 1Cor.15. The Gnostic held that there was no such thing as the resurrection of the body (2Tim.2:18). After death a man would be a kind of disembodied spirit. The basic difference is that the Gnostic believed in the body's destruction; the Christian believes in its redemption. The Gnostic believed in what he would call soul salvation; the Christian believes in whole salvation.

So behind the Pastoral Epistles there are these dangerous heretics, who gave their lives to intellectual speculations, who saw this as an evil world and the creating god as evil, who put between the world and God an endless series of emanations and lesser gods and spent their time equipping each of them with endless fables and genealogies, who reduced Jesus to the position of a link in a chain and took away his uniqueness, who lived either in a rigorous asceticism or an unbridled licentiousness, who denied the resurrection of the body. It was their heretical beliefs that the Pastorals were written to combat.

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1 Timothy 1:3-7

THE MIND OF THE HERETIC

1 Timothy 1:3-7 (Part 4)

In this passage there is a clear picture of the mind of the dangerous heretic. There is a kind of heresy in which a man differs from orthodox belief because he has honestly thought things out and cannot agree with it. He does not take any pride in being different; he is different simply because he has to be. Such a heresy does not spoil a man's character; it may in fact enhance his character, because he has really thought out his faith and is not living on a second-hand orthodoxy. But that is not the heretic whose picture is drawn here. Here are distinguished five characteristics of the dangerous heretic.

(i) He is driven by the desire for novelty. He is like someone who must be in the latest fashion and must undergo the latest craze. He despises old things for no better reason than that they are old, and desires new things for no better reason than that they are new. Christianity has always the problem of presenting old truth in a new way. The truth does not change, but every age must find its own way of presenting it. Every teacher and preacher must talk to men in language which they understand. The old truth and the new presentation go ever hand in hand.

(ii) He exalts the mind at the expense of the heart. His conception of religion is speculation and not experience. Christianity has never demanded that a man should stop thinking for himself, but it does demand that his thinking should be dominated by a personal experience of Jesus Christ.

(iii) He deals in argument instead of action. He is more interested in abstruse discussion than in the effective administration of the household of the faith. He forgets that the truth is not only something which a man accepts with his mind, but is also something which he translates into action. Long ago the distinction between the Greek and the Jew was drawn. The Greek loved argument for the sake of argument; there was nothing that he liked better than to sit with a group of friends and indulge in a series of mental acrobatics and enjoy "the stimulus of a mental hike." But he was not specially interested in reaching conclusions, and in evolving a principle of action. The Jew, too, liked argument; but he wished every argument to end in a decision which demanded action. There is always a danger of heresy when we fall in love with words and forget deeds, for deeds are the acid test by which every argument must be tested.

(iv) He is moved by arrogance rather than by humility. He looks down with a certain contempt on simple-minded people who cannot follow his flights of intellectual speculation. He regards those who do not reach his own conclusions as ignorant fools. The Christian has somehow to combine an immovable certainty with a gentle humility.

(v) He is guilty of dogmatism without knowledge. He does not really know what he is talking about nor really understand the significance of the things about which he dogmatizes. The strange thing about religious argument is that everyone thinks that he has a right to express a dogmatic opinion. In all other fields we demand that a person should have a certain knowledge before he lays down the law. But there are those who dogmatize about the Bible and its teaching although they

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1 Timothy 1:3-7

have never even tried to find out what the experts in language and history have said. It may well be that the Christian cause has suffered more from ignorant dogmatism than from anything else.

When we think of the characteristics of those who were troubling the Church at Ephesus we can see that their descendants are still with us.

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1 Timothy 1:3-7

THE MIND OF THE CHRISTIAN THINKER

1 Timothy 1:3-7 (Part 5)

As this passage draws the picture of the thinker who disturbs the Church, it also draws the picture of the really Christian thinker. He, too, has five characteristics.

(i) His thinking is based on faith. Faith means taking God at his word; it means believing that he is as Jesus proclaimed him to be. That is to say, the Christian thinker begins from the principle that Jesus Christ has given the full revelation of God.

(ii) His thinking is motivated by love. Paul's whole purpose is to produce love. To think in love will always save us from certain things. It will save us from arrogant thinking. It will save us from contemptuous thinking. It will save us from condemning either that with which we do not agree, or that which we do not understand. It will save us from expressing our views in such a way that we hurt other people. Love saves us from destructive thinking and destructive speaking. To think in love is always to think in sympathy. The man who argues in love argues not to defeat his opponent, but to win him.

(iii) His thinking comes from a pure heart. Here the word used is very significant. It is *katharos* (GSN2513), which originally simply meant clean as opposed to soiled or dirty. Later it came to have certain most suggestive uses. It was used of corn that has been winnowed and cleansed of all chaff. It was used of an army which had been purified of all cowardly and undisciplined soldiers until there was nothing left but first-class fighting men. It was used of something which was without any debasing admixture. So, then, a pure heart is a heart whose motives are absolutely pure and absolutely unmixed. In the heart of the Christian thinker there is no desire to show how clever he is, no desire to win a purely debating victory, no desire to show up the ignorance of his opponent. His only desire is to help and to illumine and to lead nearer to God. The Christian thinker is moved only by love of truth and love for men.

(iv) His thinking comes from a good conscience. The Greek word for conscience is *suneidesis* (GSN4893). It literally means a knowing with. The real meaning of conscience is a knowing with oneself. To have a good conscience is to be able to look in the face the knowledge which one shares with no one but oneself and not be ashamed. Emerson remarked of Seneca that he said the loveliest things, if only he had the right to say them. The Christian thinker is the man whose thoughts and whose deeds give him the right to say what he does--and that is the most acid test of all.

(v) The Christian thinker is the man of undissembling faith. The phrase literally means the faith in which there is no hypocrisy. That simply means that the great characteristic of the Christian thinker is sincerity. He is sincere both in his desire to find the truth--and in his desire to communicate it.

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1 Timothy 1:8-11

THOSE WHO NEED NO LAW

1 Timothy 1:8-11 (Part 1)

We know that the law is good, if a man uses it legitimately, in the awareness that the law was not instituted to deal with good men, but with the lawless and the undisciplined, the irreverent and the sinners, the impious and the polluted, those who have sunk so low that they strike their fathers and their mothers, murderers, fornicators, homosexuals, slave-dealers and kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and all those who are guilty of anything which is the reverse of sound teaching, that teaching which is in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God, that gospel which has been entrusted to me.

This passage begins with what was a favourite thought in the ancient world. The place of the law is to deal with evil-doers. The good man does not need any law to control his actions or to threaten him with punishments; and in a world of good men there would be no need for laws at all.

Antiphanes, the Greek, had it: "He who does no wrong needs no law." It was the claim of Aristotle that "philosophy enables a man to do without external control that which others do because of fear of the laws." Ambrose, the great Christian bishop, wrote: "The just man has the law of his own mind, of his own equity and of his own justice as his standard; and therefore he is not recalled from fault by terror of punishment, but by the rule of honour." Pagan and Christian alike regarded true goodness as something which had its source in a man's heart; as something which was not dependent on the rewards and punishments of the law.

But in one thing the pagan and the Christian differed. The pagan looked back to an ancient golden time when all things were good and no law was needed. Ovid, the Roman poet, drew one of the most famous pictures of that ancient golden time (Metamorphoses 1: 90-112). "Golden was that first age, which with no one to compel, without a law, of its own will, kept faith and did the right. There was no fear of punishment, no threatening words were to be read on brazen tablets; no suppliant throng gazed fearfully upon the judge's face; but without judges men lived secure. Not yet had the pine tree, felled on its native mountains, descended thence into the watery plain to visit other lands; men knew no shores except their own. Nor, yet were cities begirt with steep moats; there were no trumpets of straight, no horns of curving brass, no swords or helmets. There was no need at all of armed men, for nations, secure from war's alarms, passed the years in gentle peace." Tacitus, the Roman historian, had the same picture (Annals 3: 26). "In the earliest times, when men had as yet no evil passions, they led blameless, guiltless lives, without either punishment or restraint. Led by their own nature to pursue none but virtuous ends, they required no rewards; and as they desired nothing contrary to the right, there was no need for pains and penalties." The ancient world looked back and longed for the days that were gone. But the Christian faith does not look back to a lost golden age; it looks forward to the day when the only law will be the love of Christ within a man's heart, for it is certain that the day of law cannot end until the day of love dawns.

There should be only one controlling factor in the lives of every one of us. Our goodness should come, not from fear of the law, not even from fear of judgment, but from fear of disappointing the

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love of Christ and of grieving the fatherly heart of God. The Christian's dynamic comes from the fact that he knows sin is not only breaking God's law but also breaking his heart. It is not the law of God but the love of God which constrains us.

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1 Timothy 1:8-11

THOSE WHOM THE LAW CONDEMNS

1 Timothy 1:8-11 (Part 2)

In an ideal state, when the Kingdom comes, there will be no necessity for any law other than the love of God within a man's heart; but as things are, the case is very different. And here Paul sets out a catalogue of sins which the law must control and condemn. The interest of the passage is that it shows us the background against which Christianity grew up. This list of sins is in fact a description of the world in which the early Christians lived and moved and had their being. Nothing shows us so well how the Christian Church was a little island of purity in a vicious world. We talk about it being hard to be a Christian in modern civilization; we have only to read a passage like this to see how infinitely harder it must have been in the circumstances in which the Church first began. Let us take this terrible list and look at the items on it.

There are the lawless (anomoi, GSN0459). They are those who know the laws of right and wrong and break them open-eyed. No one can blame a man for breaking a law he does not know exists; but the lawless are those who deliberately violate the laws in order to satisfy their own ambitions and desires.

There are the undisciplined (anupotaktoi, GSN0506). They are the unruly and the insubordinate, those who refuse to obey any authority. They are like soldiers who mutinously disobey the word of command. They are either too proud or too unbridled to accept any control.

There are the irreverent (asebeis, GSN0765). Asebeis is a terrible word. It describes not indifference nor the lapse into sin. It describes "positive and active irreligion," the spirit which defiantly withholds from God that which is his right. It describes human nature "in battle array against God."

There are the sinners (hamartoloi, GSN0268). In its commonest usage this word describes character. It can be used, for instance, of a slave who is of lax and useless character. It describes the person who has no moral standards left.

There are the impious (anosioi, GSN0462). Hosios (GSN3741) is a noble word; it describes, as Trench puts it, "the everlasting ordinances of right, which no law or custom of man has constituted, for they are anterior to all law and custom." The things which are hosios (GSN3741) are part of the very constitution of the universe, the everlasting sanctities. The Greek, for instance, shudderingly declared that the Egyptian custom where brother could marry sister and the Persian custom where son could marry mother, were anosia, unholy. The man who is anosios (GSN0462) is worse than a mere lawbreaker. He is the man who violates the ultimate decencies of life.

There are the polluted (bebeloi, GSN0952). Bebelos is an ugly word with a strange history. It originally meant simply that which can be trodden upon, in contradistinction to that which is sacred to some god and therefore inviolable. It then came to mean profane in opposition to sacred, then the man who profanes the sacred things, who desecrates God's day, disobeys his laws and belittles his worship. The man who is bebelos (GSN0952) soils everything he touches.

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There are those who strike or even kill their parents (patraloi, GSN3964, and metraloi, GSN3389). Under Roman law a son who struck his parents was liable to death. The words describe sons or daughters who are lost to gratitude, lost to respect and lost to shame. And it must ever be remembered that this most cruel of blows can be one, not upon the body, but upon the heart.

There are the murderers (androphoni, GSN0409), literally man-slayers. Paul is thinking of the Ten Commandments and of how breach after breach of them characterizes the heathen world. We must not think that this at least has nothing to do with us, for Jesus widened the commandment to include not only the act of murder, but also the feeling of anger against a brother.

There are the fornicators and the homosexuals (pornoi, GSN4205, and arsenokoitai, GSN0733). It is difficult for us to realize the state of the ancient world in matters of sexual morality. It was riddled with unnatural vice. One of the extraordinary things was the actual connection of immorality and religion. The Temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, at Corinth had attached to it a thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes and who at evening came down to the city streets and plied their trade. It is said that Solon was the first law-maker in Athens to legalize prostitution and that with the profits of the public brothels he instituted a new temple was built to Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

E. F. Brown was a missionary in India, and in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles he quotes an extraordinary section from the Penal Code of India. A section of that code forbade obscene representations and then went on to say: "This section does not extend to any representation or sculpture, engraved, painted or otherwise represented on or in any temple, or any car used for the conveyance of idols, or kept or used for any religious purpose." It is an extraordinary thing that in the non-Christian religions time and time again immorality and obscenity flourish under the very protection of religion. It has often been said and said truly that chastity was the one completely new virtue which Christianity brought into this world. It was no easy thing in the early days to endeavour to live according to the Christian ethic in a world like that.

There are the andrapodistai (GSN0405). The word may either mean slave-dealers or slave-kidnappers. Possibly both meanings are involved here. It is true that slavery was an integral part of the ancient world. It is true that Aristotle declared that civilization was founded on slavery, that certain men and women existed only to perform the menial tasks of life for the convenience of the cultured classes. But even in the ancient world voices were raised against slavery. Philo spoke of slave-dealers as those "who despoil men of their most precious possession, their freedom."

But this more probably refers to kidnappers of slaves. Slaves were valuable property. An ordinary slave with no special gifts fetched from 16 to 20 British pounds. A specially accomplished slave would fetch three or four times as much. Beautiful youths were in special demand as pages and cupbearers and would fetch as much as 800 or 900 British pounds. Marcus Antonius is said to have paid 2,000 British pounds for two well-matched youths who were wrongly represented to be twins. In the days when Rome was specially eager to learn the arts of Greece and slaves who were skilled in Greek literature and music and art were specially valuable, a certain

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1 Timothy 1:8-11

Lutatius Daphnis was sold for 3,500 British pounds. The result was that frequently valuable slaves were either seduced from their masters or kidnapped. The kidnapping of specially beautiful or specially accomplished slaves was a common feature of ancient life.

Finally, there are liars (pseustai, GSN5583) and perjurers (epiorkoi, GSN1965), men who did not hesitate to twist the truth to gain dishonourable ends.

Here is a vivid picture of the atmosphere in which the ancient Church grew up. It was against an infection like that that the writer of the Pastorals sought to protect the Christians in his charge.

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1 Timothy 1:8-11

THE CLEANSING WORD

1 Timothy 1:8-11 (Part 3)

Into this world came the Christian message, and this passage tells us four things about it.

(i) It is sound teaching. The word used for sound (*hugiainein*, GSN5198) literally means health-giving. Christianity is an ethical religion. It demands from a man not only the keeping of certain ritual laws, but the living of a good life. E. F. Brown draws a comparison between it and Islam; a Mohammedan may be regarded as a very holy man if he observes certain ceremonial rituals, even though his moral life is quite unclean. He quotes a writer on Morocco: "The great blot on the creed of Islam is that precept and practice are not expected to go together, except as regards the ritual, so that a man may be notoriously wicked yet esteemed religious, having his blessing sought as that of one who has power with God, without the slightest sense of incongruity.

The position of things was very well put to me one day by a Moor in Fez, who remarked: 'Do you want to know what our religion is? We purify ourselves with water while we contemplate adultery; we go to the mosque to pray and as we do so we think how best to cheat our neighbours; we give alms at the door and go back to our shop to rob; we read our Korans and go out to commit unmentionable sins; we fast and go on pilgrimage and yet we lie and kill.'" It must always be remembered that Christianity does not mean observing a ritual, even if that ritual consists of bible-reading and church-going; it means living a good life. Christianity, if it is real, is health-giving; it is the moral antiseptic which alone can cleanse life.

(ii) It is a glorious gospel; that is to say, it is glorious good news. It is good news of forgiveness for past sins and of power to conquer sin in the days to come, good news of God's mercy, God's cleansing and God's grace.

(iii) It is good news which comes from God. The Christian gospel is not a discovery made by man; it is something revealed by God. It does not offer only the help of man; it offers the power of God.

(iv) That good news comes through men. It was entrusted to Paul to bring it to others. God makes his offer and he needs his messengers. The real Christian is the person who has himself closed with the offer of God and has realized that he cannot keep such good news to himself but must share it with others who have not yet found it.

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1 Timothy 1:12-17

SAVED TO SERVE

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (Part 1)

I give thanks to Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has filled me with his power, that he showed that he believed that he could trust me, by appointing me to his service, although I was formerly an insulter, a persecutor and a man of insolent and brutal violence. But I received mercy from him, because it was in ignorance that I acted thus, in the days when I did not believe. But the grace of our Lord rose higher than my sin, and I found it in the faith and love of those whose lives are lived in Jesus Christ. This is a saying on which we can rely, and which we are completely bound to accept, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am chief. This was why I received mercy--so that in me Jesus Christ might display all that patience of his, so that I might be the first outline sketch of those who would one day come to believe in him, that they might find eternal life. To the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, to the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This passage begins with a very paean of thanksgiving. There were four tremendous things for which Paul wished to thank Jesus Christ.

(i) He thanked him because he chose him. Paul never had the feeling that he had chosen Christ, but always that Christ had chosen him. It was as if, when he was heading straight for destruction, Jesus Christ had laid his hand upon his shoulder and arrested him in the way. It was as if, when he was busy throwing away his life, Jesus Christ had suddenly brought him to his senses. In the days of the war I knew a Polish airman. He had crowded more thrilling hairbreadth escapes from death and from worse into a few years than the vast majority of men do into a lifetime. Sometimes he would tell the story of escape from occupied Europe, of parachute descents from the air, of rescue from the sea, and at the end of this amazing odyssey, he would always say, with a look of wonder in his eyes: "And now I am God's man." That is how Paul felt; he was Christ's man for Christ had chosen him.

(ii) He thanked him because he trusted him. It was to Paul an amazing thing, that he, the arch-persecutor, had been chosen as the missionary of Christ. It was not only that Jesus Christ had forgiven him; it was that Christ trusted him. Sometimes we forgive a man who has committed some mistake or been guilty of some sin, but we make it very clear that his past makes it impossible for us to trust him again with any responsibility. But Christ had not only forgiven Paul; he entrusted him with work to do. The man who had been Christ's persecutor had been made his ambassador.

(iii) He thanked him because he had appointed him. We must be very careful to note that to which Paul felt himself appointed. He was appointed to service. Paul never thought of himself as appointed to honour, or to leadership within the Church. He was saved to serve. Plutarch tells that when a Spartan won a victory in the games, his reward was that he might stand beside his king in battle. A Spartan wrestler at the Olympic games was offered a very considerable bribe to abandon the struggle; but he refused. Finally, after a terrific effort, he won his victory. Someone said to him: "Well, Spartan, what have you got out of this costly victory you have won?" He answered: "I have

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won the privilege of standing in front of my king in battle." His reward was to serve and, if need be, to die for his king. It was for service, not honour, that Paul knew himself to be chosen.

(iv) He thanked him because he had empowered him. Paul had long since discovered that Jesus Christ never gives a man a task to do without also giving him the power to do it. Paul would never have said, "See what I have done," but always, "See what Jesus Christ has enabled me to do." No man is good enough, or strong enough, or pure enough, or wise enough to be the servant of Christ. But if he will give himself to Christ, he will go, not in his own strength, but in the strength of his Lord.

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1 Timothy 1:12-17

THE MEANS OF CONVERSION

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (Part 2)

There are two further interesting things in this passage.

Paul's Jewish background comes out. He says that Jesus Christ had mercy on him because he committed his sins against Christ and his Church in the days of his ignorance. We often think that the Jewish viewpoint was that sacrifice atoned for sin; a man sinned, his sin broke his relationship with God, then sacrifice was made and God's anger was appeased and the relationship restored.

It may well have been that that was in fact the popular, debased view of sacrifice. But the highest Jewish thought insisted on two things. First, it insisted that sacrifice could never atone for deliberate sin, but only for the sins a man committed in ignorance or when swept away in a moment of passion. Second, the highest Jewish thought insisted that no sacrifice could atone for any sin unless there was contrition in the heart of the man who brought it. Here Paul is speaking out of his Jewish background. His heart had been broken by the mercy of Christ; his sins had been committed in the days before he knew Christ and his love. And for these reasons he felt that there was mercy for him.

There is a still more interesting matter, which is pointed out by E. F. Brown. 1Tim.1:14 is difficult. In the Revised Standard Version it runs: "The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." The first part is not difficult; it simply means that the grace of God rose higher than Paul's sin. But what exactly is the meaning of the phrase "with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus"? E. F. Brown suggests that it is that the work of the grace of Christ in Paul's heart was helped by the faith and the love he found in the members of the Christian Church, things like the sympathy and the understanding and the kindness he received from men like Ananias, who opened his eyes and called him brother (Ac.9:10-19), and Barnabas, who stood by him when the rest of the Church regarded him with bleak suspicion (Ac.9:26-28). That is a very lovely idea. And if it be correct, we can see that there are three factors which cooperate in the conversion of any man.

(i) First, there is God. It was the prayer of Jeremiah: "Restore us to thyself, O Lord" (Lam.5:21). As Augustine had it, we would never even have begun to seek for God unless he had already found us. The prime mover is God; at the back of a man's first desire for goodness there is his seeking love.

(ii) There is a man's own self. The King James Version renders Matt.18:3 entirely passively: "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." The Revised Standard Version gives a much more active rendering: "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." There must be human response to divine appeal. God gave men free will and they can use it either to accept or to refuse his offer.

(iii) There is the agency of some Christian person. It is Paul's conviction that he is sent "to open the eyes of the Gentiles, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to

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1 Timothy 1:12-17

God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Ac.26:18). It is James' belief that any man who converts the sinner from the error of his way "will save a soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (Jas.5:19-20). So then there is a double duty laid upon us. It has been said that a saint is someone who makes it easier to believe in God, and that a saint is someone in whom Christ lives again. We must give thanks for those who showed us Christ, whose words and example brought us to him; and we must strive to be the influence which brings others to him.

In this matter of conversion the initiative of God, the response of man, and the influence of the Christian all combine.

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1 Timothy 1:12-17

THE UNFORGOTTEN SHAME AND THE UNDYING INSPIRATION

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (Part 3)

The thing which stands out in this passage is Paul's insistence upon remembering his own sin. He heaps up a very climax of words to show what he did to Christ and the Church. He was an insulter of the Church; he had flung hot and angry words at the Christians, accusing them of crimes against God. He was a persecutor; he had taken every means open to him under the Jewish law to annihilate the Christian Church. Then comes a terrible word; he had been a man of insolent and brutal violence. The word in Greek is *hubristes* (GSN5197). It indicates a kind of arrogant sadism; it describes the man who is out to inflict pain for the sheer joy of inflicting it.

The corresponding abstract noun is *hubris* (GSN5196) which Aristotle defines: "Hubris (GSN5196) means to hurt and to grieve people, in such a way that shame comes to the man who is hurt and grieved, and that not that the person who inflicts the hurt and injury may gain anything else in addition to what he already possesses, but simply that he may find delight in his own cruelty and in the suffering of the other person."

That is what Paul was once like in regard to the Christian Church. Not content with words of insult, he went to the limit of legal persecution. Not content with legal persecution, he went to the limit of sadistic brutality in his attempt to stamp out the Christian faith. He remembered that; and to the end of the day he regarded himself as the chief of sinners. It is not that he was the chief of sinners; he still is. True, he could never forget that he was a forgiven sinner; but neither could he ever forget that he was a sinner. Why should he remember his sin with such vividness?

(i) The memory of his sin was the surest way to keep him from pride. There could be no such thing as spiritual pride for a man who had done the things that he had done. John Newton was one of the great preachers and the supreme hymn-writers of the Church; but he had sunk to the lowest depths to which a man can sink, in the days when he sailed the seas in a slave-trader's ship. So when he became a converted man and a preacher of the gospel, he wrote a text in great letters, and fastened it above the mantelpiece of his study where he could not fail to see it: "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." He also composed his own epitaph: "John Newton, Clerk, once an Infidel and Libertine, a Servant of Slaves in Africa, was by the Mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Preserved, Restored, Pardoned, and Appointed to Preach the Faith he had so long laboured to destroy." John Newton never forgot that he was a forgiven sinner; neither did Paul.

Neither must we. It does a man good to remember his sins; it saves him from spiritual pride.

(ii) The memory of his sin was the surest way to keep his gratitude aflame. To remember what we have been forgiven is the surest way to keep awake our love to Jesus Christ. F. W. Boreham tells of a letter which the old Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, wrote to his son. "When I was threatening to become cold in my ministry, and when I felt Sabbath morning coming and my heart not filled with amazement at the grace of God, or when I was making ready to dispense the Lord's Supper, do you know what I used to do? I used to take a turn up and down among the sins of my past life, and I always came down again with a broken and a contrite heart, ready to preach, as it was preached in the beginning, the forgiveness of sins." "I do not think," he said, "I ever went up the pulpit stair that

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I did not stop for a moment at the foot of it and take a turn up and down among the sins of my past years.

I do not think that I ever planned a sermon that I did not take a turn round my study table and look back at the sins of my youth and of all my life down to the present; and many a Sabbath morning, when my soul had been cold and dry, for the lack of prayer during the week, a turn up and down in my past life before I went into the pulpit always broke my hard heart and made me close with the gospel for my own soul before I began to preach." When we remember how we have hurt God and hurt those who love us and hurt our fellow-men and when we remember how God and men have forgiven us, that memory must awake the flame of gratitude within our hearts.

(iii) The memory of his sin was the constant urge to greater effort. It is quite true that a man can never earn the approval of God, or deserve his love; but it is also true that he can never stop trying to do something to show how much he appreciates the love and the mercy which have made him what he is. Whenever we love anyone we cannot help trying always to demonstrate our love. When we remember how much God loves us and how little we deserve it, when we remember that it was for us that Jesus Christ hung and suffered on Calvary, it must compel us to effort that will tell God we realize what he has done for us and will show Jesus Christ that his sacrifice was not in vain..

(iv) The memory of his sin was bound to be a constant encouragement to others. Paul uses a vivid picture. He says that what happened to him was a kind of outline-sketch of what was going to happen to those who would accept Christ in the days to come. The word he uses is *hupotuposis* (GSN5296) which means an outline, a sketch-plan, a first draft, a preliminary model. It is as if Paul were saying, "Look what Christ has done for me! If someone like me can be saved, there is hope for everyone." Suppose a man was seriously ill and had to go through a dangerous operation, it would be the greatest encouragement to him if he met and talked with someone who had undergone the same operation and had emerged completely cured. Paul did not shrinkingly conceal his record; he blazoned it abroad, that others might take courage and be filled with hope that the grace which had changed him could change them too.

Greatheart said to Christian's boys: "You must know that Forgetful Green is the most dangerous place in all these parts." Paul's sin was something which he refused to forget, for every time he remembered the greatness of his sin, he remembered the still greater greatness of Jesus Christ. It was not that he brooded unhealthily over his sin; it was that he remembered it to rejoice in the wonder of the grace of Jesus Christ.

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1 Timothy 1:18-20

THE SUMMONS WHICH CANNOT BE DENIED

1 Timothy 1:18-20 (Part 1)

I entrust this charge to you, Timothy lad, because it is the natural consequence of the messages which came to the prophets from God, and which marked you out as the very man for this work, so that, in obedience to these messages, you may wage a fine campaign, maintaining your faith and a good conscience all the time; and there are some who, in matters of the faith, have repelled the guidance of conscience, and have come to shipwreck. Amongst them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may be disciplined out of their insults to God and his Church.

The first section of this passage is highly compressed. What lies behind it is this. There must have been a meeting of the prophets of the Church. They were men known to be within the confidence and the counsels of God. "Surely the Lord does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Am.3:7). This meeting thought about the situation which was threatening the Church and came to the conclusion that Timothy was the man to deal with it. We can see the prophets acting in exactly the same way in Ac.13:1-3. The Church was faced with the great decision whether or not to take the gospel out to the Gentiles; and it was to the prophets that there came the message of the Holy Spirit, saying: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Ac.13:2). That was what had happened to Timothy. He had been marked out by the prophets as the man to deal with the situation in the Church. It may well have been that he shrank from the greatness of the task which faced him, and here Paul encourages him with certain considerations.

(i) Paul says to him: "You are a man who has been chosen and you cannot refuse your task." Something like that happened to John Knox. He had been teaching in St. Andrews. His teaching was supposed to be private but many came to it, for he was obviously a man with a message. So the people urged him "that he would take the preaching place upon him. But he utterly refused, alleging that he would not run where God had not called him.... Whereupon they Privily among themselves advising, having with them in council Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, they concluded that they would give a charge to the said John, and that publicly by the mouth of their preacher."

So Sunday came and Knox was in Church and John Rough was preaching. "The said John Rough, preacher, directed his words to the said John Knox, saying: 'Brother, ye shall not be offended, albeit that I speak unto you that which I have in charge, even from all those that are here present, which is this: In the name of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, and in the name of these that presently call you by my mouth, I charge you that you refuse not this holy vocation, but...that you take upon you the public office and charge of preaching, even as you look to avoid God's heavy displeasure, and desire that he shall multiply his graces with you.' And in the end he said to those that were present: 'Was not this your charge to me? And do ye not approve this vocation?' They answered: 'It was: and we approve it.' Whereat the said John, abashed, burst forth in most abundant tears, and withdrew himself to his chamber.

His countenance and behaviour, from that day till the day that he was compelled to present himself to the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart; for no

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1 Timothy 1:18-20

man saw any sign of mirth in him, neither yet had he pleasure to accompany any man, many days together."

John Knox was chosen; he did not want to answer the call; but he had to, for the choice had been made by God. Years afterwards the Regent Morton uttered his famous epitaph by Knox's graveside: "In respect that he bore God's message, to whom he must make account for the same, he (albeit he was weak and an unworthy creature, and a fearful man) feared not the faces of men." The consciousness of being chosen gave him courage.

So Paul says to Timothy: "You have been chosen; you cannot let down God and man." To every one of us there comes God's choosing; and when we are summoned to some work for him, we dare not refuse it.

(ii) It may be that Paul was saying to Timothy: "Be true to your name." Timothy--its full form is Timotheos (GSN5095)--is composed of two Greek words, time (GSN5092) which means "honour," and theos (GSN2316) which means "God," and so means "honour to God." If we are called by the name Christian, one of Christ's folk, to that name we must be true.

(iii) Finally, Paul says to Timothy: "I entrust this charge to you". The word which he uses for to entrust is paratithesthai (GSN3908), which is the word used of entrusting something valuable to someone's safe keeping. It is used, for instance, of making a deposit in a bank, or of entrusting someone to another's care. It always implies that a trust has been reposed in someone for which he will be called to account. So Paul says: "Timothy, into your hands I am placing a sacred trust. See that you do not fail." God reposes his trust in us; into our hands he puts his honour and his Church. We too must see to it that we do not fail.

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1 Timothy 1:18-20

DESPATCHED ON GOD'S CAMPAIGN

1 Timothy 1:18-20 (Part 2)

What then is entrusted to Timothy? He is despatched to fight a good campaign. The picture of life as a campaign is one which has always fascinated men's thoughts. Maximus of Tyre said: "God is the general; life is the campaign; man is the soldier." Seneca said: "For me to live, my dear Lucilius, is to be a soldier." When a man became a follower of the goddess Isis and was initiated into the Mysteries connected with the goddess' name, the summons to him was: "Enrol yourself in the sacred soldiery of Isis."

There are three things to be noted.

(i) It is not to a battle that we are summoned; it is to a campaign. Life is one long campaign, a service from which there is no release, not a short, sharp struggle after which a man can lay aside his arms and rest in peace. To change the metaphor, life is not a sprint; it is a marathon race. It is there that the danger enters in. It is necessary to be for ever on the watch. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." The temptations of life never cease their search for a chink in the armour of the Christian. It is one of the commonest dangers in life to proceed in a series of spasms. We must remember that we are summoned to a campaign which goes on as long as life does.

(ii) It is to a fine campaign that Timothy is summoned. Here again we have the word *kalos* (GSN2570) of which the Pastorals are so fond. It does not mean only something which is good and strong; it means something which is also winsome and lovely. The soldier of Christ is not a conscript who serves grimly and grudgingly; he is a volunteer who serves with a certain knightly chivalry. He is not the slave of duty, but the servant of joy.

(iii) Timothy is commanded to take with him two weapons of equipment. (a) He is to take faith. Even when things are at their darkest, he must have faith in the essential rightness of his cause and in the ultimate triumph of God. It was faith which kept up John Knox when he was in despair. Once when he was a slave on the galleys, the ship came in sight of St. Andrews. He was so weak that he had to be lifted up bodily in order to see. They showed him the church steeple and asked if he knew it. "Yes," he said, "I know it well: and I am fully persuaded, how weak that ever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life till that my tongue shall glorify his godly name in the same place." He describes his feelings in 1554 when he had to flee the country to escape the vengeance of Mary Tudor. "Not only the ungodly, but even my faithful brethren, yea, and my own self, that is, all natural understanding, judged my cause to be irremediable.

The frail flesh, oppressed with fear and pain, desireth deliverance, ever abhorring and drawing back from obedience giving. O Christian brethren, I write by experience.... I know the grudging and murmuring complaints of the flesh; I know the anger, wrath, and indignation which it conceiveth against God, calling all his promises in doubt, and being ready every hour utterly to fall from God. Against which remains only faith." The Christian soldier needs in the darkest hour the faith that will not shrink. (b) He is to take the defence of a good conscience. That is to say, the Christian soldier must at least try to live in accordance with his own doctrine. The virtue is gone out of a man's message when his conscience condemns him as he speaks.

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1 Timothy 1:18-20

A STERN REBUKE

1 Timothy 1:18-20 (Part 3)

The passage closes with a stern rebuke to two members of the Church who have injured the Church, grieved Paul, and made shipwreck of their own lives. Hymenaeus is mentioned again in 2Tim.2:17; and Alexander may well be the Alexander who is referred to in 2Tim.4:14. Paul has three complaints against them.

(i) They had rejected the guidance of conscience. They had allowed their own desires to speak with more persuasiveness than the voice of God.

(ii) They had relapsed into evil practices. Once they had abandoned God, life had become soiled and debased. When God went from life, beauty went along with him.

(iii) They had taken to false teaching. Again it was almost inevitable. When a man takes the wrong way, his first instinct is to find excuses for himself. He takes the Christian teaching and twists it to suit himself. Out of the right he finds perverted arguments to justify the wrong. He finds arguments in the words of Christ to justify the ways of the devil. The moment a man disobeys the voice of conscience, his conduct becomes debased and his thinking twisted.

So Paul goes on to say that he has "handed them over to Satan." What is the meaning of this terrible phrase? There are three possibilities.

(i) He may be thinking of the Jewish practice of excommunication. According to synagogue practice, if a man was an evil-doer he was first publicly rebuked. If that was ineffective, he was banished from the synagogue for a period of thirty days. If he was still stubbornly unrepentant, he was put under the ban, which made him a person accursed, debarred from the society of men and the fellowship of God. In such a case a man might well be said to be handed over to Satan.

(ii) He may be saying that he has barred them from the Church and turned them loose in the world. In a heathen society it was inevitable that men should draw a hard and fast line between the Church and the world. The Church was God's territory; the world was Satan's; and to be debarred from the Church was to be handed over to that territory which was under the sway of Satan. The phrase may mean that these two troublers of the Church were abandoned to the world.

(iii) The third explanation is the most likely of the three. Satan was held to be responsible for human suffering and pain. A man in the Corinthian Church had been guilty of the terrible sin of incest. Paul's advice was that he should be delivered to Satan "for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1Cor.5:5). The idea is that the Church should pray for some physical chastisement to fall on that man so that, by the pain of his body, he might be brought to the senses of his mind. In Job's case it was Satan who brought the physical suffering upon him (Jb.2:6-7). In the New Testament itself we have the terrible end of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac.5:5,10), and the blindness which fell upon Elymas because of his opposition to the gospel

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(Ac.13:11). It may well be that it was Paul's prayer that these two men should be subjected to some painful visitation which would be a punishment and a warning.

That is all the more likely because it is Paul's hope that they will be, not obliterated and destroyed, but disciplined out of their evil ways. To him, as it ought to be to us, punishment was never mere vindictive vengeance but always remedial discipline, never meant simply to hurt but always to cure.

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1 Timothy 2:1-7

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE GOSPEL

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (Part 1)

So then the first thing I urge you to do is to offer your requests, your prayers, your petitions, your thanksgivings for all men. Pray for kings and for all who are in authority, that they may enjoy a life that is tranquil and undisturbed, and that they may act in all godliness and reverence. That is the fine way to live, the way which meets with the approval of God, our Saviour, who wishes all men to be saved, and to come to a full knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator, between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all. It was thus he bore his witness to God in his own good times, a witness to which I have been appointed a herald and an envoy (I am speaking the truth: I do not lie), a teacher to the Gentiles, a teacher whose message is based on faith and truth.

Before we study this passage in detail we must note one thing which shines out from it in a way that no one can fail to see. Few passages in the New Testament so stress the universality of the gospel. Prayer is to be made for all men; God is the Saviour who wishes all men to be saved; Jesus gave his life a ransom for all. As Walter Lock writes: "God's will to save is as wide as his will to create."

This is a note which sounds in the New Testament again and again. Through Christ God was reconciling the world to himself (2Cor.5:18-19). God so loved the world that he gave his Son (Jn.3:16). It was Jesus' confidence that, if he was lifted up on his Cross, soon or late he would draw all men to him (Jn.12:32).

E. F. Brown calls this passage "the charter of missionary work." He says that it is the proof that all men are *capax dei*, capable of receiving God. They may be lost, but they can be found; they may be ignorant, but they can be enlightened; they may be sinners, but they can be saved. George Wishart, the forerunner of John Knox, writes in his translation of the First Swiss Confession: "The end and intent of the Scripture is to declare that God is benevolent and friendly-minded to mankind; and that he hath declared that kindness in and through Jesus Christ, his only Son; the which kindness is received by faith." That is why prayer must be made for all. God wants all men, and so, therefore, must his Church.

(i) The gospel includes high and low. Both the Emperor in his power and the slave in his helplessness were included in the sweep of the gospel. Both the philosopher in his wisdom and the simple man in his ignorance need the grace and truth that the gospel can bring. Within the gospel there are no class distinctions. King and commoner, rich and poor, aristocrat and peasant, master and man are all included in its limitless embrace.

(ii) The gospel includes good and bad. A strange malady has sometimes afflicted the Church in modern times, causing it to insist that a man be respectable before he is allowed in, and to took askance at sinners who seek entry to its doors. But the New Testament is clear that the Church exists, not only to edify the good, but to welcome and save the sinner. C. T. Studd used to repeat four lines of doggerel:

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1 Timothy 2:1-7

"Some want to live within the sound
Of Church or Chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell."

One of the great saints of modern times, and indeed of all time, was Toyohiko Kagawa. It was to Shinkawa that he went to find men and women for Christ and he lived there in the filthiest and most depraved slums in the world. W. J. Smart describes the situation: "His neighbours were unregistered prostitutes, thieves who boasted of their power to outwit all the police in the city, and murderers who were not only proud of their murder record but always ready to add to their local prestige by committing another. All the people, whether sick, or feeble-minded or criminal, lived in conditions of abysmal misery, in streets slippery with filth, where rats crawled out of open sewers to die. The air was always filled with stench. An idiot girl who lived next door to Kagawa had vile pictures painted on her back to decoy lustful men to her den. Everywhere human bodies rotted with syphilis." Kagawa wanted people like that, and so does Jesus Christ, for he wants all men, good and bad alike.

(iii) The gospel embraces Christian and non-Christian. Prayer is to be made for all men. The Emperors and rulers for whom this letter bids us pray were not Christians; they were in fact hostile to the Church; and yet they were to be borne to the throne of grace by the prayers of the Church. For the true Christian there is no such thing as an enemy in all this world. None is outside his prayers, for none is outside the love of Christ, and none is outside the purpose of God, who wishes all men to be saved.

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1 Timothy 2:1-7

THE WAY OF PRAYER

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (Part 2)

Four different words for prayer are grouped together. It is true that they are not to be sharply distinguished; nevertheless each has something to tell us of the way of prayer.

(i) The first is *deesis* (GSN1162), which we have translated request. It is not exclusively a religious word; it can be used of a request made either to a fellow-man or to God. But its fundamental idea is a sense of need. No one will make a request unless a sense of need has already wakened a desire. Prayer begins with a sense of need. It begins with the conviction that we cannot deal with life ourselves. That sense of human weakness is the basis of all approach to God.

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness he requireth
Is to feel your need of him."

(ii) The second is *proseuche* (GSN4335), which we have translated prayer. The basic difference between *deesis* (GSN1162) and *proseuche* (GSN4335) is that *deesis* (GSN1162) may be addressed either to man or God, but *proseuche* (GSN4335) is never used of anything else but approach to God. There are certain needs which only God can satisfy. There is a strength which he alone can give; a forgiveness which he alone can grant; a certainty which he alone can bestow. It may well be that our weakness haunts us because we so often take our needs to the wrong place.

(iii) The third is *enteuxis* (GSN1783), which we have translated petition. Of the three words this is the most interesting. It has a most interesting history. It is the noun from the verb *entugchanein* (GSN1793). This originally meant simply to meet, or to fall in with a person; it went on to mean to hold intimate conversation with a person; then it acquired a special meaning and meant to enter into a king's presence and to submit a petition to him. That tells us much about prayer. It tells us that the way to God stands open and that we have the right to bring our petitions to one who is a king.

"Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much."

It is impossible to ask too great a boon from this King.

(iv) The fourth is *eucharistia* (GSN2169), which we have translated thanksgiving. Prayer does not mean only asking God for things; it also means thanking God for things. For too many of us prayer is an exercise in complaint, when it should be an exercise in thanksgiving. Epictetus, not a Christian but a Stoic philosopher, used to say: "What can I, who am a little old lame man, do, except give praise to God?" We have the right to bring our needs to God; but we have also the duty of bringing our thanksgivings to him.

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1 Timothy 2:1-7

PRAYER FOR THOSE IN AUTHORITY

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (Part 3)

This passage distinctly commands prayer for kings and emperors and all who are set in authority. This was a cardinal principle of communal Christian prayer. Emperors might be persecutors and those in authority might be determined to stamp out Christianity. But the Christian Church never, even in the times of bitterest persecution, ceased to pray for them.

It is extraordinary to trace how all through its early days, those days of bitter persecution, the Church regarded it as an absolute duty to pray for the Emperor and his subordinate kings and governors. "Fear God," said Peter. "Honour the Emperor" (1Pet.2:17), and we must remember that that Emperor was none other than Nero, that monster of cruelty. Tertullian insists that for the Emperor the Christian pray for "long life, secure dominion, a safe home, a faithful senate, a righteous people, and a world at peace" (Apology 30). "We pray for our rulers," he wrote, "for the state of the world, for the peace of all things and for the postponement of the end" (Apology 39). He writes: "The Christian is the enemy of no man, least of all of the Emperor, for we know that, since he has been appointed by God, it is necessary that we should love him, and reverence him, and honour him, and desire his safety, together with that of the whole Roman Empire. Therefore we sacrifice for the safety of the Emperor" (Ad Scapulam 2). Cyprian, writing to Demetrianus, speaks of the Christian Church as "sacrificing and placating God night and day for your peace and safety" (Ad Demetrianum 20). In A.D. 311 the Emperor Galerius actually asked for the prayers of the Christians, and promised them mercy and indulgence if they prayed for the state. Tatian writes: "Does the Emperor order us to pay tribute? We willingly offer it. Does the ruler order us to render service or servitude? We acknowledge our servitude. But a man must be honoured as befits a man but only God is to be revered" (Apology 4). Theophilus of Antioch writes: "The honour that I will give the Emperor is all the greater, because I will not worship him, but I will pray for him. I will worship no one but the true and real God, for I know that the Emperor was appointed by him.... Those give real honour to the Emperor who are well-disposed to him, who obey him, and who pray for him" (Apology 1: 11). Justin Martyr writes: "We worship God alone, but in all other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging kings and rulers of men, and praying that they may be found to have pure reason with kingly power" (Apology 1: 14,17).

The greatest of all the prayers for the Emperor is in Clement of Rome's First Letter to the Church at Corinth which was written about A.D. 90 when the savagery of Domitian was still fresh in men's minds: "Thou, Lord and Master, hast given our rulers and governors the power of sovereignty through thine excellent and unspeakable might, that we, knowing the glory and honour which thou hast given them, may submit ourselves unto them, in nothing resisting thy will. Grant unto them, therefore, O Lord, health, peace, concord, stability, that they may administer the government which thou hast given them without failure. For thou, O heavenly Master, King of the Ages, givest to the sons of men glory and honour and power over all things that are upon the earth. Do thou, Lord, direct their counsel according to that which is good and well-pleasing in thy sight, that, administering the power which thou hast given them in peace and gentleness with godliness, they may obtain thy favour.

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1 Timothy 2:1-7

O thou, who alone art able to do these things, and things far more exceeding good than these for us, we praise thee through the High Priest and Guardian of our souls, Jesus Christ, through whom be the glory and the majesty unto thee both now and for all generations, and for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Clement 61).

The Church always regarded it as a bounden duty to pray for those set in authority over the kingdoms of the earth; and brought even its persecutors before the throne of grace.

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1 Timothy 2:1-7

THE GIFTS OF GOD

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (Part 4)

The Church prayed for certain things for those in authority.

(i) It prayed for "a life that is tranquil and undisturbed." That was the prayer for freedom from war, from rebellion and from anything which would disturb the peace of the realm. That is the good citizen's prayer for his country.

(ii) But the Church prayed for much more than that. It prayed for "a life that is lived in godliness and reverence." Here we are confronted with two great words which are keynotes of the Pastoral Epistles and describe qualities which not only the ruler but every Christian must covet.

First, there is godliness, *eusebeia* (GSN2150). This is one of the great and almost untranslatable Greek words. It describes reverence both towards God and man. It describes that attitude of mind which respects man and honours God. Eusebius defined it as "reverence towards the one and only God, and the kind of life that he would wish us to lead." To the Greek, the great example of *eusebeia* (GSN2150) was Socrates whom Xenophon describes in the following terms: "So pious and devoutly religious that he would take no step apart from the will of heaven; so just and upright that he never did even a trifling injury to any living soul; so self-controlled, so temperate, that he never at any time chose the sweeter in place of the bitter; so sensible and wise and prudent that in distinguishing the better from the worse he never erred" (Xenophon: *Memorabilia*, 4, 8, 11). *Eusebeia* (GSN2150) comes very near to that great Latin word *pietas*, which Warde Fowler describes thus: "The quality known to the Romans as *pietas* rises, in spite of trial and danger, superior to the enticements of individual passion and selfish ease. Aeneas' *pietas* became a sense of duty to the will of the gods, as well as to his father, his son and his people; and this duty never leaves him." Clearly *eusebeia* (GSN2150) is a tremendous thing. It never forgets the reverence due to God; it never forgets the rights due to men; it never forgets the respect due to self. It describes the character of the man who never fails God, man or himself.

Second, there is reverence, *semnotes* (GSN4587). Here again we are in the realm of the untranslatable. The corresponding adjective *semnos* (GSN4586) is constantly applied to the gods. R. C. Trench says that the man who is *semnos* (GSN4586) "has on him a grace and a dignity, not lent by earth." He says that he is one who "without demanding it challenges and inspires reverence." Aristotle was the great ethical teacher of the Greeks. He had a way of describing every virtue as the mean between two extremes. On the one side there was an extreme of excess and on the other an extreme of defect, and in between there was the mean, the happy medium, in which virtue lay. Aristotle says that *semnotes* (GSN4587) is the mean between *areskeia* (GSN0699), subservience, and *authadeia* (GSN0829), arrogance. It may be said that for the man who is *semnos* (GSN4586) all life is one act of worship; all life is lived in the presence of God; he moves through the world, as it has been put, as if it was the temple of the living God. He never forgets the holiness of God or the dignity of man.

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These two great qualities are regal qualities which every man must covet and for which every man must pray.

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1 Timothy 2:1-7

ONE GOD AND ONE SAVIOUR

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (Part 5)

Paul concludes with a statement of the greatest truths of the Christian faith.

(i) There is one God. We are not living in a world such as the Gnostics produced with their theories of two gods, hostile to each other. We are not living in a world such as the heathen produced with their horde of gods, often in competition with one another. Missionaries tell us that one of the greatest reliefs which Christianity brings to the heathen is the conviction that there is only one God. They live for ever terrified of the gods and it is an emancipation to discover that there is one God only whose name is Father and whose nature is Love.

(ii) There is one Mediator. Even the Jews would have said that there are many mediators between God and man. A mediator is one who stands between two parties and acts as go-between. To the Jews the angels were mediators. The Testament of Dan (6: 2) has it: "Draw near unto God, and unto the angel who intercedes for you, for he is a mediator between God and man." To the Greeks there were all kinds of mediators. Plutarch said it was an insult to God to conceive that he was in any way directly involved in the world; he was involved in the world only through angels and demons and demigods who were, so to speak, his liaison officers.

Neither in Jewish nor in Greek thought had a man direct access to God. But, through Jesus Christ, the Christian has direct that access, with nothing to bar the way between. Further, there is only one Mediator. E. F. Brown tells us that that is, for instance, what the Hindus find so hard to believe. They say: "Your religion is good for you, and ours for us." But unless there is one God and one Mediator there can be no such thing as the brotherhood of man. If there are many gods and many mediators competing for their allegiance and their love, religion becomes something which divides men instead of uniting them. It is because there is one God and one Mediator that men are brethren one of another.

Paul goes on to call Jesus the one who gave his life a ransom for all. That simply means that it cost God the life and death of his Son to bring men back to himself. There was a man who lost a son in the war. He had lived a most careless and even a godless life; but his son's death brought him face to face with God as never before. He became a changed man. One day he was standing before the local war memorial, looking at his son's name upon it. And very gently he said: "I guess he had to go down to lift me up." That is what Jesus did; it cost his life and death to tell men of the love of God and to bring men home to him.

Then Paul claims to himself four offices.

(1) He is a herald of the story of Jesus Christ. A herald is a man who makes a statement and who says: "This is true." He is a man who brings a proclamation that is not his own, but which comes from the king.

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1 Timothy 2:1-7

(ii) He is a witness to the story of Christ. A witness is a man who says: "This is true, and I know it" and says also "It works." He is a man who tells, not only the story of Christ, but also the story of what Christ has done for him.

(iii) He is an envoy. An envoy is one whose duty is to commend his country in a foreign land. An envoy in the Christian sense is therefore one who commends the story of Christ to others. He wishes to communicate that story to others, so that it will mean as much to them as it does to him.

(iv) He is a teacher. The herald is the person who proclaims the facts; the witness is the person who proclaims the power of the facts; the envoy is the person who commends the facts; the teacher is the person who leads men into the meaning of the facts. It is not enough to know that Christ lived and died; we must think out what that meant. A man must not only feel the wonder of the story of Christ; he must think out its meaning for himself and for the world.

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1 Timothy 2:8-15

BARRIERS TO PRAYER

1 Timothy 2:8-15 (Part 1)

So, then, it is my wish that men should pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, with no anger in their hearts and no doubts in their minds. Even so it is my wish that women should modestly and wisely adorn themselves in seemly dress. This adornment should not consist in braided hair, and ornaments of gold, and pearls, but--as befits women who profess to reverence God--they should adorn themselves with good works. Let a woman learn in silence and with all submission. I do not allow a woman to teach or to dictate to a man. Rather, it is my advice that she should be silent. For Adam was formed first, and then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived, and so became guilty of transgression. But women will be saved through child-bearing, if they continue in faith and love, and if they wisely walk the road that leads to holiness.

The early Church took over the Jewish attitude of prayer, which was to pray standing, with hands outstretched and the palms upwards. Later Tertullian was to say that this depicted the attitude of Jesus upon the Cross.

The Jews had always known about the barriers which kept a man's prayers from God. Isaiah heard God say to the people: "When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood" (Isa.1:15). Here, too, certain things are demanded.

(i) He who prays must stretch forth holy hands. He must hold up to God hands which do not touch the forbidden things. This does not mean for one moment that the sinner is debarred from God; but it does mean that there is no reality in the prayers of the man who then goes out to soil his hands with forbidden things, as if he had never prayed. It is not thinking of the man who is helplessly in the grip of some passion and desperately fighting against it, bitterly conscious of his failure. It is thinking of the man whose prayers are a sheer formality.

(ii) He who prays must have no anger in his heart. It has been said that "forgiveness is indivisible." Human and divine forgiveness go hand in hand. Again and again Jesus stresses the fact that we cannot hope to receive the forgiveness of God so long as we are at enmity with our fellow-men. "So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt.5:23-24). "If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt.6:15). Jesus tells how the unforgiving servant himself found no forgiveness, and ends: "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt.18:35). To be forgiven, we must be forgiving. The Didache (compare GSN1322), the earliest Christian book on public worship, which dates from about A.D.

100, has it: "Let no one who has a quarrel with his neighbour come to us, until they are reconciled." The bitterness in a man's heart is a barrier which hinders his prayers from reaching God.

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1 Timothy 2:8-15

(iii) He who prays must have no doubts in his mind. This phrase can mean two things. The word used is dialogismos (GSN1261), which can mean both an argument and a doubt. If we take it in the sense of argument, it simply repeats what has gone before and restates the fact that bitterness and quarrels and venomous debates are a hindrance to prayer. It is better to take it in the sense of doubt. Before prayer is answered there must be belief that God will answer. If a man prays pessimistically and with no real belief that it is any use, his prayer falls wingless to the ground. Before a man can be cured, he must believe that he can be cured; before a man can lay hold on the grace of God, he must believe in that grace. We must take our prayers to God in the complete confidence that he hears and answers prayer.

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1 Timothy 2:8-15

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 2:8-15 (Part 2)

The second part of this passage deals with the place of women in the Church. It cannot be read out of its historical context, for it springs entirely from the situation in which it was written.

(i) It was written against a Jewish background. No nation ever gave a bigger place to women in home and in family things than the Jews did; but officially the position of a woman was very low. In Jewish law she was not a person but a thing; she was entirely at the disposal of her father or of her husband. She was forbidden to learn the law; to instruct a woman in the law was to cast pearls before swine. Women had no part in the synagogue service; they were shut apart in a section of the synagogue, or in a gallery, where they could not be seen. A man came to the synagogue to learn; but, at the most, a woman came to hear. In the synagogue the lesson from Scripture was read by members of the congregation; but not by women, for that would have been to lessen "the honour of the congregation." It was absolutely forbidden for a woman to teach in a school; she might not even teach the youngest children. A woman was exempt from the stated demands of the Law. It was not obligatory on her to attend the sacred feasts and festivals. Women, slaves and children were classed together. In the Jewish morning prayer a man thanked God that God had not made him "a Gentile, a slave or a woman." In the Sayings of the Fathers Rabbi Jose ben Johanan is quoted as saying: "'Let thy house be opened wide, and let the poor be thy household, and talk not much with a woman.' Hence the wise have said: 'Everyone that talketh much with a woman causes evil to himself, and desists from the works of the Law, and his end is that he inherits Gehenna.'" A strict Rabbi would never greet a woman on the street, not even his own wife or daughter or mother or sister. It was said of woman: "Her work is to send her children to the synagogue; to attend to domestic concerns; to leave her husband free to study in the schools; to keep house for him until he returns."

(ii) It was written against a Greek background. The Greek background made things doubly difficult. The place of women in Greek religion was low. The Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth had a thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes and every evening plied their trade on the city streets. The Temple of Diana in Ephesus had its hundreds of priestesses called the Melissae, which means the bees, whose function was the same. The respectable Greek woman led a very confined life. She lived in her own quarters into which no one but her husband came. She did not even appear at meals. She never at any time appeared on the street alone; she never went to any public assembly. The fact is that if in a Greek town Christian women had taken an active and a speaking part in its work, the Church would inevitably have gained the reputation of being the resort of loose women.

Further, in Greek society there were women whose whole life consisted in elaborate dressing and braiding of the hair. In Rome, Pliny tells us of a bride, Lollia Paulina, whose bridal dress cost the equivalent of 432,000 British pounds. Even the Greeks and the Romans were shocked at the love of dress and of adornment which characterized some of their women. The great Greek religions were called the Mystery religions, and they had precisely the same regulations about dress as Paul has here. There is an inscription which reads: "A consecrated woman shall not have gold ornaments,

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nor rouge, nor face-whitening, nor a head-band, nor braided hair, nor shoes, except those made of felt or of the skins of sacrificed animals. "The early Church did not lay down these regulations as in any sense permanent, but as things which were necessary in the situation in which it found itself.

In any event there is much on the other side. In the old story it was the woman who was created second and who fell to the seduction of the serpent tempter; but it was Mary of Nazareth who bore and who trained the child Jesus; it was Mary of Magdala who was first to see the risen Lord; it was four women who of all the disciples stood by the Cross. Priscilla with her husband Aquila was a valued teacher in the early Church, who led Apollos to a knowledge of the truth (Ac.18:26). Euodia and Syntyche, in spite of their quarrel, were women who laboured in the gospel (Php.4:2-3). Philip, the evangelist, had four daughters who were prophetesses (Ac.21:9). The aged women were to teach (Tit.2:3). Paul held Lois and Eunice in the highest honour (2Tim.1:5), and there is many a woman's name held in honour in Rom.16.

All the things in this chapter are mere temporary regulations to meet a given situation. If we want Paul's permanent view on this matter, we get it in Gal.3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Christ the differences of place and honour and function within the Church are all wiped out.

And yet this passage ends with a real truth. Women, it says, will be saved in child-bearing. There are two possible meanings here. It is just possible that this is a reference to the fact that Mary, a woman, was the mother of Jesus and that it means that women will be saved--as all others will--by that supreme act of child-bearing. But it is much more likely that the meaning is much simpler; and that it means that women will find salvation, not in addressing meetings, but in motherhood, which is their crown. Whatever else is true, a woman is queen within her home.

We must not read this passage as a barrier to all women's service within the Church, but in the light of its Jewish and its Greek background. And we must look for Paul's permanent views in the passage where he tells us that the differences are wiped out, and that men and women, slaves and freemen, Jews and Gentiles, are all eligible to serve Christ.

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

THE LEADERS OF THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (Part 1)

There is a saying which everyone must believe--if a man aspires to the office of overseer in the Church, it is a fine work on which his heart is set. An overseer must be a man against whom no criticism can be made; he must have been married only once; he must be sober, prudent, well-behaved, hospitable and possessed of an aptitude for teaching. He must not over-indulge in wine, nor must he be the kind of man who assaults others, but he must be gentle and peaceable, and free from the love of money. He must manage his own house well, keeping his children under control with complete dignity. (If a man does not know how to manage his own house, how can he take charge of the congregation of God?) He must not be a recent convert, in case he becomes inflated with a sense of his own importance, and so fall into the same condemnation as the devil did. He must have earned the respect of those outside the Church, that he may not fall into reproach and into the snare of the devil.

This is a very important passage from the point of view of Church government. It deals with the man whom the King James and Revised Standard Versions call the bishop, and whom we have translated overseer.

In the New Testament there are two words which describe the principal office-bearers of the Church, the office-bearers who were to be found in every congregation, and on whose conduct and administration its welfare depended.

(i) There was the man who was called the elder (presbuteros, GSN4245). The eldership is the most ancient of all offices within the Church. The Jews had their elders, and they traced their origin to the occasion when Moses, in the desert wanderings, appointed seventy men to help him in the task of controlling and caring for the people (Num.11:16). Every synagogue had its elders, and they were the real leaders of the Jewish community. They presided over the worship of the synagogue; they administered rebuke and discipline where these were necessary; they settled the disputes which other nations would have taken to the law-courts. Amongst the Jews the elders were the respected men who exercised a fatherly oversight over the spiritual and material affairs of every Jewish community. But more nations than the Jews had an eldership. The presiding body of the Spartans was called the gerousia (GSN1087), which means the board of the elder men. The Parliament of Rome was called the senate, which comes from senex, which means an old man. In England the men who looked after the affairs of the community were called the aldermen, which means the elder men. In New Testament times every Egyptian village had its village elders who looked after the affairs of the community. The elders had a long history, and they had a place in the life of almost every community.

(ii) But sometimes the New Testament uses another word, episkopos (GSN1985), which the King James and Revised Standard Versions translate bishop, and which literally means overseer, or superintendent. This word, too, has a long and honourable history. The Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures, uses it to describe those who were the taskmasters, who were over the public works and public building schemes (2Chr.34:17). The Greeks use it to describe the

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

men appointed to go out from the mother city to regulate the affairs of a newly founded colony in some distant place. They use it to describe what we might call commissioners appointed to regulate the affairs of a city. The Romans use it to describe the magistrates appointed to oversee the sale of food within the city of Rome. It is used of the special delegates appointed by a king to see that the laws he had laid down were carried out.

Episkopos (GSN1985) always implies two things; first, oversight over some area or sphere of work and second, responsibility to some higher power and authority.

The great question is: What was the relationship in the early Church between the elder, the presbuteros (GSN4245), and the overseer, the episkopos (GSN1985)?

Modern scholarship is practically unanimous in holding that in the early Church the presbuteros (GSN4245) and the episkopos (GSN1985) were one and the same. The grounds for that identification are: (a) Elders were everywhere appointed. After the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in all the Churches they had founded (Ac.14:23). Titus is instructed to appoint and ordain elders in all the cities of Crete (Tit.1:5). (b) The qualifications of a presbuteros (GSN4245) and of an episkopos (GSN1985) are to all intents and purposes identical (1Tim.3:2-7; Tit.1:6-9). (c) At the beginning of Philippians, Paul's greetings are to the bishops and the deacons (Php.1:1). It is quite impossible that Paul would have sent no greetings at all to the elders, who, as we have already seen, were in every Church; and therefore the bishops and the elders must be one and the same body of people.

(d) When Paul was on his last journey to Jerusalem, he sent for the elders of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus (Ac.20:17), and in the course of his talk to them he says that God has made them episkopoi (GSN1985) to feed the Church of God (Ac.20:28). That is to say, he addresses precisely the same body of men first as elders and second as bishops or overseers. (e) When Peter is writing to his people, he talks to them as an elder to elders (1Pet.5:1), and then he goes on to say that their function is oversight of the flock of God (1Pet.5:2), and the word he uses for oversight, is the verb episkopein (GSN1983) from which episkopos (GSN1985) comes. All the evidence from the New Testament goes to prove that the presbuteros (GSN4245) and the episkopos (GSN1985), the elder and the bishop or overseer, were one and the same person.

Two questions arise. First, if they were the same, why were there two names for them? The answer is that presbuteros (GSN4245) described these leaders of the Church as they personally were. They were the elder men, the older and respected members of the community. Episkopos (GSN1985), on the other hand, described their function, which was to oversee the life and the work of the Church. The one word described the man; the other described his task.

The second question is--if the elder and the bishop were originally the same, how did the bishop become what he did? The answer is simple. Inevitably the body of the elders would acquire a leader. Someone to lead would be essential and would inevitably emerge. The more organized the Church became, the more such a figure would be bound to arise. And the elder who stood out as leader came to be called the episkopos (GSN1985), the superintendent of the Church. But it is to be noted that he was simply a leader amongst equals. He was in fact the elder whom circumstances and personal qualities had combined to make a leader for the work of the Church.

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

It will be seen that to translate episkopos (GSN1985) by the word bishop in the New Testament now gives the word a misleading meaning. It is better to translate it overseer or superintendent.

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

THE APPOINTMENT AND THE DUTIES OF THE LEADERS OF THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (Part 2)

This passage is further interesting in that it tells us something of the appointment and the duties of the leaders of the Church.

(i) They were formally set apart for their office. Titus was to ordain elders in every Church (Tit.1:5). The office-bearer of the Church is not made an office-bearer in secret; he is set apart before the eyes of men; the honour of the Church is publicly delivered into his hands.

(ii) They had to undergo a period of testing. They had first to be proved (1Tim.3:10). No one builds a bridge or a piece of machinery with metal which has not been tested. The Church might do well to be more strict than she is in the testing of those chosen for leadership.

(iii) They were paid for the work which they had to do. The labourer was worthy of his hire (1Tim.5:18). The Christian leader does not work for pay, but, on the other hand, the duty of the Church which chose him for the work is to supply him with the means to live.

(iv) They were liable to censure (1Tim.5:19-22). In the early Church the office-bearer had a double function. He was a leader of the Church; but he was also the servant of the Church. He had to answer for his stewardship. No Christian office-bearer must ever consider himself answerable to no one; he is answerable to God and to the people over whom God gave him the task of presiding.

(v) They had the duty of presiding over the Christian assembly and of teaching the Christian congregation (1Tim.5:17). The Christian office-bearer has the double duty of administration and instruction. It may well be that one of the tragedies of the modern Church is that the administrative function of the office-bearer has usurped the teaching function almost entirely. It is, for instance, sad to see how few elders of the Church are actively engaged in the teaching work of Sunday schools.

(vi) The office-bearer was not to be a recent convert. Two reasons are given for this advice. The first is quite clear. It is "in case he becomes inflated with a sense of his own importance." The second is not so clear. It is, as the Revised Standard Version has it, "lest he fall into the condemnation of the devil." There are three possible explanations of that strange phrase. (a) It was through his pride that Lucifer rebelled against God and was expelled from heaven. And this may simply be a second warning against the danger of pride. (b) It may mean that, if the too quickly advanced convert becomes guilty of pride, he gives the devil a chance to level his charges against him. A conceited Church office-bearer gives the devil a chance to say to critics of the Church: "Look! There's your Christian! There's your Church member! That's what an office-bearer is like!" (c) The word *diabolos* (GSN1228) has two meanings.

It means "Devil," and that is the way in which the Revised Standard Version has taken it here; but it also means "slanderer." It is in fact the word used for slanderer in 1Tim.3:11, where the women are forbidden to be slanderers. So then this phrase may mean that the recent convert, who has been appointed to office, and has acquired, as we say, a swelled head, gives opportunity to the

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

slanderers. His unworthy conduct is ammunition for those who are ill-disposed to the Church. No matter how we take it, the point is that the conceited Church official is a bad debt to the Church.

But, as the early Church saw it, the responsibility of the office-bearer did not begin and end in the Church. He had two other spheres of responsibility, and if he failed in them, he was bound also to fail in the Church.

(i) His first sphere of duty was his own home. If a man did not know how to rule his own household, how could he engage upon the task of ruling the congregation of the Church? (1Tim.3:5). A man who had not succeeded in making a Christian home could hardly be expected to succeed in making a Christian congregation. A man who had not instructed his own family could hardly be the right man to instruct the family of the Church.

(ii) The second sphere of responsibility was the world. He must be "well thought of by outsiders" (1Tim.3:7). He must be a man who has gained the respect of his fellow-men in the day-to-day business of life. Nothing has hurt the Church more than the sight of people who are active in it, whose business and social life belies the faith which they profess and the precepts which they teach. The Christian office-bearer must first of all be a good man.

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

THE CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADER

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (Part 3)

We have just seen that the Christian leader must be a man who has won the respect of all. In this passage there is a great series of words and phrases describing his character; and it will be worth while to look at each in turn. Before we do that it will be interesting to set beside them two famous descriptions by great heathen thinkers of the good leader's character. Diogenes Laertius (7: 116-126) hands down to us the Stoic description. He must be married; he must be without pride; he must be temperate; and he must combine prudence of mind with excellence of outward behaviour. A writer called Onosander gives us the other. He must be prudent, self-controlled, sober, frugal, enduring in toil, intelligent, without love of money, neither young nor old, if possible the father of a family, able to speak competently, and of good reputation. It is interesting to see how the pagan and the Christian descriptions coincide.

The Christian leader must be a man against whom no criticism can be made (*anepileptos*, GSN0423). *Anepileptos* is used of a position which is not open to attack, of a life which is not open to censure, of an art or technique which is so perfect that no fault can be found with it, of an agreement which is inviolable. The Christian leader must not only be free from such faults as can be assailed by definite charges; he must be of such fine character as to be even beyond criticism. The Rheims version of the New Testament translates this Greek word by the very unusual English word *irreprehensible*, unable to be found fault with. The Greeks themselves defined the word as meaning "affording nothing of which an adversary can take hold." Here is the ideal of perfection. We will not be able fully to attain to it; but the fact remains that the Christian leader must seek to offer to the world a life of such purity that he leaves no loophole even for criticism of himself.

The Christian leader must have been married only once. The Greek literally means that he must be "the husband of one wife." Some take this to mean that the Christian leader must be a married man, and it is possible that the phrase could mean that. It is certainly true that a married man can be a recipient of confidences and a bringer of help in a way that a single man cannot be, and that he can bring a special understanding and sympathy to many a situation. Some few take it to mean that the Christian leader cannot marry a second time, even after his wife's death. In support they quote Paul's teaching in 1Cor.7. But in its context here we can be quite certain that the phrase means that the Christian leader must be a loyal husband, preserving marriage in all its purity. In later days the Apostolic Canons laid it down: "He who is involved in two marriages, after his baptism, or he who has taken a concubine, cannot be an *episkopos* (GSN1985), a bishop."

We may well ask why it should be necessary to lay down what looks obvious. We must understand the state of the world in which this was written. It has been said, and with much truth, that the only totally new virtue which Christianity brought into this world was chastity. In many ways the ancient world was in a state of moral chaos, even the Jewish world. Astonishing as it may seem, certain Jews still practised polygamy. In the Dialogue with Trypho, in which Justin Martyr discusses Christianity with a Jew, it is said that "it is possible for a Jew even now to have four or five wives" (Dialogue with Trypho, 134). Josephus can write: "By ancestral custom a man can live with more than one wife" (Antiquities of the Jews, 17: 1, 2).

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

Apart altogether from these unusual cases, divorce was tragically easy in the Jewish world. The Jews had the highest ideals of marriage. They said that a man must surrender his life rather than commit murder, idolatry or adultery. They had the belief that marriages are made in heaven. In the story of the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca it is said: "The thing comes from the Lord" (Gen.24:50). This was taken to mean that the marriage was arranged by God. So it is said in Prov.19:14: "A prudent wife is from the Lord." In the story of Tobit, the angel says to Tobit: "Fear not for she was prepared for thee from the beginning" (Tob.6:17). The Rabbis said: "God sits in heaven arranging marriages." "Forty days before the child is formed a heavenly voice proclaims its mate."

For all that, the Jewish law allowed divorce. Marriage was indeed the ideal but divorce was permitted. Marriage was "inviolable but not indissoluble." The Jews held that once the marriage ideal had been shattered by cruelty or infidelity or incompatibility, it was far better to allow a divorce and to permit the two to make a fresh start. The great tragedy was that the wife had no rights whatsoever. Josephus says: "With us it is lawful for a husband to dissolve a marriage, but a wife, if she departs from her husband, cannot marry another, unless her former husband put her away" (Antiquities of the Jews, 15: 8, 7). In a case of divorce by consent, in the time of the New Testament, all that was required was two witnesses, and no court case at all. A husband could send his wife away for any cause; at the most a wife could petition the court to urge her husband to write her a bill of divorcement, but it could not compel him even to do that.

In face of that situation, things came to such a pass that "women refused to contract marriages, and men grew grey and celibate." A brake was put upon this process by legislation introduced by Simon ben Shetah. A Jewish wife always brought her husband a dowry which was called Kethubah. Simon enacted that a man had unrestricted use of the Kethubah, so long as he remained married to his wife, but on divorce he was absolutely liable to repay it, even if he had "to sell his hair" to do so. This checked divorce; but the Jewish system was always vitiated by the fact that the wife had no rights.

In the heathen world things were infinitely worse. There, too, according to Roman law, the wife had no rights. Cato said: "If you were to take your wife in adultery, you could kill her with impunity, without any court judgment; but if you were involved in adultery, she would not dare to lift a finger against you, for it is unlawful." Things grew so bad, and marriage grew so irksome, that in 131 B.C. a well-known Roman called Metellus Macedonicus made a statement which Augustus was afterwards to quote: "If we could do without wives, we would be rid of that nuisance. But since nature has decreed that we can neither live comfortably with them, nor live at all without them, we must look rather to our permanent interests than to passing pleasure."

Even the Roman poets saw the dreadfulness of the situation. "Ages rich in sin," wrote Horace, "were the first to taint marriage and family life. From this source the evil has overflowed." "Sooner will the seas be dried up," said Propertius, "and the stars be raft from heaven, than our women reformed." Ovid wrote his famous, or infamous, book The Art of love, and never from beginning to end mentions married love.

He wrote cynically: "These women alone are pure who are unsolicited, and a man who is angry at his wife's love affair is nothing but a rustic boor." Seneca declared: "Anyone whose affairs have not

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

become notorious, and who does not pay a married woman a yearly fee, is despised by women as a mere lover of girls; in fact husbands are got as a mere decoy for lovers." "Only the ugly," he said, "are loyal." "A woman who is content to have only two followers is a paragon of virtue." Tacitus commended the supposedly barbarian German tribes for "not laughing at evil, and not making seduction the spirit of the age." When a marriage took place, the home to which the couple were going was decorated with green bay leaves. Juvenal said that there were those who entered on divorce before the bays of welcome had faded. In 19 B.C.

a man named Quintus Lucretius Vespillo erected a tablet to his wife which said: "Seldom do marriages last until death undivorced; but ours continued happily for forty-one years." The happy marriage was the astonishing exception.

Ovid and Pliny had three wives; Caesar and Antony had four; Sulla and Pompey had five; Herod had nine; Cicero's daughter Tullia had three husbands. The Emperor Nero was the third husband of Poppaea and the fifth husband of Statilla Messalina.

It was not for nothing that the Pastorals laid it down that the Christian leader must be the husband of one wife. In a world where even the highest places were deluged with immorality, the Christian Church must demonstrate the chastity, the stability and the sanctity of the Christian home.

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

THE CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADER

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (Part 4)

The Christian leader must be sober (nephaios, GSN3524) and he must not over-indulge in wine, (paroinos, GSN3943). In the ancient world wine was continually used. Where the water supply was very inadequate and sometimes dangerous, wine was the most natural drink of all. It is wine which cheers the hearts of gods and men (Judg.9:13). In the restoration of Israel she will plant her vineyards and drink her wine (Am.9:14). Strong drink is given to those who are ready to perish, and wine to those whose hearts are heavy (Prov.31:6).

This is not to say that the ancient world was not fully alive to the dangers of strong drink. Proverbs speaks of the disaster which comes to the man who looks on the wine when it is red (Prov.23:29-35). Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler (Prov.20:1). There are terrible stories of what happened to people through over-indulgence in wine. There is the case of Noah (Gen.9:18-27); of Lot (Gen.19:30-38); of Amnon (2Sam.13:28-29). Although the ancient world used wine as the commonest of all drinks, it used it most abstemiously. When wine was drunk, it was drunk in the proportion of two parts of wine to three parts of water. A man who was drunken would be disgraced in ordinary heathen society, let alone in the Church.

The interesting thing is the double meaning that both words in this section possess. Nephaios (GSN3524) means sober, but it also means watchful and vigilant; paroinos (GSN3943) means addicted to wine, but it also means quarrelsome and violent. The point that the Pastorals make here is that the Christian must allow himself no indulgence which would lessen his Christian vigilance or soil his Christian conduct.

There follow two Greek words which describe two great qualities which must characterize the Christian leader. He must be prudent (sophron, GSN4998) and well-behaved (kosmios, GSN2887).

We have translated sophron (GSN4998) by prudent, but it is virtually untranslatable. It is variously translated of sound mind, discreet, prudent, self-controlled, chaste, having complete control over sensual desires. The Greeks derived it from two words which mean to keep one's mind safe and sound. The corresponding noun is sophrosune (GSN4997), and the Greeks wrote and thought much about it. It is the opposite of intemperance and lack of self-control. Plato defined it as "the mastery of pleasure and desire." Aristotle defined it as "that power by which the pleasures of the body are used as law commands." Philo defined it as "a certain limiting and ordering of the desires, which eliminates those which are external and excessive, and which adorns those which are necessary with timeliness and moderation." Pythagoras said that it was "the foundation on which the soul rests." Iamblichus said that "it is the safeguard of the most excellent habits in life." Euripides said that it was "the fairest gift of God." Jeremy Taylor called it "reason's girdle and passion's bridle." Trench describes sophrosune (GSN4997) as "the condition of entire command over the passions and desires, so that they receive no further allowance than that which law and right reason admit and approve." Gilbert Murray wrote of sophron (GSN4998): "There is a way of thinking which destroys and a way which saves."

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

The man or woman who is sophron (GSN4998) walks among the beauties and perils of the world, feeling love, joy, anger, and the rest; and through all he has that in his mind which saves. Whom does it save? Not him only, but, as we should say, the whole situation. It saves the imminent evil from coming to be." E. F. Brown quotes in illustration of sophrosune (GSN4997) a prayer of Thomas Aquinas which asks for "a quieting of all our impulses, fleshly and spiritual."

The man who is sophron (GSN4998) has every part of his nature under perfect control, which is to say that the man who is sophron (GSN4998) is the man in whose heart Christ reigns supreme.

The companion word is kosmios (GSN2887), which we have translated well-behaved. If a man is kosmios (GSN2887) in his outer conduct it is because he is sophron (GSN4998) in his inner life. Kosmios (GSN2887) means orderly, honest, decorous. In Greek it has two special usages. It is common in tributes and in inscriptions to the dead. And it is commonly used to describe the man who is a good citizen. Plato defines the man who is kosmios (GSN2887) as "the citizen who is quiet in the land, who duly fulfils in his place and order the duties which are incumbent upon him as such." This word has more in it than simply good behaviour. It describes the man whose life is beautiful and in whose character all things are harmoniously integrated.

The leader of the Church must be a man who is sophron (GSN4998), his every instinct and desire under perfect control; he must be a man who is kosmios (GSN2887), his inner control issuing in outward beauty. The leader must be one in whose heart Christ's power reigns and on whose life Christ's beauty shines.

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

THE CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADER

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (Part 5)

The Christian leader must be hospitable (philoxenos, GSN5382). This is a quality on which the New Testament lays much stress. Paul bids the Roman Church to "practise hospitality" (Rom.12:13). "Practise hospitality ungrudgingly to one another," says Peter (1Pet.4:9). In the Shepherd of Hermas, one of the very early Christian writings, it is laid down: "The episkopos (GSN1985) must be hospitable, a man who gladly and at all times welcomes into his house the servants of God." The Christian leader must be a man with an open heart and an open house.

The ancient world was very careful of the rights of the guest. The stranger was under the protection of Zeus Xenios, the Protector of Strangers. in the ancient world, inns were notoriously bad. In one of Aristophanes' plays Heracles asks his companion where they will lodge for the night; and the answer is: "Where the fleas are fewest." Plato speaks of the inn-keeper being like a pirate who holds his guests to ransom. Inns tended to be dirty and expensive and, above all, immoral. The ancient world had a system of what were called Guest Friendships. Over generations families had arrangements to give each other accommodation and hospitality. Often the members of the families came in the end to be unknown to each other by sight and identified themselves by means of what were called tallies.

The stranger seeking accommodation would produce one half of some object; the host would possess the other half of the tally; and when the two halves fitted each other the host knew that he had found his guest, and the guest knew that the host was indeed the ancestral friend of his household.

In the Christian Church there were wandering teachers and preachers who needed hospitality. There were also many slaves with no homes of their own to whom it was a great privilege to have the right of entry to a Christian home. It was of the greatest blessing that Christians should have Christian homes ever open to them in which they could meet people like-minded to themselves. We live in a world where there are still many who are far from home, many who are strangers in a strange place, many who live in conditions where it is hard to be a Christian. The door of the Christian home and the welcome of the Christian heart should be open to all such.

The Christian leader must be possessed of an aptitude for teaching (didaktikos, GSN1317). It has been said that his duty is "to preach to the unconverted and to teach the converted." There are two things to be said about this. It is one of the disasters of modern times that the teaching ministry of the Church is not being exercised as it should. There is any amount of topical preaching and any amount of exhortation; but there is little use in exhorting a man to be a Christian when he does not know what being a Christian means. Instruction is a primary duty of the Christian preacher and leader. The second thing is this. The finest and the most effective teaching is done not by speaking but by being. Even the man with no gift of words can teach, by living in such a way that in him men see the reflection of the Master. A saint has been defined as someone "in whom Christ lives again."

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1 Timothy 3:1-7

The Christian leader must not be a man who assaults others (plektes, GSN4131, a striker). That this instruction was not unnecessary is seen in one of the very early regulations of the Apostolic Canons: "A bishop, priest or deacon who smites the faithful when they err, or the unbelievers when they commit injury, and desires by such means as this to terrify them, we command to be deposed; for nowhere hath the Lord taught us this. When he was reviled, he reviled not again, but the contrary. When he was smitten, he smote not again; when he suffered, he threatened not." It will not be likely that any Christian leader will nowadays strike another Christian, but the fact remains that blustering, bullying, irritable, bad-tempered speech or action is forbidden to the Christian.

The Christian leader must be gentle. The Greek is epieikes (GSN1933), another of these completely untranslatable words. The noun is epieikeia (GSN1932) and Aristotle describes it as "that which corrects justice" and as that which "is just and better than justice." He said that it was that quality which corrects the law when the law errs because of its generality. What he means is that sometimes it may actually be unjust to apply the strict letter of the law. Trenchard said that epieikeia (GSN1932) means "retreating from the letter of right better to preserve the spirit of right" and is "the spirit which recognizes the impossibility of cleaving to all formal law...that recognizes the danger that ever waits upon the assertion of legal rights, lest they should be pushed into moral wrongs...the spirit which rectifies and redresses the injustice of justice." Aristotle describes in full the action of epieikeia (GSN1932): "To pardon human failings; to look to the law-giver, not to the law; to the intention, not to the action; to the whole, not to the part; to the character of the actor in the long run and not in the present moment; to remember good rather than evil, and the good that one has received rather than the good that one has done; to bear being injured; to wish to settle a matter by words rather than deeds." If there is a matter under dispute, it can be settled by consulting a book of practice and procedure, or it can be settled by consulting Jesus Christ.

If there is a matter of debate, it can be settled in law, or it can be settled in love. The atmosphere of many a Church would be radically changed if there was more epieikeia (GSN1932) within it.

The Christian leader must be peaceable (amachos, GSN0269). The Greek word means disinclined to fight. There are people who, as we might put it, are "trigger-happy" in their relationships with other people. But the real Christian leader wants nothing so much as he wants peace with his fellow-men.

The Christian leader must be free from the love of money. He will never do anything simply for profit's sake. He will know that there are values which are beyond all money price.

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1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13

THE MEN OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12, 13

In the same way, the deacons must be men of dignity, men who are straight, men who are not given to over-indulgence in wine, men who are not prepared to stoop to disgraceful ways of making money; they must hold the secret of the faith which has been revealed to them with a clear conscience. The deacons too must first of all be put upon probation, and, if they emerge blameless from the test, let them become deacons.... Deacons must be married only once; they must manage their own children and their own homes well. For those who make a fine job of the office of deacon win for themselves a fine degree of honour, and they gain much boldness in their faith in Christ Jesus.

In the early Church the function of the deacons lay much more in the sphere of practical service. The Christian Church inherited a magnificent organization of charitable help from the Jews. No nation has ever had such a sense of responsibility for the poorer brother and sister as the Jews. The synagogue had a regular organization for helping such people. The Jews rather discouraged the giving of individual help to individual people. They preferred that help should be given through the community and especially through the synagogue.

Each Friday in every community two official collectors went round the markets and called on each house, collecting donations for the poor in money and in goods. The material so collected was distributed to those in need by a committee of two, or more if necessary. The poor of the community were given enough food for fourteen meals, that is for two meals a day for the week; but no one could receive from this fund if he already possessed a week's food in the house. This fund for the poor was called the Kuppah, or the basket. In addition to this there was a daily collection of food from house to house for those who were actually in emergency need that day. This fund was called the Tamhui or the tray. The Christian Church inherited this charitable organization, and no doubt it was the task of the deacons to attend to it.

Many of the qualifications of the deacon are the same as for the episkopos (GSN1985). They are to be men of dignified character; they are to be abstemious; they are not to soil their hands with disreputable ways of making money; they have to undergo a test and a time of probation; they must practise what they preach, so that they can hold the Christian faith with a clear conscience.

One new qualification is added; they are to be straight. The Greek is that they must not be dilogos (GSN1351), and dilogos means speaking with two voices, saying one thing to one and another to another. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* John Bunyan puts into By-ends' mouth a description of the people who live in the town of Fair-speech. There is my Lord Turn-about, my Lord Time-Server, my Lord Fair-speech, after whose ancestors the town was named, Mr. Smooth-man, Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Any-thing; and the parson of the parish, Mr. Two-tongues. A deacon, in his going from house to house, and in his dealing with those who needed charity, had to be a straight man. Again and again he would be tempted to evade issues by a little timely hypocrisy and smooth speaking. But the man who would do the work of the Christian Church must be straight.

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1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13

It is clear that the man who performs well the office of deacon can look for promotion to the high office of elder, and will gain such a confidence in the faith that he can look any man in the face.

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1 Timothy 3:11

WOMEN WHO SERVE THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 3:11

In the same way, the women must be dignified; they must not be given to slanderous gossip; they must be sober; they must be in all things reliable.

As far as the Greek goes, this could refer to the wives of the deacons, or to women engaged in a similar service. It seems far more likely that it refers to women who are also engaged upon this work of charity. There must have been acts of kindness and of help which only a woman could properly do for another woman. Certainly in the early Church there were deaconesses. They had the duty of instructing female converts and in particular of presiding and attending at their baptism, which was by total immersion.

It was necessary that such women workers should be warned against slanderous gossip and bidden to be absolutely reliable. When a young doctor graduates and before he begins to practise, he takes the Hippocratic oath, and part of that oath is a pledge never to repeat anything that he has heard in the house of a patient, or anything that he has heard about a patient, even if he has heard it on the street. In the work of helping the poor, things might easily be heard and be repeated and infinite damage done. It is not any insult to women that the Pastorals specially forbid gossip to them. In the nature of things a woman runs more risk of gossip than a man. A man's work takes him out into the world; a woman of necessity lives in a narrower sphere and for that very reason has fewer things to talk about. This increases the danger of talking about the personal relationships from which slanderous gossip arises. Whether man or woman, a tale-bearing, confidence-repeating Christian is a monstrous thing.

In Greek civilization it was essential that the women workers of the Church should preserve their dignity. The respectable Greek woman lived in the greatest seclusion; she never went out alone; she never even shared meals with her men folk. Pericles said that the duty of an Athenian mother was to live so retired a life that her name should never be mentioned among men for praise or blame. Xenophon tells how a country gentleman who was a friend of his said about the young wife whom he had just married and whom he dearly loved. "What was she likely to know when I married her? Why, she was not yet fifteen when I introduced her to my house, and she had been brought up always under the strictest supervision; as far as could be managed, she had not been allowed to see anything, hear anything or ask any questions." That is the way in which respectable Greek girls were brought up.

Xenophon gives a vivid picture of one of these girl-wives gradually "growing accustomed to her husband and becoming sufficiently tame to hold conversation with him."

Christianity emancipated women; it liberated them from a kind of slavery. But there were dangers. She who was liberated might misuse her new-found freedom; the respectable world might be shocked by such an emancipation; and so the Church had to lay down its regulations. It was by wisely using freedom, and not misusing it, that women came to hold the proud position in the Church which they hold today.

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1 Timothy 3:14-15

THE PRIVILEGE AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 3:14-15

I am writing these things to you, hoping, as I write, to come to you soon. But I am writing, so that, if I am delayed, you may know how to behave yourselves in the household of God, which is the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and buttress of the truth.

Here in one phrase is the reason why the Pastoral Epistles were written; they were written to tell men how to behave within the Church. The word for to behave is *anastrephesthai* (GSN0390); it describes what we might call a man's walk and conversation. It describes his whole life and character; but it specially describes him in his relationships with other people. As it has been said, the word in itself lays it down that a church member's personal character must be excellent and that his personal relationships with other people should be a true fellowship. A church congregation is a body of people who are friends with God and friends with each other. Paul goes on to use four words which describe four great functions of the Church.

(i) The Church is the household (*oikos*, GSN3624) of God. First and foremost it must be a family. In a despatch written after one of his great naval victories, Nelson ascribed his victory to the fact that he "had the happiness to command a band of brothers." Unless a church is a band of brothers it is not a true church at all. Love of God can exist only where brotherly love exists.

(ii) The Church is the assembly (*ekklesia*, GSN1577) of the living God. The word *ekklesia* (GSN1577) literally means a company of people who have been called out. It does not mean that they have been selected or picked out. In Athens the *ekklesia* (GSN1577) was the governing body of the city; and its membership consisted of all the citizens met in assembly. But, very naturally, at no time did all attend. The summons went out to come to the Assembly of the City, but only some citizens answered it and came. God's call has gone out to every man; but only some have accepted it; and they are the *ekklesia* (GSN1577), the Church. It is not that God has been selective. The invitation comes to all; but to an invitation there must be a response.

(iii) The Church is the pillar of the truth (*stulos*, GSN4769). In Ephesus, to which these letters were written, the word pillar would have a special significance. The greatest glory of Ephesus was the Temple of Diana or Artemis. "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Ac.19:28). It was one of the seven wonders of the world. One of its features was its pillars. It contained one hundred and twenty-seven pillars, every one of them the gift of a king. All were made of marble, and some were studded with jewels and overlaid with gold. The people of Ephesus knew well how beautiful a thing a pillar could be. It may well be that the idea of the word pillar here is not so much support--that is contained in buttress--as display. Often the statue of a famous man is set on the top of a pillar that it may stand out above all ordinary things and so be clearly seen, even from a distance. The idea here is that the Church's duty is to hold up the truth in such a way that all men may see it.

(iv) The Church is the buttress (*hedraioma*, GSN1477) of the truth. The buttress is the support of the building. It keeps it standing intact. In a world which does not wish to face the truth, the Church

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1 Timothy 3:14-15

holds it up for all to see. In a world which would often gladly eliminate unwelcome truth, the Church supports it against all who would seek to destroy it.

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1 Timothy 3:16

A HYMN OF THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 3:16

As everyone must confess, great is the secret which God has revealed to us in our religion:

He who was manifested in the flesh: He who was vindicated by the Spirit: He who was seen by angels: He who has been preached among the nations: He in whom men have believed all over the world: He who was taken up into glory.

The great interest of this passage is that here we have a fragment of one of the hymns of the early Church. It is a setting of belief in Christ to poetry and to music, a hymn in which men sang their creed. We cannot expect in poetry the precision of statement for which we would look in a creed; but we must try to see what each line in this hymn is saying to us.

(i) He who was manifested in the flesh. Right at the beginning it stresses the real humanity of Jesus. It says: "Look at Jesus, and you will see the mind and the heart and the action of God, in a form that men can understand."

(ii) He who was vindicated by the Spirit. This is a difficult line. There are three things it may mean. (a) It may mean that all through his earthly days Jesus was kept sinless by the power of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who gives a man guidance; our error is that we so often refuse his guidance. It was Jesus' perfect submission to the Spirit of God which kept him without sin. (b) It may mean that Jesus' claims were vindicated by the action of the Spirit who dwelt in him. When Jesus was accused by the scribes and Pharisees of effecting cures by the power of the devil, his answer was: "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Matt.12:28). The power that was in Jesus was the power of the Spirit, and the mighty acts he performed were the vindication of the tremendous claims which he made. (c) It may be that this is a reference to the Resurrection.

Men took Jesus and crucified him as a criminal upon a cross; but through the power of the Spirit he rose again; the verdict of men was demonstrated to be false, and he was vindicated. No matter how we take this line, its meaning is that the Spirit is the power who proved Jesus to be what he claimed to be.

(iii) He who was seen by angels. Again there are three possible meanings. (a) It may be a reference to Jesus' life before he came to earth. (b) It may be a reference to his life on earth. Even on earth the hosts of heaven were looking on at his tremendous contest with evil. (c) It may connect with the belief of all men in the time of Jesus that the air was full of demonic and angelic powers. Many of these powers were hostile to God and to man, and bent on the destruction of Jesus. Paul at least once argued that they were bent on the destruction of Jesus through ignorance, and that Jesus brought to them and to men the wisdom which had been hidden since the world began (1Cor.2:7-8). This phrase may mean that Jesus brought the truth even to the angelic and demonic powers who had never known it. However we take it, it means that the work of Jesus is so tremendous that it includes both heaven and earth.

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1 Timothy 3:16

(iv) He who has been preached among the nations. Here we have the great truth that Jesus was the exclusive possession of no race. He was not the Messiah who had come to raise the Jews to earthly greatness, but the Saviour of the whole wide world.

(v) He in whom men have believed all over the world. Here is an almost miraculous truth stated with utter simplicity. After Jesus had died and risen again and ascended to his glory, the number of his followers was one hundred and twenty (Ac.1:15). All that his followers had to offer was the story of a Galilaean carpenter who had been crucified on a hilltop in Palestine as a criminal. And yet before seventy years had passed that story had gone out to the ends of the earth and men of every nation accepted this crucified Jesus as Saviour and Lord. In this simple phrase there is the whole wonder of the expansion of the Church, an expansion which on any human grounds is incredible.

(vi) He who was taken up into glory. This is a reference to the Ascension. The story of Jesus begins in heaven and ends in heaven. He lived as a servant; he was branded as a criminal; he was crucified on a cross; he rose with the nailprints still upon him; but the end is glory.

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1 Timothy 4:1-5

THE SERVICE OF GOD OR THE SERVICE OF SATAN

1 Timothy 4:1-5 (Part 1)

The Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will desert from the faith, through paying attention to spirits who can do nothing but lead them astray, and to teachings which come from the demons, teachings of false men whose characteristic is insincerity, teachings of men whose conscience has been branded with the mark of Satan, teachings of those who forbid marriage, and who order men to abstain from foods which God created in order that men might gratefully take their share of them in the company of those who believe and who really know the truth; for everything that God has made is good, and nothing is to be rejected, but it is to be gratefully received; for it is hallowed by the word of God and by prayer.

The Christian Church had inherited from the Jews the belief that in this world things would be a great deal worse before they were better. The Jews always thought of time in terms of two ages. There was this present age, which was altogether bad and in the grip of the evil powers; there was the age to come, which was to be the perfect age of God and of goodness. But the one age would not pass into the other without a last convulsive struggle. In between the two ages would come The Day of the Lord. On that day the world would be shaken to its foundations; there would be a last supreme battle with evil, a last universal judgment, and then the new day would dawn.

The New Testament writers took over that picture. Being Jews, they had been brought up in it. One of the expected features of the last age was heresies and false teachers. "Many false prophets will arise, and lead many astray" (Matt.24:11). "False Christs and false prophets will arise, and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect" (Mk.13:22). In these last days Paul looks for the emergence of "the man of sin, the son of perdition," who would set himself up against God (2Th.2:3).

Into the Church at Ephesus such false teachers had come. The way in which their false teaching is regarded in this passage should make us think very seriously. At that time men believed in evil spirits who haunted the air and were out to ruin men. It was from them that this false teaching came. But though it came from the demons, it came through men. It came through men whose characteristic was a smooth hypocrisy and whose consciences had been branded by Satan. It sometimes happened that a slave was branded with a mark identifying him as belonging to a certain owner. These false teachers bear upon their consciences the very brand of Satan, marking them out as his property.

Here is the threatening and the terrible thing. God is always searching for men who will be his instruments in the world; but the terrible fact is that the forces of evil are also looking for men to use. Here is the terrible responsibility of manhood. Men may accept the service of God or the service of the devil. Whose service are they to choose?

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1 Timothy 4:1-5

ENSLAVERS OF MEN AND INSULTERS OF GOD

1 Timothy 4:1-5 (Part 2)

The heretics of Ephesus were propagating a heresy with very definite consequences for life. As we have already seen, these heretics were Gnostics; and the essence of Gnosticism was that spirit is altogether good and matter altogether evil. One of the consequences was that there were men who preached that everything to do with the body was evil and that everything in the world was evil. In Ephesus this issued in two definite errors. The heretics insisted that men must, as far as possible, abstain from food, for food was material and therefore evil; food ministered to the body and the body was evil. They also insisted that a man must abstain from marriage, for the instincts of the body were evil and must be entirely suppressed.

This was an ever-recurring heresy in the Church; in every generation men arose who tried to be stricter than God. When the Apostolic Canons came to be written, it was necessary to set it down in black and white: "If any overseer, priest or deacon, or anyone on the priestly list, abstains from marriage and flesh and wine, not on the ground of asceticism (that is, for the sake of discipline), but through abhorrence of them as evil in themselves, forgetting that all things are very good, and that God made man male and female, but blaspheming and slandering the workmanship of God, either let him amend, or be deposed and cast out of the Church. Likewise a layman also" (Apostolic Canons 51). Irenaeus, writing towards the end of the second century, tells how certain followers of Saturninus "declare that marriage and generation are from Satan. Many likewise abstain from animal food, and draw away multitudes by a feigned temperance of this kind" (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 1, 24, 2).

This kind of thing came to a head in the monks and hermits of the fourth century. They went away and lived in the Egyptian desert, entirely cut off from men. They spent their lives mortifying the flesh. One never ate cooked food and was famous for his "fleshlessness." Another stood all night by a jutting crag so that it was impossible for him to sleep. Another was famous because he allowed his body to become so dirty and neglected that vermin dropped from him as he walked. Another deliberately ate salt in midsummer and then abstained from drinking water. "A clean body," they said, "necessarily means an unclean soul."

The answer to these men was that by doing things like that they were insulting God, for he is the creator of the world and repeatedly his creation is said to be good. "And God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good" (Gen.1:31). "Every moving thing that lives shall be meat for you" (Gen.9:3). "God created man in his own image...male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen.1:27-28).

But all God's gifts have to be used in a certain way.

(i) They have to be used in the memory that they are gifts of God There are things which come to us so unfailingly that we begin to forget that they are gifts and begin to take them as rights. We are to remember that all that we have is a gift from God and that there is not a living thing which could have life apart from him.

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1 Timothy 4:1-5

(ii) They have to be used in sharing. All selfish use is forbidden. No man can monopolize God's gifts; every man must share them.

(iii) They are to be used with gratitude. Always there is to be grace before meat. The Jew always said his grace. He had a grace for different things. When he ate fruits he said: "Blessed art thou, King of the Universe, who createst the fruit of the tree." When he drank wine he said: "Blessed art thou, King of the Universe, who createst the fruit of the vine." When he ate vegetables he said: "Blessed art thou, King of the Universe, who createst the fruit of the earth." When he ate bread he said: "Blessed art thou, King of the Universe, who bringest forth bread from the ground." The very fact that we thank God for it makes a thing sacred. Not even the demons can touch it when it has been touched by the Spirit of God.

The true Christian does not serve God by enslaving himself with rules and regulations and insulting his creation; he serves him by gratefully accepting his good gifts and remembering that this is a world where God made all things well and by never forgetting to share God's gifts with others.

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1 Timothy 4:6-10

ADVICE TO AN ENVOY OF CHRIST

1 Timothy 4:6-10

If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a fine servant of Jesus Christ, if you feed your life on the words of faith, and of the fine teaching of which you have been a student and a follower. Refuse to have anything to do with irreligious stories like the tales old women tell to children. Train yourself towards the goal of true godliness. The training of the body has only a limited value; but training in godliness has a universal value for mankind, because it has the promise of life in this present age, and life in the age to come. This is a saying which deserves to be accepted by all. The reason why we toil and struggle so hard is that we have set our hopes on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe.

This passage is close-packed with practical advice, not only for Timothy, but for any servant of the Church who is charged with the duty of work and leadership.

(i) It tells us how to instruct others. The word used for laying these things before the brothers is most suggestive (*hupotithesthai*, GSN5294). It does not mean to issue orders but rather to advise, to suggest. It is a gentle, humble, and modest word. It means that the teacher must never dogmatically and pugnaciously lay down the law. It means that he must act rather as if he was reminding men of what they already knew or suggesting to them, not that they should learn from him, but that they should discover from their own hearts what is right. Guidance given in gentleness will always be more effective than bullying instructions laid down with force. Men may be led when they will refuse to be driven.

(ii) It tells us how to face the task of teaching. Timothy is told that he must feed his life on the words of faith. No man can give out without taking in. He who would teach must be continually learning. It is the reverse of the truth that when a man becomes a teacher he ceases to be a learner; he must daily know Jesus Christ better before he can bring him to others.

(iii) It tells us what to avoid. Timothy is to avoid profitless tales like those which old women tell to children. It is easy to get lost in side-issues and to get entangled in things which are at best embroideries. It is on the great central truths that a man must ever feed his mind and nourish his faith.

(iv) It tells us what to seek. Timothy is told that as an athlete trains his body, so the Christian must train his soul. It is not that bodily fitness is despised. The Christian faith believes that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But there are certain things in Paul's mind. First, in the ancient world, especially in Greece, the gymnasias were dangerous places. Every town had its gymnasium; for the Greek youth between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, gymnastics were the main part of education. But the ancient world was riddled with homosexuality and the gymnasias were notorious as hotbeds of that particular sin. Second, Paul is pleading for a sense of proportion. Physical training is good, and even essential; but its use is limited. It develops only part of a man; and it produces only results which last for so short a time, for the body passes away. Training in godliness

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1 Timothy 4:6-10

develops the whole man in body, mind and spirit, and its results affect not only time, but eternity as well.

The Christian is not the athlete of the gymnasium, he is the athlete of God. The greatest of the Greeks well recognized this. Isocrates wrote: "No ascetic ought to train his body as a king ought to train his soul." "Train yourself by submitting willingly to toils, so that when they come on you unwillingly you will be able to endure them."

(v) It shows us the basis of the whole matter. No one has ever claimed that the Christian life is an easy way; but its goal is God. It is because life is lived in the presence of God and ends in his still nearer presence, that the Christian is willing to endure as he does. The greatness of the goal makes the toil worth while.

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1 Timothy 4:11-16

THE ONLY WAY TO SILENCE CRITICISM

1 Timothy 4:11-16 (Part 1)

Make it your business to hand on and to teach these commandments. Do not give anyone a chance to despise you because you are young; but in your words and in your conduct, in love, in loyalty and in purity, show yourself an example of what believing people should be. Until I come, devote your attention to the public reading of the scriptures, to exhortation and to teaching. Do not neglect the special gift which was given to you, when the voices of the prophets picked you out for the charge which has been given to you, when the body of the elders laid their hands upon you. Think about these things; find your whole life in them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; stick to them; for if you do, you will save yourself and those who hear you.

One of the difficulties Timothy had to overcome was that he was young. We are not to think of him as a mere stripling. After all, it was fifteen years since he had first become Paul's helper. The word used for youth (neotes, GSN3503) can in Greek describe anyone of military age, that is up to the age of forty. But the Church has generally liked its office-bearers to be men of maturity. The Apostolic Canons laid it down that a man was not to become a bishop until he was over fifty, for by then "he will be past youthful disorders." Timothy was young in comparison with Paul, and there would be many who would watch him with a critical eye. When the elder William Pitt was making a speech in the House of Commons at the age of thirty-three, he said: "The atrocious crime of being a young man...I will neither attempt to palliate or deny." The Church has always regarded youth with a certain suspicion, and under that suspicion Timothy inevitably fell.

The advice given to Timothy is the hardest of all to follow, and yet it was the only possible advice. It was that he must silence criticism by conduct. Plato was once falsely accused of dishonourable conduct. "Well," he said, "we must live in such a way that all men will see that the charge is false." Verbal defences may not silence criticism; conduct will. What then were to be the marks of Timothy's conduct?

(i) First, there was to be love. Agape (GSN0026), the Greek word for the greatest of the Christian virtues, is largely untranslatable. Its real meaning is unconquerable benevolence. If a man has agape (GSN0026), no matter what other people do to him or say of him, he will seek nothing but their good. He will never be bitter, never resentful, never vengeful; he will never allow himself to hate; he will never refuse to forgive. Clearly this is the kind of love which takes the whole of a man's personality to achieve. Ordinarily love is something which we cannot help. Love of our nearest and dearest is an instinctive thing. The love of a man for a maid is an experience unsought. Ordinarily love is a thing of the heart; but clearly this Christian love is a thing of the will. It is that conquest of self whereby we develop an unconquerable caring for other people. So then the first authenticating mark of the Christian leader is that he cares for others, no matter what they do to him.

That is something of which any Christian leader quick to take offence and prone to bear grudges should constantly think.

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1 Timothy 4:11-16

(ii) Second, there was to be loyalty. Loyalty is an unconquerable fidelity to Christ, no matter what it may cost. It is not difficult to be a good soldier when things are going well. But the really valuable soldier is he who can fight well when his body is weary and his stomach empty, when the situation seems hopeless and he is in the midst of a campaign the movements of which he cannot understand. The second authenticating mark of the Christian leader is a loyalty to Christ which defies circumstances.

(iii) Third, there was to be purity. Purity is unconquerable allegiance to the standards of Christ. When Pliny was reporting back to Trajan about the Christians in Bithynia, where he was governor, he wrote: "They are accustomed to bind themselves by an oath to commit neither theft, nor robbery, nor adultery; never to break their word; never to deny a pledge that has been made when summoned to answer for it." The Christian pledge is to a life of purity. The Christian ought to have a standard of honour and honesty, of self-control and chastity, of discipline and consideration, far above the standards of the world. The simple fact is that the world will never have any use for Christianity, unless it can prove that it produces the best men and women. The third authenticating mark of the Christian leader is a life lived on the standards of Jesus Christ.

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1 Timothy 4:11-16

THE DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADER WITHIN THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 4:11-16 (Part 2)

Certain duties are laid upon Timothy, the young leader designate of the Church. He is to devote himself to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation and to teaching. Here we have the pattern of the Christian Church service.

The very first description of a church service which we possess is in the works of Justin Martyr. About the year A.D. 170 he wrote a defence of Christianity to the Roman government, and in it (Justin Martyr: First Apology, 1: 67) he says: "On the day called the day of the Sun a gathering takes place of all who live in the towns or in the country in one place. The Memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. Then the reader stops, and the leader by word of mouth impresses and urges to the imitation of these good things. Then we all stand together and send forth prayers." So then in the pattern of any Christian service there should be four things.

(i) There should be the reading and exposition of scripture. Men ultimately do not gather together to hear the opinions of a preacher; they gather together to hear the word of God. The Christian service is Bible-centred.

(ii) There should be teaching. The Bible is a difficult book, and therefore it has to be explained. Christian doctrine is not easy to understand, but a man must be able to give a reason for the hope that is in him. There is little use in exhorting a man to be a Christian, if he does not know what being a Christian is. The Christian preacher has given many years of his life to gain the necessary equipment to explain the faith to others. He has been set free from the ordinary duties of life in order to think, to study and to pray that he may better expound the word of God. There can be no lasting Christian faith in any Church without a teaching ministry.

(iii) There should be exhortation. The Christian message must always end in Christian action. Someone has said that every sermon should end with the challenge: "What about it, chum?" It is not enough to present the Christian message as something to be studied and understood; it has to be presented as something to be done. Christianity is truth, but it is truth in action.

(iv) There should be prayer. The gathering meets in the presence of God; it thinks in the Spirit of God; it goes out in the strength of God. Neither the preaching nor the listening during the service, nor the consequent action in the world, is possible without the help of the Spirit of God.

It would do us no harm sometimes to test our modern services against the pattern of the first services of the Christian Church.

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1 Timothy 4:11-16

THE PERSONAL DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADER

1 Timothy 4:11-16 (Part 3)

Here in this passage is set out in the most vivid way the personal duty of the Christian leader.

(i) He must remember that he is a man set apart for a special task by the Church. The Christian leader does not make sense apart from the Church. His commission came from it; his work is within its fellowship; his duty is to build others into it. That is why the really important work of the Christian Church is never done by any itinerant evangelist but always by its settled ministry.

(ii) He must remember the duty to think about these things. His great danger is intellectual sloth and the shut mind, neglecting, to study and allowing his thoughts to continue in well-worn grooves. The danger is that new truths, new methods and the attempt to restate the faith in contemporary terms may merely annoy him. The Christian leader must be a Christian thinker or he fails in his task; and to be a Christian thinker is to be an adventurous thinker so long as life lasts.

(iii) He must remember the duty of concentration. The danger is that he may dissipate his energies on many things which are not central to the Christian faith. He is presented with the invitation to many duties and confronted with the claims of many spheres of service. There was a prophet who confronted Ahab with a kind of parable. He said that in a battle a man brought him a prisoner to guard, telling him that if the prisoner escaped his own life would be forfeit; but he allowed his attention to wander, and "as your servant was busy here and there he was gone" (1Kgs.20:35-43). It is easy for the Christian leader to be busy here and there, and to let the central things go. Concentration is a prime duty of the Christian leader.

(iv) He must remember the duty of progress. His progress must be evident to all men. It is all too true of most of us that the same things conquer us year in and year out; that as year succeeds year, we are no further on. The Christian leader pleads with others to become more like Christ. How can he do so with honesty unless he himself from day to day becomes more like the Master whose he is and whom he seeks to serve? When Kagawa decided to become a Christian, his first prayer was: "God, make me like Christ." The Christian leader's prayer must first be that he may grow more like Christ, for only thus will he be able to lead others to him.

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1 Timothy 5:1-2

THE DUTY TO REPRIMAND

1 Timothy 5:1-2 (Part 1)

If you have occasion to reprimand an older man, do not do so sharply, but appeal to him as you would to a father. Treat the younger men like brothers; the older women as mothers; the younger women as sisters, in complete purity.

It is always difficult to reprimand anyone with graciousness; and to Timothy there would sometimes fall a duty that was doubly difficult--that of reprimanding a man older than himself. Chrysostom writes: "Rebuke is in its own nature offensive particularly when it is addressed to an old man; and when it proceeds from a young man too, there is a threefold show of forwardness. By the manner and mildness of it, therefore, he would soften it. For it is possible to reprove without offence, if one will only make a point of this; it requires great discretion, but it may be done."

Rebuke is always a problem. We may so dislike the task of speaking a warning word that we may shirk it altogether. Many a person would have been saved from sorrow and shipwreck, if someone had only spoken a warning word in time. There can be no more poignant tragedy than to hear someone say: "I would never have come to this, if you had only spoken in time." It is always wrong to shirk the word that should be spoken.

We may reprimand a person in such a way that there is clearly nothing but anger in our voice and nothing but bitterness in our minds and hearts. A rebuke given solely in anger may produce fear; and may cause pain; but it will almost inevitably arouse resentment; and its ultimate effect may well be to confirm the mistaken person in the error of his ways. The rebuke of anger and the reprimand of contemptuous dislike are seldom effective, and far more likely to do harm than good.

It was said of Florence Allshorn, the great missionary teacher, that, when she was Principal of a women's college, she always rebuked her students, when need arose, as it were with her arm around them. The rebuke which clearly comes from love is the only effective one. If we ever have cause to reprimand anyone, we must do so in such a way as to make it clear that we do this, not because we find a cruel pleasure in it, not because we wish to do it, but because we are under the compulsion of love and seek to help, not to hurt.

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1 Timothy 5:1-2

THE RELATIONSHIPS OF LIFE

1 Timothy 5:1-2 (Part 2)

These two verses lay down the spirit which the different age relationships should display.

(i) To older people we must show affection and respect. An older man is to be treated like a father and an older woman like a mother. The ancient world knew well the deference and respect which were due to age. Cicero writes: "It is, then, the duty of a young man to show deference to his elders, and to attach himself to the best and most approved of them, so as to receive the benefit of their counsel and influence. For the inexperience of youth requires the practical wisdom of age to strengthen and direct it. And this time of life is above all to be protected against sensuality and trained to toil and endurance of both mind and body, so as to be strong for active duty in military and civil service. And even when they wish to relax their minds and give themselves up to enjoyment, they should beware of excesses and bear in mind the rules of modesty. And this will be easier, if the young are not unwilling to have their elders join them, even in their pleasures" (Cicero: *De Officiis*, 1: 34).

Aristotle writes: "To all older persons too one should give honour appropriate to their age, by rising to receive them and finding seats for them and so on" (Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9: 2). It is one of the tragedies of life that youth is so often apt to find age a nuisance. A famous French phrase says with a sigh: "If youth but had the knowledge, if age but had the power." But when there is mutual respect and affection, then the wisdom and experience of age can cooperate with the strength and enthusiasm of youth, to the great profit of both.

(ii) To our contemporaries we must show brotherliness. The younger men are to be treated like brothers. Aristotle has it: "To comrades and brothers one should allow freedom of speech and common use of all things" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9: 2). With our contemporaries there should be tolerance and sharing.

(iii) To those of the opposite sex our relationships must always be marked with purity. The Arabs have a phrase for a man of chivalry; they call him "a brother of girls." There is a famous phrase which speaks of "Platonic friendship." Love must be kept for one; it is a fearful thing when physical things dominate the relationship between the sexes and a man cannot see a woman without thinking in terms of her body.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Timothy 5:3-8

CHURCH AND FAMILY DUTY

1 Timothy 5:3-8

Honour widows who are genuinely in a widow's destitute position. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let such children learn to begin by discharging the duties of religion in their own homes; and let them learn to give a return for all that their parents have done for them; for this is the kind of conduct that meets with God's approval. Now she who is genuinely in the position of a widow, and who is left all alone, has set her hope on God, and night and day she devotes herself to petitions and prayers. But she who lives with voluptuous wantonness is dead even though she is still alive. Pass on these instructions that they may be irreproachable. If anyone fails to provide for his own people, and especially for the members of his own family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

The Christian Church inherited a fine tradition of charity to those in need. No people has ever cared more for its needy and its aged than the Jews. Advice is now given for the care of widows. There may well have been two classes of women here. There were certainly widows who had become widows in the normal way by the death of their husbands. But it was not uncommon in the pagan world, in certain places, for a man to have more than one wife. When a man became a Christian, he could not go on being a polygamist, and therefore had to choose which wife he was going to live with. That meant that some wives had to be sent away and they were clearly in a very unfortunate position. It may be that such women as these were also reckoned as widows and given the support of the Church.

Jewish law laid it down that at the time of his marriage a man ought to make provision for his wife, should she become a widow. The very first office-bearers whom the Christian Church appointed, had this duty of caring fairly for the widows (Ac.6:1). Ignatius lays it down: "Let not widows be neglected. After the Lord be thou their guardian." The Apostolic Constitutions enjoin the bishop: "O bishop, be mindful of the needy, both reaching out thy helping hand and making provision for them as the steward of God, distributing the offerings seasonably to every one of them, to the widows, the orphans, the friendless, and those tried with affliction." The same book has an interesting and kindly instruction: "If anyone receives any service to carry to a widow or poor woman...let him give it the same day." As the proverb has it: "He gives twice who gives quickly," and the Church was concerned that those in poverty might not have to wait and want while one of its servants delayed.

It is to be noted that the Church did not propose to assume responsibility for older people whose children were alive and well able to support them. The ancient world was very definite that it was the duty of children to support aged parents, and, as E. K. Simpson has well said: "A religious profession which falls below the standard of duty recognised by the world is a wretched fraud." The Church would never have agreed that its charity should become an excuse for children to evade their responsibility.

It was Greek law from the time of Solon that sons and daughters were, not only morally, but also legally bound to support their parents. Anyone who refused that duty lost his civil rights.

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1 Timothy 5:3-8

Aeschines, the Athenian orator, says in one of his speeches: "And whom did our law-giver (Solon) condemn to silence in the Assembly of the people? And where does he make this clear? 'Let there be,' he says, 'a scrutiny of public speakers, in case there be any speaker in the Assembly of the people who is a striker of his father or mother, or who neglects to maintain them or to give them a home'." Demosthenes says: "I regard the man who neglects his parents as unbelieving in and hateful to the gods, as well as to men." Philo, writing of the commandment to honour parents, says: "When old storks become unable to fly, they remain in their nests and are fed by their children, who go to endless exertions to provide their food because of their piety." To Philo it was clear that even the animal creation acknowledged its obligations to aged parents, and how much more must men? Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics lays it down: "It would be thought in the matter of food we should help our parents before all others, since we owe our nourishment to them, and it is more honourable to help in this respect the authors of our being, even before ourselves." As Aristotle saw it, a man must himself starve before he would see his parents starve.

Plato in *The Laws* has the same conviction of the debt that is owed to parents: "Next comes the honour of loving parents, to whom, as is meet, we have to pay the first and greatest and oldest of debts, considering that all which a man has belongs to those who gave him birth and brought him up, and that he must do all that he can to minister to them; first, in his property; secondly, in his person; and thirdly, in his soul; paying the debts due to them for their care and travail which they bestowed upon him of old in the days of his infancy, and which he is now able to pay back to them, when they are old and in the extremity of their need."

It is the same with the Greek poets. When Iphigenia is speaking to her father Agamemnon, in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, she says (the translation is that of A. S. Way):

"'Twas I first called thee father, thou me child.
'Twas I first throned my body on thy knees,
And gave thee sweet caresses and received.
And this thy word was: 'Ah, my little maid,
Blest shall I see thee in a husband's halls
Living and blooming worthily of me'
And as I twined my fingers in thy beard,
Whereto I now cling, thus I answered thee:
'And what of thee? Shall I greet thy grey hairs,
Father, with loving welcome in mine halls,
Repaying all thy fostering toil for me?'"

The child's joy was to look forward to the day when she could repay all that her father had done for her.

When Euripides tells how Orestes discovered that an unkind fate had made him unwittingly slay his own father, he makes him say:

"He fostered me a babe, and many a kiss
Lavished upon me....
O wretched heart and soul of mine!

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1 Timothy 5:3-8

I have rendered foul return! What veil of gloom
Can I take for my face? Before me spread
What cloud, to shun the old man's searching eye?"

To Euripides the most haunting sin on earth was failure in duty to a parent.

The New Testament ethical writers were certain that support of parents was an essential part of Christian duty. It is a thing to be remembered. We live in a time when even the most sacred duties are pushed on to the state and when we expect, in so many cases, public charity to do what private piety ought to do. As the Pastorals see it, help given to a parent is two things. First, it is an honouring of the recipient. It is the only way in which a child can demonstrate the esteem within his heart. Second, it is an admission of the claims of love. It is repaying love received in time of need with love given in time of need; and only with love can love be repaid.

There remains one thing left to say, and to leave it unsaid would be unfair. This very passage goes on to lay down certain of the qualities of the people whom the Church is called upon to support. What is true of the Church is true within the family. If a person is to be supported, that person must be supportable. If a parent is taken into a home and then by inconsiderate conduct causes nothing but trouble, another situation arises. There is a double duty here; the duty of the child to support the parent and the duty of the parent to be such that that support is possible within the structure of the home.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Timothy 5:9-10

AN HONOURED AND A USEFUL OLD AGE

1 Timothy 5:9-10 (Part 1)

Let a woman be enrolled as a widow only if she is more than sixty years of age; if she has been the wife of one husband; if she has earned an attested reputation for good works; if she has nourished children; if she has been hospitable to strangers; if she has helped those in trouble; if she has washed the feet of the saints; if she has devoted herself to every good work.

From this passage it is clear that the Church had an official register of widows; and it seems that the word widow is being used in a double sense. Women who were aged and whose husbands had died and whose lives were lovely and useful were the responsibility of the Church; but it is also true that, perhaps as early as this, and certainly later in the early Church, there was an official order of widows, an order of elderly women who were set apart for special duties.

In the regulations of the Apostolic Constitutions, which tell us what the life and organization of the Church were like in the third century, it is laid down: "Three widows shall be appointed, two to persevere in prayer for those who are in temptation, and for the reception of revelations, when such are necessary, but one to assist women who are visited with sickness; she must be ready for service, discreet, telling the elders what is necessary, not avaricious, not given to much love of wine, so that she may be sober and able to perform the night services, and other loving duties."

Such widows were not ordained as the elders and the bishops were; they were set apart by prayer for the work which they had to do. They were not to be set apart until they were over sixty years of age. That was an age which the ancient world also considered to be specially suited for concentration on the spiritual life. Plato, in his plan for the ideal state, held that sixty was the right age for men and women to become priests and priestesses.

The Pastoral Epistles are always intensely practical; and in this passage we find seven qualifications which the Church's widows must satisfy.

They must have been the wife of one husband. In an age when the marriage bond was lightly regarded and almost universally dishonoured, they must be examples of purity and fidelity.

They must have earned an attested reputation for good works. The office-bearers of the Church, male or female, have within their keeping, not only their personal reputation, but also the good name of the Church. Nothing discredits a church like unworthy office-bearers; and nothing is so good an advertisement for it as an office-bearer who has taken his Christianity into the activity of daily living.

They must have nourished children. This may well mean more than one thing. It may mean that widows must have given proof of their Christian piety by bringing up their own families in the Christian way. But it can mean more than that. In an age when the marriage bond was very lax and men and women changed their partners with bewildering rapidity, children were regarded as a misfortune. This was the great age of child exposure. When a child was born, he was brought and

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1 Timothy 5:9-10

laid before his father's feet. If the father stooped and lifted him, that meant that he acknowledged him and was prepared to accept responsibility for his upbringing. If the father turned and walked away, the child was quite literally thrown out, like an unwanted piece of rubbish. It often happened that such unwanted children were collected by unscrupulous people and, if girls, brought up to stock the public brothels, and, if boys, trained to be slaves or gladiators for the public games. It would be a Christian duty to rescue such children from death and worse than death, and to bring them up in a Christian home. So this may mean that widows must be women who had been prepared to give a home to abandoned children.

They must have been hospitable to strangers. Inns in the ancient world were notoriously dirty, expensive and immoral. Those who opened their homes to the traveller, or the stranger in a strange place, or to young people whose work and study took them far from home, were doing a most valuable service to the community. The open door of the Christian home is always a precious thing.

They must have washed the feet of the saints. That need not be taken literally, although the literal sense is included. To wash a person's feet was the task of a slave, the most menial of duties. This means that Christian widows must have been willing to accept the humblest tasks in the service of Christ and of his people. The Church needs its leaders who will live in prominence; but no less it needs those who are prepared to do the tasks which receive no prominence and little thanks.

They must have helped those in trouble. In days of persecution it was no small thing to help Christians who were suffering for their faith. This was to identify oneself with them and to accept the risk of coming to a like punishment. The Christian must stand by those in trouble for their faith, even if, in so doing, he brings trouble on himself.

They must have devoted themselves to all good works. Every man concentrates his life on something; the Christian concentrates his on obeying Christ and helping men.

When we study these qualifications for those who were to be enrolled as widows, we see that they are the qualifications of every true Christian.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Timothy 5:9-10

THE PRIVILEGE AND THE DANGERS OF SERVICE

1 Timothy 5:9-10 (Part 2)

As we have already said, if not as early as the time of the Pastoral Epistles, certainly in later days, the widows became an accepted order in the Christian Church. Their place and work are dealt with in the first eight chapters of the third book of The Apostolic Constitutions, and these chapters reveal the use that such an order could be and the dangers into which it almost inevitably ran.

(i) It is laid down that women who would serve the Church must be women of discretion. Particularly they must be discreet in speech: "Let every widow be meek, quiet, gentle, sincere, free from anger, not talkative, not clamorous, not hasty of speech, not given to evil-speaking, not captious, not double-tongued, not a busybody. If she see or hear anything that is not right, let her be as one that does not see, and as one that does not hear." Such Church officials must be very careful when they discuss the faith with outsiders: "For unbelievers when they hear the doctrine concerning Christ, not explained as it ought to be, but defectively, especially that concerning his Incarnation or his Passion, will rather reject it with scorn, and laugh at it as false, than praise God for it."

There is nothing more dangerous than an official of the Church who talks about things which ought to be kept secret; and a Church office-bearer must be equipped to communicate the gospel in a way that will make men think more and not less of Christian truth.

(ii) It is laid down that women who serve the Church must not be gadabouts: "Let the widow therefore own herself to be the 'altar of God,' and let her sit in her own house, and not enter into the houses of the unfaithful, under any pretence to receive anything; for the altar of God never runs about, but is fixed in one place. Let therefore the virgin and the widow be such as do not run about, or gad to the houses of those who are alien from the faith. For such as these are gadders and impudent." The restless gossip is ill-equipped to serve the Church.

(iii) It is laid down that widows who accept the charity of the Church are not to be greedy. "There are some widows who esteem gain their business; and since they ask without shame, and receive without being satisfied, render other people more backward in giving.... Such a woman is thinking in her mind of where she can go to get, or that a certain woman who is her friend has forgotten her, and she has something to say to her.... She murmurs at the deaconess who distributed the charity, saying, 'Do you not see that I am in more distress and need of your charity? Why therefore have you preferred her before me?'" It is an ugly thing to seek to live off the Church rather than for the Church.

(iv) It is laid down that such women must do all they can to help themselves: "Let her take wool and assist others rather than herself want from them." The charity of the Church does not exist to make people lazy and dependent.

(v) Such women are not to be envious and jealous: "We hear that some widows are jealous, envious calumniators, and envious of the quiet of others.... It becomes them when one of their

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1 Timothy 5:9-10

fellow-widows is clothed by anyone, or receives money, or meat, or drink, or shoes, at the refreshment of their sister, to thank God."

There we have at one and the same time a picture of the faults of which the Church is all too full, and of the virtues which should be the marks of the true Christian life.

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1 Timothy 5:11-16

THE PERILS OF IDLENESS

1 Timothy 5:11-16

Refuse to enrol the younger women as widows, for when they grow impatient with the restrictions of Christian widowhood, they wish to marry, and so deserve condemnation, because they have broken the pledge of their first faith; and, at the same time, they learn to be idle and to run from house to house. Yes, they can become more than idle; they can become gossips and busybodies, saying things which should not be repeated. It is my wish that the younger widows should marry, and bear children, and run a house and home, and give our opponents no chance of abuse. For, even as things are, some of them have turned aside from the way to follow Satan. If any believing person has widowed relations, let such a person help them, and let not the Church be burdened with the responsibility, so that it may care for those who are genuinely in the position of widows.

A passage like this reflects the situation in society in which the early Church found itself.

It is not that younger widows are condemned for marrying again. What is condemned is this. A young husband dies; and the widow, in the first bitterness of sorrow and on the impulse of the moment, decides to remain a widow all her life and to dedicate her life to the Church; but later she changes her mind and remarries. That woman is regarded as having taken Christ as her bridegroom. So that by marrying again she is regarded as breaking her marriage vow to Christ. She would have been better never to have taken the vow.

What complicated this matter very much was the social background of the times. It was next to impossible for a single or a widowed woman to earn her living honestly. There was practically no trade or profession open to her. The result was inevitable; she was almost driven to prostitution in order to live. The Christian woman, therefore, had either to marry or to dedicate her life completely to the service of the Church; there was no halfway house.

In any event the perils of idleness remain the same in any age. There was the danger of becoming restless; because a woman had not enough to do, she might become one of those creatures who drift from house to house in an empty social round. It was almost inevitable that such a woman would become a gossip; because she had nothing important to talk about, she would tend to talk scandal, repeating tales from house to house, each time with a little more embroidery and a little more malice. Such a woman ran the risk of becoming a busybody; because she had nothing of her own to take up her attention, she would be very apt to be over-interested and over-interfering in the affairs of others.

It was true then, as it is true now, that "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." The full life is always the safe life, and the empty life is always the life in peril.

So the advice is that these younger women should marry and engage upon the greatest task of all, rearing a family and making a home. Here we have another example of one of the main thoughts of the Pastoral Epistles. They are always concerned with how the Christian appears to the outside world. Does he give opportunity to criticize the Church or reason to admire it? It is always true that

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1 Timothy 5:11-16

"the greatest handicap the Church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians" and equally true that the greatest argument for Christianity is a genuinely Christian life.

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1 Timothy 5:17-22

RULES FOR PRACTICAL ADMINISTRATION

1 Timothy 5:17-22 (Part 1)

Let elders who discharge their duties well be judged worthy of double honour, especially those who toil in preaching and in teaching; for Scripture says: "You must not muzzle the ox when he is treading the corn," and, "The workman deserves his pay."

Do not accept an accusation against an elder unless on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Rebuke those who persist in sin in the presence of all, so that the others may develop a healthy fear of sinning.

I adjure you before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels that you keep these regulations impartially, and that you do nothing because of your own prejudices or predilection.

Do not be too quick to lay your hands on any man, and do not share the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

Here is a series of the most practical regulations for the life and administration of the Church.

(i) Elders are to be properly honoured and properly paid. When threshing was done in the East, the sheaves of corn were laid on the threshing-floor; then oxen in pairs were driven repeatedly across them; or they were tethered to a post in the middle and made to march round and round on the grain; or a threshing sledge was harnessed to them and the sledge was drawn to and fro across the corn. In all cases the oxen were left unmuzzled and were free to eat as much of the grain as they wished, as a reward for the work they were doing. The actual law that the ox must not be muzzled is in Deut.25:4.

The saying that the workman deserves his pay is a saying of Jesus (Lk.10:7). It is most likely a proverbial saying which he quoted. Any man who works deserves his support, and the harder he works, the more he deserves. Christianity has never had anything to do with the sentimental ethic which clamours for equal shares for all. A man's reward must always be proportioned to a man's toil.

It is to be noted what kind of elders are to be specially honoured and rewarded. It is those who toil in preaching and teaching. The elder whose service consisted only in words and discussion and argument is not in question here. He whom the Church really honoured was the man who worked to edify and build it up by his preaching of the truth and his educating of the young and of the new converts in the Christian way.

(ii) It was Jewish law that no man should be condemned on the evidence of a single witness: "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed, only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained" (Deut.19:15). The Mishnah, the codified Rabbinic law, in describing

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1 Timothy 5:17-22

the process of trial says: "The second witness was likewise brought in and examined. If the testimony of the two was found to agree, the case for the defence was opened." If a charge was supported by the evidence of only one witness, it was held that there was no case to answer.

In later times Church regulations laid it down that the two witnesses must be Christian, for it would have been easy for a malicious heathen to fabricate a false charge against a Christian elder in order to discredit him, and through him to discredit the Church. In the early days, the Church authorities did not hesitate to apply discipline, and Theodore of Mopseuestia, one of the early fathers, points out how necessary this regulation was, because the elders were always liable to be disliked and were specially open to malicious attack "due to the retaliation by some who had been rebuked by them for sin." A man who had been disciplined might well seek to get his own back by maliciously charging an elder with some irregularity or some sin.

This permanent fact remains, that this would be a happier world and the Church, too, would be happier, if people would realize that it is nothing less than sin to spread stories of whose truth they are not sure. Irresponsible, slanderous and malicious talk does infinite damage and causes infinite heartbreak, and such talk will not go unpunished by God.

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1 Timothy 5:17-22

RULES FOR PRACTICAL ADMINISTRATION

1 Timothy 5:17-22 (Part 2)

(iii) Those who persist in sin are to be publicly rebuked. That public rebuke had a double value. It sobered the sinner into a consideration of his ways; and it made others have a care that they did not involve themselves in a like humiliation. The threat of publicity is no bad thing, if it keeps a man in the right way, even from fear. A wise leader will know the time to keep things quiet and the time for public rebuke. But whatever happens, the Church must never give the impression that it is condoning sin.

(iv) Timothy is urged to administer his office without favouritism or prejudice. B. S. Easton writes: "The well-being of every community depends on impartial discipline." Nothing does more harm than when some people are treated as if they could do no wrong and others as if they could do no right. Justice is a universal virtue and the Church must surely never fall below the impartial standards which even the world demands.

(v) Timothy is warned not to be too hasty "in laying hands on any man." That may mean one of two things.

(a) It may mean that he is not to be too quick in laying hands on any man to ordain him to office in the Church. Before a man gains promotion in business, or in teaching, or in the army or the navy or the air force, he must give proof that he deserves it. No man should ever start at the top. This is doubly important in the Church; for a man who is raised to high office and then fails in it, brings dishonour, not only on himself, but also on the Church. In a critical world the Church cannot be too careful in regard to the kind of men whom it chooses as its leaders.

(b) In the early Church it was the custom to lay hands on a penitent sinner who had given proof of his repentance and had returned to the fold of the Church. It is laid down: "As each sinner repents, and shows the fruits of repentance, lay hands on him, while all pray for him." Eusebius tells us that it was the ancient custom that repentant sinners should be received back with the laying on of hands and with prayer. If that be the meaning here, it will be a warning to Timothy not to be too quick to receive back the man who has brought disgrace on the Church; to wait until he has shown that his penitence is genuine, and that he is truly determined to mould his life to fit his penitent professions. That is not for a moment to say that such a man is to be held at arms' length and treated with suspicion; he has to be treated with all sympathy and with all help and guidance in his period of probation.

But it is to say that membership of the Church is never to be treated lightly, and that a man must show his penitence for the past and his determination for the future, before he is received, not into the fellowship of the Church, but into its membership. The fellowship of the Church exists to help such people redeem themselves, but its membership is for those who have truly pledged their lives to Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Timothy 5:23

ADVICE FOR TIMOTHY

1 Timothy 5:23

Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine for the sake of your stomach, to help your frequent illnesses.

This sentence shows the real intimacy of these letters. Amidst the affairs of the Church and the problems of administration, Paul finds time to slip in a little bit of loving advice to Timothy about his health.

There had always been a strain of asceticism in Jewish religion. When a man took the Nazirite vow (Num.6:1-21) he was pledged never to taste any of the product of the vine: "He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar made from wine, or strong drink, and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins" (Num.6:3-4). The Rechabites also were pledged to abstain from wine. The Book of Jeremiah tells how Jeremiah went and set before the Rechabites wine and cups: "But they answered, We will drink no wine; for Jonadab, the son of Rechab our father, commanded us, You shall not drink wine, neither you nor your sons for ever; you shall not build a house; you shall not sow seed; you shall not plant or have a vineyard" (Jer.35:5-7).

Now Timothy was on one side a Jew--his mother was a Jewess (Ac.16:1)--and it may well be that from his mother he had inherited this ascetic way of living. On his father's side he was a Greek. We have already seen that at the back of the Pastorals there is the heresy of gnosticism which saw all matter as evil and often issued in asceticism; and it may well be that Timothy was unconsciously influenced by this Greek asceticism as well.

Here we have a great truth which the Christian forgets at his peril, that we dare not neglect the body, for often spiritual dullness and aridity come from the simple fact that the body is tired and neglected. No machine will run well unless it is cared for; and neither will the body. We cannot do Christ's work well unless we are physically fit to do it. There is no virtue--rather the reverse--in neglect of or contempt for the body. *Mens sana in corpore sano*, a healthy mind in a healthy body, was the old Roman ideal, and it is the Christian ideal too.

This is a text which has much troubled those who are advocates of total abstinence. It must be remembered that it does not give any man a licence to indulge in drink to excess; it simply approves the use of wine where it may be medically helpful. If it does lay down any principle at all, E. F. Brown has well stated it: "It shows that while total abstinence may be recommended as a wise counsel, it is never to be enforced as a religious obligation." Paul is simply saying that there is no virtue in an asceticism which does the body more harm than good.

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1 Timothy 5:24-25

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ULTIMATE CONCEALMENT

1 Timothy 5:24-25

Some men's sins are plain for all to see, and lead the way to judgment; the sins of others will duly catch up on them. Even so there are good deeds which are plain for all to see, and there are things of a very different quality which cannot be hidden.

This saying bids us leave things to God and be content. There are obvious sinners, whose sins are clearly leading to their disaster and their punishment; and there are secret sinners who, behind a front of unimpeachable rectitude, live a life that is in essence evil and ugly. What man cannot see, God does. "Man sees the deed, but God sees the intention." There is no escape from the ultimate confrontation with the God who sees and knows everything.

There are some whose good deeds are plain for all to see, and who have already won the praise and thanks and congratulations of men. There are some whose good deeds have never been noticed, never appreciated, never thanked, never praised, never valued as they ought to have been. They need not feel either disappointed or embittered. God knows the good deed also, and he will repay, for he is never in any man's debt.

Here we are told that we must neither grow angry at the apparent escape of others nor embittered at the apparent thanklessness of men, but that we must be content to leave all things to the ultimate judgment of God.

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1 Timothy 6:1-2

HOW TO BE A SLAVE AND A CHRISTIAN

1 Timothy 6:1-2

Let all those who are slaves under the yoke hold their own masters to be worthy of all respect, in order that no one may have an opportunity to speak evil of the name of God and the Christian teaching. If they have masters who are believers, let them not try to take advantage of them because they are brothers, but rather let them render even better service, because those who lay claim to that service are believers and beloved.

Beneath the surface of this passage there are certain supremely important Christian principles for everyday life and work.

The Christian slave was in a peculiarly difficult position. If he was the slave of a heathen master, he might very easily make it clear that he regarded his master as bound for perdition and himself as the heir of salvation. His Christianity might well give him a feeling of intolerant superiority which would create an impossible situation. On the other hand, if his master was a Christian, the slave might be tempted to take advantage of the relationship and to trade upon it, using it as an excuse for producing inefficient work in the expectation of escaping all punishment. He might think that the fact that both he and his master were Christians entitled him to all kinds of special consideration. There was an obvious problem here. We must note two general things.

(i) In those early days the Church did not emerge as the would-be destroyer of slavery by violent and sudden means. And it was wise. There were something like 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire. Simply because of their numbers they were always regarded as potential enemies. If ever there was a slave revolt it was put down with merciless force, because the Roman Empire could not afford to allow the slaves to rise. If a slave ran away and was caught, he was either executed or branded on the forehead with the letter F, which stood for fugitivus, which means runaway. There was indeed a Roman law which stated that if a master was murdered all his slaves could be examined under torture, and could indeed be put to death in a body. E. K. Simpson wisely writes: "Christianity's spiritual campaign would have been fatally compromised by stirring the smouldering embers of class-hatred into a devouring flame, or opening an asylum for runaway slaves in its bosom."

For the Church to have encouraged slaves to revolt against their masters would have been fatal. It would simply have caused civil war, mass murder, and the complete discredit of the Church. What happened was that as the centuries went on Christianity so permeated civilization that in the end the slaves were freed voluntarily and not by force. Here is a tremendous lesson. It is the proof that neither men nor the world nor society can be reformed by force and by legislation. The reform must come through the slow penetration of the Spirit of Christ into the human situation. Things have to happen in God's time, not in ours. In the end the slow way is the sure way, and the way of violence always defeats itself.

(ii) There is here the further truth, that "spiritual equality does not efface civil distinctions." It is a continual danger that a man may unconsciously regard his Christianity as an excuse for slackness

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1 Timothy 6:1-2

and inefficiency. Because he and his master are both Christians, he may expect to be treated with special consideration. But the fact that both master and man are Christian does not release the employee from doing a good day's work and earning his wage. The Christian is under the same obligation to submit to discipline and to earn his pay as any other man.

What then is the duty of the Christian slave as the Pastorals see it? It is to be a good slave. If he is not, if he is slack and careless, if he is disobedient and insolent, he merely supplies the world with ammunition to criticize the Church. The Christian workman must commend his Christianity by being a better workman than other people. In particular, his work will be done in a new spirit. He will not now think of himself as being unwillingly compelled to work; he will think of himself as rendering service to his master, to God and to his fellow-men. His aim will be, not to see how little can be forced out of him, but how much he can willingly do. As George Herbert had it:

"A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine."

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1 Timothy 6:3-5

FALSE TEACHERS AND FALSE TEACHING

1 Timothy 6:3-5 (Part 1)

If any man offers a different kind of teaching, and does not apply himself to sound words (it is the words of our Lord Jesus Christ I mean) and to godly teaching, he has become inflated with pride. He is a man of no understanding; rather he has a diseased addiction to subtle speculations and battles of words, which can be only a source of envy, strife, the exchange of insults, evil suspicions, continual altercations of men whose minds are corrupt and who are destitute of the truth, men whose belief is that religion is a means of making gain.

The circumstances of life in the ancient world presented the false teacher with an opportunity which he was not slow to take. On the Christian side, the Church was full of wandering prophets, whose very way of life gave them a certain prestige. The Christian service was much more informal than it is now. Anyone who felt he had a message was free to give it; and the door was wide open to men who were out to propagate a false and misleading message. On the heathen side, there were men called sophists (compare GSN4680), wise men, who made it their business, so to speak, to sell philosophy. They had two lines. They claimed for a fee to be able to teach men to argue cleverly; they were the men who with their smooth tongues and their adroit minds were skilled in "making the worse appear the better reason." They had turned philosophy into a way of becoming rich. Their other line was to give demonstrations of public speaking.

The Greek had always been fascinated by the spoken word; he loved an orator; and these wandering sophists went from town to town, giving their oratorical demonstrations. They went in for advertising on an intensive scale and even went the length of delivering by hand personal invitations to their displays. The most famous of them drew people literally by the thousand to their lectures; they were in their day the equivalent of the modern pop star. Philostratus tells us that Adrian, one of the most famous of them, had such a popular power that, when his messenger appeared with the news that he was to speak, even the senate and the circus emptied, and the whole population flocked to the Athenaeum to hear him. They had three great faults.

Their speeches were quite unreal. They would offer to speak on any subject, however remote and recondite and unlikely, that any member of the audience might propose. This is the kind of question they would argue; it is an actual example. A man goes into the citadel of a town to kill a tyrant who has been grinding down the people; not finding the tyrant, he kills the tyrant's son; the tyrant comes in and sees his dead son with the sword in his body, and in his grief kills himself; the man then claims the reward for killing the tyrant and liberating the people; should he receive it?

Their thirst was for applause. Competition between them was a bitter and a cut-throat affair. Plutarch tells of a travelling sophist called Niger who came to a town in Galatia where a prominent orator resided. A competition was immediately arranged. Niger had to compete or lose his reputation. He was suffering from a fishbone in his throat and had difficulty in speaking; but for the sake of prestige he had to go on. Inflammation set in soon after, and in the end he died. Dio Chrysostom paints a picture of a public place in Corinth with all the different kinds of competitors in full blast: "You might hear many poor wretches of sophists shouting and abusing each other, and their disciples, as they call them, squabbling, and many writers of books reading

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1 Timothy 6:3-5

their stupid compositions, and many poets singing their poems, and many jugglers exhibiting their marvels, and many soothsayers giving the meaning of prodigies, and a thousand rhetoricians twisting lawsuits, and no small number of traders driving their several trades." There you have just that interchange of insults, that envy and strife, that constant wordy altercation of men with decadent minds that the writer of the Pastorals deplores. "A sophist," wrote Philostratus, "is put out in an extempore speech by a serious-looking audience and tardy praise and no clapping." "They are all agape," said Dio Chrysostom, "for the murmur of the crowd....

Like men walking in the dark they move always in the direction of the clapping and the shouting." Lucian writes: "If your friends see you breaking down, let them pay the price of the suppers you give them by stretching out their arms and giving you a chance of thinking of something to say in the intervals between the rounds of applause." The ancient world well knew just the kind of false teacher who was invading the Church.

Their thirst was for praise, and their criterion was numbers. Epictetus has some vivid pictures of the sophist talking to his disciples after his performance. "'Well, what did you think of me today?' 'Upon my life, sir, I thought you were admirable.' 'What did you think of my best passage?' 'Which was that?' 'Where I described Pan and the Nymphs.' 'Oh, it was excessively well done.'" "'A much larger audience today, I think,' says the sophist. 'Yes, much larger,' responds the disciple. 'Five hundred, I should guess.' 'O, nonsense! It could not have been less than a thousand.' 'Why, that is more than Dio ever had. I wonder why it was? They appreciated what I said, too.' 'Beauty, sir, can move a stone.'" These performing sophists were "the pets of society." They became senators, governors, ambassadors. When they died monuments were erected to them, with inscriptions such as, "The Queen of Cities to the King of Eloquence."

The Greeks were intoxicated with the spoken word. Among them, if a man could speak, his fortune was made. It was against a background like that that the Church was growing up; and it is little wonder that this type of teacher invaded it. The Church gave him a new area in which to exercise his meretricious gifts and to gain a tinsel prestige and a not unprofitable following.

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1 Timothy 6:3-5

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FALSE TEACHER

1 Timothy 6:3-5 (Part 2)

Here in this passage are set out the characteristics of the false teacher.

(i) His first characteristic is conceit. His desire is not to display Christ, but to display himself. There are still preachers and teachers who are more concerned to gain a following for themselves than for Jesus Christ, more concerned to press their own views than to bring to men the word of God. In a lecture on his old teacher A. B. Bruce, W. M. Macgregor said: "One of our own Highland ministers tells how he had been puzzled by seeing Bruce again and again during lectures take up a scrap of paper, look at it and then proceed. One day he caught at the chance of seeing what this paper contained, and discovered on it an indication of the words: 'O, send out thy light and thy truth,' and thus he realized with awe that into his classroom the professor brought the majesty and the hopefulness of worship." The great teacher does not offer men his own farthing candle of illumination; he offers them the light and the truth of God.

(ii) His concern is with abstruse and recondite speculations. There is a kind of Christianity which is more concerned with argument than with life. To be a member of a discussion circle or a Bible study group and spend enjoyable hours in talk about doctrines does not necessarily make a Christian. J. S. Whale in his book *Christian Doctrine* has certain scathing things to say about this pleasant intellectualism: "We have as Valentine said of Thurio, 'an exchequer of words, but no other treasure.' Instead of putting off our shoes from our feet because the place whereon we stand is holy ground, we are taking nice photographs of the Burning Bush from suitable angles: we are chatting about theories of the Atonement with our feet on the mantelpiece, instead of kneeling down before the wounds of Christ." As Luther had it: "He who merely studies the commandments of God (*mandata Dei*) is not greatly moved.

But he who listens to God commanding (*Deum mandantem*), how can he fail to be terrified by majesty so great?" As Melancthon had it: "To know Christ is not to speculate about the mode of his Incarnation, but to know his saving benefits." Gregory of Nyssa drew a revealing picture of Constantinople in his day: "Constantinople is full of mechanics and slaves, who are all of them profound theologians, preaching in the shops and the streets. If you want a man to change a piece of silver, he informs you wherein the Son differs from the Father; if you ask the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Son is inferior to the Father; and if you enquire whether the bath is ready, the answer is that the Son is made out of nothing." Subtle argumentation and glib theological statements do not make a Christian. That kind of thing may well be nothing other than a mode of escape from the challenge of Christian living.

(iii) The false teacher is a disturber of the peace. He is instinctively competitive; he is suspicious of all who differ from him; when he cannot win in an argument he hurls insults at his opponent's theological position, and even at his character; in any argument the accent of his voice is bitterness and not love. He has never learned to speak the truth in love. The source of his bitterness is the exaltation of self; for his tendency is to regard any difference from or any criticism of his views as a personal insult.

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1 Timothy 6:3-5

(iv) The false teacher commercializes religion. He is out for profit. He looks on his teaching and preaching, not as a vocation, but as a career. One thing is certain--there is no place for careerists in the ministry of any Church. The Pastorals are quite clear that the labourer is worthy of his hire; but the motive of his work must be public service and not private gain. His passion is, not to get, but to spend and be spent in the service of Christ and of his fellow-men.

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1 Timothy 6:6-8

THE CROWN OF CONTENT

1 Timothy 6:6-8

And in truth godliness with contentment is great gain. We brought nothing into the world, and it is quite clear that we cannot take anything out of it either; but if we have food and shelter, we shall be content with them.

The word here used for contentment is *autarkeia* (0841). This was one of the great watchwords of the Stoic philosophers. By it they meant a complete self-sufficiency. They meant a frame of mind which was completely independent of all outward things, and which carried the secret of happiness within itself.

Contentment never comes from the possession of external things. As George Herbert wrote:

"For he that needs five thousand pounds to live
Is full as poor as he that needs but five."

Contentment comes from an inward attitude to life. In the Third part of Henry the Sixth, Shakespeare draws a picture of the king wandering in the country places unknown. He meets two gamekeepers and tells them that he is a king. One of them asks him:

"But, if thou be a king, where is thy crown?" And the king gives a great answer:

"My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not deck'd with diamonds and Indian stones,
Nor to be seen; my crown is call'd content--
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy."

Long ago the Greek philosophers had gripped the right end of the matter. Epicurus said of himself: "To whom little is not enough nothing is enough. Give me a barley cake and a glass of water and I am ready to rival Zeus for happiness." And when someone asked him for the secret of happiness, his answer was: "Add not to a man's possessions but take away from his desires."

The great men have always been content with little. One of the sayings of the Jewish Rabbis was: "Who is rich? He that is contented with his lot." Walter Lock quotes the kind of training on which a Jewish Rabbi engaged and the kind of life he lived: "This is the path of the Law. A morsel with salt shalt thou eat, thou shalt drink also water by measure, and shalt sleep upon the ground and live a life of trouble while thou toilest in the Law. If thou doest this, happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee --, happy shalt thou be in this world and it shall be well with thee in the world to come." The Rabbi had to learn to be content with enough. E. F. Brown quotes a passage from the great preacher Lacordaire: "The rock of our present day is that no one knows how to live upon little. The great men of antiquity were generally poor...."

It always seems to me that the retrenchment of useless expenditure, the laying aside of what one may call the relatively necessary, is the high road to Christian disentanglement of heart, just as it

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1 Timothy 6:6-8

was to that of ancient vigour. The mind that has learned to appreciate the moral beauty of life, both as regards God and men, can scarcely be greatly moved by any outward reverse of fortune; and what our age wants most is the sight of a man, who might possess everything, being yet willingly contented with little. For my own part, humanly speaking, I wish for nothing. A great soul in a small house is the idea which has touched me more than any other."

It is not that Christianity pleads for poverty. There is no special virtue in being poor, or in having a constant struggle to make ends meet. But it does plead for two things.

It pleads for the realization that it is never in the power of things to bring happiness. E. K. Simpson says: "Many a millionaire, after choking his soul with gold-dust, has died from melancholia." Happiness always comes from personal relationships. All the things in the world will not make a man happy if he knows neither friendship nor love. The Christian knows that the secret of happiness lies, not in things, but in people.

It pleads for concentration upon the things which are permanent. We brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of it. The wise men of every age and faith have known this. "You cannot," said Seneca, "take anything more out of the world than you brought into it." The poet of the Greek anthology had it: "Naked I set foot on the earth; naked I shall go below the earth." The Spanish proverb grimly puts it: "There are no pockets in a shroud." E. K. Simpson comments: "Whatever a man amasses by the way is in the nature of luggage, no part of his truest personality, but something he leaves behind at the toll-bar of death."

Two things alone a man can take to God. He can, and must, take himself; and therefore his great task is to build up a self he can take without shame to God. He can, and must, take that relationship with God into which he has entered in the days of his life. We have already seen that the secret of happiness lies in personal relationships, and the greatest of all personal relationships is the relationship to God. And the supreme thing that a man can take with him is the utter conviction that he goes to One who is the friend and lover of his soul.

Content comes when we escape the servitude to things, when we find our wealth in the love and the fellowship of men, and when we realize that our most precious possession is our friendship with God, made possible through Jesus Christ.

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1 Timothy 6:9-10

THE PERIL OF THE LOVE OF MONEY

1 Timothy 6:9-10

Those who wish to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many senseless and harmful desires for the forbidden things, desires which swamp men in a sea of ruin and total loss in time and in eternity. For the love of money is a root from which all evils spring; and some, in their reaching out after it, have been sadly led astray, and have transfigured themselves with many pains.

Here is one of the most misquoted sayings in the Bible. Scripture does not say that money is the root of all evil; it says that the love of money is the root of all evil. This is a truth of which the great classical thinkers were as conscious as the Christian teachers. "Love of money," said Democritus, "is the metropolis of all evils." Seneca speaks of "the desire for that which does not belong to us, from which every evil of the mind springs." "The love of money," said Phocylides, "is the mother of all evils." Philo spoke of "love of money which is the starting-place of the greatest transgressions of the Law." Athenaeus quotes a saying: "The belly's pleasure is the beginning and root of all evil."

Money in itself is neither good nor bad; but the love of it may lead to evil. With it a man may selfishly serve his own desires; with it he may answer the cry of his neighbours need. With it he may facilitate the path of wrong-doing; with it he may make it easier for someone else to live as God meant him to do. Money is not itself an evil, but it is a great responsibility. It is powerful to good and powerful to evil. What then are the special dangers involved in the love of money?

(i) The desire for money tends to be a thirst which is insatiable. There was a Roman proverbial saying that wealth is like sea-water; so far from quenching a man's thirst, it intensifies it. The more he gets, the more he wants.

(ii) The desire for wealth is founded on an illusion. It is founded on the desire for security; but wealth cannot buy security. It cannot buy health, nor real love; and it cannot preserve from sorrow and from death. The security which is founded on material things is foredoomed to failure.

(iii) The desire for money tends to make a man selfish. If he is driven by the desire for wealth, it is nothing to him that someone has to lose in order that he may gain. The desire for wealth fixes a man's thoughts upon himself, and others become merely means or obstacles in the path to his own enrichment. True, that need not happen; but in fact it often does.

(iv) Although the desire for wealth is based on the desire for security, it ends in nothing but anxiety. The more a man has to keep, the more he has to lose and, the tendency is for him to be haunted by the risk of loss. There is an old fable about a peasant who rendered a great service to a king who rewarded him with a gift of much money. For a time the man was thrilled, but the day came when he begged the king to take back his gift, for into his life had entered the hitherto unknown worry that he might lose what he had. John Bunyan was right:

"He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride;

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1 Timothy 6:9-10

He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.
I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much;
And, Lord, contentment still I crave,
Because Thou savest such.
Fullness to such a burden is
That go on pilgrimage;
Here little, and hereafter bliss,
Is best from age to age."

(v) The love of money may easily lead a man into wrong ways of getting it, and therefore, in the end, into pain and remorse. That is true even physically. He may so drive his body in his passion to get, that he ruins his health. He may discover too late what damage his desire has done to others and be saddled with remorse.

To seek to be independent and prudently to provide for the future is a Christian duty; but to make the love of money the driving-force of life cannot ever be anything other than the most perilous of sins.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Timothy 6:11-16

CHALLENGE TO TIMOTHY

1 Timothy 6:11-16 (Part 1)

But you, O man of God, flee from these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, to which you are called, now that you have witnessed a noble profession of your faith in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the sight of God, who makes all things alive, and in the sight of Christ Jesus, who, in the days of Pontius Pilate, witnessed his noble confession, that you keep the commandment, that you should be without spot and without blame, until the day when our Lord Jesus Christ appears, that appearance which in his own good times the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords will show, he who alone possesses immortality, he who dwells in the light that no man can approach, he whom no man has seen or ever can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen.

The letter comes to an end with a tremendous challenge to Timothy, a challenge all the greater because of the deliberate sonorous nobility of the words in which it is clothed.

Right at the outset Timothy is put upon his mettle. He is addressed as man of God. That is one of the great Old Testament titles. It is a title given to Moses. Deut.33:1 speaks of "Moses, the man of God." The title of Ps.90 is, "A Prayer of Moses the man of God." It is a title of the prophets and the messengers of God. God's messenger to Eli is a man of God (1Sam.2:27). Samuel is described as a man of God (1Sam.9:6). Shemaiah, God's messenger to Rehoboam, is a man of God (1Kgs.12:22). John Bunyan in Pilgrim's Progress calls Great-Grace "God's Champion."

Here is a title of honour. When the charge is given to Timothy, he is not reminded of his own weakness and sin, which might well have reduced him to pessimistic despair; rather he is challenged by the honour which is his, of being God's man. It is the Christian way, not to depress a man by branding him as a lost and helpless sinner, but rather to uplift him by summoning him to be what he has got it in him to be. The Christian way is not to fling a man's humiliating past in his face, but to set before him the splendour of his potential future. The very fact that Timothy was addressed as "Man of God" would make him square his shoulders and throw his head back as one who has received his commission from the King.

The virtues and noble qualities set before Timothy are not just heaped haphazardly together. There is an order in them. First, there comes "righteousness," *dikaiousune* (GSN1343). This is defined as "giving both to men and to God their due." It is the most comprehensive of the virtues; the righteous man is he who does his duty to God and to his fellow-men.

Second, there comes a group of three virtues which look towards God. Godliness, *eusebeia* (GSN2150), is the reverence of the man who never ceases to be aware that all life is lived in the presence of God. Faith, *pistis* (GSN4102), here means fidelity, and is the virtue of the man who, through all the chances and the changes of life, down even to the gates of death, is loyal to God. Love, *agape* (GSN0026), is the virtue of the man who, even if he tried, could not forget what God has done for him nor the love of God to men.

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1 Timothy 6:11-16

Third, there comes the virtue which looks to the conduct of life. It is hupomone (GSN5281), The King James Version translates this patience; but hupomone (GSN5281) never means the spirit which sits with folded hands and simply bears things, letting the experiences of life flow like a tide over it. It is victorious endurance. "It is unswerving constancy to faith and piety in spite of adversity and suffering." It is the virtue which does not so much accept the experiences of life as conquers them.

Fourthly, there comes the virtue which looks to men. The Greek word is paupatheia. It is translated gentleness but is really untranslatable. It describes the spirit which never blazes into anger for its own wrongs but can be devastatingly angry for the wrongs of others. It describes the spirit which knows how to forgive and yet knows how to wage the battle of righteousness. It describes the spirit which walks at once in humility and yet in pride of its high calling from God. It describes the virtue by which at all times a man is enabled rightly to treat his fellow-men and rightly to regard himself.

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1 Timothy 6:11-16

MEMORIES WHICH INSPIRE

1 Timothy 6:11-16 (Part 2)

As Timothy is challenged to the task of the future, he is inspired with the memories of the past.

(i) He is to remember his baptism and the vows he took there. In the circumstances of the early Church, baptism was inevitably adult baptism, for men were coming straight from heathenism to Christ. It was confession of faith and witness to all men that the baptised person had taken Jesus Christ as Saviour, Master and Lord. The earliest of all Christian confessions was the simple creed: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Rom.10:9; Php.2:11). But it has been suggested that behind these words to Timothy lies a confession of faith which said: "I believe in God the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Christ Jesus who suffered under Pontius Pilate and will return to judge; I believe in the Resurrection from the dead and in the life immortal." It may well have been a creed like that to which Timothy gave his allegiance. So, then, first of all, he is reminded that he is a man who has given his pledge. The Christian is first and foremost a man who has pledged himself to Jesus Christ.

(ii) He is to remember that he has made the same confession of his faith as Jesus did. When Jesus stood before Pilate, Pilate said: "Are you the King of the Jews?" and Jesus answered: "You have said so" (Lk.23:3). Jesus had witnessed that he was a King; and Timothy always had witnessed to the lordship of Christ. When the Christian confesses his faith, he does what his Master has already done; when he suffers for his faith, he undergoes what his Master has already undergone. When we are engaged on some great enterprise, we can say: "Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod," but when we confess our faith before men, we can say even more; we can say: "I stand with Christ"; and surely this must lift up our hearts and inspire our lives.

(iii) He is to remember that Christ comes again. He is to remember that his life and work must be made fit for him to see. The Christian is not working to satisfy men; he is working to satisfy Christ. The question he must always ask himself is not: "Is this good enough to pass the judgment of men?" but: "Is it good enough to win the approval of Christ?"

(iv) Above all he is to remember God. And what a memory that is! He is to remember the One who is King of every king and Lord of every lord; the One who possesses the gift of life eternal to give to men; the One whose holiness and majesty are such that no man can ever dare look upon them. The Christian must ever remember God and say: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

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1 Timothy 6:17-19

ADVICE TO THE RICH

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Charge those who are rich in this world's goods not to be proud, and not set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who gives them all things richly to enjoy. Charge them to do good; to find their wealth in noble deeds; to be ready to share all that they have; to be men who never forget that they are members of a fellowship; to lay up for themselves the treasure of a fine foundation for the world to come. that they may lay hold on real life.

Sometimes we think of the early Church as composed entirely of poor people and slaves. Here we see that even as early as this it had its wealthy members. They are not condemned for being wealthy nor told to give all their wealth away; but they are told what not to do and what to do with it.

Their riches must not make them proud. They must not think themselves better than other people because they have more money than they. Nothing in this world gives any man the right to look down on another, least of all the possession of wealth. They must not set their hopes on wealth. In the chances and the changes of life a man may be wealthy today and a pauper tomorrow; and it is folly to set one's hopes on what can so easily be lost.

They are told that they must use their wealth to do good; that they must ever be ready to share; and that they must remember that the Christian is a member of a fellowship. And they are told that such wise use of wealth will build for them a good foundation in the world to come. As someone put it: "What I kept, I lost; what I gave I have."

There is a famous Jewish Rabbinic story. A man called Monobaz had inherited great wealth, but he was a good, a kindly and a generous man. In time of famine he gave away all his wealth to help the poor. His brothers came to him and said: "Your fathers laid up treasure, and added to the treasure that they had inherited from their fathers, and are you going to waste it all?" He answered: "My fathers laid up treasure below: I have laid it up above. My fathers laid up treasure of Mammon: I have laid up treasure of souls. My fathers laid up treasure for this world: I have laid up treasure for the world to come."

Every time we could give and do not give lessens the wealth laid up for us in the world to come; every time we give increases the riches laid up for us when this life comes to an end.

The teaching of the Christian ethic is, not that wealth is a sin, but that it is a very great responsibility. If a man's wealth ministers to nothing but his own pride and enriches no one but himself, it becomes his ruination, because it impoverishes his soul. But if he uses it to bring help and comfort to others, in becoming poorer, he really becomes richer. In time and in eternity "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

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1 Timothy 6:20-21

A FAITH TO HAND ON

1 Timothy 6:20-21

O Timothy, guard the trust that has been entrusted to you. Avoid irreligious empty talking; and the paradoxes of that knowledge which has no right to be called knowledge, which some have professed, and by so doing have missed the target of the faith.

Grace be with you.

It may well be that the name Timothy is here used in the fullness of its meaning. It comes from two words, timan (GSN5091), to honour, and theos (GSN2316), God and literally means he who honours God. It may well be that this concluding passage begins by reminding Timothy of his name and urging him to be true to it.

The passage talks of the trust that has been entrusted to him. The Greek word for trust is paratheke (GSN3866), which literally means a deposit. It is the word for money deposited with a banker or with a friend. When such money was in time demanded back, it was a sacred duty to hand it back entire. Sometimes children were called a paratheke (GSN3866), a sacred trust. If the gods gave a man a child, it was his duty to present that child trained and equipped to the gods.

The Christian faith is like that, something which we received from our forefathers, and which we must pass on to our children. E. F. Brown quotes a famous passage from St. Vincent of Lerins: "What is meant by the deposit? (paratheke, GSN3866). That which is committed to thee, not that which is invented by thee; that which thou hast received, not that which thou hast devised; a thing not of wit, but of learning; not of private assumption, but of public tradition; a thing brought to thee, not brought forth of thee; wherein thou must not be an author, but a keeper; not a leader, but a follower. Keep the deposit. Preserve the talent of the Catholic faith safe and undiminished; let that which is committed to thee remain with thee, and that deliver. Thou hast received gold, render gold."

A man does well to remember that his duty is not only to himself, but also to his children and his children's children. If in our day the Church were to become enfeebled; if the Christian ethic were to be more and more submerged in the world; if the Christian faith were to be twisted and distorted; it would not only be we who were the losers, those of generations still to come would be robbed of something infinitely precious. We are not only the possessors but also the trustees of the faith. That which we have received, we must also hand on.

Finally the Pastorals condemn those who, as the King James Version has it, have given themselves to "the oppositions of science falsely so-called." First, we must note that here the word science is used in its original sense; it simply means knowledge (gnosis, GSN1108). What is being condemned is a false intellectualism and a false stressing of human knowledge.

But what is meant by oppositions? The Greek word is antitheseis (GSN0477). Very much later than this there was a heretic called Marcion who produced a book called The Antitheseis in which

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he quoted Old Testament texts and set beside them New Testament texts which contradicted them. This might very well mean: "Don't waste your time seeking out contradictions in Scripture. Use the Scriptures to live by and not to argue about." But there are two meanings more probable than that.

(i) The word antithesis (GSN0477) could mean a controversy; and this might mean: "Avoid controversies; don't get yourself mixed up in useless and bitter arguments." This would be a very relevant bit of advice to a Greek congregation in Ephesus. The Greek had a passion for going to law. He would even go to law with his own brother, just for the pleasure of it. This may well mean, "Don't make the Church a battle-ground of theological arguments and debates. Christianity is not something to argue about, but something to live by."

(ii) The word antithesis (GSN0477) can mean a rival thesis. This is the most likely meaning, because it suits Jew and Gentile alike. The scholastics in the later days used to argue about questions like: "How many angels can stand on the point of a needle?" The Jewish Rabbis would argue about hair-splitting points of the law for hours and days and even years. The Greeks were the same, only in a still more serious way. There was a school of Greek philosophers, and a very influential school it was, called the Academics. The Academics held that in the case of everything in the realm of human thought, you could by logical argument arrive at precisely opposite conclusions. They therefore concluded that there is no such thing as absolute truth; that always there were two hypotheses of equal weight. They went on to argue that, this being so, the wise man will never make up his mind about anything but will hold himself for ever in a state of suspended judgment.

The effect was of course to paralyse all action and to reduce men to complete uncertainty. So Timothy is told: "Don't waste your time in subtle arguments; don't waste your time in 'dialectical fencing.' Don't be too clever to be wise. Listen rather to the unequivocal voice of God than to the subtle disputations of over-clever minds."

So the letter draws to a close with a warning which our own generation needs. Clever argument can never be made a substitute for Christian action. The duty of the Christian is not to sit in a study and weigh arguments but to live the Christian life in the dust and heat of the world. In the end it is not intellectual cleverness, but conduct and character which count.

Then comes the closing blessing--"Grace be with you." The letter ends with the beauty of the grace of God.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS TO TIMOTHY AND TITUS

PERSONAL LETTERS

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus have always been regarded as forming a separate group of letters, different from the other letters of Paul. The most obvious difference is that they, along with the little letter to Philemon, are written to persons, whereas all other Pauline letters are written to Churches. The Muratorian Canon, which was the earliest official list of New Testament books, says that they were written "from personal feeling and affection." They are private rather than public letters.

ECCLESIASTICAL LETTERS

But it very soon began to be seen that, though these are personal and private letters, they have a significance and a relevance far beyond the immediate. In 1Tim.3:15 their aim is set down. They are written to Timothy "that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God." So, then, it came to be seen that these letters have not only a personal significance, but also what one might call an ecclesiastical significance. The Muratorian Canon says of them that, though they are personal letters written out of personal affection, "they are still hallowed in the respect of the Catholic Church, and in the arrangement of ecclesiastical discipline." Tertullian said that Paul wrote "two letters to Timothy and one to Titus, which were composed concerning the state of the Church (de ecclesiastico statu)." It is not then surprising that the first name given to them was Pontifical Letters, that is, written by the pontifex, the priest, the controller of the Church.

PASTORAL LETTERS

Bit by bit they came to acquire the name by which they are still known--The Pastoral Epistles. In writing of I Timothy Thomas Aquinas, as long ago as 1274, said, "This letter is as it were a pastoral rule which the Apostle delivered to Timothy." In his introduction to the second letter, he writes, "In the first letter he gives Timothy instructions concerning ecclesiastical order; in this second letter he deals with a pastoral care which should be so great that it will even accept martyrdom for the sake of the care of the flock." But this title, The Pastoral Epistles, really became affixed to these letters in 1726 when a great scholar, Paul Anton by name, gave a series of famous lectures on them under that title.

These letters then deal with the care and organization of the flock of God; they tell men how to behave within the household of God; they give instructions as to how God's house should be administered, as to what kind of people the leaders and pastors of the Church should be, and as to how the threats which endanger the purity of Christian faith and life should be dealt with.

THE GROWING CHURCH

The supreme interest of these letters is that we get in them a picture of the infant Church. In those early days it was an island in a sea of paganism. The people in it were only one remove from their

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heathen origin. It would have been so easy for them to relapse into the pagan standards from which they had come; the tarnishing atmosphere was all around. It is most significant that missionaries tell us that of all letters the Pastoral Epistles speak most directly to the situation of the younger Churches. The situation with which they deal is being re-enacted in India, in Africa, in China every day. They can never lose their interest because in them we see, as nowhere else, the problems which continually beset the growing Church.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PASTORALS

From the beginning these letters have presented problems to New Testament scholars. There are many who have felt that, as they stand, they cannot have come directly from the hand and pen of Paul. That this is no new feeling may be seen from the fact that Marcion, who, although he was a heretic, was the first man to draw up a list of New Testament books, did not include them among Paul's letters. Let us then see what makes people doubt their direct Pauline authorship.

In them we are confronted with the picture of a Church with a fairly highly developed ecclesiastical organization. There are elders (1Tim.5:17-19; Tit.1:5-6); there are bishops, superintendents or overseers (1Tim.3:1-7; Tit.1:7-16); there are deacons (1Tim.3:8-13). From 1Tim.5:17-18 we learn that by that time elders were even salaried officials. The elders that rule well are to be counted worthy of a double pay and the Church is urged to remember that the labourer is worthy of his hire. There is at least the beginning of the order of widows who became so prominent later on in the early Church (1Tim.5:3-16). There is clearly here a quite elaborate structure within the Church, too elaborate some would claim for the early days in which Paul lived and worked.

THE DAYS OF CREEDS

It is even claimed that in these letters we can see the days of creeds emerging. The word faith changed its meaning. In the earliest days it is always faith in a person; it is the most intimate possible personal connection of love and trust and obedience with Jesus Christ. In later days it became faith in a creed; it became the acceptance of certain doctrines. It is said that in the Pastoral Epistles we can see this change emerging.

In the later days men will come who will depart from the faith and give heed to doctrines of devils (1Tim.4:1). A good servant of Jesus Christ must be nourished in the words of faith and good doctrine (1Tim.4:6). The heretics are men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith (2Tim.3:8). The duty of Titus is to rebuke men that they may be sound in the faith (Tit.1:13).

This comes out very particularly in an expression peculiar to the Pastorals. Timothy is urged to keep hold of "the truth that has been entrusted to you" (2Tim.1:14). The word for that has been entrusted is *paratheke* (GSN3866). *Paratheke* means a deposit which has been entrusted to a banker or someone else for safe-keeping. It is essentially something which must be handed back or handed on absolutely unchanged. That is to say the stress is on orthodoxy. Instead of being a close, personal relationship to Jesus Christ, as it was in the thrilling and throbbing days of the early

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Church, faith has become the acceptance of a creed. It is even held that in the Pastorals we have echoes of the earliest creeds.

"God was manifested in the flesh;
Vindicated in the Spirit;
Seen by angels;
Preached among the nations;
Believed on in the world;
Taken up in glory" (1Tim.3:16).

That indeed sounds like the fragment of a creed to be recited.

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel" (2Tim.2:8).

That sounds like a reminder of a sentence from an accepted creed.

Within the Pastorals there undoubtedly are indications that the day of insistence on acceptance of a creed has begun, and that the days of the first thrilling personal discovery of Christ are beginning to fade.

A DANGEROUS HERESY

It is clear that in the forefront of the situation against which the Pastoral Epistles were written there was a dangerous heresy which was threatening the welfare of the Christian Church. If we can distinguish the various characteristic features of that heresy, we may be able to go on to identify it.

It was characterized by speculative intellectualism. It produced questions (1Tim.1:4); those involved in it doted about questions (1Tim.6:4); it dealt in foolish and unlearned questions (2Tim.2:23); its foolish questions are to be avoided (Tit.3:9). The word used in each case for questions is *ekzesis* (compare GSN1567 and GSN2214), which means speculative discussion. This heresy was obviously one which was a play-ground of the intellectuals, or rather the pseudo-intellectuals of the Church.

It was characterized by pride. The heretic is proud, although in reality he knows nothing (1Tim.6:4). There are indications that these intellectuals set themselves on a plane above the ordinary Christian; in fact they may well have said that complete salvation was outside the grasp of the ordinary man and open only to them. At times the Pastoral Epistles stress the word *all* in a most significant way. The grace of God, which brings salvation, has appeared to all men (Tit.2:11). It is God's will that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1Tim.2:4). The intellectuals tried to make the greatest blessings of Christianity the exclusive possession of a chosen few; and in contradistinction the true faith stresses the all-embracing love of God.

There were within that heresy two opposite tendencies. There was a tendency to asceticism. The heretics tried to lay down special food laws, forgetting that everything God has made is good

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(1Tim.4:4-5). They listed many things as impure, forgetting that to the pure all things are pure (Tit.1:15). It is not impossible that they regarded sex as something unclean and belittled marriage, and even tried to persuade those who were married to renounce it, for in Tit.2:4 the simple duties of the married life are stressed as being binding on the Christian.

But this heresy also issued in immorality. The heretics even invaded private houses and led away weak and foolish women in evil desires (2Tim.3:6). They professed to know God, but denied him by their deeds (Tit.1:16). They were out to impose upon people and to make money out of their false teaching. To them gain was godliness (1Tim.6:5); they taught and deceived for base gain (Tit.1:11).

On the one hand this heresy issued in an unchristian asceticism, and on the other it produced an equally unchristian immorality.

It was characterized, too, by words and tales and genealogies. It was full of godless chatter and useless controversies (1Tim.6:20). It produced endless genealogies (1Tim.1:4; Tit.3:9). It produced myths and fables (1Tim.1:4; Tit.1:14).

It was at least in some way and to some extent tied up with Jewish legalism. Amongst its devotees were those of the circumcision (Tit.1:10). The aim of the heretics was to be teachers of the law (1Tim.1:7). It pressed on men Jewish fables and the commandments of men (Tit.1:14).

Finally, these heretics denied the resurrection of the body. They said that any resurrection that a man was going to experience had been experienced already (2Tim.2:18). This is probably a reference to those who held that the only resurrection the Christian experienced was a spiritual one when he died with Christ and rose again with him in the experience of baptism (Rom.6:4).

THE BEGINNINGS OF GNOSTICISM

Is there any heresy which fits all this material? There is, and its name is Gnosticism. The basic thought of Gnosticism was that all matter is essentially evil and spirit alone is good. That basic belief had certain consequences.

The Gnostic believed that matter is as eternal as God; and that when God created the world he had to use this essentially evil matter. That meant that to them God could not be the direct creator of the world. In order to touch this flawed matter he had to send out a series of emanations--they called them aeons--each one more and more distant from himself until at last there came an emanation or aeon so distant that it could deal with matter and create the world. Between man and God there stretched a series of these emanations, each with his name and genealogy. So Gnosticism literally had endless fables and endless genealogies. If a man was ever to get to God, he must, as it were, ascend this ladder of emanations; and to do that he needed a very special kind of knowledge including all kinds of passwords to get him past each stage. Only a person of the highest intellectual calibre could hope to acquire this knowledge and know these passwords and so get to God.

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Further, if matter was altogether evil, the body was altogether evil. From that, two opposite possible consequences sprang. Either the body must be held down so that a rigorous asceticism resulted, in which the needs of the body were as far as possible eliminated and its instincts, especially the sex instinct, as far as possible destroyed; or it could be held that, since it was evil, it did not matter what was done with the body and its instincts and desires could be given full rein. The Gnostic therefore became either an ascetic or a man to whom morality had ceased to have any relevance at all.

Still further, if the body was evil, clearly there could be no such thing as its resurrection. It was not the resurrection of the body but its destruction to which the Gnostic looked forward.

All this fits accurately the situation of the Pastoral Epistles. In Gnosticism we see the intellectualism, the intellectual arrogance, the fables and the genealogies, the asceticism and the immorality, the refusal to contemplate the possibility of a bodily resurrection, which were part and parcel of the heresy against which the Pastoral Epistles were written.

One element in the heresy has not yet been fitted into place--the Judaism and the legalism of which the Pastoral Epistles speak. That too finds its place. Sometimes Gnosticism and Judaism joined hands. We have already said that the Gnostics insisted that to climb the ladder to God a very special knowledge was necessary; and that some of them insisted that for the good life a strict asceticism was essential. It was the claim of certain of the Jews that it was precisely the Jewish law and the Jewish food regulations which provided that special knowledge and necessary asceticism; and so there were times when Judaism and Gnosticism went hand in hand.

It is quite clear that the heresy at the back of the Pastoral Epistles was Gnosticism. Some have used that fact to try to prove that Paul could have had nothing to do with the writing of them, because, they say, Gnosticism did not emerge until much later than Paul. It is quite true that the great formal systems of Gnosticism, connected with such names as Valentinus and Basilides, did not arise until the second century; but these great figures only systematized what was already there. The basic ideas of Gnosticism were there in the atmosphere which surrounded the early Church, even in the days of Paul. It is easy to see their attraction, and also to see that, if they had been allowed to flourish unchecked, they could have turned Christianity into a speculative philosophy and wrecked it. In facing Gnosticism, the Church was facing one of the gravest dangers which ever threatened the Christian faith.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE PASTORALS

The most impressive argument against the direct Pauline origin of the Pastorals is a fact which is quite clear in the Greek but not so clear in any English translation. The total number of words in the Pastoral Epistles is 902, of which 54 are proper names; and of these 902 words, no fewer than 306 never occur in any other of Paul's letters. That is to say more than a third of the words in the Pastoral Epistles are totally absent from Paul's other letters. In fact 175 words in the Pastoral Epistles occur nowhere else in the New Testament at all; although it is only fair to say that there are 50 words in the Pastoral Epistles which occur in Paul's other letters and nowhere else in the New Testament.

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Further, when the other letters of Paul and the Pastorals say the same thing they say it in different ways, using different words and different turns of speech to express the same idea.

Again, many of Paul's favourite words are absent entirely from the Pastoral Epistles. The words for the cross (stauros, GSN4716) and to crucify (stauroun, GSN4717) occur 27 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals. Eleutheria (GSN1657) and the kindred words which have to do with freedom occur 29 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals. Huios (GSN5207), "son," and huiiothesia (GSN5206), "adoption," occur 46 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals.

Moreover, Greek has many more of those little words called particles and enclitics than English has. Sometimes they indicate little more than a tone of voice; every Greek sentence is joined to its predecessor by one of them; and they are often virtually untranslatable. Of these particles and enclitics there are 112 which Paul uses altogether 932 times in his other letters that never occur in the Pastorals.

There is clearly something which has to be explained here. The vocabulary and the style make it hard to believe that Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles in the same sense as he wrote his other letters.

PAUL'S ACTIVITIES IN THE PASTORALS

But perhaps the most obvious difficulty of the Pastorals is that they show Paul engaged in activities for which there is no room in his life as we know it from the book of Acts. He has clearly conducted a mission in Crete (Tit.1:5). And he proposes to spend a winter in Nicopolis, which is in Epirus (Tit.3:12). In Paul's life as we know it that particular mission and that particular winter just cannot be fitted in. But it may well be that just here we have stumbled on the solution to the problem.

WAS PAUL RELEASED FROM HIS ROMAN IMPRISONMENT?

Let us sum up. We have seen that the Church organization of the Pastorals is more elaborate than in any other Pauline letter. We have seen that the stress on orthodoxy sounds like second or third generation Christianity, when the thrill of the new discovery is wearing off and the Church is on the way to becoming an institution. We have seen that Paul is depicted as carrying out a mission or missions which cannot be fitted into the scheme of his life as we have it in Acts. But Acts leaves it quite uncertain what happened to Paul in Rome. It ends by telling us that he lived for two whole years in a kind of semi-captivity, preaching the gospel without hindrance (Ac.28:30-31). But it does not tell us how that captivity ended, whether in Paul's release or his execution.

It is true that the general assumption is that it ended in his condemnation and death; but there is a by no means negligible stream of tradition which tells that it ended in his release, his liberty for two or three further years, his reimprisonment and his final execution about the year A.D. 67.

Let us look at this question, for it is of the greatest interest.

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First, it is clear that when Paul was in prison in Rome, he did not regard release as impossible; in fact, it looks as if he expected it. When he wrote to the Philippians, he said that he was sending Timothy to them, and goes on, "And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also" (Php.2:24). When he wrote to Philemon, sending back the runaway Onesimus, he says, "At the same time prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be granted to you" (Phm.22). Clearly he was prepared for release, whether or not it ever came.

Second, let us remember a plan that was very dear to Paul's heart. Before he went to Jerusalem on that journey on which he was arrested, he wrote to the Church at Rome, and in that letter he is planning a visit to Spain. "I hope to see you in passing," he writes, "as I go to Spain." "I shall go on by way of you," he writes, "to Spain" (Rom.15:24,28). Was that visit ever paid?

Clement of Rome, when he wrote to the Church at Corinth about A.D. 90, said of Paul that he preached the gospel in the East and in the West; that he instructed the whole world (that is, the Roman Empire) in righteousness; and that he went to the extremity (terminus) of the West, before his martyrdom. What did Clement mean by the extremity of the West? There are many who argue that he meant nothing more than Rome. Now it is true that someone writing away in the East in Asia Minor would probably think of Rome as the extremity, of the West. But Clement was writing from Rome; and it is difficult to see that for anyone in Rome the extremity of the West could be anything else but Spain. It certainly seems that Clement believed that Paul reached Spain.

The greatest of all the early Church historians was Eusebius. In his account of Paul's life he writes: "Luke who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, brought his history to a close at this point, after stating that Paul had spent two whole years at Rome as a prisoner at large, and preached the word of God without constraint. Thus, after he had made his defence, it is said that the Apostle was sent again on the ministry of preaching, and that on coming to the same city a second time he suffered martyrdom" (Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History, 2.22.2). Eusebius has nothing to say about Spain, but he did know the story that Paul had been released from his first Roman imprisonment.

The Muratorian Canon, that first list of New Testament books, describes Luke's scheme in writing Acts: "Luke related to Theophilus events of which he was an eye-witness, as also, in a separate place, he evidently declares the martyrdom of Peter (he probably refers to Lk.22:31-32); but omits the journey of Paul from Rome to Spain."

In the fifth century, two of the great Christian fathers are definite about this journey. Chrysostom in his sermon on 2Tim.4:20 says: "Saint Paul after his residence in Rome departed to Spain." Jerome in his Catalogue of Writers says that Paul "was dismissed by Nero that he might preach Christ's gospel in the West."

Beyond doubt a stream of tradition held that Paul journeyed to Spain.

This is a matter on which we will have to come to our own decision. The one thing which makes us doubt the historicity of that tradition is that in Spain itself there is not and never was any tradition that Paul had worked and preached there, no stories about him, no places connected with his name. It would be indeed strange if the memory of such a visit had become totally obliterated. It

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could well be that the whole story of Paul's release and journey to the west arose simply as a deduction from his expressed intention to visit Spain (Rom.15). Most New Testament scholars do not think that Paul was released from his imprisonment; the general consensus of opinion is that his only release was by death.

PAUL AND THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

What then shall we say of Paul's connection with these letters? If we can accept the tradition of his release, and of his return to preaching and teaching, and of his death as late as A.D. 67, we might well believe that as they stand they came from his hand. But, if we cannot believe that--and the evidence is on the whole against it--are we to say that they have no connection with Paul at all?

We must remember that the ancient world did not think of these things as we do. It would see nothing wrong in issuing a letter under the name of a great teacher, if it was sure that the letter said the things which that teacher would say under the same circumstances. To the ancient world it was natural and seemly that a disciple should write in his master's name. No one would have seen anything wrong in one of Paul's disciples meeting a new and threatening situation with a letter under Paul's name. To regard that as forgery is to misunderstand the mind of the ancient world. Are we then to swing completely to the other extreme and say that some disciple of his issued these letters in Paul's name years after he was dead, and at a time when the Church was much more highly organized than ever it was during his lifetime?

As we see it, the answer is no. It is incredible that any disciple would put into Paul's mouth a claim to be the chief of sinners (1Tim.1:15); his tendency would be to stress Paul's holiness, not to talk about his sin. It is incredible that anyone writing in the name of Paul would give Timothy the homely advice to drink a little wine for the sake of his health (1Tim.5:23). The whole of 2Tim.4 is so personal and so full of intimate, loving details that no one but Paul could have written it.

Wherein lies the solution? It may well be that something like this happened. It is quite obvious that many letters of Paul went lost. Apart from his great public letters, he must have had a continuous private correspondence; and of that we possess only the little letter to Philemon. It may well be that in the later days there were some fragments of Paul's correspondence in the possession of some Christian teacher. This teacher saw the Church of his day and his locality in Ephesus threatened on every side. It was threatened with heresy from without and from within. It was threatened with a fall away from its own high standards of purity and truth. The quality of its members and the standard of its office-bearers were degenerating. He had in his possession little letters of Paul which said exactly the things that should be said, but, as they stood, they were too short and too fragmentary to publish.

So he amplified them and made them supremely relevant to the contemporary situation and sent them out to the Church.

In the Pastoral Epistles we are still hearing the voice of Paul, and often hearing it speak with a unique personal intimacy; but we think that the form of the letters is due to a Christian teacher who summoned the help of Paul when the Church of the day needed the guidance which only he could give.

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2 Timothy 1:1-7

AN APOSTLE'S GLORY AND AN APOSTLE'S PRIVILEGE

2 Timothy 1:1-7 (Part 1)

This is a letter from Paul, who was made an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and whose apostleship was designed to make known to all men God's promise of real life in Christ Jesus, to Timothy his own beloved child. Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God, the Father, and from Christ Jesus, our Lord.

I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience, as my forefathers did before me, for all that you are to me, just as in my prayers I never cease to remember you, for, remembering your tears when we parted, I never cease to yearn to see you, that I may be filled with joy. And I thank God that I have received a fresh reminder of that sincere faith which is in you, a faith of the same kind as first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and which, I am convinced, dwells in you too. That is why I send you this reminder to keep at white heat the gift that is in you and which came to you through the laying of my hands upon you; for God did not give us the spirit of craven fear, but of power and love and self-discipline.

When Paul speaks of his own apostleship there are always certain unmistakable notes in his voice. To him it was always certain things.

(a) His apostleship was an honour. He was chosen to it by the will of God. Every Christian must regard himself as a God-chosen man.

(b) His apostleship was a responsibility. God chose him because he wanted to do something with him. He wished to make him the instrument by which the tidings of new life went out to men. No Christian is ever chosen entirely for his own sake, but for what he can do for others. A Christian is a man lost in wonder, love and praise at what God has done for him and aflame with eagerness to tell others what God can do for them.

(c) His apostleship was a privilege. It is most significant to see what Paul conceived it his duty to bring to others--the promise of God, not his threat. To him, Christianity was not the threat of damnation; it was the good news of salvation. It is worth remembering that the greatest evangelist and missionary the world has ever seen was out, not to terrify men by shaking them over the flames of hell, but to move them to astonished submission at the sight of the love of God. The dynamic of his gospel was love, not fear.

As always when he speaks to Timothy, there is a warmth of loving affection in Paul's voice. "My beloved child," he calls him. Timothy was his child in the faith. Timothy's parents had given him physical life; but it was Paul who gave him eternal life. Many a person who never knew physical parenthood has had the joy and privilege of being a father or a mother in the faith; and there is no joy in all the world like that of bringing one soul to Christ.

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2 Timothy 1:1-7

THE INSPIRING OF TIMOTHY

2 Timothy 1:1-7 (Part 2)

Paul's object in writing is to inspire and strengthen Timothy for his task in Ephesus. Timothy was young and he had a hard task in battling against the heresies and the infections that were bound to threaten the Church. So, then, in order to keep his courage high and his effort strenuous, Paul reminds Timothy of certain things.

(i) He reminds him of his own confidence in him. There is no greater inspiration than to feel that someone believes in us. An appeal to honour is always more effective than a threat of punishment. The fear of letting down those who love us is a cleansing thing.

(ii) He reminds him of his family tradition. Timothy was walking in a fine heritage, and if he failed, not only would he smirch his own name, but he would lessen the honour of his family name as well. A fine parentage is one of the greatest gifts a man can have. Let him thank God for it and never bring dishonour to it.

(iii) He reminds him of his setting apart to office and of the gift which was conferred upon him. Once a man enters upon the service of any association with a tradition, anything that he does affects not only himself nor has it to be done only in his own strength. There is the strength of a tradition to draw upon and the honour of a tradition to preserve. That is specially true of the Church. He who serves it has its honour in his hands; he who serves it is strengthened by the consciousness of the communion of all the saints.

(iv) He reminds him of the qualities which should characterize the Christian teacher. These, as Paul at that moment saw them, were four.

(a) There was courage. It was not craven fear but courage that Christian service should bring to a man. It always takes courage to be a Christian, and that courage comes from the continual consciousness of the presence of Christ.

(b) There was power. In the true Christian there is the power to cope, the power to shoulder the back-breaking task, the power to stand erect in face of the shattering situation, the power to retain faith in face of the soul-searing sorrow and the wounding disappointment. The Christian is characteristically the man who could pass the breaking-point and not break.

(c) There was love. In Timothy's case this was love for the brethren, for the congregation of the people of Christ over whom he was set. It is precisely that love which gives the Christian pastor his other qualities. He must love his people so much that he will never find any toil too great to undertake for them or any situation threatening enough to daunt him. No man should ever enter the ministry of the Church unless there is love for Christ's people within his heart.

(d) There was self-discipline. The word is *sophronismos* (GSN4995), one of these great Greek untranslatable words. Someone has defined it as "the sanity of saintliness." Falconer defines it as

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2 Timothy 1:1-7

"control of oneself in face of panic or of passion." It is Christ alone who can give us that self-mastery which will keep us alike from being swept away and from running away. No man can ever rule others unless he has first mastered himself. Sophronismos (GSN4995) is that divinely given self-control which makes a man a great ruler of others because he is first of all the servant of Christ and the master of himself.

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2 Timothy 1:8-11

A GOSPEL WORTH SUFFERING FOR

2 Timothy 1:8-11 (Part 1)

So, then, do not be ashamed to bear your witness to our Lord; and do not be ashamed of me his prisoner; but accept with me the suffering which the gospel brings, and do so in the power of God, who saved us, and who called us with a call to consecration, a call which had nothing to do with our own achievements, but which was dependent solely on his purpose, and on the grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus: and all this was planned before the world began, but now it stands full-displayed through the appearance of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and incorruption to light by means of the good news which he brought, good news in the service of which I have been appointed a herald, and an apostle and a teacher.

It is inevitable that loyalty to the gospel will bring trouble. For Timothy, it meant loyalty to a man who was regarded as a criminal, because as Paul wrote he was in prison in Rome. But here Paul sets out the gospel in all its glory, something worth suffering for. Sometimes by implication and sometimes by direct statement he brings out element after element in that glory. Few passages in the New Testament have in them and behind them such a sense of the sheer grandeur of the gospel.

(i) It is the gospel of power. Any suffering which it involves is to be borne in the power of God. To the ancient world the gospel was the power to live. That very age in which Paul was writing was the great age of suicide. The highest-principled of the ancient thinkers were the Stoics; but they had their own way out when life became intolerable. They had a saying: "God gave men life, but God gave men the still greater gift of being able to take their own lives away." The gospel was, and is, power, power to conquer self, power to master circumstances, power to go on living when life is unlivable, power to be a Christian when being a Christian looks impossible.

(ii) It is the gospel of salvation. God is the God who saves us. The gospel is rescue. It is rescue from sin; it liberates a man from the things which have him in their grip; it enables him to break with the habits which are unbreakable. The gospel is a rescuing force which can make bad men good.

(iii) It is the gospel of consecration. It is not simply rescue from the consequences of past sin; it is a summons to walk the way of holiness. In *The Bible in World Evangelism* A. M. Chirgwin quotes two amazing instances of the miraculous changing power of Christ.

There was a New York gangster who had recently been in prison for robbery with violence. He was on his way to join his old gang with a view to taking part in another robbery when he picked a man's pocket in Fifth Avenue. He went into Central Park to see what he had succeeded in stealing and discovered to his disgust that it was a New Testament. Since he had time to spare, he began idly to turn over the pages and to read. Soon he was deep in the book, and he read to such effect that a few hours later he went to his old comrades and broke with them for ever. For that ex-convict the gospel was the call to holiness.

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2 Timothy 1:8-11

There was a young Arab in Aleppo who had a bitter quarrel with a former friend. He told a Christian evangelist: "I hated him so much that I plotted revenge, even to the point of murder. Then," he went on, "one day I ran into you and you induced me to buy a copy of St. Matthew. I only bought it to please you. I never intended to read it. But as I was going to bed that night the book fell out of my pocket, and I picked it up and started to read. When I reached the place where it says: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said of old time, Thou shalt not kill.... But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment,' I remembered the hatred I was nourishing against my enemy. As I read on my uneasiness grew until I reached the words, 'Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Then I was compelled to cry: 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' Joy and peace filled my heart and my hatred disappeared. Since then I have been a new man, and my chief delight is to read God's word."

It was the gospel which set the ex-convict in New York and the would-be murderer in Aleppo on the road to holiness. It is here that so much of our Church Christianity falls down. It does not change people; and therefore is not real. The man who has known the saving power of the gospel is a changed man, in his business, in his pleasure, in his home, in his character. There should be an essential difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, because the Christian has obeyed the summons to walk the road to holiness.

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2 Timothy 1:8-11

A GOSPEL WORTH SUFFERING FOR

2 Timothy 1:8-11 (Part 2)

(iv) It is the gospel of grace. It is not something which we achieve, but something which we accept. God did not call us because we are holy; he called us to make us holy. If we had to deserve the love of God, our situation would be helpless and hopeless. The gospel is the free gift of God. He does not love us because we deserve his love; he loves us out of the sheer generosity of his heart.

(v) It is the gospel of God's eternal purpose. It was planned before time began. We must never think that once God was stern law and that only since the life and death of Jesus, he has been forgiving love. From the beginning of time God's love has been searching for men, and his grace and forgiveness have been offered to them. Love is the essence of the eternal nature of God.

(vi) It is the gospel of life and immortality. It is Paul's conviction that Christ Jesus brought life and incorruption to light. The ancient world feared death; or, if it did not fear it, regarded it as extinction. It was the message of Jesus that death was the way to life, and that so far from separating men from God, it brought men into his nearer presence.

(vii) It is the gospel of service. It was this gospel which made Paul a herald, an apostle and a teacher of the faith. It did not leave him comfortably feeling that now his own soul was saved and he did not need to worry any more. It laid on him the inescapable task of wearing himself out in the service of God and of his fellow-men. This gospel laid three necessities on Paul.

(a) It made him a herald. The word is *kerux* (GSN2783), which has three main lines of meaning, each with something to suggest about our Christian duty. The *kerux* (GSN2783) was the herald who brought the announcement from the king. The *kerux* (GSN2783) was the emissary when two armies were opposed to each other, who brought the terms of or the request for truce and peace. The *kerux* (GSN2783) was the man whom an auctioneer or a merchantman employed to shout his wares and invite people to come and buy. So the Christian is to be the man who brings the message to his fellow-men; the man who brings men into peace with God; the man who calls on his fellow-men to accept the rich offer which God is making to them.

(b) It made him an apostle, *apostolos* (GSN0652), literally one who is sent out. The word can mean an envoy or an ambassador. The *apostolos* (GSN0652) did not speak for himself, but for him who sent him. He did not come in his own authority, but in the authority of him who sent him. The Christian is the ambassador of Christ, come to speak for him and to represent him to men.

(c) It made him a teacher. There is a very real sense in which the teaching task of the Christian and of the Church is the most important of all. Certainly the task of the teacher is very much harder than the task of the evangelist. The evangelist's task is to appeal to men and confront them with the love of God. In a moment of vivid emotion, a man may respond to that summons. But a long road remains. He must learn the meaning and discipline of the Christian life. The foundations have been laid but the edifice has still to be raised. The flame of evangelism has to be followed by the steady

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2 Timothy 1:8-11

glow of Christian teaching. It may well be that people drift away from the Church, after their first decision, for the simple, yet fundamental, reason that they have not been taught into the meaning of the Christian faith.

Herald, ambassador, teacher--here is the threefold function of the Christian who would serve his Lord and his Church.

(viii) It is the gospel of Christ Jesus. It was full displayed through his appearance. The word Paul uses for appearance is one with a great history. It is *epiphaneia* (GSN2015), a word which the Jews repeatedly used of the great saving manifestations of God in the terrible days of the Maccabean struggles, when the enemies of Israel were deliberately seeking to obliterate him.

In the days of Onias the High Priest there came a certain Heliodorus to plunder the Temple treasury at Jerusalem. Neither prayers nor entreaties would stop him carrying out this sacrilege. And, so the story runs, as Heliodorus was about to set hands on the treasury, "the Lord of Spirits and the Prince of Power caused a great *epiphaneia* (GSN2015).... For there appeared unto them an horse with a terrible rider upon him... and he ran fiercely and smote at Heliodorus with his forefeet.... And Heliodorus fell suddenly to the ground and was compassed with great darkness" (2Macc.3:24-30). What exactly happened we may never know; but in Israel's hour of need there came this tremendous *epiphaneia* (GSN2015) of God.

When Judas Maccabaeus and his little army were confronted with the might of Nicanor, they prayed: "O Lord, who didst send thine angel in the time of Hezekiah king of Judaea, and didst slay in the host of Sennacherib an hundred fourscore and five thousand (compare 2Kgs.19:35-36), wherefore now also, O Lord of Heaven, send a good angel before us for a fear and a dread unto them; and through the might of thine arm let those be stricken with terror, that come against thy holy people to blaspheme." And then the story goes on: "Then Nicanor and they that were with him came forward with trumpets and with songs. But Judas and his company encountered the enemy with invocation and prayer. So that, fighting with their hands and praying unto God with their hearts, they slew no less than thirty and five thousand men; for through the *epiphaneia* (GSN2015) of God they were greatly cheered" (2Macc.15:22-27). Once again we do not know exactly what happened; but God made a great and saving appearance for his people.

To the Jew *epiphaneia* (GSN2015) denoted a rescuing intervention of God.

To the Greek this was an equally great word. The accession of the Emperor to his throne was called his *epiphaneia* (GSN2015). It was his manifestation. Every Emperor came to the throne with high hopes; his coming was hailed as the dawn of a new and precious day, and of great blessings to come.

The gospel was full displayed with the *epiphaneia* (GSN2015) of Jesus; the very word shows that he was God's great, rescuing intervention and manifestation into the world.

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2 Timothy 1:12-14

TRUST HUMAN AND DIVINE

2 Timothy 1:12-14 (Part 1)

And that is the reason why I am going through these things I am going through. But I am not ashamed, for I know him in whom my belief is fixed, and I am quite certain that he is able to keep safe what I have entrusted to him until the last day comes. Hold fast the pattern of health-giving words you have received from me, never slackening in that faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard the fine trust that has been given to you through the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

This passage uses a very vivid Greek word in a most suggestive double way. Paul talks of that which he has entrusted to God; and he urges Timothy to safeguard the trust God has reposed in him. In both cases the word is *paratheke* (GSN3866), which means a deposit committed to someone's trust. A man might deposit something with a friend to be kept for his children or his loved ones; he might deposit his valuables in a temple for safe keeping, for the temples were the banks of the ancient world. In each case the thing deposited was a *paratheke* (GSN3866). In the ancient world there was no more sacred duty than the safe-guarding of such a deposit and the returning of it when in due time it was claimed.

There was a famous Greek story which told just how sacred such a trust was (Herodotus 6: 89; Juvenal: Satires, 13: 199-208). The Spartans were famous for their strict honour and honesty. A certain man of Miletus came to a certain Glaucus of Sparta. He said that he had heard such great reports of the honesty of the Spartans that he had turned half his possessions into money and wished to deposit that money with Glaucus, until he or his heirs should claim it again. Certain symbols were given and received which would identify the rightful claimant when he should make his claim. The years passed on; the man of Miletus died; his sons came to Sparta to see Glaucus, produced the identifying tallies and asked for the return of the deposited money. But Glaucus claimed that he had no memory of ever receiving it.

The sons from Miletus went sorrowfully away; but Glaucus went to the famous oracle at Delphi to see whether he should admit the trust or, as Greek law entitled him to do, should swear that he knew nothing about it. The oracle answered:

"Best for the present it were, O Glaucus, to do as thou wishest,
Swearing an oath to prevail, and so to make prize of the money.
Swear then--death is the lot even of those who never swear falsely.
Yet hath the Oath-god a son who is nameless, footless and handless;
Mighty in strength he approaches to vengeance, and whelms in destruction
All who belong to the race, or the house of the man who is perjured.
But oath-keeping men leave behind them a flourishing offspring."

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2 Timothy 1:12-14

Glaucus understood; the oracle was telling him that if he wished for momentary profit, he should deny the trust, but such a denial would inevitably bring eternal loss. He besought the oracle to pardon his question; but the answer was that to have tempted the god was as bad as to have done the deed. He sent for the sons of the man of Miletus and restored the money. Herodotus goes on: "Glaucus at this present time has not a single descendant; nor is there any family known as his; root and branch has he been removed from Sparta. It is a good thing therefore, when a pledge has been left with one, not even in thought to doubt about restoring it." To the Greeks a paratheke (GSN3866) was completely sacred.

Paul says that he has made his deposit with God. He means that he has entrusted both his work and his life to him. It might seem that he had been cut off in mid-career; that he should end as a criminal in a Roman gaol might seem the undoing of all his work. But he had sowed his seed and preached his gospel, and the result he left in the hands of God. Paul had entrusted his life to God; and he was sure that in life and in death he was safe. Why was he so sure? Because he knew whom he had believed in. We must always remember that Paul does not say that he knew what he had believed. His certainty did not come from the intellectual knowledge of a creed or a theology; it came from a personal knowledge of God. He knew God personally and intimately; he knew what he was like in love and in power; and to Paul it was inconceivable that he should fail him. If we have worked honestly and done the best that we can, we can leave the result to God, however meagre that work may seem to us.

With him in this or any other world life is safe, for nothing can separate us from his love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 1:12-14

TRUST HUMAN AND DIVINE

2 Timothy 1:12-14 (Part 2)

But there is another side to this matter of trust; there is another paratheke (GSN3866). Paul urges Timothy to safeguard and keep inviolate the trust God has reposed in him. Not only do we put our trust in God; he also puts his trust in us. The idea of God's dependence on men is never far from New Testament thought. When God wants something done, he has to find a man to do it. If he wants a child taught, a message brought, a sermon preached, a wanderer found, a sorrowing one comforted, a sick one healed, he has to find some instrument to do his work.

The trust that God had particularly reposed in Timothy was the oversight and the edification of the Church. If Timothy was truly to discharge that trust, he had to do certain things.

(i) He had to hold fast to the pattern of health-giving words. That is to say, he had to see to it that Christian belief was maintained in all its purity and that false and misleading ideas were not allowed to enter in. That is not to say that in the Christian Church there must be no new thought and no development in doctrine and belief; but it does mean to say that there are certain great Christian verities which must always be preserved intact. And it may well be that the one Christian truth which must for ever stand is summed up in the creed of the early Church, "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Php.2:11). Any theology which seeks to remove Christ from the topmost niche or take from him his unique place in the scheme of revelation and salvation is necessarily wrong. The Christian Church must ever be restating its faith--but the faith restated must be faith in Christ.

(ii) He must never slacken in faith. Faith here has two ideas at its heart. (a) It has the idea of fidelity. The Christian leader must be for ever true and loyal to Jesus Christ. He must never be ashamed to show whose he is and whom he serves. Fidelity is the oldest and the most essential virtue in the world. (b) But faith also has in it the idea of hope. The Christian must never lose his confidence in God; he must never despair. As A. H. Clough wrote:

"Say not, 'The struggle naught availeth;
The labour and the wounds are vain;
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.'
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main."

There must be no pessimism, either for himself or for the world, in the heart of the Christian.

(iii) He must never slacken in love. To love men is to see them as God sees them. It is to refuse ever to do anything but seek their highest good. It is to meet bitterness with forgiveness; it is to meet hatred with love; it is to meet indifference with a flaming passion which cannot be quenched. Christian love insistently seeks to love men as God loves them and as he has first loved us.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 1:15-18

THE FAITHLESS MANY AND THE FAITHFUL ONE

2 Timothy 1:15-18

You know this, that as a whole the people who live in Asia deserted me, and among the deserters are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord give mercy to the family of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. So far from that, when he arrived in Rome he eagerly sought me out and found me--may the Lord grant to him mercy from the Lord on that day--and you know better than I do the many services he rendered in Ephesus.

Here is a passage in which pathos and joy are combined. In the end the same thing happened to Paul as happened to Jesus, his Master. His friends forsook him and fled. In the New Testament Asia is not the continent of Asia, but the Roman province which consisted of the western part of Asia Minor. Its capital was the city of Ephesus. When Paul was imprisoned his friends abandoned him--most likely out of fear. The Romans would never have proceeded against him on a purely religious charge; the Jews must have persuaded them that he was a dangerous troublemaker and disturber of the public peace. There can be no doubt that in the end Paul would be held on a political charge. To be a friend of a man like that was dangerous; and in his hour of need his friends from Asia abandoned him because they were afraid for their own safety.

But however others might desert, one man was loyal to the end. His name was Onesiphorus, which means profitable. P. N. Harrison draws a vivid picture of Onesiphorus' search for Paul in Rome: "We seem to catch glimpses of one purposeful face in a drifting crowd, and follow with quickening interest this stranger from the far coasts of the Aegean, as he threads the maze of unfamiliar streets, knocking at many doors, following up every clue, warned of the risks he is taking but not to be turned from his quest; till in some obscure prison-house a known voice greets him, and he discovers Paul chained to a Roman soldier. Having once found his way Onesiphorus is not content with a single visit, but, true to his name, proves unwearied in his ministrations. Others have flinched from the menace and ignominy of that chain; but this visitor counts it the supreme privilege of his life to share with such a criminal the reproach of the Cross.

One series of turnings in the vast labyrinth (of the streets of Rome) he comes to know as if it were his own Ephesus." There is no doubt that, when Onesiphorus sought out Paul and came to see him again and again, he took his life in his hands. It was dangerous to keep asking where a certain criminal could be found; it was dangerous to visit him; it was still more dangerous to keep on visiting him; but that is what Onesiphorus did.

Again and again the Bible bangs us face to face with a question which is real for every one of us. Again and again it introduces and dismisses a man from the stage of history with a single sentence. Hermogenes and Phygelus--we know nothing whatever of them beyond their names and the fact that they were traitors to Paul. Onesiphorus--we know nothing of him except that in his loyalty to Paul he risked--and perhaps lost--his life. Hermogenes and Phygelus go down to history branded as deserters; Onesiphorus goes down to history as the friend who stuck closer than a brother. If we were to be described in one sentence, what would it be? Would it be the verdict on a traitor, or the verdict on a disciple who was true?

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2 Timothy 1:15-18

Before we leave this passage we must note that in one particular connection it is a storm centre. Each one must form his own opinion, but there are many who feel that the implication is that Onesiphorus is dead. It is for his family that Paul first prays. Now if he was dead, this passage shows us Paul praying for the dead, for it shows him praying that Onesiphorus may find mercy on the last day.

Prayers for the dead are a much-disputed problem which we do not intend to discuss here. But one thing we can say--to the Jews prayers for the dead were by no means unknown. In the days of the Maccabaeans there was a battle between the troops of Judas Maccabaeus and the army of Gorgias, the governor of Idumaea, which ended in a victory for Judas Maccabaeus. After the battle the Jews were gathering the bodies of those who had fallen in battle. On each one of them they found "things consecrated to the idols of the Jamnites, which is forbidden the Jews by the law." What is meant is that the dead Jewish soldiers were wearing heathen amulets in a superstitious attempt to protect their lives. The story goes on to say that every man who had been slain was wearing such an amulet and it was because of this that he was in fact slain. Seeing this, Judas and all the people prayed that the sin of these men "might be wholly put out of remembrance." Judas then collected money and made a sin-offering for those who had fallen, because they believed that, since there was a resurrection, it was not superfluous "to pray and offer sacrifices for the dead." The story ends with the saying of Judas Maccabaeus that "it was an holy and good thing to pray for the dead. Whereupon he made a reconciliation for the dead, that they might be delivered from sin" (2Macc.12:39-45).

It is clear that Paul was brought up in a way of belief which saw in prayers for the dead, not a hateful, but a lovely thing. This is a subject on which there has been long and bitter dispute; but this one thing we can and must say--if we love a person with all our hearts, and if the remembrance of that person is never absent from our minds and memories, then, whatever the intellect of the theologian may say about it, the instinct of the heart is to remember such a one in prayer, whether he is in this or in any other world.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 2:1-2

THE CHAIN OF TEACHING

2 Timothy 2:1-2

As for you, my child, find your strength in the grace which is in Christ Jesus; and entrust the things which you have heard from me, and which are confirmed by many witnesses, to faithful men who will be competent to teach others too.

Here we have in outline two things--the reception and the transmission of the Christian faith.

(i) The reception of the faith is founded on two things. It is founded on hearing. It was from Paul that Timothy heard the truth of the Christian faith. But the words he heard were confirmed by the witness of many who were prepared to say: "These words are true--and I know it, because I have found it so in my own life." It may be that there are many of us who have not the gift of expression, and who can neither teach nor expound the Christian faith. But even he or she who has not the gift of teaching is able to witness to the living power of the gospel.

(ii) It is not only a privilege to receive the Christian faith; it is a duty to transmit it. Every Christian must look on himself as a link between two generations. E. K. Simpson writes on this passage: "The torch of heavenly light must be transmitted unquenched from one generation to another, and Timothy must count himself an intermediary between apostolic and later ages."

(iii) The faith is to be transmitted to faithful men who in their turn will teach it to others. The Christian Church is dependent on an unbroken chain of teachers. When Clement was writing to the Church at Corinth, he sketched that chain. "Our apostles appointed the aforesaid persons (that is, the elders) and afterwards they provided a continuance, that, if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry." The teacher is a link in the living chain which stretches unbroken from this present moment back to Jesus Christ.

These teachers are to be faithful men. The Greek for faithful, *pistos* (GSN4103), is a word with a rich variety of closely connected meanings. A man who is a *pistos* (GSN4103) is a man who is believing, a man who is loyal, a man who is reliable. All these meanings are there. Falconer said that these believing men are such "that they will yield neither to persecution nor to error." The teacher's heart must be so stayed on Christ that no threat of danger will lure him from the path of loyalty and no seduction of false teaching cause him to stray from the straight path of the truth. He must be steadfast alike in life and in thought.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 2:3-4

THE SOLDIER OF CHRIST

2 Timothy 2:3-4

Accept your share in suffering like a fine soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier who is on active service entangles himself in ordinary civilian business; he lays aside such things, so that by good service he may please the commander who has enrolled him in his army.

The picture of man as a soldier and life as a campaign is one which the Romans and the Greeks knew well. "To live," said Seneca, "is to be a soldier" (Seneca: Epistles 96: 5). "The life of every man," said Epictetus, "is a kind of campaign, and a campaign which is long and varied" (Epictetus: Discourses, 3, 24, 34). Paul took this picture and applied it to all Christians, but specially to the leaders and outstanding servants of the Church. He urges Timothy to fight a fine campaign (1Tim.1:18). He calls Archippus, in whose house a Church met, our fellow soldier (Phm.2). He calls Epaphroditus, the messenger of the Philippian Church, "my fellow soldier", (Php.2:25). Clearly Paul saw in the life of the soldier a picture of the life of the Christian. What then were the qualities of the soldier which Paul would have repeated in the Christian life?

(i) The soldier's service must be a concentrated service. Once a man has enlisted on a campaign he can no longer involve himself in the ordinary daily business of life and living; he must concentrate on his service as a soldier. The Roman code of Theodosius said: "We forbid men engaged on military service to engage in civilian occupations." A soldier is a soldier and nothing else; the Christian must concentrate on his Christianity. That does not mean that he must engage on no worldly task or business. He must still live in this world, and he must still make a living; but it does mean that he must use whatever task he is engaged upon to demonstrate his Christianity.

(ii) The soldier is conditioned to obedience. The early training of a soldier is designed to make him unquestioningly obey the word of command. There may come a time when such instinctive obedience will save his life and the lives of others. There is a sense in which it is no part of the soldier's duty "to know the reason why." Involved as he is in the midst of the battle, he cannot see the over-all picture. The decisions he must leave to the commander who sees the whole field. The first Christian duty is obedience to the voice of God, and acceptance even of that which he cannot understand.

(iii) The soldier is conditioned to sacrifice. A. J. Gossip tells how, as a chaplain in the 1914-18 war, he was going up the line for the first time. War and blood, and wounds and death were new to him. On his way he saw by the roadside, left behind after the battle, the body of a young kilted Highlander. Oddly, perhaps, there flashed into his mind the words of Christ: "This is my body broken for you." The Christian must ever be ready to sacrifice himself, his wishes and his fortune, for God and for his fellow-men.

(iv) The soldier is conditioned to loyalty. When the Roman soldier joined the army he took the sacramentum, the oath of loyalty to his emperor. Someone records a conversation between Marshal Foch and an officer in the 1914-18 war. "You must not retire," said Foch, "you must hold on at all costs." "Then," said the officer aghast, "that means we must all die." And Foch answered:

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2 Timothy 2:3-4

"Precisely!" The soldier's supreme virtue is that he is faithful unto death. The Christian too must be loyal to Jesus Christ, through all the chances and the changes of life, down even to the gates of death.

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2 Timothy 2:5

THE ATHLETE OF CHRIST

2 Timothy 2:5

And if anyone engages in an athletic contest, he does not win the crown unless he observes the rules of the game.

Paul has just used the picture of the soldier to represent the Christian, and now he uses two other pictures--those of the athlete and of the toiling husbandman. He uses the same three pictures close together in 1Cor.9:6-7; 1Cor.9:24-27.

Paul says that the athlete does not win the crown of victory unless he observes the rules of the contest. There is a very interesting point in the Greek here which is difficult to bring out in translation. The King James Version speaks of striving lawfully. The Greek is *athlein* (GSN0118) *nomimos* (GSN3545). In fact that is the Greek phrase which was used by the later writers to describe a professional as opposed to an amateur athlete. The man who strove *nomimos* (GSN3545) was the man who concentrated everything on his struggle. His struggle was not just a spare-time thing, as it might be for an amateur; it was a whole-time dedication of his life to excellence in the contest which he had chosen. Here then we have the same idea as in Paul's picture of the Christian as a soldier. A Christian's life must be concentrated upon his Christianity just as a professional athlete's life is concentrated upon his chosen contest.

The spare-time Christian is a contradiction in terms; a man's whole life should be an endeavour to live out his Christianity. What then are the characteristics of the athlete which are in Paul's mind?

(i) The athlete is a man under discipline and self-denial. He must keep to his schedule of training and let nothing interfere with it. There will be days when he would like to drop his training and relax his discipline; but he must not do so. There will be pleasures and indulgences he would like to allow himself; but he must refuse them. The athlete who would excel knows that he must let nothing interfere with that standard of physical fitness which he has set himself. There must be discipline in the Christian life. There are times when the easy way is very attractive; there are times when the right thing is the hard thing; there are times when we are tempted to relax our standards. The Christian must train himself never to relax in the life-long attempt to make his soul pure and strong.

(ii) The athlete is a man who observes the rules. After the discipline and the rules of the training, there come the contest and the rules of the contest. An athlete cannot win unless he plays the game. The Christian, too, is often brought into contest with his fellow-men. He must defend his faith; he must seek to convince and to persuade; he will have to argue and to debate. He must do so by the Christian rules. No matter how hot the argument, he must never forget his courtesy. He must never be anything else but honest about his own position and fair to that of his opponent. The odium theologicum, the hatred of theologians, has become a byword. There is often no bitterness like religious bitterness. But the real Christian knows that the supreme rule of the Christian life is love, and he will carry that love into every debate in which he is engaged.

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2 Timothy 2:6-7

THE TOILER OF CHRIST

2 Timothy 2:6-7

It is the toiling husbandman who must be first to receive his share of the fruits. Think of what I am saying, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.

To represent the Christian life Paul has used the picture of the soldier and of the athlete, and now he uses the picture of the farmer. It is not the lazy husbandman, but the husbandman who toils, who must be the first to receive the share of the fruits of the harvest. What then are the characteristics of the husbandman which Paul would wish to see in the life of the Christian?

(i) Often the husbandman must be content, first, to work, and, then, to wait. More than any other workman, he has to learn that there are no such things as quick results. The Christian too must learn to work and to wait. Often he must sow the good seed of the word into the hearts and minds of his hearers and see no immediate result. A teacher has often to teach, and see no difference in those he teaches. A parent has often to seek to train and guide, and see no difference in the child. It is only when the years go by that the result is seen; for it often happens that when that same young person has grown to manhood, he or she is faced with some overmastering temptation or some terrible decision or some intolerable effort, and back into his mind comes some word of God or some flash of remembered teaching; and the teaching, the guidance, the discipline bears fruit, and brings honour where without it there would have been dishonour, salvation where without it there would have been ruin.

The farmer has teamed to wait with patience, and so must the Christian teacher and the Christian parent.

(ii) One special thing characterizes the husbandman--he must be prepared to work at any hour. In harvest time we can see farmers at work in their fields so long as the last streak of light is left; they know no hours. Neither must the Christian. The trouble with so much Christianity is that it is spasmodic. But from dawn to sunset the Christian must be for ever at his task of being a Christian.

One thing remains in all three pictures. The soldier is upheld by the thought of final victory. The athlete is upheld by the vision of the crown. The husbandman is upheld by the hope of the harvest. Each submits to the discipline and the toil for the sake of the glory which shall be. It is so with the Christian. The Christian struggle is not without a goal; it is always going somewhere. The Christian can be certain that after the effort of the Christian life, there comes the joy of heaven; and the greater the struggle, the greater the joy.

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2 Timothy 2:8-10

THE ESSENTIAL MEMORY

2 Timothy 2:8-10 (Part 1)

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, born of the seed of David, as I preached the gospel to you; that gospel for which I suffer, even to the length of fetters, on the charge of being a criminal. But though I am fettered, the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of God's chosen ones, that they too may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Right from the beginning of this letter Paul has been trying to inspire Timothy to his task. He has reminded him of his own belief in him and of the godly parentage from which he has come; he has shown him the picture of the Christian soldier, the Christian athlete and the Christian toiler. And now he comes to the greatest appeal of all--Remember Jesus Christ. Falconer calls these words: "The heart of the Pauline gospel." Even if every other appeal to Timothy's gallantry should fail, surely the memory of Jesus Christ cannot. In the words which follow, Paul is really urging Timothy to remember three things.

(i) Remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead. The tense of the Greek does not imply one definite act in time, but a continued state which lasts for ever. Paul is not so much saying to Timothy: "Remember the actual resurrection of Jesus"; but rather: "Remember your risen and ever-present Lord." Here is the great Christian inspiration. We do not depend on a memory, however great. We enjoy the power of a presence. When a Christian is summoned to a great task that he cannot but feel is beyond him, he must go to it in the certainty that he does not go alone, but that there is with him for ever the presence and the power of his risen Lord. When fears threaten, when doubts assail, when inadequacy depresses, remember the presence of the risen Lord.

(ii) Remember Jesus Christ born of the seed of David. This is the other side of the question. "Remember," says Paul to Timothy, "the manhood of the Master." We do not remember one who is only a spiritual presence; we remember one who trod this road, and lived this life, and faced this struggle, and who therefore knows what we are going through. We have with us the presence not only of the glorified Christ, but also of the Christ who knew the desperate struggle of being a man and followed to the bitter end the will of God.

(iii) Remember the gospel, the good news. Even when the gospel demands much, even when it leads to an effort which seems to be beyond human ability and to a future which seems dark with every kind of threat, remember that it is good news, and remember that the world is waiting for it. However hard the task the gospel offers, that same gospel is the message of liberation from sin and victory over circumstances for us and for all mankind.

So Paul kindles Timothy to heroism by calling upon him to remember Jesus Christ, to remember the continual presence of the risen Lord, to remember the sympathy which comes from the manhood of the Master, to remember the glory of the gospel for himself and for the world which has never heard it and is waiting for it.

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2 Timothy 2:8-10

THE CRIMINAL OF CHRIST

2 Timothy 2:8-10 (Part 2)

When Paul wrote these words he was in a Roman prison, bound by a chain. This was literally true, for all the time he was in prison night and day he would be chained to the arm of a Roman soldier. Rome took no risks that her prisoners should escape.

Paul was in prison on the charge of being a criminal. It seems strange that even a hostile government should be able to regard a Christian, and especially Paul, as a criminal. There were two possible ways in which Paul might appear a criminal to the Roman government.

First, Rome had an empire which was almost coextensive with the then known world. It was obvious that such an empire was subject to stresses and to strains. The peace had to be kept and every possible centre of disaffection had to be eliminated. One of the things about which Rome was very particular was the formation of associations. In the ancient world there were many associations. There were, for instance, dinner clubs who met at stated intervals. There were what we would call friendly societies designed for charity for the dependants of members who had died. There were burial societies to see that their members were decently buried. But so particular were the Roman authorities about associations that even these humble and harmless societies had to receive special permission from the emperor before they were allowed to meet. Now the Christians were in effect an illegal association; and that is one reason why Paul, as a leader of such an association, might well be in the very serious position of being a political criminal.

Second, the first persecution of the Christians was intimately connected with one of the greatest disasters which ever befell the city of Rome. On 19 July A.D. 64 the great fire broke out. It burned for six days and seven nights and devastated the city. The most sacred shrines and the most famous buildings perished in the flames. But worse--the homes of the common people were destroyed. By far the greater part of the population lived in great tenements built largely of wood and they went up like tinder. People were killed and injured; they lost their nearest and dearest; they were left homeless and destitute. The population of Rome was reduced to what someone has called "a vast brotherhood of hopeless wretchedness."

It was believed that Nero, the emperor, himself was responsible for the fire. It was said that he had watched the fire from the Tower of Maecenas and declared himself charmed with "the flower and loveliness of the flames." It was said that when the fire showed signs of dying down men were seen rekindling it with burning brands, and that these men were the servants of Nero. Nero had a passion for building, and it was said that he had deliberately fired the city so that from the ruins he might build a new and nobler Rome. Whether the story was true or not--the chances are that it was--one thing was certain. Nothing would kill the rumour. The destitute citizens of Rome were sure that Nero had been responsible.

There was only one thing for the Roman government to do; they must find a scapegoat. And a scapegoat was found. Let Tacitus, the Roman historian, tell how it was done: "But all human

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2 Timothy 2:8-10

efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace" (Tacitus: Annals, 15: 44). Obviously slanders were already circulating regarding the Christians. No doubt the influential Jews were responsible. And the hated Christians were saddled with the blame for the disastrous fire of Rome. It was from that event that the first great persecution sprang. Paul was a Christian. More, he was the great leader of the Christians.

And it may well be that part of the charge against Paul was that he was one of those responsible for the fire of Rome and the resulting misery of the populace.

So, then, Paul was in prison as a criminal, a political prisoner, member of an illegal association and leader of that hated sect of incendiaries, on whom Nero had fastened the blame for the destruction of Rome. It can easily be seen how helpless Paul was in face of charges like that.

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2 Timothy 2:8-10

FREE YET IN FETTERS BOUND

2 Timothy 2:8-10 (Part 3)

Even though he was in prison on charges which made release impossible, Paul was not dismayed and was very far from despair. He had two great uplifting thoughts.

(i) He was certain that, though he might be bound, nothing could bind the word of God. Andrew Melville was one of the earliest heralds of the Scottish Reformation. One day the Regent Morton sent for him and denounced his writings. "There will never be quietness in this country," he said, "till half a dozen of you be hanged or banished the country." "Tush! sir," answered Melville, "threaten your courtiers in that fashion. It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or in the ground. The earth is the Lord's; my fatherland is wherever well-doing is. I have been ready to give my life when it was not half as well worn, at the pleasure of my God. I lived out of your country ten years as well as in it. Yet God be glorified, it will not lie in your power to hang nor exile his truth!"

You can exile a man, but you cannot exile the truth. You can imprison a preacher, but you cannot imprison the word he preaches. The message is always greater than the man; the truth is always mightier than the bearer. Paul was quite certain that the Roman government could never find a prison which could contain the word of God. And it is one of the facts of history that if human effort could have obliterated Christianity, it would have perished long ago; but men cannot kill that which is immortal.

(ii) Paul was certain that what he was going through would in the end be a help to other people. His suffering was not pointless and profitless. The blood of the martyrs has ever been the seed of the Church; and the lighting of the pyre where Christians were burned has always been the lighting of a fire which could never be put out. When anyone has to suffer for his Christianity, let him remember that his suffering makes the road easier for someone else who is still to come. In suffering we bear our own small portion of the weight of the Cross of Christ and do our own small part in the bringing of God's salvation to men.

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2 Timothy 2:11-13

THE SONG OF THE MARTYR

2 Timothy 2:11-13

If we die with him, we shall also live with him. If we endure, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he too will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful For he cannot deny himself

This is a saying which can be relied upon:

This is a peculiarly precious passage because in it is enshrined one of the first hymns of the Christian Church. In the days of persecution the Christian Church put its faith into song. It may be that this is only a fragment of a longer hymn. Polycarp (5: 2) seems to give us a little more of it, when he writes: "If we please Christ in the present world, we shall inherit the world to come; as he has promised to raise us from the dead, and has said:

'If we walk worthily of him,
So shall we reign with him'."

There are two possible interpretations of the first two lines--"If we die with him, we shall also live with him." There are those who wish to take these lines as a reference to baptism. In Rom.6 baptism is likened to dying and rising with Christ. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Rom.6:4,8). No doubt the language is the same; but the thought of baptism is quite irrelevant here; it is the thought of martyrdom that is in Paul's mind. Luther, in a great phrase, said: "Ecclesia haeres crucis est," "The Church is the heir of the Cross." The Christian inherits Christ's Cross, but he also inherits Christ's Resurrection. He is partner both in the shame and in the glory of his Lord.

The hymn goes on: "If we endure, we shall also reign with him." It is he who endures to the end who will be saved. Without the Cross there cannot be the Crown.

Then comes the other side of the matter: "If we deny him, he too will deny us." That is what Jesus himself said: "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt.10:32-33). Jesus Christ cannot vouch in eternity for a man who has refused to have anything to do with him in time; but he is for ever true to the man who, however much he has failed, has tried to be true to him.

These things are so because they are part of the very nature of God. A man may deny himself, but God cannot. "God is not man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent" (Num.23:19). God will never fail the man who has tried to be true to him, but not even he can help the man who has refused to have anything to do with him.

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2 Timothy 2:11-13

Long ago Tertullian said: "The man who is afraid to suffer cannot belong to him who suffered" (Tertullian: De Fuga, 14). Jesus died to be true to the will of God; and the Christian must follow that same will, whatever light may shine or shadow fall.

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2 Timothy 2:14

THE DANGER OF WORDS

2 Timothy 2:14

Remind your people of these things; and charge them before the Lord not to engage in battles of words--a thing of no use at all, and a thing which can only result in the undoing of those who listen to it.

Once again Paul returns to the inadequacy of words. We must remember that the Pastoral Epistles were written against a background of those Gnostics who produced their long words and their fantastic theories, and tried to make Christianity into a recondite philosophy instead of an adventure of faith.

There is both fascination and peril in words. They can become a substitute for deeds. There are people who are more concerned to talk than to act. If the world's problems could have been solved by discussion, they would have been solved long ago. But words cannot replace deeds. As Charles Kingsley wrote in *A Farewell*:

"Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever;
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long."

As Philip James Bailey wrote in *Festus*:

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most--feels the noblest--acts the best."

Dr. Johnson was one of the great talkers of all time; John Wesley was one of the great men of action of all time. They knew each other, and Johnson had only one complaint about Wesley: "John Wesley's conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have his talk out, as I do." But the fact remains that Wesley, the man of action, wrote his name across England in a way in which Johnson, the man of talk, never did.

It is not even true that talk and discussion fully solve intellectual problems. One of the most suggestive things Jesus ever said was: "If any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God" (Jn.7:17). Often understanding comes not by talking, but by doing. In the old Latin phrase, *solvitur ambulando*, the thing will solve itself as you go on. It often happens that the best way to understand the deep things of Christianity is to embark on the unmistakable duties of the Christian life.

There remains one further thing to be said. Too much talk and too much discussion can have two dangerous effects.

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2 Timothy 2:14

First, they may give the impression that Christianity is nothing but a collection of questions for discussion and problems for solution. The discussion circle is a characteristic phenomenon of this age. As G. K. Chesterton once said: "We have asked all the questions which can be asked. It is time we stopped looking for questions, and started looking for answers." In any society the discussion circle must be balanced by the action group.

Second, discussion can be invigorating for those whose approach to the Christian faith is intellectual, for those who have a background of knowledge and of culture, for those who have a real knowledge of, or interest in, theology. But it sometimes happens that a simple-minded person finds himself in a group which is tossing heresies about and propounding unanswerable questions, and his faith, so far from being helped, is upset. It may well be that that is what Paul means when he says that wordy battles can undo those who listen to them. The normal word used for building a person up in the Christian faith, for edification, is the same as is used for literally building a house; the word which Paul uses here for ruin (katastrophe, GSN2692) is what might well be used for the demolition of a house.

And it may well happen that clever, subtle, speculative, intellectually reckless discussion may have the effect of demolishing, and not building up, the faith of some simple person who happens to become involved in it. As in all things, there is a time to discuss and a time to be silent.

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2 Timothy 2:15-18

THE WAY OF TRUTH AND THE WAY OF ERROR

2 Timothy 2:15-18 (Part 1)

Put out every effort to present yourself to God as one who has stood the test, as a workman who has no need to be ashamed, as one who rightly handles the word of truth.

Avoid these godless chatterings, for the people who engage in them only progress further and further into ungodliness, and their talk eats its way into the Church like an ulcerous gangrene.

Amongst such people are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who, as far as the truth is concerned, have lost the way, when they say that the resurrection has already happened, and who by such statements are upsetting the faith of some.

Paul urges Timothy to present himself, amidst the false teachers, as a real teacher of the truth. The word he uses for "to present" is *parastesai* (GSN3936), which characteristically means to present oneself for service. The following words and phrases all develop this idea of usefulness for service.

The Greek for one who has stood the test is *dokimos* (GSN1384), which describes anything which has been tested and is fit for service. For instance, it describes gold or silver which has been purified of all alloy in the fire. It is therefore the word for money which is genuine, or, as we would say, sterling. It is the word used for a stone which is fit to be fitted into its place in a building. A stone with a flaw in it was marked with a capital A, standing for *adokimastos* (compare 0096), which means tested and found wanting. Timothy was to be tested that he might be a fit weapon for the work of Christ, and therefore a workman who had no need to be ashamed.

Further, Timothy is urged in a famous phrase rightly to divide the word of truth. The Greek word translated to divide rightly is interesting. It is *orthotomein* (GSN3718), which literally means to cut rightly. It has many pictures in it. Calvin connected it with a father dividing out the food at a meal and cutting it up so that each member of the family received the right portion. Beza connected it with the cutting up of sacrificial victims so that each part was correctly apportioned to the altar or to the priest. The Greeks themselves used the word in three different connections. They used it for driving a straight road across country, for ploughing a straight furrow across a field, and for the work of a mason in cutting and squaring a stone so that it fitted into its correct place in the structure of the building.

So the man who rightly divides the word of truth, drives a straight road through the truth and refuses to be lured down pleasant but irrelevant bypaths; he ploughs a straight furrow across the field of truth; he takes each section of the truth, and fits it into its correct position, as a mason does a stone, allowing no part to usurp an undue place and so knock the whole structure out of balance.

On the other hand, the false teacher engages on what Paul would call "godless chatterings." Then Paul uses a vivid phrase. The Greeks had a favourite word for making progress (*prokoptein*, GSN4298). It literally means to cut down in front; to remove the obstacles from a road so that straight and uninterrupted progress is possible. Paul says of these senseless talkers that they

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2 Timothy 2:15-18

progress further and further into ungodliness. They progress in reverse. The more they talk, the farther they get from God. Here then is the test. If at the end of our talk, we are closer to one another and to God, then all is well; but if we have erected barriers between one another and have left God more distant, then all is not well. The aim of all Christian discussion and of all Christian action is to bring a man nearer to his fellows and to God.

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2 Timothy 2:15-18

THE LOST RESURRECTION

2 Timothy 2:15-18 (Part 2)

Amongst the false teachers Paul numbers especially Hymenaeus and Philetus. Who these men were we do not know. But we get a brief glimpse of their teaching in at least one of its aspects. They said that the resurrection had already happened. This of course does not refer to the Resurrection of Jesus; it refers to the resurrection of the Christian after death. We do know two false views of the resurrection of the Christian which had some influence in the early Church.

(i) It was claimed that the real resurrection of the Christian took place at baptism. It is true that in Rom.6 Paul had written vividly about how the Christian dies in the moment of baptism and rises to life anew. There were those who taught that the resurrection happened in that moment of baptism and that it was resurrection to new life in Christ here and now, not after death.

(ii) There were those who taught that the meaning of individual resurrection was nothing more than that a man lived on in his children.

The trouble was that this kind of teaching found an echo in both the Jewish and the Greek side of the Church. On the Jewish side, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the body but the Sadducees did not. Any teaching which did away with the conception of life after death would appeal to the Sadducees; the trouble with the Pharisees was that they were wealthy materialists, who had so big a stake in this world that they were not interested in any world to come.

On the Greek side, the trouble was much greater. In the early days of Christianity, the Greeks, generally speaking, believed in immortality but not in the resurrection of the body. The highest belief was that of the Stoics. They believed that God was what might be called fiery spirit. The life in man was a spark of that spirit, a spark of God himself, a scintilla of deity. But they believed that when a man died that spark went back to God and was reabsorbed in him. That is a noble belief but it clearly abolishes personal survival after death. Further, the Greeks believed that the body was entirely evil. They had their play on words as a watchword: "Soma (GSN4983) Sema (compare GSN4591)," "The body is a tomb (marker)." The last thing they desired or believed in was the resurrection of the body; and therefore they, too, were open to receive any teaching about the resurrection which fitted their beliefs.

It is obvious that the Christian does not believe in the resurrection of this body. No one could conceive of someone smashed in an accident or dying of cancer reawakening in heaven with the same body. But the Christian does believe in the survival of personal identity; he believes most strenuously that after death you will still be you and I will still be I. Any teaching which removes that certainty of the personal survival of each individual man strikes at the very root of Christian belief.

When Hymenaeus and Philetus and their like taught that the resurrection had already happened, either at the moment of baptism or in a man's children, they were teaching something which

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Sadducean Jews and philosophic Greeks would be by no means averse to accepting; but they were also teaching something which undermined one of the central beliefs of the Christian faith.

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2 Timothy 2:19

THE FIRM FOUNDATION

2 Timothy 2:19

But the firm foundation of God stands fast with this inscription:

"The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness."

In English we use foundation in a double sense. We use it to mean the basis on which a building is erected; and also in the sense of an association, a college, a city which has been founded by someone. For instance, we talk about the foundation of a house; and we also say that King's College, Cambridge, is a foundation of Henry the Sixth. Greek used the word *themelios* (GSN2310) in the same two ways; and the foundation of God here means the Church, the association which he has founded.

Paul goes on to say that the Church has a certain inscription on it. The word he uses is *sphragis* (GSN4973) whose usual meaning is seal. The *sphragis* (GSN4973) is the seal which proves genuineness or ownership. The seal on a sack of goods proved that the contents were genuine and had not been interfered with; and it also indicated the ownership and the source of the goods. But *sphragis* (GSN4973) had other uses. It was used to denote the brandmark, what we would call the trademark. Galen, the Greek doctor, speaks of the *sphragis* (GSN4973) on a certain phial of eyesalve, meaning the mark which showed what brand of eyesalve the phial contained. Still further, the *sphragis* (GSN4973) was the architect's mark. Always on a monument or a statue or a building the architect put his mark, to show that he was responsible for its design. The *sphragis* (GSN4973) can also be the inscription which indicates the purpose for which a building has been built.

The Church has a *sphragis* (GSN4973) which shows at once what it is designed to be. The sign on the Church Paul gives in two quotations. But the way in which these two quotations are made is very illuminating in regard to the manner in which Paul and the early Church used scripture. The two quotations are: "The Lord knows those who are his," and "Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness." The interesting thing is that neither is a literal quotation from any part of scripture.

The first is a reminiscence of a saying of Moses to the rebellious friends and associates of Korah in the wilderness days. When they gathered themselves together against him, Moses said: "The Lord will show who is his" (Num.16:5). But that Old Testament text was read in the light of the saying of Jesus in Matt.7:22: "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, I never knew you: depart from me you evil-doers." The Old Testament text is, as it were, retranslated into the words of Jesus.

The second is another reminiscence of the Korah story. It was Moses' command to the people: "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs" (Num.16:26).

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2 Timothy 2:19

But that, too, is read in the light of the words of Jesus in Lk.13:27, where he says to those who falsely claim to be his followers: "Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity."

Two things emerge. The early Christians always read the Old Testament in the light of the words of Jesus; and they were not interested in verbal niceties, but to any problem they brought the general sense of the whole range of scripture. These are still excellent principles by which to read and use scripture.

The two texts give us two broad principles about the Church:

The first tells us that the Church consists of those who belong to God, who have given themselves to him in such a way that they no longer possess themselves and the world no longer possesses them, but God possesses them.

The second tells us that the Church consists of those who have departed from unrighteousness. That is not to say that it consists of perfect people. If that were so, there would be no Church. It has been said that the great interest of God is not so much in where a man has reached, as in the direction in which he is facing. And the Church consists of those whose faces are turned to righteousness. They may often fall and the goal may sometimes seem distressingly far away, but their faces are ever set in the right direction.

The Church consists of those who belong to God and have dedicated themselves to the struggle for righteousness.

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2 Timothy 2:20-21

VESSELS OF HONOUR AND OF DISHONOUR

2 Timothy 2:20-21

In any great house there are not only gold and silver vessels; there are also vessels of wood and earthenware. And some are put to a noble use and some to an ignoble use. If anyone purifies himself from these things, he will be a vessel fit to be put to a noble use, ready for any good work.

The connection between this passage and the one which immediately precedes it is very practical. Paul had just given a great and high definition of the Church as consisting of those who belong to God and are on the way to righteousness. The obvious rejoinder is: How do you explain the existence of the chattering heretics in the Church? How do you explain the existence of Hymenaeus and Philetus? Paul's reply is that in any great house there are all kinds of utensils; there are things of precious metal and things of base metal; there are things which have a dishonourable use and things which have an honourable use. It must be so in the Church. So long as it is an earthly institution it must be a mixture. So long as it consists of men and women, it must remain a cross-section of humanity. Just as it takes all kinds of people to make a world, so it takes all kinds of people to make the Church.

That is a practical truth which Jesus had stated long before, in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt.13:24-30, Matt.13:36-43). The point of that parable is that the wheat and the tares grow together, and, in the early stages, are so like each other that it is impossible to separate them. He stated it again in the Parable of the Drag-net (Matt.13:47-48). The drag-net gathered of every kind. In both parables Jesus teaches that the Church is necessarily a mixture and that human judgment must be suspended, but that God's judgment will in the end make the necessary separations.

Those who criticize the Church because there are imperfect people in it are criticizing it because it is composed of men and women. It is not given to us to judge; judgment belongs to God.

But it is the duty of a Christian to keep himself free from polluting influences. And if he does, his reward is not special honour and special privilege but special service.

Here is the very essence of the Christian faith. A really good man does not regard his goodness as entitling him to special honour; his one desire will be to have more and more work to do, for his work will be his greatest privilege. If he is good, the last thing he will do will be to seek to stand aloof from his fellow-men. He will rather seek to be among them, at their worst, serving God by serving them. His glory will not be in exemption from service; it will be in still more demanding service. No Christian should ever think of fitting himself for honour but always as fitting himself for service.

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2 Timothy 2:22-26

ADVICE TO A CHRISTIAN LEADER

2 Timothy 2:22-26

Flee from youthful passions; run in pursuit of righteousness in the company of those who call on the Lord from a clean conscience. Have nothing to do with foolish and stupid arguments, for you know that they only breed quarrels. The servant of the Lord must not fight, rather he must be kindly to all, apt to teach, forbearing, disciplining his opponents by gentleness. It may be that God will enable them to repent, so that they will come to know the truth, and so that they will escape from the snare of the devil, when they are captured alive by God's servant that they may do God's will.

Here is a passage of most practical advice for the Christian leader and teacher.

He must flee from youthful lusts. Many commentators have made suggestions as to what these youthful lusts are. They are far more than the passions of the flesh. They include that impatience, which has never learned to hasten slowly and has still to discover that too much hurry can do far more harm than good; that self-assertion, which is intolerant in its opinions and arrogant in its expression of them, and which has not yet learned to see the good in points of view other than its own; that love of disputation, which tends to argue long and act little, and which will talk the night away and be left with nothing but a litter of unsolved problems; that love of novelty, which tends to condemn a thing simply because it is old and to desire a thing simply because it is new, underrating the value of experience. One thing is to be noted--the faults of youth are the faults of idealism. It is simply the freshness and intensity of the vision which makes youth run into these mistakes. Such faults are matters not for austere condemnation but for sympathetic correction, for every one has a virtue hidden beneath it.

The Christian teacher and leader is to aim at righteousness, which means giving both to men and to God their due; at faith, which means loyalty and reliability which both come from trust in God; at love, which is the utter determination never to seek anything but the highest good of our fellow-men, no matter what they do to us, and which has for ever put away all bitterness and all desire for vengeance; at peace, which is the right relationship of loving fellowship with God and with men. And all these things are to be sought in the company of those who call upon the Lord. The Christian must never seek to live detached and aloof from his fellow-men. He must find his strength and his joy in the Christian fellowship. As John Wesley said: "A man must have friends or make friends; for no one ever went to heaven alone."

The Christian leader must not get involved in senseless controversies which are the curse of the Church. In the modern Church Christian arguments are usually doubly senseless, for they are seldom about great matters of life and doctrine and faith, but almost always about unimportant things like teacups and the like. Once a leader is involved in senseless and unchristian controversy, he has forfeited all right to lead.

The Christian leader must be kindly to all; even when he has to criticize and point out a fault, it must be done with the gentleness which never seeks to hurt. He must be apt to teach; he must not only know the truth, but also be able to communicate it, and he will do that, not so much by talking

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2 Timothy 2:22-26

about it, as by living in such a way that he shows men Christ. He must be forbearing; like his Master, if he is reviled, he must not revile again; he must be able to accept insult and injury, slights and humiliations, as Jesus accepted them. There may be greater sins than touchiness, but there is none which does greater damage in the Christian Church. He must discipline his opponents in gentleness; his hand like the hand of a surgeon, unerring to find the diseased spot, yet never for a moment causing unnecessary pain. He must love men, not batter them, into submission to the truth.

The last sentence of this passage is in very involved Greek, but it seems to be a hope that God will awaken repentance and the desire for the truth in the hearts of men, so that those who are caught in the snare of the devil may be rescued while their souls are still alive and brought into obedience to the will of God by the work of his servant. It is God who awakes the repentance; it is the Christian leader who opens the door of the Church to the penitent heart.

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2 Timothy 3:1

TIMES OF TERROR

2 Timothy 3:1

You must realize this--that in the last days difficult times will set in.

The early Church lived in an age when the time was waxing late; they expected the Second Coming at any moment. Christianity was cradled in Judaism and very naturally thought largely in Jewish terms and pictures. Jewish thought had one basic conception. The Jews divided all time into this present age and the age to come. This present age was altogether evil; and the age to come would be the golden age of God. In between there was The Day of the Lord, a day when God would personally intervene and shatter the world in order to remake it. That Day of the Lord was to be preceded by a time of terror, when evil would gather itself for its final assault and the world would be shaken to its moral and physical foundations. It is in terms of these last days that Paul is thinking in this passage.

He says that in them difficult times would set in. Difficult is the Greek word *chalepos* (GSN5467). It is the normal Greek word for difficult, but it has certain usages which explain its meaning here. It is used in Matt.8:28 to describe the two Gergesene demoniacs who met Jesus among the tombs. They were violent and dangerous. It is used in Plutarch to describe what we would call an ugly wound. It is used by ancient writers on astrology to describe what we would call a threatening conjunction of the heavenly bodies. There is the idea of menace and of danger in this word. In the last days there would come times which would menace the very existence of the Christian Church and of goodness itself, a kind of last tremendous assault of evil before its final defeat.

In the Jewish pictures of these last terrible times we get exactly the same kind of picture as we get here. There would come a kind of terrible flowering of evil, when the moral foundations seemed to be shaken. In the Testament of Issachar, one of the books written between the Old and the New Testaments, we get a picture like this:

"Know ye, therefore, my children, that in the last times
Your sons will forsake singleness
And will cleave unto insatiable desire;
And leaving guilelessness, will draw near to malice;
And forsaking the commandments of the Lord,
They will cleave unto Beliar.
And leaving husbandry,
They will follow after their own wicked devices,
And they shall be dispersed among the Gentiles,
And shall serve their enemies."
(Testament of Issachar, 6: 1-2).

In 2 Baruch we get an even more vivid picture of the moral chaos of these last times:

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2 Timothy 3:1

"And honour shall be turned into shame,
And strength humiliated into contempt,
And probity destroyed,
And beauty shall become ugliness ...
And envy shall rise in those who had not thought aught of
themselves,
And passion shall seize him that is peaceful,
And many shall be stirred up in anger to injure many;
And they shall rouse up armies in order to shed blood,
And in the end they shall perish together with them."
(2 Baruch 27).

In this picture which Paul draws he is thinking in terms familiar to the Jews. There was to be a final show-down with the forces of evil.

Nowadays we have to restate these old pictures in modern terms. They were never meant to be anything else but visions; we do violence to Jewish and to early Christian thought if we take them with a crude literalness. But they do enshrine the permanent truth that some time there must come the consummation when evil meets God in head-on collision and there comes the final triumph of God.

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2 Timothy 3:2-5

THE QUALITIES OF GODLESSNESS

2 Timothy 3:2-5 (Part 1)

For men will live a life that is centred in self; they will be lovers of money, braggarts, arrogant, lovers of insult, disobedient to their parents, thankless, regardless even of the ultimate decencies of life, without human affection, implacable in hatred, revelling in slander, ungovernable in their passions, savage, not knowing what the love of good is, treacherous, headlong in word and action, inflated with pride, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. They will maintain the outward form of religion, but they will deny its power. Avoid such people.

Here is one of the most terrible pictures in the New Testament of what a godless world would be like, with the terrible qualities of godlessness set out in a ghastly series. Let us look at them one by one.

It is no accident that the first of these qualities will be a life that is centred in self. The adjective used is *philautos* (GSN5367), which means self-loving. Love of self is the basic sin, from which all others flow. The moment a man makes his own will the centre of life, divine and human relationships are destroyed, obedience to God and charity to men both become impossible. The essence of Christianity is not the enthronement but the obliteration of self.

Men would become lovers of money (*philarguros*, GSN5366). We must remember that Timothy's work lay in Ephesus, perhaps the greatest market in the ancient world. In those days trade tended to flow down river valleys; Ephesus was at the mouth of the River Cayster, and commanded the trade of one of the richest hinterlands in all Asia Minor. At Ephesus some of the greatest roads in the world met. There was the great trade route from the Euphrates valley which came by way of Colosse and Laodicea and poured the wealth of the east into the lap of Ephesus. There was the road from north Asia Minor and from Galatia which came in via Sardis. There was the road from the south which centred the trade of the Maeander valley in Ephesus.

Ephesus was called "The Treasure-house of the ancient world," "The Vanity Fair of Asia Minor." It has been pointed out that the writer of Revelation may well have been thinking of Ephesus when he wrote that haunting passage which describes the merchandise of men: "The cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls" (Rev.18:12-13). Ephesus was the town of a prosperous, materialistic civilization; it was the kind of town where a man could so easily lose his soul.

There is peril when men assess prosperity by material things. It is to be remembered that a man may lose his soul far more easily in prosperity than in adversity; and he is on the way to losing his soul when he assesses the value of life by the number of things which he possesses.

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2 Timothy 3:2-5

THE QUALITIES OF GODLESSNESS

2 Timothy 3:2-5 (Part 2)

In these terrible days men would be braggarts and arrogant. In Greek writings these two words often went together; and they are both picturesque.

Braggart has an interesting derivation. It is the word *alazon* (GSN0213) and was derived from the *ale*, which means a wandering about. Originally the *alazon* (GSN0213) was a wandering quack. Plutarch uses the word to describe a quack doctor. The *alazon* (GSN0213) was a mountebank who wandered the country with medicines and spells and methods of exorcism which, he claimed, were panaceas for all diseases. We can still see this kind of man in fairs and market-places shouting the virtues of a patent medicine which will act like magic. Then the word went on to widen its meaning until it meant any braggart.

The Greek moralists wrote much about this word. The Platonic Definitions defined the corresponding noun (*alazoneia*, GSN0212) as: "The claim to good things which a man does not really possess." Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 7: 2) defined the *alazon* (GSN0213) as "the man who pretends to creditable qualities that he does not possess, or possesses in a lesser degree than he makes out." Xenophon tells us how Cyrus, the Persian king, defined the *alazon* (GSN0213): "The name *alazon* (GSN0213) seems to apply to those who pretend that they are richer than they are or braver than they are, and to those who promise to do what they cannot do, and that, too, when it is evident that they do this only for the sake of getting something or making some gain" (*Xenophon: Cyropoedia*, 2, 2, 12). Xenophon in the *Memorabilia* tells how Socrates utterly condemned such imposters. Socrates skid that they were to be found in every walk of life but were worst of all in politics.

"Much the greatest rogue of all is the man who has gulled his city into the belief that he is fit to direct it."

The world is full of these braggarts to this day; the clever know-alls who deceive people into thinking that they are wise, the politicians who claim that their parties have a programme which will bring in the Utopia and that they alone are born to be leaders of men, the people who crowd the advertisement columns with claims to give beauty, knowledge or health by their system, the people in the Church who have a kind of ostentatious goodness.

Closely allied with the braggart, but--as we shall see--even worse, is the man who is arrogant. The word is *huperephanos* (GSN5244). It is derived from two Greek words which mean to show oneself above. The man who is *huperephanos* (GSN5244), said Theophrastus, has a kind of contempt for everyone except himself. He is the man who is guilty of the "sin of the high heart." He is the man whom God resists, for it is repeatedly said in scripture, that God receives the humble but resists the man who is proud, *huperephanos* (GSN5244) (*Jas.4:6; 1Pet.5:5; Prov.3:24*). Theophylact called this kind of pride *akropolis* (compare GSN0206 and GSN4172) *kakon* (GSN2556), the citadel of evils.

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2 Timothy 3:2-5

The difference between the braggart and the man who is arrogant is this. The braggart is a swaggering creature, who tries to bluster his way into power and eminence. No one can possibly mistake him. But the sin of the man who is arrogant is in his heart. He might even seem to be humble; but in his secret heart there is contempt for everyone else. He nourishes an all-consuming, all-pervading pride; and in his heart there is a little altar where he bows down before himself.

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2 Timothy 3:2-5

THE QUALITIES OF GODLESSNESS

2 Timothy 3:2-5 (Part 3)

These twin qualities of the braggart and the arrogant man inevitably result in love of insult (blasphemia, GSN0988). Blasphemia is the word which is transliterated into English as blasphemy. In English we usually associate it with insult against God, but in Greek it means insult against man and God alike. Pride always begets insult. It begets disregard of God, thinking that it does not need him and that it knows better than he. It begets a contempt of men which can issue in hurting actions and in wounding words. The Jewish Rabbis ranked high in the list of sins what they called the sin of insult. The insult which comes from anger is bad but it is forgivable, for it is launched in the heat of the moment; but the cold insult which comes from arrogant pride is an ugly and an unforgivable thing.

Men will be disobedient to their parents. The ancient world set duty to parents very high. The oldest Greek laws disfranchised the man who struck his parents; to strike a father was in Roman law as bad as murder; in the Jewish law honour for father and mother comes high in the list of the Ten Commandments. It is the sign of a supremely decadent civilization when youth loses all respect for age and fails to recognize the unpayable debt and the basic duty it owes to those who gave it life.

Men will be thankless (acharistos, GSN0884). They will refuse to recognize the debt they owe both to God and to men. The strange characteristic of ingratitude is that it is the most hurting of all sins because it is the blindest. Lear's words remain true:

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!"

It is the sign of a man of honour that he pays his debts; and for every man there is a debt to God and there are debts to his fellow-men, which he must remember and repay.

Men will refuse to recognize even the ultimate decencies of life. The Greek word is that men will become anosios (GSN0462). Anosios does not so much mean that men will break the written laws; it means that they will offend against the unwritten laws which are part and parcel of the essence of life. To the Greek it was anosios (GSN0462) to refuse burial to the dead; it was anosios (GSN0462) for a brother to marry a sister, or a son a mother. The man who is anosios (GSN0462) offends against the fundamental decencies of life. Such offence can and does happen yet. The man who is mastered by his lower passions will gratify them in the most shameless way, as the streets of any great city will show when the night is late. The man who has exhausted the normal pleasures of life and still unsated, will seek his thrill in pleasures which are abnormal.

Men will be without human affection (astorgos, GSN0794). Storge is the word used especially of family love, the love of child for parent and parent for child. If there is no human affection, the family cannot exist. In the terrible times men will be so set on self that even the closest ties will be nothing to them.

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2 Timothy 3:2-5

Men will be implacable in their hatreds (aspondos, GSN0786). Sponde is the word for a truce or an agreement. Aspondos (GSN0786) can mean two things. It can mean that a man is so bitter in his hatred that he will never come to terms with the man with whom he has quarrelled. Or it can mean that a man is so dishonourable that he breaks the terms of the agreement he has made. In either case the word describes a certain harshness of mind which separates a man from his fellow-men in unrelenting bitterness. It may be that, since we are only human, we cannot live entirely without differences with our fellow-men, but to perpetuate these differences is one of the worst--and also one of the commonest--of all sins. When we are tempted to do so, we should hear again the voice of our blessed Lord saying on the Cross: "Father, forgive them."

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2 Timothy 3:2-5

THE QUALITIES OF GODLESSNESS

2 Timothy 3:2-5 (Part 4)

In these terrible days men will be slanderers. The Greek for slanderer is *diabolos* (GSN1228) which is precisely the English word devil. The devil is the patron saint of all slanderers and of all slanderers he is chief. There is a sense in which slander is the most cruel of all sins. If a man's goods are stolen, he can set to and build up his fortunes again; but if his good name is taken away, irreparable damage has been done. It is one thing to start an evil and untrue report on its malicious way; it is entirely another thing to stop it. As Shakespeare had it:

"Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands:
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed."

Many men and women, who would never dream of stealing, think nothing--even find pleasure--in passing on a story which ruins someone else's good name, without even trying to find out whether or not it is true. There is slander enough in many a church to make the recording angel weep as he records it.

Men will be ungovernable in their desires (*akrates*, GSN0193). The Greek verb *kratein* (GSN2902) means to control. A man can reach a stage when, so far from controlling it, he can become a slave to some habit or desire. That is the inevitable way to ruin, for no man can master anything unless he first masters himself.

Men will be savage. The word is *anemeros* (GSN0434) and would be more fittingly applied to a wild beast than to a human being. It denotes a savagery which has neither sensitiveness nor sympathy. Men can be savage in rebuke and savage in pitiless action. Even a dog may be sorry when he has hurt his master, but there are people who, in their treatment of others, can be lost to human sympathy and feeling.

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2 Timothy 3:2-5

THE QUALITIES OF GODLESSNESS

2 Timothy 3:2-5 (Part 5)

In these last terrible days men will come to have no love for good things or good persons (aphilagathos, GSN0865). There can come a time in a man's life when the company of good people and the presence of good things is simply an embarrassment. He who feeds his mind on cheap literature can in the end find nothing in the great masterpieces. His mental palate loses its taste. A man has sunk far when he finds even the presence of good people something which he would only wish to avoid.

Men will be treacherous. The Greek word (prodotes, GSN4273) means nothing less than a traitor. We must remember that this was written just at the beginning of the years of persecution, when it was becoming a crime to be a Christian. At this particular time in the ordinary matters of politics one of the curses of Rome was the existence of informers (delatores, compare GSN1213). Things were so bad that Tacitus could say: "He who had no foe was betrayed by his friend." There were those who would revenge themselves on an enemy by informing against him. What Paul is thinking of here is more than faithlessness in friendship--although that in all truth is wounding enough--he is thinking of those who to pay back an old score would inform against the Christians to the Roman government.

Men would be headlong in words and action. The word is propetes (GSN4312), precipitate. It describes the man who is swept on by passion and impulse to such an extent that he is totally unable to think sensibly. Far more harm is done from want of thought than almost anything else. Many and many a time we would be saved from hurting ourselves and from wounding other people, if we would only stop to think.

Men will be inflated with conceit (tetuphomenos, GSN5187). The word is almost exactly the English swelled-headed. They will be inflated with a sense of their own importance. There are still Church dignitaries whose main thought is their own dignity; but the Christian is the follower of him who was meek and lowly in heart.

They will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Here we come back to where we started; such men place their own wishes in the centre of life. They worship self instead of God.

The final condemnation of these people is that they retain the outward form of religion but deny its power. That is to say, they go through all the correct movements and maintain all the external forms of religion; but they know nothing of Christianity as a dynamic power which changes the lives of men. It is said that, after hearing an evangelical sermon, Lord Melbourne once remarked: "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of private life." It may well be that the greatest handicap to Christianity is not the scarlet sinner but the sleek devotee of an unimpeachable orthodoxy and a dignified convention, who is horrified when it is suggested that real religion is a dynamic power which changes a man's personal life.

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2 Timothy 3:6-7

SEDUCTION IN THE NAME OF RELIGION

2 Timothy 3:6-7

For from among these there come those who enter into houses, and take captive foolish women, laden with sins and driven by varied desires, ready to listen to any teacher but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

The Christian emancipation of women inevitably brought its problems. We have already seen how secluded the life of the respectable Greek woman was, how she was brought up under the strictest supervision, how she was not allowed "to see anything, to hear anything, or to ask any questions," how she never appeared, even on a shopping expedition, alone on the streets, how she was never allowed even to appear at a public meeting. Christianity changed all that and a new set of problems arose. It was only to be expected that certain women would not know how to use their new liberty. There were false teachers who were quick to take advantage of that.

Irenaeus draws a vivid picture of the methods of just such a teacher in his day. True, he is telling of something which happened later than this, but the wretched story would be the same (Irenaeus: *Against Heresies*, 1, 13, 3). There was a certain heretic called Marcus who dealt in magic. "He devotes himself specially to women, and those such as are well-bred, and elegantly attired, and of great wealth." He tells such women that by his spells and incantations he can enable them to prophesy. The woman protests that she has never done so and cannot do so. He says: "Open thy mouth, speak whatsoever occurs to thee, and thou shalt prophesy." The woman, thrilled to the heart, does so and is deluded into thinking that she can prophesy.

"She then makes the effort to reward Marcus, not only by the gift of her possessions (in which way he has collected a very large fortune), but also by yielding up to him her person, desiring in every way to be united to him, that she may become altogether one with him." The technique would be the same in the days of Timothy as it was in the later days of Irenaeus.

There would be two ways in which these heretics in the days of Timothy could exert an evil influence. We must remember that they were Gnostics and that the basic principle of Gnosticism was that spirit was altogether good and matter altogether evil. We have already seen that that teaching issued in one of two things. The Gnostic heretics taught, either that, since matter is altogether evil, a rigid asceticism must be practised and all the things of the body as far as possible eliminated, or that it does not matter what we do with the body and its desires can be indulged in to the limit because they do not matter. The Gnostic insinulators would teach these doctrines to impressionable women. The result would often be either that the woman broke off married relationships with her husband in order to live the ascetic life, or that she gave the lower instincts full play and abandoned herself to promiscuous relationships. In either case home and family life were destroyed.

It is still possible for a teacher to gain an undue and unhealthy influence over others, especially when they are impressionable.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 3:6-7

It is Paul's charge that such people are "willing to learn from anyone, and yet never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." E. F. Brown has pointed out the danger of what he calls "intellectual curiosity without moral earnestness." There is a type of person who is eager to discuss every new theory, who is always to be found deeply involved in the latest fashionable religious movement, but who is quite unwilling to accept the day-to-day discipline--even drudgery--of living the Christian life. No amount of intellectual curiosity can ever take the place of moral earnestness. We are not meant to titillate our minds with the latest intellectual crazes; we are meant to purify and strengthen ourselves in the moral battle to live the Christian life.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 3:8-9

THE OPPONENTS OF GOD

2 Timothy 3:8-9

In the same way as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these also oppose the truth, men whose minds are corrupt, and whose faith is counterfeit. But they will not get much further, for their folly will be as clear to all as that of those ancient impostors.

In the days between the Old and the New Testaments many Jewish books were written which expanded the Old Testament stories. In certain of these books Jannes and Jambres figured largely. These were the names given to the court magicians of Pharaoh who opposed Moses and Aaron, when Moses was leading the children of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. At first these magicians were able to match the wonders which Moses and Aaron did, but in the end they were defeated and discredited. In the Old Testament they are not named, but they are referred to in Exo.7:11; Exo.8:7; Exo.9:11.

A whole collection of stories gathered round their names. They were said to be the two servants who accompanied Balaam when he was disobedient to God (Num.22:22); they were said to have been part of the great mixed multitude who accompanied the children of Israel out of Egypt (Exo.12:38); some said that they perished at the crossing of the Red Sea; other stories said that it was Jannes and Jambres who were behind the making of the golden calf and that they perished among those who were killed for that sin (Exo.32:28); still other stories said that in the end they became proselytes to Judaism. Amidst all the stories one fact stands out--Jannes and Jambres became legendary figures typifying all those who opposed the purposes of God and the work of his true leaders.

The Christian leader will never lack his opponents. There will always be those who have their own twisted ideas of the Christian faith, and who wish to win others to their mistaken beliefs. But of one thing Paul was sure--the days of the deceivers were numbered. Their falsity would be demonstrated and they would receive their appropriate reward.

The history of the Christian Church teaches us that falsity cannot live. It may flourish for a time, but when it is exposed to the light of truth it is bound to shrivel and die. There is only one test for falsity--"You will know them by their fruits." The best way to overcome and to banish the false is to live in such a way that the loveliness and the graciousness of the truth is plain for all to see. The defeat of error depends not on skill in controversy but in the demonstration in life of the more excellent way.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 3:10-13

THE DUTIES AND THE QUALITIES OF AN APOSTLE

2 Timothy 3:10-13 (Part 1)

But you have been my disciple in my teaching, my training, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, my persecutions, my sufferings, in what happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, in the persecutions which I underwent; and the Lord rescued me from them all. And those who wish to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted; while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceived themselves and deceiving others.

Paul contrasts the conduct of Timothy, his loyal disciple, with the conduct of the heretics who were doing their utmost to wreck the Church. The word we have translated to be a disciple includes so much that is beyond translation in any single English word. It is the Greek *parakolouthen* (GSN3877) and literally means to follow alongside; but it is used with a magnificent width of meaning. It means to follow a person physically, to stick by him through thick and thin. It means to follow a person mentally, to attend diligently to his teaching and fully to understand the meaning of what he says. It means to follow a person spiritually, not only to understand what he says, but also to carry out his ideas and be the kind of person he wishes us to be. *Parakolouthen* (GSN3877) is indeed the word for the disciple, for it includes the unwavering loyalty of the true comrade, the full understanding of the true scholar and the complete obedience of the dedicated servant.

Paul goes on to list the things in which Timothy has been his disciple; and the interest of that list is that it consists of the strands out of which the life and work of an apostle are woven. In it we find the duties, the qualities and the experiences of an apostle.

First, there are the duties of an apostle. There is teaching. No man can teach what he does not know, and therefore before a man can teach Christ to others he must know him himself. When Carlyle's father was discussing the kind of minister his parish needed, he said: "What this parish needs is a man who knows Christ other than at secondhand." Real teaching is always born of real experience. There is training. The Christian life does not consist only in knowing something; it consists even more in being something. The task of the apostle is not only to tell men the truth; it is also to help them do it. The true leader gives training in living.

Second, there are the qualities of the apostle. First and foremost he has an aim in life. Two men were talking of a great satirist who had been filled with moral earnestness. "He kicked the world about," said one, "as if it had been a football." "True," said the other, "but he kicked it to a goal." As individuals, we should sometimes ask ourselves: what is our aim in life? As teachers we should sometimes ask ourselves: what am I trying to do with these people whom I teach? Once Agesilaus, the Sparta king, was asked, "What shall we teach our boys?" His answer was: "That which will be most useful to them when they are men." Is it knowledge, or is it life, that we are trying to transmit?

As members of the Church, we should sometimes ask ourselves, what are we trying to do in it? It is not enough to be satisfied when a church is humming like a dynamo and every night in the week has its own crowded organization. We should be asking: what, if any, is the unifying purpose which

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2 Timothy 3:10-13

binds all this activity together? In all life there is nothing so creative of really productive effort as a clear consciousness of a purpose.

Paul goes on to other qualities of an apostle. There is faith, complete belief that God's commands are binding and that his promises are true. There is patience. The word here is makrothumia (GSN3115); and makrothumia, as the Greeks used it, usually meant patience with people. It is the ability not to lose patience when people are foolish, not to grow irritable when they seem unteachable. It is the ability to accept the folly, the perversity, the blindness, the ingratitude of men and still to remain gracious, and still to toil on. There is love. This is God's attitude to men. It is the attitude which bears with everything men can do and refuses to be either angry or embittered, and which will never seek anything but their highest good. To love men is to forgive them and care for them as God forgave and cares--and it is only he who can enable us to do that.

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2 Timothy 3:10-13

THE EXPERIENCES OF AN APOSTLE

2 Timothy 3:10-13 (Part 2)

Paul completes the story of the things in which Timothy has shared, and must share, with him, by speaking of the experiences of an apostle; and he prefaces that list of experiences by setting down the quality of endurance. The Greek is *hupomone* (GSN5281), which means not a passive sitting down and bearing things but a triumphant facing of them so that even out of evil there can come good. It describes, not the spirit which accepts life, but the spirit which masters it.

And that quality of conquering endurance is necessary, because persecution is an essential part of the experience of an apostle. Paul cites three instances when he had to suffer for Christ. He was driven from Antioch in Pisidia (Ac.13:50); he had to flee from Iconium to avoid lynching (Ac.14:5-6); in Lystra he was stoned and left for dead (Ac.14:19). It is true that these things happened before the young Timothy had definitely entered on the Christian way, but they all happened in the district of which he was a native; and he may well have been an eyewitness of them. It may well be a proof of Timothy's courage and consecration that he had seen very clearly what could happen to an apostle and had yet not hesitated to cast in his lot with Paul.

It is Paul's conviction that the real follower of Christ cannot escape persecution. When trouble fell on the Thessalonians, Paul wrote to them: "When we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction; just as it has come to pass, and as you know" (1Th.3:4). It is as if he said to them: "You have been well warned." He returned after the first missionary journey to visit the Churches he had founded, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Ac.14:22). The Kingdom had its price. And Jesus himself had said: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matt.5:10). If anyone proposes to accept a set of standards quite different from the world's, he is bound to encounter trouble. If anyone proposes to introduce into his life a loyalty which surpasses all earthly loyalties, there are bound to be clashes. And that is precisely what Christianity demands that a man should do.

Persecution and hardships will come, but of two things Paul is sure.

He is sure that God will rescue the man who puts his faith in him. He is sure that in the long run it is better to suffer with God and the right than to prosper with men and the wrong. Certain of the temporary persecution, he is equally certain of the ultimate glory.

He is sure that the ungodly man will go from bad to worse and that there is literally no future for the man who refuses to accept the way of God.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 3:14-17

THE VALUE OF SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 3:14-17

But as for you, remain loyal to the things which you have learned, and in which your belief has been confirmed, for you know from whom you learned them, and you know that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that will bring you salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus. All God-inspired scripture is useful for teaching, for the conviction of error, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.

Paul concludes this section with an appeal to Timothy to remain loyal to all the teaching he had received. On his mother's side Timothy was a Jew, although his father had been a Greek (Ac.16:1); and it is clear that it was his mother who had brought him up. It was the glory of the Jews that their children from their earliest days were trained in the law. They claimed that their children learned the law even from their swaddling clothes and drank it in with their mother's milk. They claimed that the law was so imprinted on the heart and mind of a Jewish child that he would sooner forget his own name than he would forget it. So from his earliest childhood Timothy had known the sacred writings. We must remember that the scripture of which Paul is writing is the Old Testament; as yet the New Testament had not come into being. If what he claims for scripture is true of the Old Testament, how much truer it is of the still more precious words of the New.

We must note that Paul here makes a distinction. He speaks of "all God-inspired scripture." The Gnostics had their own fanciful books; the heretics all produced their own literature to support their claims. Paul regarded these as man-made things; but the great books for a man's soul were the God-inspired ones which tradition and the experience of men had sanctified.

Let us then see what Paul says of the usefulness of scripture.

(i) He says that the Scriptures give the wisdom which will bring salvation. A. M. Chirgwin in *The Bible in World Evangelism* tells the story of a ward sister in a children's hospital in England. She had been finding life, as she herself said, futile and meaningless. She had waded through book after book and laboured with philosophy after philosophy in an attempt to find satisfaction. She had never tried the Bible, for a friend had convinced her by subtle arguments that it could not be true. One day a visitor came to the ward and left a supply of gospels. The sister was persuaded to read a copy of St. John. "It shone and glowed with truth," she said, "and my whole being responded to it. The words that finally decided me were those in Jn.18:37: 'For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.' So I listened to that voice, and heard the truth, and found my Saviour."

Again and again Scripture has opened for men and women the way to God. In simple fairness, no man seeking for the truth has any right to neglect the reading of the Bible. A book with a record such as it has cannot be disregarded. Even an unbeliever is acting unfairly unless he tries to read it. The most amazing things may happen if he does, for there is a saving wisdom here that is in no other book.

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2 Timothy 3:14-17

(ii) The Scriptures are of use in teaching. Only in the New Testament have we any picture of Jesus, any account of his life and any record of his teaching. For that very reason it is unanswerable that, whatever a man might argue about the rest of the Bible, it is impossible for the Church ever to do without the Gospels. It is perfectly true--as we have so often said--that Christianity is not founded on a printed book but on a living person. The fact remains that the only place in all the world where we get a first-hand account of that person and of his teaching is in the New Testament. That is why the church which has no Bible Class is a church in whose work an essential element is missing.

(iii) The Scriptures are valuable for reproof. It is not meant that the Scriptures are valuable for finding fault; what is meant is that they are valuable for convincing a man of the error of his ways and for pointing him on the right path. A. M. Chirgwin has story after story of how the Scriptures came by chance into the hands of men and changed their lives.

In Brazil Signor Antonio of Minas bought a New Testament which he took home to burn. He went home and found the fire was out. Deliberately he lit it. He flung the New Testament on it. It would not burn. He opened out the pages to make it burn more easily. It opened at the Sermon on the Mount. He glanced at it as he consigned it to the flames. His mind was caught; he took it back. "He read on, forgetful of time, through the hours of the night, and just as the dawn was breaking, he stood up and declared, 'I believe'."

Vincente Quiroga of Chile found a few pages of a book washed up on the seashore by a tidal wave following an earthquake. He read them and never rested until he obtained the rest of the Bible. Not only did he become a Christian; he devoted the rest of his life to the distribution of the Scriptures in the forgotten villages of northern Chile.

One dark night in a forest in Sicily a brigand held up a colporteur at the point of a revolver. He was ordered to light a bonfire and burn his books. He lit the fire, and then he asked if he might read a little from each book before he dropped it in the flames. He read the twenty-third psalm from one; the story of the Good Samaritan from another; from another the Sermon on the Mount; from another 1Cor.13. At the end of each reading, the brigand said: "That's a good book; we won't burn that one; give it to me." In the end not a book was burned; the brigand left the colporteur and went off into the darkness with the books. Years later that same brigand turned up again. This time he was a Christian minister, and it was to the reading of the books that he attributed his change.

It is beyond argument that the Scriptures can convict a man of his error and convince him of the power of Christ.

(iv) The Scriptures are of use for correction. The real meaning of this is that all theories, all theologies, all ethics, are to be tested against the Bible. If they contradict the teaching of the Bible, they are to be refused. It is our duty to use our minds and set them adventuring; but the test must ever be agreement with the teaching of Jesus Christ as the Scriptures present it to us.

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2 Timothy 3:14-17

(v) Paul makes a final point. The study of the Scriptures trains a man in righteousness until he is equipped for every good work. Here is the essential conclusion. The study of the Scriptures must never be selfish, never simply for the good of a man's own soul. Any conversion which makes a man think of nothing but the fact that he has been saved is no true conversion. He must study the Scriptures to make himself useful to God and to his fellow-men. No man is saved unless he is on fire to save his fellow-men.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 4:1-5

PAUL'S GROUNDS OF APPEAL

2 Timothy 4:1-5 (Part 1)

I charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead--I charge you by his appearing and by his Kingdom--herald forth the word; be urgent in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, exhort, and do it all with a patience and a teaching which never fail. For there will come a time when men will refuse to listen to sound teaching, but, because they have ears which have to be continually titillated with novelties, they will bury themselves under a mound of teachers, whose teaching suits their own lusts after forbidden things. They will avert their ears from the truth, and they will turn to extravagant tales. As for you, be steady in all things; accept the suffering which will come upon you; do the work of an evangelist; leave no act of your service unfulfilled.

As Paul comes to the end of his letter, he wishes to nerve and to challenge Timothy to his task. To do so he reminds him of three things concerning Jesus.

(i) Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead. Some day Timothy's work will be tested, and that by none other than Jesus himself. A Christian must do every task in such a way that he can offer it to Christ. He is not concerned with either the criticism or the verdict of men. The one thing he covets is the "Well done!" of Jesus Christ. If we all did our work in that spirit, the difference would be incalculable. It would save us from the touchy spirit which is offended by criticism; it would save us from the self-important spirit which is concerned with personal rights and personal prestige; it would save us from the self-centred spirit which demands thanks and praise for its every act; it would even save us from being hurt by men's ingratitude.

(ii) Jesus is the returning conqueror. "I charge you," says Paul, "by his appearing." The word is epiphaneia (GSN2015). Epiphaneia was used in two special ways. It was used for the manifest intervention of some god; and it was specially used in connection with the Roman Emperor. His accession to the throne was his epiphaneia (GSN2015); and in particular--and this is the background of Paul's thought here--it was used of his visit to any province or town. Obviously when the Emperor was due to visit any place, everything was put in perfect order. The streets were swept and garnished and all work was brought up-to-date so that the town might be fit for epiphaneia (GSN2015). So Paul says to Timothy: "You know what happens when any town is expecting the epiphaneia (GSN2015) of the Emperor; you are expecting the epiphaneia (GSN2015) of Jesus Christ.

Do your work in such a way that all things will be ready whenever he appears." The Christian should so order life that at any moment he is ready for the coming of Christ.

(iii) Jesus is King. Paul urges Timothy to action by the remembrance of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. The day comes when the kingdoms of the world will be the Kingdom of the Lord; and so Paul says to Timothy: "So live and work that you will rank high in the roll of its citizens when the Kingdom comes."

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2 Timothy 4:1-5

Our work must be such that it will stand the scrutiny of Christ. Our lives must be such that they will welcome the appearance of the King. Our service must be such that it will demonstrate the reality of our citizenship of the Kingdom of God.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 4:1-5

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY

2 Timothy 4:1-5 (Part 2)

There can be few New Testament passages where the duties of the Christian teacher are more clearly set out than here.

The Christian teacher is to be urgent. The message he brings is literally a matter of life and death. The teachers who really get their message across are those who have the note of earnestness in their voice. Spurgeon had a real admiration for Martineau, who was a Unitarian and therefore denied the divinity of Jesus Christ which Spurgeon believed in with passionate intensity. Someone once said to Spurgeon: "How can you possibly admire Martineau? You don't believe what he preaches." "No," said Spurgeon, "but he does." Any man with the note of urgency in his voice demands, and will receive, a hearing from other men.

The Christian teacher is to be persistent. He is to urge the claims of Christ "in season and out of season." As someone has put it: "Take or make your opportunity." As Theodore of Mopsuestia put it: "The Christian must count every time an opportunity to speak for Christ." It was said of George Morrison of Wellington Church in Glasgow that with him wherever the conversation started, it went straight across country to Christ. This does not mean that we will not choose our time to speak, for there should be courtesy in evangelism as in every other human contact; but it does mean that perhaps we are far too shy in speaking to others about Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on to speak of the effect the Christian witness must produce.

He must convict. He must make the sinner aware of his sin. Walter Bagehot once said: "The road to perfection lies through a series of disgusts." Somehow or other the sinner must be made to feel disgusted with his sin. Epictetus draws a contrast between the false philosopher, who is out for popularity, and the real philosopher, whose one aim is the good of his hearers. The false philosopher deals in flattery and panders to self-esteem. The real philosopher says: "Come and be told that you are in a bad way." "The philosopher's lecture," he said, "is a surgery; when you go away you ought to have felt not pleasure, but pain." It was Alcibiades, the brilliant but spoiled darling of Athens, who used to say to Socrates: "Socrates, I hate you, because every time I meet you, you make me see what I am." The first essential is to compel a man to see himself as he is.

He must rebuke. In the great days of the Church there was an utter fearlessness in its voice; and because of that things happened. E. F. Brown tells of an incident from India. A certain young nobleman in the Viceroy's suite in Calcutta became notorious for his profligacy. Bishop Wilson one day put on his robes, drove to Government House, and said to the Viceroy: "Your excellency, if Lord _____ does not leave Calcutta before next Sunday, I shall denounce him from the pulpit in the Cathedral." Before Sunday came that young man was gone.

Ambrose of Milan was one of the great figures of the early Church. He was an intimate friend of Theodosius, the Emperor, who was a Christian, but a man of violent temper. Ambrose never hesitated to tell the Emperor the truth. "Who," he demanded, "will dare to tell you the truth if a

Barclay's Commentary

2 Timothy 4:1-5

priest does not dare?" Theodosius had appointed one of his close friends, Botherich, as governor of Thessalonica. Botherich, a good governor, had occasion to imprison a famous charioteer for infamous conduct. The popularity of these charioteers was incredible and the populace rose in a riot and murdered Botherich. Theodosius was mad with anger. Ambrose pled with him for discrimination in punishment, but Rufinus, his minister of state, deliberately inflamed his anger and Theodosius sent out orders for a massacre of vengeance. Later he countermanded the order, but too late for the new order to reach Thessalonica in time.

The theatre was crammed to capacity with the doors shut, and the soldiers of Theodosius went to and fro slaughtering men, women and children for three hours. More than seven thousand people were killed. News of the massacre came back to Milan and when Theodosius presented himself at the Church service the next Sunday, Ambrose refused him admission. The Emperor pled for pardon. Eight months passed and again he came to Church. Again Ambrose refused him entry. In the end the Emperor of Rome had to lie prostrate on the ground with the penitents before he was allowed to worship with the Church again. In its great days the Church was fearless in rebuke.

In our personal relationships a word of warning and rebuke would often save a brother from sin and shipwreck. But, as someone has said, that word must always be spoken as "brother setting brother right." It must be spoken with a consciousness of our common guilt. It is not our place to set ourselves up as moral judges of anyone; nonetheless it is our duty to speak that warning word when it needs to be spoken.

He must exhort. Here is the other side of the matter. No rebuke should ever be such that it drives a man to despair and takes the heart and the hope out of him. Not only must men be rebuked, they must also be encouraged.

Further, the Christian duty of conviction, of rebuke and of encouragement, must be carried out with unwearied patience. The word is makrothumia (GSN3115), and it describes the spirit which never grows irritated, never despairs and never regards any man as beyond salvation. The Christian patiently believes in men because he unconquerably believes in the changing power of Christ.

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2 Timothy 4:1-5

FOOLISH LISTENERS

2 Timothy 4:1-5 (Part 3)

Paul goes on to describe the foolish listeners. He warns Timothy that the day is coming when men will refuse to listen to sound teaching and will collect teachers who will titillate their ears with precisely the easy-going, comfortable things they want to hear.

In Timothy's day it was tragically easy to find such teachers. They were called sophists (compare GSN4680) and wandered from city to city, offering to teach anything for pay. Isocrates said of them: "They try to attract pupils by low fees and big promises." They were prepared to teach the whole of virtue or L15 or L20. They would teach a man to argue subtly and to use words cleverly until he could make the worse appear the better reason. Plato described them savagely: "Hunters after young men of wealth and position, with sham education as their bait, and a fee for their object, making money by a scientific use of quibbles in private conversation, while quite aware that what they are teaching is wrong."

They competed for customers. Dio Chrysostom wrote of them: "You might hear many poor wretches of sophists shouting and abusing one another, and their disciples, as they call them, squabbling, and many writers of books reading their stupid compositions, and many poets singing their poems, and many jugglers exhibiting their marvels, and many soothsayers giving the meaning of prodigies, and ten thousand rhetoricians twisting lawsuits, and no small number of traders driving their several trades."

Men in the days of Timothy were beset by false teachers hawking round sham knowledge. Their deliberate policy was to find arguments whereby a man could justify himself for doing what he wanted to do. Any teacher, to this day, whose teaching tends to make men think less of sin is a menace to Christianity and to mankind.

In contradistinction to that, certain duties are to be laid on Timothy.

He is to be steady in all things. The word (nephein, GSN3525) means that he is to be sober and self-contained, like an athlete who has his passions and his appetites and his nerves well under control. Hort says that the word describes "a mental state free from all perturbations or stupefactions...every faculty at full command, to look all facts and all considerations deliberately in the face." The Christian is not to be the victim of crazes; stability is his badge in an unbalanced and often insane world.

He is to accept whatever suffering comes upon him. Christianity will cost something, and the Christian is to pay the price of it without grumbling and without regret.

He is to do the work of an evangelist. In spite of the conviction and the rebuke the Christian is essentially the bringer of good news. If he insists on discipline and self-denial, it is that an even greater happiness may be attained than ever cheap pleasures can bring.

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2 Timothy 4:1-5

He is to leave no act of service unfulfilled. The Christian should have only one ambition--to be of use to the Church of which he is a part and the society in which he lives. The chance he dare not miss is not that of a cheap profit but that of being of service to his God, his Church and his fellow-men.

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2 Timothy 4:6-8

PAUL COMES TO THE END

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (Part 1)

For my life has reached the point when it must be sacrificed, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight: I have completed the course: I have kept the faith. As for what remains, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which on that day the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me--and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing.

For Paul the end is very near and he knows it. When Erasmus was growing old, he said: "I am a veteran, and have earned my discharge, and must leave the fighting to younger men." Paul, the aged warrior, is laying down his arms that Timothy may take them up.

No passage in the New Testament is more full of vivid pictures than this.

"My life," says Paul, "has reached the point where it must be sacrificed." The word he uses for sacrifice is the verb *spendesthai* (GSN4689) which literally means to pour out as a libation to the gods. Every Roman meal ended with a kind of sacrifice. A cup of wine was taken and was poured out (*spendesthai*, GSN4689) to the gods. It is as if Paul were saying: "The day is ended; it is time to rise and go; and my life must be poured out as a sacrifice to God." He did not think of himself as going to be executed; he thought of himself as going to offer his life to God. Ever since his conversion, he had offered everything to God--his money, his scholarship, his time, the vigour of his body, the acuteness of his mind, the devotion of his heart. Only life itself was left to offer, and gladly he was going to lay it down.

He goes on to say: "The time of my departure is at hand." The word (*analsis*, GSN0359) he uses for departure is a vivid one. It has many a picture in it and each tells us something about leaving this life. (a) It is the word for unyoking an animal from the shafts of the cart or the plough. Death to Paul was rest from toil. As Spenser had it, ease after toil, port after stormy seas, death after life, are lovely things. (b) It is the word for loosening bonds or fetters. Death for Paul was a release. He was to exchange the confines of a Roman prison for the glorious liberty of the courts of heaven. (c) It is the word for loosening the ropes of a tent. For Paul it was time to strike camp again. Many a journey he had made across the roads of Asia Minor and of Europe. Now he was setting out on his last and greatest journey; he was taking the road that led to God. (d) It is the word for loosening the mooring-ropes of a ship. Many a time Paul had felt his ship leave the harbour for the deep waters. Now he is to launch out into the greatest deep of all, setting sail to cross the waters of death to arrive in the haven of eternity.

So then, for the Christian, death is laying down the burden in order to rest; it is laying aside the shackles in order to be free; it is striking camp in order to take up residence in the heavenly places; it is casting off the ropes which bind us to this world in order to set sail on the voyage which ends in the presence of God. Who then shall fear it?

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2 Timothy 4:6-8

THE JOY OF THE WELL-FOUGHT CONTEST

2 Timothy 4:6-8 (Part 2)

Paul goes on, still speaking in these vivid pictures of which he was such a master: "I have fought the good fight: I have completed the race: I have kept the faith." It is likely that he is not using different pictures from three different spheres of life, but one picture from the games.

(i) "I have fought the good fight." The word he uses for fight is *agon* (GSN0073), which is the word for a contest in the arena. When an athlete can really say that he has done his best, then, win or lose, there is a deep satisfaction in his heart. Paul has come to the end, and he knows that he has put up a good show. When his mother died, Barrie made a great claim. "I can look back," he said, "and I cannot see the smallest thing undone." There is no satisfaction in all the world like knowing that we have done our best.

(ii) "I have finished the race." It is easy to begin but hard to finish. The one thing necessary for life is staying-power, and that is what so many people lack. It was suggested to a certain very famous man that his biography should be written while he was still alive. He absolutely refused to give permission, and his reason was: "I have seen so many men fall out on the last lap." It is easy to wreck a noble life or a fine record by some closing folly. But it was Paul's claim that he had finished the race. There is a deep satisfaction in reaching the goal.

Perhaps the world's most famous race is the marathon. The Battle of Marathon was one of the decisive battles of the world. In it the Greeks met the Persians, and, if the Persians had conquered, the glory that was Greece would never have flowered upon the world. Against fearful odds the Greeks won the victory, and, after the battle, a Greek soldier ran all the way, day and night, to Athens with the news. Straight to the magistrates he ran. "Rejoice," he gasped, "we have conquered," and even as he delivered his message he fell dead. He had completed his course and done his work, and there is no finer way for any man to die.

(iii) "I have kept the faith." This phrase can have more than one meaning. If we are to keep the background of the games, it is this. The great games in Greece were the Olympics. To these came all the greatest athletes in the world. On the day before the games all the competitors met and took a solemn oath before the gods that they had done not less than ten months training and that they would not resort to any trickery to win. So Paul may be saying: "I have kept the rules: I have played the game." It would be a great thing to die knowing that we had never transgressed the rules of honour in the race of life.

But this phrase may have other meanings. It is also a business phrase. It was the regular Greek for: "I have kept the conditions of the contract; I have been true to my engagement." If Paul used it in that way, he meant that he had engaged himself to serve Christ and had stood by that engagement and never let his Master down. Further, it could mean: "I have kept my faith: I have never lost my confidence and my hope." If Paul used it in that way, he meant that through thick and thin, in freedom and in imprisonment, in all his perils by land and sea, and now in the very face of death, he had never lost his trust in Jesus Christ.

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2 Timothy 4:6-8

Paul goes on to say there is laid up for him the crown. In the games the greatest prize was the laurel wreath. With it the victor was crowned; and to wear it was the greatest honour which could come to any athlete. But this crown in a few short days would wither. Paul knew that there awaited him a crown which would never fade.

In this moment Paul is turning from the verdict of men to the verdict of God. He knew that in a very short time he would stand before the Roman judgment seat and that his trial could have only one end. He knew what Nero's verdict would be, but he also knew what God's verdict would be. The man whose life is dedicated to Christ is indifferent to the verdict of men. He cares not if they condemn him so long as he hears his Master's "Well done!"

Paul sounds still another note--this crown awaits not only him but all who wait with expectation for the coming of the King. It is as if he said to the young Timothy: "Timothy, my end is near: and I know that I go to my reward. If you follow in my steps, you will feel the same confidence and the same joy when the end comes to you." The joy of Paul is open to every man who also fights that fight and finishes the race and keeps the faith.

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2 Timothy 4:9-15

A ROLL OF HONOUR AND DISHONOUR

2 Timothy 4:9-15 (Part 1)

Do your best to come and see me soon. Demas has deserted me, because he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful in service. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

When you come bring with you the cloak which I left behind at Troas at Corpus' house, and bring the books, especially the parchments.

Alexander, the coppersmith, did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will reward him according to his deeds. You yourself must be on your guard against him, for he hotly opposed our words.

Paul draws up a roll of honour and of dishonour of his friends. Some are only names to us; of some, as we read the Acts and the Epistles, we get little revealing glimpses. Some of the stories, if we are allowed to use our imagination, we can reconstruct.

THE SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE OF DEMAS

First on the list comes Demas. There are three mentions of him in Paul's letters; and it may well be that they hake in them the story of a tragedy. (i) In Phm.24 he is listed amongst a group of men whom Paul calls his fellow-labourers. (ii) In Col.4:14 he is mentioned without any comment at all. (iii) Here he has forsaken Paul because he loved this present world. First, Demas the fellow-labourer, then, just Demas, and, finally, Demas the deserter who loved the world. Here is the history of a spiritual degeneration. Bit by bit the fellow-labourer has become the deserter; the title of honour has become the name of shame.

What happened to Demas? That we cannot tell for sure, but we can guess.

(i) It may be that he had begun to follow Christ without first counting the cost; and it may be that he was not altogether to blame. There is a kind of evangelism which proclaims: "Accept Christ and you will have rest and peace and joy." There is a sense, the deepest of all senses, in which that is profoundly and blessedly true. But it is also true that when we accept Christ our troubles begin. Up to this time we have lived in conformity with the world and its standards. Because of that life was easy, because we followed the line of least resistance and went with the crowd. But once a man accepts Christ, he accepts an entirely new set of standards and is committed to an entirely new kind of life at his work, in his personal relationships, in his pleasures, and there are bound to be collisions.

It may be that Demas was swept into the Church in a moment of emotion without ever thinking things out; and then when unpopularity, persecution, the necessity of sacrifice, loneliness, imprisonment came, he quit because he had never bargained for anything like that. When a man undertakes to follow Christ, the first essential is that he should know what he is doing.

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2 Timothy 4:9-15

(ii) It may be that there came to Demas the inevitable weariness of the years. They have a way of taking our ideals away, of lowering our standards, of accustoming us to defeat.

Halliday Sutherland tells how he felt when he first qualified as a doctor. If on the street or in any company there came the call: "Is there a doctor here?" he thrilled to it, proud and eager to step forward and help. But as the years went on, a request like that became a nuisance. The thrill was gone.

W. H. Davies, the tramp who was also one of the greatest poets, has a revealing passage about himself. He had walked to see Tintern Abbey which he had last seen twenty-seven years ago. He says: "As I stood there now, twenty-seven years after, and compared that young boy's enthusiasm with my present lukewarm feelings, I was not very well pleased with myself. For instance, at that time I would sacrifice both food and sleep to see anything wonderful; but now in my prime I did not go seeking things of beauty, and only sang of things that came my way by chance."

Dean Inge had a sermon on Ps.91:6--"the destruction that wastes at noonday," which he called "The Peril of Middle Age." There is no threat so dangerous as the threat of the years to a man's ideals; and it can be kept at bay only by living constantly in the presence of Jesus Christ.

(iii) Paul said of Demas that "he loved this present world." His trouble may have been quite simple, and yet very terrible. It may simply be that he loved comfort more than he loved Christ, that he loved the easy way more than he loved the way which led first to a cross and then to the stars.

We think of Demas, not to condemn, but to sympathize, for so many of us are like him.

It is just possible that this is neither the beginning nor the end of the story of Demas. The name Demas is a shortened and familiar form of Demetrius and twice we come upon a Demetrius in the New Testament story. There was a Demetrius who led the riot of the silversmiths at Ephesus and wished to lynch Paul because he had taken their temple trade away (Ac.19:25). There was a Demetrius of whom John wrote that he had a good report of all and of the truth itself, a fact to which John bore willing and decisive witness (3Jn.12).

May this be the beginning and the end of the story? Did Demetrius the silversmith find something about Paul and Christ which twined itself round his heart? Did the hostile leader of the riot become the convert to Christ? Did he for a time fall away from the Christian way and become Demas, the deserter, who loved this present world? And did the grace of God lay hands on him again, and bring him back, and make him the Demetrius of Ephesus of whom John wrote that he was a servant of the truth of whom all spoke well? That we will never know, but it is a lovely thing to think that the charge of being a deserter may not have been the final verdict on the life of Demas.

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2 Timothy 4:9-15

A ROLL OF HONOUR AND DISHONOUR

2 Timothy 4:9-15 (Part 2)

THE GENTILE OF WHOM ALL SPOKE WELL

After Paul has spoken of the man who was the deserter, he goes on to speak of the man who was faithful unto death. "Luke alone is with me," he says. We know very little about Luke, and yet even from that little he emerges as one of the loveliest characters in the New Testament.

(i) One thing we know by implication--Luke accompanied Paul on his last journey to Rome and to prison. He was the writer of the Book of Acts. Now there are certain passages of Acts which are written in the first person plural and we can be quite sure that Luke is here describing occasions on which he himself was actually present. Ac.27 describes Paul setting out under arrest for Rome and the story is told in the first person. Therefore we can be sure that Luke was there. From that we deduce something else. It is thought that when an arrested prisoner was on his way to trial at Rome, he was allowed to be accompanied by only two slaves, and it is therefore probable that Luke enrolled himself as Paul's slave in order to be allowed to accompany him to Rome and to prison. Little wonder that Paul speaks of him with love in his voice. Surely devotion could go no farther.

(ii) There are only two other definite references to Luke in the New Testament. In Col.4:14 he is described as the beloved physician. Paul owed much to Luke. All his life he had the torturing thorn in his flesh; and Luke must have been the man who used his skill to ease his pain and enable him to go on. Luke was essentially a man who was kind. He does not seem to have been a great evangelist; he was the man who made his contribution in terms of personal service. God had given him healing skill in his hands, and Luke gave back that skill to God. Kindness is the quality which lifts a man out of the luck of ordinary men. Eloquence will be forgotten; mental cleverness may live on the printed page; but kindness lives on enthroned in the hearts of men.

Dr. Johnson had certain contacts with a young man called Harry Hervey. Hervey was rich and more than something of a rake. But he had a London house where Johnson was always welcome. Years later Harry Hervey was being unkindly discussed. Johnson said seriously: "He was a vicious man, but very kind to me. If you call a dog Hervey, I shall love him." Kindness covered a multitude of sins.

Luke was loyal and Luke was kind.

(iii) The other definite reference to Luke is in Phm.24; where Paul calls him his fellow-labourer. Luke was not content only to write nor to confine himself to his job as a doctor; he set his hand to the work. The Church is full of talkers and of people who are there more for what they can get than for what they can give; Luke was one of these priceless people--the workers of the Church.

(iv) There is one other possible reference to Luke in the New Testament. 2Cor.8:18 speaks of "the brother who is famous among all the Churches." From the earliest times that brother has been identified with Luke. He was the man of whom all men spoke well. He was the man who was loyal

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unto death; he was the man who was essentially kind; he was the man who was dedicated to the work. Such a man will always be one of whom all speak well.

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2 Timothy 4:9-15

A ROLL OF HONOUR AND DISHONOUR

2 Timothy 4:9-15 (Part 3)

There is still another name with an untold, yet thrilling, story behind it in this roll.

THE MAN WHO REDEEMED HIMSELF

Paul urges Timothy to bring Mark with him "for he is profitable to me for the ministry." The word ministry is not used in its narrower sense of the ministry of the Church but in its wider sense of service. "Bring Mark," says Paul, "for he is very useful in service." As E. F. Scott puts it; "Bring Mark, for he can turn his hand to anything." Or, as we might put it in our own everyday language: "Bring Mark, for he is a useful man to have about the place."

Mark had a curiously chequered career. He was very young when the Church began, but he lived at the very centre of its life. It was to the house of Mary, Mark's mother, that Peter turned his steps when he escaped from prison, and we may take it that this house was the central meeting place of the Jerusalem Church (Ac.12:12).

When Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey they took Mark with them-- John Mark was his full name--to be their assistant (Ac.13:5). It looked as if he was earmarked for a great career in the company of Paul and in the service of the Church. Then something happened. When Paul and Barnabas left Pamphylia and struck inland on the hard and dangerous road that led to the central plateau of Asia Minor, Mark left them and went home (Ac.13:13). His nerve failed him, and he turned back.

Paul took that defection very hard. When he set out with Barnabas on their second missionary journey, Barnabas--he was related to Mark (Col.4:10)--planned to take Mark with them again. But Paul absolutely refused to have the quitter a second time, and so fierce was the argument and so acute the difference that Paul and Barnabas split company and never, so far as we know, worked together again (Ac.15:36-40). So then, there was a time when Paul had no use for Mark, when he looked on him as a spineless deserter ;)nd completely refused to have him on his staff.

What happened to Mark after that we do not know. Tradition has it that he went to Egypt and that he was the founder of the Christian Church in that country. But, whatever he did, he certainly redeemed himself. When Paul comes to write Colossians from his Roman prison, Mark is with him, and Paul commends him to the Colossian Church and charges them to receive him. And now, when the end is near, the one man Paul wants, besides his beloved Timothy, is Mark, for he is a useful man to have about. The quitter has become the man who can turn his hand to anything in the service of Paul and of the gospel.

Fosdick has a sermon with the great and uplifting title, "No man need stay the way he is." Mark is proof of that. He is our encouragement and our inspiration, for he was the man who failed and yet made good. Still to this day Jesus Christ can make the coward spirit brave and nerve the feeble arm

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2 Timothy 4:9-15

for fight. He can release the sleeping hero in the soul of every man. He can turn the shame of failure into the joy of triumphant service.

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2 Timothy 4:9-15

A ROLL OF HONOUR AND DISHONOUR

2 Timothy 4:9-15 (Part 4)

HELPERS AND A HINDERER AND A LAST REQUEST

So the list of names goes on. Of Crescens we know nothing at all. Titus was another of Paul's most faithful lieutenants. "My true child," Paul calls him (Tit.1:4). When the trouble with the Church at Corinth had been worrying him, Titus had been one of Paul's emissaries in the struggle to mend things (2Cor.2:13; 2Cor.7:6,13; 2Cor.12:18). Tychicus had been entrusted with the delivery of the letter to the Colossians (Col.4:7), and of the letter to the Ephesians (Eph.6:21). The little group of helpers was being dispersed throughout the Church, for even if Paul was in prison the work had still to go on, and Paul must go lonely that his scattered people might be strengthened and guided and comforted.

Then comes the mention of a man who had hindered instead of helping: "Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm." We do not know what Alexander had done; but perhaps we can deduce it. The word that Paul uses for did me much evil is the Greek *endeiknumi* (GSN1731). That verb literally means to display, and was in fact often used for the laying of information against a man. Informers were one of the great curses of Rome at this time. And it may well be that Alexander was a renegade Christian, who went to the magistrates with false information against Paul, seeking to ruin him in the most dishonourable way.

Paul has certain personal requests to make. He wants the cloak he had left behind at the house of Carpus in Troas. The cloak (*phainole*) was a great circular rug-like garment. It had a hole for the head in the middle and it covered a man like a little tent, reaching right down to the ground. It was a garment for the winter time and no doubt Paul was feeling his Roman prison cold.

He wants the books; the word is *biblia* (GSN0975), which literally means papyrus rolls; and it may well be that these rolls contained the earliest forms of the gospels. He wanted the parchments. They could be one of two things. They might be Paul's necessary legal documents, especially his certificate of Roman citizenship; but more likely they were copies of the Hebrew Scriptures, for the Hebrews wrote their sacred books on parchment made from the skins of animals. It was the word of Jesus and the word of God that Paul wanted most of all, when he lay in prison awaiting death.

Sometimes history has a strange way of repeating itself. Fifteen hundred years later William Tyndale was lying in prison in Vilvorde, waiting for death because he had dared to give the people the Bible in their own language. It is a cold damp winter, and he writes to a friend: "Send me, for Jesus' sake, a warmer cap, something to patch my leggings, a woollen shirt, and above all my Hebrew Bible." When they were up against it and the chill breath of death was on them, the great ones wanted more than anything else the word of God to put strength and courage into their souls.

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2 Timothy 4:16-22

LAST WORDS AND GREETINGS

2 Timothy 4:16-22 (Part 1)

At my first defence no one was there to stand by me, but all forsook me. May it not be reckoned against them! But the Lord stood beside me, and he strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation of the gospel was fully made so that the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the mouth of the lion. The Lord will rescue me from every evil, and will save me for his heavenly kingdom. Glory be to him for ever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the family of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth. I left Trophimus at Miletus. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens, Linus and Claudia, and all the brothers.

The Lord be with your spirit.

Grace be with you.

A Roman trial began with a preliminary examination to formulate the precise charge against the prisoner. When Paul was brought to that preliminary examination, not one of his friends stood by him. It was too dangerous to proclaim oneself the friend of a man on trial for his life.

One of the curious things about this passage is the number of reminiscences of Ps.22. "Why hast thou forsaken me?--all forsook me." "There is none to help--no one was there to stand by me." "Save me from the mouth of the lion--I was rescued from the mouth of the lion." "All the ends of the earth shall turn to the Lord--that the Gentiles might hear it." "Dominion belongs to the Lord--The Lord will save me for his heavenly kingdom." It seems certain that the words of this psalm were running in Paul's mind. And the lovely thing is that this was the psalm which was in the mind of Jesus when he hung upon his Cross. As Paul faced death, he encouraged his heart with the same psalm as his Lord used in the same circumstances.

Three things brought Paul courage in that lonely hour.

(i) All men had forsaken him but the Lord was with him. Jesus had said that he would never leave his own or forsake them and that he would be with them to the end of the world. Paul is a witness that Jesus kept his promise. If to do the right means to be alone, as Joan of Arc said, "It is better to be alone with God."

(ii) Paul would use even a Roman court to proclaim the message of Christ. He obeyed his own commandment; in season and out of season he pressed the claims of Christ on men. He was so busy thinking of the task of preaching that he forgot the danger. A man who is immersed in his task has conquered fear.

(iii) He was quite certain of the ultimate rescue. In time he might seem to be the victim of circumstances and a criminal condemned at the bar of Roman justice; but Paul saw beyond time

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2 Timothy 4:16-22

and knew that his eternal safety was assured. It is always better to be in danger for a moment and safe for eternity, than to be safe for a moment and jeopardize eternity.

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2 Timothy 4:16-22

A HIDDEN ROMANCE?

2 Timothy 4:16-22 (Part 2)

Finally there come greetings sent and given. There is a greeting to Priscilla and Aquila, that husband and wife whose home was ever a church, wherever it might be, and who had at some time risked their lives for Paul's sake (Ac.18:2; Rom.16:3; 1Cor.16:19). There is a greeting to the gallant Onesiphorus, who had sought out Paul in prison in Rome (2Tim.1:16) and who, it may be, had paid for his loyalty with his life. There is a greeting to Erastus, whom once Paul sent as his emissary to Macedonia (Ac.19:22), and who, it may be, was afterwards within the Church at Rome (Rom.16:23). There is a greeting to Trophimus, whom Paul had been accused of bringing into the Temple precincts in Jerusalem, although a Gentile, an incident for which Paul's last imprisonment began (Ac.20:4; Ac.21:29). Finally there are greetings from Linus, Pudens and Claudia. In the later lists Linus stands as the first bishop of Rome.

Around the names of Pudens and Claudia a romance has been woven. The story may be impossible, or at least improbable, but it is too interesting not to quote. Martial was a famous Roman poet, a writer of epigrams, who flourished from A.D. 66 to A.D. 100. Two of his epigrams celebrate the marriage of a highborn and distinguished Roman called Pudens to a lady called Claudia. In the second of them Claudia is called a stranger in Rome, and it is said that she came from Britain. Now Tacitus tells us that in A.D. 52, in the reign of the Emperor Claudius, certain territories in south-east Britain were given to a British king called Cogidubnus, for his loyalty to Rome; and in 1723 a marble tablet was dug up in Chichester which commemorates the erection of a heathen temple by Cogidubnus, the king, and by Pudens, his son. In the inscription the full name of the king is given and, no doubt in honour of the Roman Emperor, we find that the British king had taken the name of Tiberius Claudius Cogidubnus.

If that king had a daughter her name must have been Claudia, for that is the name that she would take from her father. We can carry the story further. It may be that Cogidubnus would send his daughter Claudia to stay in Rome. That he should do so would be almost certain, for when a foreign king entered into an alliance with Rome, as Cogidubnus had done, some members of his family were always sent to Rome as pledges of keeping the agreement. If Claudia went to Rome, she would certainly stay in the house of a Roman called Aulus Plautius, who had been the governor in Britain from A.D. 43-52, and to whom Cogidubnus had rendered his faithful service. The wife of Aulus Plautius was a lady called Pomponia, and we learn from Tacitus that she had been arraigned before the Roman courts in A.D. 57 because she was "tainted with a foreign superstition." That "foreign superstition" may well have been Christianity.

Pomponia may have been a Christian, and from her Claudia, the British princess, may have learned of Jesus also.

We cannot say whether the guesses in that story are true. But it would be wonderful to think that this Claudia was actually a British princess who had come to stay in Rome and become a Christian, and that Pudens was her husband.

Paul comes to the end by commending his friends to the presence and the Spirit of his Lord and theirs, and, as always, his last word is grace.

Barclay's Commentary

Introduction to Timothy & Titus

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS TO TIMOTHY AND TITUS

PERSONAL LETTERS

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus have always been regarded as forming a separate group of letters, different from the other letters of Paul. The most obvious difference is that they, along with the little letter to Philemon, are written to persons, whereas all other Pauline letters are written to Churches. The Muratorian Canon, which was the earliest official list of New Testament books, says that they were written "from personal feeling and affection." They are private rather than public letters.

ECCLESIASTICAL LETTERS

But it very soon began to be seen that, though these are personal and private letters, they have a significance and a relevance far beyond the immediate. In 1Tim.3:15 their aim is set down. They are written to Timothy "that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God." So, then, it came to be seen that these letters have not only a personal significance, but also what one might call an ecclesiastical significance. The Muratorian Canon says of them that, though they are personal letters written out of personal affection, "they are still hallowed in the respect of the Catholic Church, and in the arrangement of ecclesiastical discipline." Tertullian said that Paul wrote "two letters to Timothy and one to Titus, which were composed concerning the state of the Church (de ecclesiastico statu)." It is not then surprising that the first name given to them was Pontifical Letters, that is, written by the pontifex, the priest, the controller of the Church.

PASTORAL LETTERS

Bit by bit they came to acquire the name by which they are still known--The Pastoral Epistles. In writing of I Timothy Thomas Aquinas, as long ago as 1274, said, "This letter is as it were a pastoral rule which the Apostle delivered to Timothy." In his introduction to the second letter, he writes, "In the first letter he gives Timothy instructions concerning ecclesiastical order; in this second letter he deals with a pastoral care which should be so great that it will even accept martyrdom for the sake of the care of the flock." But this title, The Pastoral Epistles, really became affixed to these letters in 1726 when a great scholar, Paul Anton by name, gave a series of famous lectures on them under that title.

These letters then deal with the care and organization of the flock of God; they tell men how to behave within the household of God; they give instructions as to how God's house should be administered, as to what kind of people the leaders and pastors of the Church should be, and as to how the threats which endanger the purity of Christian faith and life should be dealt with.

THE GROWING CHURCH

The supreme interest of these letters is that we get in them a picture of the infant Church. In those early days it was an island in a sea of paganism. The people in it were only one remove from their

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heathen origin. It would have been so easy for them to relapse into the pagan standards from which they had come; the tarnishing atmosphere was all around. It is most significant that missionaries tell us that of all letters the Pastoral Epistles speak most directly to the situation of the younger Churches. The situation with which they deal is being re-enacted in India, in Africa, in China every day. They can never lose their interest because in them we see, as nowhere else, the problems which continually beset the growing Church.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PASTORALS

From the beginning these letters have presented problems to New Testament scholars. There are many who have felt that, as they stand, they cannot have come directly from the hand and pen of Paul. That this is no new feeling may be seen from the fact that Marcion, who, although he was a heretic, was the first man to draw up a list of New Testament books, did not include them among Paul's letters. Let us then see what makes people doubt their direct Pauline authorship.

In them we are confronted with the picture of a Church with a fairly highly developed ecclesiastical organization. There are elders (1Tim.5:17-19; Tit.1:5-6); there are bishops, superintendents or overseers (1Tim.3:1-7; Tit.1:7-16); there are deacons (1Tim.3:8-13). From 1Tim.5:17-18 we learn that by that time elders were even salaried officials. The elders that rule well are to be counted worthy of a double pay and the Church is urged to remember that the labourer is worthy of his hire. There is at least the beginning of the order of widows who became so prominent later on in the early Church (1Tim.5:3-16). There is clearly here a quite elaborate structure within the Church, too elaborate some would claim for the early days in which Paul lived and worked.

THE DAYS OF CREEDS

It is even claimed that in these letters we can see the days of creeds emerging. The word faith changed its meaning. In the earliest days it is always faith in a person; it is the most intimate possible personal connection of love and trust and obedience with Jesus Christ. In later days it became faith in a creed; it became the acceptance of certain doctrines. It is said that in the Pastoral Epistles we can see this change emerging.

In the later days men will come who will depart from the faith and give heed to doctrines of devils (1Tim.4:1). A good servant of Jesus Christ must be nourished in the words of faith and good doctrine (1Tim.4:6). The heretics are men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith (2Tim.3:8). The duty of Titus is to rebuke men that they may be sound in the faith (Tit.1:13).

This comes out very particularly in an expression peculiar to the Pastorals. Timothy is urged to keep hold of "the truth that has been entrusted to you" (2Tim.1:14). The word for that has been entrusted is *paratheke* (GSN3866). *Paratheke* means a deposit which has been entrusted to a banker or someone else for safe-keeping. It is essentially something which must be handed back or handed on absolutely unchanged. That is to say the stress is on orthodoxy. Instead of being a close, personal relationship to Jesus Christ, as it was in the thrilling and throbbing days of the early

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Church, faith has become the acceptance of a creed. It is even held that in the Pastorals we have echoes of the earliest creeds.

"God was manifested in the flesh;
Vindicated in the Spirit;
Seen by angels;
Preached among the nations;
Believed on in the world;
Taken up in glory" (1Tim.3:16).

That indeed sounds like the fragment of a creed to be recited.

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel" (2Tim.2:8).

That sounds like a reminder of a sentence from an accepted creed.

Within the Pastorals there undoubtedly are indications that the day of insistence on acceptance of a creed has begun, and that the days of the first thrilling personal discovery of Christ are beginning to fade.

A DANGEROUS HERESY

It is clear that in the forefront of the situation against which the Pastoral Epistles were written there was a dangerous heresy which was threatening the welfare of the Christian Church. If we can distinguish the various characteristic features of that heresy, we may be able to go on to identify it.

It was characterized by speculative intellectualism. It produced questions (1Tim.1:4); those involved in it doted about questions (1Tim.6:4); it dealt in foolish and unlearned questions (2Tim.2:23); its foolish questions are to be avoided (Tit.3:9). The word used in each case for questions is *ekzesis* (compare GSN1567 and GSN2214), which means speculative discussion. This heresy was obviously one which was a play-ground of the intellectuals, or rather the pseudo-intellectuals of the Church.

It was characterized by pride. The heretic is proud, although in reality he knows nothing (1Tim.6:4). There are indications that these intellectuals set themselves on a plane above the ordinary Christian; in fact they may well have said that complete salvation was outside the grasp of the ordinary man and open only to them. At times the Pastoral Epistles stress the word *all* in a most significant way. The grace of God, which brings salvation, has appeared to all men (Tit.2:11). It is God's will that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1Tim.2:4). The intellectuals tried to make the greatest blessings of Christianity the exclusive possession of a chosen few; and in contradistinction the true faith stresses the all-embracing love of God.

There were within that heresy two opposite tendencies. There was a tendency to asceticism. The heretics tried to lay down special food laws, forgetting that everything God has made is good

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(1Tim.4:4-5). They listed many things as impure, forgetting that to the pure all things are pure (Tit.1:15). It is not impossible that they regarded sex as something unclean and belittled marriage, and even tried to persuade those who were married to renounce it, for in Tit.2:4 the simple duties of the married life are stressed as being binding on the Christian.

But this heresy also issued in immorality. The heretics even invaded private houses and led away weak and foolish women in evil desires (2Tim.3:6). They professed to know God, but denied him by their deeds (Tit.1:16). They were out to impose upon people and to make money out of their false teaching. To them gain was godliness (1Tim.6:5); they taught and deceived for base gain (Tit.1:11).

On the one hand this heresy issued in an unchristian asceticism, and on the other it produced an equally unchristian immorality.

It was characterized, too, by words and tales and genealogies. It was full of godless chatter and useless controversies (1Tim.6:20). It produced endless genealogies (1Tim.1:4; Tit.3:9). It produced myths and fables (1Tim.1:4; Tit.1:14).

It was at least in some way and to some extent tied up with Jewish legalism. Amongst its devotees were those of the circumcision (Tit.1:10). The aim of the heretics was to be teachers of the law (1Tim.1:7). It pressed on men Jewish fables and the commandments of men (Tit.1:14).

Finally, these heretics denied the resurrection of the body. They said that any resurrection that a man was going to experience had been experienced already (2Tim.2:18). This is probably a reference to those who held that the only resurrection the Christian experienced was a spiritual one when he died with Christ and rose again with him in the experience of baptism (Rom.6:4).

THE BEGINNINGS OF GNOSTICISM

Is there any heresy which fits all this material? There is, and its name is Gnosticism. The basic thought of Gnosticism was that all matter is essentially evil and spirit alone is good. That basic belief had certain consequences.

The Gnostic believed that matter is as eternal as God; and that when God created the world he had to use this essentially evil matter. That meant that to them God could not be the direct creator of the world. In order to touch this flawed matter he had to send out a series of emanations--they called them aeons--each one more and more distant from himself until at last there came an emanation or aeon so distant that it could deal with matter and create the world. Between man and God there stretched a series of these emanations, each with his name and genealogy. So Gnosticism literally had endless fables and endless genealogies. If a man was ever to get to God, he must, as it were, ascend this ladder of emanations; and to do that he needed a very special kind of knowledge including all kinds of passwords to get him past each stage. Only a person of the highest intellectual calibre could hope to acquire this knowledge and know these passwords and so get to God.

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Further, if matter was altogether evil, the body was altogether evil. From that, two opposite possible consequences sprang. Either the body must be held down so that a rigorous asceticism resulted, in which the needs of the body were as far as possible eliminated and its instincts, especially the sex instinct, as far as possible destroyed; or it could be held that, since it was evil, it did not matter what was done with the body and its instincts and desires could be given full rein. The Gnostic therefore became either an ascetic or a man to whom morality had ceased to have any relevance at all.

Still further, if the body was evil, clearly there could be no such thing as its resurrection. It was not the resurrection of the body but its destruction to which the Gnostic looked forward.

All this fits accurately the situation of the Pastoral Epistles. In Gnosticism we see the intellectualism, the intellectual arrogance, the fables and the genealogies, the asceticism and the immorality, the refusal to contemplate the possibility of a bodily resurrection, which were part and parcel of the heresy against which the Pastoral Epistles were written.

One element in the heresy has not yet been fitted into place--the Judaism and the legalism of which the Pastoral Epistles speak. That too finds its place. Sometimes Gnosticism and Judaism joined hands. We have already said that the Gnostics insisted that to climb the ladder to God a very special knowledge was necessary; and that some of them insisted that for the good life a strict asceticism was essential. It was the claim of certain of the Jews that it was precisely the Jewish law and the Jewish food regulations which provided that special knowledge and necessary asceticism; and so there were times when Judaism and Gnosticism went hand in hand.

It is quite clear that the heresy at the back of the Pastoral Epistles was Gnosticism. Some have used that fact to try to prove that Paul could have had nothing to do with the writing of them, because, they say, Gnosticism did not emerge until much later than Paul. It is quite true that the great formal systems of Gnosticism, connected with such names as Valentinus and Basilides, did not arise until the second century; but these great figures only systematized what was already there. The basic ideas of Gnosticism were there in the atmosphere which surrounded the early Church, even in the days of Paul. It is easy to see their attraction, and also to see that, if they had been allowed to flourish unchecked, they could have turned Christianity into a speculative philosophy and wrecked it. In facing Gnosticism, the Church was facing one of the gravest dangers which ever threatened the Christian faith.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE PASTORALS

The most impressive argument against the direct Pauline origin of the Pastorals is a fact which is quite clear in the Greek but not so clear in any English translation. The total number of words in the Pastoral Epistles is 902, of which 54 are proper names; and of these 902 words, no fewer than 306 never occur in any other of Paul's letters. That is to say more than a third of the words in the Pastoral Epistles are totally absent from Paul's other letters. In fact 175 words in the Pastoral Epistles occur nowhere else in the New Testament at all; although it is only fair to say that there are 50 words in the Pastoral Epistles which occur in Paul's other letters and nowhere else in the New Testament.

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Further, when the other letters of Paul and the Pastorals say the same thing they say it in different ways, using different words and different turns of speech to express the same idea.

Again, many of Paul's favourite words are absent entirely from the Pastoral Epistles. The words for the cross (stauros, GSN4716) and to crucify (stauroun, GSN4717) occur 27 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals. Eleutheria (GSN1657) and the kindred words which have to do with freedom occur 29 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals. Huios (GSN5207), "son," and huiiothesia (GSN5206), "adoption," occur 46 times in Paul's other letters, and never in the Pastorals.

Moreover, Greek has many more of those little words called particles and enclitics than English has. Sometimes they indicate little more than a tone of voice; every Greek sentence is joined to its predecessor by one of them; and they are often virtually untranslatable. Of these particles and enclitics there are 112 which Paul uses altogether 932 times in his other letters that never occur in the Pastorals.

There is clearly something which has to be explained here. The vocabulary and the style make it hard to believe that Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles in the same sense as he wrote his other letters.

PAUL'S ACTIVITIES IN THE PASTORALS

But perhaps the most obvious difficulty of the Pastorals is that they show Paul engaged in activities for which there is no room in his life as we know it from the book of Acts. He has clearly conducted a mission in Crete (Tit.1:5). And he proposes to spend a winter in Nicopolis, which is in Epirus (Tit.3:12). In Paul's life as we know it that particular mission and that particular winter just cannot be fitted in. But it may well be that just here we have stumbled on the solution to the problem.

WAS PAUL RELEASED FROM HIS ROMAN IMPRISONMENT?

Let us sum up. We have seen that the Church organization of the Pastorals is more elaborate than in any other Pauline letter. We have seen that the stress on orthodoxy sounds like second or third generation Christianity, when the thrill of the new discovery is wearing off and the Church is on the way to becoming an institution. We have seen that Paul is depicted as carrying out a mission or missions which cannot be fitted into the scheme of his life as we have it in Acts. But Acts leaves it quite uncertain what happened to Paul in Rome. It ends by telling us that he lived for two whole years in a kind of semi-captivity, preaching the gospel without hindrance (Ac.28:30-31). But it does not tell us how that captivity ended, whether in Paul's release or his execution.

It is true that the general assumption is that it ended in his condemnation and death; but there is a by no means negligible stream of tradition which tells that it ended in his release, his liberty for two or three further years, his reimprisonment and his final execution about the year A.D. 67.

Let us look at this question, for it is of the greatest interest.

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First, it is clear that when Paul was in prison in Rome, he did not regard release as impossible; in fact, it looks as if he expected it. When he wrote to the Philippians, he said that he was sending Timothy to them, and goes on, "And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also" (Php.2:24). When he wrote to Philemon, sending back the runaway Onesimus, he says, "At the same time prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be granted to you" (Phm.22). Clearly he was prepared for release, whether or not it ever came.

Second, let us remember a plan that was very dear to Paul's heart. Before he went to Jerusalem on that journey on which he was arrested, he wrote to the Church at Rome, and in that letter he is planning a visit to Spain. "I hope to see you in passing," he writes, "as I go to Spain." "I shall go on by way of you," he writes, "to Spain" (Rom.15:24,28). Was that visit ever paid?

Clement of Rome, when he wrote to the Church at Corinth about A.D. 90, said of Paul that he preached the gospel in the East and in the West; that he instructed the whole world (that is, the Roman Empire) in righteousness; and that he went to the extremity (terminus) of the West, before his martyrdom. What did Clement mean by the extremity of the West? There are many who argue that he meant nothing more than Rome. Now it is true that someone writing away in the East in Asia Minor would probably think of Rome as the extremity, of the West. But Clement was writing from Rome; and it is difficult to see that for anyone in Rome the extremity of the West could be anything else but Spain. It certainly seems that Clement believed that Paul reached Spain.

The greatest of all the early Church historians was Eusebius. In his account of Paul's life he writes: "Luke who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, brought his history to a close at this point, after stating that Paul had spent two whole years at Rome as a prisoner at large, and preached the word of God without constraint. Thus, after he had made his defence, it is said that the Apostle was sent again on the ministry of preaching, and that on coming to the same city a second time he suffered martyrdom" (Eusebius: Ecclesiastical History, 2.22.2). Eusebius has nothing to say about Spain, but he did know the story that Paul had been released from his first Roman imprisonment.

The Muratorian Canon, that first list of New Testament books, describes Luke's scheme in writing Acts: "Luke related to Theophilus events of which he was an eye-witness, as also, in a separate place, he evidently declares the martyrdom of Peter (he probably refers to Lk.22:31-32); but omits the journey of Paul from Rome to Spain."

In the fifth century, two of the great Christian fathers are definite about this journey. Chrysostom in his sermon on 2Tim.4:20 says: "Saint Paul after his residence in Rome departed to Spain." Jerome in his Catalogue of Writers says that Paul "was dismissed by Nero that he might preach Christ's gospel in the West."

Beyond doubt a stream of tradition held that Paul journeyed to Spain.

This is a matter on which we will have to come to our own decision. The one thing which makes us doubt the historicity of that tradition is that in Spain itself there is not and never was any tradition that Paul had worked and preached there, no stories about him, no places connected with his name. It would be indeed strange if the memory of such a visit had become totally obliterated. It

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could well be that the whole story of Paul's release and journey to the west arose simply as a deduction from his expressed intention to visit Spain (Rom.15). Most New Testament scholars do not think that Paul was released from his imprisonment; the general consensus of opinion is that his only release was by death.

PAUL AND THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

What then shall we say of Paul's connection with these letters? If we can accept the tradition of his release, and of his return to preaching and teaching, and of his death as late as A.D. 67, we might well believe that as they stand they came from his hand. But, if we cannot believe that--and the evidence is on the whole against it--are we to say that they have no connection with Paul at all?

We must remember that the ancient world did not think of these things as we do. It would see nothing wrong in issuing a letter under the name of a great teacher, if it was sure that the letter said the things which that teacher would say under the same circumstances. To the ancient world it was natural and seemly that a disciple should write in his master's name. No one would have seen anything wrong in one of Paul's disciples meeting a new and threatening situation with a letter under Paul's name. To regard that as forgery is to misunderstand the mind of the ancient world. Are we then to swing completely to the other extreme and say that some disciple of his issued these letters in Paul's name years after he was dead, and at a time when the Church was much more highly organized than ever it was during his lifetime?

As we see it, the answer is no. It is incredible that any disciple would put into Paul's mouth a claim to be the chief of sinners (1Tim.1:15); his tendency would be to stress Paul's holiness, not to talk about his sin. It is incredible that anyone writing in the name of Paul would give Timothy the homely advice to drink a little wine for the sake of his health (1Tim.5:23). The whole of 2Tim.4 is so personal and so full of intimate, loving details that no one but Paul could have written it.

Wherein lies the solution? It may well be that something like this happened. It is quite obvious that many letters of Paul went lost. Apart from his great public letters, he must have had a continuous private correspondence; and of that we possess only the little letter to Philemon. It may well be that in the later days there were some fragments of Paul's correspondence in the possession of some Christian teacher. This teacher saw the Church of his day and his locality in Ephesus threatened on every side. It was threatened with heresy from without and from within. It was threatened with a fall away from its own high standards of purity and truth. The quality of its members and the standard of its office-bearers were degenerating. He had in his possession little letters of Paul which said exactly the things that should be said, but, as they stood, they were too short and too fragmentary to publish.

So he amplified them and made them supremely relevant to the contemporary situation and sent them out to the Church.

In the Pastoral Epistles we are still hearing the voice of Paul, and often hearing it speak with a unique personal intimacy; but we think that the form of the letters is due to a Christian teacher who summoned the help of Paul when the Church of the day needed the guidance which only he could give.

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Titus 1:1-4

THE MAINSPRINGS OF APOSTLESHIP

Titus 1:1-4 (Part 1)

This is a letter from Paul, the slave of God and the envoy of Jesus Christ, whose task it is to awaken faith in God's chosen ones, and to equip them with a fuller knowledge of that truth, which enables a man to live a really religious life, and whose whole work is founded on the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began. In his own good time God set forth his message plain for all to see in the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the royal command of God our Saviour. This letter is to Titus, his true son in the faith they both share. Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from Christ Jesus our Saviour.

When Paul summoned one of his henchmen to a task, he always began by setting forth his own right to speak and, as it were, laying again the foundations of the gospel. So he begins here by saying certain things about his apostleship.

(i) It set him in a great succession. Right at the beginning Paul calls himself "the slave (doulos, GSN1401) of God." That was a title of mingled humility and legitimate pride. It meant that his life was totally submitted to God; at the same time--and here was where the pride came in--it was the title that was given to the prophets and the great ones of the past. Moses was the slave of God (Josh.1:2); and Joshua, his successor, would have claimed no higher title (Josh.24:29). It was to the prophets, his slaves, that God revealed all his intentions (Am.3:7); it was his slaves the prophets whom God had repeatedly sent to Israel throughout the history of the nation (Jer.7:25). The title slave of God was one which gave Paul the right to walk in a great succession.

When anyone enters the Church, he does not enter an institution which began yesterday. The Church has centuries of human history behind it and goes back before the eternities in the mind and intention of God. When anyone takes upon himself anything of the preaching, or the teaching, or the serving work of the Church, he does not enter on a service which is without traditions; he walks where the saints have trod.

(ii) It gave him a great authority. He was the envoy of Jesus Christ. Paul never thought of his authority as coming from his own mental excellence, still less from his own moral goodness. It was in the authority of Christ that he spoke. The man who preaches the gospel of Christ or teaches his truth, if he is truly dedicated, does not talk about his own opinions or offer his own conclusions; he comes with Christ's message and with God's word. The true envoy of Christ has reached past the stage of perhapses and maybes and possibly's, and speaks with the certainty of one who knows.

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Titus 1:1-4

AN APOSTLE'S GOSPEL

Titus 1:1-4 (Part 2)

Further, in this passage we can see the essence of an apostle's gospel and the central things in his task.

(i) The whole message of the apostle is founded on the hope of eternal life. Again and again the phrase eternal life recurs in the pages of the New Testament. The word for eternal is *aionios* (GSN0166); and properly the only one person in the whole universe to whom that word may correctly be applied is God. The Christian offer is nothing less than the offer of a share in the life of God. It is the offer of God's power for our frustration, of God's serenity for our dispeace, of God's truth for our guessing, of God's goodness for our moral failure, of God's joy for our sorrow. The Christian gospel does not in the first place offer men an intellectual creed or a moral code; it offers them life, the very life of God.

(ii) To enable a man to enter into that life, two things are necessary. It is the apostle's duty to awaken faith in men. With Paul, faith always means one thing--absolute trust in God. The first step in the Christian life is to realize that we can do nothing except receive. In every sphere of life, no matter how precious an offer may be, it remains inoperative until it is received. The first duty of the Christian is to persuade others to accept the offer of God. In the last analysis, we can never argue a man into Christianity. All we can say is, "Try it, and see!"

(iii) It is the apostle's duty also to equip others with knowledge. Christian evangelism and Christian education must go hand in hand. Faith may begin by being a response of the heart, but it must go on to be the possession of the mind. The Christian gospel must be thought out in order to be tried out. No man can live for ever on the crest of a wave of emotion. The Christian life must be a daily loving Christ more and understanding him better.

(iv) The result of faith and knowledge must be a truly religious life. Faith must always issue in life and Christian knowledge is not merely intellectual knowledge but knowledge how to live. Many people have been great scholars and yet completely inefficient in the ordinary things of life and total failures in their personal relationships. A truly religious life is one in which a man is on the right terms with God, with himself and with his fellow-men. It is a life in which a man can cope alike with the great moments and the everyday duties. It is a life in which Jesus Christ lives again.

It is the duty of the Christian to offer to men the very life of God; to awaken faith in their hearts and to deepen knowledge in their minds; to enable them to live in such a way that others will see the reflection of the Master in them.

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Titus 1:1-4

GOD'S PURPOSE AND GOD'S GOOD TIME

Titus 1:1-4 (Part 3)

This passage tells us of God's purpose and of his way of working that purpose out.

(i) God's purpose for man was always one of salvation. His promise of eternal life was there before the world began. It is important to note that here Paul applies the word Saviour both to God and to Jesus. We sometimes hear the gospel presented in a way that seems to draw a distinction between a gentle, loving, and gracious Jesus, and a hard, stern, and severe God. Sometimes it sounds as if Jesus had done something to change God's attitude to men and had persuaded him to lay aside his wrath and not to punish them. There is no justification for that in the New Testament. But at the back of the whole process of salvation is the eternal and unchanging love of God, and it was of that love Jesus came to tell men. God is characteristically the Saviour God, whose last desire is to condemn men and whose first desire is to save them. He is the Father who desires only that his children should come home so that he may gather them to his breast.

(ii) But this passage does more than speak of God's eternal purpose; it also speaks of his method. It tells us that he sent his message in his own good time. That means to say that all history was a preparation for the coming of Jesus. We cannot teach any kind of knowledge to a man until he is fit to receive it. In all human knowledge we have to start at the beginning; so men had to be prepared for the coming of Jesus. All the history of the Old Testament and all the searchings of the Greek philosophers were preparations for that event. God's Spirit was moving both amongst the Jews and amongst all other peoples so that they should be ready to receive his Son when he came. We must look on all history as God's education of men.

(iii) Further, Christianity came into this world at a time when it was uniquely possible for its message to spread. There were five elements in the world situation which facilitated its spread.

(a) Practically all the world spoke Greek. That is not to say that the nations had forgotten their own language; but nearly all men spoke Greek in addition. It was the language of trade, of commerce, of literature. If a man was going to take any part in public life and activity he had to know Greek. People were bilingual and the first age of Christianity was one of the very few when the missionary had no language problem to solve.

(b) There were to all intents and purposes no frontiers. The Roman Empire was coextensive with the known world. Wherever the traveller might go, he was within that Empire. Nowadays, if a man intended to cross Europe, he would need a passport; he would be held up at frontiers; he would find iron curtains. In the first age of Christianity a missionary could move without hindrance from one end of the known world to the other.

(c) Travel was comparatively easy. True, it was slow, because there was no mechanized travel, and most journeys had to be done on foot, with the baggage carried by slow-moving animals. But the Romans had built their great roads from country to country and had, for the most part, cleared the land of brigands and the sea of pirates. Travel was easier than it had ever been before.

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Titus 1:1-4

(d) The first age of Christianity was one of the few when the world was very largely at peace. If wars had been raging all over Europe, the progress of the missionary would have been rendered impossible. But the pax Romana, the Roman peace, held sway; and the traveller could move within the Roman Empire in safety.

(e) It was a world which was conscious of its needs. The old faiths had broken down and the new philosophies were beyond the mind of simple people. Men were looking, as Seneca said, ad salutem, towards salvation. They were increasingly conscious of "their weakness in necessary things." They were searching for "a hand let down to lift them up." They were looking for "a peace, not of Caesar's proclamation, but of God's." There never was a time when the hearts of men were more open to receive the message of salvation which the Christian missionaries brought.

It was no accident that Christianity came when it did. It came in God's own time; all history had been a preparation for it; and the circumstances were such that the way was open for the tide to spread.

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Titus 1:1-4

A FAITHFUL HENCHMAN

Titus 1:1-4 (Part 4)

We do not know a great deal about Titus, to whom this letter was written, but from the scattered references to him, there emerges a picture of a man who was one of Paul's most trusted and most valuable helpers. Paul calls him "my true son," so it is most likely that he himself converted him, perhaps at Iconium.

Titus was the companion for an awkward and a difficult time. When Paul paid his visit to Jerusalem, to a Church which suspected him and was prepared to mistrust and dislike him, it was Titus whom he took with him along with Barnabas (Gal.2:1). It was said of Dundas, the famous Scotsman, by one of his friends, "Dundas is no orator; but he will go out with you in any kind of weather." Titus was like that. When Paul was up against it, Titus was by his side.

Titus was the man for a tough assignment. When the trouble at Corinth was at its peak, it was he who was sent with one of the severest letters Paul ever wrote (2Cor.8:16). Titus clearly had the strength of mind and the toughness of fibre which enabled him to face and to handle a difficult situation. There are two kinds of people. There are the people who can make a bad situation worse, and there are the people who can bring order out of chaos and peace out of strife. Titus was the man to send to the place where there was trouble. He had a gift for practical administration. It was Titus whom Paul chose to organize the collection for the poor members of the Church at Jerusalem (2Cor.8:6,10). It is clear that he had no great gifts of speech, but he was the man for practical administration. The Church ought to thank God for the people to whom we turn whenever we want a practical job well done.

Paul has certain great titles for Titus.

He calls him his true child. That must mean that he was Paul's convert and child in the faith (Tit.1:4). Nothing in this world gives a preacher and teacher more joy than to see someone whom he has taught rise to usefulness within the Church. Titus was the son who brought joy to the heart of Paul, his father in the faith.

He calls him his brother (2Cor.2:13) and his sharer in work and toil (2Cor.8:23). The great day for a preacher or a teacher is the day when his child in the faith becomes his brother in the faith, when the one whom he has taught is able to take his place in the work of the Church, no longer as a junior, but as an equal.

He says that Titus walked in the same spirit (2Cor.12:18). He knew that Titus would deal with things as he would have dealt with them himself. Happy is the man who has a lieutenant to whom he can commit his work, certain that it will be done in the way in which he himself would have wished to do it.

He gives to Titus a great task. He sends him to Crete to be a pattern to the Christians who are there (Tit.2:7). The greatest compliment Paul paid Titus was that he sent him to Crete, not to talk to

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Titus 1:1-4

them about what a Christian should be, but to show them what he should be. There could be no greater responsibility and no higher compliment than that.

One very interesting suggestion has been made. 2Cor.8:18 and 2Cor.12:18 both say that when Titus was sent to Corinth another brother was sent with him, described in the former passage as "the brother who is famous among all the churches," and commonly identified with Luke. It has been suggested that Titus was Luke's brother. It is rather an odd fact that Titus is never mentioned in Acts; but we know that Luke wrote Acts and often tells the story in the first person plural, saying: "We did this," or, "We did that," and it has been suggested that in such passages he includes Titus with himself. Whether or not that suggestion is true we cannot tell, but certainly Titus and Luke have a family resemblance in that they were both men of practical service.

In the Western Church Titus is commemorated on 4th January, and in the Eastern Church on 25th August.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 1:5-7a

THE ELDER OF THE CHURCH

Titus 1:5-7a

The reason why I left you in Crete was that any deficiencies in the organization of the Church should be rectified, and that you might appoint elders in each city as I instructed you. An elder is a man whose conduct must be beyond reproach, the husband of one wife, with children who are also believers, who cannot be accused of profligacy, and who are not undisciplined. For he who oversees the Church of God must be beyond reproach, as befits a steward of God.

We have already studied in detail the qualifications of the elder as set out by Paul in 1Tim.3:1-7. It is therefore not necessary to examine them in detail again.

It was always Paul's custom to ordain elders as soon as a Church had been founded (Ac.14:23). Crete was an island of many cities. "Crete of the hundred cities." Homer called it. It was Paul's principle that his little Churches should be encouraged to stand on their own feet as soon as possible.

In this repeated list of the qualifications of the elder, one thing is specially stressed. He must be a man who has taught his own family in the faith. The Council of Carthage later laid it down: "Bishops, elders and deacons shall not be ordained to office before they have made all in their own households members of the Catholic Church." Christianity begins at home. It is no virtue for any man to be so engaged in public work that he neglects his own home. All the Church service in the world will not atone for neglect of a man's own family.

Paul uses one very vivid word. The family of the elder must be such that they cannot be accused of profligacy. The Greek word is asotia (GSN0810). It is the word used in Lk.15:13 for the riotous living of the prodigal son. The man who is asotos (GSN0811) is incapable of saving; he is wasteful and extravagant and pours out his substance on personal pleasure; he destroys his substance and in the end ruins himself. One who is asotos (GSN0811) is the old English scatterling, the Scots ne'er-do-well, the modern waster. Aristotle who always described a virtue as the mean between two extremes, declares that on the one hand there is stinginess, on the other there is asotia (GSN0810), reckless and selfish extravagance, and the relevant virtue is liberality. The household of the elder must never be guilty of the bad example of reckless spending on personal pleasure.

Further, the family of the elder must not be undisciplined. Nothing can make up for the lack of parental control. Falconer quotes a saying about the household of Sir Thomas More: "He controls his family with the same easy hand: no tragedies, no quarrels. If a dispute begins, it is promptly settled. His whole house breathes happiness, and no one enters it who is not the better for the visit." The true training ground for the eldership is at least as much in the home as it is in the Church.

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Titus 1:7b

WHAT THE ELDER MUST NOT BE

Titus 1:7b

He must not be obstinately self-willed; he must not be an angry man; he must not be given to drunken and outrageous conduct; he must not be a man ready to come to blows; he must not be a seeker of gain in disgraceful ways.

Here is a summary of the qualities from which the elder of the Church must be free; and every one is described in a vivid word.

(i) He must not be obstinately self-willed. The Greek is *authades* (GSN0829), which literally means pleasing himself. The man who is *authades* (GSN0829) has been described as the man who is so pleased with himself that nothing else pleases him and he cares to please nobody. R. C. Trench said of such a man that, "he obstinately maintains his own opinion, or asserts his own rights, while he is reckless of the rights, opinions and interests of others."

The Greek ethical writers had much to say about this fault of *authadeia*. Aristotle set on the one extreme the man who pleases everybody (*areskos*, compare GSN0700), and on the other extreme the man who pleases nobody (*authades*, GSN0829), and between them the man who had in his life a proper dignity (*semnos*, GSN4586). He said of the *authades* (GSN0829) that he was the man who would not converse or associate with any man. Eudemus said that the *authades* (GSN0829) was the man who "regulates his life with no respect to others, but who is contemptuous." Euripides said of him that he was "harsh to his fellow citizens through want of culture." Philodemus said that his character was compounded in equal parts of conceit, arrogance and contemptuousness. His conceit made him think too highly of himself; his contemptuousness made him think too meanly of others; and his arrogance made him act on his estimate of himself and others.

Clearly the man who is *authades* (GSN0829) is an unpleasant character. He is intolerant, condemning everything that he cannot understand and thinking that there is no way of doing anything except his. Such a quality, as Lock said, "is fatal to the rule of free men." No man of contemptuous and arrogant intolerance is fit to be an office-bearer of the Church.

(ii) He must not be an angry man. The Greek is *orgilos* (GSN3711). There are two Greek words for anger. There is *thumos* (GSN2372), which is the anger that quickly blazes up and just as quickly subsides, like a fire in straw. There is *orge* (GSN3709), the noun connected with *orgilos* (GSN3711), and it means inveterate anger. It is not the anger of the sudden blaze, but the wrath which a man nurses to keep it warm. A blaze of anger is an unhappy thing; but this long-lived, purposely maintained anger is still worse. The man who nourishes his anger against any man is not fit to be an office-bearer of the Church.

(iii) He must not be given to drunken and outrageous conduct. The word is *paroinos* (GSN3943), which literally means given to over-indulgence in wine. But the word widened its meaning until it came to describe all conduct which is outrageous. The Jews, for instance, used it of the conduct of Jews who married Midianite women; the Christians used it of the conduct of those who crucified

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Titus 1:7b

Christ. It describes the character of the man who, even in his sober moments, acts with the outrageousness of a drunken man.

(iv) He must not be a man ready to come to blows. The word is *plektes* (GSN4131), which literally means a striker. It would seem that in the early Church there were over-zealous bishops who chastised erring members of their flock with physical violence, for the Apostolic Canons lay it down: "We order that the bishop who strikes an erring believer should be deposed." Pelagius says: "He cannot strike anyone who is the disciple of that Christ who, being struck, returned no answering blow." The Greeks themselves widened the meaning of this word to include, not only violence in action, but also violence in speech. The word came to mean one who browbeats his fellow-men, and it may well be that it should be so translated here. The man who abandons love and resorts to violence of action or of speech is not fit to be an office-bearer of the Christian Church.

(v) He must not be a seeker of gain in disgraceful ways. The word is *aischrokerdes* (GSN0146), and it describes a man who does not care how he makes money so long as he makes it. It so happens that this was a fault for which the Cretans were notorious. Polybius said: "They are so given to making gain in disgraceful and acquisitive ways that among the Cretans alone of all men no gain is counted disgraceful." Plutarch said that they stuck to money like bees to honey. The Cretans counted material gain far above honesty and honour. They did not care how much their money cost them; but the Christian knows that there are some things which cost too much. The man whose only aim in life is to amass material things, irrespective of how he does so, is not fit to be an office-bearer of the Christian Church.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 1:8-9

WHAT THE ELDER MUST BE

Titus 1:8-9

Rather he must be hospitable, a lover of all good things and all good people, prudent, just, pious, self-controlled, with a strong grip on the truly reliable message which Christian teaching gave to him, that he may be well able to encourage the members of the Church with health-giving teaching, and to convict the opponents of the faith.

The previous passage set out the things which the elder of the Church must not be; this one sets out what he must be. These necessary qualities group themselves into three sections.

(i) First, there are the qualities which the elder of the Church must display to other people.

He must be hospitable. The Greek is *philoxenos* (GSN5383), which literally means a lover of strangers. In the ancient world there were always many who were on the move. Inns were notoriously expensive, dirty and immoral; and it was essential that the wayfaring Christian should find an open door within the Christian community. To this day no one needs Christian fellowship more than the stranger in a strange place.

He must also be *philagathos* (GSN5358), a word which means either a lover of good things, or a lover of good people, and which Aristotle uses in the sense of unselfish, that is, a lover of good actions. We do not have to choose between these three meanings; they are all included. The Christian office-bearer must be a man whose heart answers to the good in whatever person, in whatever place and in whatever action he finds it.

(ii) Second, there comes a group of terms which tell us the qualities which the Christian office-bearer must have within himself.

He must be prudent (*sophron*, GSN4998). Euripides called this prudence "the fairest gift the gods have given to men." Socrates called it "the foundation stone of virtue." Xenophon said that it was that spirit which shunned evil, not only when evil could be seen but even when no one would ever see it. Trenchard defined it as "entire command over the passions and desires, so that they receive no further allowance than that which the law and right reason admit and approve." *Sophron* (GSN4998) is the adjective to be applied to the man, as the Greeks said themselves, "whose thoughts are saving thoughts." The Christian office-bearer must be a man who wisely controls every instinct.

He must be "just" (*dikaios*, GSN1342). The Greeks defined the just man as he who gives both to men and to the gods what is due to them. The Christian office-bearer must be such that he gives to man the respect and to God the reverence, which are their due.

He must be pious (*hosios*, GSN3741). The Greek word is hard to translate, for it describes the man who reverences the fundamental decencies of life, the things which go back beyond any man-made law.

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Titus 1:8-9

He must be self-controlled (egkrates, GSN1468). The Greek word describes the man who has achieved complete self-mastery. Any man who would serve others must first be master of himself.

(iii) Finally, there comes a description of the qualities of the Christian office-bearer within the Church.

He must be able to encourage the members of the Church. The navy has a rule which says that no officer shall speak discouragingly to any other officer in the performance of his duties. There is always something wrong with preaching or teaching whose effect is to discourage others. The function of the true Christian preacher and teacher is not to drive a man to despair, but to lift him up to hope.

He must be able to convict the opponents of the faith. The Greek is elegchein (GSN1651) and is a most meaningful word. It means to rebuke a man in such a way that he is compelled to admit the error of his ways. Trench says that it means "to rebuke another, with such an effectual wielding of the victorious arms of the truth, as to bring him, if not always to a confession, yet at least to a conviction, of his sin." Demosthenes said that it describes the situation in which a man unanswerably demonstrates the truth of the things that he has said. Aristotle said that it means to prove that things cannot be otherwise than as we have stated them. Christian rebuke means far more than flinging angry and condemning words at a man. It means speaking in such a way that he sees the error of his ways and accepts the truth.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 1:10-11

THE FALSE TEACHERS OF CRETE

Titus 1:10-11

For there are many who are undisciplined, empty talkers, deceivers. Those of the circumcision are especially so. They must be muzzled. They are the kind of people who upset whole households, by teaching things which should not be taught in order to acquire a shameful gain.

Here we have a picture of the false teachers who were troubling Crete. The worst were apparently Jews. They tried to persuade the Cretan converts of two things. They tried to persuade them that the simple story of Jesus and the Cross was not sufficient, but that, to be really wise, they needed all the subtle stories and the long genealogies and the elaborate allegories of the Rabbis. Further, they tried to teach them that grace was not enough, but that, to be really good, they needed to take upon themselves all the rules and regulations about foods and washings which were so characteristic of Judaism. The false teachers were seeking to persuade men that they needed more than Christ and more than grace in order to be saved. They were intellectualists for whom the truth of God was too simple and too good to be true.

One by one the characteristics of these false teachers pass before us.

They were undisciplined; they were like disloyal soldiers who refused to obey the word of command. They refused to accept the creed or the control of the Church. It is perfectly true that the Church does not seek to impose upon men a flat uniformity of belief; but there are certain things which a man must believe to be a Christian, the greatest of which is the all-sufficiency of Christ. Even in the Protestant Church discipline is not eliminated.

They were empty talkers; the word is *mataiologoi* (GSN3151), and the adjective *mataios* (GSN3152), vain, empty, profitless, was the adjective applied to heathen worship. The main idea was of a worship which produced no goodness of life. These people in Crete could talk glibly but all their talk was ineffective in bringing anyone one step nearer goodness. The Cynics used to say that all knowledge which is not profitable for virtue is vain. The teacher who simply provides his pupils with a forum for pleasant intellectual and speculative discussion teaches in vain.

They were deceivers. Instead of leading men to the truth they led them away from it.

Their teaching upset whole households. There are two things to notice there. First, their teaching was fundamentally upsetting. It is true that truth must often make a man rethink his ideas and that Christianity does not run away from doubts and questions, but faces them fairly and squarely. But it is also true that teaching which ends in nothing but doubts and questionings is bad teaching. In true teaching, out of the mental disturbance should come in the end a new and greater certainty. Second, they upset households. That is to say, they had an ill effect on family life. Any teaching which tends to disrupt the family is false for the Christian Church is built on the basis of the Christian family.

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Titus 1:10-11

Their teaching was designed for gain. They were more concerned with what they could get out of the people they were teaching than with what they could put into them. Parry has said that this is indeed the besetting temptation of the professional teacher. When he looks on his teaching simply as a career designed for personal advancement and profit, he is in a perilous condition.

These men are to be muzzled. That does not imply that they are to be silenced by violence or by persecution. The Greek (epistomizein, GSN1993) does mean to muzzle, but it became the normal word for to silence a person by reason. The way to combat false teaching is to offer true teaching, and the only truly unanswerable teaching is the teaching of a Christian life.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 1:12

A BAD REPUTATION

Titus 1:12

One of themselves, a prophet of their own, has said: "The Cretans are always liars, wild and evil beasts, lazy gluttons." His testimony is true!

No people ever had a worse reputation than the Cretans. The ancient world spoke of the three most evil C's--the Cretans, the Cilicians, and the Cappadocians. The Cretans were famed as a drunken, insolent, untrustworthy, lying, gluttonous people.

Their avarice was proverbial. "The Cretans," said Polybius, "on account of their innate avarice, live in a perpetual state of private quarrel and public feud and civil strife...and you will hardly find anywhere characters more tricky and deceitful than those of Crete." He writes of them: "Money is so highly valued among them, that its possession is not only thought to be necessary, but highly creditable; and in fact greed and avarice are so native to the soil in Crete, that they are the only people in the world among whom no stigma attaches to any sort of gain whatever."

Polybius tells of a certain compact that a traitor called Bolis made with a leader called Cambylus, also a Cretan. Bolis approached Cambylus "with all the subtlety of a Cretan." "This was now made the subject of discussion between them in a truly Cretan spirit. They never took into consideration the saving of the person in danger, or their obligations of honour to those who had entrusted them with the undertaking, but confined the discussion entirely to questions of their own safety and their own advantage. As they were both Cretans they were not long in coming to a unanimous agreement."

So notorious were the Cretans that the Greeks actually formed a verb kretizein, to cretize, which meant to lie and to cheat; and they had a proverbial phrase, kretizein pros Kreta, to cretize against a Cretan, which meant to match lies with lies, as diamond cuts diamond.

The quotation which Paul makes is actually from a Greek poet called Epimenides. He lived about 600 B.C. and was ranked as one of the seven wise men of Greece. The first phrase, "The Cretans are chronic liars," had been made famous by a later and equally well-known poet called Callimachus. In Crete there was a monument called The Tomb of Zeus. Obviously the greatest of the gods cannot die and be buried in a tomb, and Callimachus quoted this as a perfect example of Cretan lying. In his Hymn to Zeus he writes:

"Cretans are chronic liars,
For they built a tomb, O King,
And called it thine; but you die not;
Your life is everlasting."

The Cretans were notorious liars and cheats and gluttons and traitors but here is the wonderful thing. Knowing that, and actually experiencing it, Paul does not say to Timothy: "Leave them alone. They are hopeless and all men know it." He says: "They are bad and all men know it. Go and

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Titus 1:12

convert them." Few passages so demonstrate the divine optimism of the Christian evangelist, who refuses to regard any man as hopeless. The greater the evil, the greater the challenge. It is the Christian conviction that there is no sin too great for the grace of Jesus Christ to conquer.

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Titus 1:13-16

THE PURE IN HEART

Titus 1:13-16 (Part 1)

For that very reason correct them with severity, that they may grow healthy in the faith and not pay attention to Jewish fables and to rules and regulations made by men who persist in turning their backs on the truth.

"To the pure all things are pure."

But to those who are defiled and who do not believe, nothing is pure, because their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny their profession by their deeds, because they are repulsive and disobedient and useless for any good work.

The great characteristic of the Jewish faith was its thousands of rules and regulations. This, that and the next thing were branded as unclean; this, that and the next food were held to be tabu. When Judaism and Gnosticism joined hands even the body became unclean and the natural instincts of the body were held to be evil. The inevitable result was that long lists of sins were constantly being created. It became a sin to touch this or that; it became a sin to eat this or that food; it even became a sin to marry and to beget children. Things which were either good in themselves or quite natural became defiled.

So Paul strikes out the great principle--To the pure all things are pure. He had already said that even more definitely in Rom.14:20 when, to those who were constantly involved in questions about clean and unclean foods, he said: "All things are pure." It may well be that this phrase is not only a proverb but an actual saying of Jesus. When Jesus was speaking about these countless Jewish rules and regulations, he said: "There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him" (Mk.7:15).

It is a man's heart which makes all the difference. If he is pure in heart, all things are pure to him. If he is unclean in heart, then he makes unclean everything he thinks about or speaks about or touches. This was a principle which the great classical writers had often stated. "Unless the vessel is pure," said Horace, "everything you pour into it grows bitter." Seneca said: "Just as a diseased stomach alters the food which it receives, so the darkened mind turns everything you commit to it to its own burden and ruin. Nothing can come to evil men which is of any good to them, nay nothing can come to them which does not actually harm them. They change whatever touches them into their own nature. And even things which would be of profit to others become pernicious to them." The man with a dirty mind makes all things dirty. He can take the loveliest things and cover them with smut. But the man whose mind is pure finds all things pure.

It is said of these men that both their mind and conscience are defiled. A man comes to his decisions and forms his conclusions by using two faculties. He uses intellect to think things out; he uses conscience to listen to the voice of God. But if his intellect is warped in such a way that it can see the unclean thing anywhere, and if his conscience is darkened and numbed by his continual consent to evil, he can take no good decision at all.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 1:13-16

A man must keep the white shield of his innocence unstained. If he lets impurity infect his mind, he sees all things through a mist of uncleanness. His mind soils every thought that enters into it; his imagination turns to lust every picture which it forms; he misinterprets every motive; he gives a double meaning to every statement. To escape that uncleanness we must walk in the cleansing presence of Jesus Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 1:13-16

THE UGLY AND THE USELESS LIFE

Titus 1:13-16 (Part 2)

When a man gets into this state of impurity, he may know God intellectually but his life is a denial of that knowledge. Three things are singled out here about such a man.

(i) He is repulsive. The word (bdeluktos, GSN0947) is the word particularly used of heathen idols and images. It is the word from which the noun bdelugma (GSN0946), an abomination, comes. There is something repulsive about a man with an obscene mind, who makes sniggering jests and is a master of the unclean innuendo.

(ii) He is disobedient. Such a man cannot obey the will of God. His conscience is darkened. He has made himself such that he can hardly hear the voice of God, let alone obey it. A man like that cannot be anything else but an evil influence and is therefore unfit to be an instrument in the hand of God.

(iii) That is just another way of saying that he has become useless to God and to his fellow-men. The word used for useless (adokimos, GSN0096) is interesting. It is used to describe a counterfeit coin which is below standard weight. It is used to describe a cowardly soldier who fails in the testing hour of battle. It is used of a rejected candidate for office, a man whom the citizens regarded as useless. It is used of a stone which the builders rejected. (If a stone had a flaw in it, it was marked with a capital A, for adokimos (GSN0096), and left aside, as being unfit to have any place in the building.) The ultimate test of life is usefulness, and the man whose influence is ever towards that which is unclean is of no use to God or to his fellow-men. Instead of helping God's work in the world, he hinders it; and uselessness always invites disaster.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 2:1-2

THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

(i) The Senior Men

Titus 2:1-2

You must speak what befits sound teaching. You must charge the senior men to be sober, serious, prudent, healthy in Christian faith and love and fortitude.

This whole chapter deals with what might be called The Christian Character in Action. It takes people by their various ages and stations and lays down what they ought to be within the world. It begins with the senior men.

They must be sober. The word is *nephalios* (GSN3524), and it literally means sober in contradistinction to given to over-indulgence in wine. The point is that when a man has reached years of seniority, he ought to have teamed what are, and what are not, true pleasures. The senior men should have teamed that the pleasures of self-indulgence cost far more than they are worth.

They must be serious. The word is *semnos* (GSN4586), and it describes the behaviour which is serious in the right way. It does not describe the demeanour of a person who is a gloomy killjoy, but the conduct of the man who knows that he lives in the light of eternity, and that before so very long he will leave the society of men for the society of God.

They must be prudent. The word is *sophrone* (GSN4998), and it describes the man with the mind which has everything under control. Over the years the senior men must have acquired that cleansing, saving strength of mind which has learned to govern every instinct and passion until each has its proper place and no more.

The three words taken together mean that the senior man must have learned what can only be called the gravity of life. A certain amount of recklessness and of unthinkingness may be pardonable in youth, but the years should bring their wisdom. One of the most tragic sights in life is a man who has learned nothing from them.

Further, there are three great qualities in which the senior man must be healthy.

He must be healthy in faith. If a man lives really close to Christ, the passing of the years and the experiences of life far from taking his faith away will make his faith even stronger. The years must teach us, not to trust God less but to trust him more.

He must be healthy in love. It may well be that the greatest danger of age is that it should drift into censoriousness and fault-finding. Sometimes the years take kindly sympathy away. It is fatally possible for a man to become so settled in his ways that he comes unconsciously to resent all new thoughts and ways. But the years ought to bring, not increasing intolerance but increasing sympathy with the views and mistakes of others.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 2:1-2

He must be healthy in fortitude. The years should temper a man like steel, so that he can bear more and more, and emerge more and more the conqueror over life's troubles.

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Titus 2:3-5

THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

(ii) The Older Women

Titus 2:3-5 (Part 1)

In the same way you must charge the older women to be in demeanour such as befits those who are engaged in sacred things. You must charge them not to spread slanderous stories, not to be enslaved by over indulgence in wine, to be teachers of fine things, in order that they may train the young women to be devoted to their husbands and their children, to be prudent, to be chaste, to be home-keepers and home-minders, to be kindly, to be obedient to their own husbands, so that no one will have any opportunity to speak evil of the word of God.

It is clear that in the early Church a most honoured and responsible position was given to the older women. E. F. Brown, who was himself a missionary in India and knew much about Anglo-Indian society in the old days, relates a most interesting thing. A friend of his on furlough in England was asked: "What is it you most want in India?" And his surprising answer was: "Grandmothers." In the old days there were few older women in Anglo-Indian society, because those engaged in the administration of the country almost invariably came to the end of their service and returned to Britain while still fairly young; and the lack of older women was a serious want. E. F. Brown goes on to say: "Old women play a very important part in society--how large a part one does not realize, till one witnesses a social life from which they are almost absent. Kindly grandmothers and sweet charitable old maids are the natural advisers of the young of both sexes." The older women to whom the years have brought serenity and sympathy and understanding have a part to play in the life of the Church and of the community which is peculiarly their own.

Here the qualities which characterize them are laid down. Their demeanour must be such as befits those who are engaged in sacred things. As has been said: "They must carry into daily life the demeanour of priestesses in a temple." As Clement of Alexandria had it: "The Christian must live as if all life was a sacred assembly." It is easy to see what a difference it would make to the peace and fellowship of the Church, if it was always remembered that we are engaged in sacred things. Much of the embittered argument and the touchiness and the intolerance which all too frequently characterize church activities would vanish overnight.

They must not spread slanderous stories. It is a curious trait of human nature that most people would rather repeat and hear a malicious tale than one to someone's credit. It is no bad resolution to make up our minds to say nothing at all about people if we cannot find anything good to say.

The older women must teach and train the younger. Sometimes it would seem that the only gift experience gives to some is that of pouring cold water on the plans and dreams of others. It is a Christian duty ever to use experience to guide and encourage, and not to daunt and discourage.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 2:3-5

THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

(iii) The Younger Women

Titus 2:3-5 (Part 2)

The younger women are bidden to be devoted to their husbands and their children, to be prudent and chaste, to manage their households well, to be kindly to their servants and to be obedient to their husbands; and the object of such conduct is that no one will be able to speak evil of the word of God.

In this passage there is both something that is temporary and something that is permanent.

In the ancient Greek world the respectable woman lived a completely secluded life. In the house she had her own quarters and seldom left them, not even to sit at meals with the menfolk of the family; and into them came no man except her husband. She never attended any public assemblies or meetings; she seldom appeared on the streets, and, when she did, she never did so alone. In fact it has been said that there was no honourable way in which a Greek woman could make a living. No trade or profession was open to her; and if she tried to earn a living, she was driven to prostitution. If the women of the ancient Church had suddenly burst every limitation which the centuries had imposed upon them, the only result would have been to bring discredit on the Church and cause people to say that Christianity corrupted womanhood. The life laid down here seems narrow and circumscribed, but it is to be read against its background. In that sense this passage is temporary.

But there is also a sense in which it is permanent. It is the simple fact that there is no greater task, responsibility and privilege in this world than to make a home. It may well be that when women are involved in the hundred and one wearing duties which children and a home bring with them, they may say: "If only I could be done with all this, so that I could live a truly religious life." There is in fact nowhere where a truly religious life can better be lived than within the home. As John Keble had it:

"We need not bid, for cloistered cell,
Our neighbour and our work farewell,
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high
For sinful man beneath the sky;
The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we need to ask--
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God."

In the last analysis there can be no greater career than that of homemaking. Many a man, who has set his mark upon the world, has been enabled to do so simply because someone at home loved him and tended him. It is infinitely more important that a mother should be at home to put her children

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Titus 2:3-5

to bed and hear them say their prayers than that she should attend all the public and Church meetings in the world.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 2:6

THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

(iv) The Younger Men

Titus 2:6

In the same way urge on the younger men the duty of prudence.

The duty of the younger men is summed up in one sentence, but it is a pregnant one. They are bidden remember the duty of prudence. As we have already seen, the man who is prudent, *sophron* (GSN4998), has that quality of mind which keeps life safe. He has the security which comes from having all things under control.

The time of youth is necessarily a time of danger.

(i) In youth the blood runs hotter and the passions speak more commandingly. The tide of life runs strongest in youth and it sometimes threatens to sweep a young person away.

(ii) In youth there are more opportunities for going wrong. Young people are thrown into company where temptation can speak with a most compelling voice. Often they have to study or to work away from home and from the influences which would keep them right. He has not yet taken upon himself the responsibility of a home and a family; he has not yet given hostages to fortune; and he does not yet possess the anchors which hold an older person in the right way through a sheer sense of obligation. In youth there are far more opportunities to make shipwreck of life.

(iii) In youth there is often that confidence which comes from lack of experience. In almost every sphere of life a younger person will be more reckless than his elders, for the simple reason that he has not yet discovered all the things which can go wrong. To take a simple example, he will often drive a motor car much faster simply because he has not yet discovered how easily an accident can take place or on how slender a piece of metal the safety of a car depends. He will often shoulder a responsibility in a much more carefree spirit than an older person, because he has not known the difficulties and has not experienced how easily shipwreck may be made. No one can buy experience; that is something for which only the years can pay. There is a risk, as there is a glory, in being young.

For that very reason, the first thing at which any young person must aim is self-mastery. No one can ever serve others until he has mastered himself. "He who rules his spirit is greater than he who takes a city" (Prov.16:32).

Self-discipline is not among the more glamorous of the virtues, but it is the very stuff of life. When the eagerness of youth is buttressed by the solidity of self-mastery, something really great comes into life.

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Titus 2:7-8

THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

(v) The Christian Teacher

Titus 2:7-8

And all the time you are doing this you must offer yourself as a pattern of fine conduct; and in your teaching you must display absolute purity of motive, dignity, a sound message which no one could condemn, so that your opponent may be turned to shame, because he can find nothing bad to say about us.

If Titus' teaching is to be effective, it must be backed by the witness of his own life. He is himself to be the demonstration of all that he teaches.

(i) It must be clear that his motives are absolutely pure. The Christian teacher and preacher is always faced with certain temptations. There is always the danger of self-display, the temptation to demonstrate one's own cleverness and to seek to attract notice to oneself rather than to God's message. There is always the temptation to power. The teacher, the preacher, the pastor is always confronted with the temptation to be a dictator. Leader he must be, but dictator never. He will find that men can be led, but that they will never be driven. If there is one danger which confronts the Christian teacher and preacher more than another, it is to set before himself the wrong standards of success. It can often happen that the man who has never been heard of outside his own sphere of work is in God's eyes a far greater success than the man whose name is on every lip.

(ii) He must have dignity. Dignity is not aloofness, or arrogance, or pride; it is the consciousness of having the terrible responsibility of being the ambassador of Christ. Other men may stoop to pettiness; he must be above it. Other men may bear their grudges; he must have no bitterness. Other men may be touchy about their place; he must have a humility which has forgotten that it has a place. Other men may grow irritable or blaze into anger in an argument; he must have a serenity which cannot be provoked. Nothing so injures the cause of Christ as for the leaders of the Church and the pastors of the people to descend to conduct and to words unbecoming an envoy of Christ.

(iii) He must have a sound message. The Christian teacher and preacher must be certain to propagate the truths of the gospel and not his own ideas. There is nothing easier for him than to spend his time on side-issues; he might well have one prayer: "God, give me a sense of proportion." The central things of the faith will last him a lifetime. As soon as he becomes a propagandist either for his own ideas or for some sectional interest, he ceases to be an effective preacher or teacher of the word of God.

The duty laid on Titus is the tremendous task, not of talking to men about Christ, but of showing him to them. It must be true of him as it was of Chaucer's saintly parson:

"But Cristes love, and his apostles twelve
He taught, but first he folwed it him-selve."

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Titus 2:7-8

The greatest compliment that can be paid a teacher is to say of him: "First he wrought, and then he taught."

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 2:9-10

THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

(vi) The Christian Workman

Titus 2:9-10

Impress upon slaves the duty of obeying their own masters. Urge them to seek to give satisfaction in every task, not to answer back, not to pilfer, but to display all fidelity with hearty good-will, that they may in all things adorn the teaching which God our Saviour gave to them.

In the early Church the problem of the Christian workman was acute. It was one which could operate in two directions.

If the master was a heathen, the responsibility laid upon the servant was heavy indeed, for it was perhaps only through his conduct that the master could ever come to see what Christianity was. It was the task of the workman to show the master what a Christian could be; and that responsibility still lies upon the Christian workman. A large number of people never willingly darken a Church door; a minister of the Church seldom gets a chance to speak to them. How then is Christianity ever to make contact with them? The only possible way is for a fellow workman to show them what Christianity is. There is a famous story of St. Francis. One day he said to one of his young friars: "Let us go down to the village and preach to the people." So they went. They stopped to talk to this man and to that. They begged a crust at this door and that. Francis stopped to play with the children, and exchanged a greeting with the passers-by. Then they turned to go home. "But father," said the novice, "when do we preach?" "Preach?" smiled Francis. "Every step we took, every word we spoke, every action we did, has been a sermon."

There was another side to the problem. If the master was a Christian, a new temptation came into the life of the Christian workman. He might attempt to trade on his Christianity. He might think that, because he was a Christian, special allowances would be made for him. He might expect to "get away" with things because both he and the master were members of the same Church. It is perfectly possible for a man to trade on his Christianity--and there is no worse advertisement for it than a man who does that.

Paul lists the qualities of the Christian workman.

He is obedient. The Christian is never a man who is above taking orders. His Christianity teaches him how to serve. He is efficient. He is determined to give satisfaction. The Christian workman can never put less than his best into any task that is given him to do. He is respectful. He does not think that his Christianity gives him a special right to be undisciplined. Christianity does not obliterate the necessary lines of authority in the world of industry and of commerce. He is honest. Others may stoop to the petty dishonesties of which the world is full. His hands are clean. He is faithful. His master can rely upon his loyalty.

It may well be that the man who takes his Christianity to his work will run into trouble; but, if he sticks to it, he will end by winning the respect of all men.

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Titus 2:9-10

E. F. Brown tells of a thing which happened in India. "A Christian servant in India was once sent by his master with a verbal message which he knew to be untrue. He refused to deliver it. Though his master was very angry at the time, he respected the servant all the more afterwards and knew that he could always trust him in his own matters."

The truth is that in the end the world comes to see that the Christian workman is the one most worth having. In one sense, it is hard to be a Christian at our work; in another sense, it is easier than we think, for there is not a master under the sun who is not desperately looking for workmen on whose loyalty and efficiency he can rely.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 2:11-14

THE MORAL POWER OF THE INCARNATION

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God, which brings salvation to all men, has appeared, schooling us to renounce godlessness and worldly desires for forbidden things, and to live in this world prudently, justly and reverently, because we expectantly await the realization of our blessed hope--I mean the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from the power of all lawlessness, and to purify us as a special people for himself, a people eager for all fine works.

There are few passages in the New Testament which so vividly set out the moral power of the Incarnation as this does. Its whole stress is the miracle of moral change which Jesus Christ can work.

This miracle is repeatedly here expressed in the most interesting and significant way. Isaiah once exhorted his people: "Cease to do evil; learn to do good" (Isa. 1:16-17). First, there is the negative side of goodness, the giving up of that which is evil and the liberation from that which is low; second, there is its positive side, the acquisition of the shining virtues which mark the Christian life.

First, there is the renunciation of all godlessness and worldly desires. What did Paul mean by worldly desires? Chrysostom said that worldly things are things which do not pass over with us into heaven but are dissolved together with this present world. A man is very short-sighted if he sets all his heart and expends all his labour on things which he must leave behind when he quits this world. But an even simpler interpretation of worldly desires is that they are for things we could not show to God. It is only Christ who can make not only our outward life but also our inward heart fit for God to see.

That was the negative side of the moral power of the incarnation; now comes the positive side. Jesus Christ makes us able to live with the prudence which has everything under perfect control, and which allows no passion or desire more than its proper place; with the justice which enables us to give both to God and to men that which is their due; with the reverence which makes us live in the awareness that this world is nothing other than the temple of God.

The dynamic of this new life is the expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ. When a royal visit is expected, everything is cleansed and decorated, and made fit for the royal eye to see. The Christian is the man who is always prepared for the coming of the King of kings.

Finally Paul goes on to sum up what Jesus Christ has done, and once again he does it first negatively and then positively.

Jesus has redeemed us from the power of lawlessness, that power which makes us sin.

Jesus can purify us until we are fit to be the special people of God. The word we have translated special (periousios, GSN4041) is interesting. It means reserved for; and it was specially used for

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Titus 2:11-14

that part of the spoils of a battle or a campaign which the king who had conquered set apart specially for himself. Through the work of Jesus Christ, the Christian becomes fit to be the special possession of God.

The moral power of the Incarnation is a tremendous thought. Christ not only liberated us from the penalty of past sin; he can enable us to live the perfect life within this world of space and time; and he can so cleanse us that we become fit in the life to come to be the special possession of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 2:15

THE THREEFOLD TASK

Titus 2:15

Let these things be the substance of your message. Deal out encouragement and rebuke with all the authority which your royal commission confers upon you. Let no one regard your authority as cheap.

Here Paul succinctly lays before Titus the threefold task of the Christian preacher, teacher and leader.

It is a task of proclamation. There is a message to be proclaimed. There are some things about which argument is not possible and on which discussion is not relevant. There are times when he must say: "Thus saith the Lord."

It is a task of encouragement. Any preacher who reduces his audience to bleak despair has failed in his task. Men must be convicted of their sin, not that they may feel that their case is hopeless, but that they may be led to the grace which is greater than all their sin.

It is a task of conviction. The eyes of the sinner must be opened to his sin; the mind of the misguided must be led to realize its mistake; the heart of the heedless must be stabbed awake. The Christian message is no opiate to send men to sleep; it is rather the blinding light which shows men themselves as they are and God as he is.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 3:1-2

THE CHRISTIAN CITIZEN

Titus 3:1-2

Remind them to be duly subject to those who are in power and authority, to obey each several command, to be ready for every work so long as it is good, to slander no one, not to be aggressive, to be kindly, to show all gentleness to all men.

Here is laid down the public duty of the Christian; and it is advice which was particularly relevant to the people of Crete. The Cretans were notoriously turbulent and quarrelsome and impatient of all authority. Polybius, the Greek historian, said of them that they were constantly involved in "insurrections, murders and internecine wars." This passage lays down six qualifications for the good citizen.

The good citizen is law-abiding. He recognizes that, unless the laws are kept, life becomes chaos. He gives a proper respect to those who are set in authority and carries out whatever command is given to him. Christianity does not insist that a man should cease to be an individual, but it does insist that he remember that he is also a member of a group. "Man," said Aristotle, "is a political animal." That means that a man best expresses his personality not in isolated individualism but within the framework of the group.

The good citizen is active in service. He is ready for every work, so long as it is good. The characteristic modern disease is boredom; and boredom is the direct result of selfishness. So long as a man lives on the principle of, "Why should I do it? Let someone else do it," he is bound to be bored. The interest of life lies in service.

The good citizen is careful in speech. He must slander no one. No man should say about other people what he would not like them to say about him. The good citizen will be as careful of the words he speaks as of the deeds he does.

The good citizen is tolerant. He is not aggressive. The Greek word is amachos (GSN0269), which means not a fighter. This does not mean that the good citizen will not stand for the principles which he believes to be right, but that he will never be so opinionated as to believe that no other way than his own is right. He will allow to others the same right to have their convictions as he claims for himself to have his own.

The good citizen is kind. The word is epieikes (GSN1933), which describes the man who does not stand upon the letter of the law. Aristotle said of this word that it denotes "indulgent consideration of human infirmities" and the ability "to consider not only the letter of the law, but also the mind and intention of the legislator." The man who is epieikes (GSN1933) is ever ready to avoid the injustice which often lies in being strictly just.

The good citizen is gentle. The word is praus (GSN4239), which describes the man whose temper is always under complete control. He knows when to be angry and when not to be angry. He

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 3:1-2

patiently bears wrongs done to himself but is ever chivalrously ready to spring to the help of others who are wronged.

Qualities like these are possible only for the man in whose heart Christ reigns supreme. The welfare of any community depends on the acceptance by the Christians within it of the duty of demonstrating to the world the nobility of Christian citizenship.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 3:3-7

THE DOUBLE DYNAMIC

Titus 3:3-7 (Part 1)

For we too were once senseless, disobedient, misguided, slaves to all kinds of desires and pleasures, living in maliciousness and envy, detestable ourselves, and hating each other. But when the goodness and the love to men of God our Saviour appeared, it was not by works wrought in righteousness, which we ourselves had done, but by his own mercy that he saved us. That saving act was made effective to us through that washing, through which there comes to us the rebirth and the renewal which are the work of the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out upon us, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And the aim of all this was that we might be put into a right relationship with God through his grace, and so enter into possession of eternal life, for which we have been taught to hope.

The dynamic of the Christian life is twofold.

It comes first from the realization that converts to Christianity were once no better than their heathen neighbours. Christian goodness does not make a man proud; it makes him supremely grateful. When he looks at others, living the pagan life, he does not regard them with contempt; he says, as Whitefield said when he saw the criminal on the way to the gallows: "There but for the grace of God go I."

It comes from the realization of what God has done for men in Jesus Christ. Perhaps no passage in the New Testament more summarily, and yet more fully, sets out the work of Christ for men than this. There are seven outstanding facts about that work here.

(i) Jesus put us into a new relationship with God. Till he came, God was the King before whom men stood in awe, the Judge before whom men cringed in terror, the Potentate whom they could regard only with fear. Jesus came to tell men of the Father whose heart was open and whose hands were stretched out in love. He came to tell them not of the justice which would pursue them for ever but of the love which would never let them go.

(ii) The love and grace of God are gifts which no man could ever earn; they can only be accepted in perfect trust and in awakened love. God offers his love to men simply out of the great goodness of his heart and the Christian thinks never of what he has earned but only of what God has given. The keynote of the Christian life must always be wondering and humble gratitude, never proud self-satisfaction. The whole process is due to two great qualities of God.

It is due to his goodness. The word is *chrestotes* (GSN5544) and means benignity. It means that spirit which is so kind that it is always eager to give whatever gift may be necessary. *Chrestotes* is an all-embracing kindness, which issues not only in warm feeling but also in generous action at all times.

It is due to God's love to men. The word is *philanthropia* (GSN5363), and it is defined as love of man as man. The Greeks thought much of this beautiful word. They used it for the good man's

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Titus 3:3-7

kindliness to his equals, for a good king's graciousness to his subjects, for a generous man's active pity for those in any kind of distress, and specially for the compassion which made a man ransom a fellow-man when he had fallen into captivity.

At the back of all this is no merit of man but only the benign kindliness and the universal love which are in the heart of God.

(iii) This love and grace of God are mediated to men through the Church. They come through the sacrament of baptism. That is not to say that they can come in no other way, for God is not confined within his sacraments; but the door to them is ever open through the Church. When we think of baptism in the earliest days of the Church, we must remember that it was the baptism of grown men and women coming directly out of paganism. It was the deliberate leaving of one way of life to enter upon another. When Paul writes to the people of Corinth, he says: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified" (1Cor.6:11). In the letter to the Ephesians he says that Jesus Christ took the Church that "he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph.5:26). In baptism there came to men the cleansing, re-creating power of God.

In this connection Paul uses two words.

He speaks of rebirth (paliggenesia, GSN3824). Here is a word which had many associations. When a proselyte was received into the Jewish faith, after he had been baptized he was treated as if he were a little child. It was as if he had been reborn and life had begun all over again. The Pythagoreans used the word frequently. They believed in reincarnation and that men returned to life in many forms until they were fit to be released from it. Each return was a rebirth. The Stoics used the word. They believed that every three thousand years the world went up in a great conflagration, and that then there was a rebirth of a new world. When people entered the Mystery Religions they were said to be "reborn for eternity." The point is that when a man accepts Christ as Saviour and Lord, life begins all over again. There is a newness about life which can be likened only to a new birth.

He speaks of a renewing. It is as if life were worn out and when a man discovers Christ there is an act of renewal, which is not over and done with in one moment of time but repeats itself every day.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 3:3-7

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Titus 3:3-7 (Part 2)

(iv) The grace and love of God are mediated to men within the Church, but behind it all is the power of the Holy Spirit. All the work of the Church, all the words of the Church, all the sacraments of the Church are inoperative unless the power of the Holy Spirit is there. However highly a Church be organized, however splendid its ceremonies may be, however beautiful its buildings, all is ineffective without that power. The lesson is clear. Revival in the Church comes not from increased efficiency in organization but from waiting upon God. Not that efficiency is not necessary, but no amount of efficiency can breathe life into a body from which the Spirit has departed.

(v) The effect of all this is threefold. It brings forgiveness for past sins. In his mercy God does not hold our sins against us. Once a man was mourning gloomily to Augustine about his sins. "Man," said Augustine, "look away from your sins and look to God." It is not that a man must not be all his life repentant for his sins; but the very memory of his sins should move him to wonder at the forgiving mercy of God.

(vi) The effect is also present life. Christianity does not confine its offer to blessings which shall be. It offers a man here and now life of a quality which he has never known before. When Christ enters into a man's life, for the first time he really begins to live.

(vii) Lastly, there is the hope of even greater things. The Christian is a man for whom the best is always still to be; he knows that, however wonderful is life on earth with Christ, the life to come will be greater yet. The Christian is the man who knows the wonder of past sin forgiven, the thrill of present life with Christ, and the hope of the greater life which is yet to be.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 3:8-11

THE NECESSITY OF ACTION AND THE DANGER OF DISCUSSION

Titus 3:8-11

This is a saying which we are bound to believe--and I want you to keep on affirming these things--that those who have put their faith in God must think and plan how to practise fine deeds. These are fine things and useful to men. But have nothing to do with foolish speculations and genealogies and contentious and legalistic battles, for they are no good to anyone and serve no useful purpose. Avoid a contentious and opinionative man, after giving him a first and a second warning, for you must be well aware that such a man is perverted and stands a self-condemned sinner.

This passage stresses the need for Christian action and the danger of a certain kind of discussion.

The word we have translated to practise fine deeds is *proistasthai* (GSN4291), which literally means to stand in front of and was the word used for a shopkeeper standing in front of his shop crying his wares. The phrase may mean either of two things. It might be a command to Christians to engage only in respectable and useful trades. There were certain professions which the early Church insisted that a man should quit before he was allowed even to ask for membership. More probably the phrase has the wider meaning that a Christian must practise good deeds which are helpful to men.

The second part of the passage warns against useless discussions. The Greek philosophers spent their time on their fine-spun problems. The Jewish Rabbis spent their time building up imaginary genealogies for the characters of the Old Testament. The Jewish scribes spent endless hours discussing what could and could not be done on the Sabbath, and what was and was not unclean. It has been said that there is a danger that a man may think himself religious because he discusses religious questions. It is much easier to discuss theological questions than to be kind and considerate and helpful at home, or efficient and diligent and honest at work. There is no virtue in sitting discussing deep theological questions when the simple tasks of the Christian life are waiting to be done. Such discussion can be nothing other than an evasion of Christian duties.

Paul was certain that the real task of the Christian lay in Christian action. That is not to say that there is no place for Christian discussion; but the discussion which does not end in action is very largely wasted time.

It is Paul's advice that the contentious and opinionative man should be avoided. The King James Version calls him the heretic. The Greek is *hairetikos* (GSN0141). The verb *hairein* means "to choose"; and *haireisis* (GSN0139) means "a party, or a school or a sect." Originally the word carries no bad meaning. This creeps in when a man erects his private opinion against all the teaching, the agreement and the tradition of the Church. A heretic is simply a man who has decided that he is right and everybody else is wrong. Paul's warning is against the man who has made his own ideas the test of all truth. A man should always be very careful of any opinion which separates him from the fellowship of his fellow believers. True faith does not divide men; it unites them.

Barclay's Commentary

Titus 3:12-15

FINAL GREETINGS

Titus 3:12-15

When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.

Do your best to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way. See to it that nothing is lacking to them.

And let our people too learn to practise fine deeds, that they may be able to supply all necessary needs, and that they may not live useless lives.

All who are with me send you their greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace be with you all. Amen.

As usual Paul ends his letter with personal messages and greetings. Of Artemas we know nothing at all. Tychicus was one of Paul's most trusted messengers. He was the bearer of the letters to the Colossian and the Ephesian Churches (Col.4:7; Eph.6:21). Nicopolis was in Epirus and was the best centre for work in the Roman province of Dalmatia. It is interesting to remember that it was there that Epictetus, the great Stoic philosopher, later had his school.

Apollos was the well-known teacher (Ac.18:24). Of Zenas we know nothing at all. He is here called a nomikos (GSN3544). That could mean one of two things. Nomikos (GSN3544) is the regular word for a scribe and Zenas may have been a converted Jewish Rabbi. It is also the normal Greek for a lawyer; and, if that is its meaning, Zenas has the distinction of being the only lawyer mentioned in the New Testament.

Paul's last piece of advice is that the Christian people should practise good deeds, so that they themselves should be independent and also able to help others who are in need. The Christian workman works not only to have enough for himself but also to have something to give away.

Next come the final greetings; and then, as in every letter, Paul's last word is grace.

Barclay's Commentary

Introduction to Philemon

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO PHILEMON

THE UNIQUE LETTER

In one thing this little letter to Philemon is unique. It is the only private letter of Paul which we possess. Doubtless Paul must have written many private letters but of them all only Philemon has survived. Apart altogether from the grace and the charm which pervade it, this fact gives it a special significance.

ONESIMUS, THE RUNAWAY SLAVE

There are two possible reconstructions of what happened. One is quite straightforward; the other, connected with the name of E. J. Goodspeed, is rather more complicated and certainly more dramatic. Let us take the simple view first.

Onesimus was a runaway slave and very probably a thief into the bargain. "If he has done you any damage," Paul writes, "or, if he owes you anything, put it down to my account--I will repay it" (Phm.18-19). Somehow the runaway had found his way to Rome, to lose himself in the thronging streets of that great city, somehow he had come into contact with Paul, and somehow he had become a Christian, the child whom Paul had begotten in his bonds (Phm.10).

Then something happened. It was obviously impossible for Paul to go on harbouring a runaway slave and something brought the problem to a head. Perhaps it was the coming of Epaphras. It may be that Epaphras recognized Onesimus as a slave he had seen at Colosse, and that thereupon the whole wretched story came out; or, it may be that, with the coming of Epaphras, the conscience of Onesimus moved him to make a clean breast of all his discreditable past.

PAUL SENDS ONESIMUS BACK

In the time that he had been with him, Onesimus had made himself very nearly indispensable to Paul; and Paul would have liked to keep him beside him. "I would have been glad to keep him with me," he writes (Phm.13). But he will do nothing without the consent of Philemon, Onesimus' master (Phm.14). So he sends Onesimus back. No one knew better than Paul how great a risk he was taking. A slave was not a person; he was a living tool. A master had absolute power over his slaves. "He can box their ears or condemn them to hard labour--making them, for instance, work in chains upon his lands in the country, or in a sort of prison-factory. Or, he may punish them with blows of the rod, the lash or the knot; he can brand them upon the forehead, if they are thieves or runaways, or, in the end, if they prove irreclaimable, he can crucify them." Pliny tells how Vedius Pollio treated a slave.

The slave was carrying a tray of crystal goblets into the courtyard; he dropped and broke one; on the instant Pollio ordered him to be thrown into the fishpond in the middle of the court, where the savage lampreys tore him to pieces. Juvenal draws the picture of the mistress who will beat her maidservant at her caprice and the master who "delights in the sound of a cruel flogging, deeming it sweeter than any siren's song," who is never happy "until he has summoned a torturer and he can

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brand someone with a hot iron for stealing a couple of towels," "who revels in clanking chains." The slave was continually at the mercy of the caprice of a master or a mistress.

What made it worse was that the slaves were deliberately held down. There were in the Roman Empire 60,000,000 of them and the danger of revolt was constantly to be guarded against. A rebellious slave was promptly eliminated. And, if a slave ran away, at best he would be branded with a red-hot iron on the forehead, with the letter F--standing for fugitivus, runaway--and at the worst he would be crucified to death. Paul well knew all this and that slavery was so ingrained into the ancient world that even to send Onesimus back to the Christian Philemon was a considerable risk.

PAUL'S APPEAL

So Paul gave Onesimus this letter. He puns on Onesimus' name. Onesimus in Greek literally means profitable. Once Onesimus was a useless fellow, but he is useful now (Phm.11). Now, as we might say, he is not only Onesimus by name, he is also Onesimus by nature. Maybe Philemon lost him for a time in order to have him for ever (Phm.15). He must take him back, not as a slave but as a Christian brother (Phm.16). He is now Paul's son in the faith, and Philemon must receive him as he would receive Paul himself.

EMANCIPATION

Such, then, was Paul's appeal. Many people have wondered why Paul says nothing in this letter about the whole matter of slavery. He does not condemn it; he does not even tell Philemon to set Onesimus free; it is still as a slave that he would have him taken back. There are those who have criticized Paul for not seizing the opportunity to condemn the slavery on which the ancient world was built. Lightfoot says, "The word emancipation seems to tremble on his lips, but he never utters it." But there are reasons for his silence.

Slavery was an integral part of the ancient world; the whole of society was built on it. Aristotle held that it was in the nature of things that certain men should be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water, to serve the higher classes of men. It may well be that Paul accepted the institution of slavery because it was almost impossible to imagine society without it. Further, if Christianity had, in fact, given the slaves any encouragement to revolt or to leave their masters, nothing but tragedy could have followed. Any such revolt would have been savagely crushed; any slave who took his freedom would have been mercilessly punished; and Christianity would itself have been branded as revolutionary and subversionary. Given the Christian faith, emancipation was bound to come--but the time was not ripe; and to have encouraged slaves to hope for it, and to seize it, would have done infinitely more harm than good.

There are some things which cannot be suddenly achieved, and for which the world must wait, until the leaven works.

THE NEW RELATIONSHIP

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What Christianity did was to introduce a new relationship between man and man, in which all external differences were abolished. Christians are one body whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free men (1Cor.12:13). In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free man, male nor female (Gal.3:28). In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free man (Col.3:11). It was as a slave that Onesimus ran away and it was as a slave that he was coming back, but now he was not only a slave, he was a beloved brother in the Lord. When a relationship like that enters into life, social grades and castes cease to matter. The very names, master and slave, become irrelevant. If the master treats the slave as Christ would have treated him, and if the slave serves the master as he would serve Christ, then it does not matter if you call the one master and the other slave; their relationship does not depend on any human classification, for they are both in Christ.

Christianity in the early days did not attack slavery; to have done so would have been disastrous. But it introduced a new relationship in which the human grades of society ceased to matter. It is to be noted that this new relationship never gave the slave the right to take advantage of it; it made him rather a better slave and a more efficient servant, for now he must do things in such a way that he could offer them to Christ. Nor did it mean that the master must be soft and easy-going, willing to accept bad workmanship and inferior service; but it did mean that he no longer treated any servant as a thing, but as a person and a brother in Christ.

There are two passages in which Paul sets out the duties of slaves and masters--Eph.6:5-9 and Col.3:22-25; Col.4:1. Both were written when Paul was in prison in Rome, and most likely when Onesimus was with him; and it is difficult not to think that they owe much to long talks that Paul had with the runaway slave who had become a Christian.

On this view Philemon is a private letter, sent by Paul to Philemon, when he sent back his runaway slave; and it was written to urge Philemon to receive back Onesimus, not as a pagan master would, but as a Christian receives a brother.

ARCHIPPUS

Let us now turn to the other view of this letter.

We may begin with a consideration of the place of Archippus. He appears in both Colossians and Philemon. In Philemon greetings are sent to Archippus, our fellow-soldier (Phm.2); and such a description might well mean that Archippus is the minister of the Christian community in question. He is also mentioned in Col.4:17: "Say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfil the ministry which you have received in the Lord'." Now that injunction comes after a whole series of very definite references, not to Colosse, but to Laodicaea (Col.4:13,15,16). May the fact that he appears among the messages sent to Laodicaea not imply that Archippus must be at Laodicaea, too? Why in any event should he get this personal message? If he was at Colosse, he would hear the letter read, as everyone else would. Why has this verbal order to be sent to him? It is surely possible that the answer is that he is not in Colosse at all, but in Laodicaea.

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If that is so, it means that Philemon's house is in Laodicaea and that Onesimus was a runaway Laodicaean slave. This must mean that the letter to Philemon was, in fact, written to Laodicaea. And, if so, the missing letter to Laodicaea, mentioned in Col.4:16, is none other than the letter to Philemon. This indeed solves problems.

Let us remember that in ancient society, with its view of slavery, Paul took a considerable risk in sending Onesimus back at all. So, it can be argued that Philemon is not really only a personal letter. It is indeed written to Philemon and to the Church in his house. And further it has also to be read at Colosse. What, then, is Paul doing? Knowing the risk that he takes in sending Onesimus back, he is mobilizing Church opinion both in Laodicaea and in Colosse in his favour. The decision about Onesimus is not to be left to Philemon; it is to be the decision of the whole Christian community. It so happens that there is one little, but important, linguistic point, which is very much in favour of this view. In Phm.12 the Revised Standard Version makes Paul write that he has sent back Onesimus to Philemon. The verb is *anapempein* (GSN0375); this is the regular verb--it is commoner in this sense than in any other--for officially referring a case to someone for decision. And Phm.12 should most probably be translated: "I am referring his case to you," that is, not only to Philemon, but also the Church in his house.

There is much to be said for this view. There is only one difficulty. In Col.4:9 Onesimus is referred to as one of you, which certainly looks as if he is a Colossian. But E. J. Goodspeed, who states this view with such scholarship and persuasiveness, argues that Hierapolis, Laodicaea and Colosse were so close together, and so much a single Church, that they could well be regarded as one community, and that, therefore, one of you need not mean that Onesimus came from Colosse, but simply that he came from that closely connected group. If we are prepared to accept this, the last obstacle to the theory is removed.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE STORY

Goodspeed does not stop there. He goes on to reconstruct the history of Onesimus in a most moving way.

In Phm.13-14 Paul makes it quite clear that he would much have liked to keep Onesimus with him. "I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will." He reminds Philemon that he owes him his very soul (Phm.19). He says, with charming wit, "Let me make some Christian profit out of you!" (Phm.20). He says, "Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say" (Phm.21). Is it possible that Philemon could have resisted this appeal? In face of language like that could he do anything other than send Onesimus back to Paul with his blessing? Goodspeed regards it as certain that Paul got Onesimus back and that he became Paul's helper in the work of the gospel.

THE BISHOP OF EPHESUS

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Let us move on about fifty years. Ignatius, one of the great Christian martyrs, is being taken to execution from Antioch to Rome. As he goes, he writes letters--which still survive--to the Churches of Asia Minor. He stops at Smyrna and writes to the Church at Ephesus, and in the first chapter of that letter, he has much to say about their wonderful bishop. And what is the bishop's name? It is Onesimus; and Ignatius makes exactly the same pun as Paul made--he is Onesimus by name and Onesimus by nature, the profitable one to Christ. It may well be that the runaway slave had become with the passing years the great bishop of Ephesus.

WHAT CHRIST DID FOR ME

If all this is so, we have still another explanation. Why did this little slip of a letter, this single papyrus sheet, survive; and how did it ever get itself into the collection of Pauline letters? It deals with no great doctrine; it attacks no great heresy; it is the only one of Paul's undoubted letters written to an individual person. It is practically certain that the first collection of Paul's letters was made at Ephesus, about the turn of the century. It was just then that Onesimus was bishop of Ephesus; and it may well be that it was he who insisted that this letter be included in the collection, short and personal as it was, in order that all might know what the grace of God had done for him. Through it the great bishop tells the world that once he was a runaway slave and that he owed his life to Paul and to Jesus Christ.

Did Onesimus come back to Paul with Philemon's blessing? Did he become the great bishop of Ephesus, he who had been the runaway slave? Did he insist that this little letter be included in the Pauline collection to tell what Christ, through Paul, had done for him? We can never tell for certain, but it is a lovely story of God's grace in Christ--and we hope that it is true!

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Philemon 1:1-7

A MAN TO WHOM IT WAS EASY TO APPEAL

Philemon 1-7

This is a letter from Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, and from Timothy, the brother, to Philemon our well-beloved and our fellow-worker; and to Apphia, the sister, and to Archippus, our fellow-soldier, and to the Church in your house. Grace be to you and peace from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God when I make mention of you in my prayers, for I hear of your love and your faith, which you have to the Lord Jesus, and to all God's dedicated people. I pray that the kindly deeds of charity to which your faith moves you may be powerfully effective to increase your knowledge of every good thing that is in us and that brings us ever closer to Christ. You have brought me much joy and encouragement, because, my brother, the hearts of God's people have been refreshed by you.

The letter to Philemon is extraordinary, for in it we see the extraordinary sight of Paul asking a favour. No man ever asked fewer favours than he did, but in this letter he is asking a favour, not so much for himself, as for Onesimus, who had taken the wrong turning and whom Paul was helping to find the way back.

The beginning of the letter is unusual. Paul usually identifies himself as Paul an apostle; but on this occasion he is writing as a friend to a friend and the official title is dropped. He is not writing as Paul the apostle but as Paul the prisoner of Christ. Here at the very beginning Paul lays aside all appeal to authority and makes his appeal to sympathy and to love alone.

We do not know who Apphia and Archippus were, but it has been suggested that Apphia was the wife and Archippus the son of Philemon, for they, too, would be very much interested in the return of Onesimus, the runaway slave. Certainly Archippus had seen Christian service with Paul, for Paul speaks of him as his fellow-campaigner.

Philemon was clearly a man from whom it was easy to ask a favour. He was a man whose faith in Christ and love to the brethren all men knew, and the story of them had reached even Rome, where Paul was in prison. His house must have been like an oasis in a desert, for, as Paul puts it, he had refreshed the hearts of God's people. It is a lovely thing to go down to history as a man in whose house God's people were rested and refreshed.

In this passage there is one verse which is very difficult to translate and about which much has been written. It is Phm.6 which the Revised Standard Version translates: "I pray that the sharing of your faith may promote the knowledge of all the good that is ours in Christ." The phrase translated the sharing of your faith, is very difficult. The Greek is *koinonia* (GSN2842) *pisteos* (GSN4102). As far as we can see, there are three possible meanings. (a) *Koinonia* (GSN2842) can mean a sharing in; it can, for instance, mean partnership in a business. So this may mean your share in the Christian faith; and it might be a prayer that the faith which Philemon and Paul share in may lead Philemon deeper and deeper into Christian truth. (b) *Koinonia* (GSN2842) can mean fellowship;

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and this may be a prayer that Christian fellowship may lead Philemon ever more deeply into the truth.

(c) Koinonia (GSN2842) can mean the act of sharing; in that case the verse will mean: "It is my prayer that your way of generously sharing all that you have will lead you more and more deeply into the knowledge of the good things which lead to Christ."

We think that the third meaning is correct. Obviously Christian generosity was a characteristic of Philemon; he had love to God's people and in his home they were rested and refreshed. And now Paul is going to ask the generous man to be more generous yet. There is a great thought here, if this interpretation is correct. It means that we learn about Christ by giving to others. It means that by emptying ourselves we are filled with Christ. It means that to be open-handed and generous-hearted is the surest way to learn more and more of the wealth of Christ. The man who knows most of Christ is not the intellectual scholar, not even the saint who spends his days in prayer, but the man who moves in loving generosity amongst his fellow-men.

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Philemon 1:8-17

THE REQUEST OF LOVE

Philemon 8-17

I could well be bold in Christ to give you orders as to where your duty lies, but for love's sake I would rather put it in the form of a request, I, Paul, such as I am, an old man now, a prisoner of Christ. My request to you is for my child, whom I begat in my bonds--I mean Onesimus, who was once useless to you, but who is now useful to you and to me. I am sending him back to you, and that is the same as to send you a bit of my own heart. I could have wished to keep him beside myself, that he might serve me for you in the bonds which the gospel has brought to me; but I did not wish to do anything without your approval; so that the boon which I ask might not be forcibly extracted but willingly given. It may be that he was parted from you for a time that you might get him back for ever; and that you might get him back, no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave--a well-beloved brother, most of all to me, and how much more to you, both as a man and a Christian. If you consider me as a partner, receive him as you would receive me.

Paul, being Paul, could have demanded what he wished from Philemon, but he will only humbly request. A gift must be given freely and with good-will; if it is coerced it is no gift at all.

In Phm.9 Paul describes himself. The King James Version translates--and we have retained the translation--Paul the aged, and a prisoner of Christ. A good number of scholars wish to substitute another translation for aged. It is argued that Paul could not really be described as an old man. He certainly was not sixty years old; he was somewhere between that and fifty-five. But on this ground those who object to the translation aged are wrong. The word which Paul uses of himself is presbutes (GSN4246), and Hippocrates, the great Greek medical writer, says that a man is presbutes (GSN4246) from the age of forty-nine to the age of fifty-six. Between these years he is what we might call senior; only after that does he become a geron (compare GSN1094), the Greek for an old man.

But what is the other translation suggested? There are two words which are very like each other; their spelling is only one letter different and their pronunciation exactly the same. They are presbutes (GSN4246), old, and presbeutes (compare GSN4243), ambassador. It is the verb of this word which Paul uses in Eph.6:20, when he says, "I am an ambassador in bonds." If we think that the word ought to be presbeutes (GSN4246), Paul is saying, "I am an ambassador, although I am an ambassador in chains." But it is far more likely that we should retain the translation old, for in this letter Paul is appealing all the time, not to any office he holds or to any authority he enjoys, but only to love. It is not the ambassador who is speaking, but the man who has lived hard and is now lonely and tired.

Paul makes his request in Phm.10 and it is for Onesimus. We notice how he delays pronouncing the name of Onesimus, almost as if he hesitated to do so. He does not make any excuses for him; he freely admits he was a useless character; but he makes one claim--he is useful now. Christianity, as James Denney used to say, is the power which can make bad men good.

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Philemon 1:8-17

It is significant to note that Paul claims that in Christ the useless person has been made useful. The last thing Christianity is designed to produce is vague, inefficient people; it produces people who are of use and can do a job better than they ever could if they did not know Christ. It was said of someone that "he was so heavenly-minded that he was no earthly use." True Christianity makes a man heavenly-minded and useful upon earth at one and the same time.

Paul calls Onesimus the child whom he has begotten in his bonds. A Rabbinic saying runs, "If one teaches the son of his neighbour the law, the Scripture reckons this the same as though he had begotten him." To lead a man to Jesus Christ is as great a thing as to bring him into the world. Happy is the parent who brings his child into life and who then leads him into life eternal; for then he will be his child twice over.

As we have noted in the introduction to this letter, there is a double meaning in Phm.12. "I am sending him back to you," writes Paul. But the verb *anapempeim* (GSN0375) does not mean only to send back, it also means to refer a case to; and Paul is saying to Philemon: "I am referring this case of Onesimus to you, that you may give a verdict on it that will match the love you ought to have." Onesimus must have become very dear to Paul in these months in prison, for he pays him the great tribute of saying that to send him to Philemon is like sending a bit of his own heart.

Then comes the appeal. Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus but he sends him back to Philemon, for he will do nothing without his consent. Here again is a significant thing. Christianity is not out to help a man escape his past and run away from it; it is out to enable him face his past and rise above it. Onesimus had run away. Well, then, he must go back, face up to the consequences of what he did, accept them and rise above them. Christianity is never escape; it is always conquest.

But Onesimus comes back with a difference. He went away as a heathen slave; he comes back as a brother in Christ. It is going to be hard for Philemon to regard a runaway slave as a brother; but that is exactly what Paul demands. "If you agree," says Paul, "that I am your partner in the work of Christ and that Onesimus is my son in the faith, you must receive him as you would receive myself."

Here again is something very significant. The Christian must always welcome back the man who has made a mistake. Too often we regard the man who has taken the wrong turning with suspicion and show that we are never prepared to trust him again. We believe that God can forgive him but we, ourselves, find it too difficult. It has been said that the most uplifting thing about Jesus Christ is that he trusts us on the very field of our defeat. When a man has made a mistake, the way back can be very hard, and God cannot readily forgive the man who, in his self-righteousness or lack of sympathy, makes it harder.

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Philemon 1:18-25

THE CLOSING APPEAL AND THE CLOSING BLESSING

Philemon 18-25

If he has done you any damage or owes you anything, put it down to my account. I, Paul, write with my own hand--I will repay it, not to mention to you that you owe your very self to me. Yes, my brother, let me make some Christian profit out of you! Refresh my heart in Christ. It is with complete confidence in your willingness to listen that I write to you, for I know well that you will do more than I ask.

At the same time get ready a lodging place for me; for I hope that through your prayers it will be granted to you that I should come to you.

Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ, sends his greetings to you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow-workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

It is one of the laws of life that someone has to pay the price of sin. God can and does forgive, but not even he can free a man from the consequences of what he has done. It is the glory of the Christian faith that, just as Jesus Christ shouldered the sins of all men, so there are those who in love are prepared to help pay for the consequences of the sins of those who are dear to them. Christianity never entitled a man to default on his debts. Onesimus must have stolen from Philemon, as well as run away from him. If he had not helped himself to Philemon's money, it is difficult to see how he could ever have covered the long road to Rome. Paul writes with his own hand that he will be responsible and will repay in full.

It is interesting to note that this is an exact instance of a cheirographon (GSN5498), the kind of acknowledgment met in Col.2:14. This is a handwriting against Paul, an obligation voluntarily accepted and signed.

It is of interest to note that Paul was able to pay Onesimus' debts. Every now and again we get glimpses which show that he was not without financial resources. Felix kept him prisoner for he had hopes of a bribe to let him go (Ac.24:26); Paul was able to hire a house during his imprisonment in Rome (Ac.28:30). It may well be that, if he had not chosen to live the life of a missionary of Christ, he might have lived a settled life of reasonable ease and comfort on his own resources. This may well have been another of the things which he gave up for Christ.

In Phm.19-20 we hear Paul speaking with a flash of humour. "Philemon," he says, "you owe your soul to me, for it was I who brought you to Christ. Won't you let me make some profit out of you now?" With an affectionate smile Paul is saying, "Philemon, you got a lot out of me--let me get something out of you now!"

Phm.21 is typical of Paul's dealings with people. It was his rule always to expect the best from others; he never really doubted that Philemon would grant his request. It is a good rule. To expect

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Philemon 1:18-25

the best from others is often to be more than half-way to getting it; if we make it clear that we expect little, we will probably get just that.

In Phm.22 there speaks Paul's optimism. Even in prison he believes it possible that through the prayers of his friends freedom may come again. He has changed his plans now. Before he was imprisoned it had been his intention to go to far off Spain (Rom.15:24,28). Maybe after the years in prison, two at Caesarea and other two at Rome, Paul felt that he must leave the distant places to younger men and that for him, as he drew near the end, old friends were best.

In Phm.23 there is a list of greetings from the same comrades as we meet in Colossians, and so there comes the blessing, and Philemon and Onesimus alike are commended to the grace of Christ.

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Introduction to Hebrews

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

GOD FULFILLS HIMSELF IN MANY WAYS

Religion has never been the same thing to all men. "God," as Tennyson said, "fulfills himself in many ways." George Russell said: "There are as many ways of climbing to the stars as there are people to climb." There is a well-known saying which tells us very truly and very beautifully that "God has his own secret stairway into every heart." Broadly speaking, there have been four great conceptions of religion.

(i) To some men it is inward fellowship with God. It is a union with Christ so close and so intimate that the Christian can be said to live in Christ and Christ to live in him. That was Paul's conception of religion. To him it was something which mystically united him with God.

(ii) To some religion is what gives a man a standard for life and a power to reach that standard. On the whole that is what religion was to James and to Peter. It was something which showed them what life ought to be and which enabled them to attain it.

(iii) To some men religion is the highest satisfaction of their minds. Their minds seek and seek until they find that they can rest in God. It was Plato who said that "the unexamined life is the life not worth living." There are some men who must understand or perish. On the whole that is what religion was to John. The first chapter of his gospel is one of the greatest attempts in the world to state religion in a way that really satisfies the mind.

(iv) To some men religion is access to God. It is that which removes the barriers and opens the door to his living presence. That is what religion was to the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews. With that idea his mind was dominated. He found in Christ the one person who could take him into the very presence of God. His whole idea of religion is summed up in the great passage in Heb.10:19-23.

"Therefore, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

If the writer to the Hebrews had one text it was: "Let us draw near."

THE DOUBLE BACKGROUND

The writer to the Hebrews had a double background into both of which this idea came. He had a Greek background Ever since the time of Plato, five hundred years before, the Greeks had been haunted by the contrast between the real and the unreal, the seen and the unseen, the temporal and the eternal. It was the Greek idea that somewhere there was a real world of which this was only a shadowy and imperfect copy. Plato had the idea that somewhere there was a world of perfect forms or ideas or patterns, of which everything in this world was an imperfect copy. To take a simple

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instance, somewhere there was laid up the pattern of a perfect chair of which all the chairs in this world were inadequate copies.

Plato said: "The Creator of the world had designed and carried out his work according to an unchangeable and eternal pattern of which the world is but a copy." Philo, who took his ideas from Plato, said: "God knew from the beginning that a fair copy could never come into being apart from a fair pattern; and that none of the objects perceivable by sense could be flawless which was not modelled after an archetype and spiritual idea, and thus, when he prepared to create this visible world, he shaped beforehand the ideal world in order to constitute the corporeal after the incorporeal and godlike pattern." When Cicero was talking of the laws men know and use on earth, he said: "We have no real and life-like likeness of real law and genuine justice; all we enjoy is a shadow and a sketch."

The thinkers of the ancient world all had this idea that somewhere there is a real world of which this one is only a kind of imperfect copy. Here we can only guess and grope; here we can work only with copies and imperfect things. But in the unseen world there are the real and perfect things. When Newman died they erected a statue to him, and on the pedestal of it are the Latin words: *Ab umbris et imaginibus ad veritatem*, "Away from the shadows and the semblances to the truth." If that be so, clearly the great task of this life is to get away from the shadows and the imperfections and to reach reality. This is exactly what the writer to the Hebrews claims that Jesus Christ can enable us to do. To the Greek the writer to the Hebrews said: "All your lives you have been trying to get from the shadows to the truth. That is just what Jesus Christ can enable you to do."

THE HEBREW BACKGROUND

But the writer to the Hebrews also had a Jewish background. To the Jew it was always dangerous to come too near to God. "Man," said God to Moses, "shall not see me and live" (Exo.33:20). It was Jacob's astonished exclamation at Peniel: "I have seen god face to face and yet my life is preserved" (Gen.32:30). When Manoah realised who his visitor had been, he said in terror to his wife: "We shall surely die, for we have seen God." The great day of Jewish worship was the Day of Atonement. That was the one day of all the year when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies where the very presence of God was held to dwell. No man ever entered in except the High Priest, and he only on that day. When he did, the law laid it down that he must not linger in the Holy Place for long "lest he put Israel in terror." It was dangerous to enter the presence of God and if a man waited too long he might be struck dead.

In view of this there entered into Jewish thought the idea of a covenant. God, in his grace and in a way that was quite unmerited, approached the nation of Israel and offered them a special relationship with himself. But this unique access to God was conditional on the observance by the people of the law that he gave to them. We can see this relationship being entered into and this law being accepted in the dramatic scene in Exo.24:3-8.

So then Israel had access to God, but only if she kept the law. To break the law was sin, and sin put up a barrier which stopped the way to God. It was to take away that barrier that the system of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices was constructed. The law was given; man sinned; the barrier

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was up; the sacrifice was made; and the sacrifice was designed to open the closed way to God. But the experience of life was that this was precisely what sacrifice could not do. It was proof of the ineffectiveness of the whole system that sacrifice had to go on and on and on. It was a losing and ineffective battle to remove the barrier that sin had erected between man and God.

THE PERFECT PRIEST AND THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

What men needed was a perfect priest and a perfect sacrifice, someone who was such that he could bring to God a sacrifice which once and for all opened the way of access to him. That, said the writer to the Hebrews, is exactly what Christ did. He is the perfect priest because he is at once perfectly man and perfectly God. In his manhood he can take man to God and in his Godhead he can take God to man. He has no sin. The perfect sacrifice he brings is the sacrifice of himself, a sacrifice so perfect that it never needs to be made again. To the Jew the writer to the Hebrews said: "All your lives you have been looking for the perfect priest who can bring the perfect sacrifice and give you access to God. You have him in Jesus Christ and in him alone."

To the Greek the writer to the Hebrews said: "You are looking for the way from the shadows to reality; you will find it in Jesus Christ." To the Jew the writer to the Hebrews said: "You are looking for that perfect sacrifice which will open the way to God which your sins have closed; you will find it in Jesus Christ." Jesus was the one person who gave access to reality and access to God. That is the key-thought of this letter.

THE RIDDLE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

So much is clear but when we turn to the other questions of introduction Hebrews is wrapped in mystery. E. F. Scott wrote: "The Epistle to the Hebrews is in many respects the riddle of the New Testament." When it was written, to whom it was written, and who wrote it are questions at which we can only guess. The very history of the letter shows how its mystery is to be treated with a certain reserve and suspicion. It was a long time before it became an unquestioned New Testament book. The first list of New Testament books, The Muratorian Canon, compiled about A.D. 170, does not mention it at all. The great Alexandrian scholars, Clement and Origen, knew it and loved it but agreed that its place as scripture was disputed. Of the great African fathers, Cyprian never mentions it and Tertullian knows that its place was disputed. Eusebius, the great Church historian, says that it ranked among the disputed books.

It was not until the time of Athanasius, in the middle of the fourth century, that Hebrews was definitely accepted as a New Testament book, and even Luther was not too sure about it. It is strange to think how long this great book had to wait for full recognition.

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?

The only information we have comes from the letter itself. Clearly it is written for what we might call second generation Christians (Heb.2:3). The story was transmitted to its recipients by those who had heard the Lord. The community to whom it was written were not new to the Christian faith; they ought to have been mature (Heb.5:12). They must have had a long history for they are

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summoned to look back on the former days (Heb.10:32). They had a great history behind them and heroic martyr figures on which they ought to look back for inspiration (Heb.13:7).

The thing that will help us most in dating the letter is its references to persecution. It is clear that at one time their leaders had died for their faith (Heb.13:7). It is clear that they themselves had not yet suffered persecution, for they had not yet resisted to the point of shedding their blood (Heb.12:4). It is also clear that they have had ill-treatment to suffer for they have had to undergo the pillaging of their goods (Heb.10:32-34). And it is clear from the outlook of the letter that there is a risk of persecution about to come. From all that it is safe to say that this letter must have been written between two persecutions, in days when Christians were not actually persecuted, but were none the less unpopular with their fellow-men. Now the first persecution was in the time of Nero in the year A.D. 64; and the next was in the time of Domitian about A.D. 85. Somewhere between these dates this letter was written, more likely nearer to Domitian. If we take the date as A.D. 80 we shall not be far wrong.

TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

Once again we have to be dependent on such hints as we get from the letter itself. One thing is certain--it cannot have been written to any of the great Churches or the name of the place could not have so completely vanished. Let us set down what we know. The letter was written to a long-established Church (Heb.5:12). It was written to a Church which had at some time in the past suffered persecution (Heb.10:32-34). It was written to a Church which had had great days and great teachers and leaders (Heb.13:7). It was written to a Church which had not been directly founded by the apostles (Heb.2:3). It was written to a Church which had been marked by generosity and liberality (Heb.6:10).

We do have one direct hint. Amongst the closing greetings we find the sentence, as the Revised Standard Version translates it: "Those who come from Italy send you greetings" (Heb.13:24). Taken by itself that phrase could mean either that the letter was written from Italy or that it was written to Italy, the greater likelihood is that it was written to Italy. Suppose I am in Glasgow and am writing to some place abroad. I would not be likely to say, "All the people from Glasgow greet you." I would be much more likely to say, "All the people in Glasgow greet you." But suppose I am somewhere abroad where there is a little colony of Glaswegians, I might well say, "All the people from Glasgow send you their greetings." So then we may say that the letter was written to Italy; and if it was written to Italy it was almost certainly written to Rome.

But quite certainly it was not written to the Church at Rome as a whole. If it had been it would never have lost its title. Furthermore, it gives the unmistakable impression that it was written to a small body of like-minded persons. Moreover, it was obviously written to a scholarly group. From Heb.5:12 we can see that they had long been under instruction and were preparing themselves to become teachers of the Christian faith. Still further, Hebrews demands such a knowledge of the Old Testament that it must always have been a book written by a scholar for scholars.

When we sum it all up, we can say that Hebrews is a letter written by a great teacher to a little group or college of Christians in Rome. He was their teacher; at the moment he was separated from

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them and was afraid that they were drifting away from the faith; and so he wrote this letter to them. It is not so much a letter as a talk. It does not begin like Paul's letters do, although it ends with greetings as a letter does. The writer himself calls it "a word of exhortation."

BY WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN?

Perhaps the most insoluble problem of all is the problem of its authorship. It was precisely that uncertainty which kept it so long on the fringes of the New Testament. The title in the earliest days was simply, "To the Hebrews." No author's name was given, no one connected it directly with the name of Paul. Clement of Alexandria used to think that Paul might have written it in Hebrew and that Luke translated it, for the style is quite different from that of Paul. Origen made a famous remark, "who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews only God knows for certain." Tertullian thought that Barnabas wrote it. Jerome said the Latin Church did not receive it as Paul's and speaking of the author said, "the writer to the Hebrews whoever he was." Augustine felt the same way about it. Luther declared that Paul could never have written it because the thought was not his. Calvin said that he could not bring himself to think that this letter was a letter of Paul.

At no time in the history of the Church did men ever really think that Paul wrote Hebrews. How then did it get attached to his name? It happened very simply. When the New Testament came into its final form there was of course argument about which books were to be included and which were not. To settle it one test was used. Was a book the work of an apostle or at least the work of one who had been in direct contact with the apostles? By this time Hebrews was known and loved throughout the Church. Most people felt like Origen that God alone knew who wrote it, but they wanted it. They felt it must go into the New Testament and the only way to ensure that was to include it with the thirteen letters of Paul. Hebrews won its way into the New Testament on the grounds of its own greatness, but to get in it had to be included with the letters of Paul and come under his name. People knew quite well that it was not Paul's but they included it among his letters because no man knew who wrote it and yet it must go in.

THE AUTHOR OF HEBREWS

Can we guess who the author was? Many candidates have been put forward. We can only glance at three of the many suggestions.

(i) Tertullian thought that Barnabas wrote it. Barnabas was a native of Cyprus; the people of Cyprus were famous for the excellence of the Greek they spoke; and Hebrews is written in the best Greek in the New Testament. He was a Levite (Ac.4:36) and of all men in the New Testament he would have had the closest knowledge of the priestly and sacrificial system on which the whole thought of the letter is based. He is called a son of encouragement; the Greek word is *paraklesis* (GSN3874); and Hebrews calls itself a word of *paraklesis* (GSN3874) (Heb.13:22). He was one of the few men acceptable to both Jews and Greeks and at home in both worlds of thought. It might be that Barnabas wrote this letter, but if so it is strange that his name should vanish in connection with it.

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(ii) Luther was sure that Apollos was the author. Apollos, according to the New Testament mention of him, was a Jew, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures (Ac.18:24ff; 1Cor.1:12; 1Cor.3:4). The man who wrote this letter knew the scriptures; he was eloquent; and he thought and argued in the way that a cultured Alexandrian would. The man who wrote Hebrews was certainly a man like Apollos in thought and in background.

(iii) The most romantic of all conjectures is that of Harnack, the great German scholar. He thought that maybe Aquila and Priscilla wrote it between them. Aquila was a teacher (Ac.18:26). Their house in Rome was a Church in itself (Rom.16:5). Harnack thought that that is why the letter begins with no greetings and why the writer's name has vanished--because the main author of Hebrews was a woman and a woman was not allowed to teach.

But when we come to the end of conjecture, we are compelled to say as Origen said seventeen hundred years ago, that only God knows who wrote Hebrews. To us the author must remain a voice and nothing more; but we can be thankful to God for the work of this great nameless one who wrote with incomparable skill and beauty about the Jesus who is the way to reality and the way to God.

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Hebrews 1:1-3

THE END OF FRAGMENTS

Hebrews 1:1-3

It was in many parts and in many ways that God spoke to our fathers in the prophets in time gone past; but in the end of these days he has spoken to us in One who is a Son, a Son whom he destined to enter into possession of all things, a Son by whose agency he made the universe. He was the very effulgence of God's glory; he was the exact expression of God's very essence. He bore everything onwards by the word of his power; and after he had made purification for the sins of men, he took his royal seat at the right hand of the glory in the heights.

This is the most sonorous piece of Greek in the whole New Testament. It is a passage that any classical Greek orator would have been proud to write. The writer of Hebrews has brought to it every artifice of word and rhythm that the beautiful and flexible Greek language could provide. In Greek the two adverbs which we have translated in many parts and in many ways are single words, *polumeros* (GSN4181) and *polutropos* (GSN4187). *Polu-* (compare GSN4183) in such a combination means "many" and it was a habit of the great Greek orators, like Demosthenes, the greatest of them all, to weave such sonorous words into the first paragraph of a speech. The writer to the Hebrews felt that, since he was going to speak of the supreme revelation of God to men, he must clothe his thought in the noblest language that it was possible to find.

There is something of interest even here. The man who wrote this letter must have been trained in Greek oratory. When he became a Christian he did not throw his training away. He used the talent he had in the service of Jesus Christ. Everyone knows the lovely legend of the acrobatic tumbler who became a monk. He felt that he had so little to offer. One day someone saw him go into the chapel and stand before the statue of the Virgin Mary. He hesitated for a moment and then began to go through his acrobatic routine. When he had completed his tumbling, he knelt in adoration; and then, says the legend, the statue of the Virgin Mary came to life, stepped down from her pedestal and gently wiped the sweat from the brow of the acrobat who had offered all he had to give. When a man becomes a Christian he is not asked to abandon all the talents he once had; he is asked to use them in the service of Jesus Christ and of his Church.

The basic idea of this letter is that Jesus Christ alone brings to men the full revelation of God and that he alone enables them to enter into his very presence. The writer begins by contrasting Jesus with the prophets who had gone before. He talks about him coming in the end of these days. The Jews divided all time into two ages--the present age and the age to come. In between they set The Day of the Lord. The present age was wholly bad; the age to come was to be the golden age of God. The Day of the Lord was to be like the birth-pangs of the new age. So the writer to the Hebrews says, "The old time is passing away; the age of incompleteness is gone; the time of human guessing and groping is at an end; the new age, the age of God, has dawned in Christ." He sees the world and the thought of men enter, as it were, into a new beginning with Christ. In Jesus God has entered humanity, eternity has invaded time, and things can never be the same again.

He contrasts Jesus with the prophets, for they were always believed to be in the secret counsels of God. Long ago Amos had said: "The Lord God does nothing without revealing his secrets to his

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servants the prophets" (Am.3:7). Philo had said: "The prophet is the interpreter of the God who speaks within." He had said: "The prophets are interpreters of the God who uses them as instruments to reveal to men that which he wills." In later days this doctrine had been completely mechanized. Athenagoras spoke of God moving the mouths of the prophets as a man might play upon a musical instrument and of the Spirit breathing into them as a flute-player breathes into a flute. Justin Martyr spoke of the divine coming down from heaven and sweeping across the prophets as a plectrum sweeps across a harp or a lute. In the end men came to put it in such a way that the prophets had really no more to do with their message than a musical instrument had to do with the music it played or a pen with the message it wrote.

That was over-mechanizing the matter; for even the finest musician is to some extent at the mercy of his instrument and can not produce great music out of a piano in which certain notes are missing or out of tune, and even the finest penman is to some extent at the mercy of his pen. God can not reveal more than men can understand. His revelation comes through the minds and the hearts of men. That is exactly what the writer to the Hebrews saw.

He says that the revelation of God which came through the prophets was in many parts (polumeros, GSN4181) and in many ways (polutropos, GSN4187). There are two ideas there.

(i) The revelation of the prophets had a variegated grandeur which made it a tremendous thing. From age to age they had spoken, always fitting their message to the age, never letting it be out of date. At the same time, that revelation was fragmentary and had to be presented in such a way that the limitations of the time would understand. One of the most interesting things is to see how time and again the prophets are characterized by one idea. For instance, Amos is "a cry for social justice." Isaiah had grasped the holiness of God. Hosea, because of his own bitter home experience, had realized the wonder of the forgiving love of God. Each prophet, out of his own experience of life and out of the experience of Israel, had grasped and expressed a fragment of the truth of God. None had grasped the whole round orb of truth; but with Jesus it was different. He was not a fragment of the truth; he was the whole truth. In him God displayed not some part of himself but all of himself.

(ii) The prophets used many methods. They used the method of speech. When speech failed they used the method of dramatic action (Compare 1Kgs.11:29-32; Jer.13:1-9; Jer.27:1-7; Eze.4:1-3; Eze.5:1-4). The prophet had to use human methods to transmit his part of the truth of God. Again, it was different with Jesus. He revealed God by being himself. It was not so much what he said and did that shows us what God is like; it is what he was.

The revelation of the prophets was great and manifold, but it was fragmentary and presented by such methods as they could find to make it effective. The revelation of God in Jesus was complete and was presented in Jesus himself. In a word, the prophets were the friends of God; but Jesus was the Son. The prophets grasped part of the mind of God; but Jesus was that mind. It is to be noted that it is no part of the purpose of the writer to the Hebrews to belittle the prophets; it is his aim to establish the supremacy of Jesus Christ. He is not saying that there is a break between the Old Testament revelation and that of the New Testament; he is stressing the fact that there is continuity, but continuity that ends in consummation.

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The writer to the Hebrews uses two great pictures to describe what Jesus was. He says that he was the *apaugasma* (GSN0541) of God's glory. *Apaugasma* (GSN0541) can mean one of two things in Greek. It can mean effulgence, the light which shines forth, or it can mean reflection, the light which is reflected. Here it probably means effulgence. Jesus is the shining of God's glory among men.

He says that he was the *charakter* (GSN5481) of God's very essence. In Greek, *charakter* (GSN5481) means two things, first, a seal, and, second, the impression that the seal leaves on the wax. The impression has the exact form of the seal. So, when the writer to the Hebrews said that Jesus was the *charakter* (GSN5481) of the being of God, he meant that he was the exact image of God. Just as when you look at the impression, you see exactly what the seal which made it is like, so when you look at Jesus you see exactly what God is like.

C. J. Vaughan has pointed out that this passage tells us six great things about Jesus:

(i) The original glory of God belongs to him. Here is a wonderful thought. Jesus is God's glory; therefore, we see with amazing clarity that the glory of God consists not in crushing men and reducing them to abject servitude, but in serving them and loving them and in the end dying for them. It is not the glory of shattering power but the glory of suffering love.

(ii) The destined empire belongs to Jesus. The New Testament writers never doubted his ultimate triumph. Think of it. They were thinking of a Galilaean carpenter who was crucified as a criminal on a cross on a hill outside the city of Jerusalem. They themselves faced savage persecution and were the humblest of people. As Sir William Watson said of them,

"So to the wild wolf Hate were sacrificed
The panting, huddled flock, whose crime was Christ."

And yet they never doubted the eventual victory. They were quite certain that God's love was backed by his power and that in the end the kingdoms of the world would be the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ.

(iii) The creative action belongs to Jesus. The early Church held that the Son had been God's agent in creation, that in some way God had originally created the world through him. They were filled with the thought that the One who had created the world would also be the One who redeemed it.

(iv) The sustaining power belongs to Jesus. These early Christians had a tremendous grip of the doctrine of providence. They did not think of God as creating the world and then leaving it to itself. Somehow and somewhere they saw a power that was carrying the world and each life on to a destined end. They believed,

"That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroy'd.
Or cast as rubbish to the void,

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When God hath made the pile complete."

(v) To Jesus belongs the redemptive work. By his sacrifice he paid the price of sin; by his continual presence he liberates from sin.

(vi) To Jesus belongs the mediatorial exaltation. He has taken his place on the right hand of glory; but the tremendous thought of the writer to the Hebrews is that he is there, not as our judge but as one who makes intercession for us so that, when we enter into the presence of God, we go, not to hear his justice prosecute us but his love plead for us.

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Hebrews 1:4-14

ABOVE THE ANGELS

Hebrews 1:4-14

He was the superior to the angels, in proportion as he had received a more excellent rank than they. For to which of the angels did God ever say: "It is my Son that you are; it is I who this day have begotten you"? And again: "I will be to him a Father, and he will be to me a Son." And again, when he brings his honoured one into the world of men, he says: "And let all the angels of God bow down before him." As for the angels, he says: "He who makes his angels winds and his servants a flame of fire." But, as for the Son, he says: "God is your throne for ever and for ever, and the sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved justice and hated lawlessness; therefore God has anointed you, even your God, with the oil of exultation above your fellows." And, "You in the beginning, O Lord, laid the foundations of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands. They shall perish but you remain unalterable.

All of them will grow old like a garment, and like a mantle you will fold them up and they will be changed. But you are ever yourself, and your years will not fail." To which of the angels did he ever say: "Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool"? Are they not all ministering spirits, continually being despatched on service, for the sake of those who are destined to enter into possession of salvation?

In the previous passage the writer was concerned to prove the superiority of Jesus over all the prophets. Now he is concerned to prove his superiority over the angels. That he thinks it worth while to do this proves the place that belief in angels had in the thought of the Jews of his day. At this time it was on the increase. The reason was that men were more and more impressed with what is called the transcendence of God. They felt more and more the distance and the difference between God and man. The result was that they came to think of the angels as intermediaries between God and man. They came to believe that the angels bridged the gulf between God and man; that God spoke to man through the angels and the angels carried the prayers of man into the presence of God. We see this process particularly in one instance. In the Old Testament the law was given directly by God to Moses, without need of intermediary.

But in New Testament times the Jews believed that God gave the law first to angels who then passed it on to Moses, direct communication between man and God being unthinkable (compare Ac.7:53; Gal.3:19).

If we look at some of the basic Jewish beliefs about angels we will see them reappearing in this passage. God lived surrounded by his angelic hosts (Isa.6; 1Kgs.22:19). Sometimes the angels are thought of as God's army (Josh.5:14f.). Greek for "angels" is *aggeloi* (GSN0032) and in Hebrew *mal'akim* (HSN4397). In both languages the meaning is messenger as well as angel. In fact, messenger is the more common meaning. The angels were really the beings who were the instruments in the bringing of God's word and the working of God's will in the universe of men. They were said to be made of an ethereal fiery substance like blazing light. They were created either on the second or the fifth day of creation. They did not eat or drink and they did not beget children. Sometimes they were believed to be immortal, although they could be annihilated by God, but there was another belief about their existence as we shall see.

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Some of them, the seraphim (HSN8314), the cherubim (see keruwb - HSN3742) and the 'owphanim (HSN0212) (-im is the plural ending of Hebrew nouns) were always around the throne of God. They were thought of as having more knowledge than men, especially of the future, but they did not possess that knowledge by right but rather because of "what they had heard behind the curtain." They were thought of as the kind of entourage, the familia, of God. They were thought of as God's senate; God did nothing without consulting them. For instance, when God said: "Let us make man" (Gen.1:26), it was to the angel senate that he was speaking. Often the angels remonstrated with God and laid objections to his purposes. In particular, they objected to the creation of man and at that time troops of them were annihilated; and they objected to the giving of the law and attacked Moses on his way up Mount Sinai. This was because they were jealous and did not wish to share any of their place or prerogatives with any other creature.

There were millions and millions of angels. It was not till quite late that the Jews assigned names to them. There were, in particular, the seven angels of the presence, who were the archangels. Of these the principal ones were Raphael, Uriel, Phanuel, Gabriel, the angel who brought God's messages to men, and Michael, the angel who presided over the destinies of Israel. The angels had many duties. They brought God's messages to men. In that case they delivered their message and vanished (Judg.13:20). They intervened for God in the events of history (2Kgs.19:35-36). There were two hundred angels who controlled the movements of the stars and kept them in their courses. There was an angel who controlled the never-ending succession of the years and months and days. There was an angel, a mighty prince, who was over the sea. There were angels of the frost, the dew, the rain, the snow, the hail, the thunder and the lightning. There were angels who were wardens of hell and torturers of the damned.

There were recording angels who wrote down every single word which every man spoke. There were destroying angels and angels of punishment. There was Satan, the prosecuting angel, who on every day except the Day of Atonement continuously brought charges against men before God. There was the angel of death who went out only at God's bidding and who impartially delivered his summons to good and evil alike. Every nation had its guardian angel who had the prostasia, the presidency over it. Every individual had his guardian angel. Even little children had their angels (Matt.18:10). So many were the angels that the Rabbis could even say: "Every blade of grass has its angel."

There was one special belief, held only by some, which is indirectly referred to in this passage which we are studying. The common belief was that the angels were immortal; but there were some who believed that they lived only one day. There was a belief in some rabbinic schools that "every day God creates a new company of angels who utter a song before him and are gone." "The angels are renewed every morning and after they have praised God they return to the stream of fire from whence they came." 4 Esdras 8: 21 speaks of the God "before whom the heavenly host stand in terror and at thy word change to wind and fire." A rabbinic homily makes one of the angels say: "God changes us every hour . . . Sometimes he makes us fire, at other times wind." That is what the writer to the Hebrews means when he talks of God making his angels wind and fire.

With this vast angelology there was a very real danger that the angels would come, in men's belief, to intervene between God and them. It was necessary to show that the Son was greater far than they and that he who knew the Son needed no angel to be his intermediary with God. The

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Hebrews 1:4-14

writer to the Hebrews does it by choosing what are for him a series of proof texts in which the Son is given a higher place than was ever given to any angel. The texts he quotes are: Ps.2:7; 2Sam.7:14; Ps.97:7 or Deut.32:43; Ps.104:4; Ps.45:7-8; Ps.102:26-27; Ps.110:1. Some of these texts differ from the versions we know because the writer to the Hebrews was quoting from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, which is not always the same as the original Hebrew from which our versions are translated. Some of the proof texts he chooses seem very strange. For instance, 2Sam.7:14 is in the original a simple reference to Solomon and has nothing to do with the Son or the Messiah.

Ps.102:26-27 is a reference to God and not to the Son. But whenever the early Christians found a text with the word son or the word Lord they considered themselves quite entitled to take it out of its context and to apply it to Jesus.

There was one danger which the writer to the Hebrews wished at all costs to avoid. The doctrine of angels is a lovely thing; but it has one danger. It introduces a series of beings other than Jesus through whom man makes approach to God. In Christianity there is no need for anyone else in between. Because of Jesus and what he did we have direct access to God. As Tennyson had it:

"Speak to him thou for he hears, and Spirit with
spirit can meet--
Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than
hands and feet."

The writer to the Hebrews lays down the great truth that we need no man or supernatural being to bring us into the presence of God. Jesus Christ has broken every barrier down and opened a direct way for us to God.

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Hebrews 2:1-4

THE SALVATION WE DARE NOT NEGLECT

Hebrews 2:1-4

We must, therefore, with very special intensity pay attention to the things that we have heard. For, if the word which was spoken through the medium of the angels proved itself to be certified as valid, and if every transgression and disobedience of it received its just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, a salvation of such a kind that it had its origin in the words of the Lord, and was then guaranteed to us by those who had heard it from his lips, while God himself added his own witness to it by signs and wonders and manifold deeds of power, and by giving us each a share of the Holy Spirit, according as he willed it?

The writer is arguing from the less to the greater. He has in his mind two revelations. One was the revelation of the law which came by the medium of the angels, that is to say, the Ten Commandments. Now any breach of that law was followed by strict and just punishment. The other was the revelation which came through the medium of Jesus Christ, the Son. Because it came in and through the Son it was infinitely greater than the revelation of God's truth brought by the angels; and therefore any transgression of it must be followed by a far more terrible punishment. If men cannot neglect the revelation which came through the angels, how much less can they neglect the revelation which came through the Son?

In the first verse there may be an even more vivid picture than there is in the translation which we have used. The two key words are *prosechein* (GSN4337) and *pararreuein* (GSN3901). We have taken *prosechein* (GSN4337) to mean to pay attention to, which is one of its commonest meanings. *Pararreuein* (GSN3901) is a word of many meanings. It is used of something flowing or slipping past; it can be used of a ring that has slipped off the finger; of a particle of food that has slipped down the wrong way; of a topic that has slipped into the conversation; of a point which has escaped someone in the course of an argument; of some fact that has slipped out of the mind; of something that has ebbed or leaked away. It is regularly used of something which has carelessly or thoughtlessly been allowed to become lost.

But both these words have also a nautical sense. *Prosechein* (GSN4337) can mean to moor a ship; and *pararreuein* (GSN3901) can be used of a ship which has been carelessly allowed to slip past a harbour or a haven because the mariner has forgotten to allow for the wind or the current or the tide. So, then, this first verse could be very vividly translated: "Therefore, we must the more eagerly anchor our lives to the things that we have been taught lest the ship of life drift past the harbour and be wrecked." It is a vivid picture of a ship drifting to destruction because the pilot sleeps.

For most of us the threat of life is not so much that we should plunge into disaster, but that we should drift into sin. There are few people who deliberately and in a moment turn their backs on God; there are many who day by day drift farther and farther away from him. There are not many who in one moment of time commit some disastrous sin; there are many who almost imperceptibly involve themselves in some situation and suddenly awake to find that they have ruined life for

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Hebrews 2:1-4

themselves and broken someone else's heart. We must be continually on the alert against the peril of the drifting life.

The writer to the Hebrews characterizes under two headings the sins for which the law brings its punishment: he calls them transgression and disobedience. The first of these words is parabasis (GSN3847), which literally means the stepping across a line. There is a line drawn both by knowledge and by conscience, and to step across it is sin. The second is parakoe (GSN3876). Parakoe begins by meaning imperfect hearing, as, for instance, of a deaf man. Then it goes on to mean careless hearing, the kind which through inattention either misunderstands or fails to catch what has been said. It ends by meaning unwillingness to hear, and therefore disobedience to the voice of God. It is the deliberate shutting of the ears to the commands and warnings and invitations of God.

The writer to the Hebrews ends this paragraph by stating three ways in which the Christian revelation is unique.

(i) It is unique in its origin. It came direct from Jesus himself. It does not consist of guessings and gropings after God; it is the very voice of God himself which comes to us in Jesus Christ.

(ii) It is unique in its transmission. It came to the people to whom Hebrews was written from men who had themselves heard it direct from the lips of Jesus. The one man who can pass on the Christian truth to others is he who knows Christ "other than at second hand." We can never teach what we do not know; and we can teach others of Christ only when we know him ourselves.

(iii) It is unique in its effectiveness. It issued in signs and wonders and manifold deeds of power. Someone once congratulated Thomas Chalmers after one of his great speeches. "Yes," he said, "but what did it do?" As Denney used to say, the ultimate object of Christianity is to make bad men good; and the proof of real Christianity is the fact that it can change the lives of men. The moral miracles of Christianity are still plain for all to see.

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Hebrews 2:5-9

THE RECOVERY OF MAN'S LOST DESTINY

Hebrews 2:5-9

It was not to angels that he subjected the order of things to come of which we are speaking. Somewhere in scripture someone bears this witness to that fact: "What is man that you remember him? Or the son of man that you visit him? For a little time you made him lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honour; you set him over the work of your hands; you subjected all things beneath his feet." The fact that all things have been subjected to him means that nothing has been left unsubjected to him. But as things are, we see that all things are not in a state of subjection to him. But we do see him who was for a little while made lower than the angels, Jesus himself, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of his death, a suffering which came to him in order that, by the grace of God, he might drain the cup of death for every man.

This is by no means an easy passage of which to grasp the meaning; but when we do, it is a tremendous thing. The writer begins with a quotation from Ps.8:4-6. If we are ever to understand this passage correctly we must understand one thing--the whole reference of Ps.8 is to man. It sings of the glory that God gave to man. There is no reference to the Messiah.

There is a phrase in the psalm which makes it difficult for us to grasp that. This is the son of man. We are so used to hearing that phrase applied to Jesus that we tend always to take it to refer to him. But in Hebrew a son of man always means simply a man. We find, for instance, that in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, more than eighty times God addresses Ezekiel as son of man. "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem" (Eze.21:2). "Son of man, prophesy and say . ." (Eze.30:2).

In the psalm quoted here the two parallel phrases: "What is man that you remember him?" and "Or the son of man that you visit him?" are different ways of saying exactly the same thing. The psalm is a great lyric cry of the glory of man as God meant it to be. It is in fact an expansion of the great promise of God at creation in Gen.1:28, when he said to man: "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

The glory of man, incidentally, is even greater than the King James Version would lead us to understand. It has: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels" (Ps.8:5). That is a correct translation of the Greek but not of the original Hebrew. In the original Hebrew it is said that man is made a little lower than the 'Elohiym (GSN0430); and 'Elohiym is the regular word for "God." What the psalmist wrote about man really was: "Thou hast made him little less than God," which, in fact, is the translation of the Revised Standard Version. So then this psalm sings of the glory of man, who was made little less than divine and whom God meant to have dominion over everything in the world.

But, the writer to the Hebrews goes on, the situation with which we are confronted is very different. Man was meant to have dominion over everything but he has not. He is a creature who is frustrated by his circumstances, defeated by his temptations, girt about with his own weakness. He who should be free is bound; he who should be a king is a slave. As G. K. Chesterton said, whatever else is or is not true, this one thing is certain--man is not what he was meant to be.

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Hebrews 2:5-9

The writer to the Hebrews goes further on. Into this situation came Jesus Christ. He suffered and he died, and because he suffered and died, he entered into glory. And that suffering and death and glory are all for man, because he died to make man what he ought to be. He died to rid man of his frustration and his bondage and his weakness and to give him the dominion he ought to have. He died to recreate man until he became what he was originally created to be.

In this passage there are three basic ideas. (i) God created man, only a little less than himself, to have the mastery over all things. (ii) Man through his sin entered into defeat instead of mastery. (iii) Into this state of defeat came Jesus Christ in order that by his life and death and glory he might make man what he was meant to be.

We may put it another way. The writer to the Hebrews shows us three things. (i) He shows us the ideal of what man should be--kin to God and master of the universe. (ii) He shows us the actual state of man--the frustration instead of the mastery, the failure instead of the glory. (iii) He shows us how the actual can be changed into the ideal through Christ. The writer to the Hebrews sees in Christ the One, who by his sufferings and his glory can make, man what he was meant to be and what, without him, he could never be.

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Hebrews 2:10-18

THE ESSENTIAL SUFFERING

Hebrews 2:10-18

For, in his work of bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that he for whom everything exists and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of salvation fully adequate for his destined work through suffering. For he who sanctifies and they who are sanctified must come of one stock. It is for this reason that he does not hesitate to call them brothers, as when he says: "I will tell your name to my brothers; I will sing hymns to you in the midst of the gathering of your people." And again: "I will put all my trust in him." And again: "Behold me and the children whom God gave to me." The children then have a common flesh and blood and he completely shared in them, so that, by that death of his, he might bring to nothing him who has the power of death, and might set free all those who, for fear of death, were all their lives liable to a slave's existence. For I presume that it is not angels that he helps; but it is the seed of Abraham that he helps. So he had in all things to be made like his brothers, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the things which pertain to God, to win forgiveness for the sins of his people. For in that he himself was tried and suffered, he is able to help those who are undergoing trial.

Here the writer to the Hebrews uses one of the great titles of Jesus. He calls him the pioneer (archegos, GSN0747) of glory. The same word is used of Jesus in Ac.3:15; Ac.5:31; Heb.12:2. At its simplest it means head or chief. So Zeus is the head of the gods and a general is the head of his army. It can mean a founder or originator. So it is used of the founder of a city or of a family or of a philosophic school. It can be used in the sense of source or origin. So a good governor is said to be the archegos (GSN0747) of peace and a bad governor the archegos (GSN0747) of confusion.

One basic idea clings to the word in all its uses. An archegos (GSN0747) is one who begins something in order that others may enter into it. He begins a family that some day others may be born into it; he founds a city in order that others may some day dwell in it; he founds a philosophic school that others may follow him into the truth and the peace that he himself has discovered; he is the author of blessings into which others may also enter. An archegos (GSN0747) is one who blazes a trail for others to follow. Someone has used this analogy. Suppose a ship is on the rocks and the only way to rescue is for someone to swim ashore with a line in order that, once the line is secured, others might follow. The one who is first to swim ashore will be the archegos (GSN0747) of the safety of the others. This is what the writer to the Hebrews means when he says that Jesus is the archegos (GSN0747) of our salvation. Jesus has blazed the trail to God for us to follow.

How was he enabled to become such? The King James and Revised Standard Versions say that God made him perfect through suffering. The verb translated make perfect is teleioun (GSN5048), which comes from the adjective teleios (GSN5046) which is usually translated "perfect." But in the New Testament teleios (GSN5046) has a very special meaning. It has nothing to do with abstract and metaphysical and philosophic perfection. It is used, for instance, of an animal which is unblemished and fit to be offered as a sacrifice; of a scholar who is no longer at the elementary stage but mature; of a human being or an animal who is full grown; of a Christian who is no longer on the fringe of the Church but who is baptized. The basic meaning of teleios (GSN5046) in the New Testament is always that the thing or person so described fully carries out the purpose for

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Hebrews 2:10-18

which designed Therefore the verb teleioun (GSN5046) will mean not so much to make perfect as to make fully adequate for the task for which designed.

So, then, what the writer to the Hebrews is saying is that through suffering Jesus was made fully able for the task of being the pioneer of our salvation.

Why should that be?

(i) It was through his sufferings that he was really identified with men. The writer to the Hebrews quotes three Old Testament texts as forecasts of this identity with men--Ps.22:22; Isa.8:17; Isa.8:18. If Jesus had come into this world in a form in which he could never have suffered, he would have been quite different from men and so no Saviour for them. As Jeremy Taylor said: "When God would save men, he did it by way of a man." It is, in fact, this identification with men which is the essence of the Christian idea of God. When the Greeks thought of their gods they thought of them as Tennyson pictures them in the Lotos Eaters:

"For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts
are hurl'd
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds
are lightly curl'd
Round their golden houses, girdled with the
gleaming world:
Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted
lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake,
roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking
ships, and praying hands."

The basis of the Greek idea of God was detachment; the basis of the Christian idea is identity. Through his sufferings Jesus Christ identified himself with man.

(ii) Through this identity Jesus Christ sympathizes with man. He literally feels with them. It is almost impossible to understand another person's sorrows and sufferings unless we have been through them. A person without a trace of nerves has no conception of the tortures of nervousness. A person who is perfectly physically fit has no conception of the weariness of the person who is easily tired or the pain of the person who is never free from pain. A person who learns easily often cannot understand why someone who is slow finds things so difficult. A person who has never sorrowed cannot understand the pain at the heart of the person into whose life grief has come. A person who has never loved can never understand either the sudden glory or the aching loneliness in the lover's heart. Before we can have sympathy we must go through the same things as the other person has gone through--and that is precisely what Jesus did.

(iii) Because he sympathizes Jesus can really help. He has met our sorrows; he has faced our temptations. As a result he knows exactly what help we need; and he can give it.

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Hebrews 3:1-6

GREATER THAN THE GREATEST

Hebrews 3:1-6

Brothers who are dedicated to God, you who are sharers in heaven's calling, because of all this you must fix your attention on him whom our creed holds to be the apostle and the high priest of God, I mean Jesus, for he was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses was in all his house, For he was deemed worthy of more honour than Moses, in so far as the man who builds and equips the house has more honour than the house itself For every house is built and equipped by someone; but it is God who builds and equips all things. Moses was faithful in all his house, but his role was the role of a servant, and his purpose was to bear witness to the things which some day would be spoken. But Christ is over his house because he is a Son. We are his house if only we keep strong the confidence and pride of our hope to the end.

Let us remember the conviction with which the writer to the Hebrews starts. The basis of his thought is that the supreme revelation of God comes through Jesus Christ and that only through him has a man real access to God. He began by proving that Jesus was superior to the prophets; he went on to prove that Jesus was superior to the angels; and now he proceeds to prove that Jesus is superior to Moses.

It might at first sight seem that this is an anticlimax. But it was not so for a Jew. For him Moses held a place which was utterly unique. He was the man with whom God had spoken face to face as a man speaks with his friend. He was the direct recipient of the Ten Commandments, the very Law of God. The greatest thing in all the world for the Jew was the Law, and Moses and the Law were one and the same thing. In the second century a Jewish teacher called Rabbi Jose ben Chalafta, commenting on this very passage which declared that Moses was faithful in all his house, said: "God calls Moses faithful in all his house, and thereby he ranked him higher than the ministering angels themselves." For a Jew the step that the writer to the Hebrews takes is the logical and inevitable step in the argument. He has proved that Jesus is greater than the angels; now he must prove that he is greater than Moses who was greater than the angels.

In fact this quotation which is used to tell of the greatness of Moses is proof of the unique position which the Jews assigned to him. "Moses was faithful in all his house." The quotation is from Num. 12:6-7. Now the point of the argument in Numbers is that Moses differs from all the prophets. To them God makes himself known in a vision; to Moses he speaks "mouth to mouth." To the Jew it would have been impossible to conceive that anyone ever stood closer to God than Moses did, and yet that is precisely what the writer of the Hebrews sets out to prove.

He bids his hearers fix their attention on Jesus. The word he uses (katanoein, GSN2657) is suggestive. It does not mean simply to look at or to notice a thing. Anyone can look at a thing or even notice it without really seeing it. The word means to fix the attention on something in such a way that its inner meaning, the lesson that it is designed to teach, may be learned. In Lk. 12:24 Jesus uses the same word when he says: "Consider the ravens." He does not merely mean, "Look at the ravens." He means, "Look at the ravens and understand and learn the lesson that God is seeking to teach you through them." If we are ever to learn Christian truth, a detached glance is never enough;

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there must be a concentrated gaze in which we gird up the loins of the mind in a determined effort to see its meaning for us.

In a sense the reason for that is implicit when the writer addresses his friends as sharers in heaven's calling. The call that comes to a Christian has a double direction. It is a calling from heaven and it is a calling to heaven. It is a voice which comes from God and calls us to God. It is a call which demands concentrated attention because of both its origin and its destination. A man cannot afford to give a disinterested glance to an invitation to God from God.

When we do fix our attention on Jesus what do we see? We see two things.

(i) We see the great apostle. No one else in the New Testament ever calls Jesus an apostle. That the writer to the Hebrews does so deliberately is quite clear, because apostle is a title he never gives to any man. He keeps it for Christ.

What does he mean when he so uses it? The word apostolos (GSN0652) literally means one who is sent forth. In Jewish terminology it was used to describe the envoys of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews. The Sanhedrin sent out apostoloi (GSN0652) who were clothed with its authority and the bearers of its commands. In the Greek world it frequently meant ambassador. So then Jesus is the supreme ambassador of God and an ambassador has two supremely important and relevant characteristics.

(a) The ambassador is clothed with all the authority of the king who sends him. On one occasion the king of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes, invaded Egypt. Rome desired to stop him and sent an envoy called Popilius to tell him to abandon his projected invasion. Popilius caught up with Antiochus on the borders of Egypt and they talked of this and that for they had known each other in Rome. Popilius had not the vestige of an army with him, not even a guard. Finally Antiochus asked him why he had come. Quietly Popilius told him that he had come to tell him that Rome wished him to abandon the invasion and go home. "I will consider it," said Antiochus. Popilius smiled a little grimly; he took his stall and drew a circle in the earth round Antiochus. "Consider it," he said, "and come to your decision before you leave that circle." Antiochus thought for a few seconds and then said: "Very well. I will go home." Popilius himself had not the slightest force available--but behind him was all the power of Rome.

So Jesus came from God and all God's grace and mercy and love and power were in his apostolos (GSN0652).

(b) The voice of the ambassador is the voice of the king or country who sent him. In a foreign land the British ambassador's voice is the voice of Britain. So Jesus came with the voice of God; in him God speaks.

(ii) Jesus is the great High Priest. What does that mean? This is an idea to which the writer to the Hebrews returns again and again. Just now we only set down the fundamental basis of what he means. The Latin for a priest is pontifex, which means a bridge-builder. The priest is the person who builds a bridge between man and God. To do that he must know both man and God. He must be able to speak to God for men and to speak to men for God. Jesus is the perfect High Priest

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Hebrews 3:1-6

because he is perfectly man and perfectly God; He can represent man to God and God to man. He is the one person through whom man comes to God and God comes to man.

Wherein then lies the superiority of Jesus over Moses? The picture in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews is this. He thinks of the world as God's house and God's family. We use the word house in a double sense. We use it in the sense of a building and also in the sense of a family. The Greeks used *oikos* (GSN3624) in the same double sense. The world, then, is God's house and men are God's family. But he has already shown us the picture of Jesus as the creator of God's universe. Now Moses was only part of God's universe, part of the house. But Jesus is the creator of the house and the creator is bound to stand above the house itself. Moses did not create the law; he only mediated it. Moses did not create the house; he only served in it. Moses did not speak of himself; all that he ever said was only a pointer to the greater things that Jesus Christ would some day say. Moses, in short, was the servant; but Jesus was the Son. Moses knew a little about God; Jesus was God.

Therein lies the secret of his superiority.

Now the writer to the Hebrews uses another picture. True, the whole world is God's house; but in a special sense the Church is God's House, for in a special sense God brought it into being. That is a picture the New Testament loves (compare 1Pet.4:17; 1Tim.3:15, and especially 1Pet.2:5). That building of the Church will stand indestructible only when every stone is firm; that is to say, when its every member is strong in the proud and confident hope he has in Jesus Christ. Each one of us is like a stone in the Church; if one stone is weak the whole edifice is endangered. The Church stands firm only when each living stone in it is rooted and grounded in faith in Jesus Christ.

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Hebrews 3:7-19

WHILE TODAY STILL LASTS

Hebrews 3:7-19

So then, as the Holy Spirit says, "If today you will hear my voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the Provocation, as happened on the day of the Temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers tried to test me, and, in consequence, experienced for forty years what I could do. So my anger was kindled against that generation, and I said, 'Always they wander in their hearts; they do not know my ways.' So I swore in my anger, 'Very certainly they shall not enter in to my rest.'" Have a care, brothers, lest that evil and disobedient heart be in any of you in a state of rebellion against the living God. But keep on exhorting each other day by day, so long as the term "today" can be used, lest any among you be hardened in heart by the seductiveness of sin; for you have become participators in Christ, if indeed you hold fast the beginning of your confidence firm to the end. While it is still possible to hear it being said, "If today you will hear my voice," do not harden your hearts as at the Provocation.

For who heard and provoked God? Was it not all who came forth from Egypt under the leadership of Moses? Against whom was God's anger kindled for forty years? Was it not against those who had sinned and whose bones lay in the desert? To whom did he swear that they should not enter into his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? Thus we see that it was through disobedience that they could not enter in.

The writer to the Hebrews has just been striving to prove the unique supremacy of Jesus and now he leaves argument for exhortation. He presses upon his hearers the inevitable consequence of this unique supremacy. If Jesus is so uniquely great, it follows that complete trust and complete obedience must be given to him. If they harden their hearts and refuse to give him their obedient trust the consequences are bound to be terrible.

The way in which he buttresses his argument is for us very difficult for it is doubly allusive. He begins by making a quotation from Ps.95:7-11. That Psalm appeals to those who hear it not to be like the children of Israel but, as the King James Version renders it. "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation." Now the two phrases, the provocation and the day of temptation translate two Hebrew words which are place names--Massah and Meribah. The whole is a reference to the story told in Exo.17:1-7 and Num.20:1-13. These passages tell of a rebellious incident in the pilgrimage of the children of Israel. They were thirsty in the desert and railed against Moses, regretting that they had ever left Egypt and forswearing their trust in God. In the Numbers version of the story God told Moses to speak to the limestone rock and water would gush forth. But Moses in his anger did not speak to the rock; he struck it.

The water came forth but for this act of distrust and disobedience God declared that Moses would never be allowed to lead the people into the promised land. "Very certainly they shall not enter in to my rest," means, "Very certainly they will not enter into the Promised Land." To wanderers in the desert the Promised Land was the place of rest, and it was often called the rest (compare Deut.12:9). The point is that the disobedience and the distrust of Israel debarred them from the blessings of God that they might have enjoyed.

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Hebrews 3:7-19

The writer to the Hebrews says to his people, "Beware lest you show the same disobedience and distrust of God that your forefathers showed, and that you do not for that reason lose the blessings you might have had, just as they lost theirs." In effect he says, "While there is yet time, while you can still speak of 'today' give God the trust and the obedience that he must have." For the individual "today" means "while life lasts" and the writer to the Hebrews is saying, "While you have the chance, give God the submission you ought to give. Give it to him before your day closes." There are certain great warnings here.

(i) God makes men an offer. Just as he offered the Israelites the blessings of the Promised Land, he offers to all men the blessings of a life which is far beyond the life that men can live without him.

(ii) But to obtain the blessings of God two things are necessary. (a) Trust is necessary. We must believe that what God says is true. We must be willing to stake our lives on his promises. (b) Obedience is necessary. It is just as if a doctor were to say to us: "I can cure you if you obey my instructions implicitly." It is just as if a teacher were to say: "I can make you a scholar if you follow my curriculum with absolute fidelity." It is just as if a trainer were to say to an athlete: "I can make you a champion if you do not deviate from the discipline that I lay down." In any realm of life success depends on obedience to the word of the expert. God, if we may put it so, is the expert in life and real happiness depends on obedience to him.

(iii) To the offer of God there is a limit. That limit is the duration of life. We never know when that limit will be reached. We speak easily about "tomorrow" but for us tomorrow may never come. All we have is today. Someone has said: "We should live each day as if it were a lifetime." God's offer must be accepted today; the trust and the obedience must be given today--for we cannot be sure that there will be a tomorrow for us.

Here we have the supreme offer of God, but it is only for perfect trust and full obedience, and it must be accepted now--or it may be too late.

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Hebrews 4:1-10

THE REST WE DARE NOT MISS

Hebrews 4:1-10

It is true that the promise which offers entry into the rest of God still remains for us; but beware lest any of you be adjudged to have missed it. It is indeed true that we have had the good news preached to us, just as those of old had. But the word which they heard was no good to them, because it did not become woven into the very fibre of their being through faith. It is we who have made the decision of faith who are entering into the rest, for of them God said: "I swore in my anger, 'Very certainly they shall not enter into my rest.'" This he said although his works had been finished after the foundation of the world.

For somewhere in scripture it speaks thus about the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his labours." And it says in the same place: "Very certainly they shall not enter into my rest." Since then it remains that some people must enter into it and since those who in former times had the gospel preached to them did not enter because of their lack of trust, he again defines a day, when in David, after so long a lapse of time, he says, "Today," just as he had said before, "Today if you will hear my voice do not harden your hearts." If Joshua had actually brought them into rest, God would not then after that be speaking about another day. So a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God. He who has entered into this rest has rest from all his works, just as God rested from his works.

In a complicated passage like this it is better to try to grasp the broad lines of the thought before we look at any of the details. The writer is really using the word rest (katapausis, GSN2663) in three different senses. (i) He is using it as we would use the peace of God. It is the greatest thing in the world to enter into the peace of God. (ii) He is using it, as he used it in Heb.3:12, to mean The Promised Land To the children of Israel who had wandered so long in the desert the Promised Land was indeed the rest of God. (iii) He is using it of the rest of God after the sixth day of creation, when all God's work was completed. This way of using a word in two or three different ways, of teasing at it until the last drop of meaning was extracted from it, was typical of cultured, academic thought in the days when the writer to the Hebrews wrote his letter.

Now let us see the steps of the argument. It will be simpler if we enumerate them one by one.

(i) The promise of the rest of God for his people still abides; the danger is that we fail to reach it.

(ii) The Israelites in the long ago failed to enter into the rest of God. Here the word rest is being used in the sense of the settlement of the Promised Land after the wilderness years. The reference is to Num.13-14. These chapters tell how the children of Israel came to the borders of the Promised Land, how they sent out scouts to spy out the land, how ten of the twelve scouts came back with the verdict that it was a good land but that the difficulties of entering into it were insuperable, how Caleb and Joshua alone were for going forward in the strength of the Lord, how the people hearkened to the advice of the cowards, and how the result was that that generation of distrusting cowards were debarred for ever from entering into the rest and the peace of the Promised Land. They did not trust God to bring them through the difficulties that lay ahead; and therefore they never enjoyed the rest they could have had.

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(iii) Now the writer switches the meaning of the word rest. It is true that these people long ago missed the rest they might have had; but, although they missed it, the rest remained. Behind this argument lies one of the favourite conceptions of the Rabbis. On the seventh day, the day after creation had been completed, God rested from his labours. In the creation story in Gen.1-2 there is a strange fact. On the first six days of creation it is said that morning and evening came; that is to say, each day had an end and a beginning. But on the seventh day, the day of God's rest, there is no mention of evening at all. From this the Rabbis argued that, while the other days came to an end, the day of God's rest had no ending; the rest of God was for ever. Therefore although long ago the Israelites may have failed to enter that rest, it still remained.

(iv) Once again the writer goes back to the meaning of rest as the Promised Land. The day came after the forty years wandering in the wilderness when, under Joshua, the people did enter into the Promised Land. Now, the Promised Land was the rest and therefore it could be argued that then the promise was fulfilled.

(v) But no, the promise is not fulfilled, because in Ps.95:7-11 David hears God's voice saying to the people that if they do not harden their hearts they can enter into his rest. That is to say, hundreds of years after Joshua had led the people into the rest of the Promised Land God is still appealing to them to enter into his rest. There is more to this rest than merely entry into the Promised Land.

(vi) So the final appeal comes. God still appeals to men not to harden their hearts but to enter into his rest. God's "today" still exists and the promise is still open; but "today" does not last for ever; life comes to an end; the promise can be missed; therefore, says the writer to the Hebrews: "Here and now through faith enter into the very rest of God."

There is a very interesting question of meaning in Heb.4:1. We have taken the translation: "Beware lest any of you be adjudged to have missed the rest of God." That is to say: "Beware lest your disobedience and your lack of faith may mean that you have shut yourselves out from the rest and the peace that God offers you."

That may very well be the correct translation. But there is another and most interesting possibility. The phrase may mean: "Beware lest you think that you have arrived too late in history ever to enjoy the rest of God."

In that second translation there is a warning. It is very easy to think that the great days of religion are past. It is told that a child, on being told some of the great Old Testament stories, said wistfully: "God was much more exciting then." There is a continual tendency in the Church to look back, to believe that God's power is grown less and that the golden days lie behind. The writer to the Hebrews sounds forth a trumpet call. "Never think," he says, "that you have arrived too late in history; never think that the days of great promise and great achievement lie behind. This is still God's 'today.' There is a blessedness for you as great as the blessedness of the saints; there is an adventure for you as great as the adventure of the martyrs. God is as great today as ever he was."

There are two great permanent truths in this passage.

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Hebrews 4:1-10

(i) A word, however great, is of no avail unless it becomes integrated into the person who hears it. There are many different kinds of hearing in this world. There is indifferent hearing, disinterested hearing, critical hearing, sceptical hearing, cynical hearing. The hearing that matters is the hearing that listens eagerly, believes and acts. The promises of God are not merely beautiful pieces of literature; they are promises on which a man is meant to stake his life and dominate his action.

(ii) In Heb.4:1 the writer to the Hebrews bids his people beware lest they miss the promise. The word we have translated beware literally means to fear (phobeisthai, GSN5399). This Christian fear is not the fear which makes a man run away from a task; nor the fear which reduces him to paralysed inaction; it is the fear which makes him put out every ounce of strength he possesses in a great effort not to miss the one thing that is worth while.

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Hebrews 4:11-13

THE TERROR OF THE WORD

Hebrews 4:11-13

Let us then be eager to enter into that rest, lest we follow the example of the Israelites and fall into the same kind of disobedience. For the word of God is instinct with life; it is effective; it is sharper than a two-edged sword; it pierces right through to the very division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it scrutinizes the desires and intentions of the heart. No created thing can ever remain hidden from his sight; everything is naked to him and is compelled to meet the eyes of him with whom we have to reckon.

The point of this passage is that the word of God has come to men and is such that it cannot be disregarded. The Jews always had a very special idea about words. Once a word was spoken, it had an independent existence. It was not only a sound with a certain meaning; it was a power which went forth and did things. Isaiah heard God say that the word which went out of his mouth would never be ineffective; it would always do that which he designed it to do.

We can understand something of this if we think of the tremendous effect of words in history. A leader coins a phrase and it becomes a trumpet-call which kindles men to crusades or to crimes. Some great man sends forth a manifesto and it produces action which can make or destroy nations. Over and over again in history the spoken word of some leader or thinker has gone out and done things. If that be so of the words of men, how much more is it so of the word of God.

The writer to the Hebrews describes the word of God in a series of great phrases. The word of God is instinct with life. Certain issues are as dead as the dodo; certain books and words have no living interest whatever. Plato was one of the world's supreme thinkers but it is unlikely that there would be any public for Daily Studies in Plato. The great fact about the word of God is that it is a living issue for all men of all times. Other things may pass quietly into oblivion; other things may acquire an academic or antiquarian interest; but the word of God is something that every man must face, its offer something he must accept or reject.

The word of God is effective. It is one of the facts of history that wherever men have taken God's word seriously things have begun to happen. When the English Bible was laid bare and the word of God came to the common people, the tremendous event of the Reformation inevitably followed. When people take God seriously they immediately realize that his word is not only something to be studied, not only something to be read, not only something to be written about; it is something to be done.

The word of God is penetrating. The writer piles up phrases to show how penetrating it is. It penetrates to the division of soul and spirit. In Greek the *psyche* (GSN5590), the soul, is the life principle. All living things possess *psyche* (GSN5590), it is physical life. In Greek the *pneuma* (GSN4151), the spirit, is that which is characteristic of man. It is by spirit that man thinks and reasons and looks beyond the earth to God. It is as if the writer to the Hebrews were saying that the word of God tests a man's earthly life and his spiritual existence. He says that the word of God scrutinizes a man's desires and intentions. Desire (*enthumesis*, GSN1761) is the emotional part of

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man, intention (ennoia, GSN1771) is the intellectual part of man. It is as if he said: "Your emotional and intellectual life must alike be submitted to the scrutiny of God."

Finally the writer to the Hebrews sums things up. He says that everything is naked to God and compelled to meet his eyes. He uses two interesting words. The word for naked is the literal word (gumnos, GSN1131). What he is saying is that as far as men are concerned we may be able to wear our outward trappings and disguises; but in the presence of God these things are stripped away and we have to meet him as we are. The other word is even more vivid (tetrachelismenos, GSN5136). This is not a common word and its meaning is not quite certain. It seems to have been used in three different ways.

(i) It was a wrestler's word and was used for seizing an opponent by the throat in such a way that he could not move. We may escape God for long enough but in the end he grips us in such a way that we cannot help meeting him face to face. God is one issue that no man can finally evade.

(ii) It was the word that was used for flaying animals. Animals were hung up and the hide was taken off them. Men may judge us by our outer conduct and appearance but God sees into the inmost secrets of our hearts.

(iii) Sometimes when a criminal was being led to judgment or to execution, a dagger, with point upwards, was so fixed below his chin that he could not bow his head in concealment but had to keep it up so that all could see his face and know his dishonour. When that was done, a man was said to be tetrachelismenos (GSN5136). In the end we have to meet the eyes of God. We may avert our gaze from people we are ashamed to meet; but we are compelled to look God in the face. Kermit Eby writes in *The God in You*: "At some time or other, a man must stop running from himself and his God--possibly because there is just no other place to run to." There comes a time to every man when he has to meet that God from whose eyes nothing ever can be concealed.

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Hebrews 4:14-16

THE PERFECT HIGH PRIEST

Hebrews 4:14-16

Since, then, we have a high priest, great in his nature, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our creed. For we have not a high priest who is such that he cannot feel with us in our weaknesses; but one who has gone through every temptation, just in the same way as we have, and who is without sin. Let us then confidently approach his throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help as need demands.

Here we are coming to closer grips with the great characteristic conception of Hebrews--that of Jesus as the perfect high priest. His task is to bring the voice of God to man and to usher men into the presence of God. The high priest at one and the same time must perfectly know man and God. That is what this epistle claims for Jesus.

(i) This passage begins by stressing the sheer greatness and absolute deity of Jesus. He is great in his nature, not by honours conferred by men or by any external trappings but, in his own essential being. He has passed through the heavens. That may mean one of two things. In the New Testament we can discern differing uses of heaven. It can mean the heaven of the sky and it can mean the heaven of the presence of God. This may mean that Jesus has passed through every heaven that may be and is in the very presence of God. It can mean what Christina Rossetti meant when she said: "Heaven cannot hold him." Jesus is so great that even heaven is too small a place for him. No one ever stressed the sheer greatness of Jesus like the writer to the Hebrews.

(ii) Then he turns to the other side. No one was ever surer of Jesus' complete identity with men. He went through everything that a man has to go through and is like us in all things--except that he emerged from it all completely sinless. Before we turn to examine more closely the meaning of this, there is one thing we must note. The fact that Jesus was without sin means that he knew depths and tensions and assaults of temptation which we never can know. So far from his battle being easier it was immeasurably harder. Why? For this reason--we fall to temptation long before the tempter has put out the whole of his power. We never know temptation at its fiercest because we fall long before that stage is reached. But Jesus was tempted far beyond what we are; for in his case the tempter put everything he possessed into the assault. Think of this in terms of pain. There is a degree of pain which the human frame can stand--and when that degree is passed a person loses consciousness so that there are agonies of pain he can not know. It is so with temptation. We collapse in face of temptation; but Jesus went to our limit of temptation and far beyond it and still did not collapse. It is true to say that he was tempted in all things as we are; but it is also true to say that no one was tempted as he was.

(iii) This experience of Jesus had three effects.

(a) It gave him the gift of sympathy. Here is something which we must understand but which we find very difficult. The Christian idea of God as a loving Father is interwoven into the very fabric of our mind and heart; but it was a new idea. To the Jew the basic idea of God was that he was holy

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Hebrews 4:14-16

in the sense of being different. In no sense did he share our human experience and was in fact incapable of sharing it just because he was God.

It was even more so with the Greeks. The Stoics, the highest Greek thinkers, said the primary attribute of God was apatheia, by which they meant essential inability to feel anything at all. They argued that if a person could feel sorrow or joy it means that some other person was able to influence him. If so, that other person must, at least for that moment, be greater than he. No one, therefore, must be able in any sense to affect God for that would be to make him greater than God; and so God had to be completely beyond all feeling. The other Greek school was the Epicureans. They held that the gods lived in perfect happiness and blessedness. They lived in what they called the intermundia, the spaces between the worlds; and they were not even aware of the world.

The Jews had their different God; the Stoics, their feelingless gods; the Epicureans, their completely detached gods. Into that world of thought came the Christian religion with its incredible conception of a God who had deliberately undergone every human experience. Plutarch, one of the most religious of the Greeks, declared that it was blasphemous to involve God in the affairs of this world. Christianity depicted God not so much involved as identified with the suffering of this world. It is almost impossible for us to realize the revolution that Christianity brought about in men's relationship to God. For century after century they had been confronted with the idea of the untouchable God; and now they discovered one who had gone through all that man must go through.

(b) That had two results. It gave God the quality of mercy. It is easy to see why. It was because God understands. Some people have lived a sheltered life; they have been protected from the temptations that come to those for whom life is not easy. Some people have a nature which is easy to control; others have hot passions that make life a perilous thing. The person who has lived the sheltered life and has the noninflammable nature finds it hard to understand why the other person falls. He is faintly disgusted and cannot help condemning what he cannot understand. But God knows. "To know all is to forgive all"--of no one is that truer than he.

John Foster in one of his books tells how he came into his home in this country one day in the thirties to find his daughter in tears before the radio set. He asked her why and found that the news bulletin had contained the sentence--"Japanese tanks entered Canton today." Most people would hear that with at the most a faint feeling of regret. Statesmen may have heard it with grim foreboding; but to most people it did not make so very much difference. Why then was John Foster's daughter in tears? Because she had been born in Canton. To her Canton meant a home, a nurse, a school, friends.

The difference was that she had been there. When you have been there it makes all the difference. And there is no part of human experience of which God cannot say: "I have been there." When we have a sad and sorry tale to tell, when life has drenched us with tears, we do not go to a God who is incapable of understanding what has happened; we go to a God who has been there. That is why--if we may put it so--God finds it easy to forgive.

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Hebrews 4:14-16

(c) It makes God able to help. He knows our problems because he has come through them. The best person to give you advice and help on a journey is someone who has travelled the road before you. God can help because he knows it all.

Jesus is the perfect high priest because he is perfectly God, and perfectly man. Because he has known our life he can give us sympathy, mercy and power. He brought God to men and he can bring men to God.

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Hebrews 5:1-10

AT HOME WITH MAN AND GOD

Hebrews 5:1-10

Every high priest who is chosen from among men is appointed on men's behalf to deal with the things which concern God. His task is to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, in that he himself is able to feel gently to the ignorant and to the wandering because he himself wears the garment of human weakness. By reason of this very weakness it is incumbent upon him, just as he makes sacrifice for the people, so to make sacrifice for sins on his own behalf also. No one takes this honourable position to himself, but he is called by God to it, just as Aaron was. So it was not Christ who gave himself the glory of becoming high priest; but it was God who said to him: "You are my beloved Son; today I have begotten you." Just so he says also in another passage: "You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days when he lived this human life of ours he offered prayers and entreaties to him who was able to bring him safely through death with strong crying and with tears.

And when he had been heard because of his reverence, although he was a Son, he learned obedience from the sufferings through which he passed. When he had been made fully fit for his appointed task, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, for he had been designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Now Hebrews comes to work out the doctrine which is its special contribution to Christian thought--the doctrine of the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ. This passage sets out three essential qualifications of the priest in any age and in any generation.

(i) A priest is appointed on men's behalf to deal with the things concerning God. A. J. Gossip used to tell his students that when he was ordained to the ministry he felt as if the people were saying to him: "We are for ever involved in the dust and the heat of the day; we have to spend our time getting and spending; we have to serve at the counter, to toil at the desk, to make the wheels of industry go round. We want you to be set apart so that you can go in to the secret place of God and come back every Sunday with a word from him to us." The priest is the link between God and man.

In Israel the priest had one special function, to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people. Sin disturbs the relationship which should exist between man and God and puts up a barrier between them. The sacrifice is meant to restore that relationship and remove that barrier.

But we must note that the Jew was always quite clear, when thinking at his highest, that the sins for which sacrifice could atone were sins of ignorance. The deliberate sin did not find its atonement in sacrifice. The writer to the Hebrews himself says: "For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Heb.10:26). This is a conviction that emerges again and again in the sacrificial laws of the Old Testament. Again and again they begin: "If any one sins unwittingly in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done..." (Lev.4:2; Lev.4:13). Num.15:22-31 is a key passage. There the requisite sacrifices are laid down "if you err unwittingly." But at the end it is laid down: "That person who does anything with a high hand...reviles the Lord...shall be utterly cut off: his iniquity shall be upon him." Deut.17:12 lays it down: "The man who acts presumptuously...that man shall die."

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The sin of ignorance is pardonable; the sin of presumption is not. Nevertheless we must note that by the sin of ignorance the Jews meant more than simply lack of knowledge. They included the sins committed when a man was swept away in a moment of impulse or anger or passion or mastered by some overmastering temptation and the sins followed by repentance. By the sin of presumption they meant the cold, calculated sin for which a man was not in the least sorry, the open-eyed disobedience of God.

So, then, the priest existed to open the way for the sinner back to God--so long as he wanted to come back.

(ii) The priest must be one with men. He must have gone through men's experiences and his sympathy must be with them. At this point the writer to the Hebrews stops to point out--he will later show that this is one of the ways in which Jesus Christ is superior to any earthly priest--that the earthly priest is so one with men that he is under the necessity of offering sacrifice for his own sin before he offers it for the sins of others. The priest must be bound up with men in the bundle of life. In connection with this he used a wonderful word--*metriopathein* (GSN3356). We have translated it "to feel gently"; but it is really untranslatable.

The Greeks defined a virtue as the mean between two extremes. On either hand there was an extreme into which a man might fall; in between there was the right way. So the Greeks defined *metriopatheia* (the corresponding noun) as the mean between extravagant grief and utter indifference. It was feeling about men in the right way. W. M. Macgregor defined it as "the mid-course between explosions of anger and lazy indulgence." Plutarch spoke of that patience which was the child of *metriopatheia*. He spoke of it as that sympathetic feeling which enabled a man to raise up and to save, to spare and to hear. Another Greek blames a man for having no *metriopatheia* and for therefore refusing to be reconciled with someone who had differed from him. It is a wonderful word. It means the ability to bear with people without getting irritated; it means the ability not to lose one's temper with people when they are foolish and will not learn and do the same thing over and over again.

It describes the attitude to others which does not issue in anger at their fault and which does not condone it, but which to the end of the day spends itself in a gentle yet powerful sympathy which by its very patience directs a man back to the right way. No man can ever deal with his fellow-men unless he has this strong and patient, God-given *metriopatheia*.

(iii) The third essential of a priest is this--no man appoints himself to the priesthood; his appointment is of God. The priesthood is not an office which a man takes; it is a privilege and a glory to which he is called. The ministry of God among men is neither a job nor a career but a calling. A man ought to be able to look back and say, not, "I chose this work," but rather, "God chose me and gave me this work to do."

The writer to the Hebrews goes on to show how Jesus Christ fulfils the great conditions of the priesthood.

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Hebrews 5:1-10

(i) He takes the last one first. Jesus did not choose his task; God chose him for it. At the Baptism there came to Jesus the voice which said: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you" (Ps.2:7).

(ii) Jesus has gone through the bitterest experiences of men and understands manhood in all its strength and weakness. The writer to the Hebrews has four great thoughts about him.

(a) He remembers Jesus in Gethsemane. That is what he is thinking of when he speaks of Jesus' prayers and entreaties, his tears and his cry. The word he uses for cry (krauge, GSN2906) is very significant. It is a cry which a man does not choose to utter but is wrung from him in the stress of some tremendous tension or searing pain. So, then, the writer to the Hebrews says that there is no agony of the human spirit through which Jesus has not come. The rabbis had a saying: "There are three kinds of prayers, each loftier than the preceding--prayer, crying and tears. Prayer is made in silence; crying with raised voice; but tears overcome all things." Jesus knew even the desperate prayer of tears.

(b) Jesus learned from all his experiences because he met them all with reverence. The Greek phrase for "He learned from what he suffered" is a linguistic jingle--emathen (GSN3129) aph' (GSN0575) hon (GSN3739) epathen (GSN3958). And this is a thought which keeps recurring in the Greek thinkers. They are always connecting mathein (GSN3129), to learn, and pathein (GSN3958), to suffer. Aeschylus, the earliest of the great Greek dramatists, had as a kind of continual text: "Learning comes from suffering" (pathei mathos). He calls suffering a kind of savage grace from the gods. Herodotus declared that his sufferings were acharista mathemata, ungracious ways of learning. A modern poet says of the poets:

"We learned in suffering what we teach in song."

God speaks to men in many experiences of life, and not least in those which try their hearts and souls. But we can hear his voice only when we accept in reverence what comes to us. If we accept it with resentment, the rebellious cries of our own heart make us deaf to the voice of God.

(c) By means of the experiences through which he passed, the King James Version says that Jesus was made perfect (teleioun, GSN5048). Teleioun is the verb of the adjective teleios (GSN5046). Teleios can quite correctly be translated "perfect" so long as we remember what the Greek meant by that perfection. To him a thing was teleios (GSN5046) if it perfectly carried out the purpose for which it was designed. When he used the word he was not thinking in terms of abstract and metaphysical perfection; he was thinking in terms of function. What the writer to the Hebrews is saying is that all the experiences of suffering through which Jesus passed perfectly fitted him to become the Saviour of men.

(d) The salvation which Jesus brought is an eternal salvation. It is something which keeps a man safe both in time and in eternity. With Christ a man is safe for ever. There are no circumstances that can pluck him from Christ's hand.

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Hebrews 5:11-14

THE REFUSAL TO GROW UP

Hebrews 5:11-14

The story which has been laid upon me to tell you about this matter is a long story, difficult to tell and difficult to grasp, for your ears have become dull. For, indeed, at a stage when you ought to be teachers because of the length of time that has passed since you first heard the gospel, you still need someone to tell you the simple elements of the very beginning of the message of God. You have sunk into a state when you need milk and not solid food; for when anyone is at the stage of participating in milk feeding, he does not really know what Christian righteousness is, for he is only a child. For solid food is for those who have reached maturity, those who, through the development of the right kind of habit, have reached a stage when their perceptions are trained to distinguish between good and evil.

Here the writer to the Hebrews deals with the difficulties which confront him in attempting to get across an adequate conception of Christianity to his hearers.

He is confronted with two difficulties. First, the full orb of the Christian faith is by no means an easy thing to grasp nor can it be teamed in a day. Second, the hearing of his hearers is dull. The word he uses (nothros, GSN3576) is full of meaning. It means slow-moving in mind, torpid in understanding, dull of hearing, witlessly forgetful. It can be used of the numbed limbs of an animal which is ill. It can be used of a person who has the imperceptive nature of a stone. Now this has something to say to everyone whose business it is to preach and to teach; in fact, it has something to say to everyone whose business it is to think and that means that it has something to say to everyone who is a real person. It often happens that we dodge teaching something because it is difficult; we defend ourselves by saying that our hearers would never grasp it. It is one of the tragedies of the Church that there is so little attempt to teach new knowledge and new thought. It is true that such teaching is difficult.

It is true that often it means meeting the lethargy of the lazy mind and the embattled prejudice of the shut mind. But the task remains. The writer to the Hebrews did not shirk to bring his message, even if it was difficult and the minds of his hearers were slow. He regarded it as his supreme responsibility to pass on the truth he knew.

His complaint is that his hearers have been Christians for many years and are still babes no nearer maturity. The contrast between the immature Christian and the child, between milk and solid food, often occurs in the New Testament (1Pet.2:2; 1Cor.2:6; 1Cor.3:2; 1Cor.14:20; Eph.4:13ff.). Hebrews says that by now they should be teachers. It is not necessary to take that literally. To say that a man was able to teach was the Greek way of saying that he had a mature grasp of a subject. The writer says that they still need someone to teach them the simple elements (stoicheia, GSN4747) of Christianity. This word has a variety of meanings. In grammar it means the letters of the alphabet, the A B C; in physics it means the four basic elements of which the world is composed; in geometry it means the elements of proof like the point and the straight line; in philosophy it means the first elementary principles with which the students begin.

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Hebrews 5:11-14

It is the sorrow of the writer to the Hebrews that after many years of Christianity his people have never got past the rudiments; they are like children who do not know the difference between right and wrong.

Here he is face to face with a problem which haunts the Church in every generation, that of the Christian who refuses to grow up.

(i) The Christian can refuse to grow up in knowledge. He can be guilty of what someone called "the culpable incapacity resulting from the neglect of opportunity." There are people who keep on saying that what was good enough for their fathers is good enough for them. There are Christians in whose faith there has been no development for thirty or forty or fifty or sixty years. There are Christians who have deliberately refused to try to understand the advances that Biblical scholarship and theological thought have made. They are grown men and women and yet insist on remaining content with the religious development of a child.

They are like a surgeon who refuses to use the new techniques of surgery, refuses to use the new anesthetics, refuses to use any new equipment and says: "What was good enough for Lister is good enough for me." They are like a physician who refuses to use any of the new drugs and says: "What I learned as a student fifty years ago is good enough for me." In religious things it is still worse. God is infinite; the riches of Christ are unsearchable; and to the end of the day we should be moving forward.

(ii) There are people who have never grown up in behaviour. It may be forgivable in a child to sulk or to be liable to fits of temper, but there are many adults who are just as childish in their behaviour.

A case of arrested development is always a pathetic thing; and the world is full of people whose religious development has been arrested. They stopped learning years ago and their conduct is that of a child. It is true that Jesus said the greatest thing in the world is the childlike spirit; but there is a tremendous difference between the childlike and the childish spirit. Peter Pan makes a charming play on the stage; but the man who will not grow up makes a tragedy in real life. Let us have a care lest we are still in the religion of childhood when we should have reached the faith of maturity.

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Hebrews 6:1-3

THE NECESSITY OF PROGRESS

Hebrews 6:1-3

So, then, let us leave elementary teaching about Christ behind us and let us be home onwards to full maturity; for we cannot go on laying the foundations all the time and teaching about repentance from dead works and giving information about washings, about the laying on of hands, about the resurrection from the dead and upon that sentence which lasts to all eternity. God willing, this very thing we will do.

The writer to the Hebrews was certain of the necessity of progress in the Christian life. No teacher would ever get anywhere if he had to lay the foundations all over again every time he began to teach. The writer to the Hebrews says that his people must be going on to what he calls teleiotes (GSN5051). The King James Version translates this word perfection. But teleios (GSN5046), the adjective, and its kindred words have a technical meaning. Pythagoras divided his students into hoi (GSN3588) manthanontes (GSN3129), the learners, and hoi (GSN3588) teleioi (GSN5046), the mature. Philo divided his students into three different classes--hoi (GSN3588) archomenoi (GSN0756), those just beginning, hoi prokoptontes (GSN4298), those making progress, and hoi (GSN3588) teleiomenoi (GSN5048), those beginning to reach maturity. Teleiotes (GSN5047) does not imply complete knowledge but a certain maturity in the Christian faith.

The writer to the Hebrews means two things by this maturity: (i) He means something to do with the mind He means that as a man gets older he should more and more have thought things out for himself. He should, for instance, be able to say better who he believes Jesus to be. He should have a deeper grasp, not only of the facts, but also of the significances of the Christian faith. (ii) He means something to do with life. As a man grows older there should be more and more of the reflection of Christ upon him. All the time he should be ridding himself of old faults and achieving new virtues. Daily a new serenity and a new nobility should be breaking upon life. As the nameless poet has it:

"Let me grow lovely, growing old;
The many fine things too,
Laces and Ivory and Gold and Silks,
Need not be new.
And there is healing in old trees,
Old streets and glamour old,
Why may not I, as well as these,
Grow lovely, growing old?"

There can be no standing still in the Christian life. It is told that on his pocket Bible Cromwell had a motto written in Latin--qui cessat esse melior cessat esse bonus--he who ceases to be better ceases to be good.

This passage enables us to see what the Early Church regarded as basic Christianity.

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Hebrews 6:1-3

(i) There is repentance from dead works. The Christian life begins with repentance; and repentance (metanoia, GSN3341) is literally a change of mind. There is a new attitude to God, to men, to life, to self. It is a repentance from dead works. What does the writer to the Hebrews mean by this strange phrase? There are many things that he may mean, and each of them is relevant and suggestive. (a) Dead works may be deeds which bring death. They may be the immoral, selfish, godless, loveless, soiled actions which lead to death. (b) They may be defiling deeds. For a Jew to touch a dead body was the greatest defilement; to do so rendered him unclean and barred him from the worship of God until he was cleansed. Dead works may be those which defile a man and separate him from God. (c) They may be works which have no connection with character. For the Jew life was ritual; if he observed the proper ceremonies at the right time, he was a good man. But none of these things had any effect upon his character.

It may be that the writer to the Hebrews means that the Christian has broken away from the meaningless rituals and conventions of life to give himself to the things which deepen his character and develop his soul.

(ii) There is faith which looks to God. The first essential in the Christian life is the godward look. The Christian determines his actions not by the verdict of men but by the verdict of God. He looks not to his own achievement for salvation but to the grace of God.

(iii) There is teaching about washings. This means that the Christian must realize what baptism really means. The first book of Christian instruction for those about to enter the Church and the first service order book is a little book called *The Didache*, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. It was written about the year A.D. 100 and lays down the regulations for Christian Baptism. Now at this time infant baptism had not yet emerged. Men were coming straight from heathendom and baptism was reception into the Church and confession of faith. *The Didache*, begins with six short chapters on the Christian faith and the Christian life. It begins by telling the candidate for baptism what he ought to believe and how he ought to live. Then in the seventh chapter it goes on:

"Concerning Baptism, baptize in this way. When you have instructed the candidate in all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running water. If you do not have running water, baptize in any other kind of water. If you cannot baptize in cold water, baptize in warm. If both of these are unobtainable, pour water three times upon the head of the candidate in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Before baptism, let him who is to baptize and him who is to be baptized fast, and let any others who can do so do the same. You must bid him who is to be baptized to fast for two or three days before the ceremony."

That is interesting. It shows that baptism in the early Church was, if possible, by total immersion. It shows that the person to be baptized was either immersed or affused with water three times, in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It shows that baptism was instructed baptism, for the account of the Christian faith and life is to be rehearsed before the sacrament of baptism is carried out. It shows that the candidate for baptism had to prepare not only his mind but

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also his spirit, for he had to fast beforehand. In the early days no one slipped into the Church without knowing what he was doing. So the writer to the Hebrews says: "At your baptism you were instructed in the basis of the Christian faith. There is no need to go back to that. You must erect a fuller faith on the basis you have already laid down."

(iv) There is the laying on of hands. In Jewish practice the laying on of hands had three significances. (a) It was the sign of the transference of guilt. The sacrificer laid his hands upon the head of the victim to symbolize the fact that he transferred his guilt to the animal being offered. (b) It was the sign of the transference of blessing. When a father blessed his son he laid his hands on the son's head as a token of that blessing. (c) It was the sign of setting apart to some special office. A man was ordained to office by the laying on of hands.

In the early Church it always accompanied baptism and was the way in which the Holy Spirit was conveyed to the person newly baptized (Ac.8:17; Ac.19:6). This is not to be thought of in a material way. In those days the apostles were regarded with reverence because they had actually been the friends of Jesus on earth. It was a thrilling thing to be touched by a man who had actually touched the hand of Jesus. The effect of the laying on of hands depends not on the office of the man who lays on the hands but on his character and his nearness to Christ.

(v) There is the resurrection from the dead. Christianity from the beginning was a religion of immortality. It gave a man two worlds in which to live; it taught him that the best was yet to be and thereby made this world the training school for eternity.

(vi) There is the sentence which lasts to all eternity. Christianity was from the beginning a religion of judgment. No Christian was ever allowed to forget that in the end he must face God, and that what God thought of him was infinitely more important than what men thought of him.

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Hebrews 6:4-8

CRUCIFYING CHRIST AGAIN

Hebrews 6:4-8

For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, those who tasted the free gift from heaven, those who were made sharers in the Holy Spirit, those who tasted the fair word of God and the powers of the age to come, and who then became apostates, for they are crucifying the Son of God again for themselves and are making a mocking show of him. For when the earth has drunk the rain that comes often times upon it and when it brings forth herbage useful to those who cultivate it, it receives a share of blessing from God; but if it produces thorns and thistles it is rejected and is in imminent danger of a curse, and its end is to be appointed for burning.

This is one of the most terrible passages in scripture. It begins with a kind of list of the privileges of the Christian life.

The Christian has been enlightened. This is a favourite New Testament idea. No doubt it goes back to the picture of Jesus as the Light of the World, the Light that enlightens every man who comes into the world (Jn.1:9; Jn.9:5). As Bilney, the martyr said, "When I heard the words, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,' it was as if day suddenly broke in the midst of a dark night." The light of knowledge and joy and guidance breaks in upon a man with Christ. So entwined with this idea did Christianity become that enlightenment (photismos, GSN5462) became a synonym for baptism, and to be enlightened (photizesthai, GSN5461) became a synonym for to be baptized. That is, in fact, the way many people have read this word here; and they have taken this passage to mean that there is no possibility of forgiveness for sins committed after baptism; and there have been times and places in the Church when baptism has been postponed to the moment of death in order to be safe. That idea we shall discuss later.

The Christian has tasted the free gift that comes from heaven. It is only in Christ that a man can be at peace with God. Forgiveness is not something he can ever win; it is a free gift. It is only when he comes to the Cross that his burden is rolled away. The Christian is a man who knows the immeasurable relief of experiencing the free gift of the forgiveness of God.

The Christian is a sharer in the Holy Spirit. He has in his life a new directive and a new power. He has discovered the presence of a power that can both tell him what to do and enable him to do it.

The Christian has tasted the fair word of God. That is another way of saying that he has discovered the truth. It is characteristic of men that instinctively they follow truth as blind men long for light; it is part of the penalty and the privilege of being a man that we can never rest content until we have learned the meaning of life. In God's word we find the truth and the meaning of life.

The Christian has tasted the powers of the world to come. Jew and Christian alike divided time into two ages. There was this present age (ho (GSN3588) nun (GSN3568) aion GSN0165), which was wholly bad; there was the age to come (ho (GSN3588) mellon (GSN3195) aion, GSN0165), which would be wholly good. Some day God would intervene; there would come the shattering

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destruction and the terrible judgment of the Day of the Lord and then this present age would end and the age to come would begin. But the Christian is a man who here and now is tasting the blessedness of the age which is God's. Even in time he has a foretaste of eternity.

"Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green;
Something lives in every hue,
Christless eyes have never seen;
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Flowers with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know,
I am his, and he is mine."

So the writer to the Hebrews sets out the shining catalogue of Christian blessedness; and then at the end of it there comes like a sudden knell, who then became apostates.

What does he mean when he says that it is impossible that those who have become apostates can ever be renewed to repentance? Many thinkers have tried to find a way round this word impossible (adunaton, GSN0102). Erasmus held that it was to be taken in the sense of difficult almost to the point of impossibility. Bengel held that what was impossible for man was possible for God, and that we must leave those who have fallen away to the mercy of God's singular love. But when we read this passage we must remember that--it was written in an age of persecution: and in any such age apostasy is the supreme sin. In any age of persecution a man can save his life by denying Christ; but every person who does so aims a body-blow at the Church, for it means that he has counted his life and comfort dearer to him than Jesus Christ.

This particular way of putting things has always emerged during and after persecutions. Two hundred years after this came the terrible persecution of the Emperor Diocletian. When peace came after the storm, the one test some wished to apply to every surviving member of the Church was: "Did you deny Christ and so save your life?" And if he had denied his Lord they would have shut the door on him once and for all. Kermit Eby tells of a French churchman who, when asked what he did during the French Revolution, whispered: "I survived."

This is the condemnation of the man who loved life more than he loved Christ. It was never meant to be erected into a doctrine that there is no forgiveness for post-baptismal sin. Who is any man to say that any other man is beyond the forgiveness of God? What it is meant to show is the terrible seriousness of choosing existence instead of loyalty to Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews goes on to say a tremendous thing. Those who fall away crucify Christ again. This is the point of the great Quo Vadis legend. It tells how in the Neronian persecution Peter was caught in Rome and his courage failed. Down the Appian Way he fled for his life. Suddenly there was a figure standing in his path. It was Jesus himself. "Domine," said Peter, "quo vadis? Lord, where are you going?" "I am going back to Rome to be crucified again, this time in your stead." And Peter, shamed into heroism, turned back to Rome and died a martyr's death.

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Late in Roman history there was an Emperor who tried to put back the clock. Julian wished to destroy Christianity and bring back the old gods. His attempt ended in defeat. Ibsen makes him say: "Where is he now? Has he been at work elsewhere since that happened at Golgotha?... Where is he now? What if that, at Golgotha, near Jerusalem, was but a wayside matter, a thing done, as it were, in the passing? What if he goes on and on, suffers and dies and conquers again and again, from world to world?"

There is a certain truth there. At the back of the thought of the writer to the Hebrews there is a tremendous conception. He saw the Cross as an event which opened a window into the heart of God. He saw It as showing in a moment of time the suffering love which is for ever in that heart. The Cross said to men: "That is how I have always loved you and always will love you. This is what your sin does to me and always will do to me. This is the only way I can ever redeem you.

In God's heart there is always, so long as there is sin, this agony of suffering and redeeming love. Sin does not only break God's law; it breaks his heart. It is true that when we fall away, we crucify Christ again.

Further, the writer to the Hebrews says that when we fall away we make a mocking show of Christ. How is that? When we sin the world will say: "So that is all that Christianity is worth. So that is all this Christ can do. So that is all the Cross achieved." It is bad enough that when a Church member falls into sin he brings shame to himself and discredit on his Church; but what is worse is that he draws men's taunts and jeers on Christ.

We may note a final thing. It has been pointed out that in the letter to the Hebrews there are four impossible things. There is the impossibility of this passage. The other three are: (i) It is impossible for God to lie (Heb.6:18). (ii) It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin (Heb.10:4). (iii) Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb.11:6).

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Hebrews 6:9-12

THE BRIGHTER SIDE

Hebrews 6:9-12

Beloved, even if we do speak like this, we are persuaded of better things for you, yes, things that are bound up with salvation. For God is not unjust to forget your work and the love that you displayed in that you have been and still are active in the service of God's dedicated people. We hope with all our hearts that each one of you will display the same zeal to make your hope come true and that you will go on doing so until the end, so that you may not become lazily lethargic but may copy those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

One thing stands out here. This is the only passage in the whole letter where the writer addresses his people as beloved. It is precisely after the sternest passage of all that he uses the address of love. It is as if he said to them: "If I did not love you so much I would not speak with such severity." Chrysostom paraphrases the thought this way: "It is better that I should scare you with words than that you should sorrow in deeds." He speaks the truth but, however stern it may be, he speaks it in love.

Further, his very form of speaking shows how individual his love is. "We hope," he says, "that each one of you will display the zeal that will make your hope come true." He is not thinking of them as a crowd but as individual men and women. Dr. Paul Tournier in *A Doctor's Casebook* has a paragraph on what he calls the personalism of the Bible. "God says to Moses, 'I know you by name' (Exo.33:17). He says to Cyrus, 'It is I, the Lord, who call you by your name' (Isa.45:3). One is struck, on reading the Bible, by the importance in it of personal names. Whole chapters are devoted to long genealogies. When I was young I used to think that they could well have been dropped from the Biblical Canon.

But I have since realized that these series of proper names bear witness to the fact that, in the biblical perspective, man is neither a thing nor an abstraction, not a fraction of the mass, as the Marxists see him, but a person." When the writer to the Hebrews wrote with sternness he was not rebuking a Church; he was yearning over individual men and women, as God himself does.

There are two interesting things implicit in this passage.

(i) We learn that even if these people to whom he is writing have failed to grow up in Christian faith and knowledge and even if they have been falling away from their first enthusiasm, they have never given up their practical service to their fellow Christians. There is a great practical truth here. Sometimes in the Christian life we come to times which are arid; the Church services have nothing to say to us, the teaching that we do in Sunday school or the singing that we do in the choir or the service we give on a committee becomes a labour without joy. At such a time there are two alternatives. We can give up our worship and our service, but if we do, we are lost. Or we can go determinedly on with them, and the strange thing is that the light and the romance and the joy will in time come back again. In the and times, the best thing to do is to go on with the habits of the Christian life and of the Church. If we do, we can be sure that the sun will shine again.

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Hebrews 6:9-12

(ii) He tells his people to be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherited the promise. What he is saying to them is: "You are not the first to launch out on the glories and the perils of the Christian faith. Others braved the dangers and endured the tribulations before you and won through." He is telling them to go on in the realization that others have gone through their struggle and won the victory. The Christian is not treading an untrodden pathway; he is treading where the saints have trod.

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Hebrews 6:13-20

THE SURE HOPE

Hebrews 6:13-20

When God made his promise to Abraham, since he was not able to swear by anyone greater, he swore by himself. "Certainly," he said, "I will bless you and I will multiply you." When Abraham had thus exercised patience he received the promise. Men swear by someone who is greater than themselves; and an oath serves for a guarantee beyond all possibility of contradiction. But on this occasion God, in his quite exceptional desire to make clear to the heirs of the promise the unalterable character of his intention, interposed with an oath, so that by two unalterable things, in which it is impossible that God should lie, we, who have fled to him for refuge, might be strongly encouraged to lay hold upon the hope that is set before us. This hope is to us like an anchor, safe and sure, and it enters with us into the inner court beyond the veil, where Jesus has already entered as a forerunner for us, when he became a High Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

God made more than one promise to Abraham. Gen.12:7 tells us of the one made when he called him out of Ur and sent him into the unknown and to the promised land. Gen.17:5-6 is the promise of many descendants who would be blessed in him. Gen.18:18 is a repetition of that promise. But the promise which God swore with an oath to keep comes in Gen.22:16-18. The real meaning of this first sentence is: "God made many a promise to Abraham, and in the end he actually made one which he confirmed with an oath." That promise was, as it were, doubly binding. It was God's word which in itself made it sure, but in addition it was confirmed by an oath. Now that promise was that all Abraham's descendants would be blessed; therefore it was to the Christian Church, for it was the true Israel and the true seed of Abraham. That blessing came true in Jesus Christ. Abraham certainly had to exercise patience before he received the promise. It was not till twenty-five years after he had left Ur that his son Isaac was born.

He was old; Sarah was barren, the wandering was long; but Abraham never wavered from his hope and trust in the promise of God.

In the ancient world the anchor was the symbol of hope. Epictetus says: "A ship should never depend on one anchor or a life on one hope." Pythagoras said: "Wealth is a weak anchor; fame is still weaker. What then are the anchors which are strong? Wisdom, great-heartedness, courage--these are the anchors which no storm can shake." The writer to the Hebrews insists that the Christian possesses the greatest hope in the world.

That hope, he says, is one which enters into the inner court beyond the veil. In the Temple the most sacred of all places was the Holy of Holies. The veil was what covered it. Within the Holy of Holies there was held to abide the very presence of God. Into that place only one man in all the world could go, and he was the High Priest; and even he might enter that Holy Place on only one day of the year, the Day of Atonement.

Even then, it was laid down, he must not linger in it for it was a dangerous and a terrible thing to enter into the presence of the living God. What the writer to the Hebrews says is this: "Under the old Jewish religion no one might enter into the presence of God but the High Priest and he only on one day of the year; but now Jesus Christ has opened the way for every man at every time."

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Hebrews 6:13-20

The writer to the Hebrews uses a most illuminating word about Jesus. He says that he entered the presence of God as our forerunner. The word is *prodromos* (GSN4274). It has three stages of meaning: (i) It means one who rushes on. (ii) It means a pioneer. (iii) It means a scout who goes ahead to see that it is safe for the body of the troops to follow. Jesus went into the presence of God to make it safe for all men to follow.

Let us put it very simply in another way. Before Jesus came, God was the distant stranger whom only a very few might approach and that at peril of their lives. But because of what Jesus was and did, God has become the friend of every man. Once men thought of him as barring the door; now they think of the door to his presence as thrown wide open to all.

Barclay's Commentary

Hebrews 7:1-28

A PRIEST AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

Hebrews 7:1-28

Now this Melchizedek was King of Salem and priest of the most high God. He met Abraham when he was returning from the smiting of the kings and blessed him and set apart for him a tenth part of the spoils. In the first place, the interpretation of his own name means King of Righteousness and, in the second place, King of Salem means King of Peace. His father is never mentioned nor his mother; nor is there any record of his descent; there is no mention of the beginning of his days, nor any of the end of his life; he is exactly like the Son of God; and he remains a priest for ever.

Just see how great this man was--Abraham gave him the tenth part of the spoils of victory--and Abraham was no less than the founder of our nation. Now look at the difference--when the sons of Levi receive their priesthood, they receive an injunction laid down by the law to exact tithes from the people. That is to say, they exact tithes from their own brothers, even although they are descendants of Abraham. But this man, whose descent is not traced from them at all, exacted tithes from Abraham and actually blessed the man who had received the promises. Beyond all argument, the lesser is blessed by the greater. Just so, in the one instance, it is a case of men who die receiving tithes; but in this instance it is the case of a man whom the evidence proves to live. Still further--if I may put it this way--through Abraham, Levi, too, the very man who receives the tithes, had tithes exacted from him, for he was in his father's body when Melchizedek met him.

If then the desired effect could have been achieved by the Levitical priesthood--for it was on the basis of that priesthood that the people became a people of the law--what further need was there to set up another priest and to call him a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and not to call him a priest after the order of Aaron? Once the priesthood was altered, of necessity there follows an alteration of the law too, for the person of whom the statements are made belongs to another tribe altogether, from which no one ever served at the altar. It is obvious that it was from Judah that our Lord sprang and, with regard to that tribe, Moses said nothing about priests. And certain things are still more abundantly clear--if a different priest is set up, a priest after the order of Melchizedek, a priest who became so, not according to the law of a mere human injunction but according to the power of a life that is indestructible--for the witness of scripture in regard to this is: "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"--if all that is so, two things emerge. On the one hand there emerges the cancellation of the previous injunction because of its own weakness and uselessness (for the law never achieved the effect which it was designed to produce) and, on the other hand, there emerges the introduction of a better hope through which we can come near to God.

And inasmuch as it happened with an oath--for the Levitical priests are made priests without an oath but he with an oath, because scripture says of him: "The Lord swore and will not repent of it, 'You are a priest forever'"--in so far as Jesus has become the surety of a better covenant. Further, of the Levitical priests more and more were made priests because they were prevented from continuing permanently by death, whereas he has a priesthood which will never pass away because he remains for ever. For that very reason it is in every possible way and for all time that he, who is for ever alive, can save those who come to God through him.

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Hebrews 7:1-28

We needed such a high priest--one who is holy, one who has never hurt any man, one who is stainless, one who is different from sinners, one who has become higher than the heavens. He does not need, as the high priests do, daily first to offer sacrifices for his own sins and then thereafter for the sins of the people. For he did this once and for all when he offered himself. For the law appointed as high priests men subject to weakness; but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appointed one who is a Son who is fully equipped to carry out his office for ever.

We come now to a passage of such paramount importance for the writer to the Hebrews and in itself so difficult to understand that we must deal with it in a special way. Heb.6 ended with the statement that Jesus had been made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. This priesthood after the order of Melchizedek is the most characteristic thought of Hebrews. Behind it lie ways of thinking and of arguing and of using scripture which are quite strange to us and which we must yet try to understand. It will be best first to collect together all that the writer to the Hebrews has to say about the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek and to read that as a whole before we divide it into shorter passages to study in detail. We shall then try to understand what the writer to the Hebrews was getting at before we study this chapter in detail.

So then, we first collect the passages which deal with this idea. The first is Heb.5:1-10.

Every high priest who is chosen from among men, is appointed on men's behalf to deal with the things which concern God. His task is to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, in that he himself is able to feel gently to the ignorant and to the wandering, because he himself wears the garment of human weakness. By reason of this very weakness it is incumbent upon him, just as he makes sacrifice for the people, so to make sacrifice for sins on his own behalf also. No one takes this honourable position to himself, but he is called by God to it, just as Aaron was. So it was not Christ who gave himself the glory of becoming high priest; but it was he who said to him:

"You are my beloved Son; today I have begotten you."

"You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek."

In the days when he lived this human life of ours, he offered prayers and entreaties to him who was able to bring him safely through death, with strong crying and with tears. And when he had been heard because of his reverence, although he was a Son he teamed obedience from the sufferings through which he passed. When he had been made fully fit for his appointed task, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, for he had been designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

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Hebrews 7:1-28

The second passage, which deals with this idea is the whole of Heb.7. So then, first, let us set it down as a whole, remembering that the last verse of Heb.6 has already said that Jesus had become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

These are the passages in which the writer to the Hebrews describes Jesus as a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Now let us see just what he is trying to say when he uses that conception.

We must begin by understanding the general position from which he starts. He starts with the basic idea that religion is access to God. It was to make that access to God possible that two things existed. First, the law. The basic idea of the law is that so long as a man faithfully observes its commandments he is in a position of friendship with God and the door to his presence is open to him. But men cannot keep the law and therefore their fellowship with God and their access to his presence are interrupted. It was exactly to deal with that situation of estrangement that the second thing existed, the priesthood and the whole sacrificial system. The Latin word for priest is pontifex which means a bridge-builder; the priest was a man whose function was to build a bridge between men and God by means of the sacrificial system.

A man broke the law; his fellowship with God was interrupted and his access to God was barred; by the offering of the correct sacrifice that breach of the law was atoned for and so the fellowship was restored and the barrier removed.

That was the theory of the matter. But in practice life showed that that was precisely what the priesthood and the sacrificial system could not do. There was no escaping the human estrangement from God which followed sin; and the problem was that not all the efforts of the priesthood and not all the sacrifices could restore that lost relationship. It is therefore the argument of the writer to the Hebrews that what is needed is a new and a different priesthood and a new and effective sacrifice. He sees in Jesus Christ the only High Priest who can open the way to God; and he calls the priesthood of Jesus a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

He got that idea from two passages in the Old Testament. The first was Ps.110:4 where it is written:

"The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'."

The second is Gen.14:17-20 where the story of the original Melchizedek is told.

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him (Abram) at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, and blessed be God most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

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Hebrews 7:1-28

The writer to the Hebrews is here doing what any skilled Jewish Rabbi might do and following the rabbinic method of interpretation. To understand that method we must understand two things.

(i) To the scholarly Jew any passage of scripture had four meanings to which he gave four different names: (a) First, there was Peshat (compare HSN6584), which is the literal and factual meaning. (b) Second, there was Remaz, which is the suggested meaning. (c) Third, there was Derush (compare HSN1875), which is the meaning arrived at after long and careful investigation. (d) Fourth, there was Sod, which is the allegorical or inner meaning. To the Jew the most important meaning by far was Sod, the inner meaning. He was not nearly so much interested in the factual meaning of a passage as in the allegorical and mystical meaning which could be extracted from it, even although it might have no connection whatever with the literal meaning. It was quite permissible, and in fact the regular practice, to take things right out of their context and read into them meanings which we would consider fantastic and quite unjustified. That is what the writer to the Hebrews is doing here.

(ii) Second, it is essential to note that the Jewish interpreters considered themselves completely justified in arguing not only from the utterances but also from the silences of scripture. An argument could be built, not only on what scripture said but also on what it did not say. In fact the writer to the Hebrews bases his argument in this passage at least as much on what scripture did not say about Melchizedek as on what it did.

Now let us see how the quality of the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek differs from the quality of the ordinary Aaronic priesthood.

(i) Melchizedek has no genealogy; he is without father and without mother (Heb.7:3). Note straight away that this is one of the arguments drawn from the silence of scripture which does not provide Melchizedek with any genealogy. This was unusual for two reasons. (a) It is the reverse of the habitual practice of Genesis. Genealogies are a feature of Genesis where long lists of a man's ancestors constantly occur. But Melchizedek arrives on the scene, as it were, from nowhere. (b) Far more important--it is the reverse of the rules which governed the Aaronic priesthood which depended entirely on descent. Under Jewish law a man could not under any circumstances become a priest unless he could produce a certificated pedigree going back to Aaron. Character and ability had nothing to do with it; the one essential was that pedigree.

When the Jews came back to Jerusalem from exile certain priestly families could not produce their genealogical records and were therefore debarred from the priesthood for ever (Ezr.2:61-63; Neh.7:63-65). On the other hand, if a man could produce a pedigree reaching back to Aaron, apart only from certain specified physical blemishes nothing on earth could stop him being a priest. Genealogy was literally everything.

So then, the first difference between the two priesthoods was this--the Aaronic priesthood depended on genealogical descent; the priesthood of Melchizedek depended on personal qualification alone. Melchizedek's priesthood was based on what he was, not on what he had inherited. As one scholar puts it--the difference was between a claim based on legality and a claim based on personality.

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(ii) Heb. 7:1-3 collects further qualities about Melchizedek. The name Melchizedek literally means King of righteousness. The word Salem (HSN8004) means peace; therefore he was also King of Peace. We have seen that he has no genealogy. Again the writer to the Hebrews draws on the silence of scripture. We are told of no time when Melchizedek began or ended his priesthood; we are told of no time when he was born or died. Therefore he had no beginning and has no end; and his priesthood lasts for ever.

From this we gather five great qualities in the priesthood of Melchizedek. (a) It is a priesthood of righteousness. (b) It is a priesthood of peace. (c) It is a royal priesthood, for Melchizedek was a king. (d) It is personal and not inherited because he has no genealogy. (e) It is eternal, because he has no birth or death, and his priesthood has no beginning or end.

(iii) Supposing all this to be true, how can it be proved that the priesthood of Melchizedek is superior to the Aaronic? The Hebrews seizes on two points in the Genesis story about Melchizedek.

First, there is the saying that Abraham gave Melchizedek tithes of all. The priests also exact tithes; but there are two differences. The priests tithe their brethren, their fellow Jews; and they tithe them as a result of legal enactment. But Melchizedek tithed Abraham who had no racial connection with him whatsoever and was in fact the founder of the Jewish nation; further, he exacted the tithes not because the law gave him the right to do so but because of an unquestionable personal right. Obviously that set him far above the ordinary priesthood.

Second, there is the saying that Melchizedek blessed Abraham. It is always the superior who blesses the inferior; therefore Melchizedek was superior to Abraham although Abraham was the founder of the Jewish race and the unique recipient of the promises of God. That indeed gives Melchizedek a place than which none could be higher.

A. B. Bruce thus sums up the points in which Melchizedek was superior to the ordinary Levitical priesthood. (a) He tithed Abraham and was therefore superior to him. Abraham was one of the patriarchs; the patriarchs are superior to their descendants; therefore Melchizedek is greater than the descendants of Abraham; the ordinary priests are the descendants of Abraham; therefore Melchizedek is greater than they. (b) Melchizedek is greater than the sons of Levi because they exacted tithes by legal enactment but he did it as a right he personally possessed given to him by no man. (c) The Levites received tithes as mortal men; he received them as one who lives for ever (Heb. 7:8). (d) Levi, to whom the Israelites paid tithes, may be said to have paid tithes to Melchizedek, because he was Abraham's grandson and was therefore in Abraham's body at the time Abraham paid tithes.

(iv) Heb. 7:11 onwards shows wherein the superiority of the new priesthood lay.

(a) The very fact that a new priesthood was promised (Heb. 7:11) shows that the old one was inadequate. If the old priesthood had fulfilled the function of bringing men to the presence of God there would have been no need for any other. Further, the introduction of the new priesthood was a revolution. According to the law, all priests must belong to the tribe of Levi; but Jesus was from the

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tribe of Judah. This shows that the whole old system was superseded. Something greater than the law had come.

(b) The new priesthood was for ever (Heb.7:15-19). Under the old system the priests died and there was no permanency; but now there had come a priest who lives for ever.

(c) The new priesthood was introduced by an oath of God Ps.110:4 says: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind 'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'." Clearly God does not swear lightly. He never introduced the ordinary priesthood like that. This was something new.

(d) The new priest offered no sacrifice for himself (Heb.7:27). The ordinary priest always had to make sacrifice for his own sin before he could do so for the sins of the people. But Jesus Christ, the new High Priest, was sinless and needed no sacrifice for himself.

(e) The new priest did not need endlessly to repeat sacrifices (Heb.7:27). He made the one perfect sacrifice, which never needs to be made again because it has for ever opened the way to the presence of God.

We now sum up briefly the ideas in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews when he thinks of Jesus in terms of the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. To make it clearer we set out only the great salient ideas without the side-lines.

(i) Jesus is the High Priest, whose priesthood depends not on any genealogy but on himself alone.

(ii) Jesus is the High Priest who lives for ever.

(iii) Jesus is the High Priest who himself is sinless and never needs to offer any sacrifice for his own sin.

(iv) Jesus is the High Priest who in the offering of himself made the perfect sacrifice which once and for all opened the way to God. No more sacrifice need be made.

Having seen the general ideas in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews concerning Jesus as a priest after the order of Melchizedek, we now turn to this passage in detail and study it in sections.

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Hebrews 7:1-3

THE TRUE KING AND THE TRUE PRIEST

Hebrews 7:1-3

Now this Melchizedek was King of Salem and priest of the most high God. He met Abraham when he was returning from the smiting of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham set apart for him a tenth part of the spoils. In the first place, the interpretation of his own name means King of Righteousness and, in the second place, King of Salem means King of Peace. His father is never mentioned nor his mother; nor is there any record of his descent; there is no mention of the beginning of his days nor any of the end of his life; he is exactly like the Son of God; and he remains a priest for ever.

As we have seen, the two passages on which the writer to the Hebrews founds his argument are Ps. 110:4 and Gen. 14:18-20. In the old Genesis story Melchizedek is a strange and almost eerie figure. He arrives out of the blue; there is nothing about his life, his birth, his death or his descent. He simply arrives. He gives Abraham bread and wine which to us, reading the passage in the light of what we know, sounds so sacramental. He blesses Abraham. And then he vanishes from the stage of history with the same unexplained suddenness as he arrived. There is little wonder that in the mystery of this story the writer to the Hebrews found a symbol of Christ.

Melchizedek from his name was King of Righteousness and from his realm King of Peace. The order is at once significant and inevitable. Righteousness must always come before peace. Without righteousness there can be no such thing as peace. As Paul has it in Rom. 5:1: "Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God." As he has it again in Rom. 14:17: "The kingdom of God is...righteousness, peace and joy." The order is always the same--first righteousness and then peace.

It may well be said that all life is a search for peace, and also that men persist in looking for it in the wrong place.

(i) Men look for peace in escape. But the trouble about escape is that it is always necessary to return. A. J. Gossip draws a picture of a slatternly woman who lived in a slatternly house. She leaves her home one afternoon and goes to a cinema. For an hour or two she escapes into the glamour and the luxury of the world of the film--and then she must go back home. It is escape all right--but there is the inevitable return. W. M. Macgregor tells of an old woman who lived in a terrible slum in Edinburgh called the Pans. Every now and again she would grow disgusted with the surroundings in which she lived and would make a tour of her friends, extracting a penny or two from each. With the proceeds she would get helplessly drunk. When others remonstrated with her she would answer: "Do you grudge me my one chance to get out of the Pans with a sup of whisky?" Again it was escape--but she, too, had to return. It is always possible to find some kind of peace by the route of escape, but it is never a lasting peace.

Dr. Johnson used to insist that a man should have a hobby, for he held that a man should have as many retreats for his mind as possible. But even there there is the necessity to return. Escape is not wrong; sometimes it is necessary if health and sanity are to be preserved; but it is always a palliative and never a cure.

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(ii) There is the peace of evasion. Many a man seeks peace by refusing to face his problems--he pushes them into the back of his mind and seeks to draw down the blind on them. There are two things to be said about that. The first is that no one ever solved a problem by refusing to look at it. However much we evade it, it is still there. And problems are like diseases--the longer we refuse to face them the worse they get. We may well come to a stage when the disease is incurable and the problem insoluble. The second thing is maybe even more serious. Psychology tells us that there is a part of the mind which never stops thinking. With our conscious minds we may be evading a problem but our subconscious mind is teasing away at it. The thing is there like a piece of hidden shrapnel in the body; and it can ruin life. So far from bringing peace, evasion is most destructive of peace.

(iii) There is the way of compromise. It is possible to arrive at some kind of peace by arriving at some kind of compromise. It is in fact one of the commonest methods of the world. We can seek peace by toning down some principle or by an uneasy agreement in which neither party is fully satisfied. Kermit Eby says that we may compromise for long enough but the time comes when a man must stand up and be counted if he wants to sleep at nights. Compromise means the loose ends of things unsolved. Compromise, therefore, inevitably means tension, even if a more or less hidden tension; tension inevitably means a gnawing worry; and therefore compromise really is the enemy of peace.

(iv) There is the way of righteousness, or, to put it otherwise, the way of the will of God. There is no real peace for any man until he has said: "Thy will be done." But once he has said that, peace floods his soul. It happened even to Jesus. He went into the Garden with a soul under such tension that he sweated blood. In the Garden he accepted God's will and came out at peace. To take the way of righteousness, to accept God's will is to remove the root of dispeace and find the way to lasting peace.

The writer to the Hebrews piles up words to show that Melchizedek has no descent. He does this to contrast the new priesthood of Jesus Christ with the old Aaronic priesthood. A Jew could not be a priest unless he could trace an unbroken descent from Aaron; but if he could trace such a descent nothing could stop him being a priest. If a priest married and his bride-to-be was the daughter of a priest, she must produce her pedigree for four generations back; if she was not the daughter of a priest, she must produce her pedigree for five generations back. It is the odd and almost incredible fact that the whole Jewish priesthood was founded on genealogy. Personal qualities did not enter into it at all. But Jesus Christ was the true priest, not because of what he inherited but because of what he was.

Some of the words Hebrews piles up here are amazing. He says that Jesus was without descent (*agenealogetos*, GSN0035). That is a word that, so far as we know, no Greek writer ever used before. It may well be that in his eagerness to stress the fact that Jesus' power did not depend on descent, he invented it. It is very likely a new word to describe a new thing. He says that Melchizedek was without father (*apator*, GSN0540) and without mother (*ameter*, GSN0282). These words are very interesting. They have certain uses in secular Greek. They are the regular description of waifs and strays and of people of low pedigree. They contemptuously dismiss a man

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Hebrews 7:1-3

as having no ancestry. More, apator (GSN0540) has a technical legal use in the contemporary Greek of the papyri. It is the word which is used on legal documents, especially on birth certificates, for father unknown and, therefore, illegitimate.

So, for instance, there is a papyrus which speaks of--"Chairemon, apator (GSN0540), father unknown, whose mother is Thases." It is amazing that the writer to the Hebrews took words like this to stress his meaning. The Christian writers had a strange way of redeeming words as well as men and women. No phrase seemed too strong to the writer to the Hebrews to insist upon the fact that Jesus' authority was in himself and came from no man.

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Hebrews 7:4-10

THE GREATNESS OF MELCHIZEDEK

Hebrews 7:4-10

Just see how great this man was--Abraham gave him the tenth of the spoils of victory--and Abraham was no less than the founder of our nation. Now look at the difference--when the sons of Levi receive their priesthood, they receive an injunction laid down by the law to exact tithes from the people. That is to say, they exact tithes from their own brothers, even although they are descendants of Abraham. But this man, whose descent is not traced through them at all, exacted tithes from Abraham and actually blessed the man who had received the promises. Beyond all argument the lesser is blessed by the greater. Just so, in the one instance, it is the case of men who die receiving tithes; but in this instance, it is the case of a man whom the evidence proves to live. Still further, if I may put it this way, through Abraham Levi, too, the very man who receives the tithes, had tithes exacted from him, for he was in his father's body when Melchizedek met him.

The writer to the Hebrews is here concerned to prove the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood to the ordinary. He proceeds on the matter of tithes, because Abraham had given to Melchizedek a tenth part of the spoils of his victory. The law of tithes is laid down in Num.18:20-21. There Aaron is told that the Levites will have no actual territory in the promised land laid down for them but that they are to receive a tenth part of everything for their services in the tabernacle. "And the Lord said to Aaron, 'You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them: I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel. To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, their service in the tent of meeting.'"

So now in a series of contrasts the writer to the Hebrews works out the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priests. He makes five different points. (i) The Levites receive tithes from the people and that is a right that only they enjoy. Melchizedek received tithes from Abraham although he was not a member of the tribe of Levi. It could be argued that while that put him on a level with the Levites, it does not prove that he was superior to them. So our writer adds four other points. (ii) The Levites tithe their brother Israelites; Melchizedek was not an Israelite but a stranger; and it was no ordinary Israelite from whom he received tithes but from no less a person than Abraham, the founder of the nation. (iii) It was due to a legal enactment that the Levites have the right to exact tithes; but Melchizedek received tithes for the sake of what he was personally. He had such personal greatness that he needed no legal enactment to entitle him to receive tithes. (iv) The Levites receive tithes as dying men; but Melchizedek lives for ever. (v) Finally he produces a curious argument for which he apologizes before he states it, Levi was a direct descendant of Abraham and the only man legally entitled to receive tithes. Now, if he was a direct descendant of Abraham it means that he was already in Abraham's body. Therefore when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi also paid them, being included in Abraham's body, the final proof that Melchizedek was superior to him. It is an extremely odd argument but it was no doubt convincing enough to those to whom it was addressed.

Strangely enough, this argument enshrines the great truth that what a man does reacts on his descendants. If he commits some sin, he may transmit to his descendants either the tendency to that

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sin or some actual physical handicap because of it. If he builds up excellence of character, he transmits a fine inheritance to those who come after. Levi, on the argument of the writer to the Hebrews, was affected by what Abraham did. Therein, amidst the fantasies of the rabbinic argument, remains the truth that no man lives to himself but transmits something of himself to those who follow after.

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Hebrews 7:11-20

THE NEW PRIEST AND THE NEW WAY

Hebrews 7:11-20

If, then, the desired effect could have been achieved by the Levitical priesthood--for it was on the basis of it that the people became a people of the law--what further need was there to set up another priest, and to call him a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and not to call him a priest after the order of Aaron? Once the priesthood was altered, of necessity there follows an alteration of the law, too, for the person of whom the statements are made belongs to another tribe altogether, from which no one ever served at the altar. It is obvious that it was from Judah that our Lord sprang, and with regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

And certain things are still more abundantly clear--if a different priest is set up, a priest after the order of Melchizedek, a priest who has become so, not according to the law of a mere human injunction but according to the power of life that is indestructible--for the witness of scripture in regard to this is: "You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek"--if all that is so, two things emerge. On the one hand, there emerges the cancellation of the previous injunction because of its own weakness and uselessness (for the law never achieved the effect it was designed to produce) and, on the other hand, there emerges the introduction of a better hope through which we can come near to God.

As we read this passage we have to remember the basic idea of religion which never leaves the mind of the writer to the Hebrews. To him religion is access to God's presence as friends, with nothing between us and him. The old Jewish religion was designed to produce that fellowship in two ways. First, by obedience to the law. Let a man obey the law and he was the friend of God. Second, it was recognised that such perfect obedience was out of the question for any man; and so the sacrificial system came in. When a man was guilty of a breach of the law, the requisite sacrifice was supposed to heal that breach. When the writer to the Hebrews says that the people became a people of the law on the basis of the Levitical priesthood, he means that without the Levitical sacrifices to atone for breaches of it, the law would have been completely impossible. But, in fact, the system of Levitical sacrifices had proved ineffective to restore the lost fellowship between God and man.

So then a new priesthood was necessary, the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek.

He says that that priesthood differed from the old in that it was not dependent on merely human--fleshly is the word in the Greek--injunctions, but on the power of a life that is indestructible. What he means is this. Every single regulation that governed the old priesthood had to do with the priest's physical body. To be a priest he must be a pure descendant of Aaron. Even then there were one hundred and forty-two physical blemishes which might disqualify him; some of them are detailed in Lev.21:16-23. The ordination ceremony is outlined in Lev.8. (i) He was bathed in water so that he would be ceremonially clean. (ii) He was clothed in the four priestly garments--the linen knee breeches, the long linen garment woven in one piece, the girdle round the breast, and the bonnet or turban. (iii) He was anointed with oil. (iv) He was touched on the tip of the right ear, his right thumb and his right great toe with the blood of certain sacrifices which had been made.

Every single item in the ceremony affects the priest's body. Once he was ordained he had to observe so many washings with water, so many anointings with oil; he had to cut his hair in a

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certain way. From beginning to end the Jewish priesthood was dependent on physical things. Character, ability, personality had nothing to do with it. But the new priesthood was dependent on a life that is indestructible. Christ's priesthood depended not on physical things but on what he was in himself. Here was a revolution; it was no longer outward ceremonies and observances that made a priest but inward worth.

Further, there was another great change which had fundamental implications. The law was definite that all priests must belong to the tribe of Levi; they must be descendants of Aaron; but Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah. Therefore, the very fact that he was the supreme priest meant that the law was cancelled; it was wiped out. The word used for cancellation is *athetesis* (GSN0115); that is the word used for annulling a treaty, for abrogating a promise, for scoring a man's name off the register, for rendering a law or regulation inoperative. The whole paraphernalia of the ceremonial law was wiped out in the priesthood of Jesus.

Finally, Jesus can do what the old priesthood never could--he can give us access to God. How does he do that? What is it that keeps a man from having access to God? (i) There is fear. So long as a man is terrified of God he can never be at home with him. Jesus came to show men the infinite tender love of the God whose name is Father--and the awful fear is gone. We know now that God wants us to come home, not to punishment but to the welcome of his open arms. (ii) There is sin. Jesus on his Cross made the perfect sacrifice which atones for sin. Fear is gone; sin is conquered; the way to God is open to men.

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Hebrews 7:21-25

THE GREATER PRIESTHOOD

Hebrews 7:21-25

And in so far as it happened with an oath--for the Levitical priests are made priests without an oath, but he with an oath, because scripture says of him, "The Lord swore and will not repent of it, 'You are a priest for ever'"--in so far Jesus has become the surety of a better covenant. Further, of the Levitical priests none and more were made priests because they were prevented from continuing permanently by death, whereas he has a priesthood which will never pass away, because he remains for ever. For that very reason, it is in every possible way and for all time that he who is for ever alive to make intercession for us can save those who come to God through him.

The writer to the Hebrews is still accumulating his proofs that the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek was superior to the Aaronic priesthood. In order to do this he brings forward two other proofs.

First, he stresses the fact that the institution of the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek was confirmed by the oath of God while the ordinary priesthood was not. The reference is to Ps.110:4: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'" The very idea of God taking an oath is startling. Long ago Philo saw this. He pointed out that the only reason for taking an oath is because a man's bare word may be disbelieved; and the oath is to guarantee that his word is true. God never needs to do that because it is impossible that his word should ever be disbelieved. If, therefore, God ever confirms a statement by an oath, that statement must be of extraordinary importance. So then it is possible that the ordinary priesthood can pass away; but the priesthood of Jesus Christ can never pass away; because God has sworn an oath that it will last for ever.

Because this priesthood has been confirmed by an oath, Jesus is the surety of a better covenant. Let us remember that the function of the priest and of all religion is to open a way of access to God. Here we come upon the word covenant. We shall soon have to examine it in more detail. It is sufficient at the moment to say that a covenant is in essence an agreement between two people that if one faithfully performs certain undertakings, the other will respond in a certain way.

There was an ancient covenant between Israel and God that if the Israelites faithfully obeyed God's law, the way of access to his friendship would always be open to them. We see the nation entering into that covenant in Exo.24:1-8. We see Moses taking the book of the law and reading it to the people; and we see the people responding with the words: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" (Exo.24:7). The old agreement was based on obedience to the law; and the agreement could be kept open only when the priests kept on making sacrifice for every breach of the law.

Jesus is the surety of a new and a better covenant, a new kind of relationship between man and God. The difference is this--the old covenant was based on law and justice and obedience; the new covenant is based on love and on the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The old covenant was based on man's achievement; the new covenant is based on God's love.

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Hebrews 7:21-25

What does the writer to the Hebrews mean by saying that Jesus is the surety (egguos, GSN1450) of this new covenant? An egguos is one who gives security. It is used, for instance, of a person who guarantees someone else's overdraft at a bank; he is surety that the money will be paid. It is used for someone who goes bail for a prisoner; he guarantees that the prisoner will appear at the trial. The egguos (GSN1450) is one who guarantees that some undertaking will be honoured.

So, then, what the writer to the Hebrews means is this. Someone might say: "How do you know that the old covenant is no longer operative? How do you know that access to God now depends, not on man's achievement of obedience but simply on the welcoming love of God?" The answer is: "Jesus Christ guarantees that it is so. He is the surety who promises that God's love will be forthcoming, if only we take him at his word." To put it in the simplest possible way--we must believe that when we look at Jesus in all his love we are seeing what God is like.

The writer to the Hebrews introduces a second proof of the superiority of the priesthood of Jesus. There was no permanency about the old priesthood. Those who were priests died and had to be replaced; but the priesthood of Jesus is for ever. The thing that matters in this passage is the overtones and implications of the almost untranslatable words the writer uses.

He says that the priesthood of Jesus is one that will never pass away (aparabatos, GSN0531). Aparabatos is a legal word. It means inviolable. A judge lays down that his decision must remain aparabatos (GSN0531), unalterable. It means non-transferable. It describes something which belongs to one person and cannot ever be transferred to anyone else. Galen, the medical writer, uses it to describe absolute scientific law which can never be violated, the principles on which the very universe is built and holds together. So then the writer to the Hebrews says that the priesthood of Jesus is something which can never be taken from him, is something that no one else can ever possess, is something that is as lasting as the laws which hold the universe together. Jesus is and will always remain the only way to God. The writer to the Hebrews uses another wonderful word about Jesus and says of him that he remains for ever (paramenein, GSN3887). That verb has two characteristic flavours.

First, it means to remain in office. No one can ever take the office of Jesus from him; to all eternity he remains the introducer of men to God. Second, it means to remain in the capacity of a servant. Gregory of Nazianzen provides in his will that his daughters will remain (paramenein, GSN3887) with their mother so long as she is alive. They are to stay with her and be her help and support. The papyri talk of a girl who must remain (paramenein, GSN3887) in a shop for three years in order to discharge by her work a debt that she cannot pay. There is a papyrus contract which says that a boy, who is being bound as an apprentice, must remain (paramenein, GSN3887) with his master for as many days extra as he has played truant. When the writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus remains for ever, there is wrapped up in that phrase the amazing thought that Jesus is for ever at the service of men. In eternity as he was in time Jesus exists to be of service to mankind. That is why he is the complete Saviour.

On earth he served men and gave his life for them; in Heaven he still exists to make intercession for them. He is the priest for ever, the one who is for ever opening the door to the friendship of God and is for ever the great servant of mankind.

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Hebrews 7:26-28

THE HIGH PRIEST WE NEED

Hebrews 7:26-28

We needed such a high priest--one who is holy, one who never hurt any man, one who is stainless, one who is different from sinners, one who has become higher than the heavens. He does not need, as the high priests do, daily first to offer sacrifices for his own sins and thereafter for the sins of the people. For he did this once and for all when he offered himself. For the law appointed as high priests men subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appointed one who is a Son who is fully equipped to carry out his office for ever.

Still the writer to the Hebrews is filled with the thought of Jesus as high priest. He begins this passage by using a series of great words and phrases to describe him.

(i) He says that Jesus is holy, (hosios, GSN3741). This word is used of Jesus in Ac.2:27 and Ac.13:35; it is used of the Lord in Rev.15:4 and Rev.16:5; it is used of the Christian bishop in Tit.1:8; it is used of the hands that a man must present to God in prayer in 1Tim.2:8. Behind it there is always one special idea. It always describes the man who faithfully does his duty to God. It describes a man, not so much as he appears before his fellow-men but as he appears before God. Hosios (GSN3741) has in it the greatest of all goodnesses, the goodness which is pure in the sight of God.

(ii) He says that Jesus never hurt any man (akakos, GSN0172). Kakia (GSN2549) is the Greek word for evil; and akakos (GSN0172) describes the man who is so cleansed of evil that there is nothing left in him but good. It describes a man in his effect upon his fellow-men. Sir Walter Scott claimed for himself as a writer that he never corrupted any man's morals or unsettled any man's faith. The man who is akakos (GSN0172) is so cleansed that his presence is like an antiseptic and in his heart there is nothing but the loving kindness of God.

(iii) He says that Jesus is stainless (amiantos, GSN0283). Amiantos describes the man who is absolutely free from any of the blemishes which might make it impossible for him to draw near to God. The blemished victim cannot be offered to God; the defiled man cannot approach him; but the one who is amiantos (GSN0283) is fit to enter into God's presence.

(iv) He says that Jesus is different from sinners. This phrase does not mean that Jesus was not really a man. He was different from sinners in that, although he underwent all a man's temptations, he conquered them all and emerged without sin. The difference between him and other men lies not in the fact that he was not fully man, but in the fact that he was manhood at its highest and its best.

(v) He says that Jesus was made higher than the heavens. In this phrase he is thinking of the exaltation of Jesus. If the last phrase stresses the perfection of his manhood, this one stresses the perfection of his godhead. He who was a man amongst men is also he who is exalted to the right hand of God.

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Hebrews 7:26-28

The writer to the Hebrews now introduces another aspect in which the priesthood of Jesus is far superior to the Levitical. Before the High Priest could offer sacrifice for the sins of the people, he had first to offer sacrifice for his own sins, for he was a sinful man.

It is of the Day of Atonement that the writer is specially thinking. This was the great day when atonement was made for all the sins of the people, the day on which the High Priest performed his supreme function. Usually it was the only day in the year when he personally carried out the sacrifices. On ordinary days they were left to the subordinate priests but on the Day of Atonement the High Priest himself officiated.

The very first item on the ritual of that day was a sacrifice for the sins of the High Priest himself. He washed his hands and his feet; he put off his gorgeous robes; he clothed himself in spotless white linen. There was brought to him a bullock which he had purchased with his own money. He laid both hands on the bullock's head to transfer his sin to it; and thus he made confession: "Ah, Lord God, I have committed iniquity; I have transgressed; I have sinned, I and my house. O Lord, I beseech thee, cover over the sins and transgressions which I have committed, transgressed and sinned before thee, I and my house."

The greatest of all the Levitical sacrifices began with a sacrifice for the sins of the High Priest. That was a sacrifice Jesus never needed to make, for he was without sin. The Levitical High Priest was a sinful man offering animal sacrifices for sinful people; Jesus was the sinless Son of God offering himself for the sin of all men. It was the law which had appointed the Levitical High Priest; it was the oath of God which gave Jesus his office; and because he was what he was, the sinless Son of God, he was equipped for his office as no human High Priest could ever be.

Now the writer to the Hebrews does what he so often does. He drops a marker to indicate the direction he is going to take. He says of Jesus that he offered himself. Two things were necessary in a sacrifice. There was the priest and there was the sacrifice. With long and intricate argument the writer to the Hebrews has proved that Jesus was the perfect High Priest; now he is going to move on to another thought. Not only was Jesus the perfect High Priest, he was also the perfect offering. Jesus alone could open the way to God because he was the perfect High Priest and he offered the one perfect sacrifice--himself.

There is much in this argument which for us is difficult to understand. It speaks and thinks in terms of ritual and ceremony long since forgotten; but one eternal thing remains. Man seeks the presence of God; his sin has erected a barrier between him and God but he is restless until he rests in God; and Jesus alone is the priest who can bring the offering that can open the way back to God for men.

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Hebrews 8:1-6

THE WAY TO REALITY

Hebrews 8:1-6

The pith of what we are saying is this--it is just such a high priest we possess, a priest who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of majesty in the heavens, a high priest who is a minister of the sanctuary and of the real tabernacle, which the Lord, and not man, founded. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices. It is therefore necessary that he should have something which he might offer. If then he had been upon earth, he would not even have been a priest, for there already exist those who offer the gifts the law lays down, men whose service is but a shadowy outline of the heavenly order, just as Moses received instructions when he was about to complete the tabernacle--"See," it says, "that you do everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain." But, as things are, he has obtained a more excellent ministry, in so far as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, a covenant which was enacted on the basis of superior promises.

The writer to the Hebrews has finished describing the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in all its glory. He has described it as the priesthood which is for ever, without beginning and without end; the priesthood that God confirmed with an oath; the priesthood that is founded on personal greatness and not on any legal appointment or racial qualification; the priesthood which death cannot touch; the priesthood which is able to offer a sacrifice that never needs to be repeated; the priesthood which is so pure that it has no necessity to offer sacrifice for any sins of its own. Now he makes and underlines his great claim. "It is," he says, "a priest precisely like that that we have in Jesus."

He goes on to say two things about Jesus. (i) He took his seat at the right hand of the throne of majesty in the heavens. That is the final proof of his glory.

"The highest place that heaven affords
Is his, is his by right,
The King of kings, and Lord of lords,
And heaven's eternal light."

There can be no glory greater than that of the ascended and exalted Jesus. (ii) He says that Jesus is a minister of the sanctuary. That is the proof of his service. He is unique both in majesty and in service.

Jesus never looked on majesty as something to be selfishly enjoyed. One of the greatest of the Roman Emperors was Marcus Aurelius; as an administrator he was unsurpassed. He died at fifty-nine, having worked himself to death in the service of his people. He was one of the Stoic saints. When chosen to succeed in due time to the imperial power, his biographer Capitolinus tells us, "he was appalled rather than overjoyed, and when he was told to move to the private house of Hadrian, the Emperor, it was with reluctance that he departed from his mother's villa. And when the members of the household asked him why he was sorry to receive the royal adoption, he

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Hebrews 8:1-6

enumerated to them the toils which sovereignty involved." Marcus Aurelius saw kingship in terms of service and not of majesty.

Jesus is the unique example of divine majesty and divine service combined. He knew that he had been given his supreme position, not jealously to guard it in splendid isolation, but rather to enable others to attain to it and to share it. In him the supreme majesty and the supreme service met.

Now there enters into the picture a thought that was never far from the mind of the writer to the Hebrews. Religion to him, remember, was access to God; therefore the supreme function of any priest was to open the way to God for men. He removed the barriers between God and man; he built a bridge across which man could go into the presence of God. But we could put this another way. Instead of talking about access to God we might talk about access to reality. Every religious writer has to search for terms which his readers will understand. He has to present his message in language and in thoughts which will get home because they are familiar or at least will strike a chord in the reader's mind. The Greeks had a basic thought about the universe. They thought in terms of two worlds, the real and the unreal. They believed that this world of space and time was only a pale copy of the real world. That was the basic doctrine of Plato, the greatest of all the Greek thinkers. He believed in what he called forms.

Somewhere there was a world where there was laid up the perfect forms of which everything in this world is an imperfect copy. Sometimes he called the forms ideas. Somewhere there is the idea of a chair of which all actual chairs are imperfect copies. Somewhere there is an idea of a horse of which all actual horses are inadequate reflections. The Greeks were fascinated by this conception of a real world of which this world is only a flickering, imperfect copy. In this world we walk in shadows; somewhere there is reality. The great problem in life is how to pass from this world of shadows to the other world of realities. That is the idea of which the writer to the Hebrews makes use.

The earthly Temple is a pale copy of the real Temple of God; earthly worship is a remote reflection of real worship; the earthly priesthood is an inadequate shadow of the real priesthood. All these things point beyond themselves to the reality of which they are the shadows. The writer to the Hebrews even finds that idea in the Old Testament itself. When Moses had received from God instructions about the construction of the tabernacle and all its furnishings, God said to him: "And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain" (Exo.25:40). God had shown Moses the real pattern of which all earthly worship is the ghost-like copy. So then the writer to the Hebrews says that the earthly priests have a service which is but a shadowy outline of the heavenly order. For shadowy outline he combines two Greek words, *hupodeigma* (GSN5262), which means a specimen, or, still better, a sketch-plan, and *skia* (GSN4639), which means a shadow, a reflection, a phantom, a silhouette.

The earthly priesthood is unreal and cannot lead men into reality; but Jesus can. We can say that Jesus leads us into the presence of God or we can say that Jesus leads us into reality; it means the same thing. When the writer to the Hebrews spoke of reality he was using language that his contemporaries used and understood.

In the highest that this world can offer there is some imperfection. It never quite reaches what we know the thing might be. Nothing we ever experience or achieve here quite reaches the ideal that

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haunts us. The real world is beyond. As Browning had it: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" Call it heaven, call it reality, call it the idea or the form, call it God--it is beyond.

As the writer to the Hebrews saw it, only Jesus can lead us out of the frustrating actuality into the all-satisfying real. So he calls him the mediator, the mesites (GSN3316). Mesites comes from mesos (GSN3319), which, in this case, means in the middle. A mesites (GSN3316) is, therefore, one who stands in the middle between two people and brings them together. When Job is desperately anxious that somehow he should be able to put his case to God, he cries out hopelessly: "There is no umpire, mesites (GSN3316), between us" (Jb.9:33). Paul calls Moses the mesites (GSN3316) (Gal.3:19) in that he was the one between who brought the law from God to men. In Athens in classical times there was a body of men--all citizens in their sixtieth year--who could be called upon to act as mediators when there was a dispute between two citizens, and their first duty was to effect a reconciliation. In Rome there were arbitri.

The judge settled points of law; but the arbitri settled matters of equity; and it was their duty to bring disputes to an end. Further, in legal Greek a mesites (GSN3316) was a sponsor, a guarantor or a surety. He went bail for a friend who was on trial; he guaranteed a debt or an overdraft. The mesites (GSN3316) was the man who was willing to pay his friend's debt to make things right again.

The mesites (GSN3316) is the man who stands between and brings together two other parties in reconciliation. Jesus is our perfect mesites (GSN3316); he stands between us and God. He opens the way to reality and to God and is the only person who can effect reconciliation between man and God, between the real and the unreal. In other words, Jesus is the only person who can bring us real life.

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Hebrews 8:7-13

THE NEW RELATIONSHIP

Hebrews 8:7-13

For, if the first covenant, which is so well known to you, had been faultless there would have been no need to seek any place for a second one. It is to censure them that he says: "Look you the days are coming, says the Lord. when I will consummate a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be the same as the covenant which I made with their fathers, when I laid my hand on them to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; this must be so because they did not abide by my covenant, and I let them go their own way, says the Lord. It will be different because this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after these days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their mind and I will inscribe them upon their hearts. I will be to them all that a God should be to them, and they will be to me all that a people should be to me. And no one will teach his fellow-citizen and no one will teach his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all will know me, small and great alike, because I will graciously forgive their iniquities and I will not remember their sins any more." In that he calls the covenant new, he has rendered the first covenant out of date; and that which is out of date and ageing into decay is near to final obliteration.

Here Hebrews begins to deal with one of the great biblical ideas--that of a covenant. In the Bible the Greek word that is always used for a covenant is *diatheke* (GSN1242) and there was a special reason for the choice of this rather unusual word. Ordinarily a covenant is an agreement entered into by two people. It is dependent on conditions on which they mutually agree; and if either should break the conditions the covenant becomes void. It is sometimes used in that simple sense in the Old Testament. For instance, it is used of the league that the Gibeonites wished to make with Joshua (Josh.9:6); of the forbidden league with the Canaanites (Judg.2:2); and of David's covenant with Jonathan (1Sam.23:18). But its distinctive use is to describe the relationship between Israel and God. "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God" (Deut.4:23). In the New Testament the word is also used to describe the relationship between God and man.

But there is a strange point which requires explanation. For all normal uses the Greek word for an agreement is *suntheke* which is the word for a marriage covenant or bond and for an agreement between two states. Further, in all normal Greek *diatheke* (GSN1242) means not an agreement, but a will. Why should the New Testament use this word for a covenant? The reason is this--*suntheke* always describes an agreement entered into on equal terms. The parties to a *suntheke* are on the one level and each can bargain with the other. But God and man do not meet on equal terms. In the biblical sense of a covenant, the whole approach comes from God. Man cannot bargain with God; he cannot argue about the terms of the covenant; he can only accept or reject the offer that God makes.

The supreme example of such an agreement is a will. The conditions of a will are not made on equal terms. They are made entirely by one person, the testator, and the other party cannot alter them but can only accept or refuse the inheritance offered.

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That is why our relationship to God is described as a *diatheke* (GSN1242), a covenant for the terms of which only one person is responsible. That relationship is offered us solely on the initiative and the grace of God. As Philo said: "It is fitting for God to give and for a wise man to receive." When we use the word covenant, we must always remember that it does not mean that man made a bargain with God on equal terms. It always means that the whole initiative is with God; the terms are his and man cannot alter them in the slightest.

The ancient covenant, so well known to the Jews, was the one made with the people after the giving of the law. God graciously approached the people of Israel. He offered them a unique relationship to himself; but that relationship was entirely dependent on the keeping of the law. We see the Israelites accepting that condition in Exo.24:1-8. The argument of the writer to the Hebrews is that that old covenant is done away with and that Jesus has brought a new relationship with God.

In this passage we can distinguish certain marks of the new covenant which Jesus brought.

(i) The writer begins by pointing out that the idea of a new covenant is not something revolutionary. It is already there in Jer.31:31-34, which he quotes in full. Further, the very fact that scripture speaks of the new covenant shows that the old was not fully satisfactory. Had it been, a new covenant would never have needed to be mentioned. Scripture looked to a new covenant and therefore itself indicated that the old covenant was not perfect.

(ii) This covenant will not only be new; it will be different in quality and in kind. In Greek there are two words for new. *Neos* (GSN3501) describes a thing as being new in point of time. It might be a precise copy of its predecessors, but since it has been made after the others, it is *neos* (GSN3501). *Kainos* (GSN2537) means not only new in point of time, but new in point of quality. A thing which is simply a reproduction of what went before may be *neos* (GSN3501) but it is not *kainos* (GSN2537). This covenant which Jesus introduces is *kainos* (GSN2537), not merely *neos* (GSN3501); it is different in quality from the old covenant. The writer to the Hebrews uses two words to describe the old covenant. He says that it is *geraskon* (GSN1095), which means not only ageing, but ageing into decay. He says that it is near to *aphanismos* (GSN0854). *Aphanismos* is the word that is used for wiping out a city, obliterating an inscription, or abolishing a law. So the covenant which Jesus brings is new in quality and completely cancels the old.

(iii) Wherein is this covenant new? It is new in its scope. It is going to include the house of Israel and the house of Judah. One thousand years before this, in the days of Rehoboam, the kingdom had split apart, into Israel with the ten tribes and Judah with the two, and these two sections had never come together again. The new covenant is going to unite that which has been divided; in it the old enemies will be at one.

(iv) It is new in its universality. All men would know God from the least to the greatest. That was something quite new. In the ordinary life of the Jews there was a complete cleavage. On the one hand there were the Pharisees and the orthodox who kept the law; on the other hand there were what were contemptuously called The People of the Land, the ordinary people who did not fully observe the details of the ceremonial law. They were completely despised. It was forbidden to have any fellowship with them; to marry one's daughter to one of them was worse than to throw her to a

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Hebrews 8:7-13

wild beast; it was forbidden to go on a journey with them; it was even forbidden, as far as it was possible, to have any trade or business dealings with them. To the rigid observers of the law the ordinary people were beyond the pale. But in the new covenant these breaches would no longer exist. All men, wise and simple, great and small, would know the Lord. The doors which had been shut were thrown wide open.

(v) There is one even more fundamental difference. The old covenant depended on obedience to an externally imposed law. The new covenant is to be written upon men's hearts and minds. Men would obey God not because of the terror of punishment, but because they loved him. They would obey him not because the law compelled them unwillingly to do so, but because the desire to obey him was written on their hearts.

(vi) It will be a covenant which will really effect forgiveness. See how that forgiveness is to come. God said that he would be gracious to their iniquities and could forget their sins. Now it is all of God. The new relationship is based entirely on his love. Under the old covenant a man could keep this relationship to God only by obeying the law; that is, by his own efforts. Now everything is dependent not on man's efforts, but solely on the grace of God. The new covenant puts men into relationship with a God who is still a God of justice but whose justice has been swallowed up in his love. The most tremendous thing about the new covenant is that it makes man's relationship to God no longer dependent on man's obedience but entirely dependent on God's love.

One thing remains to say. In Jeremiah's words about the new covenant there is no mention of sacrifice. It would seem that Jeremiah believed that in the new age sacrifice would be abolished as irrelevant; but the writer to the Hebrews cannot think except in terms of the sacrificial system and very shortly he will go on to speak of Jesus as himself the perfect sacrifice, whose death alone made the new covenant possible for men.

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Hebrews 9:1-5

THE GLORY OF THE TABERNACLE

Hebrews 9:1-5

So, then, the first tabernacle, too, had its ordinances of worship and its holy place, which was an earthly symbol of the divine realities. For the first tabernacle was constructed and in it there was the lampstand and the table with the shewbread, and it was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain there was that part of the tabernacle which was called the Holy of Holies. It was approached by means of the golden altar of incense, and it had in it the ark of the covenant, which was covered all over with gold. In the ark there was the golden pot with the manna and Aaron's rod which budded and the tables of the covenant. Above it there were the cherubim of glory, overshadowing the mercy seat; but this is not the place to speak about all these things in detail.

The writer to the Hebrews has just been thinking of Jesus as the one who leads us into reality. He has been using the idea that in this world we have only pale copies of what is truly real. The worship that men can offer is only a ghost-like shadow of the real worship which Jesus, the real High Priest, alone can offer. But even as he thinks of that his mind goes back to the Tabernacle (the Tabernacle, remember, not the Temple). Lovingly he remembers its beauty; lovingly he lingers on its priceless possessions. And the thought in his mind is this--if earthly worship was as beautiful as this, what must the true worship be like? If all the loveliness of the Tabernacle was only a shadow of reality, how surpassingly lovely the reality must be. He does not tell of the Tabernacle in detail; he only alludes to certain of its treasures. This was all he needed to do because his readers knew its glories and had them printed on their memories.

But we do not know them; therefore, let us see what the beauty of the earthly Tabernacle was like, always remembering that it was only a pale copy of reality.

The main description of the Tabernacle in the wilderness is in Exo.25-31 and Exo.35-40. God said to Moses: "Make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst" (Exo.25:8). It was constructed out of the freewill offerings of the people (Exo.25:1-7), who gave with such lavish generosity that a halt had to be called to their giving (Exo.36:5-7).

The Court of the Tabernacle was 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. It was surrounded by a curtain-like fence of fine, twined linen 7 1/2 feet high. The white linen stood for the wall of holiness that surrounds the presence of God. The curtain was supported by twenty pillars on the north and south sides, and by ten on the east and west sides; and the pillars were set in sockets of brass and had tops of silver. There was only one gate. It was on the east side and it was 30 feet wide and 7 1/2 feet high. It was made of fine, twined linen wrought with blue and purple and scarlet. In the court there were two things. There was the Brazen Altar, 7 1/2 feet square and 4 1/2 feet high and made of acacia wood sheathed in brass. Its top was a brazen grating on which the sacrifice was laid; and it had four horns to which the offering was bound. There was The Laver. The laver was made from the brass mirrors of the women (glass mirrors did not exist at that time) but its dimensions are not given.

The priests bathed themselves in the water in it before they carried out their sacred duties.

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The Tabernacle itself was constructed of forty-eight acacia beams, 15 feet high and 2 feet 3 inches wide. They were overlaid with pure gold and rested in sockets of silver. They were bound together by outside connecting rods and by a wooden tie-beam which ran through their centre. The Tabernacle was divided into two parts. The first--two-thirds of the whole--was The Holy Place; the inner part--one-third of the whole--a cube 15 feet on each side, was The Holy of Holies. The curtain which hung in front of The Holy Place was supported on five brass pillars and made of fine linen wrought in blue, purple and scarlet.

The Holy Place contained three things. (i) There was The Golden Lampstand. It stood on the south side; it was beaten out of a talent of solid gold; the lamps were fed with pure olive oil, and were always lit. (ii) On the north side stood The Table of the Shewbread. It was made of acacia wood covered with gold; it was 3 feet long, 1 1/2 feet wide and 2 feet 3 inches high. On it there were laid every Sabbath twelve loaves made of the finest flour, in two rows of six. Only the priests could eat these loaves when they were removed. They were changed every Sabbath. (iii) There was The Altar of Incense. It was of acacia wood sheathed in gold; it was 1 1/2 feet square and 3 feet high. On it incense, symbolising the prayers of the people rising to God, was burned every morning and evening.

In front of The Holy of Holies there was The Veil which was made of fine, twined linen, embroidered in scarlet and purple and blue, and with the cherubim upon it. Into The Holy of Holies no one but the High Priest might enter, and he only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and only after the most elaborate preparations. Within The Holy of Holies stood The Ark of the Covenant. It contained three things--the golden pot of the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the law. It was made of acacia wood sheathed outside and lined inside with gold. It was 3 feet 9 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches wide, and 2 feet 3 inches high. Its lid was called The Mercy Seat. On The Mercy Seat there were two cherubim of solid gold with overarching wings. It was there that the very presence of God rested, for he had said: "There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony" (Exo.25:22).

It was of all this beauty that the writer to the Hebrews was thinking--and yet it was only a shadow of reality. In his mind there was another thing of which he was to speak again--the ordinary Israelite could come only to the gate of the Tabernacle court; the priests and the Levites might enter the court; the priests alone might enter the Holy Place; and none but the High Priest might enter the Holy of Holies. There was beauty but it was a beauty in which the common man was barred from the inner presence of God. Jesus Christ took the barrier away and opened wide the way to God's presence for every man.

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Hebrews 9:6-10

THE ONLY ENTRY TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Hebrews 9:6-10

Since these preparations have been made, the priests continually enter into the first tabernacle as they perform the various acts of worship. But into the second tabernacle the High Priest alone enters, and that once a year and not without blood, which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people. By this the Holy Spirit is showing that the way into the Holy Place was not yet opened up so long as the first tabernacle stood. Now the first tabernacle stands for this present age, and according to its services sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper but which, since they are based on food and drink and various kinds of washings, are human regulations, laid down until the time of the new order should come.

Only the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies and that only on The Day of Atonement. It is of the ceremonies of that day that the writer to the Hebrews is here thinking. He did not need to describe them to his readers for they knew them. To them they were the most sacred religious ceremonies in all the world. If we are to understand the thought of the writer to the Hebrews we must have a picture of them in our minds. The main description is in Lev.16.

First, we must ask, what was the idea behind The Day of Atonement? As we have seen, the relationship between Israel and God was a covenant relationship. Sin on Israel's part broke that relationship, and the whole system of sacrifice existed to make atonement for sin and to restore the broken relationship. But what if there were some sins still not atoned for? What if there were some sins of which a man was not conscious? What if by some chance the altar itself had become defiled? That is to say, what if the sacrificial system was not performing the function it should?

The summary of the Day of Atonement is given in Lev.16:33:

And he shall make atonement for the sanctuary; and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting, and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.

It was one great comprehensive act of atonement for all sin. It was one grand day in which all things and all people were cleansed, so that the relationship between Israel and God should continue unbroken. To that end it was a day of humiliation. "You shall afflict yourselves" (Lev.16:29). It was not a feast but a fast. The whole nation fasted all day, even the boys and girls; and the really devout Jew prepared himself for it by fasting for the ten days which went before. The Day of Atonement comes ten days after the opening of the Jewish New Year, about the beginning of September in our calendar. It was the greatest of all days in the life of the High Priest.

Let us then see what happened. Very early in the morning the High Priest cleansed himself by washing. He donned his gorgeous robes of office, worn only on that day. There were the white linen breeches and the long white undergarment reaching down to the feet, woven in one piece. There was The Robe of the Ephod. It was dark blue and was a long robe with at the foot a fringe of

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blue, purple and scarlet tassels made in the form of pomegranates, interspersed with an equal number of little golden bells. Over this robe he put The Ephod itself The Ephod was probably a kind of linen tunic, embroidered in scarlet and purple and gold, with an elaborate girdle. On its shoulders were two onyx stones. The names of six of the tribes were engraved on one and six on the other. On the tunic was The Breastplate, a span square. On it were twelve precious stones with the names of the twelve tribes engraved upon them. So the High Priest carried the people to God on his shoulders and on his heart.

In the breastplate there was the Urim and the Thummim, which means lights and perfections (Exo.28:30). What exactly the Urim and the Thummim was is not known. It is known that the High Priest consulted it when he wished to know the will of God. It may be that it was a precious diamond inscribed with the consonants Y-H-W-H which are the consonants of Yahweh (HSN3068 and HSN3069), the name of God. On his head the High Priest put the tall mitre, of fine linen; and on the mitre there was a gold plate bound by a band of blue ribbon, and on the plate were the words: "Holiness unto the Lord." It is easy to imagine what a dazzling figure the High Priest must have presented on this his greatest day.

The High Priest began by doing the things that were done every day. He burned the morning incense, made the morning sacrifice, and attended to the trimming of the lamps on the seven-branched lampstand. Then came the first part of the special ritual of the day. Still dressed in his gorgeous robes, he sacrificed a bullock and seven lambs and one ram (Num.29:7). Then he removed his gorgeous robes, cleansed himself again in water, and dressed himself in the simple purity of white linen. There was brought to him a bullock bought with his own resources. He placed his hands on its head and, standing there in the full sight of the people, confessed his own sin and the sin of his house:

"Ah, Lord God, I have committed iniquity: I have transgressed: I have sinned--I and my house. O Lord, I entreat thee, cover over (atone for) the iniquities, the transgressions, and the sins, which I have committed, transgressed, and sinned before thee, I and my house, even as it is written in the law of Moses, thy servant, 'For in that day, he will cover over (atone) for you to make you clean. From all your transgressions before the Lord you shall be cleansed.'"

For the moment the bullock was left before the altar. And then followed one of the unique ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. Two goats were standing by, and beside the goats an urn with two lots in it. One lot was marked For Jehovah; the other was marked For Azazel, which is the phrase the King James Version translates The Scapegoat. The lots were drawn and laid one on the head of each goat. A tongue-shaped piece of scarlet was tied to the horn of the scapegoat. And for the moment the goats were left. Then the High Priest turned to the bullock which was beside the altar and killed it. its throat was slit and the blood caught by a priest in a basin. The basin was kept in motion so that the blood would not coagulate for soon it was to be used. Then came the first of the great moments. The High Priest took coals from the altar and put them in a censer; he took incense and put it in a special dish; and then he walked into the Holy of Holies to burn incense in the very presence of God.

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Hebrews 9:6-10

It was laid down that he must not stay too long "lest he put Israel in terror." The people literally watched with bated breath; and when he came out from the presence of God still alive, there went up a sigh of relief like a gust of wind.

When the High Priest came out from the Holy of Holies, he took the basin of the bullock's blood, went back into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it seven times up and seven times down. He came out, killed the goat that was marked For Jehovah, with its blood re-entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled again. Then he came out and mingled together the blood of the bullock and the goat and seven times sprinkled the horns of the altar of the incense and the altar itself. What remained of the blood was laid at the foot of the altar of the burnt offering. Thus the Holy of Holies and the altar were cleansed by blood from any defilement that might be on them.

Then came the most vivid ceremony. The scapegoat was brought forward. The High Priest laid his hands on it and confessed his own sin and the sin of the people; and the goat was led forth into the desert, "into a land not inhabited," laden with the sins of the people and there it was killed.

The priest turned to the slain bullock and goat and prepared them for sacrifice. Still in his linen garments he read scripture--Lev.16; Lev.23:27-32, and repeated by heart Num.29:7-11. He then prayed for the priesthood and the people. Once again he cleansed himself in water and rearranged himself in his gorgeous robes. He sacrificed, first, a kid of the goats for the sins of the people; then he made the normal evening sacrifice; then he sacrificed the already prepared parts of the bullock and the goat. Then once again he cleansed himself, took off his robes, and put on the white linen; and for the fourth and last time he entered the Holy of Holies to remove the censer of incense which still burned there. Once again he cleansed himself in water; once again he put on his vivid robes; then he burned the evening offering of incense, trimmed the lamps on the golden lampstand, and his work was done. In the evening he held a feast because he had been in the presence of God and had come out alive.

Such was the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the day designed to cleanse all things and all people from sin. That was the picture in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews and he was to make much of it. But there were certain things of which he was thinking at the moment.

Every year this ceremony had to be gone through again. Everyone but the High Priest was barred from the presence and even he entered in terror. The cleansing was a purely external one by baths of water. The sacrifice was that of bulls and goats and animal blood. The whole thing failed because such things cannot atone for sin. In it all the writer to the Hebrews sees a pale copy of the reality, a ghostly pattern of the one true sacrifice--the sacrifice of Christ. It was a noble ritual, a thing of dignity and beauty; but it was only an unavailing shadow. The only priest and the only sacrifice which can open the way to God for all men is Jesus Christ.

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Hebrews 9:11-14

THE SACRIFICE WHICH OPENS THE WAY TO GOD

Hebrews 9:11-14

But when Christ arrived upon the scene, a high priest of the good things which are to come, by means of a tabernacle which was greater and better able to produce the results for which it was meant, a tabernacle not made by the hands of men--that is, a tabernacle which did not belong to this world order--and not by the blood of goats and bullocks but by his own blood, he entered once and for all into the Holy Place because he had secured for us an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could by sprinkling cleanse those that were unclean so that their bodies became pure, how much more will the blood of Christ who, through the eternal Spirit offered himself spotless to God, cleanse your conscience so that you will be able to leave the deeds that make for death in order to become the servants of the living God?

When we try to understand this passage, we must remember three things which are basic to the thought of the writer to the Hebrews. (i) Religion is access to God. Its function is to bring a man into God's presence. (ii) This is a world of pale shadows and imperfect copies; beyond is the world of realities. The function of all worship is to bring men into contact with the eternal realities. That was what the worship of the Tabernacle was meant to do; but the earthly Tabernacle and its worship are pale copies of the real Tabernacle and its worship; and only the real Tabernacle and the real worship can give access to reality. (iii) There can be no religion without sacrifice. Purity is a costly thing; access to God demands purity; somehow man's sin must be atoned for and his uncleanness cleansed. With these ideas in his mind the writer to the Hebrews goes on to show that Jesus is the only High Priest who brings a sacrifice that can open the way to God and that that sacrifice is himself.

To begin with, he refers to certain of the great sacrifices which the Jews were in the habit of making under the old covenant with God. (i) There was the sacrifice of bullocks and of goats. In this he is referring to two of the great sacrifices on The Day of Atonement--of the bullock which the High Priest offered for his own sins and of the scapegoat which was led away to the wilderness bearing the sins of the people (Lev.16:15; Lev.16:21-22). (ii) There was the sacrifice of the red heifer. This strange ritual is described in Num.19. Under Jewish ceremonial law, if a man touched a dead body, he was unclean. He was barred from the worship of God, and everything and everyone he touched also became unclean. To deal with this there was a prescribed method of cleansing. A red heifer was slaughtered outside the camp. The priest sprinkled the blood of the heifer before the Tabernacle seven times. The body of the beast was then burned, together with cedar and hyssop and a piece of red cloth.

The resulting ashes were laid up outside the camp in a clean place and constituted a purification for sin. This ritual must have been very ancient for both its origin and its meaning are wrapped in obscurity. The Jews themselves told that once a Gentile questioned Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai on the meaning of this rite, declaring that it sounded like pure superstition. The Rabbi's answer was that it had been appointed by the Holy One and that men must not enquire into his reasons but should leave the matter there without explanation. In any event, the fact remains that it was one of the great rites of the Jews.

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Hebrews 9:11-14

The writer to the Hebrews tells of these sacrifices and then declares that the sacrifice that Jesus brings is far greater and far more effective. We must first ask what he means by the greater and more effective tabernacle not made with hands? That is a question to which no one can give an answer which is beyond dispute. But the ancient scholars nearly all took it in one way and said that this new tabernacle which brought men into the very presence of God was nothing else than the body of Jesus. It would be another way of saying what John said: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn.14:9). The worship of the ancient tabernacle was designed to bring men into the presence of God. That it could do only in the most shadowy and imperfect way. The coming of Jesus really brought men into the presence of God, because in him God entered this world of space and time in a human form and to see Jesus is to see what God is like.

The great superiority of the sacrifice Jesus brought lay in three things. (i) The ancient sacrifices cleansed a man's body from ceremonial uncleanness; the sacrifice of Jesus cleansed his soul. We must always remember this--in theory all sacrifice cleansed from transgressions of the ritual law; it did not cleanse from sins of the presumptuous heart and the high hand. Take the case of the red heifer. It was not moral uncleanness that its sacrifice wiped out but the ceremonial uncleanness consequent upon touching a dead body. A man's body might be clean ceremonially and yet his heart be torn with remorse. He might feel able to enter the tabernacle and yet far away from the presence of God. The sacrifice of Jesus takes the load of guilt from a man's conscience. The animal sacrifices of the old covenant might well leave a man in estrangement from God; the sacrifice of Jesus shows us a God whose arms are always outstretched and in whose heart is only love.

(ii) The sacrifice of Jesus brought eternal redemption. The idea was that men were under the dominion of sin; and just as the purchase price had to be paid to free a man from slavery, so the purchase price had to be paid to free a man from sin.

(iii) The sacrifice of Christ enabled a man to leave the deeds of death and to become the servant of the living God. That is to say, he did not only win forgiveness for a man's past sin, he enabled him in the future to live a godly life. The sacrifice of Jesus was not only the paying of a debt; it was the giving of a victory. What Jesus did puts a man right with God and what he does enables a man to stay right with God. The act of the Cross brings to men the love of God in a way that takes their terror of him away; the presence of the living Christ brings to them the power of God so that they can win a daily victory over sin.

Westcott outlines four ways in which Jesus' sacrifice of himself differs from the animal sacrifices of the old covenant.

(i) The sacrifice of Jesus was voluntary. The animal's life was taken from it; Jesus gave his life. He willingly laid it down for his friends.

(ii) The sacrifice of Jesus was spontaneous. Animal sacrifice was entirely the product of law; the sacrifice of Jesus was entirely the product of love. We pay our debts to a tradesman because we have to; we give a gift to our loved ones because we want to. It was not law but love that lay behind the sacrifice of Christ.

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(iii) The sacrifice of Jesus was rational. The animal victim did not know what was happening; Jesus all the time knew what he was doing. He died, not as an ignorant victim caught up in circumstances over which he had no control and did not understand but with eyes wide open.

(iv) The sacrifice of Jesus was moral. Animal sacrifice was mechanical; but Jesus' sacrifice was made, through the eternal Spirit. This thing on Calvary was not a matter of prescribed ritual mechanically carried out; it was a matter of Jesus obeying the will of God for the sake of men. Behind it there was not the mechanism of law but the choice of love.

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Hebrews 9:15-22

THE ONLY WAY IN WHICH SINS CAN BE FORGIVEN

Hebrews 9:15-22

It is through him that there emerges a new covenant between God and man; and the purpose behind this new covenant is that those who have been called might receive the eternal inheritance which has been promised to them; but this could happen only after a death had taken place, the purpose of which was to rescue them from the consequences of the transgressions which had been committed under the conditions of the old covenant. For where there is a will, it is necessary that there should be evidence of the death of the testator before the will is valid. It is in the case of dead people that a will is confirmed, since surely it cannot be operative when the testator is still alive. That is why even the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood. For, after every commandment which the law lays down had been announced by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, together with water and scarlet and hyssop, and sprinkled the book itself and all the people.

And as he did so, he said: "This is the blood of the covenant whose conditions God commanded you to observe." In like manner he sprinkled with blood the tabernacle also and all the instruments used in its worship. Under the conditions which the law lays down it is true to say that almost everything is cleansed by blood. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

This is one of the most difficult passages in the whole letter, although it would not be difficult to those who read the letter for the first time, for its methods of argument and expression and categories of thought would be familiar to them.

As we have seen, the idea of the covenant is basic to the thought of the writer, by which he meant a relationship between God and man. The first covenant was dependent on man's keeping of the law; as soon as he broke the law the covenant became ineffective. Let us remember that to our writer religion means access to God. Therefore, the basic meaning of the new covenant, which Jesus inaugurated, is that men should have access to God or, to put it another way, have fellowship with him. But here is the difficulty. Men come to the new covenant already stained with the sins committed under the old covenant, for which the old sacrificial system was powerless to atone. So, the writer to the Hebrews has a tremendous thought and says that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is retroactive. That is to say, it is effective to wipe out the sins of men committed under the old covenant and to inaugurate the fellowship promised under the new.

All that seems very complicated but at the back of it there are two great eternal truths. First, the sacrifice of Jesus gains forgiveness for past sins. We ought to be punished for what we have done and shut out from God; but because of what Jesus did the debt is wiped out, the breach is forgiven and the barrier is taken away. Second, the sacrifice of Jesus opens a new life for the future. It opens the way to fellowship with God. The God whom our sins had made a stranger, the sacrifice of Christ has made a friend. Because of what he did the burden of the past is rolled away and life becomes life with God.

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Hebrews 9:15-22

It is the next step in the argument which appears to us a fantastic way in which to argue. The question in the mind of the writer is why this new relationship with God should involve the death of Christ. He answers it in two ways.

(i) His first answer is--to us almost incredibly--founded on nothing other than a play on words. We have seen that the use of the word *diatheke* (GSN1242) in the sense of covenant is characteristically Christian, and that its normal secular use was in the sense of will or testament. Up to Heb.9:16 the writer to the Hebrews has been using *diatheke* (GSN1242) in the normal Christian sense of covenant; then, suddenly and without warning or explanation, he switches to the sense of will. Now a will does not become operative until the testator dies; so the writer to the Hebrews says that no *diatheke* (GSN1242), will, can be operative until the death of the testator so that the new *diatheke* (GSN1242), covenant, cannot become operative apart from the death of Christ. That is a merely verbal argument and is quite unconvincing to a modern mind; but it must be remembered that this founding of an argument on a play between two meanings of a word was a favourite method of the Alexandrian scholars in the time when this letter was written. In fact this very argument would have been considered in the days when the letter to the Hebrews was written an exceedingly clever piece of exposition.

(ii) His second answer goes back to the Hebrew sacrificial system and to Lev.17:11: "The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement." "Without the shedding of blood there can be no atonement for sin," was actually a well-known Hebrew principle. So the writer to the Hebrews goes back to the inauguration of the first covenant under Moses, the occasion when the people accepted the law as the condition of their special relationship with God. We are told how sacrifice was made and how Moses "took half of the blood and put it in basins; and half of the blood he threw against the altar." After the book of the law had been read and the people had signified their acceptance of it, Moses "took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Exo.24:1-8).

It is true that the memory of the writer to the Hebrews of that passage is not strictly accurate. He introduces calves and goats and scarlet and hyssop which come from the ritual of The Day of Atonement and he talks about the sprinkling of the Tabernacle, which at that time had not yet been built; but the reason is that these things are so much in his mind. His basic idea is that there can be no cleansing and no ratification of any covenant without the shedding of blood. Why that should be so he does not need to know. Scripture says it is so and that is enough for him. The probable reason is that blood is life, as the Hebrew saw it, and life is the most precious thing in the world; and man must offer his most precious thing to God.

All that goes back to a ritual which is only of antiquarian interest. But behind it there is an eternal principle--Forgiveness is a costly thing. Human forgiveness is costly. A son or a daughter may go wrong and a father or a mother may forgive; but that forgiveness brings tears, whiteness to the hair, lines to the face, a cutting anguish and then a long dull ache to the heart. It does not cost nothing. Divine forgiveness is costly. God is love but he is also holiness. He least of all can break the great moral laws on which the universe is built. Sin must have its punishment or the very structure of life disintegrates. And God alone can pay the terrible price that is necessary before men can be

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Hebrews 9:15-22

forgiven. Forgiveness is never a case of saying: "It's all right; it doesn't matter." It is the most costly thing in the world. Without the shedding of heart's blood there can be no forgiveness of sins. Nothing brings a man to his senses with such arresting violence as to see the effect of his sin on someone who loves him in this world or on the God who loves him for ever, and to say to himself: "It cost that to forgive my sin." Where there is forgiveness someone must be crucified.

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Hebrews 9:23-28

THE PERFECT PURIFICATION

Hebrews 9:23-28

So, then, if it was necessary that the things which are copies of the heavenly realities should be cleansed by processes like these, it is necessary that the heavenly realities themselves should be cleansed by finer sacrifices than those of which we have been thinking. It is not into a man-made sanctuary that Christ has entered--that would be a mere symbol of the things which are real. It is into heaven itself that he entered, now to appear on our behalf before the presence of God. It is not that he has to offer himself repeatedly, as the High Priest year by year enters into the Holy Place with a blood that is not his own. Were that so he would have had to suffer again and again since the world was founded. But now, as things are, once and for all, at the end of the ages, he has appeared with his sacrifice of himself so that our sins should be cancelled.

And just as it is laid down for men to die once and for kill and then to face the judgment, so Christ, after being once and for all sacrificed to bear the burden of the sins of many, will appear a second time, not this time to deal with sin, but for the salvation of those who are waiting for him.

The writer to the Hebrews, still thinking of the supreme efficacy of the sacrifice which Jesus made, begins with a flight of thought which, even for so adventurous a writer as he, is amazing. Let us remember again the letter's basic thought that the worship of this world is a pale copy of the real worship. The writer to the Hebrews says that in this world the Levitical sacrifices were designed to purify the means of worship. For instance, the sacrifices of the Day of Atonement purified the tabernacle and the altar and the Holy Place. Now he goes on to say that the work of Christ purifies not only earth but heaven. He has the tremendous thought of a kind of cosmic redemption that purified the whole universe, seen and unseen.

So he goes on to stress again the way in which the work and the sacrifice of Christ are supreme.

(i) Christ entered into no man-made Holy Place; he entered into the presence of God. We are to think of Christianity not in terms of Church membership but in terms of intimate fellowship with God.

(ii) Christ entered into the presence of God not only for his own sake but for ours. It was to open the way for us and plead our cause. In Christ there is the greatest paradox in the world, the paradox of the greatest glory and the greatest service, the paradox of one for whom the world exists and who exists for the world, the paradox of the eternal King and the eternal Servant.

(iii) The sacrifice of Christ never needs to be made again. Year after year the ritual of the Day of Atonement had to go on and the things that blocked the road to God had to be atoned for; but through Christ's sacrifice the road to God is for ever open. Men were always sinners and always will be but that does not mean that Christ must go on offering himself again and again. The road is open once and for all. We can have a faint analogy of that. For long a certain surgical operation may be impossible. Then some surgeon finds a way round the difficulties. From that day that same road is open to all surgeons. We may put it this way--nothing need ever be added to what Jesus Christ has done to keep open the way to God's love for sinning men.

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Finally, the writer to the Hebrews draws a parallel between the life of man and the life of Christ.

(i) Man dies and then comes the judgment. That itself was a shock to the Greek for he tended to believe that death was final. "When earth once drinks the blood of a man," said Aeschylus, "there is death once and for all and there is no resurrection." Euripides says: "It cannot be the dead to light shall come." "For the one loss is this that never mortal maketh good again the life of man--though wealth may be re-won." Homer makes Achilles say when he reaches the shades: "Rather would I live upon the soil as the hireling of another, with a landless man whose livelihood was small, than bear sway among all the dead who are no more." Mimmernus writes with a kind of despair:

"O Golden love, what life, what joy but thine?
Come death, when thou art gone, and make an end!"

There is a simple Greek epitaph:

"Farewell, tomb of Melite; the best of women lies here, who loved
her loving husband, Onesimus; thou wert most excellent, wherefore
he longs for thee after thy death, for thou wert the best of wives.
Farewell thou too, dearest husband, only love my children."

As G. Lowes Dickinson points out, in the Greek, the first and the last word of that epitaph is "Farewell!" Death was the end. When Tacitus is writing the tribute of biography to the great Agricola all he can finish with is an "if."

"If there be any habitation for the spirits of just men, if, as the
sages will have it, great souls perish not with the body, mayest
thou rest in peace."

"If" is the only word. Marcus Aurelius can say that when a man dies and his spark goes back to be lost in God, all that is left is "dust, ashes, bones, and stench." The significant thing about this passage of Hebrews is its basic assumption that a man will rise again. That is part of the certainty of the Christian creed; and the basic warning is that he rises to judgment.

(ii) With Christ it is different--he dies and rises and comes again, and he comes not to be judged but to judge. The early Church never forgot the hope of the Second Coming. It throbbed through their belief. But for the unbeliever that was a day of terror. As Enoch had it of the Day of the Lord, before Christ came: "For all you who are sinners there is no salvation, but upon you all will come destruction and a curse." In some way the consummation must come. If in that day Christ comes as a friend, it can be only a day of glory; if he comes as a stranger or as one whom we have regarded as an enemy, it can be only a day of judgment. A man may look to the end of things with joyous expectation or with shuddering terror. What makes the difference is how his heart is with Christ.

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Hebrews 10:1-10

THE ONLY TRUE SACRIFICE

Hebrews 10:1-10

Because the law is only a pale shadow of the blessings which are to come and not a real image of these things, it can never really fit for the fellowship of God those who seek to draw near to his presence with the sacrifices which have to be brought year by year and which go on for ever. For if these sacrifices could achieve that, would they not have stopped being brought because the worshipper had been once and for all brought into a state of purity and no longer had any consciousness of sin? So far from that, in them there is a year by year reminder of sin. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. That is why he says as he enters the world: "You did not desire sacrifice and offering; it is a body you have prepared for me. You took no pleasure in whole burnt-offerings and in sin-offerings.

So then I said: 'So then I come--in the roll of the book it is written of me--to do, O God, your will.'" At the beginning of this passage he says: "You did not desire sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt-offerings and sin-offerings and you took no pleasure in them," and it is such offerings as these that the law prescribes. Then he went on to say: "Behold, I come to do your will." He abolishes the kind of offerings referred to in the first quotation in order to establish the kind of offering referred to in the second. It is by this way of "the will" that we have been purified through the once and for all offering of the body of Christ.

To the writer to the Hebrews the whole business of sacrifice was only a pale copy of what real worship ought to be. The business of religion was to bring a man into a close relationship with God and that is what these sacrifices could never do. The best that they could do was to give him a distant and spasmodic contact with God. He uses two words to indicate what he means. He says that these things are a pale shadow. The word he uses is *skia* (GSN4639), the Greek for a shadow, and it means a nebulous reflection, a mere silhouette, a form without reality. He says that they do not give a real image. The word he uses is *eikon* (GSN1504), which means a complete representation, a detailed reproduction. It actually does mean a portrait, and would mean a photograph, if there had been such a thing in those days. In effect he is saying: "Without Christ you cannot get beyond the shadows of God."

He brings proof. Year by year the sacrifices of the Tabernacle and especially of the Day of Atonement go on. An effective thing does not need to be done again; the very fact of the repetition of these sacrifices is the final proof that they are not purifying men's souls and not giving full and uninterrupted access to God. Our writer goes further--he says that all they are is a reminder of sin. So far from purifying a man, they remind him that he is not purified and that his sins still stand between him and God.

Let us take an analogy. A man is ill. A bottle of medicine is prescribed for him. If that medicine effects a cure, every time he looks at the bottle thereafter, he will say: "That is what gave me back my health." On the other hand, if the medicine is ineffective, every time he looks at the bottle he will be reminded that he is ill and that the recommended cure was useless.

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Hebrews 10:1-10

So the writer to the Hebrews says with prophetic vehemence: "The sacrifice of animals is powerless to purify a man and give him access to God. All that such sacrifices can do is to remind a man that he is an uncured sinner and that the barrier of his sin is between himself and God." So far from erasing his sin, they underline it.

The only effective sacrifice is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. To make his point and to explain what is in his mind, Hebrews takes a quotation from Ps.40:6-9. In the Revised Standard Version, which is close to the original Hebrew, the passage runs:

"Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire;
but thou hast given me an open ear.
Burnt-offering and sin-offering thou hast not required.
Then I said: Lo I come;
In the roll of the book it is written of me.
I delight to do thy will, O my God."

The writer to the Hebrews quotes it differently and in the second line he has:

"A body you have prepared for me."

The explanation is that he was not quoting from the original Hebrew but from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. About 270 B.C. the task of translating the Old Testament into Greek was begun in Alexandria in Egypt. Obviously far more people in the ancient world read Greek than Hebrew. It is very likely that the writer to the Hebrews did not know any Hebrew at all and therefore it is the Septuagint that he uses. In any event the meaning of the two phrases is the same. "Thou hast given me an open ear," means, "You have so touched me that everything I hear I obey." It is the obedient ear of which the psalmist is thinking. "A body you have prepared for me," really means, "You created me that in my body and with my body I should do your will." In essence the meaning is the same.

The writer to the Hebrews has taken the words of the psalm and put them into the mouth of Jesus. What they say is that God wants not animal sacrifices but obedience to his will. In its essence sacrifice was a noble thing. It meant that a man was taking something dear to him and giving it to God to show his love. But human nature being what it is it was easy for the idea to degenerate and for sacrifice to be thought of as a way of buying God's forgiveness.

The writer to the Hebrews was not saying anything new when he said that obedience was the only true sacrifice. Long before him the prophets had seen how sacrifice had degenerated and had told the people that what God wanted was not the blood and the flesh of animals but the obedience of a man's life. That is precisely one of the noblest thoughts of the Old Testament men of God.

"And Samuel said, has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1Sam.15:22).

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Hebrews 10:1-10

"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving; and pay your vows to the Most High" (Ps.50:14).

"For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Ps.51:16-17).

"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." (Hos.6:6).

"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats.... Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me.... When you spread forth your hands. I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.... Cease to do evil, learn to do good" (Isa.1:11-20).

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Mic.6:6-8).

Always there had been voices crying out for God that the only sacrifice was that of obedience. Nothing but obedience could open the way to God; disobedience set up a barrier that no animal sacrifice could ever take away. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because he perfectly did God's will. He took himself and said to God: "Do with me as you will." He brought to God for men what no man had been able to bring--the perfect obedience, that was the perfect sacrifice.

If we are ever to have fellowship with God, obedience is the only way. What man could not offer, Jesus offered. In his perfect manhood he offered the perfect sacrifice of the perfect obedience. Through that the way was once and for all opened up for us.

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Hebrews 10:11-18

THE FINALITY OF CHRIST

Hebrews 10:11-18

Again, every priest stands every day engaged upon his service; he stands offering the same sacrifices over and over again, and they are sacrifices of such a kind that they can never take away sins. But he offered one single sacrifice for sin and then took his seat for ever at the right hand of God, and for the future he waits until his enemies are made the footstool of his feet. For by one offering and for all time he perfectly gave us that cleansing we need to enter into the presence of God. And to this the Holy Spirit is our witness, for after he has said: "This is the covenant I will make with them after these days, says the Lord. I will put my laws upon their hearts; and I will write them upon their minds," he goes on to say: "And I will not remember any more their sins and their breaches of the law." Now, where there is forgiveness of these things, a sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

Once again the writer to the Hebrews is drawing a series of implicit contrasts between the sacrifice that Jesus offered and the animal sacrifices that the priests offer.

(i) He stresses the achievement of Jesus. The sacrifice of Jesus was made once and is effective for ever; the animal sacrifices of the priests must be made over and over again, and even then they are not effective in any real way. Every day, so long as the Temple stood, the following sacrifices had to be carried out (Num.28:3-8). Every morning and every evening a male lamb of one year old, without spot and blemish, was offered as a burnt-offering. Along with it there was offered a meat-offering, which consisted of one tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of pure oil. There was also a drink-offering, which consisted of a quarter of a hin of wine. Added to that there was the daily meat-offering of the High Priest; it consisted of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour, mixed with oil, and baked in a flat pan; half was offered in the morning and half in the evening. In addition there was an offering of incense before these offerings in the morning and after them in the evening.

There was a kind of priestly tread-mill of sacrifice. Moffatt speaks of "the levitical drudges" who, day in day out, kept offering these sacrifices. There was no end to this process and it left men still conscious of their sin and alienated from God.

In contrast, Jesus had made a sacrifice that neither could nor need be repeated.

(a) It could not be repeated. There is something unrepeatable about any great work. It is possible to repeat the popular tunes of the day ad infinitum; to a great extent one echoes another. But it is not possible to repeat the Fifth or the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven; no one else will ever write anything like them. It is possible to repeat the kind of poetry that is written in sentimental journals and on Christmas cards; but not to repeat the blank verse of Shakespeare's plays or the hexametres of Homer's Iliad. These things stand alone. Certain things can be repeated; but all works of genius have a certain unrepeatable quality. It is so with the sacrifice of Christ. It is *sui generis*; it is one of these masterpieces which can never be done again.

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Hebrews 10:11-18

(b) It need not be repeated. For one thing, the sacrifice of Jesus perfectly shows the love of God. In that life of service and in that death of love, there stands fully displayed the heart of God. Looking at Jesus, we can say: "That is what God is like." For another thing, the life and death of Jesus was an act of perfect obedience and, therefore, the only perfect sacrifice. All scripture, at its deepest, declares that the only sacrifice God desires is obedience; and in the life and death of Jesus that is precisely the sacrifice that God received. Perfection cannot be improved upon. In Jesus there is at one and the same time the perfect revelation of God and the perfect offering of obedience. Therefore his sacrifice cannot and need not ever be made again. The priests must go on with their weary routine of animal sacrifice; but the sacrifice of Christ was made once and for all.

(ii) He stresses the exaltation of Jesus. It is with care that he picks his words. The priests stand offering sacrifice; Christ sits at the right hand of God. Theirs is the position of a servant; his is the position of a monarch. Jesus is the King come home, his task accomplished and his victory won. There is a wholeness about the life of Jesus that perhaps we ought to give more thought. His life is incomplete without his death; his death is incomplete without his resurrection; his resurrection is incomplete without his return to glory. It is the same Jesus who lived and died and rose again and is at the right hand of God. He is not simply a saint who lived a lovely life; not simply a martyr who died an heroic death; not simply a risen figure who returned to company with his friends. He is the Lord of glory. His life is like a panelled tapestry; to look at one panel is to see only a little bit of the story. The tapestry must be looked on as a whole before the full greatness is disclosed.

(iii) He stresses the final triumph of Jesus. He awaits the final subjugation of his enemies; in the end there must come a universe in which he is supreme. How that will come is not ours to know; but it may be that this final subjugation will consist not in the extinction of his enemies but in their submission to his love. It is not so much the power but the love of God which must conquer in the end.

Finally, as is his habit, the writer to the Hebrews clinches his argument with a quotation from scripture. Jeremiah, speaking of the new covenant which will not be imposed on a man from outside but which will be written on his heart, ends: "I will remember their sin no more" (Jer.31:34). Because of Jesus the barrier of sin is for ever taken away.

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Hebrews 10:19-25

THE MEANING OF CHRIST FOR US

Hebrews 10:19-25

Since then, brothers, in virtue of what the blood of Jesus has done for us, we can confidently enter into the Holy Place by the new and living way which Jesus inaugurated for us through the veil--that is, through his flesh--and since we have a great High Priest who is over the house of God, let us approach the presence of God with a heart wherein the truth dwells and with the full conviction of faith, with our hearts so sprinkled that they are cleansed from all consciousness of evil and with our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the undeviating hope of our creed, for we can rely absolutely on him who made the promises; and let us put our minds to the task of spurring each other on in love and fine deeds. Let us not abandon our meeting together--as some habitually do--but let us encourage one another, and all the more so as we see the Day approaching.

The writer to the Hebrews now comes to the practical implication of all that he has been saying. From theology he turns to practical exhortation. He is one of the deepest theologians in the New Testament but all his theology is governed by the pastoral instinct. He does not think merely for the thrill of intellectual satisfaction but only that he may the more forcibly appeal to men to enter into the presence of God.

He begins by saying three things about Jesus.

(i) Jesus is the living way to the presence of God. We enter into the presence of God by means of the veil, that is, by the flesh of Jesus. That is a difficult thought, but what he means is this. Before the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle hung the veil to screen off the presence of God. For men to enter into that presence the veil would have to be torn apart. Jesus' flesh is what veiled his godhead. Charles Wesley in his great hymn appealed to men:

"Veiled in flesh the godhead see."

It was when the flesh of Christ was rent upon the Cross that men really saw God. All his life showed God; but it was on the Cross that God's love really was revealed. As the rending of the Tabernacle veil opened the way to the presence of God, so the rending of the flesh of Christ revealed the full greatness of his love and opened up the way to him.

(ii) Jesus is the High Priest over God's house in the heavens. As we have seen so often, the function of the priest was to build a bridge between man and God. This means that Jesus not only shows us the way to God but also when we get there introduces us to his very presence. A man might be able to direct an enquirer to Buckingham Palace and yet be very far from having the right to take him into the presence of the Queen; but Jesus can take us the whole way.

(iii) Jesus is the one person who can really cleanse. In the priestly ritual, the holy things were cleansed by being sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices. Again and again the High Priest bathed himself in the laver of clear water. But these things were ineffective to remove the real pollution of

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sin. Only Jesus can really cleanse a man. His is no external purification; by his presence and his Spirit he cleanses the inmost thoughts and desires of a man until he is really clean.

From this the writer to the Hebrews goes on to urge three things.

(i) Let us approach the presence of God. That is to say, let us never forget the duty of worship. It is given to every man to live in two worlds, this world of space and time, and the world of eternal things. Our danger is that to become so involved in this world that we forget the other. As the day begins, as the day ends and ever and again in the midst of its activities, we should turn aside, if only for a moment, and enter God's presence. Every man carries with him his own secret shrine, but so many forget to enter it. As Matthew Arnold wrote:

"But each day brings its pretty dust
Our soon-choked souls to fill;
And we forget because we must,
And not because we will."

(ii) Let us hold fast to our creed That is to say, let us never lose our grip of what we believe. The cynical voices may try to take our faith away; the materialist and his arguments may try to make us forget God; the events of life may conspire to shake our faith. Stevenson said that he so believed in the ultimate decency of things that if he woke up in hell he would still believe in it; and we must have a grip on the faith that nothing can loosen.

(iii) Let us put our minds to the task of taking thought for others. That is to say, let us remember that we are Christians not only for our own sake but also for the sake of others. No man ever saved his soul who devoted his whole time and energy to saving it; but many a man has saved it by being so concerned for others that he forgot that he himself had a soul to save. It is easy to drift into a kind of selfish Christianity; but a selfish Christianity is a contradiction in terms.

But the writer to the Hebrews goes on to outline our duty to others in the most practical way. He sees that duty extend in three directions.

(i) We must spur each other to noble living. Best of all we can do that by setting the fine example. We can do it by reminding others of their traditions, their privileges, their responsibilities when they are likely to forget them. It has been said that a saint is someone in whom Christ stands revealed; we can seek ever to incite others to goodness by showing them Christ. We may remember how the dying soldier lad looked up at Florence Nightingale and murmured: "You're Christ to me."

(ii) We must worship together. There were some amongst those to whom the writer of the Hebrews was writing who had abandoned the habit of meeting together. It is still possible for a man to think that he is a Christian and yet abandon the habit of worshipping with God's people in God's house on God's day. He may try to be what Moffatt called "a pious particle," a Christian in isolation. Moffatt distinguishes three reasons which keep a man from worshipping with his fellow Christians.

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(a) He may not go to church because of fear. He may be ashamed to be seen going to church. He may live or work among people who laugh at those who do so. He may have friends who have no use for that kind of thing and may fear their criticism and contempt. He may, therefore, try to be a secret disciple; but it has been well said that this is impossible because either "the discipleship kills the secrecy or the secrecy kills the discipleship." It would be well if we remembered that, apart from anything else, to go to church is to demonstrate where our loyalty lies. Even if the sermon be poor and the worship tawdry, the church service still gives us the chance to show to men what side we are on.

(b) He may not go because of fastidiousness. He may shrink from contact with people who are "not like himself." There are congregations which are as much clubs as they are churches. They may be in neighbourhoods where the social status has come down; and the members who have remained faithful to them would be as much embarrassed as delighted if the poor people in the area came flooding in. We must never forget that there is no such thing as a "common" man in the sight of God. It was for all men, not only for the respectable classes, that Christ died.

(c) He may not go because of conceit. He may believe that he does not need the Church or that he is intellectually beyond the standard of preaching there. Social snobbery is bad but spiritual and intellectual snobbery is worse. The wisest man is a fool in the sight of God; and the strongest man is weak in the moment of temptation. There is no man who can live the Christian life and neglect the fellowship of the Church. If any man feels that he can do so let him remember that he comes to Church not only to get but to give. If he thinks that the Church has faults, it is his duty to come in and help to mend them.

(iii) We must encourage one another. One of the highest of human duties is that of encouragement. There is a regulation of the Royal Navy which says: "No officer shall speak discouragingly to another officer in the discharge of his duties." Eliphaz unwillingly paid Job a great tribute. As Moffatt translates it: "Your words have kept men on their feet" (Jb.4:4). Barrie somewhere wrote to Cynthia Asquith: "Your first instinct is always to telegraph to Jones the nice thing Brown said about him to Robinson. You have sown a lot of happiness that way." It is easy to laugh at men's ideals, to pour cold water on their enthusiasm, to discourage them. The world is full of discouragers; we have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many a time a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet. Blessed is the man who speaks such a word.

Finally, the writer to the Hebrews says that our Christian duty to each other is all the more pressing because the time is short. The Day is approaching. He is thinking of the Second Coming of Christ when things as we know them will be ended. The early Church lived in that expectation. Whether or not we still do, we must realize that no man knows when the summons to rise and go will come to him also. In the time we have it is our duty to do all the good we can to all the people we can in all the ways we can.

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Hebrews 10:26-31

THE THREAT AT THE HEART OF THINGS

Hebrews 10:26-31

For, if we deliberately sin after we have received full knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left. All that we can expect is to wait in terror for judgment and for that flaming wrath which will consume the adversaries of God. Anyone who regards the law of Moses as a dead letter dies without pity on the evidence of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you think, that man will be deemed worthy who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, who has failed to regard the blood of the new covenant, with which he was made fit for God's presence, as a sacred thing, and who has insulted the Spirit through whom God's grace comes to us? For we know who it was who said: "Vengeance belongs to me; it is I who will repay," and again: "The Lord will judge his people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Every now and again the writer to the Hebrews speaks with a sternness that is almost without parallel in the New Testament. Few writers have such a sense of the sheer horror of sin. In this passage his thoughts are going back to the grim instruction in Deut. 17:2-7. It is there laid down that, if any person shall be proved to have gone after strange gods and to have worshipped them, "you shall bring forth to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones. On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses he that is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from the midst of you."

The writer to the Hebrews has this horror of sin for two reasons.

First, he lived in a day when the Church had been under attack and would be under attack again. Its greatest peril was from the possible evil living and apostasy of its members. A Church in such circumstances could not afford to carry members who were a bad advertisement for the Christian faith. Its members must be loyal or nothing. That is still true. Dick Sheppard spent much of his life preaching in the open air to people who were either hostile or indifferent to the Church. From their questions and their arguments and their criticisms he said that he had learned that "the greatest handicap the Church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians." The unsatisfactory Christian undermines the very foundations of the Church.

Second, he was sure that sin had become doubly serious because of the new knowledge of God and of God's will which Jesus had brought. One of the old divines wrote a kind of catechism. He ends by asking what happens if men disregard the offer of Jesus Christ. His answer is that condemnation must necessarily follow, "and so much the more because thou hast read this book." The greater the knowledge, the greater the sin. The conviction of the writer to the Hebrews was that, if under the old law, apostasy was a terrible thing, it had become doubly terrible now that Christ had come.

He gives us three definitions of sin.

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Hebrews 10:26-31

(i) Sin is to trample Christ under foot. It is not mere rebelliousness against law; it is the wounding of love. A man can stand almost any attack on his body; the thing that beats him is a broken heart. It is told that in the days of the Hitler terror there was a man in Germany who was arrested, tried, tortured and put into a concentration camp. He faced it all with gallantry and emerged erect and unbroken. Then by accident he discovered who it was who had laid information against him--it was his own son. The discovery broke him and he died. Attack by an enemy he could bear; attack by one whom he loved killed him. When Caesar was murdered he faced his assassins with almost disdainful courage. But when he saw the hand of his friend Brutus raised to strike, he wrapped his head in his mantle and died. Once Christ had come, the awfulness of sin lay not in its breaking of the law but in its trampling of the love of Christ under foot.

(ii) Sin is the failure to see the sacredness of sacred things. Nothing produces a shudder like sacrilege. The writer to the Hebrews says in effect: "Look at what has been done for you; look at the shed blood and the broken body of Christ; look at what your new relationship to God cost; can you treat it as if it did not matter? Don't you see what a sacred thing it is?" Sin is the failure to realize the sacredness of that sacrifice upon the Cross.

(iii) Sin is the insult to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks within us, telling us what is right and wrong, seeking to check us when we are on the way to sin and to spur us on when we are drifting into lethargy. To disregard these voices is to insult the Spirit and to grieve the heart of God.

All through this, one thing comes out. Sin is not disobedience to an impersonal law; it is the wrecking of a personal relationship and the wounding of the heart of the God whose name is Father.

The writer to the Hebrews finishes his appeal with a threat. He quotes Deut.32:35-36 where the sternness of God is clearly seen. At the heart of Christianity there remains for ever a threat. To remove that threat is to emasculate the faith. At the end of the day it is not all one for the good and the bad man alike. No man can evade the fact that in the end judgment comes.

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Hebrews 10:32-39

THE DANGER OF DRIFT

Hebrews 10:32-39 (Part 1)

Remember the former days. Remember how, after you had been enlightened, you had to go through a hard struggle of suffering, partly because you yourselves were held up to insult and involved in affliction and partly because you had become partners with people whose life was like that. For you gave your sympathy to those in prison; you accepted the pillaging of your goods with joy; for you knew that you yourselves hold a possession which is better and which lasts. Do not throw away your confidence, for it is a confidence that has a great reward. You need fortitude so that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. For in a short time, a very short time, "He who is to come will come and he will not delay. And my just man shall live by faith; but if he shrinks back, my soul will not find pleasure in him." We are not men to shrink back from things and so to come to disaster, but we are men of a faith which will enable us to possess our souls.

There had been a time when those to whom this letter was written had been up against it. When first they had become Christians they had known persecution and plundering of their goods; and they had learned what it was to become involved with those under suspicion and unpopular. They had met that situation with gallantry and with honour; and now, when they were in danger of drifting away, the writer to the Hebrews reminds them of their former loyalty.

It is a truth of life that in many ways it is easier to stand adversity than to stand prosperity. Ease has ruined far more men than trouble ever did. The classic example is what happened to the armies of Hannibal.

Hannibal of Carthage was the one general who had routed the Roman legions. But winter came and the campaign had to be suspended. Hannibal wintered his troops in Capua which he had captured, a city of luxury. And one winter in Capua did what the Roman legions had not succeeded in doing. The luxury so sapped the morale of the Carthaginian troops that when the spring came and the campaign was resumed they were unable to stand before the Romans.

Ease had ruined them when struggle had only toughened them. That is often true of Christian life. Often a man can meet with honour the great hour of testing and of trial; and yet lets the time of plain sailing sap his strength and emasculate his faith.

The appeal of the writer to the Hebrews is one that could be made to every man. In effect, he says: "Be what you were at your best." If only we were always at our best, life would be very different. Christianity does not demand the impossible; but if we were always as honest, as kind, as courageous, as courteous as we can be, life would be transformed.

To be such we need certain things.

(i) We need to keep our hope before us. The athlete will make his great effort because the goal beckons him on. He will submit to the discipline of training because of the end in view. If life is

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Hebrews 10:32-39

only a day to day doing of the routine things, we may well sink into a policy of drift; but if we are on the way to heaven's crown, effort must always be at full pitch.

(ii) We need fortitude. Perseverance is one of the great unromantic virtues. Most people can start well and almost everyone can be fine in spasms. To everyone it is sometimes given to mount up with wings as eagles; in the moment of the great effort everyone can run and not be weary; but the greatest gift of all is to walk and not to faint.

(iii) We need the memory of the end. The writer to the Hebrews makes a quotation from Hab.2:3. The prophet tells his people that if they hold fast to their loyalty, God will see them through their present situation. The victory comes only to the man who holds on.

To the writer to the Hebrews life was a thing that was on its way to the presence of Christ. It was therefore never something that could be allowed to drift; it was its end which made the process of life all important, and only the man who endured to the end would be saved.

Here is a summons never to be less than our best; and always to remember that the end comes. If life is the road to Christ none can afford to miss it or to stop half-way.

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Hebrews 10:32-39

THE DANGER OF DRIFT

Hebrews 10:32-39 (Part 2)

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Hebrews 10:32-39

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Hebrews 11:1-3

THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

Hebrews 11:1-3

Faith means that we are certain of the things we hope for, convinced of the thing we do not see. It was because of faith that the men of old time had their record attested. It is by faith that we understand that the world was fashioned by the word of God, so that what is seen came into being out of what is unseen.

To the writer to the Hebrews faith is absolutely certain that what it believes is true and that what it expects will come. It is not the hope which looks forward with wistful longing; it is the hope which looks forward with utter conviction. In the early days of persecution they brought a humble Christian before the judges. He told them that nothing they could do could shake him because he believed that, if he was true to God, God would be true to him. "Do you really think," asked the judge, "that the like of you will go to God and his glory?" "I do not think," said the man, "I know." At one time Bunyan was tortured by uncertainty. "Everyone doth think his own Religion rightest," he said, "both Jews and Moors and Pagans; and how if all our Faith and Christ and Scriptures should be but a 'Think so' too?" But when the light broke he ran out crying, "Now I know! I know!" The Christian faith is a hope that has turned to certainty.

This Christian hope is such that it dictates all a man's conduct. He lives in it and he dies in it; and it is the possession of it which makes him act as he does.

As Silesius sang:

"With Hope for pilgrim's stall I go,
And Patience is my travelling dress
Wherewith through earthly weal and woe,
I fare to everlastingness."

Moffatt distinguishes three directions in which the Christian hope operates.

(i) It is belief in God against the world. If we follow the world's standards we may well have ease and comfort and prosperity; if we follow God's standards we may well have pain and loss and unpopularity. It is the conviction of the Christian that it is better to suffer with God than to prosper with the world. In the book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are confronted with the choice of obeying Nebuchadnezzar and worshipping the king's image or obeying God and entering the fiery furnace. Without hesitation they choose God (Dn.3). When Bunyan was due for trial he said: "With God's comfort in my poor soul, before I went down to the justices I begged of God that if I might do more good by being at liberty than in prison, then I might be set at liberty. But if not, his will be done." The Christian attitude is that in terms of eternity it is better to stake everything on God than to trust to the rewards of the world.

(ii) The Christian hope is belief in the spirit against the senses. The senses say to a man: "Take what you can touch and taste and handle and enjoy."

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Hebrews 11:1-3

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying."

The senses tell us to grasp the thing of the moment; the spirit tells us that there is something far beyond that. The Christian believes in the spirit rather than the senses.

(iii) The Christian hope is belief in the future against the present. Long ago Epicurus said the chief end of life was pleasure. But he did not mean what so many people think he meant. He insisted that we must take the long view. The thing which is pleasant at the moment may bring pain in the long run; the thing which hurts like fury at the moment may bring joy in the long run. The Christian is certain that in the long run no man can exile the truth for "great is truth, and in the end she will prevail."

It looked as if his judges had eliminated Socrates and as if Pilate had crushed Christ; but the verdict of the future reversed the verdict of the moment. Fosdick somewhere says that Nero once condemned Paul, but the years have passed on and the time has come when men call their sons Paul and their dogs Nero.

It is easy to argue: "Why should I refuse the pleasure of the moment for an uncertain future?" The Christian answer is that the future is not uncertain because it belongs to God; and it is enough that God has commanded and that God has promised.

The writer to the Hebrews goes on to say that it was precisely because the great heroes of the faith lived on that principle that they were approved by God. Every one of them refused what the world calls greatness and staked everything on God--and history proved them right.

The writer to the Hebrews goes further. He says that it is an act of faith to believe that God made this world and adds that the things which are seen emerged from the things which are not seen. This was aiming a blow at the current belief that God created the world out of existing matter which, being necessarily imperfect, meant that from the beginning this was an imperfect world. The writer to the Hebrews insists that God did not work with existing material but created the world from nothing. When he argued like this he was not interested in the scientific side of the matter; he wanted to stress the fact that this is God's world.

If we can grip that fact, two things follow. First, we will use it as such. We will remember that everything in it is God's and will try to use it as God would have us use it. Second, we will remember that, even when it may not look like it, somehow God is in control. If we believe that this is God's world then into our lives come a new sense of responsibility and a new power of acceptance, for everything belongs to God and all is in his hands.

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Hebrews 11:4

THE FAITH OF THE ACCEPTABLE OFFERING

Hebrews 11:4

It was by faith that Abel offered to God a fuller sacrifice than Cain and so gained the verdict of being a just man, for God himself witnessed to that fact on the grounds of the gifts he brought: and although he died because of his faith, he is still speaking to us.

The writer to the Hebrews begins his honour roll of faith with the name of Abel whose story is in Gen.4:1-15. Cain tilled the ground and brought to God an offering of the fruits of the ground; Abel was a flock-master and brought to God an offering from his flocks. God preferred the gift of Abel to the gift of Cain who, moved to bitter jealousy, murdered his brother and became an outcast upon the earth. In the original, the meaning of the story is difficult. There is no indication why God preferred the gift of Abel to the gift of Cain. It may well be that the only offering which a man can properly bring to God is his most precious possession. This is life itself, and to the Hebrews blood always stood for life. We can well understand that, because when the blood flows away, life ebbs away. On that principle the only true sacrifice to God was a sacrifice of blood. Abel's sacrifice was of a living creature, Cain's was not; therefore Abel's was the more acceptable.

But it may well be that the writer to the Hebrews is thinking not only of the story as it is in Genesis but also of the legends which gathered round it in Jewish folk-lore. The Jews themselves found the story puzzling and elaborated it in order to find a reason for God's rejection of Cain and for Cain's murder of Abel. The earliest legend tells how every time Eve bore children she bore twins, a boy and a girl, and that they were given to each other as man and wife. In the case of Abel and Cain, Adam tried to change this and planned to give the twin sister of Cain to Abel. Cain was bitterly dissatisfied. To settle the matter, Adam said to them: "Go, my sons, sacrifice to the Lord; and he whose sacrifice is accepted shall have the young girl. Take each of you offerings in your hand and go, sacrifice to the Lord and he will decide." So Abel, who was a shepherd, took his best lamb to the place of sacrifice; but Cain, who was a tiller of the ground, took the poorest sheaf of corn he could find and laid it on the altar. Whereupon fire descended from heaven and consumed Abel's offering so that not even the cinders were left while Cain's was left untouched. Adam then gave the girl to Abel and Cain was sorely vexed. One day Abel was asleep upon a mountain; and Cain came upon him and took a stone and crushed his head. Then he threw the dead body on his back and carried it about because he did not know what to do with it. He saw two crows fighting and one killed the other, then dug a hole with its beak and buried it. Cain said: "I have not the sense of this bird. I, too, will lay my brother in the ground," and he did so.

The Jews had still another story to explain the first murder. Cain and Abel could not agree as to what they should possess. So Abel devised a scheme whereby they might bring an end to contention. Cain took the earth and everything stationary; Abel took everything moveable. But in Cain's heart there was still bitter envy. One day he said to his brother: "Remove thy foot; thou standest on my property; the plain is mine." Abel ran to the hills but Cain pursued him, saying: "The hills are mine." Abel took refuge on the mountains but Cain still pursued him saying: "The mountains, too, are mine." And so, in his envy, he hunted his brother until he killed him.

Barclay's Commentary

Hebrews 11:4

At the back of this story lie two great truths. First, there is envy. Even the Greeks saw its horror. Demosthenes said: "Envy is the sign of a nature that is altogether evil." Euripides said: "Envy is the greatest of all diseases among men." There was a Greek proverb which said: "Envy has no place in the choir of God." Envy leads to bitterness; bitterness to hatred; and hatred to murder. Envy is that poison which can poison all life and kill all goodness. Second, there is this strange and eerie thought that Cain had discovered a new sin. One of the old Greek fathers said: "Up to this time no man had died so that Cain should know how to kill. The devil instructed him in this in a dream." It was Cain who introduced murder into the world. There is condemnation for the sinner; but there is still greater condemnation for the man who teaches another to sin. Such a man, even as Cain was, is banished from the face of God.

So the writer to the Hebrews says: "Although he died for his faith, he is still speaking to us." Moffatt finely comments: "Death is never the last word in the life of a righteous man." When a man leaves this world, he leaves something in it. He may leave something which will grow and spread like a canker; or he may leave something fine which blossoms and flourishes without end. He leaves an influence of good or ill; every one when he dies still speaks. May God grant to us to leave behind not a germ of evil but a lovely thing in which the lives of those who come afterwards will find blessing.

Barclay's Commentary

Hebrews 11:5-6

WALKING WITH GOD

Hebrews 11:5-6

It was by faith that Enoch was transferred from this to the other life so that he did not die but passed from men's sight, because God took him from one life to the other. For, before this change came to him it was testified that he pleased God. Apart from faith it is impossible to please God, for he who approaches God must believe that God is, and that he is the rewarder of those who spend their lives seeking him.

In the Old Testament the life of Enoch is summed up in one sentence: "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen.5:24). Many legends gathered around his name. He was said to be the first man skilled in tailoring and in sewing and that he instructed men how to cut out skins in the proper shape to make garments. He was said to be the first to teach men to make shoes to protect their feet. He was said to be the first to put pen to paper and instruct men from books.

Legend tells that with Enoch the Angel of Death made a compact of friendship. Enoch made three requests of him. First, to die and come back again so that he might know what death was like. Second, to see the abode of the wicked so that he might know what the punishment of the evil was like. Both these requests were granted. His third request was to be permitted to see into Paradise so that he might see what the blessed enjoyed. This also was granted, but Enoch, having been granted a glimpse of Paradise, never came back to earth again.

The simple statement in Genesis has a kind of mystical quality. In itself it does not say how Enoch died. It simply says that in God's good time he passed serenely from this earth. There were two specially famous interpretations of the death of Enoch.

(i) The Book of Wisdom (Wis.4:10ff.) has the idea that God took Enoch to himself when he was still young to save him from the infection of this world. "He was taken away while he lived amidst sinners.... He was snatched away lest evil should change his understanding or guile deceive his soul." This is another way of putting the famous classical saying: "Whom the gods love die young." It looks on death as a reward. It means that God loved Enoch so much that he removed him before age and degeneration descended hand in hand upon him.

(ii) Philo, the great Alexandrian Jewish interpreter, saw in Enoch the great pattern of repentance. He was changed by repentance from the life that is apart from God to the life that walks with God.

The writer to the Hebrews reads into the simple statement of the Old Testament passage the idea that Enoch did not die at all but that in some mystic way God took him to himself. But surely the meaning is much simpler. In a wicked and corrupt generation Enoch walked with God and so when the end came to him, there was no shock or interruption. Death merely took him into God's nearer presence. Because he walked with God when other men were walking away from him, he daily came nearer to him and death was no more than the last step that took him into the very presence of that God with whom he had always walked.

Barclay's Commentary Hebrews 11:5-6

We cannot think of Enoch without thinking of the different attitudes to death. The sheer serenity of the Old Testament statement, so simple and yet so moving, points forward to the Christian attitude.

(i) There are those who have thought of death as mysterious and inexplicable. William Morris wrote:

"Death have we hated, knowing not what it meant."

Bacon said: "Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark." To some, it has always been the terrifying unknown giving rise to what Hamlet called "that dread of something after death."

(ii) There are those who simply have seen in death the one inevitable thing in life. Shakespeare makes Caesar say in Julius Caesar:

"It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come."

And in Cymbeline he writes with a strange fatalistic beauty:

"Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.
"Fear no more the frown o' the great,
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke:
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the reed is as the oak:
The sceptre, Teaming, physic must
All follow this, and come to dust.
"Fear not more the lightning-flash,
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finish'd joy and moan:
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust."

Death is inevitable and there is nothing to be gained by struggling against it.

(iii) Some have seen in death sheer extinction. It was that loveliest of Roman poets, Catullus, who pled with Lesbia for her kisses because the night was coming:

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Hebrews 11:5-6

"Lesbia mine, let's live and love!
Give no do it for tattle of
Crabbed old censorious men;
Suns may set and rise again,
But when our short day takes flight
Sleep we must one endless night."

To die was to go out to nothingness and be lost in an eternal sleep.

(iv) Some have seen in death the supreme terror and the unmitigated evil. In Measure for Measure Shakespeare makes Claudio say:

"Death is a fearful thing.
Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world....
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death."

To Claudio the worst and bitterest of life was to be preferred to death. W. S. Gilbert wrote in The Yeomen of the Guard:

"Is life a boon?
If so, it must befall
That Death, whene'er he call,
Must call too soon."

Robert Burns wrote of the early death of Highland Mary:

"But oh! fell death's untimely frost
That nipt my flower sae early!"

There are those who have seen only the grim terroriser and despoiler in death.

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Hebrews 11:5-6

(v) Many have seen in death release. Weary of the world and of life, they have seen it as escape. Keats said that he had been "half in love with easeful death." Shakespeare in one of his sonnets cried:

"Tir'd with all these, for restful death I cry."

Nicholas Rowe wrote: "Death is the privilege of human nature." The Stoics held that the gods had given men the gift of life and the still greater gift of taking their own lives away. Swinburne best of all caught this mood of world-weariness in The Garden of Proserpine:

"From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives forever,
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Then star nor sun shall waken,
Nor any change of light;
Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight;
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal
Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night."

There are those for whom death is good because it is the end of life.

(vi) Some have seen in death transition--not an end, but a stage on the way; not a door closing, but a door opening. Longfellow wrote:

"There is no Death! What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call death."

George Meredith wrote:

"Death met I too,
And saw the dawn glow through."

To such death has always been a call to come up higher, a crossing from the dark to the dawn.

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Hebrews 11:5-6

(vii) Some have seen death as an adventure. As Barrie made Peter Pan say: "To die will be an awfully big adventure." Charles Frohman, who had known Barrie so well, went down with the Lusitania in that disaster of 7 May 1915. His last words were: "Why fear death? It is the most beautiful adventure in life." An old scholar who was dying turned to his friends: "Do you realize," he said, "that in an hour or two I will know the answers for which we have been searching all our lives?" To such death is the adventure of supreme discovery.

(viii) Above all, there are those, like Enoch, who have seen death as an entering into the nearer presence of him with whom they have lived for so long. If we have lived with Christ, we may die in the certainty that we go to be for ever with our Lord.

In this passage the writer to the Hebrews lays down in addition the two great foundation acts of faith of the Christian life.

(i) We must believe in God. There can be no such thing as religion without that belief. Religion began when men became aware of God; it ceases when they live a life in which for them God does not exist.

(ii) We must believe that God is interested. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, we must believe that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

There were those in the ancient world who believed in the gods, but they believed that they lived out in the spaces between the worlds, entirely unaware of these strange animals called men. "God," said Epicurus as a first principle, "does nothing." There are many who believe in God but do not believe that he cares. It has been said that no astronomer can be an atheist; but it has also been said that an astronomer is bound to believe that God is a mathematician. But a God who is a mathematician need not care. Men have called God The First Principle, The First Cause, The Creative Energy, The Life Force. These are the statements of men who believe in God, but not in a God who cares.

When Marcus Aurelius was asked why he believed in the gods, he said: "True, the gods are not discernible by human sight, but neither have I seen my soul and yet I honour it. So then I believe in the gods and I honour them, because again and again I have experienced their power." Not logic but life convinced him of the gods. Seneca said: "The first essential of the worship of the gods is to believe that there are gods...and to know those gods who preside over the world, because they control the universe with their power, and work for the safety of the whole human race, while they still remember each individual person." Epictetus said: "You must know that the most important thing in reverence for the gods is to have right beliefs that they are and that they order all things righteously and well."

We must believe not only that God exists but also that he cares and is involved in the human situation. For the Christian that is easy, for God came to the world in Jesus Christ to tell us how much he cares.

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Hebrews 11:7

THE MAN WHO BELIEVED IN GOD'S MESSAGE

Hebrews 11:7

It was by faith that Noah, when he had been informed by God about things that were still unseen, reverently accepted the message and built an ark to preserve his household in safety. Through that faith he passed judgment on the world and became an heir of the righteousness which is the result of faith.

The Old Testament story of Noah is in Gen.6-8. The earth was so wicked that God decided that there remained nothing to do but destroy it. He told Noah his purpose of judgment and instructed him to build an ark in which he and his family and the representatives of the animal creation might be saved. With reverence and obedience Noah took God at his word and so in the destruction of the world he was preserved.

As is usually the case, legend adds many a detail to this story. The writer to the Hebrews must have known these legends and they must have helped to add vividness to the picture in his mind. One story tells how Noah was in doubt as to the shape he was to give the ark. God revealed to him that it was to be modelled on a bird's belly and was to be constructed of teak wood. Noah planted a teak tree and in twenty years it grew to such a size that out of it he was able to build the entire ark. Another story tells that, after he had been forewarned by God, Noah made a bell of plane wood, about five feet high, and that he sounded it every day, morning, noon and evening. When he was asked why, he answered: "To warn you that God will send a deluge to destroy you all." Another story tells that, when Noah was building the ark, the people laughed at him and counted him mad. But he said to them: "Though you rail at me now, the time will come when I shall rail at you; for you will learn to your cost who it is that punishes the wicked in this world and reserves for them a further punishment in the world to come."

Even more than Abel and Enoch, Noah stands out as a man of faith.

(i) Noah took God at his word. He believed the message which God sent him. God's message might look foolishness at the moment; but Noah believed it and staked everything on it. Obviously if he was going to accept that word of God, he had to lay aside his normal activities and concentrate on doing what his message commanded. Noah's life was one continued and concentrated preparation for what God had said would come.

The choice comes to every man either to listen to or to disregard the message of God. He may live as if that message is of no importance or as if it is the most important thing in the world. We may put it in another way--Noah was the man who heeded the warning of God; and because he heeded he was saved from disaster. God's warning comes to us in many ways. It may come from conscience; it may come from some direct word of God to our souls; it may come from the advice or the rebuke of some good and godly man; it may leap out at us from God's Book or challenge us in some sermon. Wherever it comes from, we neglect it at our peril.

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Hebrews 11:7

(ii) Noah was not deterred by the mockery of others. When the sun was shining, his conduct must have looked like that of a fool. Who ever in his senses built a great hulk of a ship on dry land far from the sea? The man who takes God's word may often have to adopt a course of action which looks like madness.

We have only to think of the early days of the Church. One man meets a friend. He says to him: "I have decided to become a Christian." The other man replies: "Do you know what happens to Christians? They are outlaws. They are imprisoned, thrown to the lions, crucified, burned." The first man replies: "I know." And the other says despairingly: "You must be mad."

It is one of the hardest challenges of Christianity that we have to be prepared to be sometimes a fool for Jesus' sake. We should never forget that there was a day when his friends came and tried to get him to go home because they thought that he was mad. The wisdom of God is so often foolishness with men.

(iii) Noah's faith was a judgment on others. That is why, at least in one sense, it is dangerous to be a Christian. It is not that the Christian is self-righteous; it is not that he is censorious; it is not that he goes about finding fault with other people; it is not that he says: "I told you so." It often happens that simply by being himself the Christian passes judgment on other people. Alcibiades that brilliant but wild young man of Athens used to say to Socrates: "Socrates, I hate you, for every time I meet you, you show me what I am." One of the finest men who ever lived in Athens was Aristides, who was called "the just." But they voted to banish him. One man, asked why he had so voted, answered: "Because I am tired of hearing Aristides called 'the just.'" There is danger in goodness, for in its light evil stands condemned.

(iv) Noah was righteous through faith. It so happens that he is the first man in the Bible to be called dikaios (GSN1342), righteous (Gen.6:9). His goodness consisted in the fact that he took God at his word. When other men broke God's commandments, Noah kept them; when other men were deaf to God's warnings, Noah listened to them; when other men laughed at God, Noah revered him. It has been said of Noah that "he threw the dark scepticism of the world into relief against his own shining faith in God." In an age when men disregarded God, for Noah he was the supreme reality in the world.

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Hebrews 11:8-10

THE ADVENTURE AND THE PATIENCE OF FAITH

Hebrews 11:8-10

It was by faith that Abraham, when he was caned, showed his obedience by going out to a place which he was going to receive as an inheritance, and he went out not knowing where he was to go. It was by faith that he sojourned in the land that had been promised to him, as though it had been a foreign land, living in tents, in the same way as did Isaac and Jacob, who were his coheirs in the promise of it. For he was waiting for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

The call of Abraham is told with dramatic simplicity in Gen.12:1. Jewish and eastern legends gathered largely round Abraham's name and some of them must have been known to the writer to the Hebrews. The legends tell how Abraham was the son of Terah, commander of the armies of Nimrod. When Abraham was born a very vivid star appeared in the sky and seemed to obliterate the others. Nimrod sought to murder the infant but Abraham was concealed in a cave and his life saved. It was in that cave the first vision of God came to him. When he was a youth he came out of the cave and stood looking across the face of the desert. The sun rose in all its glory and Abraham said: "Surely the sun is God, the Creator!" So he knelt down and worshipped the sun. But when evening came, the sun sank in the west and Abraham said: "No! the author of creation cannot set!" The moon arose in the east and the stars came out. Then Abraham said: "The moon must be God and the stars his host!" So he knelt down and adored the moon. But after the night was passed, the moon sank and the sun rose again and Abraham said: "Truly these heavenly bodies are no gods, for they obey law; I will worship him who imposed the law upon them."

The Arabs have a different legend. They tell how Abraham saw many flocks and herds and said to his mother: "Who is the lord of these?" She answered: "Your father, Terah." "And who is the lord of Terah?" the lad Abraham asked. "Nimrod," said his mother. "And who is the lord of Nimrod?" asked Abraham. His mother bade him be quiet and not push questions too far; but already Abraham's thoughts were reaching out to him who is the God of all. The legends go on to tell that Terah not only worshipped twelve idols, one for each of the months, but was also a manufacturer of idols. One day Abraham was left in charge of the shop. People came in to buy idols. Abraham would ask them how old they were and they would answer perhaps fifty or sixty years of age. "Woe to a man of such an age," said Abraham, "who adores the work of one day!" A strong and hale man of seventy came in. Abraham asked him his age and then said: "You fool to adore a god who is younger than yourself!" A woman came in with a dish of meat for the gods. Abraham took a stick and smashed all the idols but one, in whose hands he set the stick he had used. Terah returned and was angry. Abraham said: "My father, a woman brought this dish of meat for your gods; they all wanted to have it and the strongest knocked the heads off the rest, lest they should eat it all." Terah said: "That is impossible for they are made of wood and stone." And Abraham answered: "Let thine own ear hear what thine own mouth has spoken!"

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Hebrews 11:8-10

All these legends give us a vivid picture of Abraham searching after God and dissatisfied with the idolatry of his people. So when God's call came to him he was ready to go out into the unknown to find him! Abraham is the supreme example of faith.

(i) Abraham's faith was the faith that was ready for adventure. God's summons meant that he had to leave home and family and business; yet he went. He had to go out into the unknown; yet he went. In the best of us there is a certain timorousness. We wonder just what will happen to us if we take God at his word and act on his commands and promises.

Bishop Newbigin tells of the negotiations which led to the formation of the United Church of South India. He had a share in these negotiations and in the long discussions which were necessary. Things were frequently held up by cautious people who wished to know just where each step was taking them, until in the end the chairman reminded them that a Christian has no right to ask where he is going.

Most of us live a cautious life on the principle of safety first; but to live the Christian life there is necessary a certain reckless willingness to adventure. If faith can see every step of the way, it is not really faith. It is sometimes necessary for the Christian to take the way to which the voice of God is calling him without knowing what the consequences will be. Like Abraham he has to go out not knowing where he is going.

(ii) Abraham's faith was the faith which had patience. When he reached the promised land, he was never allowed to possess it. He had to wander in it, a stranger and a tent-dweller, as the people were some day to wander in the wilderness. To Abraham God's promise never came fully true; and yet he never abandoned his faith.

It is characteristic of the best of us that we are in a hurry. To wait is even harder than to adventure. The hardest time of all is the time in between. At the moment of decision there is the excitement and the thrill; at the moment of achievement there is the glow and glory of satisfaction; but in the intervening time there is necessary the ability to wait and work and watch when nothing seems to be happening. It is then that we are so liable to give up our hopes and lower our ideals and sink into an apathy whose dreams are dead. The man of faith is the man whose hope is flaming bright and whose effort is intensely strenuous even in the grey days when there is nothing to do but to wait.

(iii) Abraham's faith was the faith which was looking beyond this world. The later legends believed that at the moment of his call Abraham was given a glimpse of the new Jerusalem. In the Apocalypse of Baruch God says: "I showed it to my servant by night" (4: 4). In 4 Ezra the writer says: "It came to pass when they practised ungodliness before thee, that thou didst choose one from among them whose name was Abraham; him thou didst love and to him only thou didst reveal the end of the times, secretly, by night" (4: 13). No man ever did anything great without a vision which enabled him to face the difficulties and discouragements of the way. To Abraham there was given the vision; and, even when his body was wandering in Palestine, his soul was at home with God. God cannot give us the vision unless we permit him; but if we wait upon him, even in earth's desert places he will send us the vision and with it the toil and trouble of the way become all worth while.

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Hebrews 11:11-12

BELIEVING THE INCREDIBLE

Hebrews 11:11-12

It was by faith that Sarah, too, received power to conceive and to bear a son, although she was beyond the age for it, for she believed that he who gave the promise could be absolutely relied upon. So from one man, and he a man whose body had lost its vitality, there were born descendants, as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, as countless as the sand upon the seashore.

The story of the promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah is told in Gen.17:15-22; Gen.18:9-15; Gen.21:1-8. Its wonder is that both Abraham and Sarah were ninety years old, long past the age of begetting or bearing a child; and yet, according to the old story, that promise was made and came true.

The reaction of Abraham and Sarah to the promise of God followed a threefold course.

(i) It began with sheer incredulosity. When Abraham heard the promise he fell upon his face and laughed (Gen.17:17). When Sarah heard it she laughed within herself (Gen.18:12). On first hearing of the promises of God, the human reaction often is that this is far too good to be true.

"How thou canst think so well of us,
And be the God thou art,
Is darkness to my intellect,
But sunshine to my heart."

There is no mystery in all creation like the love of God. That he should love men and suffer and die for them is something that staggers us into sheer incredulity. That is why the Christian message is the gospel, good news; it is news so good that it is almost impossible to believe it true.

(ii) It passed into dawning realization. After the incredulity came the dawning realization that this was God who was speaking; and God cannot lie. The Jews used to lay it down as a primary law for a teacher that he must never promise his pupils what he was unwilling or unable to perform; to do so would be to accustom the pupils thus early to the broken word. When we remember that the one who makes the promise is God, there comes the realization that however astonishing that promise may be, it must none the less be true.

(iii) It culminated in the ability to believe in the impossible. That Abraham and Sarah should have a child, humanly speaking, was impossible. As Sarah said: "Who would have said that Sarah would suckle children?" (Gen.21:7). But, by the grace and the power of God, the impossible became true. There is something here to challenge and uplift the heart of every man. Cavour said that the first essential of a statesman is "the sense of the possible." When we listen to men planning and arguing and thinking aloud, we get the impression of a vast number of things in this world which are known to be desirable but dismissed as impossible. Men spend the greater part of their lives putting

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Hebrews 11:11-12

limitations on the power of God. Faith is the ability to lay hold on that grace which is sufficient for all things in such a way that the things which are humanly impossible become divinely possible. With God all things are possible, and, therefore, the word impossible has no place in the vocabulary of the Christian and of the Christian Church.

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Hebrews 11:13-16

SOJOURNERS AND STRANGERS

Hebrews 11:13-16

All these died without obtaining possession of the promises. They only saw them from far away and greeted them from afar, and they admitted that they were strangers and sojourners upon the earth. Now people who speak like that make it quite clear that they are searching for a fatherland. If they were thinking of the land from which they had come out, they would have had time to return. In point of fact they were reaching out after something better, I mean, the heavenly country. It was because of that that God was not ashamed to be called their God, for he had prepared a city for them.

None of the patriarchs entered into the full possession of the promises that God had made to Abraham. To the end of their days they were nomads, never living a settled life in a settled land. They had to be for ever moving on. Certain great permanent truths emerge from them.

(i) They lived for ever as strangers. The writer to the Hebrews uses three vivid Greek words about them.

(a) In Heb.11:13 he calls them *xenoi* (GSN3581). *Xenos* is the word for a stranger and a foreigner. In the ancient world the fate of the stranger was hard. He was regarded with hatred and suspicion and contempt. In Sparta *xenos* (GSN3581) was the equivalent of *barbaros* (GSN0915), barbarian. A man writes complaining that he was despised "because I am a *xenos* (GSN3581)". Another man writes that, however poor a home is, it is better to live at home than *epi* (GSN1909) *xenes* (GSN3581), in a foreign country. When clubs had their common meal, those who sat down to it were divided into members and *xenoi* (GSN3581). *Xenos* (GSN3581) can even mean a refugee. All their lives the patriarchs were foreigners in a land that never was their own.

(b) In Heb.11:9 he uses the word *paroikein* (GSN3939), to sojourn, of Abraham. A *paroikos* (GSN3941) was a resident alien. The word is used of the Jews when they were captives in Babylon and in Egypt. A *paroikos* (GSN3941) was not very much above a slave in the social scale. He had to pay an alien tax. He was always an outsider and only on payment a member of the community.

(c) In Heb.11:13 he uses the word *parepidemos* (GSN3927). A *parepidemos* was a person who was staying there temporarily and who had his permanent home somewhere else. Sometimes his stay was strictly limited. A *parepidemos* (GSN3927) was a man in lodgings, a man without a home in the place where life had sent him. All their lives the patriarchs were men who had no settled place that they could call home. It is to be noted that to dwell in a foreign land was a humiliating thing in ancient days; to the foreigner in any country a certain stigma attached. In the Letter of Aristeas the writer says: "It is a fine thing to live and to die in one's native land; a foreign land brings contempt to poor men and shame to rich men, for there is the lurking suspicion that they have been exiled for the evil they have done." In Ecclesiasticus (Sir.29:22-28) there is a wistful passage:

"Better the life of the poor under a shelter of logs

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Than sumptuous fare in the house of strangers.
With little or much be contented:
So wilt thou not have to bear the reproach of thy wandering.
An evil life it is to go from house to house,
And where thou art a stranger thou must not open thy mouth.
A stranger thou art in that case and drinkest contempt;
And besides this thou wilt have to hear bitter things:
'Come hither, sojourner, and furnish my table,
And if thou hast aught feed me therewith';
Or, 'Get thee gone, sojourner, from the face of honour,
My brother is come as my guest, I have need of my house.'
These things are grievous to a man of understanding:
Upbraiding concerning sojourning, and the reproach of a
moneylender."

At any time it is an unhappy thing to be a stranger in a strange land, but in ancient days to this natural unhappiness there was added the bitterness of humiliation.

All their days the patriarchs were strangers in a strange land. That picture of the sojourner became a picture of the Christian life. Tertullian said of the Christian: "He knows that on earth he has a pilgrimage but that his dignity is in heaven." Clement of Alexandria said: "We have no fatherland on earth." Augustine said: "We are sojourners exiled from our fatherland." It was not that the Christians were foolishly other-worldly, detaching themselves from the life and work of this world; but they always remembered that they were people on the way. There is an unwritten saying of Jesus: "The world is a bridge. The wise man will pass over it but will not build his house upon it." The Christian regards himself as the pilgrim of eternity.

(ii) In spite of everything these men never lost their vision and their hope. However long that hope might be in coming true, its light always shone in their eyes. However long the way might be, they never stopped tramping along it. Robert Louis Stevenson said: "It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive." They never wearily gave up the journey; they lived in hope and died in expectation.

(iii) In spite of everything they never wished to go back. Their descendants, when they were in the desert, often wished to go back to the fleshpots of Egypt. But not the patriarchs. They had begun and it never struck them to turn back. In flying there is what is called the point of no return. When the aeroplane has reached that point it cannot go back. Its petrol supply has reached such a level that there is nothing left but to go on. One of the tragedies of life is the number of people who turn back just a little too soon. One further effort, a little more waiting, a little more hoping, would make the dream come true. Immediately a Christian has set out on some enterprise sent him by God, he should feel that he has already passed the point of no return.

(iv) These men were able to go on because they were haunted by the things beyond. The man with the wanderlust is lured on by the thought of the countries he has never yet seen. The great artist or composer is driven by the thought of the performance he has never yet given and the wonder he has never yet produced. Stevenson tells of an old byreman who spent all his days amidst

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the muck of the byre. Someone asked him if he never got tired of it all. He answered; "He that has something ayont (beyond) need never weary." These men had the something beyond--and so may we.

(v) Because these men were what they were, God was not ashamed to be called their God. Above all things, he is the God of the gallant adventurer. He loves the man who is ready to venture for his name. The prudent, comfort-loving man is the very opposite of God. The man who goes out into the unknown and keeps going on will in the end arrive at God.

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Hebrews 11:17-19

THE SUPREME SACRIFICE

Hebrews 11:17-19

It was by faith that Abraham offered up Isaac when he was put to the test. He was willing to offer up even his only son, although it had been said to him: "It is in Isaac that your descendants will be named." He was willing to do this for he reckoned that God was able to raise him even from the dead. Hence he did receive him back which is a parable of the resurrection.

The Isaac story, told in Gen.22:1-18, is that most dramatic account of how Abraham met the supreme test of the demand for the life of his own son. To some extent this story has fallen into disrepute. It is excluded from syllabuses of religious education because it is held to teach an unacceptable view of God. Or it is held that the point of the story is that it was in this way that Abraham learned that God did not desire human sacrifice. No doubt that is true; but, if we want to see this story at its greatest and as the writer to the Hebrews saw it, we must take it at its face value. It was the response of a man who was asked to offer God his own son.

(i) This story teaches us that we must be ready to sacrifice what is dearest to us for the sake of loyalty to God. There have been many who have sacrificed their careers to what they took to be the will of God. J. P. Struthers was the minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Greenock, a little congregation, which, it is neither false nor unkind to say, had a great past but no future. Had he been willing to forsake the Church of his fathers, any pulpit in the land was open to him and the most dazzling ecclesiastical prizes were his; but he sacrificed them all for the sake of what he considered to be loyalty to God's will.

Sometimes a man may have to sacrifice personal relationships. He may feel called by God to a task in a sphere which is difficult and in a place that is unattractive and it may be that the girl he is to marry will not face it with him. The man must choose between the will of God and the relationship which means so much to him. When Bunyan was in gaol he was thinking of what must happen to his family if he was executed. Especially the thought of his little blind daughter, who was so dear to him, haunted him: "O," he said, "I saw in this condition I was a man who was pulling down his house upon the head of his wife and children; yet, thought I, I must do it, I must do it."

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee."

Abraham was the man who would sacrifice even the dearest thing in life for God. Time and again in the early Church it happened. In a home one partner became a Christian and the other did not; the children became Christians and the parents did not. The sword came down upon that home; and unless there had been those who counted Christ dearer than all else, there would be no Christianity today.

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God must come first in our lives, or he comes nowhere. There is a story of two children who had been given a toy Noah's Ark as a present. They had been listening to the Old Testament stories and determined that they too would offer a sacrifice. They examined the animals in their toy ark and finally decided on a sheep with a broken leg. The only thing they would offer was a broken toy they could well do without. That is the way in which so many people would like to sacrifice to God; but only the dearest and the best is good enough for him.

(ii) Abraham is the pattern of the man who accepts what he cannot understand. To him there had come this incomprehensible demand. It did not make sense. The promise was that in Isaac his seed would grow and grow until he became a mighty nation in which all others would be blessed. On the life of Isaac depended the promise; and now God seemed to want to take that life away. As Chrysostom put it: "The things of God seemed to fight against the things of God, and faith fought with faith, and the commandment fought with the promise." For everyone at some time there comes something for which there seems to be no reason and which defies explanation. It is then that a man is faced with life's hardest battle--to accept when he cannot understand. At such a time there is only one thing to do--to obey and to do so without resentment, saying: "God, you are love! I build my faith on that."

(iii) Abraham is the pattern of the man who, with the test, found a way of escape. If we take God at his word and stake everything on him, even when there seems to be nothing but a blank wall in front of us, the way of escape will open up.

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Hebrews 11:20-22

THE FAITH WHICH DEFEATS DEATH

Hebrews 11:20-22

It was by faith that Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in the things concerning the future. It was by faith that Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and prayed leaning, on the head of his staff. It was by faith that Joseph, as he came to the end, had his mind the days when the children of Israel would leave Egypt, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

One thing links these three examples of faith together. In each case it was the faith of a man to whom death was very near. The blessing which Isaac gave is in Gen.27:28-29; Gen.27:39-40. Given after Isaac had said: "Behold. I am old, I do not know the day of my death" (Gen.27:2). it was: "God give you of the dew of heaven. and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you and nations bow down to you." The blessing of Jacob is given in Gen.48:9-22. The story has just said that "the time drew near that Israel must die" (Gen.47:29). The blessing was: "in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Gen.48:15-16). The incident from the life of Joseph comes from Gen.50:22-26.

When Joseph was near to death he made the Israelites take an oath that they would not leave his bones in Egypt but would take them with them when they went out to possess the promised land, which in due time they did (Exo.13:19; Josh.24:32).

The point which the writer to the Hebrews wishes to make is that all three men died without having entered into the promise that God had made, the promise of the Promised Land and of greatness to the nation of Israel. Isaac was still a nomad, Jacob was an exile in Egypt. Joseph had attained to greatness but it was the greatness of a stranger in a strange land; and yet they never doubted that the promise would come true. They died not in despair but in hope. Their faith defeated death.

There is something of permanent greatness here. The thought in the mind of all these men was the same: "God's promise is true, for he never breaks a promise. I may not live to see it, death may come to me before that promise becomes a fact; but I am a link in its fulfilment. Whether or not that promise comes depends on me." Here is the great function of life. Our hopes may never be realized but we must live in such a way that we shall hasten their coming. It may not be given to every man to enter into the fullness of the promises of God, but it is given to him to live with such fidelity as to bring nearer the day when others will enter into it. To us all is given the tremendous task of helping God make his promises come true.

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Hebrews 11:23-29

FAITH AND ITS SECRET

Hebrews 11:23-29

It was by faith that Moses, when he was born, was kept hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful: and they did not fear the edict of the king. It was by faith that Moses, when he grew to manhood, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose rather to suffer evil with the people of God than to enjoy the transient pleasures of sin, for he considered that a life of reproach for the sake of the Messiah was greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he kept his eyes fixed upon his reward. It was by faith that he left Egypt, unmoved by the blazing anger of the king, for he could face all things as one who sees him who is invisible. It was by faith that he carried out the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroying angel might not touch the children of his people. It was by faith that they crossed the Red Sea as if they were going through dry land and that the Egyptians, when they ventured to try to do so, were engulfed.

To the Hebrews Moses was the supreme figure in their history. He was the lender who had rescued them from slavery and who had received the Law of their lives from God. To the writer of the letter to the Hebrews Moses was preeminently the man of faith. In this story, as Moffatt points out, there are five different acts of faith. As with the other great characters whose names are included in this roll of honour of God's faithful ones, many legends and elaborations had gathered round the name of Moses and doubtless the writer of this letter had them also in his mind.

(i) There was the faith of Moses' parents. The story of their action is told in Exo.2:1-10. Exo.1:15-22 tells how the king of Egypt in his hatred tried to wipe out the children of the Israelites by having them killed at birth. Legend tells how Amram and Jochebed, the parents of Moses (Exo.6:20), were troubled by the decree of Pharaoh. As a result Amram put away his wife, not because he did not love her, but because he would spare her the sorrow of seeing her children killed. For three years she was put away, and then Miriam prophesied: "My parents shall have another son, who shall deliver Israel out of the hands of the Egyptians." She said to her father: "What hast thou done? Thou hast sent thy wife away out of thine house, because thou couldst not trust the Lord God that he would protect the child that might be born to thee." So Amram, shamed into trusting God, took back his wife; and in due time Moses was born. He was so lovely a child that his parents determined to hide him in their house.

This they did for three months. Then, the legend tells, the Egyptians struck upon a cruel scheme. The king was determined that hidden children should be sought out and killed. Now when a child hears another child cry, he will cry too. So Egyptian mothers were sent into the homes of the Israelites with their babies; there they pricked their babies until they cried. This made the hidden children of the Israelites cry, too, and so they were discovered and killed. In view of this, Amram and Jochebed decided to make a little ark and to entrust their child to it on the waters of the Nile.

That Moses was born at all was an act of faith; that he was preserved was another. He began by being the child of faith.

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(ii) The second act of faith was Moses' loyalty to his own people. The story is told in Exo.2:11-14. Again the legends help to light up the picture. When Moses was entrusted to the waters of the Nile, he was found by the daughter of Pharaoh, whose name is given as Bithia, or more commonly Thermouthis. She was entranced by his beauty. Legend says that when she drew the ark out of the water, the archangel Gabriel boxed the ears of the little baby to make him cry so that the heart of Thermouthis might be touched as she saw the little face puckered in sorrow and the eyes full of tears. Thermouthis, much to her sorrow, was childless; so she took the baby Moses home, and cared for him as her own son. He grew to be so beautiful that people turned in the street, and even ceased their work, to look at him. He was so wise that he was far beyond all other children in learning and in knowledge. When he was still a child, Thermouthis took him to Pharaoh and told him how she had found him.

She placed him in his arms, and he was so entranced by the child that he embraced him and, at the request of Thermouthis, he promised to make him his heir. By way of jest he took his crown and placed it on the child's head; but the infant snatched the crown from his head and flung it on the ground and trampled on it. Pharaoh's wise men were full of foreboding that this child would some day trample the royal power under foot. They wished to destroy Moses there and then. But a test was proposed; they set before the child a bowl of precious stones and a bowl of live coals. If he put out his hand and touched the jewels, that would prove that he was so wise that he was a danger; if he put out his hands and touched the coals, that would prove that he was so witless that he was no danger. The infant Moses was about to touch the jewels when Gabriel took his hand and put it on the coals.

His finger was burnt; he put the burnt finger in his mouth and burnt his mouth; that, they say, was why he was not a good speaker (Exo.4:10) but stammered all his life.

So Moses was spared. He was brought up in all luxury. He was heir to the kingdom. He became one of the greatest of all Egyptian generals; in particular he conquered the Ethiopians when they were threatening Egypt and in the end was married to an Ethiopian princess. But all the time he had never forgotten his fellow-countrymen; and the day came when he decided to ally himself with the downtrodden Israelites and say goodbye to the future of riches and royalty that he might have had.

Moses gave up earthly glory for the sake of the people of God. Christ gave up his glory for the sake of mankind; and accepted scourging and shame and a terrible death. Moses in his day and generation shared in the sufferings of Christ, choosing the loyalty that led to suffering rather than the ease which led to earthly glory. He knew that the prizes of earth were contemptible compared with the ultimate reward of God.

(iii) There came the day when Moses, because of his intervention on behalf of his people, had to withdraw from Egypt to Midian (Exo.2:14-22). Because of the order in which it comes that must be what Heb.11:27 refers to. Some people have found difficulty here, because the Exodus narrative says that it was because Moses feared Pharaoh that he fled to Midian (Exo.2:14), while Hebrews says that he went out not fearing the blazing wrath of the king. There is no real contradiction. It is simply that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews saw even more deeply into the story. For Moses to withdraw to Midian was not an act of fear; it was an act of courage. It showed the courage of the man who has learned to wait.

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The Stoics were wise; they held that a man should not throw his life away by needlessly provoking the wrath of a tyrant. Seneca wrote: "The wise man will never provoke the wrath of mighty men; nay, he will turn aside from it; in just the same way as sailors in sailing will not deliberately court the danger of the storm." At that moment Moses might have gone on but his people were not ready. If he had gone on recklessly he would simply have thrown his life away and the deliverance from Egypt might never have happened. He was big enough and brave enough to wait until God said: "Now is the hour."

Moffatt quotes a saying of A. S. Peake: "The courage to abandon work on which one's heart is set and accept inaction cheerfully as the will of God is of the rarest and highest kind and can be created and sustained only by the clearest spiritual vision." When our fighting instincts say: "Go on," it takes a big and a brave man to wait. It is human to fear to miss the chance; but it is great to wait for the time of God--even when it seems like throwing a chance away.

(iv) There came the day when Moses had to make all the arrangements for the first Passover. The account is in Exo.12:12-48. The unleavened bread had to be made; the Passover lamb had to be slain; the door post had to be smeared with the blood of the lamb so that the Angel of Death would see the blood and pass over that house and not slay the first-born in it. But the really amazing thing is that, according to the Exodus story, Moses not only made these regulations for the night on which the children of Israel were leaving Israel; he also laid it down that they were to be observed annually for all time. That is to say, he never doubted the success of the enterprise, never doubted that the people would be delivered from Egypt and that some day they would reach the promised land.

Here was a band of wretched Hebrew slaves about to set off on a journey across an unknown desert to an unknown promised land and here was the whole power of Egypt hot upon their heels; yet Moses never doubted that God would bring them safely through. He was preeminently the man who had the faith that if God gave his people an order he would also give them the strength to carry it out. Moses knew well that God does not summon his servants to a great task and leave it at that; he goes with them every step of the way.

(v) There was the great act of the crossing of the Red Sea. The story is told in Exo.14. There we read of how the children of Israel were wondrously enabled to pass through and of how the Egyptians were engulfed when they tried to do the same. It was at that moment that the faith of Moses communicated itself to the people and drove them on when they might well have turned back. Here we have the faith of a leader and of a people who were prepared to attempt the impossible at the command of God, realizing that the greatest barrier in the world is no barrier if God be there to help us overpass it. The book As in Adam has this sentence: "The business of life, the way to life, consists in getting over fences, not in lying down and moaning on the hither side." To Moses belonged the faith to attempt what appeared to be the most insurmountable fences in the certainty that God would help the man who refused to turn back and insisted on going on.

Finally, this passage not only tells us of the faith of Moses; it also tells us of the source of that faith. Heb.11:27 tells us that he was able to face all things as one who sees him who is invisible. The outstanding characteristic of Moses was the close intimacy of his relationship with God. In Exo.33:9-11 we read of how he went into the Tabernacle; "and the Lord used to speak to Moses

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face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." In Num.12:7-8 we read of God's verdict on him when there were those who were ready to rebel against him: "with him I speak mouth to mouth." To put it simply--the secret of his faith was that Moses knew God personally. To every task he came out from God's presence.

It is told that before a great battle Napoleon would stand in his tent alone; he would send for his commanders to come to him, one by one; when they came in, he would say no word but would look them in the eye and shake them by the hand; and they would go out prepared to die for the general whom they loved. That is like Moses and God. Moses had the faith he had because he knew God in the way he did. When we come to it straight from God's presence, no task can ever defeat us. Our failure and our fear are so often due to the fact that we try to do things alone. The secret of victorious living is to face God before we face men.

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Hebrews 11:30-31

THE FAITH WHICH DEFIED THE FACTS

Hebrews 11:30-31

It was by faith that the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. It was by faith that Rahab, the harlot, did not perish with the disobedient because she had welcomed the scouts in peace.

The writer to the Hebrews has been citing as examples of faith the great figures of the time before Israel entered into the Promised Land. Now he takes two figures from the period of struggle when the children of Israel were winning a place for themselves within Palestine.

(i) The first is the story of the fall of Jericho. That strange old story is told in Josh.6:1-20. Jericho was a strong city, barred and fortified. To take it seemed impossible. It was God's commandment that once a day for six days and in silence the people should march round it, led by seven priests marching in front of the ark and bearing trumpets of rams' horn. On the seventh day the priests were to blow upon the trumpets, after the city had been encircled seven times, and the people were to shout with all their might, "and the wall of the city will fall down flat." As the old story tells it, so it happened.

That story left an indelible mark upon the memory of Israel. Centuries after this Judas Maccabaeus and his men were facing the city of Caspis, so secure in its strength that its defenders laughed in their safety. "Wherefore Judas with his company, calling upon the great Lord of the world, who without any rams or engines of war did cast down Jericho in the time of Joshua, gave it fierce assault against the walls and took the city by the will of God" (2Macc.12:13-16). The people never forgot what great things God had done for them and, when some great effort was called for, they nerved themselves for it by remembering them.

Here is the very point the writer to the Hebrews wishes to make. The taking of Jericho was the result of an act of faith. It was taken by men who thought not of what they could do but of what God could do for them. They were prepared to believe that God could make their obvious weakness able for an incredible task. After the smashing of the Spanish Armada, there was erected on Plymouth Hoe a monument with the inscription: "God sent his wind and they were scattered." When the people of England saw how the storm and the gale had shattered the Spanish Armada, they said: "God did it." When we are faced with any great and demanding task, God is the ally we must never leave out of the reckoning. That which to us alone is impossible is always possible with him.

(ii) The second story the writer to the Hebrews takes is that of Rahab. It is told in Josh.2:1-21 and finds its sequel in Josh.6:25. When Joshua sent out spies to spy out the situation in Jericho, they found a lodging in the house of Rahab, a harlot. She protected them and enabled them to make their escape; and in return, when Jericho was taken she and her family were saved from the general slaughter. It is extraordinary how Rahab became imprinted on the memory of Israel. James (Jas.2:25) quotes her as a great example of the good works which demonstrate faith. The Rabbis were proud to trace their descent to her. And, amazingly, she is one of the names which appear in

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the genealogy of Jesus (Matt.1:5). Clement of Rome quotes her as an outstanding example of one who was saved "by faith and hospitality."

When the writer to the Hebrews cites her, the point he desires to make is this--Rahab in face of all the facts believed in the God of Israel. She said to the spies whom she welcomed and hid: "I know that the Lord has given you the land.... For the Lord your God, is he who is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath" (Josh.2:9-11). At the moment when she was speaking, there seemed not one chance in a million that the children of Israel could capture Jericho. These nomads from the desert had no artillery and no siege-engines. Yet Rahab believed and staked her whole future on the belief--that God would make the impossible possible. When common sense pronounced the situation hopeless, she had the uncommon sense to see beyond the situation. The real faith and the real courage are those which can take God's side when it seems doomed to defeat. As Faber had it:

"Thrice blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field when he
Is most invisible.
For right is right, since God is God;
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin."

The Christian believes that no man who takes the side of God can ever ultimately be on the losing side for, even if he knows earth's defeats, there is a victory whose trophies are in heaven.

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Hebrews 11:32-34

THE HEROES OF THE FAITH

Hebrews 11:32-34

And what more shall I say? Time will fail me if I try to recount the story of Gideon, of Barak, of Samson, or Jephthah, of David, of Samuel and of the prophets, men who, through faith, mastered kingdoms, did righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, showed themselves strong in warfare, routed the ranks of aliens.

In this passage the writer lets his mind's eye roam back over the history of his people; and out of it there springs to memory name after name of those who were heroic souls. He does not take them in any particular order but, as we shall see when we look at the outstanding characteristics of each, there is a line of thought which binds them all together.

The story of Gideon is told in Judg.6-7. With only three hundred men Gideon won a victory over the Ammonites in days when they had terrorized Israel, a victory which went ringing down the centuries. The story of Barak is in Judg.4-5. Under the inspiration of the prophetess Deborah, Barak assembled ten thousand young men and faced the fearful odds of the Canaanites with their nine hundred chariots of iron to win an almost incredible victory. It was as if a band of almost unarmed infantry had routed a division of tanks. The story of Samson is in Judg.13-16. Always Samson was fighting alone. In the isolation of his splendid strength again and again he faced the most amazing odds and emerged triumphant. He was the scourge of the Philistines. The story of Jephthah is in Judg.11-12.

Jephthah was an illegitimate son; he was driven into a kind of exile and into the life of an outlaw; but when the Ammonites were putting Israel into fear, the forgotten outlaw was called back and won a tremendous victory, although his vow to God cost him the life of his daughter. There was David, who had once been a shepherd lad and who, to his own and everyone else's astonishment, was anointed king in preference to all his brothers (1Sam.16:1-13). There was Samuel, born to his mother so late in life (1Sam.1), again and again moving alone as the only strong and faithful man of God amongst an easily frightened, discontented and rebellious people. There were the prophets, man after man of them bearing a faithful and isolated witness to God.

The whole list is of men who faced incredible odds for God. It is of men who never believed that God was on the side of the big battalions and were willing to take tremendous and even terrifying risks for him. It is of men who cheerfully and courageously and confidently accepted God-given tasks which, on human terms, were impossible. They were all men who were never afraid to stand alone and to face immense odds for the sake of their loyalty to God. The honour roll of history is of men who chose to be in God's minority rather than with earth's majority.

In the second part of the passage the writer to the Hebrews tells what these men did and others like them in a series of machine-gun-like phrases. For most of us much of their impact may be lost, for this reason--phrase after phrase is a reminiscence. For those who knew the scriptures well in their Greek version, phrase after phrase would ring a bell in the mind. The word used for mastering kingdoms is what Josephus, the Jewish historian, used of David. The phrase used for wrought

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righteousness is the description of David in 2Sam.8:15. The expression used for stopping the mouths of lions is that used of Daniel in Dn.6:18,23. The phrase about quenching the violence of fire goes straight back to the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in Dn.3:19-28. To speak about escaping the edge, of the sword was to direct men's thoughts to the way in which Elijah escaped threatened assassination in 1Kgs.19:1ff and Elisha in 2Kgs.6:31ff.

The trumpet call about being strong in warfare and routing the ranks of the aliens would immediately make men think of the unforgettable glories of the Maccabean days.

The phrase about being made strong out of weakness might conjure up many a picture. It might paint the mental picture of the extraordinary healing of Hezekiah after he had turned his face to the wall to die (2Kgs.20:1-7). Perhaps more likely in the time in which the writer to the Hebrews wrote, it would remind his hearers of that epic but bloodthirsty incident told in the Book of Judith, one of the apocryphal books. There was a time when Israel was threatened by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar led by his general Holofernes. The Jewish town of Bethulia had determined to surrender in five days' time for its supplies of food and water were at an end. In the town there was a widow called Judith. She was wealthy and beautiful but she had lived in lonely mourning since her husband Manasses had died. She dressed in all her finery, persuaded her people to let her out of the town and went straight to the camp of the Assyrians.

She gained entry into the presence of Holofernes and persuaded him that she was convinced of the defeat of her people as a punishment for their sins. She offered him a way into Jerusalem by stealth; and then, having gained his confidence, she slew him in his drunken sleep with his own dagger, cut off his head and carried it back to her people. The traitors within the camp were silenced and looming defeat was turned into tumultuous victory. A woman's weakness had become strength to save her country.

The writer to the Hebrews is here seeking to inspire new courage and a new sense of responsibility by making his hearers remember their past. He does not do it blatantly but with infinite artistry. He does not so much tell them what to remember as by delicate hints compel them to remember for themselves. When Oliver Cromwell was arranging for the education of his son Richard, he said: "I would have him learn a little history." When we are discouraged, let us remember and take heart again. God's arm is not shortened; his power is not grown less. What he did once he can do again, for the God of history is the same one as we worship today.

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Hebrews 11:35-40

THE DEFIANCE OF SUFFERING

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Women received back their own folk as if they had been raised from the dead. Others were crucified because they refused to accept release, for they were eager to obtain a better resurrection. Others went through scoffing and scourging, yes, and chains and imprisonment. They were stoned; they were sawn asunder; they underwent every kind of trial; they died by the murder of the sword. They went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, they were in want, they were oppressed, they were maltreated--the world was not worthy of them--they wandered in desert places and on the mountains, they lived in caves and in holes of the earth. All these, though they were attested through their faith, did not receive the promise. because God had some better plan for us, that they, without us, should not find all his purposes fulfilled.

In this passage the writer to the Hebrews is intermingling different periods of history. Sometimes he takes his illustrations from the Old Testament period; but still more he takes them from the Maccabean period which falls between the Old and the New Testaments.

First let us take the things that can be explained against the Old Testament background. In the lives of Elijah (1Kgs.17:17ff.) and of Elisha (2Kgs.4:8ff.) we read how, by the power and the faith of the prophets, women did receive back again their children who had died. 2Chr.24:20-22 tells how the prophet Zechariah was stoned by his own people because he told them the truth. Legend had it that down in Egypt Jeremiah was stoned to death by his fellow-countrymen. Jewish legend tells that Isaiah was sawn asunder. Hezekiah, the good king, died, and Manasseh came to the throne. He worshipped idols and tried to compel Isaiah to take part in his idolatry and to approve of it. Isaiah refused and was condemned to be sawn asunder with a wooden saw. While his enemies tried to make him recant his faith he steadfastly defied them and prophesied their doom. "And whilst the saw cut into his flesh, Isaiah uttered no complaint and shed no tears; but he ceased not to commune with the Holy Spirit till the saw had cloven him to the middle of his body."

Even more the mind of the writer to the Hebrews goes back over the terrible days of the Maccabean struggle. That is a struggle of which every Christian should know something, for if in these killing times, the Jews had surrendered their faith, Jesus could not have come. The story is like this.

About the year 170 B.C. there was on the throne of Syria a king called Antiochus Epiphanes. He was a good governor but he had an almost abnormal love for all things Greek and saw himself as a missionary for the Greek way of life. He tried to introduce this into Palestine. He had some success; there were those who were willing to accept Greek culture, Greek drama, Greek athletics. Greek athletes trained naked and some of the Jewish priests even went so far as to seek to obliterate the mark of circumcision from their bodies so that they might become completely hellenized. So far, Antiochus had succeeded only in causing a division in the nation; the greater part of the Jews were unshakeably true to their faith and could not be moved. Force and violence had not yet been used.

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Then about 168 B.C. the matter came to boiling-point. Antiochus had an interest in Egypt. He amassed an army and invaded that country. To his deep humiliation the Romans ordered him home. They did not send an army to oppose him; such was the might of Rome that they did not need to. They sent a senator called Popilius Laena with a small and quite unarmed suite. Popilius and Antiochus met on the boundaries of Egypt. They talked; they both knew Rome and they had been friendly. Then, very gently, Popilius told Antiochus that Rome did not wish him to proceed with the campaign but wished him to go home. Antiochus said that he would consider it. Popilius took the stall which he was carrying and drew a circle in the sand round about Antiochus. Quietly he said: "Consider it now; you will give me your decision before you leave that circle." Antiochus thought for a moment and realized that to defy Rome was impossible. "I will go home," he said. It was a shattering humiliation for a king.

So Antiochus turned for home, almost mad with rage; and on the way he turned aside and attacked Jerusalem, capturing it almost without an effort. It was said that 80,000 Jews were killed and 10,000 sold into captivity. But there was worse to come. He sacked the Temple. The golden altars of the shewbread and of the incense, the golden candlestick, the golden vessels, even the curtains and the veils were taken. The treasury was sacked. Worse was to come. On the altar of the burnt offering he offered sacrifices of swine flesh to Zeus; and he turned the Temple chambers into brothels. No act of sacrilege was omitted. Still worse was to come. He completely forbade circumcision and the possession of the scriptures and of the law. He ordered the Jews to eat meats which were unclean and to sacrifice to the Greek gods. Inspectors went throughout the land to see that these commands were carried out.

And if any were found to defy them, they "underwent great miseries and bitter torments.; for they were whipped with rods and their bodies were torn to pieces; they were crucified while they were still alive and breathed; they also strangled those women and their sons whom they had circumcised, as the king had appointed, hanging their sons about their necks as if they were upon their crosses. And if there were any sacred book of the law found, it was destroyed; and those with whom they were found miserably perished also" (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 12: 5, 4). Never in all history has there been such a sadistic and deliberate attempt to wipe out a people's religion.

It is easy to see how this passage can be read against the terrible happenings of these days. The Book of Fourth Maccabees has two famous stories which were undoubtedly in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews when he made his list of the things that the man of faith has had to suffer.

The first is the story of Eleazar, the aged priest (4 Maccabees 5-7). He was brought before Antiochus and ordered to eat swine's flesh, being threatened with the direst penalties if he refused. He did refuse. "We, Antiochus," he said, "who are convinced that we live under a divine law, consider no compulsion to be so forcible as obedience to our law." He would not comply with the king's order, "no, not if you pluck out my eyes and consume my bowels in the fire." They stripped him naked and scourged him with whips, while a herald stood by him, saying: "Obey the king's commands," His flesh was torn off by the whips and he streamed down with blood and his flanks were laid open by wounds. He collapsed and one of the soldiers kicked him violently in the stomach to make him rise. In the end even the guards were moved to wondering compassion. They

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suggested to him that they would bring him dressed meat which was not pork, and that he should eat it pretending that it was pork. He refused.

"We should thus ourselves become an example of impiety to the young, if we became to them an excuse for eating the unclean." In the end they carried him to the fire and threw him on it, "burning him with cruelly contrived instruments and pouring stinking liquids into his nostrils." So he died, declaring: "I am dying by fiery torments for the law's sake."

The second is the story of the seven brothers (4 Maccabees 8-14). They, too, were given the same choice and confronted with the same threats. They were confronted with "the wheels and racks and hooks and catapults and caldrons and frying pans and finger racks and iron hands and wedges and hot cinders." The first brother refused to eat the unclean things. They lashed him with whips and tied him to the wheel until he was dislocated and fractured in every limb. "They heaped up fuel and, setting fire to it, strained him upon the wheel still more. And the wheel was besmeared all over with blood, and the heap of coals was extinguished with the droppings of gore, and pieces of flesh flew about the axles of the machine." But he withstood their tortures and died faithful. The second brother they bound to the catapults. They donned spiked iron gloves.

"These wild beasts, fierce as panthers, first dragged all the flesh off his sinews with their iron gauntlets to his chin and tore off the skin of his head." He, too, died faithful. The third brother was brought forward. "The officers, impatient at the man's boldness, dislocated his hands and feet with racking engines and wrenching them from their sockets, pulled his limbs asunder. And they fractured his fingers and his arms and his legs and his elbows." In the end they tore him apart on the catapult and flayed him alive. He, too, died faithful. They cut out the tongue of the fourth brother before they submitted him to like tortures. The fifth brother they bound to the wheel, bending his body round the edge of it, and then fastened him with iron fetters to the catapult and tore him in pieces. The sixth they broke upon the wheel "while a fire roasted him from beneath.

Then they heated sharp spits and applied them to his back; and piercing through his sides they burned away his bowels." The seventh brother they roasted alive in a gigantic frying pan. These, too, died faithful.

These are the things of which the writer to the Hebrews is thinking; and these are things which we do well to remember. It was due to the faith of these men that the Jewish religion was not completely destroyed. If that religion had been destroyed, what would have happened to the purposes of God? How could Jesus have been born into the world if the Jewish religion had ceased to exist? In a very real way we owe our Christianity to these martyrs of the times when Antiochus made his deliberate attempt to wipe out the Jewish religion.

There came a day when the situation ignited. The agents of Antiochus had gone to a town called Modin and had erected an altar there to make the inhabitants do sacrifice to the Greek gods. The emissaries of Antiochus tried to persuade a certain Mattathias to set an example by offering sacrifice, for he was a distinguished and influential man. He refused in anger. But another Jew, seeking to curry favour and to save his own life, came forward and was about to sacrifice. Mattathias, moved to uncontrollable wrath, seized a sword and slew his apostate countryman and the king's commissioner with him.

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The standard of rebellion was raised. Mattathias and his sons and those like-minded took to the hills; and once again the phrases used to describe their life there were in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews and he has echoes of them over and over again. "So Mattathias and his sons fled into the mountains, and left all that they ever had in the city" (1Macc.2:28). "Judas Maccabaeus (and his friends) withdrew himself into the wilderness and lived in the mountains, after the manner of beasts" (2Macc.5:27). "Others, who had run together into caves near by, to keep the Sabbath day secretly, being discovered...were all burnt together" (2Macc.6:11). "They wandered in the mountains and in the dens like beasts" (2Macc.10:6). In the end under Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers the Jews regained their freedom and the Temple was cleansed and the faith flourished again.

In this passage the writer to the Hebrews has done as before. He does not actually mention these things. Far better than his hearers should be moved by this and that phrase to remember them for themselves.

In the end he says a great thing. All these died before the final unfolding of God's promise and the coming of his Messiah into the world. It was as if God had so arranged things that the full blaze of his glory should not be revealed until we and they can enjoy it together. The writer to the Hebrews is saying: "See! the glory of God has come. But see what it cost to enable it to come! That is the faith which gave you your religion. What can you do but be true to a heritage like that?"

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Hebrews 12:1-2

THE RACE AND THE GOAL

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses enveloping us, let us strip off every weight and let us rid ourselves of the sin which so persistently surrounds us, and let us run with steadfast endurance the course that is marked out for us and, as we do so, let us keep our gaze fixed on Jesus who, in order to win the joy that was set before him, steadfastly endured the Cross, thinking nothing of its shame, and has now taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

This is one of the great, moving passages of the New Testament; and in it the writer has given us a well-nigh perfect summary of the Christian life.

(i) In the Christian life we have a goal. The Christian is not an unconcerned stroller along the byways of life; he is a wayfarer on the high road. He is not a tourist, who returns each night to the place from which he starts; he is a pilgrim who is for ever on the way. The goal is nothing less than the likeness of Christ. The Christian life is going somewhere, and it would be well if, at each day's ending, we were to ask ourselves: "Am I any farther on?"

(ii) In the Christian life we have an inspiration. We have the thought of the unseen cloud of witnesses: and they are witnesses in a double sense. For they have witnessed their confession to Christ and they are now witnesses of our performance. The Christian is like a runner in some crowded stadium. As he presses on, the crowd looks down; and the crowd looking down are those who have already won the crown.

Longinus, in his great work *On The Sublime*, has a recipe for greatness in literary endeavour. "It is a good thing," he writes, "to form the question in our souls, How would Homer perhaps have said this? How would Plato or Demosthenes have lifted it up to sublimity? How would Thucydides have put it in his history? For when the faces of these people come before us in our emulation they will, as it were, illumine our road and will lift us up to those standards of perfection which we have imagined in our minds. It would be still better if we were to suggest this to our minds. 'What would this that I have said sound like to Homer, if he were standing by, or to Demosthenes, or how would they have reacted to it?' In truth it is a supreme test to imagine such a judgment court and theatre for our own private productions, and, in imagination, to submit an account of our writings to such heroes as judges."

An actor would act with double intensity if he knew that some famous dramatic master was sitting in the stalls watching him. An athlete would strive with double effort if he knew that a stadium of famous Olympic athletes was watching him. It is of the very essence of the Christian life that it is lived in the gaze of the heroes of the faith who lived, suffered and died in their day and generation. How can a man avoid the struggle for greatness with an audience like that looking down upon him?

(iii) In the Christian life we have a handicap. If we are encircled by the greatness of the past. We are also encircled by the handicap of our own sin. No man would seek to climb Mount Everest with

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Hebrews 12:1-2

a pantechnicon of lumber weighing him down. If we would travel far, we must travel light. There is in life an essential duty of discarding things. There may be habits, pleasures, self-indulgences, associations which hold us back. We must shed them as the athlete sheds his track suit when he goes to the starting-mark; and often we will need the help of Christ to enable us to do so.

(iv) In the Christian life we have a means. That means is steadfast endurance. The word is *hupomone* (GSN5281) which does not mean the patience which sits down and accepts things but the patience which masters them. It is not some romantic thing which lends us wings to fly over the difficulties and the hard places. It is a determination, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on and refuses to be deflected. Obstacles do not daunt it and discouragements do not take its hope away. It is the steadfast endurance which carries on until in the end it gets there.

(v) In the Christian life we have an example. That example is Jesus himself. For the goal that was set before him, he endured all things; to win it meant the way of the Cross. The writer to the Hebrews has a flash of insight--despising the shame, he says. Jesus was sensitive; never had any person so sensitive a heart. A cross was a humiliating thing. It was for criminals, for those whom society regarded as the dregs of humanity--and yet he accepted it. St. Philip of Neri bids us "to despise the world, to despise ourselves, and to despise--the fact that we are despised" (*spernere mundum, spernere te ipsum, spernere te spemi*). If Jesus could endure like that, so must we.

(vi) In the Christian life we have a presence, the presence of Jesus. He is at once the goal of our journey and the companion of our way; at once the one whom we go to meet and the one with whom we travel. The wonder of the Christian life is that we press on surrounded by the saints, oblivious to everything but the glory of the goal and forever in the company of him who has already made the journey and reached the goal, and who waits to welcome us when we reach the end.

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Hebrews 12:3-4

THE STANDARD OF COMPARISON

Hebrews 12:3-4

Consider him who steadfastly endured such opposition at the hands of sinners, and compare your lives with his, so that you may not faint and grow weary in your souls. You have not yet had to resist to the point of blood in your struggle against sin.

The writer to the Hebrews uses two very vivid words when he speaks of fainting and growing weary. They are the words which Aristotle uses of an athlete who flings himself on the ground in collapse after he has surged past the winning post of the race. So Hebrews is in effect saying: "Don't give up too soon; don't collapse until the winning post is passed.

To urge them to that he uses two arguments.

(i) For them the struggle of Christianity has not yet become a mortal struggle. When he speaks of resisting to the point of blood, he uses the very phrase of the Maccabaeans when they called on their troops to fight to the death. When the writer to the Hebrews says that his people have not yet resisted to the point of blood, as Moffatt puts it, "he is not blaming them, he is shaming them." When they think of what the heroes of the past went through to make their faith possible, surely they cannot drift into lethargy or flinch from conflict.

(ii) He pleads with them to compare what they have to suffer with what Jesus suffered. He gave up the glory which was his; he came into all the narrowness of the life of humanity; he faced the hostility of men; in the end he had to die upon a cross. So the writer to the Hebrews in effect demands: "How can you compare what you have to go through with what he went through? He did all that for you--what are you going to do for him?"

These two verses stress the essential costliness of Christian faith. It cost the lives of the martyrs; it cost the life of him who was the Son of God. A thing which cost so much cannot be lightly discarded. A heritage like that is not something that a man can hand down tarnished. These two verses make the demand that comes to every Christian: "Show yourself worthy of the sacrifice that men and God have made for you."

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Hebrews 12:5-11

THE DISCIPLINE OF GOD

Hebrews 12:5-11

Have you forgotten the appeal, an appeal which reasons with you as sons?

"My son, do not treat lightly the discipline which the Lord sends; Never lose heart when you are put to the test by him; For the Lord disciplines the man whom he loves, and scourges every son whom he receives."

It is for the sake of discipline that you must endure. It is because he is treating us as sons that God sends these things upon us. What son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline--that discipline which everyone must share--then you are bastards and not sons. Surely it is true that we have human fathers who discipline us, and we pay heed to them. Surely we are still more bound to submit to the Father of the spirits of men, for that is the only way in which we can find real life. It was only for a short time that our human fathers disciplined us, and they did it as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our highest good and he does so to make us fit to share his own holiness. No discipline seems to be a thing of joy when we are actually undergoing it but afterwards it yields a fruit which is all to our highest welfare--the fruit of a righteous life--to those who are trained by it.

The writer to the Hebrews sets out still another reason why men should cheerfully bear affliction when it comes to them. He has urged them to bear it because the great saints of the past have borne it. He has urged them to bear it because anything they may have to bear is a little thing compared with what Jesus Christ had to bear. Now he says that they must bear hardship because it is sent as a discipline from God and no life can have any value apart from discipline.

A father always disciplines his child. It would not be a mark of love to let a son do what he likes and have nothing but an easy way; it would show that the father regarded the son as no better than an illegitimate child to whom he felt neither love nor responsibility. We submit to an earthly father's discipline which is imposed only for a short time, until we reach years of maturity, and which at best always contains an element of arbitrariness. The earthly father is he to whom we owe our bodily life; how much more should we submit to the discipline of God to whom we owe our immortal spirits and who, in his wisdom, seeks for nothing but our highest good.

There is a curious passage in Xenophon's Cyropaedia. There is an argument about whether the man who makes men laugh or makes them weep is of most use in the world. Aglaitidas says: "He that makes his friends laugh seems to me to do them much less service than he who makes them weep; and if you will look at it rightly, you, too, will find that I speak the truth. At any rate, fathers develop self-control in their sons by making them weep and teachers impress good lessons on their pupils in the same way, and laws, too, turn the citizens to justice by making them weep. But could you say that those who make us laugh either do good to our bodies or make our minds any more fitted for the management of our private business or the affairs of state?" It was the view of Aglaitidas that it was the man who exerted discipline who really did good to his fellow-men.

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Hebrews 12:5-11

There is no doubt that this passage would come to those who heard it for the first time with a double impact, for all the world knew of that amazing thing the patria potestas, the father's power. A Roman father had by law absolute power over his family. If his son should marry, the father continued to have absolute power both over him and any grandchildren there might be. It began at the beginning. A Roman father could keep or discard his newborn child as he liked. He could bind or scourge his son; he could sell him into slavery; and he even had the right to execute him. True, when a father was about to take serious steps against a member of his family, he usually called a council of all its adult male members, but he did not need to. True, later on public opinion would not permit the execution of a son by a father, but it happened as late as the time of Augustus.

Sallust, the Roman historian, tells us of an incident during the Catiline conspiracy.

Catiline rebelled against Rome and amongst those who went out to join his forces was Aulus Fulvius, the son of a Roman senator. He was arrested and brought back, and his father tried him and judged him and ordered him to be put to death. In regard to the patria potestas a Roman son never came of age. He might have engaged on a state career; he might be holding the highest magistracies; he might be held in honour by the whole country; all that did not matter; he was directly and completely under his father's power so long as his father survived. If ever a people knew what parental discipline was the Romans did; and when the writer to the Hebrews talked about the way in which an earthly father disciplined his son, his hearers well knew what he was talking about.

So, then, the writer insists that we must look on all the hardships of life as the discipline of God and as sent to work, not for our harm but for our ultimate and highest good. To prove his point he makes a quotation from Prov.3:11-12. There are many ways in which a man may look at the discipline which God sends him. .

(i) He may resignedly accept it. That is what the Stoics did. They held that nothing in this world happens outside the will of God; therefore, they argued, there is nothing to do but to accept it. To do anything else is simply to batter one's head against the walls of the universe. That is possibly the acceptance of supreme wisdom; but none the less it is the acceptance not of a father's love but of a father's power. It is not a willing but a defeated acceptance.

(ii) A man may accept discipline with the grim sense of getting it over as soon as possible. A certain famous Roman said: "I will let nothing interrupt my life." If a man accepts discipline like that he regards it as an infliction to be struggled through with defiance and certainly not with gratitude.

(iii) A man may accept discipline with the self-pity which leads in the end to collapse. Some people, when they are caught up in some difficult situation, give the impression that they are the only people in the world whom life ever hurt. They are lost in their self-pity.

(iv) A man may accept discipline as a punishment which he resents. It is strange that at this time the Romans saw in national and personal disasters nothing but the vengeance of the gods. Lucan wrote: "Happy were Rome indeed, and blessed citizens would she have, if the gods were as much concerned with caring for men as they are with exacting vengeance from them." Tacitus held that the disasters of the nation were proof that not men's safety but men's punishment was the interest of

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Hebrews 12:5-11

the gods. There are still people who regard God as vindictive. When something happens to them or to those whom they love their question is: "What did I do to deserve this?" And the question is asked in such a tone as to make it clear that they regard the whole matter as an unjust punishment from God. It never dawns upon them to ask: "What is God trying to teach me and to do with me through this experience?"

(v) So we come to the last attitude. A man may accept discipline as coming from a loving father. Jerome said a paradoxical but true thing: "The greatest anger of all is when God is no longer angry with us when we sin." He meant that the supreme punishment is when God lets us alone as unteachable. The Christian knows that "a father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear" and that everything can be utilised to make him a wiser and a better man. As Robert Browning wrote in Rabbi ben Ezra:

"Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joy three-parts pain!
Strive and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!
For thence--a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks--
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail;
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me.
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale."

We shall cease from self-pity, from resentment and from rebellious complaint if we remember that there is no discipline of God which does not take its source in love and is not aimed at good.

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Hebrews 12:12-17

DUTIES, AIMS AND DANGERS

Hebrews 12:12-17

So, then, lift up the slack hands. Strengthen the weak knees. And make straight the paths of your feet so that the bones of the lame may not be completely dislocated but rather may be cured. Make peace your aim--and do it all together--and aim at that holiness without which no one can see the Lord. Watch that no one misses the grace of God. Watch that no pernicious influence grows up to involve you in troubles. And watch that the main body of your people are not soiled by any such thing. Watch that no one falls into sexual impurity or turns to an unhallowed life, as Esau did, Esau who, for a single meal, gave away his birthright. For you are well aware of how when he afterwards wanted to claim the blessing he ought to have inherited, he was rejected--for he had no opportunity to change his mind--although he sought that blessing with tears.

With this passage the writer to the Hebrews comes to the problems of everyday Christian life and living. He knew that sometimes it is given to a man to mount up with wings as an eagle; he knew that sometimes a man is enabled to run and not be weary in the pursuit of some great moment of endeavour; but he also knew that of all things it is hardest to walk every day and not to faint. Here he is thinking of the daily struggle of the Christian way.

(i) He begins by reminding them of their duties. In every congregation and in every Christian society there are those who are weaker and more likely to go astray and to abandon the struggle. It is the duty of those who are stronger to put fresh vigour into listless hands and fresh strength into failing feet. The phrase used for slack hands is the same as is used to describe the children of Israel in the days when they wished to abandon the rigours of the journey across the wilderness and to return to the ease and the fleshpots of Egypt.

The Odes of Solomon (6: 14ff.) have a description of the work of those who are true servants and ministers:

"They have assuaged the dry lips,
And the will that fainted they have raised up...
And limbs that had fallen
They have straightened and set up."

One of life's greatest glories is to be an encourager of the man who is near to despair and a strengthener of the man whose strength is failing. To help these people we have to make their ways straight. A Christian has a double duty; he has a duty to God and a duty to his fellow men. The Testimony of Simeon (5: 2, 3) has an illuminating description of the duty of the good man. "Make your heart good in the sight of the Lord; and make your ways straight in the sight of men; so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord and of men."

To God a man must present a clean heart; to men he must present an upright life. To show a man the right way to walk, by personal example to keep him on the right road, to remove from the path something that would make him stumble, to make the journey easier for faltering and lagging feet,

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Hebrews 12:12-17

is a Christian duty. A man must offer his heart to God and his service and example to his fellow-men.

(ii) The writer to the Hebrews turns to the aims which must ever be before the Christian.

(a) He must aim at peace. In Hebrew thought and language peace was no negative thing; it was intensely positive. It was not simply freedom from trouble; it was two things.

First, it was everything which makes for a man's highest good. As the Hebrews saw it, that highest good was to be found in obedience to God. Proverbs says: "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days and long life and peace shall they add unto thee." The Christian must aim at that complete obedience to God in which life finds its highest happiness, its greatest good, its perfect consummation, its peace. Second, peace meant right relationships between man and man. It meant a state when hatred was banished and each man sought nothing but his neighbour's good. Hebrews says: "Seek to live together as Christian men ought to live, in the real unity which comes from living in Christ."

The peace to be sought is that coming from obedience to God's will, which raises a man's life to its highest realization and enables him to live in and to produce right relationships between his fellow-men.

One thing remains to be noted--that kind of peace is to be pursued. It requires an effort; it is not something which just happens. It is the product of mental and spiritual toil and sweat. Rudyard Kipling wrote:

"Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made
By singing;--'Oh, how beautiful!' and sitting in the shade,
While better men than we go out and start their working-lives
At grubbing weeds from gravel-paths with broken dinner-knives."

The gifts of God are given, but they are not given away; they have to be won, for they can be received only on God's conditions--and the supreme condition is obedience to himself

(b) He must aim at holiness (hagiasmos, GSN0038). Hagiasmos has in it the same root as the adjective hagios, which is usually translated holy. The root meaning is always difference and separation. Although he lives in the world, the man who is hagios (GSN0040) must always in one sense be different from it and separate from it. His standards are not the world's standards, nor his conduct the world's conduct. His aim is not to stand well with men but to stand well with God. Hagiasmos (GSN0038), as Westcott finely put it, is "the preparation for the presence of God." The life of the Christian is dominated by the constant memory that its greatest aim is to enter into the presence of God.

(iii) The writer to the Hebrews goes on to point the dangers which threaten the Christian life:

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(a) There is the danger of missing the grace of God. The word he uses might be paraphrased failing to keep up with the grace of God. The early Greek commentator Theophylact interprets this in terms of a journey of a band of travellers who every now and again check up, "Has anyone fallen out? Has anyone been left behind while the others have pressed on?" In Micah there is a vivid text (Mic.4:6), "I will assemble the lame." Moffatt translates it: "I will collect the stragglers." It is easy to straggle away, to linger behind, to drift instead of to march, and so to miss the grace of God. There is no opportunity in this life which cannot be missed. The grace of God brings to us the opportunity to make ourselves and to make life what they are meant to be. A man may, in his lethargy, his thoughtlessness, his unawareness, his procrastination, miss the chances which grace brings to him. Against that we must ever be upon the watch.

(b) There is the danger of what the Revised Standard Version calls "a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit." The phrase comes from Deut.29:18; and there it describes the man who goes after strange gods and encourages others to do so, and who thereby becomes a pernicious influence on the life of the community. The writer to the Hebrews is warning against those who are a corrupting influence. There are always those who think the Christian standards unnecessarily strict and punctitious; there are always those who do not see why they should not accept the world's standards of life and conduct. This was specially so in the early Church. It was a little island of Christianity surrounded by a sea of paganism; its members were, at the most, only one generation away from heathenism. It was easy to relapse into the old standards. This is a warning against the infection of the world, sometimes deliberately, sometimes unconsciously, spread within the Christian society.

(c) There is the danger of failing into immorality or relapsing into an unhallowed life. The word used for unhallowed is *bebelos* (GSN0952). It has an illuminating background. It was used for ground that was profane in contradistinction to ground that was consecrated. The ancient world had its religions into which only the initiated could come. *Bebelos* (GSN0952) was used for the person who was uninitiated and uninterested in contradistinction to the man who was devout. It was applied to such men as Antiochus Epiphanes who was pledged to wipe out all true religion; it was applied to Jews who had become apostates and had forsaken God. Westcott sums up this word by saying that it describes the man whose mind recognizes nothing higher than earth, for whom there is nothing sacred, who has no reverence for the unseen. An unhallowed life is a life without any awareness of or interest in God. In its thoughts, aims, pleasures, it is completely earthbound. We have to have a care lest we drift into a frame of mind and heart which has no horizon beyond this world, for that way inevitably lie the failure of chastity and the loss of honour.

To sum it all up, the writer to the Hebrews cites the example of Esau. He really puts two stories together--Gen.25:28-34 and Gen.27:1-39. In the first Esau came in from the field ravenously hungry and sold his birthright to Jacob for a share of the food which he was preparing. The second story tells how Jacob subtly robbed Esau of his birthright by impersonating him when Isaac was old and blind and so gaining the blessing which belonged to Esau as the elder of the two sons. It was when Esau sought the blessing that Jacob had shrewdly obtained and learned he could not get it that he lifted up his voice and wept (Gen.27:38).

There is more to this than lies upon the surface. In Hebrew legend and in rabbinic elaboration Esau had come to be looked upon as the entirely sensual man, the man who put the needs of his

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body first. Hebrew legend says that while Jacob and Esau--they were twins--were still in their mother's womb, Jacob said to Esau: "My brother, there are two worlds before us, this world and the world to come. In this world men eat and drink and traffic and marry and bring up sons and daughters; but all this does not take place in the world to come. If you like, take this world and I will take the other." And Esau was well content to take this world, because he did not believe that there was any other. On that very day when Jacob's subterfuge gained him Isaac's blessing, legend said that Esau already had committed five sins--"he had worshipped with strange worship, he had shed innocent blood, he had pursued a betrothed damsel, he had denied the life of the world to come, and he had despised his birthright."

Hebrew interpretation saw Esau as the sensual man, the man who saw no pleasures beyond the crude pleasures of this world. Any man like that sells his birthright; for a man throws away his inheritance when he throws away eternity.

The writer to the Hebrews says, according to the King James Version, that Esau found no place for repentance. The Greek for repentance is *metanoia* (GSN3341), which literally means a change of mind. It is better to say that it was now impossible for Esau to change his mind. It is not that he was barred from the forgiveness of God. It is just the grim fact that there are certain choices which cannot be unmade and certain consequences which not even God can take away. To take a very simple example--if a young man loses his purity or a girl her virginity, nothing can ever bring it back. The choice has been made and it stands. God can and will forgive but he cannot turn back the clock.

We do well to remember that there is a certain finality in life. If, like Esau, we take the way of this world and make bodily things our final good, if we choose the pleasures of time in preference to the joys of eternity, God can and will still forgive but something has happened that can never be undone. There are certain things in which a man cannot change his mind but must abide for ever by the choice that he has made.

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Hebrews 12:18-24

THE TERROR OF THE OLD AND THE GLORY OF THE NEW

Hebrews 12:18-24

It is not to something that can be touched that you have come, to a flaming fire, to mist and gloom and stormblast, and to the blare of a trumpet, and to a voice which spoke such words that those who heard it begged that not another word should be further spoken unto them, for they could not bear the command: "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." So terrifying was the apparition that Moses said: "I am in utter fear and trembling." But you have come to Mount Sion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to ten thousands of angels gathered in glad assembly, to the assembly of the honoured ones whose names are in the registers of heaven, to that God who is judge of all, to the spirits of just men who have come to that goal for which they were created, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, to the sprinkled blood which has a message greater than the blood of Abel.

This passage is a contrast between the old and the new. It is a contrast between the giving of the law on Mount Sinai and the new covenant of which Jesus is the mediator. Down to Heb.12:21 it has echo after echo of the story of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. Deut.4:11 describes that first law-giving: "And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain; while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud and gloom.

And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire." Exo.19:12-13 tells of the unapproachability of that awful mountain: "And you shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Take heed that you do not go up into the mountain, or touch the border of it: whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death: no hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned, or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live: When the trumpet sounds a long blast they shall come up to the mountain.'"

Deut.5:23-27 tells how the people were so afraid to hear the voice of God for themselves that they asked Moses to go and to bring God's message to them. "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, we shall die." Deut.9:19 tells of the terror of Moses, but the writer to the Hebrews has transferred these words to the giving of the law, although in the original story they were spoken by Moses when he came down from the mountain and found the people worshipping the golden calf. The whole passage down to Heb.12:21 is a pattern of reminiscences from the story of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. All the terrifying things have been gathered together to stress the awfulness of that scene.

In the giving of the law at Mount Sinai three things are stressed. (i) The sheer majesty of God. The story stresses the shattering might of God and in it there is no love at all. (ii) The absolute unapproachability of God. So far from the way being open to God, he who tries to approach him meets death. (iii) The sheer terror of God. Here is nothing but an awe-stricken fear which is afraid to look and even to listen.

Then at Heb.12:22 comes the difference. The first section deals with all that man can expect under the old covenant, a God of lonely majesty, complete separation from man, and prostrating fear. But to the Christian there has come the new covenant and a new relationship with God.

Hebrews makes a kind of list of the new glories that await the Christian.

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Hebrews 12:18-24

(i) The new Jerusalem awaits him. This world with all its impermanence, its fears, its mysteries, its separations goes and life for the Christian is made new.

(ii) The angels await him in joyful assembly. The word used for joyful assembly is *paneguris* (GSN3831) which is the word for a joyful national assembly in honour of the gods. To the Greek it described a joyful holy day when all men rejoiced. For the Christian, the joy of heaven is such that it makes even the angels break into rejoicing.

(iii) There await him God's elected people. The writer to the Hebrews uses two words to describe them. He says literally that they are the first-born. Now the characteristic of the first-born son is that the inheritance and the honour are his. He says that they are those whose names are written in the registers of heaven. In ancient days kings kept a register of their faithful citizens. So there await the Christian all those whom God has honoured and all those whom God has reckoned amongst his faithful citizens.

(iv) There awaits him God the Judge. The writer to the Hebrews never forgot that, at the end, the Christian must stand the scrutiny of God. The glory is there; but the awe and the fear of God still remain. The New Testament is never in the slightest danger of sentimentalising the idea of God.

(v) There await him the spirits of all good men who have achieved their goal. Once they encircled him in the unseen cloud; now he will be one of them. He himself goes to join those whose names are on God's honour roll.

(vi) Finally the writer to the Hebrews says that it was Jesus who initiated this new covenant and made this new relationship with God possible. It was he, the perfect priest and the perfect sacrifice, who made the unapproachable approachable and he did this at the cost of his blood. So the section ends with a curious contrast between the blood of Abel and the blood of Jesus. When Abel was slain, his blood upon the ground called for vengeance (Gen.4:10); but when Jesus was slain, his blood opened up the way of reconciliation. His sacrifice made it possible for man to be friends with God.

Once men were under the terror of the law; the relationship between them and God was one of unbridgeable distance and shuddering fear. But after Jesus came and lived and died, the God who was far distant was brought near and the way opened to his presence.

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Hebrews 12:25-29

THE GREATER OBLIGATION

Hebrews 12:25-29

See that you do not refuse to listen to his voice; for if they who refused to listen to the one who brought the oracles of God upon earth did not escape, how much more shall we not escape if we turn away from him who speaks from Heaven? Then his voice shook the earth but now the voice of the promise is: "Still once more I will shake not only the earth but heaven also." That phrase "still once more" signifies the removal of the things that are shaken, because they are merely created things, in order that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us give thanks because we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a kingdom in which we must worship God acceptably, with reverence and with fear, for our God, too, is a consuming fire.

Here the writer begins with a contrast which is also a warning. Moses brought to earth the oracles of God. The word that he uses (chrematizein, GSN5537) implies that Moses was only the transmitter of these oracles, the mouthpiece through which God spoke; and yet the man who broke these commandments did not escape punishment. On the other hand there is Jesus. The word used of him (lalein, GSN2980) implies the direct speech of God. He was not merely the transmitter of God's voice, he was God's voice. If that be so, how much more will the man who refuses to obey him find punishment? If a man merits condemnation for neglecting the imperfect message of the law, how much more does he merit it for neglecting the perfect message of the gospel? Because the gospel is the full revelation of God, there is laid on the man who hears it a double and a terrible responsibility; and his condemnation must be all the more if he neglects it.

Hebrews goes on to draw out another thought. When the law was given, the earth was shaken. "And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly" (Exo.19:18). "Tremble, O earth at the presence of the Lord" (Ps.114:7). "The earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God" (Ps.68:8). "The crash of thy thunder was in the whirlwind; thy lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook" (Ps.77:18).

The writer to the Hebrews finds another reference to the shaking of the earth in Hag.2:6. There the Greek version of the Old Testament says: "Once again, in a little while, (the Hebrew says, "very soon") I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land." The writer to the Hebrews takes this to be an announcement of the day when this earth shall pass away and the new age will begin. In that day everything that can be shaken will be destroyed; the only things to remain will be the things which can never be shaken; and chief among them is our relationship with God.

All things may pass away; the world as we know it may be uprooted; life as we experience it may come to an end; but one thing stands eternally sure--the relationship of the Christian to God.

If that be so there is a great obligation laid upon us. We must worship God with reverence and serve him with fear; for nothing must be allowed to disturb that relationship which will be our salvation when the world passes away. So the writer to the Hebrews finishes with one of those

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Hebrews 12:25-29

threatening quotations which he so often flings like a thunderbolt at his readers. It is a quotation from Deut.4:24. Moses is telling the people that they must never break their agreement with God and relapse into idolatry. For he is a jealous God. They must worship him alone or they will find him a consuming fire. It is as if the writer to the Hebrews was saying: "There is a choice before you. Remain steadfastly true to God, and in the day when the universe is shaken into destruction your relationship with him will stand safe and secure.

Be false to him and that very God who might have been your salvation will be to you a consuming fire of destruction." It is a grim thought; but in it there is the eternal truth that, if a man is true to God, he gains everything and, if he is untrue to God, he loses everything. In time and in eternity nothing really matters save loyalty to God.

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Hebrews 13:1-6

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Hebrews 13:1-6

Let brotherly love be always with you.

Do not forget the duty of hospitality for, in remembering this duty, there are some who have entertained angels without knowing that they were doing so.

Remember those who are in prison for you yourselves know what it is like to be a prisoner; remember those who are suffering ill-treatment for the same thing can happen to you so long as you are in the body.

Let marriage be held in honour among you all and never let the marriage bed be defiled. God judges those who are adulterers and immoral in their conduct.

Let your way of life be free from the love of money. Be content with what you have for he has said: "I will never fail you and I will never forsake you"; so that we can say with confidence: "The Lord is my helper: I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

As he comes to the close of the letter, the writer to the Hebrews turns to practical things. Here he outlines five essential qualities of the Christian life.

(i) There is brotherly love. The very circumstances of the early Church sometimes threatened brotherly love. The very fact that they took their religion as seriously as they did was in one sense a danger. In a Church which is threatened from the outside and desperately in earnest in the inside, there are always two dangers. First, there is the danger of heresy-hunting. The very desire to keep the faith pure tends to make men eager to track down and eliminate the heretic and the man whose faith has gone astray. Second, there is the danger of stern and unsympathetic treatment of the man whose nerve and faith have failed. The very necessity of unswerving loyalty in the midst of a heathen and a hostile world tends to add rigorousness to the treatment of the man who in some crisis had not the courage to stand for his faith.

It is a great thing to keep the faith clean; but when the desire to do so makes us censorious, harsh and unsympathetic, brotherly love is destroyed and we are left with a situation which may be worse than the one we tried to avoid. Somehow or other we have to combine two things--an earnestness in the faith and a kindness to the man who has strayed from it.

(ii) There is hospitality. The ancient world loved and honoured hospitality. The Jews had a saying: "There are six things the fruit of which a man eats in this world and by which his horn is raised in the world to come." And the list begins: "Hospitality to the stranger and visiting the sick." The Greeks gave Zeus, as one of his favourite titles, the title Zeus Xenios, which means Zeus, the god of strangers. The wayfaring man and the stranger were under the protection of the king of the gods. Hospitality, as Moffatt says, was an article of ancient religion.

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Hebrews 13:1-6

Inns were filthy, ruinously expensive, and of low repute. The Greek had always a shrinking from hospitality given for money; inn-keeping seemed to him an unnatural affair. In *The Frogs* of Aristophanes, Dionysus asks Heracles, when they are discussing finding a lodging, if he knows where there are fewest fleas. Plato in *The Laws* speaks of the inn-keeper holding travellers to ransom. It is not without significance that Josephus says that Rahab, the harlot who harboured Joshua's scouts in Jericho, kept an inn. When Theophrastus wrote his character sketch of the reckless man, he said that he was fit to keep an inn or run a brothel; he put both occupations on the same level.

In the ancient world there was a rather wonderful system of what were called "guest friendships." Throughout the years families, even when they had lost active touch with each other, had an arrangement that at any time needful they would make accommodation available for each other. This hospitality was even more necessary in the circle of the Christians. Slaves had no home of their own to which to go. Wandering preachers and prophets were always on the roads. On the ordinary business of life, Christians had journeys to make. Both their price and their moral atmosphere made the public inns impossible. There must in those days have been many isolated Christians fighting a lonely battle. Christianity was, and still should be, the religion of the open door. The writer to the Hebrews says that those who have given hospitality to strangers have sometimes, all unaware, entertained the angels of God.

He is thinking of the time when the angel came to Abraham and Sarah to tell them of the coming of a son (Gen.18:1ff.) and of the day when the angel came to Manoah to tell him that he would have a son (Judg.13:3ff.).

(iii) There is sympathy for those in trouble. It is here we see the early Christian Church at its loveliest. It often happened that the Christian landed in prison and worse. It might be for his faith; it might be for debt, for the Christians were poor; it might be that they were captured by pirates or brigands. It was then that the Church went into action.

Tertullian in *The Apology* writes: "If there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in prisons for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession." Aristides the heathen orator said of the Christians: "If they hear that any one of their number is imprisoned or in distress for the sake of their Christ's name, they all render aid in his necessity and, if he can be redeemed, they set him free." When Origen was young it was said of him: "Not only was he at the side of the holy martyrs in their imprisonment and until their final condemnation but, when they were led to death, he boldly accompanied them into danger."

Sometimes Christians were condemned to the mines which was almost like being sent to Siberia. The Apostolic Constitutions lay it down: "If any Christian is condemned for Christ's sake to the mines by the ungodly, do not overlook him but from the proceeds of your toil and sweat send him something to support himself and to reward the soldier of Christ." The Christians sought out their fellow Christians even in the wilds. There was actually a little Christian Church in the mines at Phaeno.

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Hebrews 13:1-6

Sometimes Christians had to be ransomed from robbers and brigands. The Apostolic Constitutions lay it down: "All monies accruing from honest labour do ye appoint and apportion to the redeeming of the saints ransoming thereby slaves and captives and prisoners, people who are sore abused or condemned by tyrants." When the Numidian robbers carried off their Christian friends, the Church at Carthage raised the equivalent of L1,000 to ransom them and promised more. There were actually cases where Christians sold themselves as slaves to find money to ransom their friends.

They were even prepared to bribe their way into gaol. The Christians became so notorious for their help to those in gaol that at the beginning of the fourth century the Emperor Licinius passed new legislation that "no one was to show kindness to sufferers in prison by supplying them with food and that no one was to show mercy to those starving in prison." It was added that those who were discovered so doing would be compelled to suffer the same fate as those they tried to help.

These instances are taken from Harnack's Expansion of Christianity and many others could be added. In the early days no Christian in trouble for his faith was ever neglected or forgotten by his fellow Christians.

(iv) There is purity. First, the marriage bond is to be universally respected. This may mean either of two almost opposite things. (a) There were ascetics who despised marriage. Some even went the length of castrating themselves to secure what they thought was purity. Origen, for instance, took that course. Even a heathen like Galen, the physician, noted of the Christians that "they include men and women who refrain from cohabiting all their lives." The writer to the Hebrews insists against these ascetics that the marriage bond is to be honoured and not despised. (b) There were those who were ever liable to relapse into immorality. The writer to the Hebrews uses two words. The one denotes adulterous living; the other denotes all kinds of impurity, such as unnatural vice. Into the world the Christians brought a new ideal of purity. Even the heathen admitted that. Galen, in the passage we have already quoted, goes on: "And they also number individuals who, in ruling and controlling themselves and in their keen pursuit of virtue, have attained a pitch not inferior to that of real philosophers." When Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, examined the Christians and reported back to Trajan, the Emperor, he had to admit, even although he was looking for a charge on which to condemn them, that at their Lord's Day meeting: "They bound themselves by an oath not for any criminal end but to avoid theft or robbery or adultery, never to break their word nor repudiate a deposit when called upon to refund it." In the early days the Christians presented such a purity to the world that not even their critics and their enemies could find a fault in it.

(v) There is contentment. The Christians must be free from the love of money. He must be content with what he has, and why should he not be for he possesses the continual presence of God? Hebrews quotes two great Old Testament passages--Josh. 1:5 and Ps. 118:6--to show that the man of God needs nothing more because he has with him always the presence and the help of God. Nothing that man can give him can improve on that.

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Hebrews 13:7-8

THE LEADERS AND THE LEADER

Hebrews 13:7-8

Remember your leaders, the men who spoke the word of God to you. Look back on how they made their exit from this life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

Implicit in this passage is a description of the real leader of men.

(i) The real leader of the Church preaches Christ and thereby brings men to him. Leslie Weatherhead somewhere tells of a public schoolboy who decided to enter the ministry. He was asked when he had come to that decision and said it was after hearing a certain sermon in his school chapel. He was asked the name of the preacher and his answer was that he had no memory of the preacher's name. All he knew was that he had shown him Jesus. The duty of the real preacher is to obliterate himself and show men nothing but Christ.

(ii) The real leader of the Church lives in the faith and thereby brings Christ to men. A saint has been defined as "a man in whom Christ lives again." The duty of the real preacher is not so much to talk to men about Christ as to show them Christ in his own life. Men listen not so much to what he is saying as to what he is.

(iii) The real leader, if need be, dies in loyalty. He shows men how to live and is prepared to show them how to die. Jesus, having loved his own, loved them to the end; and the real leader, having loved Jesus, loves him to the end. His loyalty never stops halfway.

(iv) Thereby the real leader leaves to those who come after two things--an example and an inspiration. Quintilian, the Roman master of oratory, said: "It is a good thing to know, and always to keep turning over in the mind, the things which were illustriously done of old." Epicurus advised his disciples continuously to remember those of old time who lived with virtue.

If there is one thing more than another that the world and the Church need in every generation, it is leadership like that.

Then the writer to the Hebrews moves on to another great thought. It is in the nature of things that all earthly leaders must come and go. They have their part in the drama of life and then the curtain comes down. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. His preeminence is permanent; his leadership is for ever. Therein lies the secret of earthly leadership; the real leader is the man who is himself led by Jesus Christ. He who walked the ways of Galilee is as powerful as ever to smite evil and to love the sinner; and, as then he chose twelve to be with him and sent them out to do his work, so now he is still seeking those who will bring men to him and him to men.

Barclay's Commentary

Hebrews 13:9-16

THE WRONG AND THE RIGHT SACRIFICE

Hebrews 13:9-16

Do not let yourselves be carried away by subtle and strange teachings, for it is a fine thing to have your heart made strong by grace not by the eating of different kinds of food, for they never did any good to those who took that line of conduct. We have an altar from which those who serve in the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of the animals, whose blood is taken by the High Priest into the Holy Place as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. That was why Jesus suffered outside the gate, so that he might make men fit for the presence of God by his own blood. So then let us go to him outside the camp, bearing the same reproach as he did, for here we have no abiding city but are searching for the city which is to come. Through him, therefore, let us continually bring to God a sacrifice of praise, I mean, the fruit of lips which continually acknowledge their faith in his name. Do not forget to do good and to share everything, for God is well pleased with a sacrifice like that.

It may be that no one will ever discover the precise meaning behind this passage. Clearly there was some false teaching going on in the Church to which this letter was written. The writer to the Hebrews did not need to describe it; his readers knew all about it, because some of them had succumbed to it and all were in danger of it. As to what it was, we can only guess.

We may start with one basic fact. The writer to the Hebrews is convinced that real strength comes to a man's heart only from the grace of God and that what people eat and drink has nothing to do with their spiritual strength. So then in the Church to which he was writing there were some who placed too much importance on laws about food. There are certain possibilities.

(i) The Jews had rigid food laws, laid down at length in Lev. 11. They believed they could serve and please God by eating and by not eating certain foods. Possibly there were some in this Church who were ready to abandon their Christian liberty and once again put themselves under the yoke of Jewish rules and regulations about food, thinking that by so doing they were going to add strength to their spiritual life.

(ii) Certain Greeks had very definite ideas about food. Long ago Pythagoras had been like that. He believed in reincarnation, that a man's soul passed from body to body until finally it merited release. That release could be hastened by prayer and meditation and discipline and asceticism; and so the Pythagoreans were vegetarians. There were people called Gnostics who were much the same. They believed that matter was altogether bad and that a man must concentrate on spirit which is altogether good. They therefore believed that the body was altogether bad and that a man ought to discipline it and treat it with the greatest austerity. They cut down food to the bare minimum and they, too, abstained from meat. There were any number of Greeks who thought that by what they ate or refused to eat they were strengthening their spiritual life and releasing their soul.

(iii) Neither of these things seems quite to fit. This eating and drinking has something to do with the body of Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews goes back to the regulations for the Day of Atonement. According to these regulations, the body of the bullock which was an offering for the

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Hebrews 13:9-16

sins of the High Priest and the body of the goat which was an offering for the sins of the people must be totally consumed with fire in a place outside the camp (Lev.16:27). They were sin offerings and the point is that even if the worshippers had wished to eat their flesh they could not do so. The writer to the Hebrews sees Jesus as the perfect sacrifice. The parallel for him is complete because Jesus, too, was sacrificed "outside the gate" that is, outside the city wall of Jerusalem. Crucifixions were always carried out outside a town. Jesus, then, was a sin-offering for men; and it follows that, just as none could eat of the flesh of the sin-offering on the Day of Atonement, no one can eat of his flesh.

It may be that here we have the clue. There may have been a little group in this Church who, either at the sacrament or at some common meal where they consecrated their food to Jesus, claimed that they were in fact eating the body of Christ. They may have persuaded themselves that because they had consecrated their food to Christ, his body had entered into it. That was indeed what the religious Greeks believed about their gods. When a Greek sacrificed he was given back part of the meat. Often he made a feast for himself and his friends within the temple where the sacrifice had been made; and he believed that when he ate the meat of the sacrifice, the god to whom that meat had been sacrificed was in it and entered into him. It may well be that certain Greeks had brought their own ideas into Christianity with them; and talked about eating the body of Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews believed with all the intensity of his being that no food can bring Christ into a man and that Christ can enter into him only by grace. It is quite likely that we have here a reaction against an overstressing of the sacraments. It is a notable fact that the writer to the Hebrews never mentions the sacraments; they do not seem to come into his scheme at all. It is likely that, even thus early, there were those who took a mechanical view of the sacraments, forgetting that no sacrament in the world avails anything by itself and that its only use is that in it the grace of God meets the faith of man. It is not the meat but the faith and the grace which matter.

This queer argument has set the writer to the Hebrews thinking. Christ was crucified outside the gate. He was exiled from men and numbered with the transgressors. Therein the writer to the Hebrews sees a picture. We, too, have to sever ourselves from the life of the world and be willing to bear the same reproach as Christ bore. The isolation and the humiliation may come to the Christian as they came to his Saviour.

Hebrews goes further. If the Christian cannot again offer the sacrifice of Christ, what can he offer? The writer says he can offer certain things.

(i) He can offer his continual praise and thanks to God. The ancient peoples sometimes argued that a thank-offering was more acceptable to God than a sin-offering, for when a man offered a sin-offering he was trying to get something for himself, while a thank-offering was the unconditional offering of the grateful heart. The sacrifice of gratitude is one that all may and should bring.

(ii) He can offer his public and glad confession of his faith in the name of Christ. That is the offering of loyalty. The Christian can always offer to God a life that is never ashamed to show whose it is and whom it serves.

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(iii) The Christian can offer deeds of kindness to his fellow men. In fact that was something which a Jew knew well. After A.D. 70 the sacrifices of the Temple came to an end when the Temple was destroyed. The Rabbis taught that with the Temple ritual gone, theology, prayer, penitence, the study of the law and charity were sacrifices equivalent to the ancient ritual. Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai comforted himself in those sorrowful days by believing that "in the practice of charity he still possessed a valid sacrifice for sin." An ancient Christian writer says: "I expected that thy heart would bear fruit and that thou wouldst worship God, the Creator of all, and unto him continually offer thy prayers by means of compassion; for compassion shown to men by men is a bloodless sacrifice and holy unto God." After all, Jesus himself said: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt.25:40).

The best of all sacrifices to bring to God is the gift of help to one of his children in need.

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Hebrews 13:17-20

OBEDIENCE AND PRAYER

Hebrews 13:17-20

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they sleeplessly watch over your souls, conscious that they will have to give account of their trust. This do that they may carry out this task with joy and not with grief, for, if you grieve them, there would be no profit to you either in that. Keep on praying for us, for we believe that we have a clear conscience, for we wish in all things to live in such a way that our conduct will be fair. I urge you to do this all the more that I may the more quickly be enabled to return to you.

The writer to the Hebrews lays down the duty of the congregation to its present leaders and its absent leader.

To the present leaders the duty of the congregation is obedience. A Church is a democracy but not a democracy run mad; it must give obedience to those whom it has chosen as its guides. That obedience is not to be given in order to gratify the leaders' sense of power or to increase their prestige. It is to be given so that at the end of the day the leaders may be seen to have lost none of the souls committed to their care. The greatest joy of the leader of any Christian fellowship is to see those whom he leads established in the Christian way. As John wrote: "No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth" (3Jn.4). The greatest sorrow of the leader of any Christian fellowship is to see those whom he leads growing further away from God.

To the absent leader the duty of the congregation is that of prayer. It is a Christian duty always to bear our absent loved ones to the throne of God's grace and daily to remember there all who bear the responsibility of leadership and authority. When Stanley Baldwin became Prime Minister of Great Britain, his friends thronged round to congratulate him. He said: "It is not your congratulations I need; it is your prayers."

We must give our respect and our obedience to those set in authority over us in the Church when they are present with us, and when they are absent we must remember them in our prayers.

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Hebrews 13:20-24

A PRAYER, A GREETING AND A BLESSING

Hebrews 13:20-24

May the God of peace, who brought up from among the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the eternal covenant, it is our Lord Jesus I mean, equip you with every good thing that you may do his will and may he create in you through Jesus Christ that which is well-pleasing in his sight. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Brothers, I appeal to you to bear with this appeal of mine, for indeed it is but a short letter that I have sent to you.

I would have you know that our brother Timothy is at liberty again. If he comes soon I will see you along with him.

Greet all your leaders and all God's dedicated people. The folk from Italy send you their greetings. Grace be with you all. Amen.

The great prayer of Heb.13:20-21 draws a perfect picture of God and of Jesus.

(i) God is the God of peace. Even in the most troublous and distressing situation, he can bring peace to men's souls. In any fellowship where there is division, it is because men have forgotten God and only the remembrance of his presence can bring back the lost peace. When a man's mind and heart are distracted and he is torn in two between the two sides of his own nature, it is only by giving his life into the control of God that he can know peace. It is only the God of peace who can make us at peace with ourselves, at peace with each other and at peace with himself.

(ii) God is the God of life. It was God who brought Jesus again from the dead. His love and power are the only things which can bring a man peace in life and triumph in death. It was to obey the will of God that Jesus died and that same will brought him again from the dead. For the man who obeys the will of God there is no such thing as final disaster; even death itself is conquered.

(iii) God is the God who both shows us his will and equips us to do it. He never gives us a task without also giving us the power to accomplish it. When God sends us out, he sends us equipped with everything we need.

The picture of Jesus is also threefold.

(i) Jesus is the great shepherd of his sheep. The picture of Jesus as the good shepherd is very precious to us but, strangely enough, it is one that Paul never uses and that the writer to the Hebrews uses only here. There is a lovely legend of Moses which tells of a thing he did when he had fled from Egypt and was keeping the flocks of Jethro in the desert. A sheep of the flock wandered far away. Moses patiently followed it and found it drinking at a mountain stream. He came up to it and put it upon his shoulder. "So it was because you were thirsty that you wandered away," said Moses gently and, without any anger at the toil the sheep had caused him, he carried it

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home. When God saw it, he said: "If Moses is so compassionate to a straying sheep, he is the very man I want to be the leader of my people." A shepherd is one who is ready to give his life for his sheep; he bears with their foolishness and never stops loving them. That is what Jesus does for us.

(ii) Jesus is the one who established the new covenant and made possible the new relationship between God and man. It was he who took away the terror and showed us the love of God.

(iii) Jesus is the one who died. To show men what God was like and to open the way to him, cost the life of Jesus. Our new relationship to God cost his blood.

The letter finishes with some personal greetings. The writer to the Hebrews half apologises for its length. If he had dealt with these vast topics the letter would never have ended at all. It is short--Moffatt points out that you can read it aloud in less than an hour--in comparison with the greatness of the eternal truths with which it deals.

What the reference to Timothy means no one knows, but it sounds as if he, too, had been in prison for the sake of Jesus Christ.

And so the letter closes with a blessing. All through it has been telling of the grace of Christ which opens the way to God and it comes to an end with a prayer that that wondrous grace may rest upon its readers.

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Introduction to James

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER OF JAMES

James is one of the books which had a very hard fight to get into the New Testament. Even when it did come to be regarded as Scripture, it was spoken of with a certain reserve and suspicion, and even as late as the sixteenth century Luther would gladly have banished it from the New Testament altogether.

THE DOUBTS OF THE FATHERS

In the Latin-speaking part of the Church it is not until the middle of the fourth century that James emerges in the writings of the fathers. The first list of New Testament books ever to be compiled is the Muratorian Canon, which dates to about A.D. 170, and James is absent from it. Tertullian, writing in the middle of the third century, is an immense quoter of Scripture; he has 7,258 quotations from the New Testament, but never one from James. The first appearance of James in Latin is in a Latin manuscript called the Codex Corbeiensis, which dates to about A.D. 350. This manuscript attributes the authorship of the book to James the son of Zebedee; and includes it, not with the universally acknowledged New Testament books, but with a collection of religious tracts written by the early fathers. James has now emerged, but it is accepted with a certain reservation. The first Latin writer to quote James verbatim is Hilary of Poitiers in a work On the Trinity, written about A.D. 357.

If, then, James was so late in emerging in the Latin Church and if, when it did emerge, it was still regarded with some uncertainty, how did it become integrated into the New Testament? The moving influence was that of Jerome, for he unhesitatingly included James in his Vulgate version of the New Testament. But even then there is an accent of doubt. In his book On Famous Men, Jerome writes, "James, who is called the brother of the Lord...wrote only one epistle, which is one of the seven catholic epistles, and which, some people say, was issued by someone else under James' name." Jerome fully accepted the letter as Scripture, but he felt that there was some doubt as to who the writer was. The doubt was finally set at rest by the fact that Augustine fully accepted James, and was not in doubt that the James in question was the brother of our Lord.

James was late in emerging in the Latin Church; for long there was a kind of question mark against it; but Jerome's inclusion of it in the Vulgate and Augustine's full acceptance of it, brought it in the end, albeit after a struggle, full recognition.

THE SYRIAN CHURCH

One would have thought that the Syrian Church would have been the first to accept James, if it was really written in Palestine and was really the work of the brother of our Lord; but in the Syrian Church there was the same oscillation. The official New Testament of the Syrian Church is called the Peshitto. This was to the Syrian Church what the Vulgate was to the Latin Church. It was made by Rabbula, the Bishop of Edessa, about A.D. 412 and in it for the first time James was translated into Syriac. Up to that time there was no Syriac version of the book, and Up to A.D. 451 there is no trace of James in Syriac religious literature. After that James was widely enough accepted, but as late as A.D. 545 Paul of Nisibis was still questioning its right to be in the New Testament. It was

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not, in fact, until midway through the eighth century that the great authority of John of Damascus did for James in the Syrian Church what Augustine had done for it in the Latin.

THE GREEK CHURCH

Although James emerged sooner in the Greek-speaking Church than it did in the Latin and Syrian, it was none the less late in making a definite appearance. The first writer to quote it by name is Origen, head of the school of Alexandria. Writing almost midway through the third century, he says, "If faith is called faith, but exists apart from works, such a faith is dead, as we read in the letter which is currently reported to be by James." It is true that in other works he quotes it as being without doubt by James and shows that he believes James to be the brother of our Lord; but once again there is the accent of doubt. Eusebius, the great scholar of Caesarea, investigated the position of the various books in the New Testament or on its fringe midway through the fourth century.

He classes James amongst the books which are "disputed"; and he writes of it: "The first of the epistles called Catholic is said to be his (James'); but it must be noted that some regard it as spurious; and it is certainly true that very few of the ancient writers mention it." Here again is the accent of doubt. Eusebius himself accepted James but he was well aware that there were those who did not. The turning-point in the Greek-speaking Church came in A.D. 367. In that year Athanasius issued his famous Easter Letter in Egypt. Its purpose was to inform his people what books were Scripture and what were not, because apparently their reading had become too wide, or at least, too many books were being regarded as Holy Writ. In that Letter James was included without qualification; and its position was thenceforth safe.

So, then, in the early church no one really questioned the value of James; but in every branch of it it was late in emerging and had to go through a period when its right to be considered a New Testament book was under dispute.

In fact the history of James is still to be seen in its position in the Roman Catholic Church. In 1546 the Council of Trent once and for all laid down the Roman Catholic Bible. A list of books was given to which none could be added and from which none could be subtracted, and which had to be read in the Vulgate Version and in no other. The books were divided into two classes; those which were proto-canonical, that is to say, those which had been unquestioningly accepted from the beginning; and those which were deuterio-canonical, that is to say, those which only gradually won their way into the New Testament. Although the Roman Catholic Church never had any doubts about James, it is none the less in the second class that it is included.

LUTHER AND JAMES

In our own day it is true to say that James, at least for most people, does not occupy a position in the forefront of the New Testament. Few would mention it in the same breath as John or Romans, or Luke or Galatians. There is still for many a kind of reservation about it. Why should that be? It cannot have to do with the doubt about James in the early church, for the history of the New Testament books in these distant days is not known to many people in the modern Church. The reason lies in this. In the Roman Catholic Church the position of James was finally settled by the

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Edict of the Council of Trent; but in the Protestant Church its history continued to be troubled, and indeed, became even more troubled, because Luther attacked it and would have ejected it from the New Testament altogether. In his printing of the German New Testament Luther had a contents page with the books set out and numbered.

At the end of the list there was a little group, separate from the others and with no numbers assigned to them. That group comprised James, Jude, Hebrews and Revelation. These were books which he held to be secondary.

Luther was specially severe on James, and the adverse judgment of a great man on any book can be a millstone round its neck for ever. It is in the concluding paragraph of his Preface to the New Testament that there stands Luther's famous verdict on James:

In sum: the gospel and the first epistle of St. John, St. Paul's epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians and Ephesians; and St. Peter's first epistle, are the books which show Christ to you. They teach everything you need to know for your salvation, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or hear any other teaching. In comparison with these the epistle of James is an epistle full of straw, because it contains nothing evangelical. But more about this in other prefaces.

As he promised, Luther developed this verdict in the Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude. He begins: "I think highly of the epistle of James, and regard it as valuable although it was rejected in early days. It does not expound human doctrines, but lays much emphasis on God's law. Yet to give my own opinion, without prejudice to that of anyone else, I do not hold it to be of apostolic authorship." He then goes on to give his reasons for this rejection.

First, in direct opposition to Paul and the rest of the Bible, it ascribes justification to works, quoting Abraham wrongly as one who was justified by his works. This in itself proves that the epistle cannot be of apostolic origin.

Second, not once does it give to Christians any instruction or reminder of the Passion, Resurrection, or Spirit of Christ. It mentions Christ only twice. Then Luther goes on to state his own principle for testing any book: "The true touchstone for testing any book is to discover whether it emphasises the prominence of Christ or not.... What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, not even if taught by Peter or Paul. On the other hand what does preach Christ is apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, or Herod does it." On that test James fails. So Luther goes on: "The epistle of James however only drives you to the law and its works. He mixes one thing to another to such an extent that I suspect some good and pious man assembled a few things said by disciples of the apostles, and put them down in black and white; or perhaps the epistle was written by someone else who made notes of a sermon of his. He calls the law a law of freedom (Jas.1:25; Jas.2:12), although St. Paul calls it a law of slavery, wrath, death, and sin" (Gal.3:23f.; Rom.4:15; Rom.7:10f.).

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So Luther comes to his conclusion: "In sum: he wishes to guard against those who depended on faith without going on to works, but he had neither the spirit, nor the thought, nor the eloquence equal to the task. He does violence to Scripture, and so contradicts Paul and all Scripture. He tries to accomplish by emphasising law what the apostles bring about by attracting man to love. I therefore refuse him a place among the writers of the true canon of my Bible; but I would not prevent anyone else placing him or raising him where he likes, for the epistle contains many excellent passages. One man does not count as a man even in the eyes of the world; how then shall this single and isolated writer count against Paul and all the rest of the Bible?"

Luther does not spare James; and it may be that once we have studied the book we may think that for once he allowed personal prejudice to injure sound judgment.

Such, then, is the troubled history of James. Now we must try to answer the questions it poses regarding authorship and date.

THE IDENTITY OF JAMES

The author of this letter gives us practically no information about himself. He calls himself simply: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jas.1:1). Who then is he? In the New Testament there are apparently at least five people who bear that name.

(i) There is the James who was the father of the member of the Twelve called Judas, not Iscariot (Lk.6:16). He is no more than a name and cannot have had any connection with this letter.

(ii) There is James, the son of Alphaeus, who was a member of the Twelve (Matt.10:3; Mk.3:18; Lk.6:15; Ac.1:13). A comparison of Matt.9:9 with Mk.2:14 makes it certain that Matthew and Levi were one and the same person. Levi was also a son of Alphaeus, and therefore Matthew and this James must have been brothers. But of James, the son of Alphaeus, nothing else is known; and he also can have had no connection with this letter.

(iii) There is the James who is called James the Younger and is mentioned in Mk.15:40 (compare Matt.27:56; Jn.19:25). Again nothing is known of him, and he cannot have had any connection with this letter.

(iv) There is James, the brother of John, and the son of Zebedee, a member of the twelve (Matt.10:2; Mk.3:17; Lk.6:14; Ac.1:13). In the gospel story James never appears independently of his brother John (Matt.4:21; Matt.17:1; Mk.1:19; Mk.1:29; Mk.5:37; Mk.9:2; Mk.10:35,41; Mk.13:3; Mk.14:33; Lk.5:10; Lk.8:51; Lk.9:28; Lk.9:54). He was the first of the apostolic band to be martyred, for he was beheaded on the orders of Herod Agrippa the First in the year A.D. 44. He has been connected with the letter. The fourth century Latin Codex Corbeiensis at the end of the epistle, has a note quite definitely ascribing it to James the son of Zebedee. The only place where this ascription of authorship was taken seriously was in the Spanish Church, in which, down to the end of the seventeenth century, he was often held to be the author. This was due to the fact that St. James of Compostella, the patron saint of Spain, is identified with James the son of Zebedee; and it was natural that the Spanish Church should be predisposed to wish that their country's patron saint

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should be the author of a New Testament letter. But the martyrdom of James came too early for him to have written the letter, and in any event there is nothing beyond the Codex Corbeiensis to connect him with it.

(v) Finally, there is James, who is called the brother of Jesus. Although the first definite connection of him with this letter does not emerge until Origen in the first half of the third century, it is to him that it has always been traditionally ascribed. The Roman Catholic Church agrees with this ascription, for in 1546 the Council of Trent laid it down that James is canonical and is written by an apostle.

Let us then collect the evidence about this James. From the New Testament we learn that he was one of the brothers of Jesus (Mk.6:3; Matt.13:55). We shall later discuss in what sense the word brother is to be taken. During Jesus' ministry it is clear that his family did not understand or sympathize with him and would have wished to restrain him (Matt.12:46-50; Mk.3:21; Mk.3:31-35; Jn.7:3-9). John says bluntly, "For even his brothers did not believe in him" (Jn.7:5). So, then, during Jesus' earthly ministry James was numbered amongst his opponents.

With Acts there comes a sudden and unexplained change. When Acts opens, Jesus' mother and his brothers are there with the little group of Christians (Ac.1:14). From there onwards it becomes clear that James has become the leader of the Jerusalem Church although how that came about is never explained. It is to James that Peter sends the news of his escape from prison (Ac.12:17). James presides over the Council of Jerusalem which agreed to the entry of the Gentiles into the Christian Church (Ac.15). It is James and Peter whom Paul meets when he first goes to Jerusalem; and it is with Peter, James and John, the pillars of the Church, that he discusses and settles his sphere of work (Gal.1:19; Gal.2:9). It is to James that Paul comes with his collection from the Gentile Churches on the visit to Jerusalem which is destined to be his last and which leads to his imprisonment (Ac.21:18-25).

This last episode is important, for it shows James very sympathetic to the Jews who still observe the Jewish law, and so eager that their scruples should not be offended, that he actually persuades Paul to demonstrate his loyalty to the law by assuming responsibility for the expenses of certain Jews who are fulfilling a Nazirite vow.

Plainly, then, James was the leader of the Jerusalem Church. As might be expected, this was something which tradition greatly developed. Hegesippus, the early historian, says that James was the first bishop of the Church at Jerusalem. Clement of Alexandria goes further and says that he was chosen for that office by Peter and John. Jerome in his book, *On Famous Men*, says, "After the Passion of the Lord, James was immediately ordained bishop of Jerusalem by the apostles.... He ruled the Church of Jerusalem for thirty years, that is, until the seventh year of the reign of Nero." The Clementine Recognitions take the final step in the development of the legend, for they say that James was ordained Bishop of Jerusalem by none other than Jesus himself. Clement of Alexandria relates a strange tradition: "To James the Just, and John and Peter, after the Resurrection, the Lord committed knowledge; they committed it to the other apostles; and the other apostles to the seventy." The later developments are not to be accepted but the basic fact remains that James was the undisputed head of the Church at Jerusalem.

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JAMES AND JESUS

Such a change must have some explanation. It may well be that we have it in a brief sentence in the New Testament itself. In 1Cor.15 Paul gives us a list of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus and includes the words: "Then he appeared to James" (1Cor.15:7). It so happens that there is a strange reference to James in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which was one of the early gospels which did not gain admittance to the New Testament but which, to judge from its surviving fragments, had much of value in it. The following passage from it is handed down by Jerome:

Now the Lord, when he had given the linen cloth unto the servant of the High Priest, went unto James and appeared to him (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour, wherein he had drunk the Lord's cup, until he should see him risen again from among them that sleep). And again after a little, "Bring ye," saith the Lord, "a table and bread," and immediately it is added: "He took bread and blessed and brake it and gave it unto James the Just and said unto him, 'My brother, eat thy bread, for the Son of Man is risen from among them that sleep.'"

That passage is not without its difficulties. The beginning seems to mean that Jesus, when he rose from the dead and emerged from the tomb, handed the linen shroud, which he had been wearing in death, to the servant of the High Priest and went to meet his brother James. It also seems to imply that James was present at the Last Supper. But although the passage has its obscurities, one thing is clear. Something about Jesus in the last days and hours had fastened on James' heart and he had vowed that he would not eat until Jesus had risen again; and so Jesus came to him and gave him the assurance for which he waited. That there was a meeting of James and the Risen Christ is certain. What passed at that moment we shall never know. But we do know this, that after it the James who had been hostile and unsympathetic to Jesus became his servant for life and his martyr in death.

JAMES THE MARTYR OF CHRIST

That James died a martyr's death is the consistent statement of early tradition. The accounts of the circumstances vary, but the fact that he was martyred remains constant. Josephus' account is very brief (Antiquities 20: 9.1):

So Ananus, being that kind of man, and thinking that he had got a good opportunity because Festus was dead and Albinus not yet arrived, holds a judicial council; and he brought before it the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ--James was his name--and some others, and on the charge of violating the Law he gave them over to be stoned.

Ananus was a Jewish High Priest; Festus and Albinus were procurators of Palestine, holding the same position as Pilate had held. The point of the story is that Ananus took advantage of the interregnum between the death of one procurator and the arrival of his successor to eliminate James

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and other leaders of the Christian Church. This, in fact, well fits the character of Ananus as it is known to us and would mean that James was martyred in A.D. 62.

A much longer account is given in the history of Hegesippus. Hegesippus' history is itself lost, but his account of the death of James has been preserved in full by Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History 2: 23). It is lengthy, but it is of such interest that it must be quoted in its entirety.

To the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles succeeded the Lord's brother, James, he whom all from the time of the Lord to our own day call the Just, as there were many named James. And he was holy from his mother's womb; wine and strong drink he drank not, nor did he eat flesh; no razor touched his head, he anointed himself not with oil, and used not the bath. To him alone was it permitted to enter the Holy Place, for neither did he wear wool, but linen clothes. And alone he would enter the Temple, and be found prostrate on his knees beseeching pardon for the people, so that his knees were callous like a camel's in consequence of his continual kneeling in prayer to God and beseeching pardon for the people. Because of his exceeding righteousness he was called the Just, and Oblias, which is in Greek Bulwark of the People, and Righteousness, as the prophets declare concerning him.

Therefore, certain of the seven sects among the people, already mentioned by me in the Memoirs, asked him: "What is the door of Jesus?" and he said that He was the Saviour--of whom some accepted the faith that Jesus is the Christ. Now the aforesaid sects were not believers either in a Resurrection or in One who should come to render to every man according to his deeds; but as many as believed did so because of James. So, since many of the rulers, too, were believers, there was a tumult of the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, for they said there was danger that all the people would expect Jesus the Christ. Accordingly they said, when they had met together with James: "We entreat thee restrain the people since it has gone astray unto Jesus, holding him to be the Christ. We entreat thee to persuade concerning Jesus all those who come to the day of the Passover, for we all listen to thee. For we and all the people testify to thee that thou art just and that thou respectest not persons.

So thou, therefore, persuade the people concerning Jesus, not to go astray, for all the people and all of us listen to thee. Take thy stand, therefore, on the pinnacle of the Temple, that up there thou mayest be well seen, and thy words audible to all the people. For because of the Passover all the tribes have come together and the gentiles also."

So the aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees set James on the pinnacle of the Temple and called to him: "O thou, the Just, to whom we all ought to listen, since the people is going astray after Jesus the crucified, tell us what is the door of Jesus?" And with a loud voice he answered: "Why do you ask me concerning the Son of Man? He sitteth himself in heaven on the right hand of the great Power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven." And when many were convinced and gave glory for the witness of James, and said, "Hosanna to the Son of David," then again the same Scribes and

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Pharisees said to one another, "We were wrong to permit such a testimony to Jesus; but let us go up and cast him (James) down, that through fear they may not believe him." And they cried out saying, "Ho, Ho! even the Just has gone astray," and they fulfilled the Scriptures written in Isaiah: "Let us away with the Just, because he is troublesome to us; therefore they shall eat the fruits of their doings."

Accordingly they went up and cast the Just down. And they said to one another, "Let us stone James the Just," and they began to stone him, since he was not killed by the fall, but he turned and knelt down saying, "I beseech thee, Lord God Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And so, as they were stoning him, one of the Priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of Rechabim. mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out saying, "Stop! what are ye doing? The Just prays for you." And a certain one of them, one of the fullers, taking the club with which he pounds clothes, brought it down on the head of the Just; and so he suffered martyrdom.

And they buried him there on the spot, near the Temple. A true witness has he become both to Jews and Greeks that Jesus is Christ. And immediately Vespasian besieges them.

The last sentence shows that Hegesippus had a different date for the death of James. Josephus makes it A.D. 62; but, if this happened just before the siege of Vespasian, the date is perhaps about A.D. 66.

Much in the story of Hegesippus may well be legendary but from it two things emerge. First, it is again evidence that James died a martyr's death. Second, it is evidence that, even after James became a Christian, he remained in complete loyalty to the orthodox Jewish Law. So loyal that the Jews regarded him as one of themselves. This would fit well with what we have already noted of James' attitude to Paul when he came to Jerusalem with the collection for the Jerusalem Church (Ac.21:18-25).

THE BROTHER OF OUR LORD

There is one other question about the person of James which we must try to solve. In Gal.1:19 Paul speaks of him as the Lord's brother. In Matt.13:55 and in Mk.6:3 he is named among the brothers of Jesus; and in Ac.1:14, although no names are given, the brothers of Jesus are said to be amongst his followers in the earliest Church. The question of the meaning of brother is one which must be faced, for the Roman Catholic Church attaches a great deal of importance to the answer, as does the Anglo-Catholic section of the Anglican Church. Ever since the time of Jerome there has been continuous argument in the Church on this question. There are three theories of the relationship of these "brothers" to Jesus; and we shall consider them one by one.

THE HIERONYMIAN THEORY

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The Hieronymian Theory takes its name from Jerome, who in Greek is Hieronymos (GSN0000). It was he who worked out the theory which declares that the "brothers" of Jesus were in fact his cousins; and this is the settled belief of the Roman Catholic Church, for which it is an article of faith. It was put forward by Jerome in A.D. 383 and we shall best grasp his complicated argument by setting it out in a series of steps.

(i) James the brother of our Lord is included among the apostles. Paul writes: "But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother" (Gal.1:19).

(ii) Jerome insists that the word apostle can be used only of the Twelve. If that be so, we must look for James among them. He cannot be identified with James, brother of John and son of Zebedee, who apart from anything else was martyred by the time of Gal.1:19, as Ac.12:2 plainly tells us. Therefore he must be identified with the only other James among the Twelve, James the son of Alphaeus.

(iii) Jerome proceeds to make another identification. In Mk.6:3 we read: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, brother of James and Joses?"; and in Mk.15:40 we find beside the Cross Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joses. Since James the Younger is the brother of Joses and the son of Mary, he must therefore be the same person as the James of Mk.6:3, who is the brother of our Lord. Therefore, according to Jerome, James the brother of the Lord, James the son of Alphaeus and James the Younger are the same person under different descriptions.

(iv) Jerome bases the next and final step of his argument on a deduction made from the lists of the women who were there when Jesus was crucified. Let us set down that list as given by the three gospel writers.

In Mk.15:40 it is:

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome.

In Matt.27:56 it is:

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

#In Jn.19:25 it is:

Jesus' mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.

Now let us analyse these lists. In each of them Mary Magdalene appears by name. It is safe to identify Salome and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. But the real problem is how many women are there in John's list? Is the list to be read like this:

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- (i) Jesus' mother;
- (ii) Jesus' mother's sister;
- (iii) Mary the wife of Cleopas;
- (iv) Mary Magdalene.

Or is the list to be read like this:

- (i) Jesus' mother;
- (ii) Jesus' mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas;
- (iii) Mary Magdalene.

Jerome insists that the second way is correct and that Jesus' mother's sister and Mary, the wife of Cleopas, are one and the same person. If that be so, she must also be the Mary who in the other lists is the mother of James and Joses. This James who is her son is the man who is variously known as James the Younger and as James the son of Alphaeus and as James the apostle who is known as the brother of our Lord. This means that James is the son of Mary's sister and therefore is Jesus' cousin.

There, then, is Jerome's argument. Against it at least four criticisms can be levelled.

(i) Again and again James is called the brother of Jesus or is numbered amongst the brothers of Jesus. The word used in each case is adelphos (GSN0000), the normal word for brother. True, it can describe people who belong to a common fellowship, just as the Christians called each other brother. True, it can be used as a term of endearment and we may call someone with whom we enjoy personal intimacy a brother. But when it is used of those who are kin, it is, to say the least of it, very doubtful that it can mean cousin. If James was the cousin of Jesus, it is extremely unlikely--perhaps impossible--that he would be called the adelphos (GSN0000) of Jesus.

(ii) Jerome was quite wrong in assuming that the term apostle could be used only of the Twelve. Paul was an apostle (Rom.1:1; 1Cor.1:1; 2Cor.1:1; Gal.1:1). Barnabas was an apostle (Ac.14:14; 1Cor.9:6). Silas was an apostle (Ac.15:22). Andronicus and Junia were apostles (Rom.16:7). It is impossible to limit the word apostle to the Twelve; since, therefore, it is not necessary to look for James the Lord's brother among the Twelve, the whole argument of Jerome collapses.

(iii) It is on the face of it much more likely that Jn.19:25 is a list of four women, not three, for, if Mary the wife of Cleopas were the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother, it would mean that there were two sisters in the same family both called Mary, which is extremely unlikely.

(iv) It must be remembered that the Church knew nothing of this theory until A.D. 383 when Jerome produced it; and it is quite certain that it was produced for no other reason than to conserve the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

The theory that those called Jesus' brothers were, in fact, his cousins must be dismissed as rendered quite untenable by the facts of the case.

THE EPIPHANIAN THEORY

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The second of the great theories concerning the relationship of Jesus and his "brothers" holds that these "brothers" were, in fact, his half-brothers, sons of Joseph by a previous marriage. This is called the Epiphanian Theory after Epiphanius who strongly affirmed it about A.D. 370. He did not construct it. It existed long before this and may indeed be said to be the most usual opinion in the early church. The substance of it already appears in an apocryphal book called the Book of James or the Protevangelium which dates back to the middle of the second century. That book tells how there was a devout husband and wife called Joachim and Anna. Their great grief was that they had no child. To their great joy in their old age a child was born to them, and this too, apparently, was regarded as a virgin birth. The child, a girl, was called Mary and was to be the mother of Jesus. Joachim and Anna vowed their child to the Lord; and when she reached the age of three they took her to the Temple and left her there in the charge of the priests. She grew up in the Temple; and when she reached the age of twelve the priests took thought for her marriage. They called together the widowers of the people, telling each man to bring his rod with him. Among them came Joseph the carpenter. The High Priest took the rods, and Joseph's was last. To the other rods nothing happened; but from the rod of Joseph there flew a dove which came and settled on Joseph's head. In this way it was revealed that Joseph was to take Mary to wife. Joseph at first was very unwilling. "I have sons," he said, "and I am an old man, but she is a girl: lest I become a laughing-stock to the children of Israel" (Protevangelium 9: 1). But in the end he took her in obedience to the will of God, and in due time Jesus was born.

The material of the Protevangelium is, of course, legendary; but it shows that by the middle of the second century the theory which was one day to bear the name of Epiphanius was widely held.

There is no direct evidence for this theory whatsoever and all the support adduced in its favour is of an indirect character.

(i) It is asked: would Jesus have committed his mother to the care of John, if she had other sons besides himself? (Jn.19:26-27). The answer is that, so far as we know, Jesus' family were quite out of sympathy with him and it would hardly have been possible to commit his mother to their care.

(ii) It is argued that the behaviour of Jesus' "brothers" to him is that of elder brothers to a younger brother. They questioned his sanity and wished to take him home (Mk.3:21; Mk.3:31-35); they were actively hostile to him (Jn.7:1-5). But it could just as well be argued that their conduct was due to the simple fact that they found him an embarrassment to the family in a way that had nothing to do with age.

(iii) It is argued that Joseph must have been older than Mary because he vanishes completely from the gospel story and, therefore, probably had died before Jesus' public ministry began. The mother of Jesus was at the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, but there is no mention of Joseph (Jn.2:1). Jesus is called, at least sometimes, the son of Mary, and the implication is that Joseph was dead and Mary was a widow (Mk.6:3; but compare Matt.13:55). Further, Jesus' long stay in Nazareth until he was thirty years of age (Lk.3:23), is most easily explained by the assumption that Joseph had died and that Jesus had become responsible for the support of the household. But the fact that Joseph was older than Mary does not by any means prove that he had no other children by

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her; and the fact that Jesus stayed in Nazareth as the village carpenter in order to support the family would much more naturally indicate that he was the eldest, and not the youngest, son.

To these arguments Lightfoot would add two more of a general nature.

First, he says that this is the theory of Christian tradition; and, second, he claims that anything else is "abhorrent to Christian sentiment."

But basically this theory springs from the same origin as the Hieronymian theory. Its aim is to conserve the perpetual virginity of Mary. There is no direct evidence whatsoever for it; and no one would ever have thought of it had it not been for the desire to think that Mary never ceased to be a virgin.

THE HELVIDIAN THEORY

The third theory is called the Helvidian Theory. It states quite simply that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were in the full sense of the term his brothers and sisters, that, to use the technical term, they were his uterine brothers and sisters. Nothing whatever is known of the Helvidius with whose name this theory is connected except that he wrote a treatise to support it which Jerome strongly opposed. What then may be said in favour of it?

(i) No one reading the New Testament story without theological presuppositions would ever think of anything else. On the face of it that story does not think of Jesus' brothers and sisters as anything else but his brothers and sisters in the full sense of the term.

(ii) The birth narratives both in Matthew and Luke presuppose that Mary had other children. Matthew writes: "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not till she had borne a son" (Matt.1:24-25). The clear implication is that Joseph entered into normal married relationships with Mary after the birth of Jesus. Tertullian, in fact, uses this passage to prove that both virginity and the married state are consecrated in Christ by the fact that Mary was first a virgin and then a wife in the full sense of the term. Luke in writing of the birth of Jesus says: "She gave birth to her first-born son" (Lk.2:7). To call Jesus a first-born son is plainly to indicate that other children followed.

(iii) As we have already said, the fact that Jesus remained in Nazareth as the village carpenter until the age of thirty is at least an indication that he was the eldest son and had to take upon himself the responsibility of the support of the family after the death of Joseph.

We believe that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were in truth his brothers and sisters. Any other theory ultimately springs from the glorification of asceticism and from a wish to regard Mary as for ever a virgin. It is surely a far more lovely thing to believe in the sanctity of the home than to insist that celibacy is a higher thing than married love.

So, then, we believe that James, called the Lord's brother, was in every sense the brother of Jesus.

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JAMES AS THE AUTHOR

Can we then say that this James was also the author of this letter? Let us collect the evidence in favour of that view.

(i) If James wrote a letter at all, it would most naturally be a general epistle, as this is. James was not, like Paul, a traveller and a man of many congregations. He was the leader of the Jewish section of the Church; and the kind of letter we would expect him to write would be a general epistle directed to all Jewish Christians.

(ii) There is scarcely anything in the letter that a good Jew could not accept. So much so that there are those who think that it is actually a Jewish ethical tract which has found its way into the New Testament. A. H. McNeile has pointed out that in instance after instance there are phrases in James which can be read equally well in a Christian or a Jewish sense. The Twelve Tribes of the Dispersion (Jas.1:1) could be taken either of the exiled Jews scattered all over the world or of the Christian Church, the new Israel of God. "The Lord" can again and again in this letter be understood equally well of Jesus or of God (Jas.1:7; Jas.4:10,15; Jas.5:7-8; Jas.5:10-11; Jas.5:14-15). Our bringing forth by God by the word of his truth to be the first fruits of his creation (Jas.1:18) can equally well be understood of God's first act of creation or of his re-creation of men in Jesus Christ.

The perfect law and the royal law (Jas.1:25; Jas.2:8), can equally well be understood of the ethical law of the Ten Commandments or of the new law of Christ. The elders of the Church, the ekklesia (GSN0000) (Jas.5:14), can equally well be understood as meaning the elders of the Christian Church or the Jewish elders, for in the Septuagint ekklesia (GSN0000) is the title of the chosen nation of God. In Jas.2:2 "your assembly" is spoken of. The word there used for assembly is sunagoge (GSN0000), which can mean the synagogue even more readily than it can mean the Christian congregation. The habit of addressing its readers as brothers is thoroughly Christian, but it is equally thoroughly Jewish. The coming of the Lord and the picture of the Judge standing at the door (Jas.5:7,9) are just as common in Jewish thought as in Christian thought.

The accusation that they have murdered the righteous man (Jas.5:6) is a phrase which occurs again and again in the prophets, but a Christian could read it as a statement of the Crucifixion of Christ. There is nothing in this letter which an orthodox Jew could not heartily accept, if he read it in his own terms.

It could be argued that all this perfectly suits James. He was the leader of what might be called Jewish Christianity; he was the head of that part of the Church which remained centred in Jerusalem. There must have been a time when the Church was very close to Judaism and it was more a reformed Judaism than anything else. There was a kind of Christianity which had not the width or the universality which the mind of Paul put into it. Paul himself said that the sphere of the Gentiles had been allocated to him and the sphere of the Jews to Peter, James and John (Gal.2:9). The letter of James may well represent a kind of Christianity which had remained in its earliest form. This would explain two things.

First, it would explain the frequency with which James repeats the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. We may, out of many instances, compare Jas.2:12-13 and Matt.6:14-15; Jas.3:11-13 and

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Matt.7:16-20; Jas.5:12 and Matt.5:34-37. Any Jewish Christian would be supremely interested in the ethical teaching of the Christian faith.

Second, it would help to explain the relationship of this letter to the teaching of Paul. At a first reading Jas.2:14-26 reads like a direct attack on Paulinism. "A man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas.2:24) seems a flat contradiction of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. But what James is attacking is a so-called faith which has no ethical results and one thing is quite clear--anyone who charges Paul with preaching such a faith cannot possibly have read his letters. They are full of ethical demands, as, for instance, a chapter like Rom.12 illustrates. Now James died in A.D. 62 and, therefore, could not have read Paul's letters which did not become the common property of the Church until at least A.D. 90.

Therefore what James is attacking is either a misunderstanding of what Paul said or a perversion of it; and nowhere was such a misunderstanding or perversion more likely to arise than in Jerusalem, where Paul's stress on faith and grace and his attack on the law were likely to be regarded with more suspicion than anywhere else.

(iii) It has been pointed out that James and the letter of the Council of Jerusalem to the Gentile Churches have at least two rather curious resemblances. Both begin with the word Greeting (Jas.1:1; Ac.15:23). The Greek is *chairein* (GSN0000). This was the normal Greek beginning to a letter, but nowhere else in all the New Testament is it found other than in the letter of Claudius Lysias, the military officer, to the governor of the province quoted in Ac.23:26-30. Second, Ac.15:17 has a phrase in the letter of the Council of Jerusalem in which it speaks of the Gentiles who are called by my name. This phrase occurs nowhere else in the New Testament other than in Jas.2:7 where it is translated the name by which you are called. Although the Revised Standard Version translations differ slightly, the Greek is exactly the same.

It is curious that the letter of the Council of Jerusalem presents us with two unusual phrases which recur only in James, when we remember that the letter of the Council of Jerusalem must have been drafted by James.

There is then evidence which lends colour to the belief that James was the work of James, the Lord's brother and head of the Jerusalem Church.

On the other hand there are facts which make us a little doubtful if he was, after all, the author.

(i) If the writer was the brother of our Lord, we would have expected him to make some reference to that fact. All he calls himself is "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jas.1:1). Such a reference would not have been in any sense for his own personal glory, but simply to lend authority to his letter. And such authority would have been specially useful outside Palestine, in countries where James could hardly have been known. If the author was indeed the Lord's brother, it is surprising that he makes no reference, direct or indirect, to that fact.

(ii) Failing a reference to his relationship to Jesus, we would have expected a reference to the fact that he was an apostle. It was Paul's regular custom to begin his letters with a reference to his apostleship. Again it is not a question of personal prestige but simply a guarantee of the authority by which he writes. If this James was indeed the Lord's brother and the head of the Jerusalem

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Church, we should have expected some reference at the beginning of the letter to his apostolic status.

(iii) The most surprising fact of all is that which made Luther question the right of this letter to a place in the New Testament--the almost complete absence of any references to Jesus Christ. Only twice in the whole letter is his name mentioned and these mentions are almost incidental (Jas.1:1; Jas.2:1).

There is no reference at all to his Resurrection. We know well that the early church was built on faith in the Risen Christ. If this letter is the work of James, it is contemporary, with the events of Acts in which the Resurrection is mentioned no fewer than twenty-five times. What makes it still more surprising is that James had a personal reason for writing about the appearance of Jesus which may well have been what changed the direction of his life. It is surprising that anyone writing at such a time in the Church's history should write without reference to the Resurrection of Jesus; and it is doubly surprising if the writer should be James the brother of our Lord.

Further, there is no reference to Jesus as Messiah. If James, the leader of the Jewish Church, was writing to Jewish Christians in these very early days, one would have thought his main aim would have been to present Jesus as Messiah or that at least he would have made his belief in that fact plain; but the letter does not mention it.

(iv) It is plain that the writer of this letter is steeped in the Old Testament; it is also plain that he is intimately acquainted with the Wisdom Literature; and that in James is only to be expected. There are in his letter twenty-three apparent quotations from the Sermon on the Mount; that too is easy to understand, because from the very beginning, long before the gospels were written, compendiums of Jesus' teaching must have circulated. It is argued by some that he must have known Paul's letters to the Romans and to the Galatians in order to write as he does about faith and works, and it is argued rightly that a Jew who had never been outside Palestine and who died in A.D. 62 could not have known these letters. As we have seen, this argument will not stand, because the criticism of Paul's doctrine in James is criticism which could have been offered only by someone who had not read the letters of Paul at first hand and who is dealing with a misunderstanding or a perversion of Pauline doctrine.

But the phrase in Jas.1:17: "Every good endowment and every perfect gift," is an hexametre line and clearly a quotation from some Greek poet; and the phrase in Jas.3:6: "the cycle of nature" may be an Orphic phrase from the mystery religions. How could James of Palestine pick up quotations like these?

There are things which are difficult to account for on the assumption that James, the brother of our Lord, was the author of this letter.

The evidence for and against James' authorship of this letter is extraordinarily evenly balanced. For the moment we must leave the matter in suspense and turn to certain other questions.

THE DATE OF THE LETTER

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When we turn to the evidence for the date of the letter we find this same even balance. It is possible to argue that it is very early, and equally possible to argue that it is rather late.

(i) When James was writing, it is clear that the hope of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was still very real (Jas.5:7-9). Now the expectation of the Second Coming never left the Christian Church, but it did to some extent fade from the foreground of its thought as it was unexpectedly long delayed. This would suggest an early date.

(ii) In the early chapters of Acts and in the letters of Paul, there is a continuous background of Jewish controversy against the accepting of the Gentiles into the Church on the basis of faith alone. Wherever Paul went the Judaizers followed him, and the acceptance of the Gentiles was not a battle which was readily won. In James there is not even a hint of this Jewish-Gentile controversy, a fact which is doubly surprising when we remember that James, the Lord's brother, took a leading part in settling it at the Council of Jerusalem. That being so, this letter could be either very early and written before that controversy emerged; or, it could be late and written after the last echo of the controversy had died away. The fact that there is no mention of the Jewish-Gentile controversy can be used as an argument either way.

(iii) The evidence from the Church order reflected in the letter is equally conflicting. The meeting place of the Church is still called the sunagoge (GSN0000) (Jas.2:2). That points to an early date; later an assembly of Christians would definitely be called the ekklesia (GSN0000), for the Jewish term was soon dropped. The elders of the Church are mentioned (Jas.5:14), but there is no mention of either deacons or bishops. This again indicates an early date, and possibly a Jewish connection, for the eldership was a Jewish institution before it was a Christian one. James is worried about the existence of many teachers (Jas.3:1). This could well indicate a very early situation, before the Church had systematized its ministry and introduced some kind of order; or, it could indicate a late date, when many false teachers had arisen to plague the Church.

There are two general facts which seem on the whole to indicate that James is late. First, as we have seen there is hardly any mention of Jesus at all. The subject of the letter is, in fact, the inadequacies and the imperfections, the sins and the mistakes of the members of the Church. This seems to point to a fairly late date. The early preaching was ablaze with the grace and the glory of the Risen Christ; later preaching became, as it so often is today, a tirade against the imperfections of the members of the Church. The second general fact is the condemnation of the rich (Jas.2:1-3; Jas.5:1-6). The flattery of the rich and the arrogance of the rich seem to have been real problems when this letter was written. Now in the very early church there were few, if any, rich men (1Cor.1:26-27). James seems to indicate a later time when the once poor Church was being threatened with a spirit of worldliness in its members.

THE PREACHERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

It will help us to date this so-called letter of James and may also help us to identify its author, if we place it in its context in the ancient world.

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The sermon is identified with the Christian Church, but it was by no means its invention. It had roots in both the Hellenistic and the Jewish world; and when we set James beside the Hellenistic and the Jewish sermons we cannot fail to be struck by the resemblances.

1. Let us look first at the Greek preachers and their sermons. The wandering philosopher was a common figure in the ancient world. Sometimes he was a Stoic; far more often he was a Cynic. Wherever men were gathered together you would find him there calling them to virtue. You would find him at the street corner and in the city squares; you would find him at the vast concourses which gathered for the games: you would even find him at the gladiatorial games, sometimes, even directly addressing the emperor, rebuking him for luxury and tyranny, and calling him to virtue and justice. The ancient preacher, the philosopher-missionary, was a regular figure in the ancient world. There was a time when philosophy had been the business of the schools, but now its voice and its ethical demands were to be heard daily in the public places.

These ancient sermons had certain characteristics. The method was always the same; and that method had deeply influenced Paul's presentation of the gospel, and James was in the same line of descent. We list some of the tricks of the trade of these ancient preachers, noting how they occur in James and bearing in mind the way in which Paul writes to his Churches. The main aim of these ancient preachers, it must be remembered, was not to investigate new truth; it was to awaken sinners to the error of their ways and compel them to look at truths, which they knew but were deliberately neglecting or had forgotten. Their aim was to confront men with the good life in the midst of the looseness of their living and their forgetfulness of the gods.

(i) They frequently carried on imaginary conversations with imaginary opponents, speaking in what has been called a kind of "truncated dialogue." James also uses that method in Jas.2:18f. and Jas.5:13f.

(ii) They habitually effected their transition from one part of the sermon to another, by way of a question which introduced the new subject. Again James does that in Jas.2:14 and Jas.4:1.

(iii) They were very fond of imperatives in which they commanded their hearers to right action and to the abandoning of their errors. In James' 108 verses there are almost 60 imperatives.

(iv) They were very fond of the rhetorical question flung out at their audience. James frequently employs such questions (compare Jas.2:4-5; Jas.2:14-16; Jas.3:11-12; Jas.4:4).

(v) They frequently dealt in apostrophes, vivid direct addresses to particular sections of the audience. So James apostrophizes the merchants out for gain and the arrogant rich (Jas.4:13; Jas.5:6).

(vi) They were fond of personifying virtues and vices, sins and graces. So James personifies sin (Jas.1:15); mercy (Jas.2:13); rust (Jas.5:3).

(vii) They sought to awaken the interest of their audience by pictures and figures from everyday life. The figure of the bridle, the rudder and the forest fire are standard figures in the ancient

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sermons (compare Jas.3:3-6). Amongst many others James vividly uses the picture of the farmer and his patience (Jas.5:7).

(viii) They frequently used the example of famous men and women to point their moral. So James uses the examples of Abraham (Jas.2:21-23); Rahab (Jas.2:25); Job (Jas.5:11); Elijah (Jas.5:17).

(ix) It was the custom of the ancient preachers to begin their sermon with a paradox which would arrest the attention of their hearers. James does that by telling a man to think it all joy when he is involved in trials (Jas.1:2). In the same way the ancient preachers often pointed out how true goodness meant the reversal of all popular verdicts on life. So James insists that the happiness of the rich lies in their being brought low (Jas.1:10). They used the weapon of irony as James does (Jas.2:14-19; Jas.5:1-6).

(x) The ancient preachers could speak with harshness and with sternness. So James addresses his reader as: "Foolish fellow!" and calls those who listen to him unfaithful creatures (Jas.2:20; Jas.4:4). The ancient preachers used the lash and so does James.

(xi) The ancient preachers had certain standard ways of constructing their sermons.

(a) They often concluded a section with a vivid antithesis, setting the right beside the wrong way. James follows the same custom (compare Jas.2:13; Jas.2:26).

(b) They often made their point by means of a searching question fired at the hearer; and so does James (Jas.4:12).

(c) They often used quotations in their preaching. This also James does (Jas.5:20; Jas.1:11,17; Jas.4:6; Jas.5:11).

It is true that we do not find in James the bitterness, the scolding, the frivolous and often broad humour that the Greek preachers used; but it is plain to see that he uses all the other methods which the wandering Hellenistic preachers used to win their way into the minds and hearts of men.

2. The Jewish world also had its tradition of preaching. That preaching was done mainly by the Rabbis at the services of the synagogue. It had many of the characteristics of the preaching of the Greek wandering philosophers. It had its rhetorical questions and its imperatives and its pictures taken from life, and its quotations and its citations of the heroes of the faith. But Jewish preaching had one curious characteristic. It was deliberately disconnected. The Jewish masters instructed their pupils never to linger for any length of time on any one subject, but to move quickly from one subject to another in order to maintain the interest of the listener. Hence one of the names for preaching was *charaz* (GSN0000), which literally means stringing beads. The Jewish sermon was frequently a string of moral truths and exhortations coming one after another. This is exactly what James is. It is difficult, if not impossible, to extract from it a continuous and coherent plan. Its sections follow each other with a certain disconnectedness. Goodspeed writes: "The work has been compared to a chain, each link related to the one before and the one after it. Others have

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compared its contents to beads on a string.... And, perhaps, James is not so much a chain of thoughts or beads as it is a handful of pearls dropped one by one into the hearer's mind."

James, whether looked at from the Hellenistic or from the Jewish point of view, is a good example of an ancient sermon. And here is, perhaps, the clue we need to its authorship. With all this in mind, let us now turn to ask who the author is.

THE AUTHOR OF JAMES

There are five possibilities.

(i) We begin with a theory worked out in detail by Meyer more than half a century ago and revived by Easton in the new Interpreter's Bible. One of the commonest things in the ancient world was for books to be published in the name of some great figure of the past. Jewish literature between the Testaments is full of writings like that, ascribed to Moses, the Twelve Patriarchs, Baruch, Enoch, Isaiah, and people of like standing in order that the added authority might give greater encouragement to their readers. This was an accepted practice. One of the best-known books in the Apocrypha is the Wisdom of Solomon, in which the later Sage attributes new wisdom to the wisest of the kings.

Let us remember three things about James. (a) There is nothing in it which an orthodox Jew could not accept, if the two references to Jesus in Jas.1:1 and Jas.2:1 are removed, as they easily may be. (b) The Greek for James is in fact Iakobos (GSN0000) which of course is the Old Testament Jacob. (c) The book is addressed to "the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad." This theory holds that James is nothing other than a Jewish writing, written under the name of Jacob and meant for the Jews who were scattered throughout the world to encourage them in faith and belief amidst the trials through which they might be passing in Gentile lands.

This theory is further elaborated in this way. In Gen.49 we have Jacob's last address to his sons. The address consists of a series of short descriptions in which each son is in turn characterized. Meyer professed to be able to find in James allusions to the descriptions of each of the patriarchs and, therefore, of each of the twelve tribes, in Jacob's address. Here are some of his identifications.

Asher is the worldly rich man; Jas.1:9-11; Gen.49:20.

Issachar is the doer of good deeds; Jas.1:12; Gen.49:14-15.

Reuben is the first fruits; Jas.1:18; Gen.49:3.

Simeon stands for anger; Jas.1:19-20; Gen.49:5-7.

Levi is the tribe which is specially connected with religion and is alluded to in Jas.1:26-27.

Naphtali is characterized by peace; Jas.3:18; Gen.49:21.

Gad stands for wars and fightings; Jas.4:1-2; Gen.49:19.

Dan represents waiting for salvation; Jas.5:7; Gen.49:18.

Joseph represents prayer; Jas.5:13-18; Gen.49:22-26.

Benjamin stands for birth and death; Jas.5:20; Gen.49:27.

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That is a most ingenious theory. No one can either finally prove it or disprove it; and it certainly would explain in the most natural way the reference in Jas.1:1 to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. It would hold that some Christian came upon this Jewish tract, written under the name of Jacob to all the exiled Jews, and was so impressed with its moral worth, that he made certain adjustments and additions to it and issued it as a Christian book. There is no doubt that this is an attractive theory--but it is possible for a theory to be too ingenious.

(ii) Just as the Jews did, the Christians also wrote many books under the names of the great figures of the Christian faith. There are gospels issued under the name of Peter and Thomas and James himself; there is a letter under the name of Barnabas; there are gospels of Nicodemus and Bartholomew; and there are Acts of John, Paul, Andrew, Peter, Thomas, Philip and others. The technical title for these books is pseudonymous, that is, written under a false name.

It has been suggested that James was a letter written by someone else under the name of the Lord's brother. That is apparently what Jerome thought when he said that this letter "was issued by someone under James' name." But, whatever else this work is, it cannot be that because, when anyone wrote such a book, he was careful to make quite clear who was supposed to have written it. If this had been pseudonymous no possible doubt would have been left that the author was supposed to be James the brother of our Lord; but this fact is not mentioned at all.

(iii) Moffatt inclined to the theory that the writer was not the brother of our Lord, or any other well-known James, but simply a teacher called James of whose life and story we have no information whatever. That is by no means impossible for the name James was just as common then as it is now; but it would be rather difficult to understand how such a book gained entry into the New Testament, and how it came to be connected with the name of the Lord's brother.

(iv) The traditional view is that the book was written by James, the Lord's brother. We have already seen that it seems strange that such a book should have only two incidental references to Jesus, and none at all to the Resurrection or to Jesus as the Messiah. A further and most serious difficulty is this. The book is written in good Greek. Ropes says that Greek must have been the mother tongue of the man who wrote it; and Mayor, himself one of the greatest of Greek scholars, says, "I should be inclined to rate the Greek of this epistle as approaching more nearly to the standard of classical purity than that of any other book in the New Testament with the exception perhaps of the Epistle to the Hebrews." Quite certainly James' mother tongue was Aramaic and not Greek; and quite certainly he would not be a master of classical Greek. His orthodox Jewish upbringing would make him despise and avoid it, as a Gentile and accursed tongue. It is next door to impossible to think of James actually penning this letter.

(v) So we come to the fifth possibility. Let us remember how closely James resembles a sermon. It is possible that this is, in substance, a sermon preached by James, taken down by someone else, translated into Greek, added to and decorated a little and then issued to the Church at large so that all men should benefit from it. That explains its form and how it came to be attached to the name of James. It even explains the scarcity of the references to Jesus, to the Resurrection, and to the Messiahship of Jesus; for in one single sermon James could not go through the whole gamut of

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orthodoxy and is, in fact, pressing moral duty upon men, and not talking about theology. It seems to us that this is the one theory which explains the facts.

One thing is certain--we may approach this little letter feeling that it is one of the lesser books of the New Testament; but if we study it faithfully, we will lay it down thanking God that it was preserved for our edification and inspiration.

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James 1:1

GREETINGS

James 1:1 (Part 1)

James, the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, sends greetings to the twelve tribes who are scattered throughout the world.

At the very beginning of his letter James describes himself by the title wherein lies his only honour and his only glory, the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. With the exception of Jude he is the only New Testament writer to describe himself by that term (doulos, GSN1401) without any qualification. Paul describes himself as the slave of Jesus Christ and his apostle (Rom.1:1; Php.1:1). But James will go no further than to call himself the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are at least four implications in this title.

(i) It implies absolute obedience. The slave knows no law but his master's word; he has no rights of his own; he is the absolute possession of his master; and he is bound to give his master unquestioning obedience.

(ii) It implies absolute humility. It is the word of a man who thinks not of his privileges but of his duties, not of his rights but of his obligations. It is the word of the man who has lost his self in the service of God.

(iii) It implies absolute loyalty. It is the word of the man who has no interests of his own, because what he does, he does for God. His own profit and his own preference do not enter into his calculations; his loyalty is to him.

(iv) Yet, at the back of it, this word implies a certain pride. So far from being a title of dishonour it was the title by which the greatest ones of the Old Testament were known. Moses was the doulos (GSN1401) of God (1Kgs.8:53; Dn.9:11; Mal.4:4); so were Joshua and Caleb (Josh.24:29; Num.14:24); so were the great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Deut.9:27); so was Job (Jb.1:8); so was Isaiah (Isa.20:3); and doulos (GSN1401) is distinctively the title by which the prophets were known (Am.3:7; Zech.1:6; Jer.7:25). By taking the title doulos (GSN1401) James sets himself in the great succession of those who found their freedom and their peace and their glory in perfect submission to the will of God. The only greatness to which the Christian can ever aspire is that of being the slave of God.

There is one unusual thing about this opening salutation. James sends greetings to his readers; using the word chairein (GSN5463) which is the regular opening word of salutation in secular Greek letters. Paul never uses it. He always uses the distinctively Christian greeting, "Grace and peace" (Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:3; 2Cor.1:2; Gal.1:3; Eph.1:2; Php.1:2; Col.1:2; 1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:2; Phm.3). This secular greeting occurs only twice in the rest of the New Testament, in the letter which Claudius Lysias, the Roman officer, wrote to Felix to ensure the safe journeying of Paul (Ac.23:26), and in the general letter issued after the decision of the Council of Jerusalem to allow the Gentiles into the Church (Ac.15:23). This is interesting, because it was James who presided

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over that Council (Ac.15:13). It may be that he used the most general greeting that he could find because his letter was going out to the widest public.

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James 1:1

THE JEWS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

James 1:1 (Part 2)

The letter is addressed to the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad. Literally the greeting is to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora (GSN1290), the technical word for the Jews who lived outside Palestine. All the millions of Jews who were, for one reason or another, outside the Promised Land were the Diaspora (GSN1290). This dispersal of the Jews throughout the world was of the very greatest importance for the spread of Christianity, because it meant that all over the world there were synagogues, from which the Christian preachers could take their start; and it meant that all over the world there were groups of men and women who themselves already knew the Old Testament, and who had persuaded others among the Gentiles, at least to be interested in their faith. Let us see how this dispersal took place.

Sometimes--and the process began in this way--the Jews were forcibly taken out of their own land and compelled to live as exiles in foreign lands. There were three such great movements.

(i) The first compulsory removal came when the people of the Northern Kingdom, who had their capital in Samaria, were conquered by the Assyrians and were carried away into captivity in Assyria (2Kgs.17:23; 1Chr.5:26). These are the lost ten tribes who never returned. The Jews themselves believed that at the end of all things all Jews would be gathered together in Jerusalem, but until the end of the world these ten tribes, they believed, would never return. They founded this belief on a rather fanciful interpretation of an Old Testament text. The Rabbis argued like this: "The ten tribes never return for it is said of them, 'He will cast them into another land, as at this day' (Deut.29:28). As then this day departs and never returns, so too are they to depart and never return. As this day becomes dark, and then again light, so too will it one day be light again for the ten tribes for whom it was dark."

(ii) The second compulsory removal was about 580 B.C. At that time the Babylonians conquered the Southern Kingdom whose capital was at Jerusalem, and carried the best of the people away to Babylon (2Kgs.24:14-16; Ps.137). In Babylon the Jews behaved very differently; they stubbornly refused to be assimilated and to lose their nationality. They were said to be congregated mainly in the cities of Nehardea and Nisibis. It was actually in Babylon that Jewish scholarship reached its finest flower; and there was produced the Babylonian Talmud, the immense sixty-volume exposition of the Jewish law. When Josephus wrote his Wars of the Jews, the first edition was not in Greek but in Aramaic, and was designed for the scholarly Jews in Babylon. He tells us that the Jews rose to such power there that at one time the province of Mesopotamia was under Jewish rule. Its two Jewish rulers were Asidaeus and Anilaus; and on the death of Anilaus it was said that no fewer than 50,000 Jews were massacred.

(iii) The third compulsory transplantation took place much later. When Pompey conquered the Jews and took Jerusalem in 63 B.C., he took back to Rome many Jews as slaves. Their rigid adherence to their own ceremonial law and their stubborn observance of the Sabbath made them difficult slaves; and most of them were freed. They took up residence in a kind of quarter of their own on the far side of the Tiber. Before long they were to be found flourishing all over the city. Dio

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Cassius says of them, "They were often suppressed, but they nevertheless mightily increased, so that they achieved even the free exercise of their customs." Julius Caesar was their great protector and we read of them mourning all night long at his bier. We read of them present in large numbers when Cicero was defending Flaccus. In A.D.

19 the whole Jewish community was banished from Rome on the charge that they had robbed a wealthy female proselyte on pretence of sending the money to the Temple and at that time 4,000 of them were conscripted to fight against the brigands in Sardinia; but they were soon received back. When the Jews of Palestine sent their deputation to Rome to complain of the rule of Archelaus, we read that the deputation was joined by 8,000 Jews resident in the city. Roman literature is full of contemptuous references to the Jews, for anti-Semitism is no new thing; and the very number of the references is proof of the part that the Jews played in the life of the city.

Compulsory transplantation took the Jews by the thousand to Babylon and to Rome. But far greater numbers left Palestine of their own free-will for more comfortable and more profitable lands. Two lands in particular received thousands of Jews. Palestine was sandwiched between the two great powers, Syria and Egypt and was, therefore, liable at any time to become a battleground. For that reason many Jews left it to take up residence either in Egypt or in Syria.

During the time of Nebuchadnezzar there was a voluntary exodus of many Jews to Egypt (2Kgs.25:26). As far back as 650 B.C. the Egyptian king Psammetichus was said to have had Jewish mercenaries in his armies. When Alexander the Great founded Alexandria special privileges were offered to settlers there and the Jews came in large numbers. Alexandria was divided into five administrative sections; and two of them were inhabited by Jews. In Alexandria alone there were more than 1,000,000 Jews. The settlement of the Jews in Egypt went so far that about 50 B.C. a temple, modelled on the Jerusalem one, was built at Leontopolis for the Egyptian Jews.

The Jews also went to Syria. The highest concentration was in Antioch, where the gospel was first preached to the Gentiles and where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians. In Damascus we read of 10,000 of them being massacred at one time.

So, then, Egypt and Syria had very large Jewish populations. But they had spread far beyond that. In Cyrene in North Africa we read that the population was divided into citizens, agriculturists, resident aliens and Jews. Mommsen, the Roman historian, writes: "The inhabitants of Palestine were only a portion, and not the most important portion, of the Jews; the Jewish communities of Babylonia, Syria, Asia Minor and Egypt were far superior to those of Palestine." That mention of Asia Minor leads us to another sphere in which the Jews were numerous. When Alexander's empire broke up on his death, Egypt fell to the Ptolemies, and Syria and the surrounding districts fell to Seleucus and his successors, known as the Seleucids. The Seleucids had two great characteristics. They followed a deliberate policy of the fusion of populations hoping to gain security by banishing nationalism. And they were inveterate founders of cities.

These cities needed citizens, and special attractions and privileges were offered to those who would settle in them. The Jews accepted citizenship of these cities by the thousand. All over Asia Minor, in the great cities of the Mediterranean sea coast, in the great commercial centres, Jews were numerous and prosperous. Even there there were compulsory transplantations. Antiochus the Great took 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon and settled them in Lydia and Phrygia. In fact, so great

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was the drift from Palestine that the Palestine Jews complained against their brethren who left the austerities of Palestine for the baths and feasts of Asia and Phrygia; and Aristotle tells of meeting a Jew in Asia Minor who was "not only Greek in his language but in his very soul."

It is quite clear that everywhere in the world there were Jews. Strabo, the Greek geographer, writes: "It is hard to find a spot in the whole world which is not occupied and dominated by Jews." Josephus, the Jewish historian writes: "There is no city, no tribe, whether Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish customs have not taken root." The Sibylline Oracles, written about 140 B.C., say that every land and every sea is filled with the Jews. There is a letter, said to be from Agrippa to Caligula, which Philo quotes. In it he says that Jerusalem is the capital not only of Judaea but of most countries by reason of the colonies it has sent out on fitting occasions into the neighbouring lands of Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Coelesyria, and the still more remote Pamphylia and Cilicia, into most parts of Asia as far as Bithynia, and into the most distant corners of Pontus; also to Europe, Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetolia, Attica, Argos, Corinth, and the most and best parts of the Peloponnese.

And not only is the continent full of Jewish settlements, but also the more important islands--Euboea, Cyprus, Crete--to say nothing of the lands beyond the Euphrates, for all have Jewish inhabitants.

The Jewish Diaspora was coextensive with the world; and there was no greater factor in the spread of Christianity.

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James 1:1

THE RECIPIENTS OF THE LETTER

James 1:1 (Part 3)

James writes to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora. Who has he in his mind's eye as he writes? The twelve tribes in the Diaspora could equally well mean any of three things.

(i) It could stand for all the Jews outside of Palestine. We have seen that they were numbered by the million. There were actually far more Jews scattered throughout Syria and Egypt and Greece and Rome and Asia Minor and all the Mediterranean lands and far off Babylon than there were in Palestine. Under the conditions of the ancient world it would be quite impossible to send out a message to such a huge and scattered constituency.

(ii) It could mean Christian Jews outside Palestine. In this instance, it would mean the Jews in the lands closely surrounding Palestine, perhaps particularly those in Syria and in Babylon. Certainly if anyone was going to write a letter to these Jews, it would be James, for he was the acknowledged leader of Jewish Christianity.

(iii) The phrase could have a third meaning. To the Christians, the Christian Church was the real Israel. At the end of Galatians Paul sends his blessing to the Israel of God (Gal.6:16). The nation Israel had been the specially chosen people of God; but they had refused to accept their place and their responsibility and their task. When the Son of God came they had rejected him. Therefore all the privileges which had once belonged to them passed over to the Christian Church, for it was in truth the chosen people of God. Paul (compare Rom.9:7-8) had fully worked out the idea. It was his conviction that the true descendants of Abraham were not those who could trace their physical descent from him but those who had made the same venture of faith as he had made. The true Israel was composed not of any particular nation or race but of those who accepted Jesus Christ in faith. So, then, this phrase may well mean the Christian Church at large.

We may choose between the second and the third meanings, each of which gives excellent sense. James may be writing to the Christian Jews scattered amidst the surrounding nations; or he may be writing to the new Israel, the Christian Church.

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James 1:2-4

TESTED AND TRIUMPHANT

James 1:2-4 (Part 1)

My brothers, reckon it all joy whenever you become involved in all kinds of testings, for you are well aware that the testing of your faith produces unswerving constancy. And let constancy go on to work out its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, deficient in nothing.

James never suggested to his readers that Christianity would be for them an easy way. He warns them that they would find themselves involved in what the King James Version calls divers temptations. The word translated temptations is *peirasmos* (GSN3986), whose meaning we must fully understand, if we are to see the very essence of the Christian life.

Peirasmos (GSN3986) is not temptation in our sense of the term; it is testing (trial in the Revised Standard Version). *Peirasmos* (GSN3986) is trial or testing directed towards an end, and the end is that he who is tested should emerge stronger and purer from the testing. The corresponding verb *peirazein* (GSN3985), which the King James Version usually translates to tempt, has the same meaning. The idea is not that of seduction into sin but of strengthening and purifying. For instance, a young bird is said to test (*peirazein*, GSN3985) its wings. The Queen of Sheba was said to come to test (*peirazein*, GSN3985) the wisdom of Solomon. God was said to test (*peirazein*, GSN3985) Abraham, when he appeared to be demanding the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen.22:1). When Israel came into the Promised Land, God did not remove the people who were already there. He left them so that Israel might be tested (*peirazein*, GSN3985) in the struggle against them (Judg.2:22; Judg.3:1,4).

The experiences in Israel were tests which went to the making of the people of Israel (Deut.4:34; Deut.7:19).

Here is a great and uplifting thought. Hort writes: "The Christian must expect to be jostled by trials on the Christian way." All kinds of experiences will come to us. There will be the test of the sorrows and the disappointments which seek to take our faith away. There will be the test of the seductions which seek to lure us from the right way. There will be the tests of the dangers, the sacrifices, the unpopularity which the Christian way must so often involve. But they are not meant to make us fall; they are meant to make us soar. They are not meant to defeat us; they are meant to be defeated. They are not meant to make us weaker; they are meant to make us stronger. Therefore we should not bemoan them; we should rejoice in them. The Christian is like the athlete. The heavier the course of training he undergoes, the more he is glad, because he knows that it is fitting him all the better for victorious effort.

As Browning said, we must "welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough," for every hard thing is another step on the upward way.

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James 1:2-4

THE RESULT OF TESTING

James 1:2-4 (Part 2)

James describes this process of testing by the word dokimion (GSN1383). It is an interesting word. It is the word for sterling coinage, for money which is genuine and unalloyed. The aim of testing is to purge us of all impurity.

If we meet this testing in the right way, it will produce unswerving constancy (or steadfastness as the Revised Standard Version translates it). The word is hupomone (GSN5281), which the King James Version translates as patience; but patience is far too passive. Hupomone (GSN5281) is not simply the ability to bear things; it is the ability to turn them to greatness and to glory. The thing which amazed the heathen in the centuries of persecution was that the martyrs did not die grimly, they died singing. One smiled in the flames; they asked him what he found to smile at there. "I saw the glory of God," he said, "and was glad." Hupomone (GSN5281) is the quality which makes a man able, not simply to suffer things, but to vanquish them. The effect of testing rightly borne is strength to bear still more and to conquer in still harder battles.

This unswerving constancy in the end makes a man three things.

(i) It makes him perfect. The Greek is teleios (GSN5046) which usually has the meaning of perfection towards a given end. A sacrificial animal is teleios (GSN5046) if it is fit to offer to God. A scholar is teleios (GSN5046) if he is mature. A person is teleios (GSN5046) if he is full grown. This constancy born of testing well met makes a man teleios (GSN5046) in the sense of being fit for the task he was sent into the world to do. Here is a great thought. By the way in which we meet every experience in life we are either fitting or unfitting ourselves for the task which God meant us to do.

(ii) It makes him complete. The Greek is holokleros (GSN3648) which means entire, perfect in every part. It is used of the animal which is fit to be offered to God and of the priest who is fit to serve him. It means that the animal or the person has no disfiguring and disqualifying blemishes. Gradually this unswerving constancy removes the weaknesses and the imperfections from a man's character. Daily it enables him to conquer old sins, to shed old blemishes and to gain new virtues, until in the end he becomes entirely fit for the service of God and of his fellow-men.

(iii) It makes him deficient in nothing. The Greek is leipesthai (GSN3007) and it is used of the defeat of an army, of the giving up of a struggle, of the failure to reach a standard that should have been reached. If a man meets his testing in the right way, if day by day he develops this unswerving constancy, day by day he will live more victoriously and reach nearer to the standard of Jesus Christ himself.

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James 1:5-8

GOD'S GIVING AND MAN'S ASKING

James 1:5-8

If any of you is deficient in wisdom, let him ask it from God, who gives generously to all men and never casts up the gift, and it will be given to him. Let him ask in faith, with no doubts in his mind; for he who oscillates between doubts is like a surge of the sea, wind-driven and blown hither and thither. Let not that man think that he will receive anything from the Lord, a man with a divided mind, inconstant in all his ways.

There is a close connection between this passage and what has gone before. James has just told his readers that, if they use all the testing experiences of life in the right way, they will emerge from them with that unswerving constancy which is the basis of all the virtues. But immediately the question arises, "Where can I find the wisdom and the understanding to use these testing experiences in the right way?" James' answer is, "If a man feels that he has not the wisdom to use aright the experiences of this life--and no man in himself possesses that wisdom--let him ask it from God."

One thing stands out. For James, the Christian teacher with the Jewish background, wisdom is a practical thing. It is not philosophic speculation and intellectual knowledge; it is concerned with the business of living. The Stoics defined wisdom as "knowledge of things human and divine." But Ropes defines this Christian wisdom as "the supreme and divine quality of the soul whereby man knows and practises righteousness." Hort defines it as "that endowment of heart and mind which is needed for the right conduct of life." In the Christian wisdom there is, of course, knowledge of the deep things of God; but it is essentially practical; it is such knowledge turned into action in the decisions and personal relationships of everyday life. When a man asks God for that wisdom, he must remember two things.

(i) He must remember how God gives. He gives generously and never casts up the gift. "All Wisdom," said Jesus the son of Sirach, "cometh from the Lord and is with him for ever" (Sir.1:1). But the Jewish wise men were well aware how the best gift in the world could be spoiled by the manner of the giving. They have much to say about how the fool gives. "My son, blemish not thy good deeds, neither use uncomfortable words when thou givest anything...Lo, is not a word better than a gift? But both are with a gracious man. A fool will upbraid churlishly, and a gift of the envious consumeth the eyes" (i.e., "brings tears") (Sir.18:15-18). "The gift of a fool shall do thee no good when thou hast it; neither yet of the envious for his necessity; for he looketh to receive many things for one. He giveth little, and upbraideth much; he openeth his mouth like a crier; today he lendeth, and tomorrow will he ask it again; such an one is to be hated of God and man" (Sir.20:14-15).

The same writer warns against "upbraiding speeches before friends" (Sir.41:22). There is a kind of giver who gives only with a view to getting more than he gives; who gives only to gratify his vanity and his sense of power by putting the recipient under an obligation which he will never be allowed to forget; who gives and then continuously casts up the gift that he has given. But God gives with generosity. Philemon, the Greek poet, called God "the lover of gifts," not in the sense of loving to

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James 1:5-8

receive gifts, but in the sense of loving to give them. Nor does God cast up his gifts; he gives with all the splendour of his love, because it is his nature to give.

(ii) We must remember how the asker must ask. He must ask without doubts. He must be sure of both the power and the desire of God to give. If he asks in doubt, his mind is like the broken water of the sea, driven hither and thither by any chance wind. Mayor says that he is like a cork carried by the waves, now near the shore, now far away. Such a man is unstable in his ways. Hort suggests that the picture is of a man who is drunk, staggering from side to side on the road and getting nowhere. James says vividly that such a man is dipsuchos (GSN1374), which literally means a man with two souls, or two minds, inside him. One believes, the other disbelieves; and the man is a walking civil war in which trust and distrust of God wage a continual battle against each other.

If we are to use aright the experiences of life to beget a sterling character, we must ask wisdom from God. And when we ask, we must remember the absolute generosity of God and see to it that we ask believing that we shall receive what God knows it is good and right for us to have.

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James 1:9-11

AS EACH MAN NEEDS

James 1:9-11

Let the lowly brother be proud of his exaltation; and let the rich brother be proud of his humiliation; for he will pass away like a flower of the field. The sun rises with the scorching wind and withers the grass, and the flower wilts, and the beauty of its form is destroyed. So the rich will wither away in all his ways.

As James saw it, Christianity brings to every man what he needs. As Mayor put it "As the despised poor learns self-respect, so the proud rich learns self-abasement."

(i) Christianity brings to the poor man a new sense of his own value. (a) He learns that he matters in the Church. In the early church there were not class distinctions. It could happen that the slave was the minister of the congregation, preaching and dispensing the sacrament, while the master was no more than a humble member. In the Church the social distinctions of the world are obliterated and none matters more than any other. (b) He learns that he matters in the world. It is the teaching of Christianity that every man in this world has a task to do. Every man is of use to God and even if he be confined to a bed of pain, the power of his prayers can still act on the world of men. (c) He learns that he matters to God As Muretus said long ago, "Call no man worthless for whom Christ died."

(ii) Christianity brings to the rich man a new sense of self-abasement. The great peril of riches is that they tend to give a man a false sense of security. He feels that he is safe; he feels that he has the resources to cope with anything and to buy himself out of any situation he may wish to avoid.

James draws a vivid picture, very familiar to the people of Palestine. In the desert places, if there is a shower of rain, the thin green shoots of grass will sprout; but one day's burning sunshine will make them vanish as if they had never been. The scorching heat is the kauson (GSN2742). The kauson was the south-east wind, the Simoon. It came straight from the deserts and burst on Palestine like a blast of hot air when an oven door is opened. In an hour it could wipe out all vegetation.

This is a picture of what a life dependent on riches can be like. A man who puts his trust in riches is trusting in things which the chances and changes of life can take from him at any moment. Life itself is uncertain. At the back of James' mind there is Isaiah's picture: "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people is grass" (Isa.40:6-7; compare Ps.103:15).

James' point is this. If life is so uncertain and man so vulnerable, calamity and disaster may come at any moment. Since that is so, a man is a fool to put all his trust in things--like wealth--which he may lose at any moment. He is only wise if he puts his trust in things which he cannot lose.

Barclay's Commentary

James 1:9-11

So, then, James urges the rich to cease to put their trust in that which their own power can amass. He urges them to admit their essential human helplessness and humbly to put their trust in God, who alone can give the things which abide for ever.

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James 1:12

THE CROWN OF LIFE

James 1:12

Happy is the man who meets trial with steadfast constancy because, when he has shown himself of sterling worth, he will receive the crown of life which he has promised to those who love him.

To the man who meets trials in the right way there is joy here and hereafter.

(i) In this life he becomes a man of sterling worth. He is dokimos (GSN1384); he is like metal which is cleansed of all alloy. The weaknesses of his character are eradicated; and he emerges strong and pure.

(ii) In the life to come he receives the crown of life. There is far more than one thought here. In the ancient world the crown (stephanos, GSN4735) had at least four great associations.

(a) The crown of flowers was worn at times of joy, at weddings and at feasts (compare Isa.28:1-2; SS.3:11). The crown was the sign of festive joy.

(b) The crown was the mark of royalty. It was worn by kings and by those in authority. Sometimes this was the crown of gold; sometimes it was the linen band, or fillet, worn around the brows (compare Ps.21:3; Jer.13:18).

(c) The crown of laurel leaves was the victor's crown in the games, the prize which the athlete coveted above all (compare 2Tim.4:8).

(d) The crown was the mark of honour and of dignity. The instructions of parents can bring a crown of grace to those who listen to them (Prov.1:9); Wisdom provides a man with a crown of glory (Prov.4:9); in a time of disaster and dishonour it can be said, "The crown has fallen from our head" (Lam.5:16).

We do not need to choose between these meanings. They are all included. The Christian has a joy that no other man can ever have. Life for him is like being for ever at a feast. He has a royalty that other men have never realized for, however humble his earthly circumstances, he is the child of God. He has a victory which others cannot win, for he meets life and all its demands in the conquering power of the presence of Jesus Christ. He has a new dignity for he is ever conscious that God thought him worth the life and death of Jesus Christ.

What is the crown? It is the crown of life; and that phrase means that it is the crown which consists of life. The crown of the Christian is a new kind of living which is life indeed; through Jesus Christ he has entered into life more abundant.

James says that if the Christian meets the testings of life in the steadfast constancy which Christ can give, life becomes infinitely more splendid than ever it was before. The struggle is the way to glory, and the very struggle itself is a glory.

Barclay's Commentary

James 1:13-15

PUTTING THE BLAME ON GOD

James 1:13-15 (Part 1)

Let no man say when he is tempted, "My temptation comes from God." For God himself is untemptable by evil and tempts no man. But temptation comes to every man, because he is lured on and seduced by his own desire; then desire conceives and begets sin; and, when sin has reached its full development, it spawns death.

At the back of this passage lies a Jewish way of belief to which all of us are to some extent prone. James is here rebuking the man who puts the blame for temptation on God.

Jewish thought was haunted by the inner division that is in every man. It was the problem which haunted Paul: "I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (Rom.7:22-23). Every man was pulled in two directions. Purely as an interpretation of experience the Jews arrived at the doctrine that in every man there were two tendencies. They called them the Yetser (HSN3336) Hatob (HSN2896), the good tendency, and the Yetser (HSN3336) Hara` (HSN7451), the evil tendency. This simply stated the problem; it did not explain it. In particular, it did not say where the evil tendency came from. So Jewish thought set out to try to explain that.

The writer of Ecclesiasticus was deeply impressed with the havoc that the evil tendency causes. "O Yetser (HSN3336) Hara` (HSN7451), why wast thou made to fill the earth with thy deceit?" (Sir.37:3). In his view the evil tendency came from Satan, and man's defence against it was his own will. "God made man from the beginning and he delivered him into the hand of him who took him for a prey. He left him in the power of his will. If thou wilt, thou wilt observe the commandments, and faithfulness is a matter of thy good pleasure" (Sir.15:14-15).

There were Jewish writers who traced this evil tendency right back to the Garden of Eden. In the apocryphal work, The Life of Adam and Eve, the story is told. Satan took the form of an angel and, speaking through the serpent, put into Eve the desire for the forbidden fruit and made her swear that she would give the fruit to Adam as well. "When he had made me swear," says Eve, "he ascended up into the tree. But in the fruit he gave me to eat he placed the poison of his malice, that is, of his lust. For lust is the beginning of all sin. And he bent down the bough to the earth, and I took of the fruit and ate it." In this conception it was Satan himself who succeeded in inserting the evil tendency into man; and that evil tendency is identified with the lust of the flesh. A later development of this story was that the beginning of all sin was in fact Satan's lust for Eve.

The Book of Enoch has two theories. One is that the fallen angels are responsible for sin (85). The other is that man himself is responsible for it. "Sin has not been sent upon the earth, but man himself created it" (98: 4).

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James 1:13-15

But every one of these theories simply pushes the problem one step further back. Satan may have put the evil tendency into man; the fallen angels may have put it into man; man may have put it into himself. But where did it ultimately come from?

To meet this problem, certain of the Rabbis took a bold and dangerous step. They argued that, since God has created everything, he must have created the evil tendency also. So we get Rabbinic sayings such as the following. "God said, It repents me that I created the evil tendency in man; for had I not done so, he would not have rebelled against me. I created the evil tendency; I created the law as a means of healing. If you occupy yourself with the law, you will not fall into the power of it. God placed the good tendency on a man's right hand, and the evil on his left." The danger is obvious. It means that in the last analysis a man can blame God for his own sin. He can say, as Paul said, "It is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells in me" (Rom.7:15-24). Of all strange doctrines surely the strangest is that God is ultimately responsible for sin.

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James 1:13-15

THE EVASION OF RESPONSIBILITY

James 1:13-15 (Part 2)

From the beginning of time it has been man's first instinct to blame others for his own sin. The ancient writer who wrote the story of the first sin in the Garden of Eden was a first-rate psychologist with a deep knowledge of the human heart. When God challenged Adam with his sin, Adam's reply was, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." And when God challenged Eve with her action, her answer was, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." Adam said, "Don't blame me; blame Eve." Eve said, "Don't blame me; blame the serpent" (Gen.3:12-13).

Man has always been an expert in evasion.

Robert Burns wrote:

Thou know'st that Thou hast formed me
With passions wild and strong;
And list'ning to their witching voice
Has often led me wrong.

In effect, he is saying that his conduct was as it was because God made him as he was. The blame is laid on God. So men blame their fellows, they blame their circumstances, they blame the way in which they are made, for the sin of which they are guilty.

James sternly rebukes that view. To him what is responsible for sin is man's own evil desire. Sin would be helpless if there was nothing in man to which it could appeal. Desire is something which can be nourished or stifled. A man can control and even, by the grace of God, eliminate it if he deals with it at once. But he can allow his thoughts to follow certain tracks, and his steps to take him into certain places and his eyes to linger on certain things; and so foment desire. He can so hand himself over to Christ and be so engaged on good things that there is no time or place left for evil desire. It is idle hands for which Satan finds mischief to do; it is the unexercised mind and the uncommitted heart which are vulnerable.

If a man encourages desire long enough, there is an inevitable consequence. Desire becomes action.

Further, it was the Jewish teaching that sin produced death. The life of Adam and Eve says that the moment Eve ate of the fruit she caught a glimpse of death. The word which James uses in Jas.1:15, and which the King James and the Revised Standard Versions translate brings forth death, is an animal word for birth; and it means that sin spawns death. Mastered by desire, man becomes less than a man and sinks to the level of the brute creation.

The great value of this passage is that it urges upon man his personal responsibility for sin. No man was ever born without desire for some wrong thing. And, if a man deliberately encourages and

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James 1:13-15

nourishes that desire until it becomes full-grown and monstrously strong, it will inevitably issue in the action which is sin--and that is the way to death. Such a thought--and all human experience admits it to be true--must drive us to that grace of God which alone can make and keep us clean, and which is available to all.

Barclay's Commentary

James 1:16-18

GOD'S CONSTANCY FOR GOOD

James 1:16-18

My dear brothers, do not be deceived. Every good gift and every perfect boon comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is none of that changeableness which comes from changing shadows. Of his own purpose he has begotten us by the word of truth so that we might be, as it were, the first-fruits of his created things.

Once again James stresses the great truth that every gift that God sends is good. Jas.1:17 might well be translated: "All giving is good." That is to say, there is nothing which comes from God which is not good. There is a strange phenomenon here in the Greek. The phrase which we have translated, "Every good gift and every perfect boon," is, in fact, a perfect hexametre line of poetry. Either James had a rhythmic ear for a fine cadence or he is quoting from some work which we do not know.

What he is stressing is the unchangeableness of God. To do so he uses two astronomical terms. The word he uses for changeableness is parallax (GSN3883), and the word for the turn of the shadow is trope (GSN5157). Both these words have to do with the variation which the heavenly bodies show, the variation in the length of the day and of the night, the apparent variation in the course of the sun, the phases of waxing and waning, the different brilliance at different times of the stars and the planets. Variability is characteristic of all created things. God is the creator of the lights of heaven--the sun, the moon, the stars. The Jewish morning prayer says, "Blessed be the Lord God who hath formed the lights." The lights change but he who created them never changes.

Further, his purpose is altogether gracious. The word of truth is the gospel; and by the sending of that gospel it is God's purpose that man should be reborn into a new life. The shadows are ended and the certain word of truth has come.

That rebirth is a rebirth into the family and the possession of God. In the ancient world it was the law that all first-fruits were sacred to God. They were offered in grateful sacrifice to God because they belonged to him. So, when we are reborn by the true word of the gospel, we become the property of God, even as the first-fruits of the harvest did.

James insists that, so far from ever tempting man, God's gifts are invariably good. In all the chances and changes of a changing world they never vary. And God's supreme object is to re-create life through the truth of the gospel, so that men should know that they belong by right to him.

Barclay's Commentary

James 1:19-20

WHEN TO BE QUICK AND WHEN TO BE SLOW

James 1:19-20

All this, my dear brothers, you already know. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness which God desires.

There are few wise men who have not been impressed by the dangers of being too quick to speak and too unwilling to listen. A most interesting list could be compiled of the things in which it is well to be quick and the things in which it is well to be slow. In the Sayings of the Jewish Fathers we read: "There are four characters in scholars. Quick to hear and quick to forget; his gain is cancelled by his loss. Slow to hear and slow to forget; his loss is cancelled by his gain. Quick to hear and slow to forget; he is wise. Slow to hear and quick to forget; this is an evil lot." Ovid bids men to be slow to punish, but swift to reward. Philo bids a man to be swift to benefit others, and slow to harm them.

In particular the wise men were impressed by the necessity of being slow to speak. Rabbi Simeon said, "All my days I have grown up among the wise, and have not found aught good for a man but silence...Whoso multiplies words occasions sin." Jesus, the son of Sirach, writes, "Be swift to hear the word that thou mayest understand...If thou hast understanding, answer thy neighbour; if not, lay thy hand upon thy mouth, lest thou be surprised in an unskilful word, and be confounded" (Sir.5:11-12). Proverbs is full of the perils of too hasty speech. "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is prudent" (Prov.10:19). "He who guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin" (Prov.13:3). "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise" (Prov.17:28). "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Prov.29:20).

Hort says that the really good man will be much more anxious to listen to God than arrogantly, garrulously and stridently to shout his own opinions. The classical writers had the same idea. Zeno said, "We have two ears but only one mouth, that we may hear more and speak less." When Demonax was asked how a man might rule best, he answered, "Without anger, speaking little, and listening much." Bias said, "If you hate quick speaking, you will not fall into error." The tribute was once paid to a great linguist that he could be silent in seven different languages. Many of us would do well to listen more and to speak less.

It is James' advice that we should also be slow to anger. He is probably meeting the arguments of some that there is a place for the blazing anger of rebuke. That is undoubtedly true; the world would be a poorer place without those who blazed against the abuses and the tyrannies of sin. But too often this is made an excuse for petulant and self-centred irritation.

The teacher will be tempted to be angry with the slow and backward and still more with the lazy scholar. But, except on the rarest occasions, he will achieve more by encouragement than by the lash of the tongue. The preacher will be tempted to anger. But "don't scold" is always good advice to him; he loses his power whenever he does not make it clear by every word and gesture that he loves his people. When anger gives the impression in the pulpit of dislike or contempt it will not

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James 1:19-20

convert the souls of men. The parent will be tempted to anger. But a parent's anger is much more likely to produce a still more stubborn resistance than it is to control and direct. The accent of love always has more power than the accent of anger; and when anger becomes constant irritability, petulant annoyance, carping nagging, it always does more harm than good.

To be slow to speak, slow to anger, quick to listen is always good policy for life.

Barclay's Commentary

James 1:21

THE TEACHABLE SPIRIT

James 1:21

So then strip yourself of all filthiness and of the excrescence of vice, and in gentleness receive the inborn word which is able to save your souls.

James uses a series of vivid words and pictures.

He tells his readers to strip themselves of all vice and filthiness. The word he uses for strip is the word used for stripping off one's clothes. He bids his hearers get rid of all defilement as a man strips off soiled garments or as a snake sloughs off its skin.

Both the words he uses for defilement are vivid. The word we have translated filthiness is *ruparia* (GSN4507); and it can be used for the filth which soils clothes or soils the body. But it has one very interesting connection. It is a derivative of *rupos* (GSN4509) and, when *rupos* is used in a medical sense, it means wax in the ear. It is just possible that it still retains that meaning here; and that James is telling his readers to get rid of everything which would stop their ears to the true word of God. When wax gathers in the ear, it can make a man deaf; and a man's sins can make him deaf to God. Further, James talks of the excrescence (*perisseia*, GSN4050) of vice. He thinks of vice as tangled undergrowth or a cancerous growth which must be cut away.

He bids them receive the inborn word in gentleness. The word for inborn is *emphutos* (GSN1721), and is capable of two general meanings.

(i) It can mean inborn in the sense of innate as opposed to acquired. If James uses it in that way he is thinking of much the same thing as Paul was thinking of when he spoke of the Gentiles doing the works of the law by nature because they have a kind of law in their hearts (Rom.2:14-15); it is the same picture as the Old Testament picture of the law "very near you; it is in your mouth, and in your heart" (Deut.30:14). It is practically equal to our word conscience. If this is its meaning here, James is saying that there is an instinctive knowledge of good and evil in a man's heart whose guidance we should at all times obey.

(ii) It can mean inborn in the sense of implanted, as a seed is planted in the ground. In 4 Ezra 9:31 we read of God saying: "Behold, I sow my law in you, and you shall be glorified in it for ever." If James is using the word in this sense, the idea may well go back to the Parable of the Sower (Matt.13:1-8), which tells how the seed of the word is sown into the hearts of men. Through his prophets and his preachers, and above all through Jesus Christ, God sows his truth into the hearts of men and the man who is wise will receive it and welcome it.

It may well be that we are not required to make a choice between these two meanings. It may well be that James is implying that knowledge of the true word of God comes to us from two sources, from the depths of our own being, and from the Spirit of God and the teaching of Christ and the preaching of men. From inside and from outside come voices telling us the right way; and the wise man will listen and obey.

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James 1:21

He will receive the word with gentleness. Gentleness is an attempt to translate the untranslatable word *prautes* (GSN4240). This is a great Greek word which has no precise English equivalent. Aristotle defined it as the mean between excessive anger and excessive angerlessness; it is the quality of the man whose feelings and emotions are under perfect control. Andronicus Rhodius, commenting on Aristotle, writes, "*Prautes* (GSN4240) is moderation in regard to anger... You might define *prautes* (GSN4240) as serenity and the power, not to be lead away by emotion, but to control emotion as right reason dictates." The Platonic definitions say that *prautes* (GSN4240) is the regulation of the movement of the soul caused by anger. It is the temperament (*krasis*) of a soul in which everything is mixed in the right proportions.

No one can ever find one English word to translate what is a one word summary of the truly teachable spirit. The teachable spirit is docile and tractable, and therefore humble enough to learn. The teachable spirit is without resentment and without anger and is, therefore, able to face the truth, even when it hurts and condemns. The teachable spirit is not blinded by its own overmastering prejudices but is clear-eyed to the truth. The teachable spirit is not seduced by laziness but is so self-controlled that it can willingly and faithfully accept the discipline of learning. *Prautes* (GSN4240) describes the perfect conquest and control of everything in a man's nature which would be a hindrance to his seeing, learning and obeying the truth.

Barclay's Commentary

James 1:22-24

HEARING AND DOING

James 1:22-24

Prove yourselves to be doers of the word, and not only hearers, for those who think that hearing is enough deceive themselves. For, if a man is a hearer of the word and not a doer of it, he is like a man who looks in a mirror at the face which nature gave him. A glance and he is gone; and he immediately forgets what kind of man he is.

Again James presents us with two of the vivid pictures of which he is such a master. First of all, he speaks of the man who goes to the church meeting and listens to the reading and expounding of the word, and who thinks that that listening has made him a Christian. He has shut his eyes to the fact that what is read and heard in Church must then be lived out. It is still possible to identify Church attendance and Bible reading with Christianity but this is to take ourselves less than half the way; the really important thing is to turn that to which we have listened into action.

Second, James says such a man is like one who looks in a mirror--ancient mirrors were made, not of glass, but of highly polished metal--sees the smuts which disfigure his face and the dishevelment of his hair, and goes away and forgets what he looks like, and so omits to do anything about it. In his listening to the true word a man has revealed to him that which he is and that which he ought to be. He sees what is wrong and what must be done to put it right; but, if he is only a hearer, he remains just as he is, and all his hearing has gone for nothing.

James does well to remind us that what is heard in the holy place must be lived in the market place--or there is no point in hearing at all.

Barclay's Commentary

James 1:25

THE TRUE LAW

James 1:25

He who looks into the perfect law, which is the law in the observance of which a man finds freedom, and who abides in it and shows himself not a forgetful hearer but an active doer of the word, will be blessed in all his action.

This is the kind of passage in James which Luther so much disliked. He disliked the idea of law altogether, for with Paul he would have said, "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom.10:4). "James," said Luther, "drives us to law and works." And yet beyond all doubt there is a sense in which James is right. There is an ethical law which the Christian must seek to put into action. That law is to be found first in the Ten Commandments and then in the teaching of Jesus.

James calls that law two things.

(i) He calls it the perfect law. There are three reasons why the law is perfect. (a) It is God's law, given and revealed by him. The way of life which Jesus laid down for his followers is in accordance with the will of God. (b) It is perfect in that it cannot be bettered. The Christian law is the law of love; and the demand of love can never be satisfied. We know well, when we love some one, that even though we gave them all the world and served them for a lifetime, we still could not satisfy or deserve their love. (c) But there is still another sense in which the Christian law is perfect. The Greek word is *teleios* (GSN5046) which nearly always describes perfection towards some given end. Now, if a man obeys the law of Christ, he will fulfil the purpose for which God sent him into the world; he will be the person he ought to be and will make the contribution to the world he ought to make. He will be perfect in the sense that he will, by obeying the law of God, realize his God-given destiny.

(ii) He calls it the law of liberty; that is, the law in the keeping of which a man finds his true liberty. All the great men have agreed that it is only in obeying the law of God that a man becomes truly free. "To obey God," said Seneca, "is liberty." "The wise man alone is free," said the Stoics, "and every foolish man is a slave." Philo said "All who are under the tyranny of anger or desire or any other passion are altogether slaves; all who live with the law are free." So long as a man has to obey his own passions and emotions and desires, he is nothing less than a slave. It is when he accepts the will of God that he becomes really free--for then he is free to be what he ought to be. His service is perfect freedom and in doing his will is our peace.

Barclay's Commentary

James 1:26-27

TRUE WORSHIP

James 1:26-27

If anyone thinks that he is a worshipper of God and yet does not bridle his tongue, his worship is an empty thing. This is pure and undefiled worship, as God the Father sees it, to visit the orphans and the widows, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

We must be careful to understand what James is saying here. The Revised Standard Version translates the phrases at the beginning of Jas.1:27: "Religion that is pure and undefiled is....." The word translated religion is *theskeia* (GSN2356), and its meaning is not so much religion as worship in the sense of the outward expression of religion in ritual and liturgy and ceremony. What James is saying is, "The finest ritual and the finest liturgy you can offer to God is service of the poor and personal purity." To him real worship did not lie in elaborate vestments or in magnificent music or in a carefully wrought service; it lay in the practical service of mankind and in the purity of one's own personal life. It is perfectly possible for a Church to be so taken up with the beauty of its buildings and the splendour of its liturgy that it has neither the time nor the money for practical Christian service; and that is what James is condemning.

In fact James is condemning only what the prophets had condemned long ago. "God," said the Psalmist, "is a father of the fatherless, and protector of widows" (Ps.68:5). It was Zechariah's complaint that the people pulled away their shoulders and made their hearts as adamant as stone at the demand to execute true justice, to show mercy and compassion every man to his brother, to oppress not the widow, the fatherless, the stranger and the poor, and not to entertain evil thoughts against another within the heart (Zech.7:6-10). It was Micah's complaint that all ritual sacrifices were useless, if a man did not do justice and love kindness and walk humbly before God (Mic.6:6-8).

All through history men have tried to make ritual and liturgy a substitute for sacrifice and service. They have made religion splendid within the Church at the expense of neglecting it outside the Church. This is by no means to say that it is wrong to seek to offer the noblest and the most splendid worship within God's house; but it is to say that all such worship is empty and idle unless it sends a man out to love God by loving his fellow-men and to walk more purely in the tempting ways of the world.

Barclay's Commentary

James 2:1

RESPECT OF PERSONS

James 2:1

My brothers, you cannot really believe that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, and yet continue to have respect of persons.

Respect of persons is the New Testament phrase for undue and unfair partiality; it means pandering to someone, because he is rich or influential or popular. It is a fault which the New Testament consistently condemns. It is a fault of which the orthodox Jewish leaders completely acquitted Jesus. Even they were bound to admit that there was no respect of persons with him (Lk.20:21; Mk.12:14; Matt.22:16). After his vision of the sheet with the clean and unclean animals upon it, the lesson that Peter learned was that with God there is no respect of persons (Ac.10:34). It was Paul's conviction that Gentile and Jew stand under a like judgment in the sight of God, for with God there is no favouritism (Rom.2:11). This is a truth which Paul urges on his people again and again (Eph.6:9; Col.3:25).

The word itself is curious--prosopolempsia (GSN4382). The noun comes from the expression prosopon (GSN4383) lambanein (GSN2983). Prosopon (GSN4383) is the "face"; and lambanein (GSN2983) here means "to lift up." The expression in Greek is a literal translation of a Hebrew phrase. To lift up a person's countenance was to regard him with favour, in contradistinction perhaps to casting down his countenance.

Originally it was not a bad word at all; it simply meant to accept a person with favour. Malachi asks if the governor will be pleased with the people and will accept their persons, if they bring him blemished offerings (Mal.1:8-9). But the word rapidly acquired a bad sense. It soon began to mean, not so much to favour a person, as to show favouritism, to allow oneself to be unduly influenced by a person's social status or prestige or power or wealth. Malachi goes on to condemn that very sin when God accuses the people of not keeping his ways and of being partial in their judgments (Mal.2:9). The great characteristic of God is his complete impartiality. In the Law it was written, "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour" (Lev.19:15). There is a necessary emphasis here. A person may be unjust because of the snobbery which truckles to the rich; and may be equally unjust because of the inverted snobbery which glorifies the poor. "The Lord," said Ben Sirach, "is judge and with him is no respect of persons" (Sir.35:12).

The Old and New Testaments unite in condemning that partiality of judgment and favouritism of treatment which comes of giving undue weight to a man's social standing, wealth or worldly influence. And it is a fault to which every one is more or less liable. "The rich and the poor meet together," says Proverbs, "the Lord is the maker of them all" (Prov.22:2). "It is not meet," says Ben Sirach, "to despise the poor man that hath understanding; neither is it fitting to magnify a sinful man that is rich" (Sir.10:23). We do well to remember that it is just as much respect of persons to truckle to the mob as it is to pander to a tyrant.

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James 2:2-4

THE PERIL OF SNOBBERY WITHIN THE CHURCH

James 2:2-4

For, if a man comes into your assembly with his fingers covered with gold rings and dressed in elegant clothes and a poor man comes in dressed in shabby clothes, and you pay special attention to the man who is dressed in elegant clothes and you say to him: "Will you sit here, please?" and you say to the poor man, "You stand there!" or, "Squat on the floor beside my footstool!" have you not drawn distinctions within your minds, and have you not become judges whose thoughts are evil?

It is James' fear that snobbery may invade the Church. He draws a picture of two men entering the Christian assembly. The one is well-dressed and his fingers are covered with gold rings. The more ostentatious of the ancients wore rings on every finger except the middle one, and wore far more than one on each finger. They even hired rings to wear when they wished to give an impression of special wealth. "We adorn our fingers with rings," said Seneca, "and we distribute gems over every joint." Clement of Alexandria recommends that a Christian should wear only one ring, and that he should wear it on his little finger. It ought to have on it a religious emblem, such as a dove, a fish or an anchor; and the justification for wearing it is that it might be used as a seal.

So, then, into the Christian assembly comes an elegantly dressed and much be ringed man. The other is a poor man, dressed in poor clothes because he has no others to wear and unadorned by any jewels. The rich man is ushered to a special seat with all ceremony and respect; while the poor man is bidden to stand, or to squat on the floor, beside the footstool of the well-to-do.

That the picture is not overdrawn is seen from certain instructions in some early service order books. Ropes quotes a typical passage from the Ethiopia Statutes of the Apostles: "If any other man or woman enters in fine clothes, either a man of the district or from other districts, being brethren, thou, presbyter, while thou speakest the word which is concerning God, or while thou hearest or readest, thou shalt not respect persons, nor leave thy ministering to command places for them, but remain quiet, for the brethren shall receive them, and if they have no place for them, the lover of brothers and sisters, will rise, and leave a place for them ... And if a poor man or woman of the district or of other districts should come in and there is no place for them, thou, presbyter, make place for such with all thy heart, even if thou wilt sit on the ground, that there should not be the respecting of the person of man but of God." Here is the same picture.

It is even suggested that the leader of the service might be liable, when a rich man entered, to stop the service and to conduct him to a special seat.

There is no doubt that there must have been social problems in the early church. The Church was the only place in the ancient world where social distinctions did not exist. There must have been a certain initial awkwardness when a master found himself sitting next his slave or when a master arrived at a service in which his slave was actually the leader and the dispenser of the Sacrament. The gap between the slave, who in law was nothing more than a living tool, and the master was so wide as to cause problems of approach on either side. Further, in its early days the Church was predominantly poor and humble; and therefore if a rich man was converted and came to the

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James 2:2-4

Christian fellowship, there must have been a very real temptation to make a fuss of him and treat him as a special trophy for Christ.

The Church must be the one place where all distinctions are wiped out. There can be no distinctions of rank and prestige when men meet in the presence of the King of glory. There can be no distinctions of merit when men meet in the presence of the supreme holiness of God. In his presence all earthly distinctions are less than the dust and all earthly righteousness is as filthy rags. In the presence of God all men are one.

In Jas.2:4 there is a problem of translation. The word *diekrithete* (GSN1252) can have two meanings: (i) It can mean, "You are wavering in your judgments, if you act like that." That is to say, "If you pay special honour to the rich, you are torn between the standards of the world and the standards of God and you can't make up your mind which you are going to apply." (ii) It may mean, "You are guilty of making class distinctions which in the Christian fellowship should not exist." We prefer the second meaning, because James goes on to say, "If you do that, you are judges whose thoughts are evil." That is to say, "You are breaking the commandment of him who said, 'Judge not that you be not judged'" (Matt.7:1).

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James 2:5-7

THE RICHES OF POVERTY AND THE POVERTY OF RICHES

James 2:5-7

Listen, my dear brothers. Did God not choose those who are poor by the world's valuation to be rich because of their faith and to be heirs of the Kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? But you dishonour the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you, and is it not they who drag you to the law-courts? And is it not they who abuse the fair name by which you have been called?

"God," said Abraham Lincoln, "must love the common people because he made so many of them." Christianity has always had a special message for the poor. In Jesus' first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth his claim was: "He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Lk.4:18). His answer to John's puzzled inquiries as to whether or not he was God's Chosen One culminated in the claim: "The poor have good news preached to them" (Matt.11:5). The first of the Beatitudes was "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt.5:3). And Luke is even more definite: "Blessed are you poor; for yours is the Kingdom of God (Lk.6:20). During the ministry of Jesus, when he was banished from the synagogues and took to the open road and the hillside and the seaside, it was the crowds of common men and women to whom his message came. In the days of the early church it was to the crowds that the street preachers preached.

In fact the message of Christianity was that those who mattered to no one else mattered intensely to God. "For consider your call, brethren," wrote Paul to the Corinthians, "not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth" (1Cor.1:26).

It is not that Christ and the Church do not want the great and the rich and the wise and the mighty; we must beware of an inverted snobbery, as we have already seen. But it was the simple fact that the gospel offered so much to the poor and demanded so much from the rich, that it was the poor who were swept into the Church. It was, in fact, the common people who heard Jesus gladly and the rich young ruler who went sorrowfully away because he had great possessions. James is not shutting the door on the rich--far from that. He is saying that the gospel of Christ is specially dear to the poor and that in it there is a welcome for the man who has none to welcome him, and that through it there is a value set on the man whom the world regards as valueless.

In the society which James inhabited the rich oppressed the poor. They dragged them to the law-courts. No doubt this was for debt. At the bottom end of the social scale men were so poor that they could hardly live and moneylenders were plentiful and extortionate. In the ancient world there was a custom of summary arrest. If a creditor met a debtor on the street, he could seize him by the neck of his robe, nearly throttling him, and literally drag him to the law-courts. That is what the rich did to the poor. They had no sympathy; all they wanted was the uttermost farthing. It is not riches that James is condemning; it is the conduct of riches without sympathy.

It is the rich who abuse the name by which the Christians are called. It may be the name Christian by which the heathen first called the followers of Christ at Antioch and which was given at first as a jest. It may be the name of Christ, which was pronounced over a Christian on the day of his

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baptism. The word James uses for called (epikaleisthai, GSN1941) is the word used for a wife taking her husband's name in marriage or for a child being called after his father. The Christian takes the name of Christ; he is called after Christ. It is as if he was married to Christ, or born and christened into the family of Christ.

The rich and the masters would have many a reason for insulting the name Christian. A slave who became a Christian would have a new independence; he would no longer cringe at his master's power, punishment would cease to terrorize him and he would meet his master clad in a new manhood. He would have a new honesty. That would make him a better slave, but it would also mean he could no longer be his master's instrument in sharp practice and petty dishonesty as once he might have been. He would have a new sense of worship; and on the Lord's Day he would insist on leaving work aside in order that he might worship with the people of God. There would be ample opportunity for a master to find reasons for insulting the name of Christian and cursing the name of Christ.

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James 2:8-11

THE ROYAL LAW

James 2:8-11

If you perfectly keep the royal law, as the Scripture has it: "You must love your neighbour as yourself," you do well. But if you treat people with respect of persons, such conduct is sin and you stand convicted by the law as transgressors. For, if a man keeps the whole law and yet fails to keep it in one point, he becomes guilty of transgressing the law as a whole. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not kill." If you do not commit adultery but kill, you become a transgressor of the law.

The connection of thought with the previous passage is this. James has been condemning those who pay special attention to the rich man who enters the Church. "But," they might answer, "the law tells me to love my neighbour as myself. Therefore we are under duty to welcome the man when he comes to Church." "Very well," answers James, "If you are really welcoming the man because you love him as you do yourself, and you wish to give him the welcome you yourself would wish to receive, that is fine. But, if you are giving him this special welcome because he is a rich man, that is respect of persons and that is wrong--and so far from keeping the law, you are in fact breaking it. You don't love your neighbour, or you would not neglect the poor man. What you love is wealth--and that is not what the law commands."

James calls the great injunction to love our neighbour as ourselves the royal law. There can be various meanings of the phrase. It may mean the law which is of supreme excellence; it may mean the law which is given by the King of the kings; it may mean the king of all laws; it may mean the law that makes men kings and is fit for kings. To keep that greatest law is to become king of oneself and a king among men. It is a law fit for those who are royal, and able to make men royal.

James goes on to lay down a great principle about the law of God. To break any part of it is to become a transgressor. The Jew was very apt to regard the law as a series of detached injunctions. To keep one was to gain credit; to break one was to incur debt. A man could add up the ones he kept and subtract the ones he broke and so emerge with a credit or a debit balance. There was a Rabbinic saying, "Whoever fulfils only one law, good is appointed to him; his days are prolonged and he will inherit the land." Again many of the Rabbis held that "the Sabbath weighs against all precepts," and to keep it was to keep the law.

As James saw it, the whole law was the will of God; to break any part of it was to infringe that will and therefore to be guilty of sin. That is perfectly true. To break any part of the law is to become a transgressor in principle. Even under human justice a man becomes a criminal when he has broken one law. So James argues: "No matter how good you may be in other directions, if you treat people with respect of persons, you have acted against the will of God and you are a transgressor."

There is a great truth here which is both relevant and practical. We may put it much more simply. A man may be in nearly all respects a good man; and yet he may spoil himself by one fault. He may

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James 2:8-11

be moral in his action, pure in his speech, meticulous in his devotion. But he may be hard and self-righteous; rigid and unsympathetic; and, if so, his goodness is spoiled.

We do well to remember that, though we may claim to have done many a good thing and to have resisted many an evil thing, there may be something in us by which everything is spoiled.

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James 2:12-13

THE LAW OF LIBERTY AND THE LIFE OF MERCY

James 2:12-13

So speak and so act as those who are going to be judged under the law of liberty. For he who acts without mercy will have judgment without mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

As he comes to the end of a section, James reminds his readers of two great facts of the Christian life.

(i) The Christian lives under the law of liberty, and it is by the law of liberty he will be judged. What he means is this. Unlike the Pharisee and the orthodox Jew, the Christian is not a man whose life is governed by the external pressure of a whole series of rules and regulations imposed on him from without. He is governed by the inner compulsion of love. He follows the right way, the way of love to God and love to men, not because any external law compels him to do so nor because any threat of punishment frightens him into doing so, but because the love of Christ within his heart makes him desire to do so.

(ii) The Christian must ever remember that only he who shows mercy will find mercy. This is a principle which runs through all Scripture. Ben Sirach wrote, "Forgive thy neighbour the hurt that he hath done thee, so shall thy sins also be forgiven. One man beareth hatred against another, and doth he seek pardon from the Lord? He sheweth no mercy to a man who is like himself; and doth he ask forgiveness for his own sins?" (Sir.28:2-5). Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt.5:7). "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt.6:14-15). "Judge not that you be not judged, for with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged" (Matt.7:1-2).

He tells of the condemnation which fell upon the unforgiving servant and ends the parable by saying, "So, also, my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt.18:22-35).

Scripture teaching is agreed that he who would find mercy must himself be merciful. And James goes even further, for in the end he says that mercy triumphs over judgment; by which he means that in the day of judgment the man who has shown mercy will find that his mercy has even blotted out his own sin.

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James 2:14-26

FAITH AND WORKS

James 2:14-26

My brothers, what use is it if a man claims to have faith and has no deeds to show? Are you going to claim that his faith is able to save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear, and if they have not enough for their daily food, and if one of you says to them, "Go in peace! Be warmed and fed!" and yet does not give them the essentials of bodily existence, what use is that? So, if faith too has no deeds to show, by itself it is dead.

But someone may well say, "Have you faith?" My answer is, "I have deeds. Show me your faith apart from your deeds, and I will show you my faith by means of my deeds." You say that you believe that there is one God. Excellent! The demons also believe the same thing--and shudder in terror.

Do you wish for proof, you empty creature, that faith without deeds is ineffective? Was not our father Abraham proved righteous in virtue of deeds when he was ready to offer Isaac his own son upon the altar? You see how his faith cooperated with his deeds and how his faith was completed by his deeds, and so there was fulfilled the passage of Scripture which says, "Abraham believed in God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness, for he was the friend of God." You see that it is by deeds that a man is proved righteous, and not only by faith.

In the same way was Rahab the harlot not also proved righteous by deeds, when she received the messengers and sent them away by another way? For just as the body without breath is dead, so faith without works is dead.

This is a passage which we must take as a whole before we look at it in parts, for it is so often used in an attempt to show that James and Paul were completely at variance. It is apparently Paul's emphasis that a man is saved by faith alone and that deeds do not come into the process at all. "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom.3:28). "A man is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ...because by works of the law shall no one be justified" (Gal.2:16). It is often argued that James is not simply differing from Paul but is flatly contradicting him. This is a matter we must investigate.

(i) We begin by noting that James' emphasis is in fact a universal New Testament emphasis. It was the preaching of John the Baptist that men should prove the reality of their repentance by the excellence of their deeds (Matt.3:8; Lk.3:8). It was Jesus' preaching that men should so live that the world might see their good works and give the glory to God (Matt.5:16). He insisted that it was by their fruits that men must be known and that a faith which expressed itself in words only could never take the place of one which expressed itself in the doing of the will of God (Matt.7:15-21).

Nor is this emphasis missing from Paul himself. Apart from anything else, there can be few teachers who have ever stressed the ethical effect of Christianity as Paul does. However doctrinal and theological his letters may be, they never fail to end with a section in which the expression of Christianity in deeds is insisted upon. Apart from that general custom Paul repeatedly makes clear

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the importance he attaches to deeds as part of the Christian life. He speaks of God who will render to every man according to his works (Rom.2:6). He insists that every one of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom.14:12). He urges men to put off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light (Rom.13:12). Every man shall receive his own reward according to his labour (1Cor.3:8). We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that every one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body (2Cor.5:10). The Christian has to put off the old nature and all its deeds (Col.3:9).

The fact that Christianity must be ethically demonstrated is an essential part of the Christian faith throughout the New Testament.

(ii) The fact remains that James reads as if he were at variance with Paul; for in spite of all that we have said Paul's main emphasis is upon grace and faith and James' upon action and works. But this must be said--what James is condemning is not Paulinism but a perversion of it. The essential Pauline position in one sentence was: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" (Ac.16:31). But clearly the significance we attach to this demand will entirely depend on the meaning we attach to believe. There are two kinds of belief.

There is belief which is purely intellectual. For instance, I believe that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle equals the sum of the squares on the other two sides; and if I had to, I could prove it--but it makes no difference to my life and living. I accept it, but it has no effect upon me.

There is another kind of belief. I believe that five and five make ten, and, therefore, I will resolutely refuse to pay more than ten pence for two fivepenny bars of chocolate. I take that fact, not only into my mind, but into my life and action.

What James is arguing against is the first kind of belief, the acceptance of a fact without allowing it to have any influence upon life. The devils are intellectually convinced of the existence of God; they, in fact, tremble before him; but their belief does not alter them in the slightest. What Paul held was the second kind of belief. For him to believe in Jesus meant to take that belief into every section of life and to live by it.

It is easy to pervert Paulinism and to emasculate belief of all effective meaning; and it is not really Paulinism but a misunderstood form of it that James condemns. He is condemning profession without practice and with that condemnation Paul would have entirely agreed.

(iii) Even allowing for that, there is still a difference between James and Paul--they begin at different times in the Christian life. Paul begins at the very beginning. He insists that no man can ever earn the forgiveness of God. The initial step must come from the free grace of God; a man can only accept the forgiveness which God offers him in Jesus Christ.

James begins much later with the professing Christian, the man who claims to be already forgiven and in a new relationship with God. Such a man, James rightly says, must live a new life for he is a

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James 2:14-26

new creature. He has been justified; he must now show that he is sanctified With that Paul would have entirely agreed.

The fact is that no man can be saved by works; but equally no man can be saved without producing works. By far the best analogy is that of a great human love. He who is loved is certain that he does not deserve to be loved; but he is also certain that he must spend his life trying to be worthy of that love.

The difference between James and Paul is a difference of starting-point. Paul starts with the great basic fact of the forgiveness of God which no man can earn or deserve; James starts with the professing Christian and insists that a man must prove his Christianity by his deeds. We are not saved by deeds; we are saved for deeds; these are the twin truths of the Christian life. Paul's emphasis is on the first and James' is on the second. In fact they do not contradict but complement each other; and the message of both is essential to the Christian faith in its fullest form. As the paraphrase has it:

Let all who hold this faith and hope
In holy deeds abound;
Thus faith approves itself sincere,
By active virtue crown'd.

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James 2:14-17

PROFESSION AND PRACTICE

James 2:14-17

My brothers, what use is it, if a man claims to have faith and has no deeds to show? Are you going to claim that his faith is able to save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and if they have not enough for their daily food, and if one of you says to them, "Go in peace! Be warmed and fed!" and yet does not give them the essentials of bodily existence, what use is that? So, if faith too has no deeds to show, by itself it is dead.

The one thing that James cannot stand is profession without practice, words without deeds. He chooses a vivid illustration of what he means. Suppose a man to have neither clothes to protect him nor food to feed him; and suppose his so-called friend to express the sincerest sympathy for his sad plight; and suppose that sympathy stops with words and no effort is made to alleviate the plight of the unfortunate man, what use is that? What use is sympathy without some attempt to turn that sympathy into practical effect? Faith without deeds is dead. This is a passage which would appeal specially to a Jew.

(i) To a Jew almsgiving was of paramount importance. So much so that righteousness and almsgiving mean one and the same thing. Almsgiving was considered to be a man's one defence when he was judged by God. "Water will quench a flaming fire," writes Ben Sirach, "and alms maketh an atonement for sin" (Sir.3:30). In Tobit it is written, "Everyone who occupieth himself in alms shall behold the face of God, as it is written, I will behold thy face by almsgiving" (Tob.4:8-10). When the leaders of the Jerusalem Church agreed that Paul should go to the Gentiles the one injunction laid upon him was not to forget the poor (Gal.2:10). This stress on practical help was one of the great and lovely marks of Jewish piety.

(ii) There was a strain of Greek religion to which this stress on sympathy and almsgiving was quite alien. The Stoics aimed at apatheia, the complete absence of feeling. The aim of life was serenity. Emotion disturbs serenity. The way to perfect calm was to annihilate all emotion. Pity was a mere disturbance of the detached philosophic calm in which a man should aim to live. So Epictetus lays it down that only he who disobeys the divine command will ever feel grief or pity (Discourses 3: 24, 43). When Virgil in the Georgics (2: 498) draws the picture of the perfectly happy man, he has no pity for the poor and no grief for the sorrowing, for such emotions would only upset his own serenity. This is the very opposite of the Jewish point of view. For the Stoic blessedness meant being wrapped up in his own philosophic detachment and calm; for the Jew it meant actively sharing in the misfortunes of others.

(iii) In his approach to this subject James is profoundly right. There is nothing more dangerous than the repeated experiencing of a fine emotion with no attempt to put it into action. It is a fact that every time a man feels a noble impulse without taking action, he becomes less likely ever to take action. In a sense it is true to say that a man has no right to feel sympathy unless he at least tries to put that sympathy into action. An emotion is not something in which to luxuriate; it is something which at the cost of effort and of toil and of discipline and of sacrifice must be turned into the stuff of life.

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James 2:18-19

NOT "EITHER OR", BUT "BOTH AND"

James 2:18-19

But some one may well say, "Have you faith?" My answer is, "I have deeds. Show me your faith apart from your deeds and I will show you my faith by means of my deeds." You say that you believe there is one God. Excellent! The demons also believe the same thing--and shudder in terror.

James is thinking of a possible objector who says, "Faith is a fine thing; and works are fine things. They are both perfectly genuine manifestations of real religion. But the one man does not necessarily possess both. One man will have faith and another will have works. Well, then, you carry on with your works and I will carry on with my faith; and we are both being truly religious in our own way." The objector's view is that faith and works are alternative expressions of the Christian religion. James will have none of it. It is not a case of either faith or works; it is necessarily a case of both faith and works.

In many ways Christianity is falsely represented as an "either or" when it must properly be a "both and".

(i) In the well-proportioned life there must be thought and action. It is tempting and it is common to think that one may be either a man of thought or a man of action. The man of thought will sit in his study thinking great thoughts; the man of action will be out in the world doing great deeds. But that is wrong. The thinker is only half a man unless he turns his thoughts into deeds. He will scarcely even inspire men to action unless he comes down into the battle and shares the arena with them. As Kipling had it:

O England is a garden and such gardens are not made
By saying, "O how beautiful," and sitting in the shade;
While better men than we began their working lives
By digging weeds from garden paths with broken dinner knives.

Nor can anyone be a real man of action unless he has thought out the great principles on which his deeds are founded.

(ii) In the well-proportioned life there must be prayer and effort. Again it is tempting to divide men into two classes--the saints who spend life secluded on their knees in constant devotion and the toilers who labour in the dust and the heat of the day. But it will not do. It is said that Martin Luther was close friends with another monk. The other was as fully persuaded of the necessity of the Reformation as Luther was. So they made an arrangement. Luther would go down into the world and fight the battle there; the other would remain in his cell praying for the success of Luther's labours. But one night the monk had a dream. In it he saw a single reaper engaged on the impossible task of reaping an immense field by himself. The lonely reaper turned his head and the monk saw his face was the face of Martin Luther; and he knew that he must leave his cell and his prayers and go to help.

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James 2:18-19

It is, of course, true that there are some who, because of age or bodily weakness, can do nothing other than pray; and their prayers are indeed a strength and a support. But if any normal person thinks that prayer can be a substitute for effort, his prayers are merely a way of escape. Prayer and effort must go hand in hand.

(iii) In any well-proportioned life there must be faith and deeds. It is only through deeds that faith can prove and demonstrate itself; and it is only through faith that deeds will be attempted and done. Faith is bound to overflow into action; and action begins only when a man has faith in some great cause or principle which God has presented to him.

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James 2:20-26

THE PROOF OF FAITH

James 2:20-26

Do you wish for proof, you empty creature, that faith without deeds is ineffective? Our father Abraham was proved righteous in consequence of deeds, when he was ready to offer Isaac his son upon the altar. You see how his faith cooperated with his deeds and how his faith was completed by his deeds, and so there was fulfilled the passage of Scripture which says, "Abraham believed in God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness and he was called the friend of God." You see that it is by deeds that a man is proved righteous and not only by faith. In the same way was Rahab the harlot not also proved righteous by deeds, when she received the messengers and sent them away by another way? For just as the body without the breath is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

James offers two illustrations of the point of view on which he is insisting. Abraham is the great example of faith; but Abraham's faith was proved by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac at the apparent demand of God. Rahab was a famous figure in Jewish legend. She had sheltered the spies sent to spy out the Promised Land (Josh.2:1-21). Later legend said that she became a proselyte to the Jewish faith, that she married Joshua and that she was a direct ancestress of many priests and prophets, including Ezekiel and Jeremiah. It was her treatment of the spies which proved that she had faith.

Paul and James are both right here. Unless Abraham had had faith he would never have answered the summons of God. Unless Rahab had had faith, she would never have taken the risk of identifying her future with the fortunes of Israel. And yet, unless Abraham had been prepared to obey God to the uttermost, his faith would have been unreal; and unless Rahab had been prepared to risk all to help the spies, her faith would have been useless.

These two examples show that faith and deeds are not opposites; they are, in fact, inseparables. No man will ever be moved to action without faith; and no man's faith is genuine unless it moves him to action. Faith and deeds are opposite sides of a man's experience of God.

Barclay's Commentary

James 3:1

THE TEACHER'S PERIL

James 3:1

My brothers, it is a mistake for many of you to become teachers, for you must be well aware that those of us who teach will receive a greater condemnation.

In the early church the teachers were of first rate importance. Wherever they are mentioned, they are mentioned with honour. In the Church at Antioch they are ranked with the prophets who sent out Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Ac.13:1). In Paul's list of those who hold great gifts within the Church they come second only to the apostles and to the prophets (1Cor.12:28; compare Eph.4:11). The apostles and the prophets were for ever on the move. Their field was the whole Church; and they did not stay long in any one congregation. But the teachers worked within a congregation, and their supreme importance was that it must have been to them that the converts were handed over for instruction in the facts of the Christian gospel and for edification in the Christian faith. It was the teacher's awe-inspiring responsibility that he could put the stamp of his own faith and knowledge on those who were entering the Church for the first time.

In the New Testament itself we get glimpses of teachers who failed in their responsibility and became false teachers. There were teachers who tried to turn Christianity into another kind of Judaism and tried to introduce circumcision and the keeping of the law (Ac.15:24). There were teachers who lived out nothing of the truth which they taught, whose life was a contradiction of their instruction and who did nothing but bring dishonour on the faith they represented (Rom.2:17-29). There were some who tried to teach before they themselves knew anything (1Tim.1:6-7); and others who pandered to the false desires of the crowd (2Tim.4:3).

But, apart altogether from the false teachers, it is James' conviction that teaching is a dangerous occupation for any man. His instrument is speech and his agent the tongue. As Ropes puts it, James is concerned to point out "the responsibility of teachers and the dangerous character of the instrument they have to use."

The Christian teacher entered into a perilous heritage. In the Church he took the place of the Rabbi in Judaism. There were many great and saintly Rabbis, but the Rabbi was treated in a way that was liable to ruin the character of any man. His very name means, "My great one." Everywhere he went he was treated with the utmost respect. It was actually held that a man's duty to his Rabbi exceeded his duty to his parents, because his parents only brought him into the life of this world but his teacher brought him into the life of the world to come. It was actually said that if a man's parents and a man's teacher were captured by an enemy, the Rabbi must be ransomed first. It was true that a Rabbi was not allowed to take money for teaching and that he was supposed to support his bodily needs by working at a trade; but it was also held that it was a specially pious and meritorious work to take a Rabbi into the household and to support him with every care. It was desperately easy for a Rabbi to become the kind of person whom Jesus depicted, a spiritual tyrant, an ostentatious ornament of piety, a lover of the highest place at any function, a person who gloried in the almost subservient respect showed to him in public (Matt.23:4-7). Every teacher runs

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James 3:1

the risk of becoming "Sir Oracle." No profession is more liable to beget spiritual and intellectual pride.

There are two dangers which every teacher must avoid. In virtue of his office he will either be teaching those who are young in years or those who are children in the faith. He must, therefore, all his life struggle to avoid two things. He must have every care that he is teaching the truth, and not his own opinions or even his own prejudices. It is fatally easy for a teacher to distort the truth and to teach, not God's version, but his own. He must have every care that he does not contradict his teaching by his life, continually, as it were, not, "Do as I do," but, "Do as I say." He must never get into the position when his scholars and students cannot hear what he says for listening to what he is. As the Jewish Rabbis themselves said, "Not learning but doing is the foundation, and he who multiplies words multiplies sin" (Sayings of the Fathers 1: 18).

It is James' warning that the teacher has of his own choice entered into a special office; and is, therefore, under the greater condemnation, if he fails in it. The people to whom James was writing coveted the prestige of the teacher; James demanded that they should never forget the responsibility.

Barclay's Commentary

James 3:2

THE UNIVERSAL DANGER

James 3:2

There are many things in which we all slip up; but if a man never slips up in his speech, he is a perfect man, able to keep the whole body also on the rein.

James sets down two ideas which were woven into Jewish thought and literature.

(i) There is no man in this world who does not sin in something. The word James uses means to slip up. "Life," said Lord Fisher, the great sailor, "is strewn with orange peel." Sin is so often not deliberate but the result of a slip up when we are off our guard. This universality of sin runs all through the Bible. "None is righteous, no not one," quotes Paul. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom.3:10; Rom.3:23). "If we say we have no sin," says John, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1Jn.1:8). "There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins," said the preacher (Ecc.7:20). "There is no man," says the Jewish sage, "among them that be born, but he hath dealt wickedly; and among the faithful there is none who hath not done amiss" (2Esdr.8:35). There is no room for pride in human life, for there is not a man upon earth who has not some blot of which to be ashamed. Even the pagan writers have the same conviction of sin.

"It is the nature of man to sin both in private and in public life," said Thucydides (3: 45). "We all sin," said Seneca, "some more grievously, some more lightly" (On Clemency 1: 6).

(ii) There is no sin into which it is easier to fall and none which has graver consequences than the sin of the tongue. Again this idea is woven into Jewish thought. Jesus warned men that they would give account for every word they spoke. "By your words you will be justified; and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt.12:36-37). "A soft answer turns away wrath; but a harsh word stirs up anger.... A gentle tongue is a tree of life; but perverseness in it breaks the spirit" (Prov.15:1-4).

Of all Jewish writers, Jesus ben Sirach, the writer of Ecclesiasticus, was most impressed with the terrifying potentialities of the tongue. "Honour and shame is in talk; and the tongue of man is his fall. Be not called a whisperer, and lie not in wait with the tongue; for a foul shame is upon the thief, and an evil condemnation upon the double tongue.... Instead of a friend become not an enemy; for thereby thou shalt inherit an ill name, shame and reproach; even so shall a sinner that hath a double tongue" (Sir.5:13-6:1). "Blessed is the man who has not slipped with his mouth" (Sir.14:1). "Who is he that hath not offended with his tongue?" (Sir.19:15). "Who shall set a watch before my mouth and a sea, of wisdom upon my lips, that I shall not suddenly fall by them and my tongue destroy me not?" (Sir.22:27).

He has a lengthy passage which is so nobly and passionately put that it is worth quoting in full:

Curst the whisperer and the double-tongued; for such have destroyed many that were at peace. A backbiting tongue hath disquieted many and driven them from nation to nation; strong cities hath it pulled down and overthrown the houses of great men. It hath cut in

Barclay's Commentary

James 3:2

pieces the forces of people and undone strong nations. A backbiting tongue hath cast out virtuous women and deprived them of their labours. Whoso hearkeneth unto it shall never find rest and never dwell quietly, neither shall he have a friend in whom he may repose. The stroke of the whip maketh marks in the flesh: but the stroke of the tongue breaketh the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword; but not so many as have fallen by the tongue. Well is he that is defended from it and has not passed through the venom thereof; who hath not drawn the yoke thereof, nor hath been bound in her bands. For the yoke thereof is a yoke of iron and the bands thereof are bands of brass. The death thereof is an evil death, the grave were better than it.... Look that thou hedge thy possession about with thorns and bind up thy silver and gold and weigh thy words in a balance and make a bridle for thy lips and make a door and bar for thy mouth. Beware thou slide not by it, lest thou fall before him that lieth in wait and thy fall be incurable unto death (Sir.28:13-26).

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James 3:3-5a

LITTLE BUT POWERFUL

James 3:3-5a

If we put bits into horses' mouths to make them obedient to us, we can control the direction of their whole body as well. Look at ships, too. See how large they are and how they are driven by rough winds, and see how their course is altered by a very small rudder, wherever the pressure of the steersman desires. So, too, the tongue is a little member of the body, but it makes arrogant claims for itself.

It might be argued against James' terror of the tongue that it is a very small part of the body to make such a fuss about and to which to attach so much importance. To combat that argument James uses two pictures.

(i) We put a bit into the mouth of a horse, knowing that if we can control its mouth, we can control its whole body. So James says that if we can control the tongue, we can control the whole body; but if the tongue is uncontrolled, the whole life is set on the wrong way.

(ii) A rudder is very small in comparison with the size of a ship; and yet, by exerting pressure on that little rudder, the steersman can alter the course of the ship and direct it to safety. Long before, Aristotle had used this same picture when he was talking about the science of mechanics: "A rudder is small and it is attached to the very end of the ship, but it has such power that by this little rudder, and by the power of one man--and that a power gently exerted--the great bulk of ships can be moved." The tongue also is small, yet it can direct the whole course of a man's life.

Philo called the mind the charioteer and steersman of man's life; it is when the mind controls every word and it itself is controlled by Christ that life is safe.

James is not for a moment saying that silence is better than speech. He is not pleading for a Trappist life where speech is forbidden. He is pleading for the control of the tongue. Aristippus the Greek had a wise saying, "The conqueror of pleasure is not the man who never uses it. He is the man who uses pleasure as a rider guides a horse or a steersman directs a ship, and so directs them wherever he wishes." Abstention from anything is never a complete substitute for control in its use. James is not pleading for a cowardly silence but for a wise use of speech.

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James 3:5b-6

A DESTRUCTIVE FIRE

James 3:5b-6 (Part 1)

See how great a forest how little a fire can set alight. And the tongue is a fire; in the midst of our members the tongue stands for the whole wicked world, for it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the ever-recurring cycle of creation, and is itself set on fire by hell.

The damage the tongue can cause is like that caused by a forest fire. The picture of the forest fire is common in the Bible. It is the prayer of the Psalmist that God may make the wicked like chaff before the wind; and that his tempest may destroy them as fire consumes the forest and the flame sets the mountains ablaze (Ps.83:13-14). Isaiah says "wickedness burns like a fire, it consumes briars and thorns; it kindles the thickets of the forest" (Isa.9:18). Zechariah speaks of "a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves" (Zech.12:6). The picture was one the Jews of Palestine knew well. In the dry season the scanty grass and low-growing thorn bushes and scrub were as dry as tinder. If they were set on fire, the flames spread like a wave which there was no stopping.

The picture of the tongue as a fire is also a common Jewish picture. "A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire," says the writer of the Proverbs (Prov.16:27). "As pitch and tow, so a hasty contention kindleth fire" (Sir.28:11). There are two reasons why the damage which the tongue can do is like a fire.

(i) It is wide-ranging. The tongue can damage at a distance. A chance word dropped at one end of the country or the town can finish up by bringing grief and hurt at the other. The Jewish Rabbis had this picture: "Life and death are in the hand of the tongue. Has the tongue a hand? No, but as the hand kills, so the tongue. The hand kills only at close quarters; the tongue is called an arrow because it kills at a distance. An arrow kills at forty or fifty paces, but of the tongue it is said (Ps.73:9), 'They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth.' It ranges over the whole earth and reaches to heaven." That, indeed, is the peril of the tongue. A man can ward off a blow with the hand, for the striker must be in his presence. But a man can drop a malicious word, or repeat a scandalous and untrue story, about someone whom he does not even know or about someone who stays hundreds of miles away, and cause infinite harm.

(ii) It is uncontrollable. In the tinder-dry conditions of Palestine a forest fire was almost immediately out of control; and no man can control the damage of the tongue. "Three things come not back--the spent arrow, the spoken word and the lost opportunity." There is nothing so impossible to kill as a rumour; there is nothing so impossible to obliterate as an idle and malignant story. Let a man, before he speaks, remember that once a word is spoken it is gone from his control; and let him think before he speaks because, although he cannot get it back, he will most certainly answer for it.

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James 3:5b-6

THE CORRUPTION WITHIN

James 3:5b-6 (Part 2)

We must spend a little longer on this passage, because in it there are two specially difficult phrases.

(i) The tongue, says the Revised Standard Version is an unrighteous world. That ought to be the unrighteous world. In our bodies, that is to say, the tongue stands for the whole wicked world. In Greek the phrase is *ho* (GSN3588) *kosmos* (GSN2899) *tes* (GSN3588) *adikias* (GSN0093), and we shall best get at its meaning by remembering that *kosmos* (GSN2889) can have two meanings.

(a) It can mean adornment, although this is less usual. The phrase, therefore, could mean that the tongue is the adornment of evil. That would mean that it is the organ which can make evil attractive. By the tongue men can make the worse appear the better reason; by the tongue men can excuse and Justify their wicked ways; by the tongue men can persuade others into sin. There is no doubt that this gives excellent sense; but it is doubtful if the phrase really can mean that.

(b) *Kosmos* (GSN2889) can mean world. In almost every part of the New Testament *kosmos* (GSN2889) means the world with more than a suggestion of the evil world. The world cannot receive the Spirit (Jn.14:17). Jesus manifests himself to the disciples but not to the world (Jn.14:22). The world hates him and therefore hates his disciples (Jn.15:18-19). Jesus' kingdom is not of this world (Jn.18:36). Paul condemns the wisdom of this world (1Cor.1:20). The Christian must not be conformed to this world (Rom.12:2). When *kosmos* (GSN2889) is used in this sense it means the world without God, the world in its ignorance of, and often its hostility to, God. Therefore, if we call the tongue the evil *kosmos* (GSN2889), it means that it is that part of the body which is without God. An uncontrolled tongue is like a world hostile to God. It is the part of us which disobeys him.

(ii) The second difficult phrase is what the Revised Standard Version translates the cycle of nature (*trochos* (GSN5164) *geneseos*, GSN1083). It literally means the wheel of being.

The ancients used the picture of the wheel to describe life in four different ways.

(i) The wheel is a circle, a rounded and complete whole, and, therefore, the wheel of life can mean the totality of life.

(ii) Any particular point in the wheel is always moving up or down. Therefore, the wheel of life can stand for the ups and downs of life. In this sense the phrase very nearly means the wheel of fortune, always changing and always variable.

(iii) The wheel is circular; it is always turning back upon itself in exactly the same circle; therefore, the wheel came to stand for the cyclical repetition of life, the weary round of an existence which is ever repeating itself without advancing.

Barclay's Commentary

James 3:5b-6

(iv) The phrase had one particular technical use. The Orphic religion believed that the human soul was continually undergoing a process of birth and death and rebirth; and the aim of life was to escape from this treadmill into infinite being. So the Orphic devotee who had achieved could say, "I have flown out of the sorrowful, weary wheel." In this sense the wheel of life can stand for the weary treadmill of constant reincarnation.

It is unlikely that James knew anything about Orphic reincarnation. It is not at all likely that any Christian would think in terms of a cyclical life which was not going anywhere. It is not likely that a Christian would be afraid of the chances and changes of life. Therefore, the phrase most probably means the whole of life and living. What James is saying is that the tongue can kindle a destructive fire which can destroy all life; and the tongue itself is kindled with the very fire of hell. Here indeed is its terror.

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James 3:7-8

BEYOND ALL TAMING

James 3:7-8

Every kind of beast and bird, and reptile and fish, is and has been tamed for the service of mankind; but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

The idea of the taming of the animal creation in the service of mankind is one which often occurs in Jewish literature. We get it in the creation story. God said of man, "Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gen.1:28). It is, in fact, to that verse that James is very likely looking back. The same promise is repeated to Noah: "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered (Gen.9:2). The writer of Ecclesiasticus repeats the same idea: "God put the fear of man upon all flesh, and gave him dominion over beasts and fowls" (Sir.17:4).

The Psalmist thought on the same lines: "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet; all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field; the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea" (Ps.8:6-8). The Roman world knew of tame fish in the fish-ponds which were in the open central hall or atrium of a Roman house. The serpent was the emblem of Aesculapius, and in his temples tame serpents glided about and were supposed to be incarnations of the god. People who were ill slept in the temples of Aesculapius at night, and if one of these tame serpents glided over them, that was supposed to be the healing touch of the god.

Man's ingenuity has tamed every wild creature in the sense of controlling and making useful; that, says James, is what no man by his own unaided efforts has ever been able to do with the tongue.

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James 3:9-12

BLESSING AND CURSING

James 3:9-12

With it we bless the Lord and Father and with it we curse the men who have been made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth there emerge blessing and cursing. These things should not be so, my brothers. Surely the one stream from the same cleft in the rock does not gush forth fresh and salt water? Surely, brothers, a fig-tree cannot produce olives, nor a vine figs, nor can salt water produce fresh water?

We know only too well from experience that there is a cleavage in human nature. In man there is something of the ape and something of the angel, something of the hero and something of the villain, something of the saint and much of the sinner. It is James' conviction that nowhere is this contradiction more evident than in the tongue.

With it, he says, we bless God. This was specially relevant to a Jew. Whenever the name of God was mentioned, a Jew must respond: "Blessed be he!" Three times a day the devout Jew had to repeat the Shemoneh Esreh, the famous eighteen prayers called Eulogies, every one of which begins, "Blessed be thou, O God." God was indeed eulogetos (GSN2128), The Blessed One, the One who was continually blessed. And yet the very mouths and tongues which had frequently and piously blessed God, were the very same mouths and tongues which cursed fellowmen. To James there was something unnatural about this; it was as unnatural as for a stream to gush out both fresh and salt water or a bush to bear opposite kinds of fruit. Unnatural and wrong such things might be, but they were tragically common.

Peter could say, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you" (Matt.26:35), and that very same tongue of his denied Jesus with oaths and curses (Matt.26:69-75). The John who said, "Little children, love one another," was the same who had once wished to call down fire from heaven in order to blast a Samaritan village out of existence (Lk.9:51-56). Even the tongues of the apostles could say very different things.

John Bunyan tells us of Talkative: "He was a saint abroad and a devil at home." Many a man speaks with perfect courtesy to strangers and even preaches love and gentleness, and yet snaps with impatient irritability at his own family. It has not been unknown for a man to speak with piety on Sunday and to curse a squad of workmen on Monday. It has not been unknown for a man to utter the most pious sentiments one day and to repeat the most questionable stories the next. It has not been unknown for a woman to speak with sweet graciousness at a religious meeting and then to go outside to murder someone's reputation with a malicious tongue.

These things, said James, should not be. Some drugs are at once poisons and cures; they are benefits to a man when wisely controlled by his doctor but harmful when used unwisely. The tongue can bless or curse; it can wound or soothe; it can speak the fairest or the foulest things. It is one of life's hardest and plainest duties to see that the tongue does not contradict itself but speaks only such words as we would wish God to hear.

Barclay's Commentary

James 3:13-14

THE MAN WHO OUGHT NEVER TO BE A TEACHER

James 3:13-14

Who among you is a man of wisdom and of understanding? Let him show by the loveliness of his behaviour that all he does is done with gentleness. If in your hearts you have a zeal that is bitter, and selfish ambition, do not be arrogantly boastful about your attainments, for you are false to the truth.

James goes back, as it were, to the beginning of the chapter. His argument runs like this: "Is there any of you who wishes to be a real sage and a real teacher? Then let him live a life of such beautiful graciousness that he will prove to all that gentleness is enthroned as the controlling power within his heart. For, if he has a fanatical bitterness and is obviously controlled by selfish and personal ambition, then, whatever claims he makes in his arrogance, all he does is to be false to the truth which he professes to teach."

James uses two interesting words. His word for zeal is *zelos* (GSN2205). *Zelos* (GSN2205) need not be a bad word. It could mean the noble emulation which a man felt when confronted with some picture of greatness and goodness. But there is a very narrow dividing line between noble emulation and ignoble envy. The word he uses for selfish ambition is *eritheia* (GSN2052) which was also a word with no necessarily bad meaning. It originally meant spinning for hire and was used of serving women. Then it came to mean any work done for pay. Then it came to mean the kind of work done solely for what could be got out of it. Then it entered politics and came to mean that selfish ambition which was out for self and for nothing else and was ready to use any means to gain its ends.

A scholar and a teacher is always under a double temptation.

(i) He is under the temptation to arrogance. Arrogance was the besetting sin of the Rabbis. The greatest of the Jewish teachers were well aware of that. In *The Sayings of the Fathers* we read, "He that is arrogant in decision is foolish, wicked, puffed up in spirit." It was the advice of one of the wise men: "It rests with thy colleagues to choose whether they will adopt thy opinion: it is not for thee to force it upon them." Few are in such constant spiritual peril as teachers and preachers. They are used to being listened to and to having their words accepted. All unconsciously they tend, as Shakespeare had it, to say,

"I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark!"

It is very difficult to be a teacher or a preacher and to remain humble; but it is absolutely necessary.

(ii) He is under the temptation to bitterness. We know how easily "learned discussion can produce passion." The odium theologicum is notorious. Sir Thomas Browne has a passage on the savagery of scholars to each other: "Scholars are men of peace, they bear no arms, but their tongues are

Barclay's Commentary

James 3:13-14

sharper than Actius' razor; their pens carry farther, and give a louder report than thunder: I had rather stand the shock of a basilisco, than the fury of a merciless pen." Philip Lilley reminds us that Dr. H. F. Stewart said that the arguments of Pascal with the Jesuits reminded him of Alan Breck's fight with the crew of the Covenant in Stevenson's Kidnapped: "The sword in his hand flashed like quicksilver into the middle of our flying enemies, and at every flash came the scream of a man hurt." One of the most difficult things in the world is to argue without passion and to meet arguments without wounding.

To be utterly convinced of one's own beliefs without at the same time being bitter to those of others is no easy thing; and yet it is a first necessity for the Christian teacher and scholar.

We may find in this passage four characteristics of the wrong kind of teaching.

(i) It is fanatical. The truth it holds is held with unbalanced violence rather than with reasoned conviction.

(ii) It is bitter. It regards its opponents as enemies to be annihilated rather than as friends to be persuaded.

(iii) It is selfishly ambitious. It is, in the end, more eager to display itself than to display the truth; and it is interested more in the victory of its own opinions than in the victory of the truth.

(iv) It is arrogant. Its attitude is pride in its knowledge rather than humility in its ignorance. The real scholar will be far more aware of what he does not know than of what he knows.

Barclay's Commentary

James 3:15-16

THE WRONG KIND OF WISDOM

James 3:15-16

Such wisdom is not the wisdom which comes down from above, but is earthly, characteristic of the natural man, inspired by the devil. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and every evil thing.

This bitter and arrogant wisdom, so-called, is very different from real wisdom. James first of all describes it in itself, and then in its effects. In itself it is three things.

(i) It is earthly. Its standards and sources are earthly. It measures success in worldly terms; and its aims are worldly aims.

(ii) It is characteristic of the natural man. The word James uses is difficult to translate. It is *psuchikos* (GSN5591), which comes from *psuche* (GSN5590). The ancients divided man into three parts--body, soul and spirit. The body (*soma*, GSN4983) is our physical flesh and blood; the soul (*psuche*, GSN5590) is the physical life which we share with the beasts; the spirit (*pneuma*, GSN4151) is that which man alone possesses, which differentiates him from the beasts, which makes him a rational creature and kin to God. This is a little confusing for us, because we are in the habit of using soul in the same sense as the ancient people used spirit. James is saying that this wrong kind of wisdom is no more than an animal kind of thing; it is the kind of wisdom which makes an animal snap and snarl with no other thought than that of prey or personal survival.

(iii) It is devilish. Its source is not God, but the devil. It produces the kind of situation which the devil delights in, not God.

James then describes this arrogant and bitter wisdom in its effects. The most notable thing about it is that it issues in disorder. That is to say, instead of bringing people together, it drives them apart. Instead of producing peace, it produces strife. There is a kind of person who is undoubtedly clever, with acute brain and skilful tongue; but his effect, nevertheless, in any committee, in any church, in any group, is to cause trouble and to disturb personal relationships. It is a sobering thing to remember that the wisdom he possesses is devilish rather than divine.

Barclay's Commentary

James 3:17-18

THE TRUE WISDOM (1)

James 3:17-18 (Part 1)

The wisdom which comes from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, willing to yield, full of mercy and of good fruits, undivided in mind, without hypocrisy. For the seed which one day produces the reward which righteousness brings can only be sown when personal relationships are right and by those whose conduct produces such relationships.

The Jewish sages were always agreed that the true wisdom came from above. It was not the attainment of man but the gift of God. Wisdom describes this wisdom as "the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty" (Wis.7:25). The same book prays, "Give me the wisdom that sitteth by thy throne" (Wis.9:4); and again, "O send her from Thy holy heavens, and from the throne of thy glory" (Wis.9:8). Ben Sirach began his book with the sentence, "All wisdom cometh from the Lord, and is with him for ever" (Sir.1:1); and he makes Wisdom say, "I came out of the mouth of the Most High" (Sir.24:3). With one voice the Jewish sages agreed that wisdom came to men from God.

James uses eight words to describe this wisdom, and every one has a great picture in it.

(i) The true wisdom is pure. The Greek is *hagnos* (GSN0053) and its root meaning is pure enough to approach the gods. At first it had only a ceremonial meaning and meant nothing more than that a man had gone through the right ritual cleansings. So, for instance, Euripides can make one of his characters say, "My hands are pure, but my heart is not." At this stage *hagnos* (GSN0053) describes ritual, but not necessarily moral, purity. But as time went on the word came to describe the moral purity which alone can approach the gods. On the Temple of Aesculapius at Epidaurus there was the inscription at the entrance: "He who would enter the divine temple must be pure (*hagnos*, GSN0053); and purity is to have a mind which thinks holy thoughts." The true wisdom is so cleansed of all ulterior motives and of self that it has become pure enough to see God. Worldly wisdom might well wish to escape God's sight; the true wisdom is able to bear his very scrutiny.

(ii) The true wisdom is *eirenikos* (GSN1516). We have translated this peaceable but it has a very special meaning. *Eirene* (GSN1515) means peace, and when it is used of men its basic meaning is right relationships between man and man, and between man and God. The true wisdom produces right relationships. There is a kind of clever and arrogant wisdom which separates man from man, and which makes a man look with superior contempt on his fellows. There is a kind of cruel wisdom which takes a delight in hurting others with clever, but cutting, words. There is a kind of depraved wisdom which seduces men away from their loyalty to God. But the true wisdom at all times brings men closer to one another and to God.

(iii) The true wisdom is *epieikes* (GSN1933). Of all Greek words in the New Testament this is the most untranslatable. Aristotle defined it as that "which is just beyond the written law" and as "justice and better than justice" and as that "which steps in to correct things when the law itself becomes unjust." The man who is *epieikes* (GSN1933) is the man who knows when it is actually wrong to apply the strict letter of the law. He knows how to forgive when strict justice gives him a

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James 3:17-18

Perfect right to condemn. He knows how to make allowances, when not to stand upon his rights, how to temper justice with mercy, always remembers that there are greater things in the world than rules and regulations. It is impossible to find an English word to translate this quality. Matthew Arnold called it "sweet reasonableness" and it is the ability to extend to others the kindly consideration we would wish to receive ourselves.

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James 3:17-18

THE TRUE WISDOM (2)

James 3:17-18 (Part 2)

(iv) The true wisdom is *eupieithes* (GSN2138). Here we must make a choice between two meanings. (a) *Eupieithes* (GSN2138) can mean ever ready to obey. The first of William Law's rules for life was, "To fix it deep in my mind that I have but one business upon my hands, to seek for eternal happiness by doing the will of God." If we take the word in this sense, it means that the truly wise man is for ever ready to obey whenever God's voice comes to him. (b) *Eupieithes* (GSN2138) can mean easy to persuade, not in the sense of being pliable and weak, but in the sense of not being stubborn and of being willing to listen to reason and to appeal. Coming as it does after *epieikes* (GSN1933), it probably bears this second meaning here. The true wisdom is not rigid but is willing to listen and skilled in knowing when wisely to yield.

(v) We take the next two terms together. The true wisdom is full of mercy (*eleos*, GSN1656) and good fruits. *Eleos* (GSN1656) is a word which acquired a new meaning in Christian thought. The Greeks defined it as pity for the man who is suffering unjustly; but Christianity means far more than that by *eleos* (GSN1656). (a) In Christian thought *eleos* (GSN1656) means mercy for the man who is in trouble, even if the trouble is his own fault. Christian pity is the reflection of God's pity; and that went out to men, not only when they were suffering unjustly, but when they were suffering through their own fault. We are so apt to say of someone in trouble, "It is his own fault; he brought it on himself," and, therefore, to feel no responsibility for him. Christian mercy is mercy for any man who is in trouble, even if he has brought that trouble on himself. (b) In Christian thought *eleos* (GSN1656) means mercy which issues in good fruits, that is, which issues in practical help. Christian pity is not merely an emotion; it is action. We can never say that we have truly pitied anyone until we have helped him.

(vi) The true wisdom is *adiakritos* (GSN0087), undivided. This means that it is not wavering and vacillating; it knows its own mind, chooses its course and abides by it. There are those who think that it is clever never to make one's mind up about anything. They speak about having an open mind and about suspending judgment. But the Christian wisdom is based on the Christian certainties which come to us from God through Jesus Christ.

(vii) The true wisdom is *anupokritos* (GSN0505), without hypocrisy. That is to say, it is not a pose and does not deal in deception. It is honest; it never pretends to be what it is not; and it never acts a part to gain its own ends.

Finally, James says something which every Christian Church and every Christian group should have written on its heart. The Revised Standard Version correctly translates the Greek literally: "The harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." This is a highly compressed sentence. Let us remember that peace, *eirene* (GSN1515), means right relationships between man and man. So, then, what James is saying is this, "We are all trying to reap the harvest which a good life brings. But the seeds which bring the rich harvest can never flourish in any atmosphere other than one of right relationships between man and man. And the only people who

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James 3:17-18

can sow these seeds and reap the reward are those whose life work it has been to produce such right relationships."

That is to say, nothing good can ever grow in an atmosphere where men are at variance with one another. A group where there is bitterness and strife is a barren soil in which the seeds of righteousness can never grow and out of which no reward can ever come, The man who disturbs personal relationships and is responsible for strife and bitterness has cut himself off from the reward which God gives to those who live his life.

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James 4:1-3

MAN'S PLEASURE OR GOD'S WILL?

James 4:1-3 (Part 1)

Whence come feuds and whence come fights among you? Is this not their source--do they not arise because of these desires for pleasures which carry on their constant warring campaign within your members? You desire but you do not possess; you murder; you covet but you cannot obtain. You fight and war but you do not possess, because you do not ask. You ask but you do not receive, because you ask wrongly, for your only desire is to spend what you receive on your own pleasures.

James is setting before his people a basic question--whether their aim in life is to submit to the will of God or to gratify their own desires for the pleasures of this world? He warns that, if pleasure is the policy of life, nothing but strife and hatred and division can possibly follow. He says that the result of the over-mastering search for pleasure is polemoi (GSN4171) "wars" and machai (GSN3163) "battles." He means that the feverish search for pleasure issues in long-drawn-out resentments which are like wars, and sudden explosions of enmity which are like battles. The ancient moralists would have thoroughly agreed with him.

When we look at human society we so often see a seething mass of hatred and strife. Philo writes, "Consider the continual war which prevails among men even in times of peace, and which exists not only between nations and countries and cities, but also between private houses, or, I might rather say, is present with every individual man; observe the unspeakable raging storm in men's souls that is excited by the violent rush of the affairs of life; and you may well wonder whether anyone can enjoy tranquility in such a storm, and maintain calm amidst the surge of this billowing sea."

The root cause of this unceasing and bitter conflict is nothing other than desire. Philo points out that the Ten Commandments culminate in the forbidding of covetousness or desire, for desire is the worst of all the passions of the soul. "Is it not because of this passion that relations are broken, and this natural goodwill changed into desperate enmity? that great and populous countries are desolated by domestic dissensions? and land and sea filled with ever new disasters by naval battles and land campaigns? For the wars famous in tragedy...have all flowed from one source--desire either for money or glory or pleasure. Over these things the human race goes mad." Lucian writes, "All the evils which come upon man--revolutions and wars, stratagems and slaughters--spring from desire.

All these things have as their fountain-head the desire for more." Plato writes, "The sole cause of wars and revolutions and battles is nothing other than the body and its desires." Cicero writes, "It is insatiable desires which overturn not only individual men, but whole families, and which even bring down the state. From desires there spring hatred, schisms, discords, seditions and wars." Desire is at the root of all the evils which ruin life and divide men.

The New Testament is clear that this overmastering desire for the pleasures of this world is always a threatening danger to the spiritual life. It is the cares and riches and pleasures of this life which combine to choke the good seed (Lk.8:14). A man can become a slave to passions and pleasures and when he does malice and envy and hatred enter into life (Tit.3:3).

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James 4:1-3

The ultimate choice in life lies between pleasing oneself and pleasing God; and a world in which men's first aim is to please themselves is a battleground of savagery and division.

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James 4:1-3

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PLEASURE-DOMINATED LIFE

James 4:1-3 (Part 2)

This pleasure-dominated life has certain inevitable consequences.

(i) It sets men at each other's throats. Desires, as James sees it, are inherently warring powers. He does not mean that they war within a man--although that is also true--but that they set men warring against each other. The basic desires are for the same things--for money, for power, for prestige, for worldly possessions, for the gratification of bodily lusts. When all men are striving to possess the same things, life inevitably becomes a competitive arena. They trample each other down in the rush to grasp them. They will do anything to eliminate a rival. Obedience to the will of God draws men together, for it is that will that they should love and serve one another; obedience to the craving for pleasure drives men apart, for it drives them to internecine rivalry for the same things.

(ii) The craving for pleasure drives men to shameful deeds. It drives them to envy and to enmity; and even to murder. Before a man can arrive at a deed there must be a certain driving emotion in his heart. He may restrain himself from the things that the desire for pleasure incites him to do; but so long as that desire is in his heart he is not safe. It may at any time explode into ruinous action.

The steps of the process are simple and terrible. A man allows himself to desire something. That thing begins to dominate his thoughts; he finds himself involuntarily thinking about it in his waking hours and dreaming of it when he sleeps. It begins to be what is aptly called a ruling passion. He begins to form imaginary schemes to obtain it; and these schemes may well involve ways of eliminating those who stand in his way. For long enough all this may go on in his mind. Then one day the imaginings may blaze into action; and he may find himself taking the terrible steps necessary to obtain his desire. Every crime in this world has come from desire which was first only a feeling in the heart but which, being nourished long enough, came in the end to action.

(iii) The craving for pleasure in the end shuts the door of prayer. If a man's prayers are simply for the things which will gratify his desires, they are essentially selfish and, therefore, it is not possible for God to answer them. The true end of prayer is to say to God, "Thy will be done." The prayer of the man who is pleasure-dominated is: "My desires be satisfied." It is one of the grim facts of life that a selfish man can hardly ever pray aright; no one can ever pray aright until he removes self from the centre of his life and puts God there.

In this life we have to choose whether to make our main object our own desires or the will of God. And, if we choose our own desires, we have thereby separated ourselves from our fellow-men and from God.

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James 4:4-7

INFIDELITY TO GOD

James 4:4-7 (Part 1)

Renegades to your vows, do you not know that love for this world is enmity to God? Whoever makes it his aim to be the friend of this world thereby becomes the enemy of God. Do you think that the saying of Scripture is only an idle saying: "God jealously yearns for the spirit which he has made to dwell within us"? But God gives the more grace. That is why Scripture says, "God sets himself against the haughty, but gives grace to the humble." So, then, submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you; draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

The King James Version makes this passage even more difficult than it is. In it the warning is addressed to adulterers and adulteresses. In the correct text the word occurs only in the feminine. Further, the word is not intended to be taken literally; the reference is not to physical but to spiritual adultery. The whole conception is based on the common Old Testament idea of Jahweh as the husband of Israel and Israel as the bride of God. "Your Maker is your husband; the Lord of hosts is his name" (Isa.54:5). "Surely as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the Lord" (Jer.3:20). This idea of Jahweh as the husband and the nation of Israel as the wife, explains the way in which the Old Testament constantly expresses spiritual infidelity in terms of physical adultery. To make a covenant with the gods of a strange land and to sacrifice to them and to intermarry with their people is "to play the harlot after their gods" (Exo.34:15-16).

It is God's forewarning to Moses that the day will come when the people "will rise and play the harlot after the strange gods of the land, where they go to be among them," and that they will forsake him (Deut.31:16). It is Hosea's complaint that the people have played the harlot and forsaken God (Hos.9:1). It is in this spiritual sense that the New Testament speaks of "an adulterous generation" (Matt.16:4; Mk.8:38). And the picture came into Christian thought in the conception of the Church as the Bride of Christ (2Cor.11:1-2; Eph.5:24-28; Rev.19:7; Rev.21:9).

This form of expression may offend some delicate modern ears; but the picture of Israel as the bride of God and of God as the husband of Israel has something very precious in it. It means that to disobey God is like breaking the marriage vow. It means that all sin is sin against love. It means that our relationship to God is not like the distant relationship of king and subject or master and slave, but like the intimate relationship of husband and wife. It means that when we sin we break God's heart, as the heart of one partner in a marriage may be broken by the desertion of the other.

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James 4:4-7

FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD AND ENMITY WITH GOD

James 4:4-7 (Part 2)

In this passage James says that love of the world is enmity with God and that he who is the friend of the world thereby becomes the enemy of God. It is important to understand what he means.

(i) This is not spoken out of contempt for the world. It is not spoken from the point of view which regards earth as a desert drear and which denigrates everything in the natural world. There is a story of a Puritan who was out for a walk in the country with a friend. The friend noticed a very lovely flower at the roadside and said, "That is a lovely flower." The Puritan replied, "I have learned to call nothing lovely in this lost and sinful world." That is not James' point of view; he would have agreed that this world is the creation of God; and like Jesus he would have rejoiced in its beauty.

(ii) We have already seen that the New Testament often uses the word kosmos (GSN2889) in the sense of the world apart from God. There are two New Testament passages which well illustrate what James means. Paul writes, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God;...those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom.8:7-8). What he means is that those who insist on assessing everything by purely human standards are necessarily at variance with God. The second passage is one of the most poignant epitaphs on the Christian life in all literature: "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me" (2Tim.4:10). The idea is that of worldliness. If material things are the things to which he dedicates his life, clearly he cannot dedicate his life to God. In that sense the man who has dedicated his life to the world is at enmity with God.

(iii) The best commentary on this saying is that of Jesus: "No one can serve two masters" (Matt.6:24). There are two attitudes to the things of this world and the things of time. We may be so dominated by them that the world becomes our master. Or we may so use them as to serve our fellow-men and prepare ourselves for eternity, in which case the world is not our master but our servant. A man may either use the world or be used by it. To use the world as the servant of God and men is to be the friend of God, for that is what God meant the world to be. To use the world as the controller and dictator of life is to be at enmity with God, for that is what God never meant the world to be.

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James 4:4-7

GOD, THE JEALOUS LOVER

James 4:4-7 (Part 3)

Jas.4:5 is exceedingly difficult. To begin with, it is cited as a quotation from Scripture, but there is no part of Scripture of which it is, in fact, anything like a recognizable quotation. We may either assume that James is quoting from some book now lost which he regarded as Scripture; or, that he is summing up in one sentence what is the eternal sense of the Old Testament and not meaning to quote any particular passage.

Further, the translation is difficult: There are two alternative renderings which in the end give much the same sense. "He (that is, God) jealously yearns for the devotion of the spirit which he has made to dwell within us," or, "The Spirit which God has made to dwell within us jealously yearns for the full devotion of our hearts."

In either case the meaning is that God is the jealous lover who will brook no rival. The Old Testament was never afraid to apply the word jealous to God. Moses says of God to the people: "They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods" (Deut.32:16). He hears God say, "They have stirred me to jealousy with what is no God" (Deut.32:21). In insisting on his sole right to worship, God in the Ten Commandments says, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God" (Exo.20:5). "You shall worship no other god, for the Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous God" (Exo.34:14). Zechariah hears God say, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy" (Zech.8:2). Jealous comes from the Greek *zelos* (GSN2205) which has in it the idea of burning heat. The idea is that God loves men with such a passion that he cannot bear any other love within the hearts of men.

It may be that jealous is a word which nowadays we find it difficult to connect with God, for it has acquired a lower significance; but behind it is the amazing truth that God is the lover of the souls of men. There is a sense in which love must be diffused among all men and over all God's children; but there is also a sense in which love gives and demands an exclusive devotion to one person. It is profoundly true that a man can be in love only with one person at one time; if he thinks otherwise, he does not know the meaning of love.

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James 4:4-7

THE GLORY OF HUMILITY AND THE TRAGEDY OF PRIDE

James 4:4-7 (Part 4)

James goes on to meet an almost inevitable reaction to this picture of God as the jealous lover. If God is like that, how can any man give to him the devotion he demands? James' answer is that, if God makes a great demand, he gives great grace to fulfil it; and the greater the demand, the greater the grace God gives.

But grace has a constant characteristic--a man cannot receive it until he has realized his need of it, and has come to God humbly pleading for help. Therefore, it must always remain true that God sets himself against the proud and gives lavishly of his grace to the humble. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." This is a quotation from Prov.3:34; and it is made again in 1Pet.5:5.

What is this destructive pride? The word for proud is *huperephanos* (GSN5244) which literally means one who shows himself above other people. Even the Greeks hated pride. Theophrastus described it as "a certain contempt for all other people." Theophylact, the Christian writer, called it, "the citadel and summit of all evils." Its real terror is that it is a thing of the heart. It means haughtiness; but the man who suffers from it might well appear to be walking in downcast humility, while all the time there is in his heart a vast contempt for all his fellow-men. It shuts itself off from God for three reasons.

(i) It does not know its own need. It so admires itself that it recognizes no need to be supplied. (ii) It cherishes its own independence. It will be beholden to no man and not even to God. (iii) It does not recognize its own sin. It is occupied with thinking of its own goodness and never realizes that it has any sin from which it needs to be saved. A pride like that cannot receive help, because it does not know that it needs help, and, therefore, it cannot ask.

The humility for which James pleads is no cringing thing. It has two great characteristics.

(i) It knows that if a man takes a resolute stand against the devil, he will prove him a coward. "The Devil," as Hermas puts it, "can wrestle against the Christian, but he cannot throw him." This is a truth of which the Christians were fond, for Peter says the same thing (1Pet.5:8-9). The great example and inspiration is Jesus in his own temptations. In them Jesus showed that the devil is not invincible; when he is confronted with the word of God, he can be put to flight. The Christian has the humility which knows that he must fight his battles with the tempter, not in his own power, but in the power of God.

(ii) It knows that it has the greatest privilege of all, access to God. This is a tremendous thing, for the right of approach to God under the old order of things belonged only to the priests (Exo.19:22). The office of the priest was to come near to God for sin-stained people (Eze.44:13). But through the work of Jesus Christ any man can come boldly before the throne of God, certain that he will find mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb.4:16). There was a time when only the High Priest might enter the Holy of Holies, but we have a new and a living way, a better hope by which we draw near to God (Heb.7:19).

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James 4:4-7

The Christian must have humility, but it is a humility which gives him dauntless courage and knows that the way to God is open to the most fearful saint.

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James 4:8-10

GODLY PURITY

James 4:8-10 (Part 1)

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to sorrow, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourself before God and then he will exalt you.

In James' thought the ethical demand of Christianity is never far away. He has talked about the grace which God gives to the humble and which enables a man to meet his great demands. But James is sure that there is something needed beyond asking and passive receiving. He is sure that moral effort is a prime necessity.

His appeal is addressed to sinners. The word used for sinner is hamartolos (GSN0268), which means the hardened sinner, the man whose sin is obvious and notorious. Suidas defines hamartoloi (GSN0268) as "those who choose to live in company with disobedience to the law, and who love a corrupt life." From such people James demands a moral reform which will embrace both their outward conduct and their inner desires. He demands both clean hands and a pure heart (Ps.24:4).

The phrase cleanse your hands originally denoted nothing more than ceremonial cleansing, the ritual washing with water which made a man ceremonially fit to approach the worship of God. The priests must wash and bathe themselves before they entered on their service (Exo.30:19-21; Lev.16:4). The orthodox Jew must ceremonially wash his hands before he ate (Mk.7:3). But men came to see that God required much more than an outward washing; and so the phrase came to stand for moral purity. "I wash my hands in innocence," says the Psalmist (Ps.26:6). It is Isaiah's demand that men should "wash yourselves; make yourselves clean," and that is equated with ceasing to do evil (Isa.1:16). In the letter to Timothy men are urged to lift holy hands to God in prayer (1Tim.2:8). The history of the phrase shows a deepening consciousness of what God demanded. Men began by thinking in terms of an outward washing, a ritual thing; and ended by seeing that the demand of God was moral, not ritual.

Biblical thought demands a fourfold cleansing. It demands a cleansing of the lips (Isa.6:5-6). It demands a cleansing of the hands (Ps.24:4). It demands a cleansing of the heart (Ps.73:13). It demands a cleansing of the mind (Jas.4:8). That is to say, the ethical demand of the Bible is that a man's words and deeds and emotions and thoughts should all be purified. Inwardly and outwardly a man must be clean, for only the pure in heart shall see God (Matt.5:8).

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James 4:8-10

THE GODLY SORROW

James 4:8-10 (Part 2)

In his demand for a godly sorrow James is going back to the fact that Jesus had said, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted" (Matt.5:4; Lk.6:20-26). We must not read into this passage something James does not mean. He is not denying the joy of the Christian life. He is not demanding that men should live a gloom-encompassed life in a shadowed world. He is doing two things. He is pleading for sobriety in place of frivolousness, and is doing so with all the intensity of one whose natural instincts are puritan; and he is describing, not the end, but the beginning of the Christian life. He demands three things.

(i) He demands what he calls affliction. The verb is *talaiporein* (GSN5003) and it can describe--Thucydides so uses it--the experiences of an army whose food is gone and who have no shelter from the stormy weather. What James is here demanding is a voluntary abstinence from lavish luxury and effeminate comfort. He is talking to people who are in love with the world; and he is pleading with them not to make luxury and comfort the standards by which they judge all life. It is discipline which produces the scholar; it is rigorous training which creates the athlete; and it is a wise abstinence which produces the Christian who knows how to use the world and its gifts aright.

(ii) He demands that they should mourn, that their laughter should be turned to sorrow and their joy to gloom. Here, James is describing the first step of the Christian life which is taken when a man is confronted with God and with his own sin. That is a daunting experience. When Wesley preached to the miners of Kingswood, they were moved to such grief that the tears made runnels as they ran down the grime of their faces. But that is by no means the end of the Christian life. The terrible sorrow of the realization of sin moves on to the thrilling joy of sins forgiven. But to get to the second stage a man must go through the first. James is demanding that these self-satisfied, luxury-loving, unworried hearers of his should be confronted with their sins and should be ashamed, grief-stricken and afraid; for only then can they reach out for grace and go on to a joy far greater than their earthbound pleasures.

(iii) He demands that they should weep. It is perhaps not reading too much into this to say that James may well be thinking of tears of sympathy. Up to this time these luxury-loving people have lived in utter selfishness, quite insensitive to what the poet called "the world's rain of tears." James is insisting that the griefs and the needs of others should pierce the armour of their own pleasure and comfort. A man is not a Christian until he becomes aware of the poignant cry of that humanity for which Christ died.

So, then, in words deliberately chosen to waken the sleeping soul, James demands that his hearers should substitute the way of abstinence for the way of luxury; that they should become aware of their own sins and mourn for them; and that they should become conscious of the world's need and weep for it.

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James 4:8-10

THE GODLY HUMILITY

James 4:8-10 (Part 3)

James concludes with the demand for a godly humility. All through the Bible there runs the conviction that it is only the humble who can know the blessings of God. God will save the humble person (Jb.22:29). A man's pride will bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit (Prov.29:23). God dwells on high, but he is also with him that is of a humble and a contrite spirit (Isa.57:15). They that fear the Lord will humble their souls in his sight, and the greater a man is the more he ought to humble himself, if he is to find favour in the sight of God (Sir.2:17; Sir.3:17). Jesus himself repeatedly declared that it was the man who humbled himself who alone would be exalted (Matt.23:12; Lk.14:11).

Only when a man realizes his own ignorance will he ask God's guidance. Only when a man realizes his own poverty in the things that matter will he pray for the riches of God's grace. Only when a man realizes his weakness in necessary things will he come to draw upon God's strength. Only when a man realizes his own sin will he realize his need of a Saviour and of God's forgiveness.

In life there is one sin which can be said to be the basis of all others; and that is forgetting that we are creatures and that God is creator. When a man realizes his essential creatureliness, he realizes his essential helplessness and goes to the source from which that helplessness can alone be supplied.

Such a dependence begets the only real independence; for then a man faces life not in his own strength but in God's and is given victory. So long as a man regards himself as independent of God he is on the way to ultimate collapse and to defeat.

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James 4:11-12

THE SIN OF JUDGING OTHERS

James 4:11-12

Stop talking harshly about each other. He who speaks harshly of his brother, or who judges his brother, speaks harshly of the law and judges the law; and, if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. One is law-giver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge your neighbour?

The word James uses for to speak harshly of, or, to slander is *katalalein* (GSN2635). Usually this verb means to slander someone when he is not there to defend himself. This sin slander (the noun is *katalalia*, GSN2636) is condemned all through the Bible. It is the Psalmist's accusation against the wicked man: "You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son" (Ps.50:20). The Psalmist hears God saying, "Him who slanders his neighbour secretly I will destroy" (Ps.101:5). Paul lists it among the sins which are characteristic of the unredeemed evil of the pagan world (Rom.1:30); and it is one of the sins which he fears to find in the warring Church of Corinth (2Cor.12:20). It is significant to note that in both these passages slander comes in immediate connection with gossip. *Katalalia* (GSN2636) is the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential tidbits of information which destroy the good name of those who are not there to defend themselves.

The same sin is condemned by Peter (1Pet.2:1).

There is great necessity for this warning. People are slow to realize that there are few sins which the Bible so unsparingly condemns as the sin of irresponsible and malicious gossip. There are few activities in which the average person finds more delight than this; to tell and to listen to the slanderous story--especially about some distinguished person--is for most people a fascinating activity. We do well to remember what God thinks of it. James condemns it for two fundamental reasons.

(i) It is a breach of the royal law that we should love our neighbour as ourselves (Jas.2:8; Lev.19:18). Obviously a man cannot love his neighbour as himself and speak slanderous evil about him. Now, if a man breaks a law knowingly, he sets himself above the law. That is to say, he has made himself a judge of the law. But a man's duty is not to judge the law, but to obey it. So the man who speaks evil of his neighbour has appointed himself a judge of the law and taken to himself the right to break it, and therefore stands condemned.

(ii) It is an infringement of the prerogative of God. To slander our neighbour is, in fact, to pass judgment upon him. And no human being has any right to judge any other human; the right of judgment belongs to God alone.

It is God alone who is able to save and to destroy. This great prerogative runs all through Scripture. "I kill and I make alive," says God (Deut.32:39). "The Lord kills and brings to life," says Hannah in her prayer (1Sam.2:6). "Am I God to kill and to make alive?" is the shocked question of the Israelite king to whom Naaman came with a demand for a cure for his leprosy (2Kgs.5:7). Jesus warns that we should not fear men, who at the worst can only kill the body, but should fear him

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James 4:11-12

who can destroy both body and soul (Matt.10:28). As the Psalmist had it, it is to God alone that the issues of life and of death belong (Ps.68:20). To judge another is to take to ourselves a right to do what God alone has the right to do; and he is a reckless man who deliberately infringes the prerogatives of God.

We might think that to speak evil of our neighbour is not a very serious sin. But Scripture would say that it is one of the worst of all because it is a breach of the royal law and an infringement of the rights of God.

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James 4:13-17

THE MISTAKEN CONFIDENCE

James 4:13-17

Come now, you who say, "Today, or tomorrow, we will go into this city, and we will spend a year there, and we will trade and make a profit." People like you do not know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life like? You are like a mist which appears for a little time and then disappears. And yet you talk like that instead of saying, "If the Lord wills, we shall live, and we shall do this or that." As it is, you make your arrogant claims in your braggart ways. All such arrogant claims are evil. So then, if a man knows what is good and does not do it, that to him is sin.

Here again is a contemporary picture which James' readers would recognize, and in which they might well see their own portrait. The Jews were the great traders of the ancient world; and in many ways that world gave them every opportunity to practise their commercial abilities. This was an age of the founding of cities; and often when cities were founded and their founders were looking for citizens to occupy them, citizenship was offered freely to the Jews, for where the Jews came money and trade followed. So the picture is of a man looking at a map. He points at a certain spot on it, and says, "Here is a new city where there are great trade chances. I'll go there; I'll get in on the ground floor; I'll trade for a year or so; I'll make my fortune and come back rich." James' answer is that no man has a right to make confident plans for the future, for he does not know what even a day may bring forth. Man may propose but God disposes.

The essential uncertainty of the future was deeply impressed on the minds of men of all nations. The Hebrew sage wrote, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Prov.27:1). Jesus told his story of the rich but foolish man who made his fortune and built up his plans for the future, and forgot that his soul might be required of him that very night (Lk.12:16-21). Ben Sirach wrote, "There is that waxeth rich by his wariness and pinching, and this is the portion of his reward: whereas, he saith, 'I have found rest and now will eat continually of my goods'; and yet he knoweth not what time shall come upon him and that death approacheth; and that he must leave these things to others and die" (Sir.11:18-19).

Seneca said: "How foolish it is for a man to make plans for his life, when not even tomorrow is in his control." And again: "No man has such rich friends that he can promise himself tomorrow." The Rabbis had a proverb: "Care not for the morrow, for ye know not what a day may bring forth. Perhaps you may not find tomorrow." Dennis Mackail was the friend of Sir James Barrie. He tells that, as Barrie grew older, he would never make an arrangement for even a social engagement at any distant date. "Short notice now!" he would always say.

James goes on. This uncertainty of life is not a cause either for fear or for inaction. It is a reason for realizing our complete dependence on God. It has always been the mark of a serious-minded man that he makes his plans in such dependence. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills" (1Cor.4:19). "I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits" (1Cor.16:7). Xenophon writes, "May all these things be, if the gods so will. If anyone wonders that we often find the phrase written, 'if the gods will,' I would have him to know that, once he has experienced the risks of life, he will not wonder nearly so much." Plato relates a conversation

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James 4:13-17

between Socrates and Alcibiades. Alcibiades says: "I will do so if you wish, Socrates." Socrates answers, "Alcibiades, that is not the way to talk.

And how ought you to speak? You ought to say, 'If God so wishes.'" Minucius Felix writes, "'God grant it'--it comes instinctively to the ordinary man to speak like that." Constantly among the Arabs there is heard the expressions: "Imsh' Allah--if Allah wills." The curious thing is that there seems to have been no corresponding phrase which the Jews used. In this they had to learn.

The true Christian way is not to be terrorized into fear and paralysed into inaction by the uncertainty of the future; but to commit the future and all our plans into the hands of God, always remembering that these plans may not be within God's purpose.

The man who does not remember that, is guilty of arrogant boasting. The word is alazoneia (GSN0212). Alazoneia was originally the characteristic of the wandering quack. He offered cures which were no cures and boasted of things that he was not able to do. The future is not within the hands of men and no man can arrogantly claim that he has power to decide it.

James ends with a threat. If a man knows that a thing is wrong and still continues to do it, that to him is sin. James is in effect saying, "You have been warned; the truth has been placed before your eyes." To continue now in the self-confident habit of seeking to dispose of one's own life is sin for the man who has been reminded that the future is not in his hands but in God's.

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James 5:1-3

THE WORTHLESSNESS OF RICHES

James 5:1-3 (Part 1)

Come now, you rich, weep and wail at the miseries which are coming upon you. Your wealth is rotten and your garments are food for moths. Your gold and silver are corroded clean through with rust; and their rust is proof to you of how worthless they are. It is a rust which will eat into your very flesh like fire. It is a treasure indeed that you have amassed for yourselves in the last days!

Jas.5:1-6 has two aims. First, to show the ultimate worthlessness of all earthly riches; and second, to show the detestable character of those who possess them. By doing this he hopes to prevent his readers from placing all their hopes and desires on earthly things.

If you knew what you were doing, he says to the rich, you would weep and wail for the terror of the judgment that is coming upon you at the Day of the Lord. The vividness of the picture is increased by the word which James uses for to rust. It is the verb *ololuzein* (GSN3649), which is onomatopoeic and carries its meaning in its very sound. It means even more than to wail, it means to shriek, and in the King James Version is often translated to howl; and it depicts the frantic terror of those on whom the judgment of God has come (Isa.13:6; Isa.14:31; Isa.15:2-3; Isa.16:7; Isa.23:1; Isa.23:14; Isa.65:14; Am.8:3). We might well say that it is the word which describes those undergoing the tortures of the damned.

All through this passage the words are vivid and pictorial and carefully chosen. In the east there were three main sources of wealth and James has a word for the decay of each of them.

There were corn and grain. That is the wealth which grows rotten (*sepein*, GSN4595).

There were garments. In the east garments were wealth. Joseph gave changes of garments to his brothers (Gen.45:22). It was for a beautiful mantle from Shinar that Achan brought disaster on the nation and death on himself and his family (Josh.7:21). It was changes of garments that Samson promised to anyone who would solve his riddle (Judg.14:12). It was garments that Naaman brought as a gift to the prophet of Israel and to obtain which Gehazi sinned his soul (2Kgs.5:5; 2Kgs.5:22). It was Paul's claim that he had coveted no man's money or apparel (Ac.20:33). These garments, which are so splendid, will be food for moths (*setobrotos* (GSN4598, compare Matt.6:19).

The climax of the world's inevitable decay comes at the end. Even their gold and silver will be rusted clean through (*katiasthai*, GSN2728). The point is that gold and silver do not actually rust; so James in the most vivid way is warning men that even the most precious and apparently most indestructible things are doomed to decay.

This rust is proof of the impermanence and ultimate valuelessness of all earthly things. More, it is a dread warning. The desire for these things is like a dread rust eating into men's bodies and souls. Then comes a grim sarcasm. It is a fine treasure indeed that any man who concentrates on these things is heaping up for himself at the last. The only treasure he will possess is a consuming fire which will wipe him out.

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James 5:1-3

It is James' conviction that to concentrate on material things is not only to concentrate on a decaying delusion; it is to concentrate on self-produced destruction.

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James 5:1-3

THE SOCIAL PASSION OF THE BIBLE

James 5:1-3 (Part 2)

Not even the most cursory reader of the Bible can fail to be impressed with the social passion which blazes through its pages. No book condemns dishonest and selfish wealth with such searing passion as it does. The book of the prophet Amos was called by J. E. McFadyen "The Cry for Social Justice." Amos condemns those who store up violence and robbery in their palaces (Am.3:10). He condemns those who tread on the poor and themselves have houses of hewn stone and pleasant vineyards--which in the wrath of God they will never enjoy (Am.5:11). He lets loose his wrath on those who give short weight and short measure, who buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes, and who palm off on the poor the refuse of their wheat. "I will never forget any of their deeds," says God (Am.8:4-7). Isaiah warns those who build up great estates by adding house to house and field to field (Isa.5:8). The sage insisted that he who trusts in riches shall fall (Prov.11:28).

Luke quotes Jesus as saying, "Woe to you that are rich!" (Lk.6:24). It is only with difficulty that those who have riches enter into the Kingdom of God (Lk.18:24). Riches are a temptation and a snare; the rich are liable to foolish and hurtful lusts which end in ruin, for the love of money is the root of all evils (1Tim.6:9-10).

In the inter-testamental literature there is the same note. "Woe to you who acquire silver and gold in unrighteousness.... They shall perish with their possessions, and in shame will their spirits be cast into the furnace of fire" (Enoch 97: 8). In the Wisdom of Solomon there is a savage passage in which the sage makes the selfish rich speak of their own way of life as compared with that of the righteous. "Come on, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present; and let us speedily use created things like as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments: and let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered; let there be no meadow but our luxury shall pass through it. Let none of us go without his part of our voluptuousness; let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place; for this is our portion, and our lot is this.

Let us oppress the poor righteous man, let us not spare the widow, nor reverence the ancient grey hairs of the aged.... Therefore, let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn and is clean contrary to our doings; he upbraideth us with our offending of the law, and objecteth to our infamy, the sins of our way of life" (Wis.2:6-12).

One of the mysteries of social thought is how the Christian religion ever came to be regarded as "the opiate of the people" or to seem an other-worldly affair. There is no book in any literature which speaks so explosively of social injustice as the Bible, nor any book which has proved so powerful a social dynamic. It does not condemn wealth as such but there is no book which more strenuously insists on wealth's responsibility and on the perils which surround a man who is abundantly blessed with this world's goods.

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James 5:4-6

THE WAY OF SELFISHNESS AND ITS END

James 5:4-6

Look you, the pay of the reapers who reaped your estates, the pay kept back from them by you, cries against you, and the cries of those who reaped have come to the ears of the Lord of Hosts. On the earth you have lived in soft luxury and played the wanton; you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter. You condemned, you killed the righteous man, and he does not resist you.

Here is condemnation of selfish riches and warning of where they must end.

(i) The selfish rich have gained their wealth by injustice. The Bible is always sure that the labourer is worthy of his hire (Lk.10:7; 1Tim.5:18). The day labourer in Palestine lived on the very verge of starvation. His wage was small; it was impossible for him to save anything; and if the wage was withheld from him, even for a day, he and his family simply could not eat. That is why the merciful laws of Scripture again and again insist on the prompt payment of his wages to the hired labourer. "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy.... You shall give him his hire on the day he earns it, before the sun goes down (for he is poor, and sets his heart upon it); lest he cry against you to the Lord, and it be sin in you" (Deut.24:14-15). "The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning" (Lev.19:13). "Do not say to your neighbour, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it'--when you have it with you" (Prov.3:27-28).

"Woe to him that builds his house by unrighteousness and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbour serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages" (Jer.22:13). "Those that oppress the hireling in his wages" are under the judgment of God (Mal.3:5). "He that taketh away his neighbour's living, the bread gotten by sweat, slayeth him; and he that defraudeth the labourer of his hire, defraudeth his Maker, and shall receive a bitter reward, for he is brother to him that is a blood-shedder" (Sir.34:22). "Let not the wages of any man which hath wrought for thee tarry with thee, but give it him out of hand" (Tob.4:14).

The law of the Bible is nothing less than the charter of the labouring man. The social concern of the Bible speaks in the words of the Law and of the Prophets and of the Sages alike. Here it is said that the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts! The hosts are the hosts of heaven, the stars and the heavenly powers. It is the teaching of the Bible in its every part that the Lord of the universe is concerned for the rights of the labouring man.

(ii) The selfish rich have used their wealth selfishly. They have lived in soft luxury and have played the wanton. The word translated to live in soft luxury is truphein (GSN5171). It comes from a root which means to break down; and it describes the soft living which in the end saps and destroys a man's moral fibre. The word translated to play the wanton is spatalan (GSN4684). It is a much worse word; it means to live in lewdness and lasciviousness. It is the condemnation of the selfish rich that they have used their possessions to gratify their own love of comfort and to satisfy their own lusts, and that they have forgotten all duty to their fellow-men.

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James 5:4-6

(iii) But anyone who chooses this pathway has also chosen its end. The end of specially fattened cattle is that they will be slaughtered for some feast; and those who have sought this easy luxury and selfish wantonness are like men who have fattened themselves for the day of judgment. The end of their pleasure is grief and the goal of their luxury is death. Selfishness always leads to the destruction of the soul.

(iv) The selfish rich have slain the unresisting righteous man. it is doubtful to whom this refers. It could be a reference to Jesus. "You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you" (Ac.3:14). It is Stephen's charge that the Jews always slew God's messengers even before the coming of the Just One (Ac.7:52). It is Paul's declaration that God chose the Jews to see the Just One although they rejected him (Ac.22:14). Peter says that Christ suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust (1Pet.3:18). The suffering servant of the Lord offered no resistance. He opened not his mouth and like a sheep before his shearers he was dumb (Isa.53:7), a passage which Peter quotes in his picture of Jesus (1Pet.2:23). It may well be that James is saying that in their oppression of the poor and the righteous man, the selfish rich have crucified Christ again. Every wound that selfishness inflicts on Christ's people is another wound inflicted on Christ.

It may be that James is not specially thinking of Jesus when he speaks about the righteous man but of the evil man's instinctive hatred of the good man. We have already quoted the passage in The Wisdom of Solomon which describes the conduct of the rich. That passage goes on: "He (the righteous man) professeth to have the knowledge of God, and he calleth himself the child of the Lord. He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold: for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits: he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness: he pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed, and maketh his boast that God is his Father. Let us see if his words be true: and let us prove what shall happen in the end of him. For if the just man be the son of God, he will help him and deliver him from the hand of his enemies. Let us examine him with despitefulness and torture, that we may know his meekness and prove his patience.

Let us condemn him with a shameful death: for by his own saying he shall be respected" (Wis.2:13-30). These, says the Sage, are the words of men whose wickedness has blinded them.

Alcibiades, the friend of Socrates, for all his great talents often lived a riotous and debauched life. And there were times when he said to Socrates: "Socrates, I hate you; for every time I see you, you show me what I am." The evil man would gladly eliminate the good man, for he reminds him of what he is and of what he ought to be.

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James 5:7-9

WAITING FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD

James 5:7-9 (Part 1)

Brothers, have patience until the coming of the Lord. Look you, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, patiently waiting for it until it receives the early and the late rains. So do you too be patient. Make firm your hearts for the coming of the Lord is near. Brothers, do not complain against each other, that you may not be condemned. Look you, the judge stands at the door.

The early church lived in expectation of the immediate Second Coming of Jesus Christ; and James exhorts his people to wait with patience for the few years which remain. The farmer has to wait for his crops until the early and the late rains have come. The early and the late rains are often spoken of in Scripture, for they were all-important to the farmer of Palestine (Deut.11:14; Jer.5:24; Jl.2:23). The early rain was the rain of late October and early November without which the seed would not germinate. The late rain was the rain of April and May without which the grain would not mature. The farmer needs patience to wait until nature does her work; and the Christian needs patience to wait until Christ comes.

During that waiting they must confirm their faith. They must not blame one another for the troubles of the situation in which they find themselves for, if they do, they will be breaking the commandment which forbids Christians to judge one another (Matt.7:1); and if they break that commandment, they will be condemned. James has no doubt of the nearness of the coming of Christ. The judge is at the door, he says, using a phrase which Jesus himself had used (Mk.13:29; Matt.24:33).

It so happened that the early church was mistaken. Jesus Christ did not return within a generation. But it will be of interest to gather up the New Testament's teaching about the Second Coming so that we may see the essential truth at its heart.

We may first note that the New Testament uses three different words to describe the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

(i) The commonest is *parousia* (GSN3952), a word which has come into English as it stands. It is used in Matt.24:3; Matt.24:27; Matt.24:37,39; 1Th.2:19; 1Th.3:13; 1Th.4:15; 1Th.5:23; 2Th.2:1; 1Cor.15:23; 1Jn.2:28; 2Pet.1:16; 2Pet.3:4. In secular Greek this is the ordinary word for someone's presence or arrival. But it has two other usages, one of which became quite technical. It is used of the invasion of a country by an army and specially it is used of the visit of a king or a governor to a province of his empire. So, then, when this word is used of Jesus, it means that his Second Coming is the final invasion of earth by heaven and the coming of the King to receive the final submission and adoration of his subjects.

(ii) The New Testament also uses the word *epiphaneia* (GSN2015) (Tit.2:13; 2Tim.4:1; 2Th.2:9). In ordinary Greek this word has two special usages. It is used of the appearance of a god to his worshipper; and it is used of the accession of an emperor to the imperial power of Rome. So, then,

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when this word is used of Jesus, it means that his Second Coming is God appearing to his people, both to those who are waiting for him and to those who are disregarding him.

(iii) Finally the New Testament uses the word apokalupsis (GSN0602) (1Pet.1:7,13). Apokalupsis in ordinary Greek means an unveiling or a laying bare; and when it is used of Jesus, it means that his Second Coming is the laying bare of the power and glory of God come upon men.

Here, then, we have a series of great pictures. The Second Coming of Jesus is the arrival of the King; it is God appearing to his people and mounting his eternal throne; it is God directing on the world the full blaze of his heavenly glory.

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James 5:7-9

THE COMING OF THE KING

James 5:7-9 (Part 2)

We may now gather up briefly the teaching of the New Testament about the Second Coming and the various uses it makes of the idea.

(i) The New Testament is clear that no man knows the day or the hour when Christ comes again. So secret, in fact, is that time that Jesus himself does not know it; it is known to God alone (Matt.24:36; Mk.13:32). From this basic fact one thing is clear. Human speculation about the time of the Second Coming is not only useless, it is blasphemous; for surely no man should seek to gain a knowledge which is hidden from Jesus Christ himself and resides only in the mind of God.

(ii) The one thing that the New Testament does say about the Second Coming is that it will be as sudden as the lightning and as unexpected as a thief in the night (Matt.24:27; Matt.24:37,39; 1Th.5:2; 2Pet.3:10). We cannot wait to get ready when it comes; we must be ready for its coming.

So, the New Testament urges certain duties upon men.

(i) They must be for ever on the watch (1Pet.4:7). They are like servants whose master has gone away and who, not knowing when he will return, must have everything ready for his return, whether it be at morning, at midday, or at evening (Matt.24:36-51).

(ii) Long delay must not produce despair or forgetfulness (2Pet.3:4). God does not see time as men do. To him a thousand years are as a watch in the night and even if the years pass on, it does not mean that he has either changed or abandoned his design.

(iii) Men must use the time given them to prepare for the coming of the King. They must be sober (1Pet.4:7). They must get to themselves holiness (1Th.3:13). By the grace of God they must become blameless in body and in spirit (1Th.5:23). They must put off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light now that the day is far spent (Rom.13:11-14). Men must use the time given them to make themselves such that they can greet the coming of the King with joy and without shame.

(iv) When that time comes, they must be found in fellowship. Peter uses the thought of the Second Coming to urge men to love and mutual hospitality (1Pet.4:8-9). Paul commands that all things be done in love--Maran-atha (GSN3134)--the Lord is at hand (1Cor.16:14,22). He says that our forbearance must be known to all men because the Lord is at hand (Php.4:5). The word translated "forbearance" is *epieikes* (GSN1933) which means the spirit that is more ready to offer forgiveness than to demand justice. The writer to the Hebrews demands mutual help, mutual Christian fellowship, mutual encouragement because the day is coming near (Heb.10:24-25). The New Testament is sure that in view of the Coming of Christ we must have our personal relationships right with our fellow-men. The New Testament would urge that no man ought to end a day with an unhealed breach between himself and a fellow-man, lest in the night Christ should come.

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James 5:7-9

(v) John uses the Second Coming as a reason for urging men to abide in Christ (1Jn.2:28). Surely the best preparation for meeting Christ is to live close to him every day.

Much of the imagery attached to the Second Coming is Jewish, part of the traditional apparatus of the last things in the ancient Jewish mind. There are many things which we are not meant to take literally. But the great truth behind all the temporary pictures of the Second Coming is that this world is not purposeless but going somewhere, that there is one divine far-off event to which the whole creation moves.

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James 5:10-11

THE TRIUMPHANT PATIENCE

James 5:10-11

Brothers, take as an example of patience in hardship the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Look you, we count those who endure blessed. You have heard of Job's steadfast endurance and you have seen the conclusion of his troubles which the Lord gave to him, and you have proof that the Lord is very kind and merciful.

It is always a comfort to feel that others have gone through what we have to go through. James reminds his readers that the prophets and the men of God could never have done their work and borne their witness had they not patiently endured. He reminds them that Jesus himself had said that the man who endured to the end was blessed for he would be saved (Matt.24:13).

Then he quotes the example of Job, of whom in the synagogue discourses they had often heard. We generally speak of the patience of Job which is the word the King James Version uses. But patience is far too passive a word. There is a sense in which Job was anything but patient. As we read the tremendous drama of his life we see him passionately resenting what has come upon him, passionately questioning the conventional arguments of his so-called friends, passionately agonizing over the terrible thought that God might have forsaken him. Few men have spoken such passionate words as he did; but the great fact about him is that in spite of all the agonizing questionings which tore at his heart, he never lost his faith in God. "Behold, he will slay me; I have no hope;" (Jb.13:15). "My witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high" (Jb.16:19). "I know that my redeemer lives" (Jb.19:25).

His is no unquestioning submission; he struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of his faith was never extinguished.

The word used of him is that great New Testament word *hupomone* (GSN5281), which describes, not a passive patience, but that gallant spirit which can breast the tides of doubt and sorrow and disaster and come out with faith still stronger on the other side. There may be a faith which never complained or questioned; but still greater is the faith which was tortured by questions and still believed. It was the faith which held grimly on that came out on the other side, for "the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" (Jb.42:12).

There will be moments in life when we think that God has forgotten, but if we cling to the remnants of faith, at the end we, too, shall see that God is very kind and very merciful.

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THE NEEDLESSNESS AND THE FOLLY OF OATHS

James 5:12

Above all things, my brothers, do not swear, neither by heaven nor by earth nor by any other oath. Let your yes be a simple yes and your no a simple no, lest you fall under judgment.

James is repeating the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5:33-37), teaching which was very necessary in the days of the early church. James is not thinking of what we call bad language but of confirming a statement or a promise or an undertaking by an oath. In the ancient world, there were two evil practices.

(i) There was a distinction--especially in the Jewish world--between oaths which were binding and oaths which were not binding. Any oath in which the name of God was directly used was considered to be definitely binding; but any oath in which direct mention of the name of God was not made was held not to be binding. The idea was that, once God's name was definitely used, he became an active partner in the transaction, but he did not become a partner unless his name was so introduced. The result of this was that it became a matter of skill and sharp practice to find an oath which was not binding. This made a mockery of the whole practice of confirming anything by an oath.

(ii) There was in this age an extraordinary amount of oath-taking. This in itself was quite wrong. For one thing, the value of an oath depends to a large extent on the fact of it being very seldom necessary to take one. When oaths became a commonplace, they ceased to be respected as they ought to be. For another thing, the practice of taking frequent oaths was nothing other than a proof of the prevalence of lying and cheating. In an honest society no oath is needed; it is only when men cannot be trusted to tell the truth that they have to be put upon oath.

In this the ancient writers on morals thoroughly agreed with Jesus. Philo says, "Frequent swearing is bound to beget perjury and impiety." The Jewish Rabbis said, "Accustom not thyself to vows, for sooner or later thou wilt swear false oaths." The Essenes forbade all oaths. They held that if a man required an oath to make him tell the truth, he was already branded as untrustworthy. The great Greeks held that the best guarantee of any statement was not an oath but the character of the man who made it; and that the ideal was to make ourselves such that no one would ever think of demanding an oath from us because he would be certain that we would always speak the truth.

The New Testament view is that every word is spoken in the presence of God and ought, therefore, to be true; and it would agree that the Christian must be known to be a man of such honour that it will be quite unnecessary ever to put him on oath. The New Testament would not entirely condemn oaths but it would deplore the human tendency to falsehood which on occasion makes oaths necessary.

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James 5:13-15

A SINGING CHURCH

James 5:13-15 (Part 1)

Is any among you in trouble? Let him pray. Is any in good spirits? Let him sing a hymn. Is any among you sick? Let him call in the elders of the Church; and let them anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and pray over him; and the believing prayer will restore to health the ailing person, and the Lord will enable him to rise from his bed; and even if he has committed sin, he will receive forgiveness.

Here we have set out before us certain dominant characteristics of the early church.

It was a singing church; the early Christians were always ready to burst into song. In Paul's description of the meetings of the Church at Corinth, we find singing an integral part (1Cor.14:15; 1Cor.14:26). When he thinks of the grace of God going out to the Gentiles, it reminds him of the joyous saying of the Psalmist: "I will praise thee among the Gentiles, and sing to thy name" (Rom.15:9; compare Ps.18:49). The Christians they speak to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord (Eph.5:19). The word of Christ dwells in them, and they teach and admonish each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in their hearts to the Lord (Col.3:16). There was a joy in the heart of the Christians which issued from their lips in songs of praise for the mercy and the grace of God.

The fact is that the heathen world has always been sad and weary and frightened. Matthew Arnold wrote a poem describing its bored weariness.

"On that hard Pagan world disgust
And secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell.
In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay;
He drove abroad in furious guise
Along the Appian Way;
He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his hair with flowers--
No easier nor no quicker past
The impracticable hours."

In contrast with that weary mood the accent of the Christian is singing joy. That was what impressed John Bunyan when he heard four poor old women talking, as they sat at a door in the sun: "Me thought they spake, as if joy did make them speak." When Bilney, the martyr, grasped the wonder of redeeming grace, he said, "It was as if dawn suddenly broke on a dark night." Archibald Lang Fleming, the first Bishop of the Arctic, tells of the saying of an Eskimo hunter: "Before you came the road was dark and we were afraid. Now we are not afraid, for the darkness has gone away and all is light as we walk the Jesus way."

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James 5:13-15

Always the church has been a singing Church. When Pliny, governor of Bithynia, wrote to Trajan, the Roman Emperor, in A.D. 111 to tell him of this new sect of Christians, he said that his information was that "they are in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it is light, when they sing in alternate verses a hymn to Christ as God." In the orthodox Jewish synagogue, since the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, there has been no music, for, when they worship, they remember a tragedy; but in the Christian Church, from the beginning until now, there has been the music of praise, for the Christian remembers an Infinite love and enjoys a present glory.

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James 5:13-15

A HEALING CHURCH

James 5:13-15 (Part 2)

Another great characteristic of the early church was that it was a healing Church. Here it inherited its tradition from Judaism. When a Jew was ill, it was to the Rabbi he went rather than to the doctor; and the Rabbi anointed him with oil--which Galen the Greek doctor called "the best of all medicines"--and prayed over him. Few communities can have been so devotedly attentive to their sick as the early church was. Justin Martyr writes that numberless demoniacs were healed by the Christians when all other exorcists had been helpless to cure them and all drugs had been unavailing. Irenaeus, writing far down the second century, tells us that the sick were still healed by having hands laid on them. Tertullian, writing midway through the third century, says that no less a person than the Roman Emperor, Alexander Severus, was healed by anointing at the hands of a Christian called Torpacion and that in his gratitude he kept Torpacion as a guest in his palace until the day of his death.

One of the earliest books concerning Church administration is the Canons of Hippolytus, which goes back to the end of the second century or the beginning of the third. It is there laid down that men who have the gift of healing are to be ordained as presbyters after investigation has been made to ensure that they really do possess the gift and that it comes from God. That same book gives the noble prayer used at the consecration of the local bishops, part of which runs: "Grant unto him, O Lord...the power to break all the chains of the evil power of the demons, to cure all the sick, and speedily to subdue Satan beneath his feet." In the Clementine Letters the duties of the deacons are laid down; and they include the rule: "Let the deacons of the Church move about intelligently and act as eyes for the bishop...."

Let them find out those who are sick in the flesh, and bring such to the notice of the main body who know nothing of them, that they may visit them, and supply their wants." In the First Epistle of Clement the prayer of the Church is: "Heal the sick; raise up the weak; cheer the faint-hearted." A very early Church code lays it down that each congregation must appoint at least one widow to take care of women who are sick. For many centuries the Church consistently used anointing as a means of healing the sick. In fact it is important to note that the sacrament of unction, or anointing, was in the early centuries always designed as a means of cure, and not as a preparation for death as it now is in the Roman Catholic Church. It was not until A.D. 852 that this sacrament did, in fact, become the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, administered to prepare for death.

The Church has always cared for her sick; and in her there has always resided the gift of healing. The social gospel is not an appendix to Christianity; it is the very essence of the Christian faith and life.

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James 5:16-18

A PRAYING CHURCH

James 5:16-18

Confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other, that you may be healed. The prayer of a good man, when it is set to work, is very powerful. Elijah was a man with the same emotions as ourselves, and he prayed earnestly that it should not rain, and for three years and six months no rain fell upon the earth. And he prayed again and the heaven gave rain; and the earth put forth her fruit.

There are in this passage three basic ideas of Jewish religion.

(i) There is the idea that all sickness is due to sin. It was a deeply-rooted Jewish belief that where there were sickness and suffering, there must have been sin. "There is no death without guilt," said the Rabbis, "and no suffering without sin." The Rabbis, therefore, believed that before a man could be healed of his sickness his sins must be forgiven by God. Rabbi Alexandrai said, "No man gets up from his sickness until God has forgiven him all his sins." That is why Jesus began his healing of the man with the palsy by saying, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mk.2:5). The Jew always identified suffering and sin. Nowadays we cannot make this mechanical identification; but this remains true--that no man can know any health of soul or mind or body until he is right with God.

(ii) There is the idea that, to be effective, confession of sin has to be made to men, and especially to the person wronged, as well as to God. In a very real sense it is easier to confess sins to God than to confess them to men; and yet in sin there are two barriers to be removed--the barrier it sets up between us and God, and the barrier it sets up between us and our fellow-men. If both these barriers are to be removed, both kinds of confession must be made. This was, in fact, the custom of the Moravian Church and Wesley took it over for his earliest Methodist classes. They used to meet two or three times a week "to confess their faults to one another and to pray for one another that they might be healed." This is clearly a principle which must be used with wisdom. It is quite true that there may be cases where confession of sin to each other may do infinitely more harm than good; but where a barrier has been erected because of some wrong which has been done, a man must put himself right both with God and his fellow-man.

(iii) Above all, there is the idea that no limits can be set to the power of prayer. The Jews had a saying that he who prays surrounds his house with a wall stronger than iron. They said, "Penitence can do something; but prayer can do everything." To them prayer was nothing less than contacting the power of God; it was the channel through which the strength and grace life. How much more must this be so for a Christian?

Tennyson wrote:

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats

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James 5:16-18

That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

As the Jew saw it, and as indeed it is, to cure the his of life we need to be right with God and right with men, and we need to bring to bear upon men through prayer the mercy and the might of God.

Before we leave this passage there is one interesting technical fact that we must note. It quotes Elijah as an example of the power of prayer. This is an excellent illustration of how Jewish rabbinic exegesis developed the meaning of Scripture. The full story is in 1Kgs.17-18. The three years and six months--a period also quoted in Lk.4:25--is a deduction from 1Kgs.18:1. Further, the Old Testament narrative does not say that either the coming or the cessation of the drought was due to the prayers of Elijah; he was merely the prophet who announced its coming and its going. But the Rabbis always studied Scripture under the microscope. In 1Kgs.17:1 we read: "As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." Now the Jewish attitude of prayer was standing before God; and so in this phrase the Rabbis found what was to them an indication that the drought was the result of the prayers of Elijah. In 1Kgs.18:42 we read that Elijah went up to Carmel, bowed himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees. Once again the Rabbis saw the attitude of agonizing prayer; and so found what was to them an indication that it was the prayer of Elijah which brought the drought to an end.

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James 5:19-20

THE TRUTH WHICH MUST BE DONE

James 5:19-20 (Part 1)

My brothers, if any among you wanders from the truth and if anyone turns him again to the right way, let him know that he who has turned a sinner from his wandering way will save his brother's soul from death and will hide a multitude of his own sins.

In this passage there is set down the great differentiating characteristic of Christian truth. It is something from which a man can wander. It is not only intellectual, philosophical and abstract; it is always moral truth.

This comes out very clearly when we go to the New Testament and look at the expressions which are used in connection with truth. Truth is something which a man must love (2Th.2:10); it is something which a man must obey (Gal.5:7); it is something which a man must display in life (2Cor.4:2); it is something which must be spoken in love (Eph.4:15); it is something which must be witnessed to (Jn.18:37); it is something which must be manifested in a life of love (1Jn.3:19); it is something which liberates (Jn.8:32); and it is something which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus Christ (Jn.16:13-14).

Clearest of all is the phrase in Jn.3:21, he who does it, that is true. That is to say, Christian truth is something which must be done. It is not only the object of the search of the mind; it is always moral truth issuing in action. It is not only something to be studied but something to be done; not only something to which a man must submit only his mind but something to which he must submit his whole life.

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James 5:19-20

THE SUPREME HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT

James 5:19-20 (Part 2)

James finishes his letter with one of the greatest and most uplifting thoughts in the New Testament; and yet one which occurs more than once in the Bible. Suppose a man goes wrong and strays away; and suppose a fellow-Christian rescues him from the error of his ways and brings him back to the right path. That man has not only saved his brother's soul, he has covered a multitude of his own sins. In other words, to save another's soul is the surest way to save one's own.

Mayor points out that Origen has a wonderful passage in one of his Homilies in which he indicates these six ways in which a man may gain forgiveness of his sins--by baptism, by martyrdom, by almsgiving (Lk.11:41), by the forgiveness of others (Matt.6:14), by love (Lk.7:47), and by converting a sinner from the evil of his ways. God will forgive much to the man who has been the means of leading another brother back to him.

This is a thought which shines forth every now and then from the pages of Scripture. Jeremiah says, "If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth" (Jer.15:19). Daniel writes: "And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Dn.12:3). The advice to the young Timothy is: "Take heed to yourself, and to your teaching; for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1Tim.4:16).

There is a saying of the Jewish Fathers: "Whosoever makes a man righteous, sin prevails not over him." Clement of Alexandria says that the true Christian reckons that which benefits his neighbour his own salvation. It is told that an ultra-evangelical lady once asked Wilberforce, the liberator of the slaves, if his soul was saved. "Madame," he answered, "I have been so busy trying to save the souls of others that I have had no time to think of my own." It has been said that those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves; and certainly those who bring the lives of others to God cannot keep God out of their own. The highest honour God can give is bestowed upon him who leads another to God; for the man who does that does nothing less than share in the work of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER

THE CATHOLIC OR GENERAL EPISTLES

First Peter belongs to that group of New Testament letters which are known as the Catholic or General Epistles. Two explanations of that title have been offered.

(i) It is suggested that these letters were so called because they were addressed to the Church at large, in contradistinction to the Pauline letters which were addressed to individual churches. But that is not so. James is addressed to a definite, though widely scattered, community. It is written to the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad (Jas.1:1). It needs no argument that Second and Third John are addressed to definite communities; and, although First John has no specific address, it is clearly written with the needs and perils of a particular community in mind. First Peter itself is written to the strangers scattered abroad through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1Pet.1:1). It is true that these General Epistles have a wider range than the letters of Paul; at the same time, they all have a definite community in mind.

(ii) So we must turn to the second explanation--that these letters were called Catholic or General because they were accepted as Scripture by the whole Church in contradistinction to that large number of letters which enjoyed a local and temporary authority but never universally ranked as Scripture. At the time when these letters were being written there was an outbreak of letter-writing in the Church. We still possess many of the letters which were then written--the letter of Clement of Rome to Corinth, the letter of Barnabas, the letters of Ignatius and the letters of Polycarp. All were regarded as very precious in the Churches to which they were written but were never regarded as having authority throughout the Church; on the other hand the Catholic or General Epistles gradually won a place in Scripture and were accepted by the whole Church. Here is the true explanation of their title.

THE LOVELY LETTER

Of all the General Epistles it is probably true that First Peter is the best known and loved, and the most read. No one has ever been in any doubt about its charm. Moffatt writes of it: "The beautiful spirit of the pastoral shines through any translation of the Greek text. 'Affectionate, loving, lowly, humble,' are Izaak Walton's quaternion of adjectives for the Epistles of James, John and Peter, but it is First Peter which deserves them preeminently." It is written out of the love of a pastor's heart to help people who were going through it and on whom worse things were still to come. "The keynote," says Moffatt, "is steady encouragement to endurance in conduct and innocence in character." It has been said that its distinctive characteristic is warmth. E. J. Goodspeed wrote: "First Peter is one of the most moving pieces of persecution literature." To this day it is one of the easiest letters in the New Testament to read, for it has never lost its winsome appeal to the human heart.

THE MODERN DOUBT

Until a comparatively short time ago few would have raised any doubts about the authenticity of First Peter. Renan, who was by no means a conservative critic, wrote of it: "The First Epistle is one

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of the writings of the New Testament which are most anciently and most unanimously cited as genuine." But in recent times the Petrine authorship of the letter has been widely questioned. The commentary by F. W. Beare, published in 1947, goes the length of saying, "There can be no possible doubt that 'Peter' is a pseudonym." That is to say, Beare has no doubt that someone else wrote this letter under the name of Peter. We shall go on in fairness to investigate that view; but first we shall set out the traditional view--which we ourselves unhesitatingly accept--of the date and authorship of this letter. This is that First Peter was written from Rome by Peter himself, about the year A.D.

67, in the days immediately following the first persecution of the Christians by Nero, to the Christians in those parts of Asia Minor named in the address. What is the evidence for this early date and, therefore, for the Petrine authorship?

THE SECOND COMING

When we go to the letter we find that expectation of the second coming of Christ is in the very forefront of its thought. Christians are being kept for the salvation which is to be revealed at the last time (1Pet.1:5). Those who keep the faith will be saved from the coming judgment (1Pet.1:7). Christians are to hope for the grace which will come at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1Pet.1:13). The day of visitation is expected (1Pet.2:12). The end of all things is at hand (1Pet.4:7). Those who suffer with Christ will also rejoice with Christ when his glory is revealed (1Pet.4:13). Judgment is to begin at the house of God (1Pet.4:17). The writer himself is sure that he will be a sharer in the glory to come (1Pet.5:1). When the Chief Shepherd shall appear the faithful Christian will receive a crown of glory (1Pet.5:4).

From beginning to end of the letter the second coming is in the forefront of the writer's mind. It is the motive for steadfastness in the faith, for the loyal living of the Christian life and for gallant endurance amidst the sufferings which have come and will come upon them.

It would be untrue to say that the second coming ever dropped out of Christian belief, but it did recede from the forefront of Christian belief as the years passed on and Christ did not return. It is, for instance, significant that in Ephesians, one of Paul's latest letters, there is no mention of it. On this ground it is reasonable to suppose that First Peter is early and comes from the days when the Christians vividly expected the return of their Lord at any moment.

SIMPLICITY OF ORGANIZATION

It is clear that First Peter comes from a time when the organization of the Church is very simple. There is no mention of deacons; nor of the episkopos (GSN1985), the bishop, who begins to emerge in the Pastoral Epistles and becomes prominent in Ignatius' letters in the first half of the second century. The only Church officials mentioned are the elders. "I exhort the elders among you as a fellow-elder" (1Pet.5:1). On this ground, also, it is reasonable to suppose that First Peter comes from an early date.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

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What is most significant of all is that the theology of First Peter is the theology of the very early church. E. G. Selwyn has made a detailed study of this; and he has proved beyond all question that the theological ideas of First Peter are exactly the same as those we meet in the recorded sermons of Peter in the early chapters of Acts.

The preaching of the early church was based on five main ideas. One of the greatest contributions of C. H. Dodd to New Testament scholarship was his formulation of these. They form the framework of all the sermons of the early church, as recorded in Acts; and they are the foundation of the thought of all the New Testament writers. The summary of these basic ideas has been given the name *Kerugma* (GSN2782), which means the announcement or the proclamation of a herald.

These are the fundamental ideas which the Church in its first days heralded forth. We shall take them one by one and shall set down after each, first, the references in the early chapters of Acts and, second, the references in First Peter; and we will make the significant discovery that the basic ideas of the sermons of the early church and the theology of First Peter are precisely the same. We are not claiming, of course, that the sermons in Acts are verbatim reports of what was actually preached, but we believe that they give correctly the substance of the message of the first preachers.

(i) The age of fulfilment has dawned; the Messianic age has begun. This is God's last word. A new order is being inaugurated and the elect are summoned to join the new community. Ac.2:14-16; Ac.3:12-26; Ac.4:8-12; Ac.10:34-43; 1Pet.1:3; 1Pet.1:10-12; 1Pet.4:7.

(ii) This new age has come through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all of which are in direct fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament and are, therefore, the result of the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Ac.2:20-31; Ac.3:13-14; Ac.10:43; 1Pet.1:20-21.

(iii) By virtue of the resurrection Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God and is the Messianic head of the new Israel. Ac.2:22-26; Ac.3:13; Ac.4:11; Ac.5:30-31; Ac.10:39-42; 1Pet.1:21; 1Pet.2:7; 1Pet.2:24; 1Pet.3:22.

(iv) These Messianic events will shortly reach their consummation in the return of Christ in glory and the judgment of the living and the dead. Ac.3:19-23; Ac.10:42; 1Pet.1:5,7,13; 1Pet.4:5,13; 1Pet.17-18; 1Pet.5:1,4.

(v) These facts are made the grounds for an appeal for repentance, and the offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life. Ac.2:38-39; Ac.3:19; Ac.5:31; Ac.10:43; 1Pet.1:13-25; 1Pet.2:1-3; 1Pet.4:1-5.

These declarations are the five main planks in the edifice of early Christian preaching, as recorded for us in the sermons of Peter in the early chapters of Acts. They are also the dominant ideas in First Peter. The correspondence is so close and so consistent that we almost certainly with entire probability see the same hand and mind in both.

QUOTATIONS FROM THE FATHERS

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We may add another point to our evidence that First Peter is early; very early the fathers and preachers of the Church begin to quote it. The first person to quote First Peter by name is Irenaeus, who lived from A.D. 130 until well into the next century. He twice quotes 1Pet.1:8: "Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy." And he once quotes 1Pet.2:16, with its command not to use liberty as a cloak for maliciousness. But even before this the fathers of the Church are quoting Peter without mentioning his name. Clement of Rome, writing about A.D. 95, speaks of "the precious blood of Christ," an unusual phrase which may well come from Peter's statement that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1Pet.1:19). Polycarp, who was martyred in A.D. 155, continuously quotes Peter without using his name. We may select three passages to show how closely he gives Peter's words.

Wherefore, girding up your loins, serve God in fear ... believing on him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and gave him glory (Polycarp, To the Philippians 2: 1).

Therefore, gird up your minds...through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory (1Pet.1:13,21).

Christ Jesus who bare our sins in his own body on the tree, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth (Polycarp 8: 1).

He committed no sin; no guile was found on his life... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree (1Pet.2:22,24).

Having your conversation blameless among the Gentiles (Polycarp 10: 2).

Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles (1Pet.2:12).

There can be no doubt that Polycarp is quoting Peter, although he does not name him. It takes some time for a book to acquire such an authority and familiarity that it can be quoted almost unconsciously, its language woven into the language of the Church. Once again we see that First Peter must be a very early book.

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE GREEK

If, however, we are defending the Petrine authorship of this letter, there is one problem we must face--and that is the excellence of the Greek. It seems impossible that it should be the work of a Galilaean fisherman. New Testament scholars are at one in praising the Greek of this letter. F. W. Beare writes: "The epistle is quite obviously the work of a man of letters, skilled in all the devices of rhetoric, and able to draw on an extensive, and even learned, vocabulary. He is a stylist of no ordinary capacity, and he writes some of the best Greek in the whole New Testament, far smoother and more literary than that of the highly-trained Paul." Moffatt speaks of this letter's "plastic language and love of metaphor." Mayor says that First Peter has no equal in the New Testament for

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"sustained stateliness of rhythm." Bigg has likened certain of First Peter's phrases to the writing of Thucydides.

Selwyn has spoken of First Peter's "Euripidean tenderness" and of its ability to coin compound words as Aeschylus might have done. The Greek of First Peter is not entirely unworthy to be set beside that of the masters of the language. It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine Peter using the Greek language like that.

The letter itself supplies the solution to this problem. In the concluding short section Peter himself says, "By Silvanus...I have written briefly" (1Pet.5:12). By Silvanus--dia (GSN1223) Silouanou (GSN4610)--is an unusual phrase. The Greek means that Silvanus was Peter's agent in the writing of the letter; it means that he was more than merely Peter's stenographer.

Let us approach this from two angles. First, let us enquire what we know about Silvanus. (The evidence is set out more fully in our study section on 1Pet.5:12). In all probability he is the same person as the Silvanus of Paul's letters and the Silas of Acts, Silas being a shortened and more familiar form of Silvanus. When we examine these passages, we find that Silas or Silvanus was no ordinary person but a leading figure in the life and counsels of the early church.

He was a prophet (Ac.15:32); he was one of the "chief among the brethren" at the council of Jerusalem and one of the two chosen to deliver the decisions of the council to the Church at Antioch (Ac.15:22,27). He was Paul's chosen companion in the second missionary journey, and was with Paul both in Philippi and in Corinth (Ac.15:37-40; Ac.16:19,25,29; Ac.18:5; 2Cor.1:19). He was associated with Paul in the initial greetings of 1 and 2 Thessalonians (1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:1). He was a Roman citizen (Ac.16:37).

Silvanus, then, was a notable man in the early church; he was not so much the assistant as the colleague of Paul; and, since he was a Roman citizen, there is at least a possibility that he was a man of an education and culture such as Peter could never have enjoyed.

Now let us add our second line of thought. In a missionary situation, when a missionary can speak a language well enough but cannot write it very well, it is quite common for him to do one of two things in order to send a message to his people. He either writes it out in as good a style as he can, and then gets a native speaker of the language to correct his mistakes and to polish his style; or, if he has a native colleague whom he can fully trust, he tells him what he wishes said, leaves him to put the message into written form and then vets the result.

We can well imagine that this was the part Silvanus played in the writing of First Peter. Either he corrected and polished Peter's necessarily inadequate Greek; or he wrote in his own words what Peter wanted said, with Peter setting the final product and adding the last personal paragraph to it.

The thought is that of Peter; but the style is that of Silvanus. And so, although the Greek is so excellent, there is no necessity to deny that the letter comes from Peter himself.

THE RECIPIENTS OF THE LETTER

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The recipients of the letter are the exiles (a Christian is always a sojourner on the earth) scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

Almost all of these words had a double significance. They stood for ancient kingdoms and they stood for Roman provinces to which the ancient names had been given; and the ancient kingdoms and the new provinces did not always cover the same territory. Pontus was never a province. It had originally been the kingdom of Mithradates and part of it was incorporated in Bithynia and part of it in Galatia. Galatia had originally been the kingdom of the Gauls in the area of the three cities Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium, but the Romans had expanded it into a much larger unit of administration, including sections of Phrygia, Pisidia, Lycaonia, and Isauria. The kingdom of Cappadocia had become a Roman province in A.D. 17 in practically its original form. Asia was not the continent of Asia as we use the term. It had been an independent kingdom, whose last king, Attalus the Third, had bequeathed it as a gift to Rome in 133 B.C.

It embraced the centre of Asia minor and was bounded on the north by Bithynia, on the south by Lycia, and on the east by Phrygia and Galatia. In popular language it was that part of Asia Minor which lay along the shores of the Aegean Sea.

We do not know why these particular districts were picked out; but this much is certain--they embraced a large area with a very large population; and the fact that they are all mentioned is one of the greatest proofs of the immense missionary activity of the early church, apart altogether from the missionary activities of Paul.

All these districts lie in the north-east corner of Asia Minor. Why they are named as a group and why they are named in this particular order, we do not know. But a glance at the map will show that, if the bearer of this letter--who may well have been Silvanus--sailed from Italy and landed at Sinope in north-east Asia Minor, a journey through these provinces would be a circular tour which would take him back to Sinope. From Sinope in Bithynia he would go south to Galatia, further south to Cappadocia, west to Asia, north again to Bithynia, and then east to arrive back in Sinope.

It is clear from the letter itself that its recipients were mainly Gentiles. There is no mention of any question of the law, a question which always arose when there was a Jewish background. Their previous condition had been one of fleshly passion (1Pet.1:14; 1Pet.4:3-4) which fits gentiles far better than Jews. Previously they had been no people--Gentiles outside the covenant--but now they are the people of God (1Pet.2:9-10).

The form of his name which Peter uses also shows that this letter was intended for Gentiles for Peter is a Greek name. Paul calls him Cephas (1Cor.1:12; 1Cor.3:22; 1Cor.9:5; 1Cor.15:5; Gal.1:18; Gal.2:9,11,14); among his fellow Jews, he was known as Simeon (Ac.15:14), which is the name by which he is called in Second Peter (2Pet.1:1). Since he uses his Greek name here, it is likely that he was writing to Greek people.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES BEHIND THE LETTER

That this letter was written in a time when persecution threatened, is abundantly clear. They are in the midst of various trials (1Pet.1:6). They are likely to be falsely accused as evil-doers

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(1Pet.3:16). A fiery ordeal is going to try them (1Pet.4:12). When they suffer, they are to commit themselves to God (1Pet.4:19). They may well have to suffer for righteousness' sake (1Pet.3:14). They are sharing in the afflictions which the Christian brotherhood throughout the world is called upon to endure (1Pet.5:9). At the back of this letter there are fiery trial, a campaign of slander and suffering for the sake of Christ. Can we identify this situation?

There was a time when the Christians had little to fear from the Roman government. In Acts it is repeatedly the Roman magistrates and the Roman soldiers and officials who save Paul from the fury of Jews and pagans alike. As Gibbon had it, the tribunal of the pagan magistrate proved the most assured refuge against the fury of the synagogue. The reason was that in the early days the Roman government was not able to distinguish between Jews and Christians. Within the empire Judaism was what was called a *religio licita*, a permitted religion, and Jews had full liberty to worship in their own way. It was not that the Jews did not try to enlighten the Romans to the true facts of the situation; they did so in Corinth, for example (Ac.18:12-17). But for some time the Romans simply regarded the Christians as a Jewish sect and, therefore, did not molest them.

The change came in the days of Nero and we can trace almost every detail of the story. On 19th July, A.D. 64, the great fire of Rome broke out. Rome, a city of narrow streets and high wooden tenements, was in real danger of being wiped out. The fire burned for three days and three nights, was checked, and then broke out again with redoubled violence. The Roman populace had no doubt who was responsible and put the blame on the Emperor. Nero had a passion for building; and they believed so that he had deliberately taken steps to obliterate Rome that he might build it again. Nero's responsibility must remain for ever in doubt; but it is certain that he watched the raging inferno from the tower of Maecenas and expressed himself as charmed with the flower and loveliness of the flames. It was freely said that those who tried to extinguish the fire were deliberately hindered and that men were seen to rekindle it again, when it was likely to subside. The people were overwhelmed.

The ancient landmarks and the ancestral shrines had vanished; the Temple of Luna, the Ara Maxima, the great altar, the Temple of Jupiter Stator, the shrine of Vesta, their very household gods were gone. They were homeless and, in Farrar's phrase, there was "a hopeless brotherhood of wretchedness."

The resentment of the people was bitter. Nero had to divert suspicion from himself; a scapegoat had to be found. The Christians were made the scapegoat. Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells the story (Annals 15.44):

Neither human assistance in the shape of imperial gifts, nor attempts to appease the gods, could remove the sinister report that the fire was due to Nero's own orders. And, so, in the hope of dissipating the rumour, he falsely diverted the charge on to a set of people to whom the vulgar gave the name of Chrestians, and who were detested for the abominations they perpetrated. The founder of the sect, one Christus by name, had been executed by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius; and the dangerous superstition, though put down for the moment, broke out again, not

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only in Judaea, the original home of the pest, but even in Rome, where everything shameful and horrible collects and is practised.

Clearly Tacitus had no doubt that the Christians were not to blame for the fire and that Nero was simply choosing them to be the scapegoats for his own crime.

Why did Nero pick on the Christians and how was it possible even to suggest that they were responsible for the fire of Rome? There are two possible answers.

(i) The Christians were already the victims of certain slanders.

(a) They were in the popular mind connected with the Jews. Antisemitism is no new thing and it was easy for the Roman mob to attach any crime to the Jews and, therefore, to the Christians.

(b) The Lord's Supper was secret, at least in a sense. It was open only to the members of the Church. And certain phrases connected with it were fruitful sources of pagan slanders, phrases about eating someone's body and drinking someone's blood. That was enough to produce a rumour that the Christians were cannibals. In time the rumour grew until it became a story that the Christians killed and ate a Gentile, or a newly born child. At the Lord's Table the Christians gave each other the kiss of peace (1Pet.5:14). Their meeting was called the Agape (GSN0026), the Love Feast. That was enough for stories to spread that the Christian meetings were orgies of vice.

(e) It was always a charge against the Christians that they "tampered with family relationships." There was this much truth in such a charge that Christianity did indeed become a sword to split families, when some members of a family became Christian and some did not. A religion which split homes was bound to be unpopular.

(d) It was the case that the Christians spoke of a coming day when the world would dissolve in flames. Many a Christian preacher must have been heard preaching of the second coming and the fiery dissolution of all things (Ac.2:19-20). It would not be difficult to put the blame for the fire on to people who spoke like that.

There was abundant material which could be perverted into false charges against the Christians by anyone maliciously disposed to victimise them.

(ii) The Jewish faith had always appealed especially to women because of its moral standards in a world where chastity did not exist. There were, therefore, many well-born women who had embraced the Jewish faith. The Jews did not hesitate to work upon these women to influence their husbands against the Christians. We get a definite example of that in what happened to Paul and his company in Antioch of Pisidia. There it was through such women that the Jews stirred up action against Paul (Ac.13:50). Two of Nero's court favourites were Jewish proselytes. There was Aliturus, his favourite actor; and there was Poppaea, his mistress. It is very likely that the Jews through them influenced Nero to take action against the Christians.

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In any event, the blame for the fire was attached to the Christians and a savage outbreak of persecution occurred. Nor was it simply persecution by legal means. What Tacitus called an *ingens multitudo*, a huge multitude, of Christians perished in the most sadistic ways. Nero rolled the Christians in pitch, set light to them and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them up in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting-dogs upon them, to tear them limb from limb while they still lived.

Tacitus writes:

Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burned, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserve extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for, it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty that they were being destroyed (Tacitus, *Annals* 15: 44).

The same terrible story is told by the later Christian historian, Sulipicius Severus, in his *Chronicle*:

In the meantime, the number of Christians being now very large, it happened that Rome was destroyed by fire, while Nero was stationed at Antium. But the opinion of all cast the odium of causing the fire upon the emperor, and he was believed in this way to have sought for the glory of building a new city. And, in fact, Nero could not, by any means he tried, escape from the charge that the fire had been caused by his orders. He, therefore, turned the accusation against the Christians and the most cruel tortures were accordingly inflicted upon the innocent. Nay, even new kinds of death were invented so that, being covered in the skins of wild beasts, they perished by being devoured by dogs, while many were crucified, or slain by fire, and not a few were set apart for this purpose, that, when the day came to a close, they should be consumed to serve for light during the night. In this way, cruelty first began to be manifested against the Christians. Afterwards, too, their religion was prohibited by laws which were enacted; and by edicts openly set forth it was proclaimed unlawful to be a Christian.

It is true that this persecution was confined originally to Rome; but the gateway to persecution had been opened and in every place they were ready victims for the mob.

Moffatt writes:

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After the Neronic wave had passed over the capital, the wash of it was felt on the far shores of the provinces; the dramatic publicity of the punishment must have spread the name of Christian *urbi et orbi*, far and wide, over the entire empire; the provincials would soon hear of it, and when they desired a similar outburst at the expense of the loyal Christians, all that they needed was a proconsul to gratify their wishes and some outstanding disciple to serve as a victim.

For ever after the Christians were to live under threat. The mobs of the Roman cities knew what had happened in Rome and there were always these slanderous stories against the Christians. There were times when the mob loved blood and there were many governors ready to pander to their blood-lust. It was not Roman law but lynch law which threatened the Christians.

From now on the Christian was in peril of his life. For years nothing might happen; then some spark might set off the explosion; and the terror would break out. That is the situation at the back of First Peter; and it is in face of it that Peter calls his people to hope and to courage and to that lovely Christian living which alone can give the lie to the slanders with which they are attacked and which are the grounds for taking measures against them. First Peter was written to meet no theological heresy; it was written to strengthen men and women in jeopardy of their lives.

THE DOUBTS

We have set out in full the arguments which go to prove that Peter is really the author of the first letter which bears his name. But, as we have said, not a few first-class scholars have felt that it cannot have been his work. We ourselves accept the view that Peter is the author of the letter; but in fairness we set out the other side, largely as it is presented in the chapter on First Peter in *The Primitive Church* by B. H. Streeter

STRANGE SILENCES

Bigg writes in his introduction: "There is no book in the New Testament which has earlier, better, or stronger attestation (than First Peter). It is true that Eusebius, the great fourth century scholar and historian of the Church, classes First Peter among the books universally accepted in the early church as part of scripture" (Eusebius: *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.2). But certain things are to be noted.

(a) Eusebius adduces certain quotations from earlier writers to prove his contention that First Peter was universally accepted. This he never does in connection with the gospels or the letters of Paul; and the very fact that he feels called upon to produce his evidence in the case of First Peter might be held to indicate that in it he felt some necessity to prove his point, a necessity which did not exist in connection with the other books. Was there a doubt in Eusebius' own mind? Or, were there people who had to be convinced? Was the universal acceptance of First Peter not so unanimous after all?

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(b) In his book, *The Canon of the New Testament*, Westcott noted that, although no one in the early church questions the right of First Peter to be part of the New Testament, surprisingly few of the early fathers quote it and, still more surprising, very few of the early fathers in the west and in Rome quote it. Tertullian is an immense quoter of scripture. In his writings there are 7,258 quotations from the New Testament, but only 2 of them are from First Peter. If Peter wrote this letter and wrote it in Rome, we would expect it to be well known and largely used in the Church of the west.

(e) The earliest known official list of New Testament books is the Muratorian Canon, so called after Cardinal Muratori who discovered it. It is the official list of New Testament books as accepted in the Church at Rome about the year A.D. 170. It is an extraordinary fact that First Peter does not appear at all. It can be fairly argued that the Muratorian Canon, as we possess it, is defective and that it may originally have contained a reference to First Peter. But that argument is seriously weakened by the next consideration.

(d) It is a fact that First Peter was still not in the New Testament of the Syrian Church as late as A.D. 373. It did not get in until the Syriac version of the New Testament known as the Peshitto was made about A.D. 400. We know that it was Tatian who brought the New Testament books to the Syriac-speaking Church; and he brought them to Syria from Rome when he went to Edessa and founded the Church there in A.D. 172. It could, therefore, be argued that the Muratorian Canon is correct as we possess it and that First Peter was not part of the Roman Church's New Testament as late as A.D. 170. This would be a very surprising fact if Peter wrote it--and actually wrote it at Rome.

When all these facts are put together, it does seem that there are some strange silences in regard to First Peter and that its attestation may not be as strong as is usually assumed.

FIRST PETER AND EPHESIANS

Further, there is definitely some connection between First Peter and Ephesians. There are many close parallels of thought and expression between the two and we select the following specimens of this similarity.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1Pet.1:3).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph.1:3).

Therefore, gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1Pet.1:13).

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Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth (Eph.6:14).

Jesus Christ, was destined before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake (1Pet.1:20).

Even as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:4).

Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God, with angels and authorities and powers subject to him (1Pet.3:22).

God made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority, and power and dominion (Eph.1:20-21).

In addition, the injunctions to slaves, husbands and wives in First Peter and Ephesians are very similar.

The argument is put forward that First Peter is quoting Ephesians. Although Ephesians must have been written somewhere about A.D. 64, Paul's letters were not collected and edited until about A.D. 90. If, then, Peter was also writing in A.D. 64, how could he know Ephesians?

This is an argument to which there is more than one reply. (a) The injunctions to slaves, husbands and wives are part of the standardized ethical teaching given to all converts in all churches. Peter was not borrowing from Paul; both were using common stock. (b) All the similarities quoted can well be explained from the fact that certain phrases and lines of thought were universal in the early church. For instance, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," was part of the universal devotional language of the early church, which both Peter and Paul would know and use without any borrowing from each other. (c) Even if there was mutual borrowing, it is by no means certain that First Peter borrowed from Ephesians; the borrowing might well have been the other way round and probably was, for First Peter is much simpler than Ephesians.

(d) Lastly, even if First Peter borrowed from Ephesians, if Peter and Paul were in Rome at the same time, it is perfectly possible that Peter could have seen a copy of Ephesians before it was sent to Asia Minor, and he might well have discussed its ideas with Paul.

The argument that First Peter must be late because it quotes from Ephesians seems to us very uncertain and insecure, and probably mistaken.

YOUR FELLOW-ELDER

It is objected that Peter could not well have written the sentence: "The elders among you I exhort, as a fellow-elder" (1Pet.5:1). It is maintained that Peter could not have called himself an elder. He was an apostle whose function was quite different from that of an elder. The apostle was characteristically a man whose work and authority were not confined to any one congregation, but

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whose writ ran throughout the Church at large; whereas the elder was the governing official of the local congregation.

That is perfectly true. But it must be remembered that amongst the Jews there was no office more universally honoured than that of elder. The elder had the respect of the whole community and to him the community looked for guidance in its problems and justice in its disputes. Peter, as a Jew, would feel nothing out of place in calling himself an elder; and in so doing he would avoid the conscious claim of authority that the title of apostle might have implied, and graciously and courteously identify himself with the people to whom he spoke.

A WITNESS OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

It is objected that Peter could not honestly have called himself a witness of Christ's sufferings, for after the arrest in the garden all the disciples forsook Jesus and fled (Matt.26:56) and, apart from the beloved disciple, none was a witness of the Cross (Jn.19:26-27). A witness of the resurrection Peter could call himself, and indeed to be such was the function of an apostle (Ac.1:22), but a witness of the Cross he was not. In a sense that is undeniable. And yet Peter is not here claiming to be a witness of the crucifixion, but to be a witness of the sufferings of Christ. He did see Christ suffer, in his continual rejection by men, in the poignant moments of the Last Supper, in the agony in the garden and in that moment when, after he had denied him, Jesus turned and looked on him (Lk.22:61). It is an insensitive and pedestrian criticism which denies to Peter the right to say that he had been a witness of the sufferings of Christ.

PERSECUTION FOR THE NAME

The main argument for a late date for First Peter is drawn from its references to persecution. It is argued that First Peter implies that it was already a crime to be a Christian and that Christians were brought before the courts, not for any crime but for the bare fact of their faith. First Peter speaks about being reproached for the name of Christ (1Pet.4:14); it speaks of suffering as a Christian (1Pet.4:16). It is argued that this stage of persecution was not reached until after A.D. 100, and that prior to that date their persecution was on the score of alleged evil-doing, as in the time of Nero.

There is no doubt that this was the law by A.D. 112. At that time Pliny was governor of Bithynia. He was a personal friend of the Emperor Trajan and he had a way of referring all his difficulties to Trajan for solution. He wrote to the Emperor to tell how he dealt with the Christians. Pliny was well aware that they were law-abiding citizens to whose practices no crimes were attached. They told him that "they had been accustomed to assemble on a fixed day before daylight, and sing by turns a hymn to Christ as God; that they had bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but to commit neither theft, nor robbery, nor adultery, nor to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded." Pliny accepted all this; but, when they were brought before him, he asked only one question. "I have asked them whether they were Christians. Those who confessed I asked a second and a third time, threatening punishment.

Those who persisted I ordered to be led away to execution." Their sole crime was that of being a Christian.

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Trajan replied that this was the correct proceeding and that anyone who denied being a Christian and proved it by sacrificing to the gods was immediately to be set free. From the letters it is clear that there was a good deal of information being laid against the Christians; and Trajan laid it down that no anonymous letters of information were to be accepted or acted upon (Pliny: Letters 96 and 97).

It is argued that this stage of persecution did not emerge until the time of Trajan; and that First Peter, therefore, implies a situation which must be as late as Trajan's time.

The only way in which we can settle this is to sketch the progress of persecution and the reason for it in the Roman Empire. We may do so by setting out one basic fact and three developments from it.

(i) Under the Roman system, religions were divided into two kinds. There were those which were *religiones licitae*, permitted religions; these were recognized by the state and it was open to any man to practise them. There were *religiones illicitae*; these were forbidden by the state and it was illegal for any man to practise them on pain of automatic prosecution as a criminal. It is to be noted that Roman toleration was very wide; and that any religion which did not affect public morality and civil order was certain to be permitted.

(ii) Judaism was a *religio licita*; and in the very early days the Romans, not unnaturally, did not know the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Christianity, as far as they were concerned, was merely a sect of Judaism and any tension and hostility between the two was a private quarrel which was no concern of the Roman government. Because of that in the very early days Christianity was under no danger of persecution. It enjoyed the same freedom of worship as Judaism enjoyed because it was assumed to be a *religio licita*.

(iii) The action of Nero changed the situation. However it came about, and most likely it was by the deliberate action of the Jews, the Roman government discovered that Judaism and Christianity were different. It is true that Nero first persecuted the Christians, not for being Christians, but for burning Rome. But the fact remains that Christianity had been discovered by the government to be a separate religion.

(iv) The consequence was immediate and inevitable. Christianity was at once a prohibited religion and immediately, *ipso facto*, every Christian became an outlaw. In the Roman historian, Suetonius, we have direct evidence that this was precisely what happened. He gives a kind of list of the legislative reforms initiated by Nero:

During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and not a few new laws were made; a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food; the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas, before, every kind of dainty was exposed for sale. Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and

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mischievous superstition. He put an end to the diversions of the chariot-drivers, who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and robbing the people. The pantomimic actors and their partisans were banished from the city.

We have quoted that passage in full because it is proof that by the time of Nero the punishment of Christians had become an ordinary police affair. It is abundantly clear that we do not need to wait until the time of Trajan for the mere fact of being a Christian to be a crime. Any time after Nero a Christian was liable to punishment and death simply for the name he bore,

This does not mean that persecution was constant and consistent; but it does mean that any Christian was liable to execution at any time, purely as a police matter. In one area a Christian might live a whole lifetime at peace; in another there might be outbreaks of persecution every few months. It depended very largely on two things. It depended on the governor himself who might either leave the Christians unmolested or equally set the processes of the law in action against them. It depended on informers. The governor might not wish to act against the Christians, but if information was laid against a Christian he had to; and there were times when the mob were out for blood, information was laid and Christians were butchered to make a Roman holiday.

To compare small things with great, the legal position of the Christians and the attitude of the Roman law can be paralleled in Britain today. There are certain actions which are illegal--to take a very small example, parking a car partly on the pavement--but which for long enough may be permitted. But if the police authorities decide to institute a drive against such an action, or if it develops into too blatant a breaking of the law, or if someone lays a complaint and information, the law will go into action and due penalty and punishment will be exacted. That was the position of the Christians in the empire all of whom were technically outlaws. In actual fact no action might be taken against them; but a kind of sword of Damocles was for ever suspended over them. None knew when information would be laid against him; none knew when a governor would take action; none knew when he might have to die. And that situation obtained consistently after the action of Nero.

Up to that time the Roman authorities had not realized that Christianity was a new religion; but from then on the Christian was automatically an outlaw.

Let us, then, look at the situation as depicted in First Peter. Peter's people are undergoing various trials (1Pet.1:6). Their faith is liable to be tried as metal is tested with fire (1Pet.1:7). Clearly they are undergoing a campaign of slander in which ignorant and baseless charges are being maliciously directed against them (1Pet.2:12; 1Pet.2:15; 1Pet.3:16; 1Pet.4:4). At this very moment they are in the midst of an outbreak of persecution because they are Christians (1Pet.4:12,14,16; 1Pet.5:9). Such suffering is only to be expected and they must not be surprised at it (1Pet.4:12). In any event it gives them the happiness of suffering for righteousness' sake (1Pet.3:14,17), and of being sharers in the sufferings of Christ (1Pet.4:13). There is no need to come down to the time of Trajan for this situation. It is one in which Christians daily found themselves in every part of the empire at any time after their true status had been disclosed by the action of Nero.

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The persecution situation in First Peter does not in any way compel us to date it after the lifetime of Peter.

HONOUR THE KING

But we must proceed with the arguments of those who cannot hold the Petrine authorship. It is argued that in the situation which obtained in the time of Nero, Peter could never have written: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.... Fear God. Honour the emperor." (1Pet.2:13-17). The fact is, however, that this is precisely the point of view expressed in Rom.13:1-7. The whole teaching of the New Testament, except only in the Revelation in which Rome is damned, is that the Christian must be a loyal citizen and must demonstrate the falsity of the charges made against him by the excellence of his behaviour as such. (1Pet.2:15). Even in times of persecution the Christian fully acknowledged his obligation to be a good citizen; and his only defence against persecution was to show by the excellence of his citizenship that he did not deserve such treatment.

It is by no means impossible that Peter should have written like that.

A SERMON AND A PASTORAL

What is the view of those who cannot believe that First Peter is the work of Peter himself?

First of all, it is suggested that the initial address (1Pet.1:1-2), and the closing greetings and salutations (1Pet.5:12-14) are later additions and no part of the original letter.

It is then suggested that First Peter as it stands is composed of two separate and quite different works. In 1Pet.4:11 we find a doxology. The natural place for a doxology is at the end; and it is suggested that 1Pet.1:3-25; 1Pet.2:3; 1Pet.4:1-11 is the first of the two works of which the letter is composed. It is further suggested that this part of First Peter was originally a baptismal sermon. There is indeed in it a reference to the baptism which saves us (1Pet.3:21); and the advice to slaves, wives and husbands (1Pet.2:18-25; 1Pet.3:1-7) would be entirely relevant to those who were entering the Christian Church from paganism and setting out on the newness of the Christian life.

It is suggested that the second part of the letter, 1Pet.4:12-19; 1Pet.5:1-11, contains the substance of a pastoral letter, written to strengthen and comfort during a time of persecution (1Pet.4:12-19). At such a time the elders were very important; on them the resistance power of the Church depended. The writer of this pastoral fears that greed and arrogance are creeping in (1Pet.5:1-3), and he urges them faithfully to perform their high task (1Pet.5:4).

On this view First Peter is composed of two separate works--a baptismal sermon, and a pastoral letter written in time of persecution and neither has anything to do with Peter.

ASIA MINOR, NOT ROME

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If First Peter is a baptismal sermon and a pastoral letter in time of persecution, where is its place of origin? If the letter is not Peter's, there is no necessity to connect it with Rome; and, in any event, it appears that the Roman Church did not know or use First Peter. Let us put together certain facts.

(a) Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1Pet.1:1) are all in Asia Minor and all centred in Sinope.

(b) The first extensive quoter of First Peter is Polycarp bishop of Smyrna, and Smyrna is in Asia Minor.

(c) Certain phrases in First Peter immediately turn our thoughts to parallel phrases in other parts of the New Testament. In 1Pet.5:13 the Church is called "she that is elect," and in 2Jn.13 the Church is also described as an "elect sister." 1Pet.1:8 speaks of Jesus Christ, "without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy." This turns our thoughts very naturally to Jesus' saying to Thomas in the Fourth Gospel: "Blessed are those who have not seen, and believe" (Jn.20:29). First Peter urges the elders to tend, that is, to shepherd, the flock of God (1Pet.5:2). That turns our thoughts to Jesus' injunction to Peter to feed his lambs and his sheep (Jn.21:15-17), and to Paul's farewell injunction to the elders of Ephesus to take heed to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them guardians (Ac.20:28).

All this is to say that the memories First Peter awakens are of the Fourth Gospel, the Letters of John and of Paul at Ephesus. The Fourth Gospel and the Letters of John were most probably written at Ephesus, and Ephesus is in Asia Minor.

It seems that in the case of First Peter all roads lead to Asia Minor.

THE OCCASION OF THE PUBLICATION OF FIRST PETER

Assuming that First Peter has its origin in Asia Minor, can we suggest an occasion for its writing? It was written at a time of persecution. We know from Pliny's letters that in Bithynia about A.D. 112 there was a serious persecution of the Christians and Bithynia is one of the provinces named in the address. We may well conjecture that it was to give courage to the Christians then that First Peter was issued. It may be that at that time someone in a church in Asia Minor came upon these two documents and sent them out under the name of Peter. This would not be looked upon as forgery. Both in Jewish and in Greek practice it was the regular custom to attach books to the name of the great writers of the past.

THE AUTHOR OF FIRST PETER

If Peter did not write First Peter, is it possible to guess at the author? Let us reconstruct some of his essential qualifications. On our previous assumption, he must come from Asia Minor. On the basis of First Peter itself, he must be an elder and an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ (1Pet.5:1). Is there anyone who fits these requirements? Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis about A.D. 170, who spent his life collecting all the information he could about the early days of the Church, tells of his methods and his sources: "Nor shall I hesitate, along with my own interpretations, to set

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Introduction to 1 Peter

down for thee whatsoever I learned with care and remembered with care from the elders, guaranteeing its truth....

Furthermore, if anyone chanced to arrive who had been really a follower of the elders, I would enquire as to the sayings of the elders--as to what Andrew or Peter said, or Philip, or Thomas or James, or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples, also as to what Aristion or the Presbyter John, the Lord's disciples say. For I supposed that things out of books would not be of such use to me as the utterances of a living voice which was still with us." Here we have an elder called Aristion who was a disciple of the Lord and, therefore, a witness of his sufferings. Is there anything to connect him with First Peter?

ARISTION OF SMYRNA

When we turn to the Apostolic Constitutions we find that one of the first bishops of Smyrna was called Ariston--which is the same name as Aristion. Now who is the great quoter of First Peter? None other than Polycarp, a later Bishop of Smyrna. What more natural than that Polycarp should quote what might well have been the devotional classic of his own Church?

Let us turn to the letters to the Seven Churches in the Revelation and read the letter to Smyrna: "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev.2:10). Can this be the very same persecution as that which originally lay behind First Peter? And was it for this persecution that Aristion, the Bishop of Smyrna, first wrote the pastoral letter which was afterwards to become a part of First Peter?

Such is the suggestion of B. H. Streeter. He thinks that First Peter is composed of a baptismal sermon and a pastoral letter written by Aristion, Bishop of Smyrna. Originally the pastoral letter was written to comfort and strengthen the people of Smyrna in A.D. 90 when the persecution mentioned in the Revelation threatened the Church. These writings of Aristion became the devotional classics and the cherished possessions of the Church at Smyrna. Rather more than twenty years later a much wider and more far-reaching persecution broke out in Bithynia and spread throughout northern Asia Minor. Someone remembered the letter and the sermon of Aristion, felt that they were the very thing the Church needed in her time of trial, and sent them out under the name of Peter, the great apostle.

AN APOSTLE'S LETTER

We have stated in full both views of the origin, date and authorship of First Peter. There is no doubt of the ingenuity of the theory which B. H. Streeter has produced nor that those who favour a later date have produced arguments which have to be considered. For our own part, however, we see no reason to doubt that the letter is the work of Peter himself, and that it was written not long after the great fire of Rome and the first persecution of the Christians with the object of encouraging the Christians of Asia Minor to stand fast when the onrushing tide of persecution sought to engulf them and take their faith away.

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1 Peter 1:1-2

THE GREAT INHERITANCE

1 Peter 1:1-2 (Part 1)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's Chosen People, who are scattered as exiles throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. I am an apostle, and you are chosen, according to the fore-knowledge of God, through the consecration of the Spirit, for obedience and to be sprinkled by the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

It happens again and again in the New Testament that the true greatness of a passage lies not only on the surface and in what is actually said, but in the ideas and the convictions which lie behind it. That is particularly so here.

It is clear that this letter was written to people who were Gentiles. They have been released from the futile way of life which they had learned from their fathers (1Pet.1:18). Those who were once not a people had become nothing less than the people of God (1Pet.2:10). In previous times they had walked after the will and the lusts of the Gentiles (1Pet.4:3). But the outstanding thing about this passage is that it takes words and conceptions which had originally applied only to the Jews, the Chosen Nation, and applies them to the Gentiles, who had once been believed to be outside the mercy of God. Once it had been said that "God created the Gentiles to be fuel for the fires of Hell." Once it had been said that, just as the best of the snakes must be crushed, so even the best of the Gentiles must be destroyed. Once it had been said that God loved only Israel of all nations upon the earth.

But now the mercy, the privileges, and the grace of God have gone out to all the earth and to all men, even to those who could never have expected them.

(i) Peter calls the people to whom he writes the elect, God's Chosen People, Once that had been a title which belonged to Israel alone: "You are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth" (Deut.7:6; compare Deut.14:2). The prophet speaks of "Israel, my chosen" (Isa.45:4). The Psalmist speaks of "the sons of Jacob, his chosen ones" (Ps.105:6; Ps.105:43).

But the nation of Israel failed in the purposes of God, for, when he sent his Son into the world, they rejected and crucified him. When Jesus spoke the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, he said that the inheritance of Israel was to be taken from them and given to others (Matt.21:41; Mk.12:9; Lk.20:16). That is the basis of the great New Testament conception of the Christian Church as the true Israel, the new Israel, the Israel of God (compare Gal.6:16). All the privileges which had once belonged to Israel now belonged to the Christian Church. The mercy of God has gone out to the ends of the earth, and all nations have seen the glory and experienced the grace of God.

(ii) There is another word here which once belonged exclusively to Israel. The address literally reads: "To the elect strangers of the Diaspora throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia." Diaspora (GSN1290), literally the dispersion, was the technical name for the Jews scattered in exile in all the countries outside the bounds of Palestine. Sometimes in their troubled history the Jews had been forcibly deported from their native land; sometimes they had gone of

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1 Peter 1:1-2

their own free will to work, and often to prosper, in other lands. Those exiled Jews were called the Diaspora (GSN1290). But now the real Diaspora is not the Jewish nation; it is the Christian Church scattered abroad throughout the provinces of the Roman Empire and the nations of the world. Once the people who had been different from others were the Jews; now the people who are different are the Christians. They are the people whose King is God, whose home is eternity, and who are exiles in the world.

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1 Peter 1:1-2

THE CHOSEN OF GOD AND THE EXILES OF ETERNITY

1 Peter 1:1-2 (Part 2)

What we have just been saying means that the two great titles of which we have been thinking belong to us who are Christians.

(i) We are the Chosen People of God. There is uplift here. Surely there can be no greater compliment and privilege in all the world than to be chosen by God. The word *eklektos* (GSN1588) can describe anything that is specially chosen; it can describe specially chosen fruit, articles specially chosen because they are so outstandingly well made, picked troops specially chosen for some great exploit. We have the honour of being specially chosen by God. But there is also challenge and responsibility here. God always chooses for service. The honour which he gives a man is that of being used for his purposes. It was precisely there that the Jews failed, and we have to see to it that the tragedy of a like failure does not mark our lives.

(ii) We are the exiles of eternity. This is never to say that we must withdraw from the world, but that in the real sense we must be at the same time both in the world and not of it. It has been wisely said that the Christian must be apart from the world but never aloof from it. Wherever the exiled Jew settled, his eyes were towards Jerusalem. In foreign countries his synagogues were so built that, when the worshipper entered, he was facing towards Jerusalem. However useful a citizen of his adopted country the Jew was, his greatest loyalty was to Jerusalem.

The Greek word for such a sojourner in a strange land is *paroikos* (GSN3941). A *paroikos* was a man who was in a strange land and whose thoughts ever turned home. Such a sojourning was called a *paroikia* (GSN3940); and *paroikia* is the direct derivation of the English word parish. The Christians in any place are a group of people whose eyes are turned to God and whose loyalty is beyond. "Here," said the writer to the Hebrews, "we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Heb.13:14).

We must repeat that this does not mean withdrawal from the world; but it does mean that the Christian sees all things in the light of eternity and life as a journey towards God. It is this which decides the importance which he attaches to anything; it is this which dictates his conduct. It is the touchstone and the dynamic of his life.

There is a famous unwritten saying of Jesus: "The world is a bridge. The wise man will pass over it, but he will not build his house upon it." This is the thought which is behind the famous passage in The Epistle to Diognetus, one of the best-known works of the post-apostolic age: "Christians are not marked out from the rest of mankind by their country or their speech or their customs.... They dwell in cities both Greek and barbarian, each as his lot is cast, following the customs of the region in clothing and in food and in the outward things of life generally; yet they manifest the wonderful and openly paradoxical character of their own state. They inhabit the lands of their birth, but as temporary residents thereof; they take their share of all responsibilities as citizens, and endure all disabilities as aliens. Every foreign land is their native land, and every native land a foreign land.... They pass their days upon earth, but their citizenship is in heaven."

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1 Peter 1:1-2

It would be wrong to think that this makes the Christian a bad citizen of the land in which he lives. It is because he sees all things in the light of eternity that he is the best of all citizens, for it is only in the light of eternity that the true values of things can be seen.

We, as Christians, are the Chosen People of God; we are the exiles of eternity. Therein lie both our priceless privilege and our inescapable responsibility.

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1 Peter 1:1-2

THE THREE GREAT FACTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 Peter 1:1-2 (Part 3)

In 1Pet.1:2 we are confronted with the three great facts of the Christian life.

(i) The Christian is chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. C. E. B. Cranfield has a fine comment on this phrase: "If all our attention is concentrated on the hostility or indifference of the world or the exiguousness of our own progress in the Christian life, we may well be discouraged. At such times we need to be reminded that our election is according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. The Church is not just a human organization--though, of course, it is that. Its origin lies, not in the will of the flesh, in the idealism of men, in human aspirations and plans, but in the eternal purpose of God." When we are discouraged we may well remind ourselves that the Christian Church came into being according to the purpose and plan of God and, if it is true to him, it can never ultimately fail.

(ii) The Christian is chosen to be consecrated by the Spirit. Luther said: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him." For the Christian the Holy Spirit is essential to every part of the Christian life and every step in it. It is the Holy Spirit who awakens within us the first faint longings for God and goodness. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin and leads us to the Cross where that sin is forgiven. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to be freed from the sins which have us in their grip and to gain the virtues which are the fruit of the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the assurance that our sins are forgiven and that Jesus Christ is Lord. The beginning, the middle and the end of the Christian life are the work of the Holy Spirit.

(iii) The Christian is chosen for obedience and for sprinkling by the blood of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament there are three occasions when sprinkling with blood is mentioned. It may well be that all three were present in Peter's mind and that all three have something to contribute to the thought behind these words.

(a) When a leper had been healed, he was sprinkled with the blood of a bird (Lev.14:1-7). Sprinkling with blood is, therefore, the symbol of cleansing. By the sacrifice of Christ, the Christian is cleansed from sin.

(b) Sprinkling with blood was part of the ritual of the setting apart of Aaron and the priests (Exo.29:20-21; Lev.8:30). It was the sign of setting apart for the service of God. The Christian is specially set apart for the service of God, not only within the Temple, but also within the world.

(c) The great picture of the sprinkling comes from the covenant relationship between Israel and God. In the covenant, God, of his own gracious will, approached Israel that they might be his people and that he might be their God. But that relationship depended on the Israelites accepting the conditions of the covenant and obeying the law. Obedience was a necessary condition of the covenant, and failure in obedience meant failure of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. So the book of the covenant was read to Israel and the people pledged themselves: "All the

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words which the Lord has spoken we will do." As a token of this relationship of obedience between the people and God, Moses took half the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the altar, and half the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the people (Exo.24:1-8). Sprinkling was for obedience.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Christian is called into a new relationship with God, in which the sins of the past are forgiven and he is pledged to obedience in the time to come.

It is in the purpose of God that the Christian is called. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that his life is hallowed towards God. It is by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ that he is cleansed from past sin and dedicated to future obedience to God.

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1 Peter 1:3-5

THE REBIRTH OF THE CHRISTIAN

1 Peter 1:3-5 (Part 1)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his great mercy, has brought about in us that rebirth which leads to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, an inheritance imperishable, undefilable, and unfading, kept safe in heaven for us, who are protected by the power of God through faith, until there comes that deliverance which is ready to be revealed at the last time.

It will take us a long time to appropriate the riches of this passage, for there are few passages in the New Testament where more of the great fundamental Christian ideas come together.

It begins with a doxology to God--but a doxology with a difference. For a Jew the commonest of all beginnings to prayer was, "Blessed art thou, O God." The Christian takes over that prayer--but with a difference. His prayer begins, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." He is not praying to a distant, unknown God; he is praying to the God who is like Jesus and to whom, through Jesus Christ, he may come with childlike confidence.

This passage begins with the idea of rebirth; the Christian is a man who has been reborn; begotten again by God to a new kind of life. Whatever else this means, it means that, when a man becomes a Christian, there comes into his life a change so radical that the only thing that can be said is that life has begun all over again for him. This idea of rebirth runs all through the New Testament. Let us try to collect what it says about it.

(i) The Christian rebirth happens by the will and by the act of God (Jn.1:13; Jas.1:18). It is not something which a man achieves any more than he achieves his physical birth.

(ii) Another way to put that is to say that this rebirth is the work of the Spirit (Jn.3:1-15). It happens to a man, not by his own effort, but when he yields himself to be possessed and re-created by the Spirit within him.

(iii) It happens by the word of truth (Jas.1:18; 1Pet.1:23). In the beginning it was the word of God which created heaven and earth and all that is in them. God spoke and the chaos became a world, and the world was equipped with and for life. It is the creative word of God in Jesus Christ which brings about this rebirth in a man's life.

(iv) The result of this rebirth is that the man who is reborn becomes the first fruits of a new creation (Jas.1:18). It lifts him out of this world of space and time, of change and decay, of sin and defeat, and brings him here and now into touch with eternity and eternal life.

(v) When a man is reborn, it is to a living hope (1Pet.1:3). Paul describes the heathen world as being without hope (Eph.2:12). Sophocles wrote: "Not to be born at all--that is by far the best fortune; the second best is as soon as one is born with all speed to return thither whence one has come." To the heathen the world was a place where all things faded and decayed; it might be

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1 Peter 1:3-5

pleasant enough in itself but it was leading out into nothing but an endless dark. To the ancient world the Christian characteristic was hope. That hope came from two things. (a) The Christian felt that he had been born, not of corruptible, but of incorruptible seed (1Pet.1:23). He had something of the very seed of God in him and, therefore, had in him a life which neither time nor eternity could destroy. (b) It came from the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1Pet.1:3).

The Christian had for ever beside him--even more, was one with--this Jesus Christ who had conquered even death and, therefore, there was nothing of which he need be afraid.

(vi) The rebirth of the Christian is a rebirth to righteousness (1Jn.2:29; 1Jn.3:9; 1Jn.5:18). In this rebirth he is cleansed from himself, the sins which shackle him and the habits which bind him; and he is given a power which enables him to walk in righteousness. That is not to say that the man who is reborn will never sin; but it is to say that every time he falls he will be given the power and the grace to rise again.

(vii) The rebirth of the Christian is a rebirth to love (1Jn.4:7). Because the life of God is in him, he is cleansed from the essential unforgiving bitterness of the self-centred life and there is in him something of the forgiving and sacrificial love of God.

(viii) Finally, the rebirth of the Christian is rebirth to victory (1Jn.5:4). Life ceases to be defeat and begins to be victory, over self and sin and circumstances. Because the life of God is in him, the Christian has learned the secret of victorious living.

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1 Peter 1:3-5

THE GREAT INHERITANCE

1 Peter 1:3-5 (Part 2)

Further, the Christian has entered into a great inheritance (kleronomia, GSN2817). Here is a word with a great history; for it is the word which is regularly used in the Greek Old Testament for the inheritance of Canaan, the Promised Land. Again and again the Old Testament speaks of the land which God had given his people for an inheritance to possess (Deut.15:4; Deut.19:10). To us inheritance tends to mean something which in the future we shall possess; as the Bible uses the word, it rather means a secure possession. To the Jew the great settled possession was the Promised Land.

But the Christian inheritance is even greater. Peter uses three words with three great pictures behind them to describe it. It is imperishable (aphthartos, GSN0862). The word does mean imperishable but it can also mean unravaged by any invading army. Many and many a time Palestine had been ravaged by the armies of the aliens; it had been fought over and blasted and destroyed. But the Christian possesses a peace and a joy, which no invading army can ravage and destroy. It is undefilable. The word is amiantos (GSN0283), and the verb miainein (GSN3392), from which this adjective comes, means to pollute with impious impurity. Many and many a time Palestine had been rendered impure by false worship of false gods (Jer.2:7; Jer.2:23; Jer.3:2; Eze.20:43). The defiling things had often left their touch even on the Promised Land; but the Christian has a purity which the sin of the world cannot infect. It is unfading (amarantos, GSN0263).

In the Promised Land, as in any land, even the loveliest flower fades and the loveliest blossom dies. But the Christian is lifted into a world where there is no change and decay and where his peace and joy are untouched by the chances and the changes of life.

What, then, is this wonderful inheritance which the reborn Christian possesses? There may be many secondary answers to that question but there is only one primary answer--the inheritance of the Christian is God himself. The Psalmist said, "The Lord is my chosen portion... I have a goodly heritage" (Ps.16:5). God is his portion for ever (Ps.73:23-26). "The Lord," said the prophet, "is my portion; therefore I will hope in him" (Lam.3:24).

It is because the Christian possesses God and is possessed by God that he has the inheritance which is imperishable, undefilable and which can never fade away.

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1 Peter 1:3-5

PROTECTED IN TIME AND SAFE IN ETERNITY

1 Peter 1:3-5 (Part 3)

The inheritance of the Christian, the full joy of God, is waiting for him in heaven; and of that Peter has two great things to say.

(i) On our journey through this world to eternity we are protected by the power of God through faith. The word which Peter uses for protect (phrourein, GSN5432) is a military word. It means that our life is garrisoned by God and that he stands sentinel over us all our days. The man who has faith never doubts, even when he cannot see him, that God is standing within the shadows keeping watch upon his own. It is not that God saves us from the troubles and the sorrows and the problems of life; but he enables us to conquer them and march on.

(ii) The final salvation will be revealed at the last time. Here we have two conceptions which are at the very basis of New Testament thought.

The New Testament frequently speaks of the last day or days, or the last time. At the back of this is the way the Jews divided all time into two ages--the present age, which is wholly under the domination of evil and the age to come, which will be the golden age of God. In between came the day of the Lord during which the world would be destroyed and remade and judgment would come. It is this in between time which is the last days or the last time, that time when the world as we know it will come to an end.

It is not given to us to know when that time will come nor what will happen then. But we can gather together what the New Testament says about these last days.

(i) The Christians believed that they were already living in the last days. "It is the last hour," says John to his people (1Jn.2:18). The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the fullness of the revelation which has come to men in Christ in these last days (Heb.1:2). As the first Christians saw it, God had already invaded time and the end was hastening on.

(ii) The last times were to be times of the pouring out of God's Spirit upon men (Ac.2:17). The early Christians saw that being fulfilled in Pentecost and in the Spirit-filled Church.

(iii) It was the regular conviction of the early Christians that before the end the powers of evil would make a final assault and that all kinds of false teachers would arise (2Tim.3:1; 1Jn.2:18; Jd.18).

(iv) The dead would be resurrected. It is Jesus' promise that at the last time he will raise up his own (Jn.6:39-40,44; Jn.6:54; Jn.11:24).

(v) Inevitably it would be a time of judgment when God's justice would be exercised and his enemies find their just condemnation and punishment (Jn.12:48; Jas.5:3).

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1 Peter 1:3-5

Such are the ideas which are in the minds of the New Testament writers when they use this phrase the last times or the last days.

Clearly for many a man such a time will be a time of terror; but for the Christian there is, not terror, but deliverance. The word *sozein* (GSN4982) means to save in far more than a theological sense. It is the regular word for to rescue from danger and to heal in sickness. Charles Bigg in his commentary points out that in the New Testament *sozein* (GSN4982), to save, and *soteria* (GSN4991), salvation, have four different, but closely related, spheres of meaning. (a) They describe deliverance from danger (Matt.8:25). (b) They describe deliverance from disease (Matt.9:21). (c) They describe deliverance from the condemnation of God (Matt.10:22; Matt.24:13). (d) They describe deliverance from the disease and power of sin (Matt.1:21). Salvation is a many-sided thing. In it there is deliverance from danger, deliverance from disease, deliverance from condemnation and deliverance from sin. And it is that, and nothing less than that, to which the Christian can look forward at the end.

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1 Peter 1:6-7

THE SECRET OF ENDURANCE

1 Peter 1:6-7

Herein you rejoice, even if it is at present necessary that for a brief time you should be grieved by all kinds of trials, for the object of these trials is that your tried and tested faith, more precious than gold which perishes though it is tested by the fire, may win praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ shall appear.

Peter comes to the actual situation in life in which his readers found themselves. Their Christianity had always made them unpopular, but now they were facing almost certain persecution. Soon the storm was going to break and life was going to be an agonizing thing. In face of that threatening situation Peter in effect reminds them of three reasons why they can stand anything that may come upon them.

(i) They can stand anything because of what they are able to look forward to. At the end there is for them the magnificent inheritance, life with God. In fact this is how Westcott understands the phrase, "in the last time" (en (GSN1722) kairo (GSN2540) eschato, GSN2078). We have taken it to mean in the time when the world as we know it will come to an end; but the Greek can mean when the worst comes to the worst. It is then, says Westcott, when things have reached their limit, that the saving power of Christ will be displayed.

In any event, the ultimate meaning is the same. For the Christian persecution and trouble are not the end; beyond lies the glory; and in the hope of that glory he can endure anything that life brings to him. It sometimes happens that a man has to undergo a painful operation or course of treatment; but he gladly accepts the pain and the discomfort because of the renewed health and strength which lie beyond. It is one of the basic facts of life that a man can endure anything so long as he has something to look forward to--and the Christian can look forward to the ultimate joy.

(ii) They can stand anything that comes if they remember that every trial is, in fact, a test. Before gold is pure it has to be tested in the fire. The trials which come to a man test his faith and out of them that faith can emerge stronger than ever it was before. The rigours which the athlete has to undergo are not meant to make him collapse but to make him able to develop more strength and staying-power. In this world trials are not meant to take the strength out of us, but to put the strength into us.

In this connection there is something most suggestive in the language Peter uses. He says that the Christian for the moment may well have to undergo various trials. The Greek is poikilos (GSN4164), which literally means many-coloured. Peter uses that word only one other time and it is to describe the grace of God (1Pet.4:10). Our troubles may be many-coloured, but so is the grace of God; there is no colour in the human situation which that grace cannot match. There is a grace to match every trial and there is no trial without its grace.

(iii) They can stand anything, because at the end of it, when Jesus Christ appears, they will receive from him praise and glory and honour. Again and again in this life we make our biggest

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1 Peter 1:6-7

efforts and do our best work, not for pay or profit, but in order to see the light in someone's eyes and to hear his word of praise. These things mean more than anything else in the world. The Christian knows that, if he endures, he will in the end hear the Master's "Well done!"

Here is the recipe for endurance when life is hard and faith is difficult. We can stand up to things because of the greatness to which we can look forward, because every trial is another test to strengthen and to purify our faith, and because at the end of it Jesus Christ is waiting to say, "Well done!" to all his faithful servants.

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1 Peter 1:8-9

UNSEEN BUT NOT UNKNOWN

1 Peter 1:8-9

Although you never knew him, you love him; although you do not see him, you believe in him. And you rejoice with unspeakable and glorious joy because you are receiving that which faith must end in--the salvation of your souls.

Peter is drawing an implicit contrast between himself and his readers. It was his great privilege to have known Jesus in the days of his flesh. His readers had not had that joy; but, although they never knew Jesus in the flesh, they love him; and although they do not see him with the bodily eye, they believe. And that belief brings to them a joy beyond speech and clad with glory, for even here and now it makes them certain of the ultimate welfare of their souls.

E. G. Selwyn in his commentary distinguishes four stages in man's apprehension of Christ.

(i) The first is the stage of hope and desire, the stage of those who throughout the ages dreamed of the coming of the King. As Jesus himself said to his disciples, "Many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it" (Lk.10:23-24). There were the days of longings and expectations which were never fully realized.

(ii) The second stage came to those who knew Christ in the flesh. That is what Peter is thinking about here. That is what he was thinking about when he said to Cornelius, "We are witnesses to all that he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (Ac.10:39). There were those who walked with Jesus and on whose witness our knowledge of his life and the words depends.

(iii) There are those in every nation and time who see Jesus with the eye of faith. Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe" (Jn.20:29). This way of seeing Jesus is possible only because he is not someone who lived and died and exists now only as a figure in a book but someone who lived and died and is alive for evermore. It has been said that "no apostle ever remembered Jesus." That is to say, Jesus is not only a memory; he is a person whom we can meet.

(iv) There is the beatific vision. It was John's confidence that we shall see him as he is (1Jn.3:2). "Now," said Paul, "we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1Cor.13:12). If the eye of faith endures, the day will come when it will be the eye of sight, and we shall see face to face and know even as we are known.

Jesus, these eyes have never seen
That radiant form of thine;
The veil of sense hangs dark between
Thy blessed face and mine.

I see thee not, I hear thee not,
Yet art thou oft with me;

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1 Peter 1:8-9

And earth hath ne'er so dear a spot
As where I meet with thee.

Yet, though I have not seen, and still
Must rest in faith alone,
I love thee, dearest Lord, and will,
Unseen but not unknown.

When death these mortal eyes shall seal,
And still this throbbing heart,
The rending veil shall thee reveal
All glorious as thou art.

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1 Peter 1:10-12

THE FORETELLING OF THE GLORY

1 Peter 1:10-12 (Part 1)

Prophets, who prophesied about the grace which was to come to you, enquired and searched concerning that salvation, seeking to find out when and how the Spirit of Christ within them, testifying in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and to the glories which must follow them, was telling them that it would come. It was revealed to them that the ministry which they were exercising in these things was not for themselves but for you, things which have now been proclaimed to you through those who preached the gospel to you through the power of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, things of which the angels long to catch a glimpse.

Here again we have a rich passage. The wonder of the salvation which was to come to men in Christ was such that the prophets searched and enquired about it; and even the angels were eager to catch a glimpse of it. Few passages have more to tell us about how the prophets wrote and about how they were inspired.

(i) We are told two things about the prophets. First, they searched and enquired about the salvation which was to come. Second, the Spirit of Christ told them about Christ. Here we have the great truth that inspiration depends on two things--the searching mind of man and the revealing Spirit of God. It used sometimes to be said that the men who wrote Scripture were pens in the hands of God or flutes into which his Spirit breathed or lyres across which his Spirit moved. That is to say, they were held to be nothing more than almost unconscious instruments in God's hands. But this passage tells us that God's truth comes only to the man who searches for it. In inspiration there is an element which is human and an element which is divine; it is the product at one and the same time of the search of man's mind and the revelation of God's Spirit.

Further, this passage tells us that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, was always operative in this world. Wherever men have glimpsed beauty, wherever they have laid hold on truth, wherever they have had longings for God, the Spirit of Christ was there. Never has there been any time in any nation when the Spirit of Christ was not moving men to seek God and guiding them to find him. Sometimes they have been blind and deaf, sometimes they have misinterpreted that guidance, sometimes they have grasped but fragments of it, but always that revealing Spirit has been there to guide the searching mind.

(ii) This passage tells us that the prophets spoke of the sufferings and the glory of Christ. Such passages as Ps.22 and Isa.52:13-15; Isa.53:1-12 found their consummation and fulfilment in the sufferings of Christ. Such passages as Ps.2, Ps.16:8-11, Ps.110, found their fulfilment in the glory and the triumph of Christ. We need not think that the prophets foresaw the actual man Jesus. What they did foresee was that one would come some day in whom their dreams and visions would all be fulfilled.

(iii) This passage tells us for whom the prophets spoke. It was the message of the glorious deliverance of God that they brought to men. That was a deliverance which they themselves never experienced. Sometimes God gives a man a vision, but says to the man himself, "Not yet!" He took

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1 Peter 1:10-12

Moses to Pisgah and showed him the Promised Land and said to him, "I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there" (Deut.34:14). Someone tells of watching one night at dusk a blind lamplighter lighting the lamps. He tapped his way from lamp-post to lamp-post bringing to others a light which he himself would never see. As the prophets knew, it is a great gift to receive the vision, even if the consummation of the vision is for others still to come.

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1 Peter 1:10-12

THE MESSAGE OF THE PREACHER

1 Peter 1:10-12 (Part 2)

This passage tells us not only of the visions of the prophets but also of the message of the preacher. It was the preachers who brought the message of salvation to the readers of Peter's letter.

(i) It tells us that preaching is the announcement of salvation. Preaching may at different times have many notes and many aspects, but fundamentally it is the proclamation of the gospel, the good news. The preacher may at times have to warn, threaten and condemn; he may have to remind men of the judgment and the wrath of God; but basically, beyond all else, his message is the announcement of salvation.

(ii) It tells us that preaching is through the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. The preacher's message is not his own; it is given to him. He brings, not his own opinions and even prejudices; he brings the truth as given him by the Holy Spirit. Like the prophet he will have to search and enquire; he will have to study and to learn; but he must then wait for the guidance of the Spirit to come to him.

(iii) It tells us that the preacher's message is of things of which the angels long to catch a glimpse. There is no excuse for triviality in preaching. There is no excuse for an earthbound and unlovely message without interest or thrill. The salvation of God is a tremendous thing.

It is with the message of salvation and the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ that the preacher must ever appear before men.

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1 Peter 1:13

THE NECESSARY VIRILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

1 Peter 1:13

So, then, gird up the loins of your mind; be sober; come to a final decision to place your hope on the grace which is going to be brought to you at the revealing of Jesus Christ.

Peter has been talking about the greatness and the glory to which the Christian may look forward; but the Christian can never be lost in dreams of the future; he must always be virile in the battle of the present. So Peter sends out three challenges to his people.

(i) He tells them to gird up the loins of their mind This is a deliberately vivid phrase. In the east men wore long flowing robes which hindered fast progress or strenuous action. Round the waist they wore a broad belt or girdle; and when strenuous action was necessary they shortened the long robe by pulling it up within the belt in order to give them freedom of movement. The English equivalent of the phrase would be to roll up one's sleeves or to take off one's jacket. Peter is telling his people that they must be ready for the most strenuous mental endeavour. They must never be content with a flabby and unexamined faith; they must set to and think things out and think them through. It may be that they will have to discard some things. It may be that they will make mistakes. But what they are left with will be theirs in such a way that nothing and nobody can ever take it away from them.

(ii) He tells them to be sober. The Greek word, like the English, can have two meanings. It can mean that they must refrain from drunkenness in the literal sense of the term; and it can also mean that they must be steady in their minds. They must become intoxicated neither with intoxicating liquor nor with intoxicating thoughts; they must preserve a balanced judgment. It is easy for the Christian to be carried away with this, that, or the next sudden enthusiasm and to become readily intoxicated with the latest fashion and the newest craze. Peter is appealing to them to maintain the essential steadiness of the man who knows what he believes.

(iii) He tells them to set their hope on the grace which is going to be given to them when Jesus Christ comes. It is the great characteristic of the Christian that he lives in hope; and because he lives in hope he can endure the trials of the present. Any man can endure struggle and effort and toil, if he is certain that it is all leading somewhere. That is why the athlete accepts his training and the student his study. For the Christian the best is always still to come. He can live with gratitude for all the mercies of the past, with resolution to meet the challenge of the present and with the certain hope that in Christ the best is yet to be.

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1 Peter 1:14-25

THE CHRISTLESS LIFE AND THE CHRIST-FILLED LIFE

1 Peter 1:14-25

Be obedient children. Do not continue to live a life which matches the desires of the days of your former ignorance, but show yourselves holy in all your conduct of life as he who called you is holy, because it stands written: "You must be holy, because I am holy." If you address as Father him who judges each man according to his work with complete impartiality, conduct yourselves with reverence throughout the time of your sojourn in this world; for you know that it was not by perishable things, by silver or gold, that you were rescued from the futile way of life which you learned from your fathers, but it was by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. It was before the creation of the world that he was predestined to his work; it is at the end of the ages that he has appeared, for the sake of you who through him believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope might be in God. Now that you have purified your souls by obedience to the truth--a purification that must issue in a brotherly love that is sincere--love each other heartily and steadfastly, for you have been reborn, not of mortal but of immortal seed, through the living and abiding word of God, for, "All flesh is grass, and its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever." And that is the word, the good news of which was brought to you.

There are three great lines of approach in this passage and we look at them one by one.

1. JESUS CHRIST REDEEMER AND LORD

It has great things to say about Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord.

(i) Jesus Christ is the emancipator, through whom men are delivered from the bondage of sin and death; he is the lamb without blemish and without spot (1Pet.1:19). When Peter spoke like that of Jesus, his mind was going back to two Old Testament pictures--to Isa.53, with its picture of the Suffering Servant, through whose suffering the people were saved and healed and above all to the picture of the Passover Lamb (Exo.12:5). On that memorable night when they left the slavery of Egypt, the children of Israel were bidden to take a lamb and slay it and mark their doorposts with its blood; and, when the angel of death went through the land slaying the first-born sons of the Egyptians, he passed over every house so marked. In that picture of the Passover Lamb there are the twin thoughts of emancipation from slavery and deliverance from death. No matter how we interpret it, it cost the life and death of Jesus Christ to liberate men from their bondage to sin and to death.

(ii) Jesus Christ is the eternal purpose of God. It was before the creation of the world that he was predestined for the work which was given him to do (1Pet.1:20). Here is a great thought. Sometimes we tend to think of God as first Creator and then Redeemer, as having created the world and then, when things went wrong, finding a way to rescue it through Jesus Christ. But here we have the vision of a God who was Redeemer before he was Creator. His redeeming purpose was not an emergency measure to which he was compelled when things went wrong. It goes back before creation.

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1 Peter 1:14-25

(iii) Peter has a connection of thought which is universal in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is not only the lamb who was slain; he is the resurrected and triumphant one to whom God gave glory. The New Testament thinkers seldom separate the Cross and the Resurrection; they seldom think of the sacrifice of Christ without thinking of his triumph. Edward Rogers, in *That they might have Life*, tells us that on one occasion he went carefully through the whole story of the Passion and the Resurrection in order to find a way to represent it dramatically, and goes on, "I began to feel that there was something subtly and tragically wrong in any emphasis on the agony of the Cross which dimmed the brightness of the Resurrection, any suggestion that it was endured pain rather than overcoming love which secured man's salvation." He asks where the eyes of the Christian turn at the beginning of Lent.

What do we dominantly see? "Is it the darkness that covered the earth at noon, swirling round the pain and anguish of the Cross? Or is it the dazzling, mysterious early-morning brightness that shone from an empty tomb?" He continues, "There are forms of most earnest and devoted evangelical preaching and theological writing which convey the impression that somehow the Crucifixion has overshadowed the Resurrection and that the whole purpose of God in Christ was completed on Calvary. The truth, which is obscured only at grave spiritual peril, is that the Crucifixion cannot be interpreted and understood save in the light of the Resurrection."

Through his death Jesus emancipated men from their bondage to slavery and death; but through his Resurrection he gives them a life which is as glorious and indestructible as his own. Through this triumphant Resurrection we have faith and hope in God (1Pet.1:21).

In this passage we see Jesus the great emancipator at the cost of Calvary; We see Jesus the eternal redeeming purpose of God; We see Jesus the triumphant victor over death and the glorious Lord of life, the giver of life which death cannot touch and the bringer of hope which nothing can take away.

2. THE CHRISTLESS LIFE

Peter picks out three characteristics of the Christless life.

(i) It is the life of ignorance (1Pet.1:14). The pagan world was always haunted by the unknowability of God; at best men could but grope after his mystery. "It is hard," said Plato, "to investigate and to find the framer and the father of the universe; and, if one did find him, it would be impossible to express him in terms which all could understand." Even for the philosopher, to find God is difficult; and for the ordinary man, to understand him is impossible. Aristotle spoke of God as the supreme cause, by all men dreamed of and by no man known. The ancient world did not doubt that there was a God or gods but it believed that such gods as there were were quite unknowable and totally uninterested in men and the universe. In a world without Christ God was mystery and power but never love; there was no one to whom men could raise their hands for help or their eyes for hope.

(ii) It is the life dominated by desire (1Pet.1:14). As we read the records of that world into which Christianity came we cannot but be appalled at the sheer fleshliness of life within it. There was

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desperate poverty at the lower end of the social scale; but at the top we read of banquets which cost thousands of pounds, where peacocks' brains and nightingales' tongues were served and where the Emperor Vitellius set on the table at one banquet two thousand fish and seven thousand birds. Chastity was forgotten. Martial speaks of a woman who had reached her tenth husband; Juvenal of a woman who had eight husbands in five years; and Jerome tells us that in Rome there was one woman who was married to her twenty-third husband, she herself being his twenty-first wife. Both in Greece and in Rome homosexual practices were so common that they had come to be looked on as natural. It was a world mastered by desire, whose aim was to find newer and wilder ways of gratifying its lusts.

(iii) It was a life characterized by futility. Its basic trouble was that it was not going anywhere. Catullus writes to his Lesbia pleading for the delights of love. He pleads with her to seize the moment with its fleeting joys. "Suns can rise and set again; but once our brief light is dead, there is nothing left but one long night from which we never shall awake." If a man was to die like a dog, why should he not live like a dog? Life was a futile business with a few brief years in the light of the sun and then an eternal nothingness. There was nothing for which to live and nothing for which to die. Life must always be futile when there is nothing on the other side of death.

3. THE CHRIST-FILLED LIFE

Peter finds three characteristics of the Christ-filled life and for each he finds compelling reasons.

(i) The Christ-filled life is the life of obedience and of holiness (1Pet.1:14-16). To be chosen by God is to enter, not only into great privilege, but also into great responsibility. Peter remembers the ancient command at the very heart of all Hebrew religion. It was God's insistence to his people that they must be holy because he was holy (Lev.11:44; Lev.19:2; Lev.20:7; Lev.20:26). The word for holy is *hagios* (GSN0040) whose root meaning is different. The Temple is *hagios* (GSN0040) because it is different from other buildings; the Sabbath is *hagios* (GSN0040) because it is different from other days; the Christian is *hagios* (GSN0040) because he is different from other men. The Christian is God's man by God's choice. He is chosen for a task in the world and for a destiny in eternity. He is chosen to live for God in time and with him in eternity. In the world he must obey his law and reproduce his life. There is laid on the Christian the task of being different.

(ii) The Christ-filled life is the life of reverence (1Pet.1:17-21). Reverence is the attitude of mind of the man who is always aware that he is in the presence of God. In these five verses Peter picks out three reasons for this Christian reverence. (a) The Christian is a sojourner in this world. Life for him is lived in the shadow of eternity; he thinks all the time, not only of where he is but also of where he is going. (b) He is going to God; true, he can call God Father, but that very God whom he calls Father is also he who judges every man with strict impartiality. The Christian is a man for whom there is a day of reckoning. He is a man with a destiny to win or to lose. Life in this world becomes of tremendous importance because it is leading to the life beyond. (c) The Christian must live life in reverence, because it cost so much, nothing less than the life and death of Jesus Christ. Since, then, life is of such surpassing value, it cannot be wasted or thrown away. No honourable man squanders what is of infinite human worth.

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1 Peter 1:14-25

(iii) The Christ-filled life is the life of brotherly love. It must issue in a love for the brethren which is sincere and hearty and steadfast. The Christian is a man who is reborn, not of mortal, but of immortal seed. That may mean either of two things. It may mean that the remaking of the Christian is due to no human agency but to the agency of God, another way of saying what John said when he spoke of those "who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn.1:13). More probably it means that the Christian is remade by the entry into him of the seed of the word; and the picture is that of the Parable of the Sower (Matt.13:1-9). The quotation which Peter makes is from Isa.40:6-8 and the second interpretation fits that better. However we take it, the meaning is that the Christian is remade. Because he is reborn, the life of God is in him. The great characteristic of the life of God is love, and so the Christian must show that divine love for men.

The Christian is the man who lives the Christ-filled life, the life that is different, never forgets the infinity of its obligation, and is made beautiful by the love of the God who gave it birth.

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1 Peter 2:1-3

WHAT TO LOSE AND WHAT TO YEARN FOR

1 Peter 2:1-3 (Part 1)

Strip off, therefore, all the evil of the heathen world and all deceitfulness, acts of hypocrisy and feelings of envy, and all gossiping disparagements of other people, and, like newly-born babes, yearn for the unadulterated milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up until you reach salvation. You are bound to do this if you have tasted that the Lord is kind.

No Christian can stay the way he is; and Peter urges his people to have done with evil things and to set their hearts on that which alone can nourish life.

There are things which must be stripped off. *Apothesthai* (compare GSN0595) is the verb for stripping off one's clothes. There are things of which the Christian must divest himself as he would strip off a soiled garment.

He must strip off all the evil of the heathen world. The word for evil is *kakia* (GSN2549); it is the most general word for wickedness and includes all the wicked ways of the Christless world. The other words are illustrations and manifestations of this *kakia* (GSN2549); and it is to be noted that they are all faults of character which hurt the great Christian virtue of brotherly love. There can be no brotherly love so long as these evil things exist.

There is deceitfulness (*dolos*, GSN1388). *Dolos* is the trickery of the man who is out to deceive others to attain his own ends, the vice of the man whose motives are never pure.

There is hypocrisy (*hupokrisis*, GSN5272). *Hupokrites* (GSN5273) (hypocrite) is a word with a curious history. It is the noun from the verb *hupokrinesthai* (GSN5271) which means to answer; a *hupokrites* (GSN5273) begins by being an answerer. Then it comes to mean an actor, the man who takes part in the question and answer of the stage. Next it comes to mean a hypocrite, a man who all the time is acting a part and concealing his real motives. The hypocrite is the man whose alleged Christian profession is for his own profit and prestige and not for the service and glory of Christ.

There is envy (*phthonos*, GSN5355). It may well be said that envy is the last sin to die. It reared its ugly head even in the apostolic band. The other ten were envious of James and John, when they seemed to steal a march upon them in the matter of precedence in the coming Kingdom (Mk.10:41). Even at the last supper the disciples were disputing about who should occupy the seats of greatest honour (Lk.22:24). So long as self remains active within a man's heart there will be envy in his life. E. G. Selwyn calls envy "the constant plague of all voluntary organisations, not least religious organisations." C. E. B. Cranfield says that "we do not have to be engaged in what is called 'church work' very long to discover what a perennial source of trouble envy is."

There is gossiping disparagement (*katalalia*, GSN2636). *Katalalia* is a word with a definite flavour. It means evil-speaking; it is almost always the fruit of envy in the heart; and it usually takes place when its victim is not there to defend himself. Few things are so attractive as hearing or

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1 Peter 2:1-3

repeating spicy gossip. Disparaging gossip is something which everyone admits to be wrong and which at the same time almost everyone enjoys; and yet there is nothing more productive of heartbreak and nothing is so destructive of brotherly love and Christian unity.

These, then, are the things which the reborn man must strip off for, if he continues to allow them to have a grip upon his life, the unity of the brethren must be injured.

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1 Peter 2:1-3

THAT ON WHICH TO SET THE HEART

1 Peter 2:1-3 (Part 2)

But there is something on which the Christian must set his heart. He must yearn for the unadulterated milk of the word. This is a phrase about whose meaning there is some difficulty. The difficulty is with the word *logikos* (GSN3050) which with the King James Version we have translated of the word. The English Revised Version translates it spiritual, and in the margin gives the alternative translation reasonable. Moffatt has spiritual, as has the Revised Standard Version.

Logikos (GSN3050) is the adjective from the noun *logos* (GSN3056) and the difficulty is that it has three perfectly possible translations.

(a) *Logos* (GSN3056) is the great Stoic word for the reason which guides the universe; *logikos* (GSN3050) is a favourite Stoic word which describes what has to do with this divine reason which is the governor of all things. If this is the word's connection, clearly spiritual is the meaning.

(b) *Logos* (GSN3056) is the normal Greek word for mind or reason; therefore, *logikos* (GSN3050) often means reasonable or intelligent. It is in that way that the King James Version translates it in Rom.12:1, where it speaks of our reasonable service.

(c) *Logos* (GSN3056) is the Greek for word, and *logikos* (GSN3050) means belonging to the Lord. This is the sense in which the King James Version takes it, and we think it is correct. Peter has just been talking about the word of God which abides forever (1Pet.1:23-25). It is the word of God which is in his mind; and we think that what he means here is that the Christian must desire with his whole heart the nourishment which comes from the word of God, for by that nourishment he can grow until he reaches salvation itself. In face of all the evil of the heathen world the Christian must strengthen his soul with the pure food of the word of God.

This food of the word is unadulterated (*adolos*, GSN0097). That is to say, there is not the slightest admixture of anything evil in it. *Adolos* (GSN0097) is an almost technical word to describe corn (American: grain) that is entirely free from chaff or dust or useless or harmful matter. In all human wisdom there is some admixture of what is either useless or harmful; the word of God alone is altogether good.

The Christian is to yearn for this milk of the word; yearn is *epipothein* (GSN1971) which is a strong word. It is the word which is used for the hart longing for the waterbrooks (Ps.42:1), and for the Psalmist longing for the salvation of the Lord (Ps.119:174). For the sincere Christian, to study God's word is not a labour but a delight, for he knows that there his heart will find the nourishment for which it longs.

The metaphor of the Christian as a baby and the word of God as the milk whereby he is nourished is common in the New Testament. Paul thinks of himself as the nurse who cares for the infant Christians of Thessalonica (1Th.2:7). He thinks of himself as feeding the Corinthians with milk for they are not yet at the stage of meat (1Cor.3:2); and the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews blames

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1 Peter 2:1-3

his people for being still at the stage of milk when they should have gone on to maturity (Heb.5:12; Heb.6:2). To symbolize the rebirth of baptism in the early church, the newly baptized Christian was clothed in white robes, and sometimes he was fed with milk as if he was a little child. It is this nourishment with the milk of the word which makes a Christian grow up and grow on until he reaches salvation.

Peter finishes this introduction with an allusion to Ps.34:8. "You are bound to do this," he writes, "if you have tasted the kindness of God." Here is something of the greatest significance. The fact that God is gracious is not an excuse for us to do as we like, depending on him to overlook it; it lays on us an obligation to toil towards deserving his graciousness and love. The kindness of God is not an excuse for laziness in the Christian life; it is the greatest of all incentives to effort.

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1 Peter 2:4-10

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

1 Peter 2:4-10

Come to him, the living stone, rejected by men but chosen and precious with God, and be yourselves, like living stones, built into a spiritual house until you become a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices, which are well-pleasing to God through Jesus Christ; for there is a passage in Scripture which says, "Behold, I place in Zion a stone, chosen, a cornerstone, precious, and he who believes in him shall not be put to shame." So, then, there is preciousness in that stone to you who believe; but, to those who disbelieve, the stone which the builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner, and a stone over which they will stumble, and a rock over which they will trip. They stumble because they disobey the word--a fate for which they were appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people dedicated to God, a nation for him specially to possess that you might tell forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his glorious light, you, who were once not a people and are now the people of the Lord, you who were once without mercy and have now found mercy.

Peter sets before us the nature and the function of the Church. There is so much in the passage that we divide it into four sections.

1. THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED

Much is made of the idea of the stone. Three Old Testament passages are symbolically used; let us look at them one by one.

(i) The beginning of the whole matter goes back to the words of Jesus himself. One of the most illuminating parables he ever told was the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. In it he told how the wicked husbandmen killed servant after servant and in the end even murdered the son. He was showing how the nation of Israel had again and again refused to listen to the prophets and had persecuted them, and how this refusal was to reach its climax with his own death. But beyond the death he saw the triumph and he told of that triumph in words taken from the Psalms: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes" (Matt.21:42; Mk.12:10; Lk.20:17).

That is a quotation from Ps.118:22. In the original it is a reference to the nation of Israel. A. K. Kirkpatrick writes of it: "Israel is 'the head corner-stone.' The powers of the world flung it aside as useless, but God destined it for the most honourable and important place in the building of his kingdom in the world. The words express Israel's consciousness of its mission and destiny in the purpose of God." Jesus took these words and applied them to himself. It looked as if he was utterly rejected by men; but in the purpose of God he was the corner-stone of the edifice of the Kingdom, honoured above all.

(ii) In the Old Testament there are other references to this symbolic stone, and the early Christian writers used them for their purposes. The first is in Isa.28:16: "Therefore, thus says the Lord God, Behold I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure

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1 Peter 2:4-10

foundation; he who believes will not be in haste." Again the reference is to Israel. The sure and precious stone is God's unfailing relationship to his people, a relationship which was to culminate in the coming of the Messiah. Once again the early Christian writers took this passage and applied it to Jesus Christ as the precious and immovable foundation stone of God.

(iii) The second of these other passages is also from Isaiah: "But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Isa.8:13-14). Its meaning is that God is offering his lordship to the people of Israel; that to those who accept him he will become a sanctuary and a salvation, but to those who reject him he will become a terror and a destruction. Again the early Christian writers took this passage and applied it to Jesus. To those who accept him Jesus is Saviour and Friend; to those who reject him he is judgment and condemnation.

(iv) For the understanding of this passage, we have to take in a New Testament reference to these Old Testament ones. It is hardly possible that Peter could speak of Jesus as the corner-stone and of Christians as being built into a spiritual house, united in him, without thinking of Jesus' own words to himself. When he made his great confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus said to him, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church" (Matt.16:18). It is on the faith of the loyal believer that the Church is built.

These are the origins of the pictures in this passage.

2. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

From this passage we learn three things about the very nature of the Church.

(i) The Christian is likened to a living stone and the Church to a living edifice into which he is built (1Pet.2:5). Clearly that means that Christianity is community; the individual Christian finds his true place only when he is built into that edifice. "Solitary religion" is ruled out as an impossibility. C. E. B. Cranfield writes: "The free-lance Christian, who would be a Christian but is too superior to belong to the visible Church upon earth in one of its forms, is simply a contradiction in terms."

There is a famous story from Sparta. A Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and could see no walls. He said to the Spartan king, "Where are these walls about which you boast so much?" His host pointed at his bodyguard of magnificent troops. "These," he said, "are the walls of Sparta, every man a brick."

The point is clear. So long as a brick lies by itself it is useless; it becomes of use only when it is incorporated into a building. So it is with the individual Christian. To realize his destiny he must not remain alone, but must be built into the fabric of the Church.

Suppose that in time of war a man says, "I wish to serve my country and to defend her from her enemies." If he tries to carry out that resolution alone, he can accomplish nothing. He can be

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1 Peter 2:4-10

effective in that purpose only by standing shoulder to shoulder with others of like mind. It is so with the Church. Individualistic Christianity is an absurdity; Christianity is community within the fellowship of the Church.

(ii) Christians are a holy priesthood (1Pet.2:5). There are two great characteristics of the priest.

(a) He is the man who himself has access to God and whose task it is to bring others to him. In the ancient world this access to God was the privilege of the professional priests, and in particular of the High Priest who alone could enter into the Holy of Holies. Through Jesus Christ, the new and living way, access to God becomes the privilege of every Christian, however simple he may be. Further, the Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means bridge-builder; the priest is the man who builds a bridge for others to come to God; and the Christian has the duty and the privilege of bringing others to that Saviour whom he himself has found and loves.

(b) The priest is the man who brings an offering to God. The Christian also must continuously bring his offerings to God. Under the old dispensation the offerings brought were animal sacrifices; but the sacrifices of the Christian are spiritual sacrifices. He makes his work an offering to God. Everything is done for God; and so even the meanest task is clad with glory. The Christian makes his worship an offering to God; and so the worship of God's house becomes, not a burden but a joy. The Christian makes himself an offering to God. "Present your bodies," said Paul, "as a living sacrifice to God" (Rom.12:1). What God desires most of all is the love of our hearts and the service of our lives. That is the perfect sacrifice which every Christian must make.

(iii) The function of the Church is to tell forth the excellencies of God. That is to say, it is to witness to men concerning the mighty acts of God. By his very life, even more than by his words, the Christian is to be a witness of what God in Christ has done for him.

3. THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH

In 1Pet.2:9 we read of the things to which the Christian is a witness.

(i) God has called the Christian out of darkness into his glorious light. The Christian is called out of darkness into light. When a man comes to know Jesus Christ, he comes to know God. No longer does he need to guess and to grope. "He who has seen me," said Jesus, "has seen the Father" (Jn.14:9). In Jesus is the light of the knowledge of God. When a man comes to know Jesus, he comes to know goodness. In Christ he has a standard by which all actions and motives may be tested. When a man comes to know Jesus Christ, he comes to know the way. Life is no longer a trackless road without a star to guide. In Christ the way becomes clear. When a man comes to know Jesus Christ, he comes to know power. It would be little use to know God without the power to serve him. It would be little use to know goodness and yet be helpless to attain to it. It would be little use to see the right way and be quite unable to take it. In Jesus Christ there is both the vision and the power.

(ii) God has made those who were not a people into the people of God. Here Peter is quoting from Hos.1:6,9,10; Hos.2:1; Hos.2:23). This means that the Christian is called out of insignificance

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into significance. It continually happens in this world that a man's greatness lies not in himself but in what has been given him to do. The Christian's greatness lies in the fact that God has chosen him to be his man and to do his work in the world. No Christian can be ordinary, for he is a man of God.

(iii) The Christian is called out of no mercy, into mercy. The great characteristic of non-Christian religion is the fear of God. The Christian has discovered the love of God and knows that he need no longer fear him, because it is well with his soul.

4. THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

In 1Pet.2:9 Peter uses a whole series of phrases which are a summary of the functions of the Church. He calls the Christians "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people dedicated to God, a nation for him specially to possess." Peter is steeped in the Old Testament and these phrases are all great description of the people of Israel. They come from two main sources. In Isa.43:21 Isaiah hears God say, "The people whom I formed for myself." But even more in Exo.19:5-6 the voice of God is heard: "Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all people; for all the earth is mine: and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." The great promises which God made to his people Israel are being fulfilled to the Church, the new Israel. Every one of these titles is full of meaning.

(i) Christians are a chosen people. Here we are back to the covenant idea. Exo.19:5-6 is from the passage which describes how God entered into his covenant with Israel. In the covenant he offered a special relationship with himself to Israel; but it depended on the people of Israel accepting the conditions of the covenant and keeping the law. That relationship would hold only "if you will obey my voice, and keep my covenant" (Exo.19:5).

From this we learn that the Christian is chosen for three things. (a) He is chosen for privilege. In Jesus Christ there is offered to him a new and intimate fellowship with God. God has become his friend and he has become God's friend. (b) He is chosen for obedience. Privilege brings with it responsibility. The Christian is chosen in order that he may become the obedient child of God. He is chosen not to do as he likes but to do as God likes. (c) He is chosen for service. His honour is that he is the servant of God. His privilege is that he will be used for the purposes of God. But he can be so used only when he brings to God the obedience he desires. Chosen for privilege, chosen for obedience, chosen for service--these three great facts go hand in hand.

(ii) Christians are a royal priesthood. We have already seen that this means that every Christian has the right of access to God; and that he must offer his work, his worship and himself to God.

(iii) Christians are what the Revised Standard Version calls a holy nation. We have already seen that the basic meaning of hagios (GSN0040) (holy) is different. The Christian has been chosen that he may be different from other men. That difference lies in the fact that he is dedicated to God's will and to God's service. Other people may follow the standards of the world but for him the only standards are God's. A man need not even start on the Christian way unless he realizes that it will compel him to be different from other people.

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(iv) Christians are a people for God specially to possess. It frequently happens that the value of a thing lies in the fact that some one has possessed it. A very ordinary thing acquires a new value, if it has been possessed by some famous person. In any museum we find quite ordinary things--clothes, a walking-stick, a pen, books, pieces of furniture--which are of value only because they were once possessed by some great person. It is so with the Christian. The Christian may be a very ordinary person but he acquires a new value because he belongs to God.

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1 Peter 2:11-12

REASONS FOR RIGHT LIVING

1 Peter 2:11-12 (Part 1)

Beloved, I urge you, as strangers and sojourners, to abstain from the fleshly desires which carry on their campaign against the soul. Make your conduct amongst the Gentiles fine, so that in every matter in which they slander you as evil-doers, they may see from your fine deeds what you are really like and glorify God on the day when he will visit the earth.

The basic commandment in this passage is that the Christian should abstain from fleshly desires. It is of the greatest importance that we should see what Peter means by this. The phrases sins of the flesh and, fleshly, desires have become much narrowed in meaning in modern usage. For us they usually mean sexual sin; but in the New Testament they are much wider than that. Paul's list of the sins of the flesh in Gal.5:19-21, includes "immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." There are far more than bodily sins here.

In the New Testament, flesh stands for far more than the physical nature of man. It stands for human nature apart from God; it means unredeemed human nature; it means life lived without the standards, the help, the grace and the influence of Christ. Fleshly desires and sins of the flesh, therefore, include not only the grosser sins but all that is characteristic of fallen human nature. From these sins and desires the Christian must abstain. As Peter sees it, there are two reasons for this abstinence.

(i) The Christian must abstain from these sins because he is a stranger and a pilgrim. The words are paroikos (GSN3941) and parepidemos (GSN3927). They are quite common Greek words and they describe someone who is only temporarily resident in a place and whose home is somewhere else. They are used to describe the patriarchs in their wanderings, and especially Abraham who went out not knowing where he was to go and whose search was for the city whose maker and builder is God (Heb.11:9,13). They are used to describe the children of Israel when they were slaves and strangers in the land of Egypt before they entered into the Promised Land (Ac.7:6).

These words give us two great truths about the Christian. (a) There is a real sense in which he is a stranger in the world; and because of that he cannot accept the world's laws and ways and standards. Others may accept them; but the Christian is a citizen of the Kingdom of God and it is by the laws of that Kingdom that he must direct his life. He must take his full share of responsibility for living upon earth, but his citizenship is in heaven and the laws of heaven are paramount for him. (b) The Christian is not a permanent resident upon earth; he is on the way to the country which is beyond. He must therefore, do nothing which would keep him from reaching his ultimate goal. He must never become so entangled in the world that he cannot escape from its grip; he must never so soil himself as to be unfit to enter the presence of the holy God to whom he is going.

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1 Peter 2:11-12

THE GREATEST ANSWER AND DEFENCE

1 Peter 2:11-12 (Part 2)

(ii) But there was for Peter another and even more practical reason why the Christian must abstain from fleshly desires. The early church was under fire. Slanderous charges were continually being made against the Christians; and the only effective way to refute them was to live lives so lovely that they would be seen to be obviously untrue.

To modern ears the King James Version can be a little misleading. It speaks about "having your conversation honest among the Gentiles." That sounds to us as if it meant that the Christian must always speak the truth, but the word translated conversation is *anastrophe* (GSN0391), which means a man's whole conduct, not simply his talk. That is, in fact, what conversation did mean in the seventeenth century. The word translated honest is *kalos* (GSN2570). In Greek there are two words for good. There is *agathos* (GSN0018), which simply means good in quality; and there is *kalos* (GSN2570), which means not only good but also lovely, fine, attractive, winsome. That is what *honestus* means in Latin. So, what Peter is saying is that the Christian must make his whole way of life so lovely and so good to look upon that the slanders of his heathen enemies may be demonstrated to be false.

Here is timeless truth. Whether we like it or not, every Christian is an advertisement for Christianity; by his life he either commends it to others or makes them think less of it. The strongest missionary force in the world is a Christian life.

In the early church this demonstration of the loveliness of the Christian life was supremely necessary, because of the slanders the heathen deliberately cast on the Christian Church. Let us see what some of these slanders were.

(i) In the beginning Christianity was closely connected with the Jews. By race Jesus was a Jew; Paul was a Jew; Christianity was cradled in Judaism; and inevitably many of its early converts were Jews. For a time Christianity was regarded merely as a sect of Judaism. Antisemitism is no new thing. Friedlander gives a selection of the slanders which were repeated against the Jews in his *Roman Life and Manners under the Early Empire*. "According to Tacitus they (the Jews) taught their proselytes above all to despise the gods, to renounce their fatherland, to disregard parents, children, brothers and sisters. According to Juvenal, Moses taught the Jews not to show anyone the way, nor to guide the thirsty traveller to the spring, except he were a Jew. Apion declares that, in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Jews every year fattened a Greek, and having solemnly offered him up as a sacrifice on a fixed day in a certain forest, ate his entrails and swore eternal hostility to the Greeks." These were the things which the heathen had persuaded themselves were true about the Jews, and inevitably the Christians shared in this odium.

(ii) Apart from these slanders attached to the Jews, there were slanders directed particularly against the Christians themselves. They were accused of cannibalism. This accusation took its rise from a perversion of the words of the Last Supper, "This is my body. This cup is the new covenant in my blood." The Christians were accused of killing and eating a child at their feasts.

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1 Peter 2:11-12

They were also accused of immorality and even of incest. This accusation took its rise from the fact that they called their meeting the Agape (GSN0026), the Love Feast. The heathen perverted that name to mean that the Christian feasts were sensual orgies at which shameless deeds were done.

The Christians were accused of damaging trade. Such was the charge of the silversmiths of Ephesus (Ac.19:21-41).

They were accused of "tampering with family relationships" because often homes were, in fact, broken up when some members of the family became Christians and others did not.

They were accused of turning slaves against their masters, and Christianity indeed did give to every man a new sense of worth and dignity.

They were accused of "hatred of mankind" and indeed the Christian did speak as if the world and the Church were entirely opposed to each other.

Above all they were accused of disloyalty to Caesar, for no Christian would worship the Emperor's godhead and burn his pinch of incense and declare that Caesar was Lord, for to him Jesus Christ and no other was Lord.

Such were the charges which were directed against the Christians. To Peter there was only one way to refute them and that was to live that their Christian life demonstrated that they were unfounded. When Plato was told that a certain man had been making certain slanderous charges against him, his answer was: "I will live in such a way that no one will believe what he says." That was Peter's solution.

Jesus himself had said--and doubtless the saying was in Peter's mind: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt.5:16). This was a line of thought which the Jews knew well. In one of the books written between the Old and the New Testaments it says: "If ye work that which is good, my children, both men and angels shall bless you; and God shall be glorified among the Gentiles through you, and the devil shall flee from you" (The Testament of Naphtali 8: 4).

The striking fact of history is that by their lives the Christians actually did defeat the slanders of the heathen. In the early part of the third century Celsus made the most famous and the most systematic attack of all upon the Christians in which he accused them of ignorance and foolishness and superstition and all kinds of things--but never of immorality. In the first half of the fourth century, Eusebius, the great Church historian, could write: "But the splendour of the catholic and only true Church, which is always the same, grew in magnitude and power, and reflected its piety and simplicity and freedom, and the modesty and purity of its inspired life and philosophy to every nation both of Greeks and barbarians. At the same time the slanderous accusations which had been brought against the whole Church also vanished, and there remained our teaching alone, which has

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prevailed over all, and which is acknowledged to be superior to all in dignity and temperance, and in divine and philosophical doctrines.

So that none of them now ventures to affix a base calumny upon our faith, or any such slander as our ancient enemies formerly delighted to utter" (Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History, 4.7.15). It is true that the terrors of persecution were not even then ended, for the Christians would never admit that Caesar was Lord; but the excellence of their lives had silenced the calumnies against the Church.

Here is our challenge and our inspiration. It is by the loveliness of our daily life and conduct that we must commend Christianity to those who do not believe.

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1 Peter 2:13-15

THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN

1 Peter 2:13-15

1. AS A CITIZEN

Peter looks at the duty of the Christian within the different spheres of his life; and he begins with his duty as a citizen of the country in which he happens to live.

Nothing is further from the thought of the New Testament than any kind of anarchy. Jesus had said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's" (Matt.22:21). Paul was certain that those who governed the nation were sent by God and held their responsibility from him, and were, therefore, no terror to the man who lived an honourable life (Rom.13:17). In the Pastoral Epistles the Christian is instructed to pray for kings and all in authority (1Tim.2:2). The instruction of the New Testament is that the Christian must be a good and useful citizen of the country in which his life is set.

It has been said that fear built the cities and that men huddled behind a wall in order to be safe. Men join themselves together and agree to live under certain laws, so that the good man may have peace to do his work and go about his business and the evil man may be restrained and kept from his evil-doing. According to the New Testament life is meant by God to be an ordered business and the state is divinely appointed to provide and to maintain that order.

The New Testament view is perfectly logical and just. It holds that a man cannot accept the privileges which the state provides without also accepting the responsibilities and the duties which it demands. He cannot in honour and decency take everything and give nothing.

How are we to translate this into modern terms? C. E. B. Cranfield has well pointed out that there is a fundamental difference between the state in New Testament times and the state as we in Britain know it. In New Testament times the state was authoritarian. The ruler was an absolute ruler; and the sole duty of the citizen was to render absolute obedience and to pay taxes (Rom.13:6-7). Under these conditions the keynote was bound to be subjection to the state. But we live in a democracy; and in a democracy something far more than unquestioning subjection becomes necessary. Government is not only government of the people; it is also for the people and by the people. The demand of the New Testament is that the Christian should fulfil his responsibility to the state. In the authoritarian state that consisted solely in submission. But what is that obligation in the very different circumstances of a democracy?

In any state there must be a certain subjection. As C. E. B. Cranfield puts it, there must be "a voluntary subordination of oneself to others, putting the interest and welfare of others above one's own, preferring to give rather than to get, to serve rather than to be served." But in a democratic state the keynote must be not subjection but cooperation, for the duty of the citizen is not only to submit to be ruled but to take a necessary share in ruling. Hence, if the Christian is to fulfil his duty to the state, he must take his part in its government. He must also take his part in local government and in the life of the trade union or association connected with his trade, craft, or profession. It is

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tragic that so few Christians really fulfil their obligation to the state and the society in which they live.

It remains to say that the Christian has a higher obligation than even his obligation to the state. While he must render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, he must also render to God the things which are God's. He must on occasion make it quite clear that he must listen to God rather than to men (Ac.4:19; Ac.5:29). There may be times, therefore, when the Christian will fulfil his highest duty to the state by refusing to obey it and by insisting on obeying God. By so doing, at least he will witness to the truth, and at best he may lead the state to take the Christian way.

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1 Peter 2:16

THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN

1 Peter 2:16

You must live as free men, yet not using your freedom as a cloak for evil, but as the slaves of God.

2. IN SOCIETY

Any great Christian doctrine can be perverted into an excuse for evil. The doctrine of grace can be perverted into an excuse for sinning to one's heart's content. The doctrine of the love of God can be sentimentalized into an excuse for breaking his law. The doctrine of the life to come can be perverted into an excuse for neglecting life in this world. And there is no doctrine so easy to pervert as that of Christian freedom.

There are hints in the New Testament that it was frequently so perverted. Paul tells the Galatians that they have been called to liberty but they must not use that liberty as an occasion for the flesh to do as it wills (Gal.5:13). In Second Peter we read of those who promise others liberty and are themselves the slaves of corruption (2Pet.2:19). Even the great pagan thinkers saw quite clearly that perfect freedom is, in fact, the product of perfect obedience. Seneca said, "No one is free who is the slave of his body," and, "Liberty consists in obeying God." Cicero said, "We are the servants of the laws that we may be able to be free." Plutarch insisted that every bad man is a slave; and Epictetus declared that no bad man can ever be free.

We may put it this way. Christian freedom is always conditioned by Christian responsibility. Christian responsibility is always conditioned by Christian love. Christian love is the reflection of God's love. And, therefore, Christian liberty can rightly be summed up in Augustine's memorable phrase: "Love God, and do what you like."

The Christian is free because he is the slave of God. Christian freedom does not mean being free to do as we like; it means being free to do as we ought.

In this matter we have to return to the great central truth which we have already seen. Christianity is community. The Christian is not an isolated unit; he is a member of a community and within that community his freedom operates. Christian freedom therefore is the freedom to serve. Only in Christ is a man so freed from self and sin that he can become as good as he ought to be. Freedom comes when a man receives Christ as king of his heart and Lord of his life.

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1 Peter 2:17

A SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN DUTY

1 Peter 2:17

Honour all men; love the brotherhood; fear God; honour the king.

Here is what we might call a four-point summary of Christian duty.

(i) Honour all men. To us this may seem hardly needing to be said; but when Peter wrote this letter it was something quite new. There were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire, everyone of whom was considered in law to be, not a person, but a thing, with no rights whatever. In effect, Peter is saying, "Remember the rights of human personality and the dignity of every man." It is still possible to treat people as things. An employer may treat his employees as so many human machines for producing so much work. Even in a welfare state, where the aim is to do so much for their physical welfare, there is a very real danger that people may be regarded as numbers on a form or as cards in a filing system.

John Lawrence in his book, *Hard Facts, A Christian Looks at the World*, says that one of the greatest needs in the welfare state is "to see through the files and forms in triplicate to God's creatures who are at the other end of the chain of organization." The danger is that we fail to see men and women as persons. This matter comes nearer home. When we regard anyone as existing solely to minister to our comfort or to further our plans, we are in effect regarding them, not as persons, but as things. The most tragic danger of all is that we may come to regard those who are nearest and dearest to us as existing for our convenience--and that is to treat them as things.

(ii) Love the brotherhood. Within the Christian community this respect for every man turns to something warmer and closer; it turns to love. The dominant atmosphere of the Church must always be love. One of the truest definitions of the Church is that it is "the extension of the family." The Church is the larger family of God and its bond must be love. As the Psalmist had it (Ps.133:1):

Behold, how good a thing it is,
And how becoming well,
Together such as brethren are
In unity to dwell!

(iii) Fear God. The writer of the proverbs has it: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov.1:7). It may well be that the translation should be, not that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but that the fear of the Lord is the principal part, the very foundation of knowledge. Fear here does not mean terror; it means awe and reverence. It is the simple fact of life that we will never reverence men until we reverence God. It is only when God is given his proper place in the centre that all other things take their proper place.

(iv) Honour the king. Of the four injunctions of this verse this is the most amazing, for, if it was really Peter who wrote this letter, the king in question is none other than Nero. It is the teaching of

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1 Peter 2:17

the New Testament that the ruler is sent by God to preserve order among men and that he must be respected, even when he is a Nero.

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1 Peter 2:18-25

THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN AS A SERVANT

1 Peter 2:18-25 (Part 1)

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and equitable, but also to those who are perverse, for it is a real sign of grace when a man bears pains in unjust suffering because of his consciousness of God. It is to live like this that you were called, because Christ too suffered for us, leaving behind him an example that we should follow in his steps. He did no sin nor was any guile found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he did not return insult for insult. When he suffered, he uttered no threats, but he committed himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might depart from sins and live to righteousness. With his stripes you have been healed, for you were straying away like sheep but now you have turned to the Shepherd and Watchman of your souls.

Here is the passage which would be relevant to by far the greatest number of the readers of this letter, for Peter writes to servants and slaves, and they formed by far the greatest part of the early church. The word Peter uses for servants is not *douloi* (GSN1401), which is the commonest word for slaves, but *oiketai* (GSN3610), the word for the household and domestic slaves.

To understand the real meaning of what Peter is saying we must understand something of the nature of slavery in the time of the early church. In the Roman Empire there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves, Slavery began with Roman conquests, slaves being originally mainly prisoners taken in war, and in very early times Rome had few slaves but by New Testament times slaves were counted by the million.

It was by no means only menial tasks which were performed by slaves. Doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards were slaves. In fact, all the work of Rome was done by slaves. Roman attitude was that there was no point in being master of the world and doing one's own work. Let the slaves do that and let the citizens live in pampered idleness. The supply of slaves would never run out.

Slaves were not allowed to marry; but they cohabited; and the children born of such a partnership were the property of the master, not of the parents, just as the lambs born to the sheep belonged to the owner of the flock, and not to the sheep.

It would be wrong to think that the lot of slaves was always wretched and unhappy, and that they were always treated with cruelty. Many slaves were loved and trusted members of the family; but one great inescapable fact dominated the whole situation. In Roman law a slave was not a person but a thing; and he had absolutely no legal rights whatsoever. For that reason there could be no such thing as justice where a slave was concerned. Aristotle writes, "There can be no friendship nor justice towards inanimate things; indeed, not even towards a horse or an ox, nor yet towards a slave as a slave.

For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave." Varro divides the instruments of agriculture into three classes--the articulate, the inarticulate and the mute, "the articulate comprising the slaves, the inarticulate comprising the cattle, and the

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1 Peter 2:18-25

mute comprising the vehicles." The only difference between a slave and a beast or a farmyard cart was that a slave happened to be able to speak. Peter Chrysologus sums the matter up: "Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law." In regard to a slave, his master's will, and even his master's caprice, was the only law.

The dominant fact in the life of a slave was that, even if he was well treated, he remained a thing. He did not possess even the elementary rights of a person and for him justice did not even exist.

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1 Peter 2:18-25

THE PERIL OF THE NEW SITUATION

1 Peter 2:18-25 (Part 2)

Into this situation came Christianity with its message that every man was precious in the sight of God. The result was that within the Church the social barriers were broken down. Callistus, one of the earliest bishops of Rome, was a slave; and Perpetua, the aristocrat, and Felicitas, the slave-girl, met martyrdom hand in hand. The great majority of the early Christians were humble folk and many of them were slaves. It was quite possible in the early days that the slave should be the president of the congregation and the master a member of it. This was a new and revolutionary situation. It had its glory and it had its dangers. In this passage Peter is urging the slave to be a good slave and a faithful workman; for he sees two dangers.

(i) Suppose both master and servant became Christians; there arose the danger that the slave might presume upon the new relationship and make an excuse for shirking his work, assuming that since he and his master were both Christians, he could get away with anything. That situation is by no means at an end. There are still people who trade on the goodwill of a Christian master and think that the fact that both they and their employers are Christians gives them a right to dispense with discipline and punishment. But Peter is quite clear. The relationship between Christian and Christian does not abolish the relationship between man and man. The Christian must, indeed, be a better workman than anyone else. His Christianity is not a reason for claiming exemption from discipline; it should bring him under self-discipline and make him more conscientious than anyone else.

(ii) There was the danger that the new dignity which Christianity brought him would make the slave rebel and seek to abolish slavery altogether. Some students are puzzled that no New Testament writer ever pleads for the abolition of slavery or even says in so many words that it is wrong. The reason was simple. To have encouraged the slaves to rise against their masters would have been the way to speedy disaster. There had been such revolts before and they had always been quickly and savagely crushed. In any event, such teaching would merely have gained for Christianity the reputation of being a subversionary religion. There are some things which cannot happen quickly; there are some situations in which the leaven has to work and in which haste is the surest way to delay the desired end. The leaven of Christianity had to work in the world for many generations before the abolition of slavery became a practical possibility.

Peter was concerned that Christian slaves should demonstrate to the world that their Christianity did not make them disgruntled rebels but rather workmen who had found a new inspiration towards doing an honest day's work. It will still often happen that, when some situation cannot at the time be changed, the Christian duty is to be Christian within that situation and to accept what cannot be changed until the leaven has worked.

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1 Peter 2:18-25

THE NEW ATTITUDE TO WORK

1 Peter 2:18-25 (Part 3)

But Christianity did not leave the matter in that merely negative form. It introduced three great new principles into a man's attitude as a servant and a workman.

(i) Christianity introduced a new relationship between master and man. When Paul sent the runaway slave Onesimus back to Philemon, he did not for a moment suggest that Philemon should set Onesimus free. He did not suggest that Philemon should cease to be the master and that Onesimus should cease to be the slave. What he did say was that Philemon must receive Onesimus not now as a servant, but as a brother beloved (Phm.16). Christianity did not abolish social differences; but it introduced a new relationship of brotherhood in which these other differences were overpassed and transformed. Where there is real brotherhood, it does not matter if you call one man master and the other servant. There is between them a bond which transforms the necessary differences which the circumstances of life make necessary. The solution of the world's problems lies in the new relationship between man and man.

(ii) Christianity introduced a new attitude to work. It is the conviction of the New Testament that all work must be done for Jesus Christ. Paul writes: "Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col.3:17). "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1Cor.10:31). In the Christian ideal work is not done for an earthly master or for personal prestige or to make so much money; it is done for God. It is, of course, true that a man must work in order to earn a wage and he must work to satisfy a master; but beyond that there is for the Christian the conviction that his work must be done well enough to be able to show it to God without shame.

(iii) But when these great ideals were set against the situation in the early church--and the situation does not entirely change--one great question arose. Suppose a man has the Christian attitude to men and to work and is treated with injustice, insult and injury--what then? Peter's great answer is that this is exactly what happened to Jesus. He was none other than the Suffering Servant. 1Pet.2:21-25 are full of reminiscences and quotations of Isa.53, the supreme picture of the Suffering Servant of God, which came to life in Jesus. He was without sin and yet he was insulted and he suffered; but he accepted the insults and the suffering with serene love and bore them for the sins of mankind.

In so doing he left us an example that we should follow in his steps (1Pet.2:21). The word Peter uses for example is very vivid. It is *hupogrammos* (GSN5261), a word which comes from the way in which children were taught to write in the ancient world. *Hupogrammos* (GSN5261) can mean two things--an outline sketch which the learner had to fill in or the copyhead of copperplate handwriting in a writing exercise book which the child had to copy out on the lines below. Jesus gave us the pattern which we have to follow. If we have to suffer insult and injustice and injury, we have only to go through what he has already gone through. It may be that at the back of Peter's mind there was a glimpse of a tremendous truth. That suffering of Jesus was for the sake of man's sin; he suffered in order to bring men back to God. And it may be that, when the Christian suffers

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1 Peter 2:18-25

insult and injury with uncomplaining steadfastness and unfailing love, he shows such a life to others as will lead them to God.

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1 Peter 2:18-25

TWO PRECIOUS NAMES FOR GOD

1. THE SHEPHERD OF THE SOULS OF MEN

1 Peter 2:18-25 (Part 4)

In the last verse of this chapter we come upon two of the great names for God--the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls--as the King James Version has it.

(i) God is the Shepherd of the souls of men. The Greek is *poimen* (GSN4166) and shepherd is one of the oldest descriptions of God. The Psalmist has it in the best-loved of all the Psalms: "The Lord is my shepherd" (Ps.23:1). Isaiah has it: "He will feed his flock like a shepherd: he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isa.40:11).

The great king whom God was going to send to Israel would be the shepherd of his people. Ezekiel hears the promise of God: "And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them, and be their shepherd" (Eze.34:23; Eze.37:24).

This was the title which Jesus took to himself when he called himself the Good Shepherd and when he said that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (Jn.10:1-18). To Jesus the men and women who did not know God and who were waiting for what he could give them were like sheep without a shepherd (Mk.6:34). The great privilege given to the servant and the minister of Christ is to shepherd the flock of God (Jn.21:16; 1Pet.5:2).

It may be difficult for those of us who live in an industrial civilization to grasp the greatness of this picture; but in the East the picture would be very vivid, particularly in Judaea, where there was a narrow central plateau which held danger on either side. It was on this narrow tableland that the sheep grazed. Grass was sparse; there were no protecting walls; and the sheep wandered. The shepherd, therefore, had to be ceaselessly and sleeplessly on the watch lest harm should come to his flock.

In *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* Sir George Adam Smith describes the shepherd of Judaea. "With us, sheep are often left to themselves; but I do not remember ever to have seen in the East a flock of sheep without a shepherd. In such a landscape as Judaea, where a day's pasture is thinly scattered over an unfenced track of country, covered with delusive paths, still frequented by wild beasts, and rolling off into the desert, the man and his character are indispensable. On some high moor, across which at night the hyenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning upon his staff, and looking out over his scattered sheep, everyone of them on his heart, you understand why the shepherd of Judaea sprang to the front in his people's history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice."

This word shepherd tells us most vividly of the ceaseless vigilance and the self-sacrificing love of God for us who are his flock. "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps.100:3).

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1 Peter 2:18-25

TWO PRECIOUS NAMES FOR GOD

2. THE GUARDIAN OF OUR SOULS

1 Peter 2:18-25 (Part 5)

(ii) The King James Version speaks of God as the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls; but nowadays Bishop is an inadequate and misleading translation of the Greek (episkopos, GSN1985).

Episkopos (GSN1985) is a word with a great history. In Homer's Iliad, Hector, the great champion of the Trojans, is called the episkopos (GSN1985) who, during his lifetime, guarded the city of Troy and kept safe its noble wives and infants. Episkopos (GSN1985) is used of the gods who are the guardians of the treaties which men make and of the agreements to which men come, and who are the protectors of house and home. Justice, for instance, is the episkopos (GSN1985), who sees to it that a man shall pay the price for the wrong that he has done.

In Plato's Laws the Guardians of the state are those whose duty it is to oversee the games, the feeding and the education of the children that "they may be sound of hand and foot, and may in no wise, if possible, get their natures warped by their habits." The people whom Plato calls market-stewards are the episkopoi (GSN1985) who "supervise personal conduct, keeping an eye on temperate and outrageous behaviour, so as to punish him who needs punishment."

In Athenian law and administration the episkopoi (GSN1985) were governors and administrators and inspectors sent out to subject states to see that law and order and loyalty were observed. In Rhodes the main magistrates were five episkopoi (GSN1985) who presided over the good government and the law and order of the state.

Episkopos (GSN1985) is, therefore, a many-sided but always a noble word. It means the protector of public safety; the guardian of honour and honesty; the overseer of right education and of public morals; the administrator of public law and order.

So, then, to call God the episkopos (GSN1985) of our souls is to call him our Guardian, our Protector, our Guide, and our Director.

God is the Shepherd and the Guardian of our souls. In his love he cares for us; in his power he protects us; and in his wisdom he guides us in the right way.

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1 Peter 3:1-2

THE SILENT PREACHING OF A LOVELY LIFE

1 Peter 3:1-2

Likewise, you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that, if there are any who refuse to believe the word, they may be won for Christ without a word because they have seen your pure and reverent behaviour.

Peter turns to the domestic problems which Christianity inevitably produced. It was inevitable that one marriage partner might be won for Christ, while the other remained untouched by the appeal of the gospel; and such a situation inevitably had difficulties.

It may seem strange that Peter's advice to wives is six times as long as that to husbands. This is because the wife's position was far more difficult than that of the husband. If a husband became a Christian, he would automatically bring his wife with him into the Church and there would be no problem. But if a wife became a Christian while her husband did not, she was taking a step which was unprecedented and which produced the acutest problems.

In every sphere of ancient civilization, women had no rights at all. Under Jewish law a woman was a thing; she was owned by her husband in exactly the same way as he owned his sheep and his goats: on no account could she leave him, although he could dismiss her at any moment. For a wife to change her religion while her husband did not was unthinkable.

In Greek civilization the duty of the woman was "to remain indoors and to be obedient to her husband." It was the sign of a good woman that she must see as little, hear as little and ask as little as possible. She had no kind of independent existence and no kind of mind of her own, and her husband could divorce her almost at caprice, so long as he returned her dowry.

Under Roman law a woman had no rights. In law she remained for ever a child. When she was under her father she was under the patria potestas, the father's power, which gave the father the right even of life and death over her; and when she married she passed equally into the power of her husband. She was entirely subject to her husband and completely at his mercy. Cato the Censor, the typical ancient Roman, wrote: "If you were to catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her with impunity without a trial." Roman matrons were prohibited from drinking wine, and Egnatius beat his wife to death when he found her doing so. Sulpicius Gallus dismissed his wife because she had once appeared in the streets without a veil. Antistius Vetus divorced his wife because he saw her secretly speaking to a freed woman in public. Publius Sempronius Sophus divorced his wife because once she went to the public games.

The whole attitude of ancient civilization was that no woman could dare take any decision for herself.

What, then, must have been the problems of the wife who became a Christian while her husband remained faithful to the ancestral gods? It is almost impossible for us to realize what life must have been for the wife who was brave enough to become a Christian.

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1 Peter 3:1-2

What, then, is Peter's advice in such a case? We must first note what he does not advise.

He does not advise the wife to leave her husband. In this he takes exactly the same attitude as Paul takes (1Cor.7:13-16). Both Paul and Peter are quite sure that the Christian wife must remain with the heathen husband so long as he does not send her away. Peter does not tell the wife to preach or to argue. He does not tell her to insist that there is no difference between slave and freeman, Gentile and Jew, male and female, but that all are the same in the presence of the Christ whom she has come to know.

He tells her something very simple--nothing else than to be a good wife. It is by the silent preaching of the loveliness of her life that she must break down the barriers of prejudice and hostility, and win her husband for her new Master.

She must be submissive. It is not a spineless submission that is meant but, as someone has finely put it, a "voluntary selflessness." it is the submission which is based on the death of pride and the desire to serve. It is the submission not of fear but of perfect love.

She must be pure. There must be in her life a lovely chastity and fidelity founded on love.

She must be reverent. She must live in the conviction that the whole world is the Temple of God and that all life is lived in the presence of Christ.

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1 Peter 3:3-6

THE TRUE ADORNMENT

1 Peter 3:3-6

Let not your adornment be an outward thing of braided hair and ornaments of gold and wearing of robes, but let it be an adornment of the inward personality of the heart, wrought by the unfading loveliness of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For it was thus in days of old the holy women, who placed their hopes in God, adorned themselves in submission to their husbands. It was thus that Sara obeyed Abraham calling him, "Lord." And you have become her children, if you do good, and if you do not become a prey to fluttering fears.

Bengel speaks of "the labour bestowed on dress which consumes much time." Such labour is no modern thing. We have already seen that in the ancient world women had no part in public life whatsoever; they had nothing to pass their time; for that reason it was sometimes argued that they must be allowed an interest in dress and adornment. Cato the Censor insisted on simplicity; Lucius Valerius answered: "Why should men grudge women their ornaments and their dress? Women cannot hold public offices, or priesthoods, or gain triumphs; they have no public occupations. What, then, can they do but devote their time to adornment and to dress?" Undue interest in self-adornment was then, as it still is, a sign that the person who indulged in it had no greater things to occupy her mind.

The ancient moralists condemned undue luxury as much as the Christian teachers did. Quintilian, the Roman master of oratory, wrote: "A tasteful and magnificent dress, as the Greek poet tells us, lends added dignity to the wearer: but effeminate and luxurious apparel fails to adorn the body, and only reveals the sordidness of the mind." Epictetus, the philosopher, thinking of the narrow life to which women were condemned in the ancient world, said, "Immediately after they are fourteen, women are called 'ladies' by men. And so, when they see that they have nothing else than to be bedfellows of men, they begin to beautify themselves and put all their hopes on that. It is, therefore, worthwhile for us to take pains to make them understand that they are honoured for nothing else but only for appearing modest and self-respecting." Epictetus and Peter agree.

There is at least one passage in the Old Testament which lists the various items of female adornment and threatens the day of judgment in which they will be destroyed. The passage is Isa.3:18-24. It speaks of the "finery of the anklets, the headbands and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets, and the scarfs; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes and the amulets; the signet rings and nose rings; the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks and the handbags; the garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans and the veils."

In the world of the Greeks and the Romans it is interesting to collect the references to personal adornments. There were as many ways of dressing the hair as there were bees in Hybca. Hair was waved and dyed, sometimes black, more often auburn. Wigs were worn, especially blonde wigs, which are found even in the Christian catacombs; and hair to manufacture them was imported from Germany, and even from as far away as India. Hairbands, pins and combs were made of ivory, and boxwood, and tortoiseshell; and sometimes of gold, studded with gems.

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1 Peter 3:3-6

Purple was the favourite colour for clothes. One pound weight of the best Tyrian purple wool, strained twice through, cost 1,000 denarii, 43.50 British pounds. A tyrian cloak of the best purple cost well over 100 British pounds. In one year silks, pearls, scents and jewellery were imported from India to the value of 1,000,000 British pounds. Similar imports of luxury came from Arabia.

Diamonds, emeralds, topazes, opals and the sardonyx were favourite stones. Struma Nonius had a ring valued at 21,250 British pounds. Pearls were loved most of all. Julius Caesar bought for Servilia a pearl which cost him 65,250 British pounds. Earrings were made of pearls and Seneca spoke of women with two or three fortunes in their ears. Slippers were encrusted with them; Nero even had a room whose walls were covered with them. Pliny saw Lollia Paulina, wife of Caligula, wearing a dress so covered with pearls and emeralds that it had cost 450,000 British pounds.

Christianity came into a world of luxury and decadence combined.

In face of all this Peter pleads for the graces which adorn the heart, which are precious in the sight of God. These were the jewels which adorned the holy women of old. Isaiah had called Sara the mother of God's faithful people (Isa.51:2); and if Christian wives are adorned with the same graces of modesty, humility and chastity, they too will be her daughters and will be within the family of the faithful people of God.

A Christian wife of those times lived in a society where she would be tempted to senseless extravagance and where she might well go in fear of the caprices of her heathen husband; but she must live in selfless service, in goodness and in serene trust. That would be the best sermon she could preach to win her husband for Christ. There are few passages where the value of a lovely Christian life is so vividly stressed.

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1 Peter 3:7

THE HUSBAND'S OBLIGATION

1 Peter 3:7

Likewise, you husbands, live understandingly with your wives, remembering that women are the weaker sex and assigning honour to them as fellow-heirs of the grace of life, so that there may be no barrier to your prayers.

Short as this passage is, it has in it much of the very essence of the Christian ethic. That ethic is what may be called a reciprocal ethic. It never places all the responsibility on one side. If it speaks of the duties of slaves, it speaks also of the obligations of masters. If it speaks of the duty of children, it speaks also of the obligations of parents (compare Eph.6:1-9; Col.3:20-25; Col.4:1). Peter has just laid down the duty of wives; now he lays down the duty of husbands. A marriage must be based on reciprocal obligation. A marriage in which all the privileges are on one side and all the obligations on the other is bound to be imperfect with every chance of failure. This was a new conception in the ancient world. We have already noted the woman's total lack of rights then and quoted Cato's statement of the rights of the husband.

But we did not finish that quotation and we do so now: "If you were to catch your wife in an act of infidelity, you can kill her with impunity without a trial; but, if she were to catch you, she would not venture to touch you with her finger and, indeed, she has no right." In the Roman moral code all the obligation was on the wife and all the privilege with the husband. The Christian ethic never grants a privilege without a corresponding obligation.

What are the obligations of the husband?

(i) He must be understanding. He must be considerate and sensitive to the feelings of his wife. Somerset Maugham's mother was a very beautiful woman with the world at her feet but his father was unhandsome. Someone once asked her: "Why do you remain faithful to that ugly little man you married?" Her answer was: "Because he never hurts me." Understanding and considerateness had forged an unbreakable bond. The cruelty which is hardest to bear is often not deliberate but the product of sheer thoughtlessness.

(ii) He must be chivalrous. He must remember that women are the weaker sex and treat them with courtesy. In the ancient world chivalry to women was well-nigh unknown. It was, and still is, no uncommon sight in the East to see the man riding on a donkey while the woman trudged by his side. It was Christianity which introduced chivalry into the relationship between men and women.

(iii) He must remember that the woman has equal spiritual rights. She is a fellow-heir of the grace of life. Women did not share in the worship of the Greeks and the Romans. Even in the Jewish synagogue they had no share in the service, and in the orthodox synagogue still have none. When they were admitted to the synagogue at all, they were segregated from the men and hidden behind a screen. Here in Christianity emerged the revolutionary principle that women had equal spiritual rights and with that the relationship between the sexes was changed.

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1 Peter 3:7

(iv) Unless a man fulfils these obligations, there is a barrier between his prayers and God. As Bigg puts it: "The sighs of the injured wife come between the husband's prayers and God's hearing." Here is a great truth. Our relationships with God can never be right, if our relationships with our fellow-men are wrong. It is when we are at one with each other that we are at one with him.

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1 Peter 3:8-12

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (1)

1 Peter 3:8-12 (Part 1)

Finally, you must all be of one mind; you must have sympathy with each other and you must live in brotherly love; you must be compassionate and humble; you must not return evil for evil, nor insult for insult; on the contrary, you must return blessing; for it was to give and to inherit blessing that you were called.

He that would love life, And see good days, Let him keep his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking guile: Let him turn away from evil and do right; Let him seek peace, and pursue it, For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, And his ears are open to their prayer; But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil.

Peter, as it were, gathers together the great qualities of the Christian life.

(i) Right in the forefront he sets Christian unity. It is worth while to collect together the great New Testament passages about unity, in order to see how great a place it occupies in New Testament thought. The basis of the whole matter is in the words of Jesus who prayed for his people that they might all be one, as he and his Father were one (Jn.17:21-23). In the thrilling early days of the Church this prayer was fulfilled, for they were all of one heart and of soul (Ac.4:32). Over and over again Paul exhorts men to this unity and prays for it. He reminds the Christians of Rome that, though they are many, they are one body, and he pleads with them to be of one mind (Rom.12:4; Rom.12:16). In writing to the Christians of Corinth, he uses the same picture of the Christians as members of one body in spite of all their differing qualities and gifts (1Cor.12:12-31). He pleads with the quarrelling Corinthians that there should be no divisions among them and that they should be perfectly joined together in the same mind (1Cor.1:10). He tells them that strifes and divisions are fleshly things, marks that they are living on purely human standards, without the mind of Christ (1Cor.3:3). Because they have partaken of the one bread, they must be one body (1Cor.10:17). He tells them that they must be of one mind and must live in peace (2Cor.13:11). In Christ Jesus the dividing walls are down, and Jew and Greek are united into one (Eph.2:13-14). Christians must maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, remembering that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Eph.4:3-6). The Philippians must stand fast in one spirit, striving together with one mind for the faith of the gospel; they will make Paul's happiness complete, if they have the same love and have one accord and one mind; the quarrelling Euodias and Syntyche are urged to be of one mind in the Lord (Php.1:27; Php.2:2; Php.4:2).

All through the New Testament rings this plea for Christian unity. It is more than a plea; it is an announcement that no man can live the Christian life unless in his personal relationships he is at unity with his fellow-men; and that the Church cannot be truly Christian if there are divisions within it. It is tragic to realize how far men are from realizing this unity in their personal lives and how far the Church is from realizing it within herself. C. E. B. Cranfield writes so finely of this that we cannot do other than quote his whole comment in full, lengthy though it is: "The New Testament never treats this agreeing in Christ as an unnecessary though highly desirable spiritual

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1 Peter 3:8-12

luxury, but as something essential to the true being of the Church. Divisions, whether disagreements between individual members or the existence of factions and parties and--how much more!--our present-day denominations, constitute a calling in question of the Gospel itself and a sign that those who are involved are carnal.

The more seriously we take the New Testament, the more urgent and painful becomes our sense of the sinfulness of the divisions, and the more earnest our prayers and strivings after the peace and unity of the Church on earth. That does not mean that the like-mindedness we are to strive for is to be a drab uniformity of the sort beloved of bureaucrats. Rather is it to be a unity in which powerful tensions are held together by an over-mastering loyalty, and strong antipathies of race and colour, temperament and taste, social position and economic interest, are overcome in common worship and common obedience.

Such unity will only come when Christians are humble and bold enough to lay hold on the unity already given in Christ and to take it more seriously than their own self-importance and sin, and to make of these deep differences of doctrine, which originate in our imperfect understanding of the Gospel and which we dare not belittle, not an excuse for letting go of one another or staying apart, but rather an incentive for a more earnest seeking in fellowship together to hear and obey the voice of Christ." There speaks the prophetic voice to our modern condition.

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1 Peter 3:8-12

THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (2)

1 Peter 3:8-12 (Part 2)

(ii) Second, Peter sets sympathy. Here again the whole New Testament urges this duty upon us. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep (Rom.12:15). When one member of the body suffers all the other members suffer with it; and when one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it (1Cor.12:26), and it must be so with Christians, who are the body of Christ. One thing is clear, sympathy and selfishness cannot coexist. So long as the self is the most important thing in the world, there can be no such thing as sympathy; sympathy depends on the willingness to forget self and to identify oneself with the pains and sorrows of others. Sympathy comes to the heart when Christ reigns there.

(iii) Third, Peter sets brotherly love. Again the matter goes back to the words of Jesus. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.... By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn.13:34-35). Here the New Testament speaks with unmistakable definiteness and with almost frightening directness. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer" (1Jn.3:14-15). "If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1Jn.4:20). The simple fact is that love of God and love of man go hand in hand; the one cannot exist without the other. The simplest test of the reality of the Christianity of a man or a Church is whether or not it makes them love their fellow-men.

(iv) Fourth, Peter sets compassion. There is a sense in which pity is in danger of becoming a lost virtue. The conditions of our own age tend to blunt the edge of the mind to sensitiveness in pity. As C. E. B. Cranfield puts it: "We got used to hearing on the radio of a thousand-bomber raid as we ate our breakfast. We have got used to the idea of millions of people becoming refugees." We can read of the thousands of casualties on the roads with no reaction within our hearts, forgetting that each means a broken body or a broken heart for someone. It is easy to lose the sense of pity and still easier to be satisfied with a sentimentalism which feels a moment's comfortable sorrow and does nothing. Pity is of the very essence of God and compassion of the very being of Jesus Christ; a pity so great that God sent his only Son to die for men, a compassion so intense that it took Christ to the Cross. There can be no Christianity without compassion.

(v) Fifth, Peter sets humility. Christian humility comes from two things. It comes, first, from the sense of creatureliness. The Christian is humble because he is constantly aware of his utter dependence on God and that of himself he can do nothing. It comes, second, from the fact that the Christian has a new standard of comparison. It may well be that when he compares himself with his fellow-men, he has nothing to fear from the comparison. But the Christian's standard of comparison is Christ, and, compared with his sinless perfection, he is ever in default. When the Christian remembers his dependence on God and keeps before him the standard of Christ, he must remain humble.

(vi) Lastly, and as a climax, Peter sets forgiveness. It is to receive forgiveness from God and to give forgiveness to men that the Christian is called. The one cannot exist without the other; it is

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1 Peter 3:8-12

only when we forgive others their sins against us that we are forgiven our sins against God (Matt.6:12,14,15). The mark of the Christian is that he forgives others as God has forgiven him (Eph.4:32).

As was natural for him, Peter sums the matter up by quoting Ps.34, with its picture of the man whom God receives and the man whom God rejects.

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1 Peter 3:13-15a

THE CHRISTIAN'S SECURITY IN A THREATENING WORLD

1 Peter 3:13-15a

Who will hurt you, if you are ardent lovers of goodness? Even if you do have to suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. Have no fear of them; do not be troubled; but in your hearts give Christ a unique place.

In this passage we can see how Peter was soaked in the Old Testament; there are two Old Testament foundations for it. It is not so much that he actually quotes them, as that he could not have written the passage at all unless the Old Testament had been in his mind. The very first sentence is a reminiscence of Isa.50:9: "Behold, the Lord God helps me; who will declare me guilty?" Again, when Peter is talking about the banishing of fear, he is thinking of Isa.8:13, "But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."

There are three great conceptions in this passage.

(i) Peter begins by insisting on a passionate love of goodness. A man may have more than one attitude to goodness. It may be to him a burden or a bore or something which he vaguely desires but the price of which he is not willing to pay in terms of effort. The word we have translated an ardent lover is zelotes (GSN2207); which is often translated Zealot. The Zealots were the fanatical patriots, who were pledged to liberate their native land by every possible means. They were prepared to take their lives in their hands, to sacrifice ease and comfort, home and loved ones, in their passionate love for their country. What Peter is saying is: "Love goodness with that passionate intensity with which the most fanatical patriot loves his country." Sir John Seeley said, "No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue safe which is not enthusiastic." It is only when a man falls in love with goodness that the wrong things lose their fascination and their power.

(ii) Peter goes on to speak about the Christian attitude to suffering. It has been well pointed out that we are involved in two kinds of suffering. There is the suffering in which we are involved because of our humanity. Because we are men, there come physical suffering, death, sorrow, distress of mind and weariness and pain of body. But there is also the suffering in which we may be involved because of our Christianity. There may be unpopularity, persecution, sacrifice for principle and the deliberate choosing of the difficult way, the necessary discipline and toil of the Christian life. Yet the Christian life has a certain blessedness which runs through it all. What is the reason for it?

(iii) Peter's answer is this. The Christian is the man to whom God and Jesus Christ are the supremacies in life; his relationship to God in Christ is life's greatest value. If a man's heart is set on earthly things, possessions, happiness, pleasure, ease and comfort, he is of all men most vulnerable. For, in the nature of things, he may lose these things at any moment. Such a man is desperately easily hurt. On the other hand, if he gives to Jesus Christ the unique place in his life, the most precious thing for him is his relationship to God and nothing can take that from him. Therefore, he is completely secure.

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1 Peter 3:13-15a

So, then, even in suffering the Christian is still blessed. When the suffering is for Christ, he is demonstrating his loyalty to Christ and is sharing his sufferings. When the suffering is part of the human situation, it still cannot despoil him of the most precious things in life. No man escapes suffering, but for the Christian suffering cannot touch the things which matter most of all.

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1 Peter 3:15b-16

THE CHRISTIAN ARGUMENT FOR CHRIST

1 Peter 3:15b-16

Always be prepared to make your defence to anyone who calls you to account concerning the hope that is in you; but do so with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame.

In a hostile and suspicious world it was inevitable that the Christian would be called upon to defend the faith he held and the hope by which he lived. Here Peter has certain things to say about this Christian defence.

(i) It must be reasonable. It is a *logos* (GSN3056) that the Christian must give, and a *logos* (GSN3056) is a reasonable and intelligent statement of his position. A cultivated Greek believed that it was the mark of an intelligent man that he was able to give and to receive a *logos* (GSN3056) concerning his actions and belief. As Bigg puts it, he was expected "intelligently and temperately to discuss matters of conduct." To do so we must know what we believe; we must have thought it out; we must be able to state it intelligently and intelligibly. Our faith must be a first-hand discovery and not a second-hand story. It is one of the tragedies of the modern situation that there are so many Church members who, if they were asked what they believe, could not tell, and who, if they were asked why they believe it, would be equally helpless. The Christian must go through the mental and spiritual toil of thinking out his faith, so that he can tell what he believes and why.

(ii) His defence must be given with gentleness. There are many people who state their beliefs with a kind of arrogant belligerence. Their attitude is that anyone who does not agree with them is either a fool or a knave and they seek to ram their beliefs down other people's throats. The case for Christianity must be presented with winsomeness and with love, and with that wise tolerance which realizes that it is not given to any man to possess the whole truth. "There are as many ways to the stars as there are men to climb them." Men may be wooed into the Christian faith when they cannot be bullied into it.

(iii) His defence must be given with reverence. That is to say, any argument in which the Christian is involved must be carried on in a tone which God can hear with joy. No debates have been so acrimonious as theological debates; no differences have caused such bitterness as religious differences. In any presentation of the Christian case and in any argument for the Christian faith, the accent should be the accent of love.

(iv) The only compelling argument is the argument of the Christian life. Let a man so act that his conscience is clear. Let him meet criticism with a life which is beyond reproach. Such conduct will silence slander and disarm criticism. "A saint," as someone has said, "is someone whose life makes it easier to believe in God."

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1 Peter 3:17-4:6

THE SAVING WORK OF CHRIST

1 Peter 3:17-4:6

For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be the will of God, than to suffer for doing wrong. For Christ also died once and for all for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but he was raised to life in the Spirit, in which also he went and preached to the spirits who are in prison, the spirits who were once upon a time disobedient, in the time when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built, in which some few--that is, eight souls--were brought in safety through the water. And water now saves you, who were symbolically represented in Noah and his company, I mean the water of baptism; and baptism is not merely the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge to God of a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, because he went to heaven, after angels and authorities and power had been made subject to him.

Since, then, Christ suffered in the flesh, you too must arm yourselves with the same conviction that he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, and as a result of this the aim of such a man now is to spend the time that remains to him of life in the flesh no longer in obedience to human passions, but in obedience to the will of God. For the time that is past is sufficient to have done what the Gentiles will to do, to have lived a life of licentiousness, lust, drunkenness, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatry. They think it strange when you do not rush to join them in the same flood of profligacy and they abuse you for not doing so. They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, so that, although they have already been judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the Spirit like God.

This is not only one of the most difficult passages in Peter's letter, it is one of the most difficult in the whole New Testament; and it is also the basis of one of the most difficult articles in the creed, "He descended into Hell." It is, therefore, better first of all to read it as a whole and then to study it in its various sections.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Peter 3:17-18a

THE EXAMPLE OF THE WORK OF CHRIST

1 Peter 3:17-18a

For, it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be the will of God, than to suffer for doing wrong. For Christ also died once and for all for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

Although this passage is one of the most difficult in the New Testament, it begins with something which anyone can understand. The point that Peter is making is that, even if the Christian is compelled to suffer unjustly for his faith, he is only walking the way that his Lord and Saviour has already walked. The suffering Christian must always remember that he has a suffering Lord. In the narrow compass of these two verses Peter has the greatest and the deepest things to say about the work of Christ.

(i) He lays it down that the work of Christ was unique and never need be repeated. Christ died once and for all for sins. The New Testament says this same thing often. When Christ died, he died once and for all (Rom.6:10). The priestly sacrifices in the Temple have to be repeated daily but Christ made the perfect sacrifice once and for all when he offered himself up (Heb.7:27). Christ was once and for all offered to bear the sin of many (Heb.9:28). We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once and for all (Heb.10:10). The New Testament is completely sure that on the Cross something happened which never needs to happen again and that in that happening sin is finally defeated. On the Cross God dealt with man's sin in a way which is adequate for all sin, for all men, for all time.

(ii) He lays it down that that sacrifice was for sin. Christ died once and for all for sins. This again is frequently said in the New Testament. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (1Cor.15:3). Christ gave himself for our sins (Gal.1:4). The function of the High Priest, and Jesus Christ is the perfect High Priest, is to offer sacrifice for sins (Heb.5:1,3). He is the expiation for our sins (1Jn.2:2).

The Greek for for sins is either *huper* (GSN5228) or *peri* (GSN4012) *hamartion* (GSN0266). It so happens that in the Greek version of the Old Testament the regular phrase for a sin-offering is *peri* (GSN4012) *hamartias* (GSN0266) (*Hamartias*, GSN0266, is the singular of *hamartion*, GSN0266), as, for instance, in Lev.5:7 and Lev.6:30. That is to say, Peter is laying it down that the death of Christ is the sacrifice which atones for the sin of men.

We may put it this way. Sin is that which interrupts the relationship which should exist between God and men. The object of sacrifice is to restore that lost relationship. The death of Christ upon the Cross, however we explain it, avails to restore the lost relationship between God and man. As Charles Wesley put it in verse:

No condemnation now I dread:
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,

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1 Peter 3:17-18a

And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

It may be that we will never agree in our theories of what exactly happened on the Cross, for, indeed, as Charles Wesley said in that same hymn: "'Tis mystery all!" But on one thing we can agree--through what happened there we may enter into a new relationship with God.

(iii) He lays it down that that sacrifice was vicarious. Christ died once and for all for sins, the just for the unjust. That the just should suffer for the unjust is an extraordinary thing. At first sight it looks like injustice. As Edwin H. Robertson put it: "Only forgiveness without reason can match sin without excuse." The suffering of Christ was for us; and the mystery is that he who deserved no suffering bore that suffering for us who deserved to suffer. He sacrificed himself to restore our lost relationship with God.

(iv) He lays it down that the work of Christ was to bring us to God. Christ died once and for all for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. The word for "to bring" is *prosagein* (GSN4317). It has two vivid backgrounds.

(a) It has a Jewish background. It is used in the Old Testament of bringing to God those who are to be priests. It is God's instruction: "You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tent of meeting" (Exo.29:4). The point is this--as the Jews saw it, only the priests had the right of close access to God. In the Temple the layman might come so far; he could pass through the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of the Israelites--but there he must stop. Into the Court of the Priests, into the nearer presence of God, he could not go; and of the priests, only the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies. But Jesus Christ brings us to God; he opens the way for all men to his nearer presence.

(b) It has a Greek background. In the New Testament the corresponding noun *prosagoge* (GSN4318) is three times used. *Prosagein* (GSN4317) means to bring in; *prosagoge* (GSN4318) means the right of access, the result of the bringing in. Through Christ we have access to grace (Rom.5:2). Through him we have access to God the Father (Eph.2:18). Through him we have boldness and access and confidence to come to God (Eph.3:12). In Greek this had a specialized meaning. At the court of kings there was an official called the *prosagogeus*, the introducer, the giver of access, and it was his function to decide who should be admitted to the king's presence and who should be kept out. He, as it were, held the keys of access. It is Jesus Christ, through what he did, who gives men access to God.

(v) When we go beyond these two verses, further into the passage, we can add two more great truths to Peter's view of the work of Christ. In 1Pet.3:19 he says that Jesus preached to the spirits in prison; and in 1Pet.4:6 he says that the gospel was preached to them that are dead. As we shall go on to see, this most probably means that in the time between his death and his resurrection Jesus actually preached the gospel in the abode of the dead; that is to say, to those who in their lifetime had never had the opportunity to hear it. Here is a tremendous thought. It means that the work of Christ is infinite in its range. It means that no man who ever lived is outside the grace of God.

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1 Peter 3:17-18a

(vi) Peter sees the work of Christ in terms of complete triumph. He says that after his resurrection Jesus went into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to him (1Pet.3:22). The meaning is that there is nothing in earth and heaven outside the empire of Christ. To all men he brought the new relationship between man and God; in his death he even brought the good news to the dead; in his resurrection he conquered death; even the angelic and the demonic powers are subject to him; and he shares the very power and throne of God. Christ the sufferer has become Christ the victor; Christ the crucified has become Christ the crowned.

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1 Peter 3:18b-20; 4:6

THE DESCENT INTO HELL (1)

1 Peter 3:18b-20; 1Pet.4:6 (Part 1)

He was put to death in the flesh, but he was raised to life in the Spirit, in which also he went and preached to the spirits who are in prison, the spirits who were once upon a time disobedient in the time when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built.... For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, so that, although they have already been judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God.

We have already said that we are here face to face with one of the most difficult passages, not only in Peter's letter, but in the whole New Testament; and, if we are to grasp what it means, we must follow Peter's own advice and gird up the loins of our mind to study it.

This passage has lodged in the creed in the phrase: "He descended into hell." We must first note that this phrase is very misleading. The idea of the New Testament is not that Jesus descended into hell but that he descended into Hades. Ac.2:27, as all the newer translations correctly show, should be translated not: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," but, "Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades." The difference is this. Hell is the place of the punishment of the wicked; Hades was the place where all the dead went.

The Jews had a very shadowy conception of life beyond the grave. They did not think in terms of heaven and of hell but of a shadowy world, where the spirits of men moved like grey ghosts in an everlasting twilight and where there was neither strength nor joy. Such was Hades, into which the spirits of all men went after death. Isaiah writes: "For Sheol cannot thank thee, death cannot praise thee; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness" (Isa.38:18). The Psalmist wrote: "In death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?" (Ps.6:5). "What profit is there in my death if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?" (Ps.30:9). "Dost thou work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise thee? Is thy steadfast love declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in Abaddon? Are thy wonders known in the darkness, or thy saving help in the land of forgetfulness?" (Ps.88:10-12). "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence" (Ps.115:17). "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going" (Ecc.9:10). The Jewish conception of the world after death was of this grey world of shadows and forgetfulness, in which men were separated from life and light and God.

As time went on, there emerged the idea of stages and divisions in this shadowland. For some it was to last for ever; but for others it was a kind of prison-house in which they were held until the final judgment of God's wrath should blast them (Isa.24:21-22; 2Pet.2:4; Rev.20:1-7). So, then, it must first of all be remembered that this whole matter is to be thought of, not in terms of hell, as we understand the word, but in terms of Christ's going to the dead in their shadowy world.

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1 Peter 3:18b-20; 4:6

THE DESCENT INTO HELL (2)

1 Peter 3:18b-20; 1Pet.4:6 (Part 2)

This doctrine of the descent into Hades, as we must now call it, is based on two phrases in our present passage. It says that Jesus went and preached to the spirits who are in prison (1Pet.3:19); and it speaks of the gospel being preached to the dead (1Pet.4:6). In regard to this doctrine there have always been differing attitudes amongst thinkers.

(i) There are those who wish to eliminate it altogether. There is the attitude of elimination. Some wish to eliminate it altogether and attempt to do so along two lines.

(a) Peter says that in the Spirit Christ preached to the spirits in prison, who were disobedient in the time when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah, when the ark was being built. It is argued that what this means is that it was in the time of Noah himself that Christ did this preaching; that in the Spirit long ages before this he made his appeal to the wicked men of Noah's day. This would completely do away with the idea of the descent into Hades. Many great scholars have accepted that view; but we do not think it is the view which comes naturally from Peter's words.

(b) If we look at Moffatt's translation, we find something quite different. He translates: "In the flesh he (Christ) was put to death, but he came to life in the Spirit. It was in the Spirit that Enoch also went and preached to the imprisoned spirits who had disobeyed at the time when God's patience held out during the construction of the ark in the days of Noah." How does Moffatt arrive at this translation?

The name of Enoch does not appear in any Greek manuscript. But in the consideration of the text of any Greek author, scholars sometimes use a process called emendation. They think that there is something wrong with the text as it stands, that some scribe has perhaps copied it wrongly; and they, therefore, suggest that some word should be changed or added. In this passage Rendel Harris suggested that the word Enoch was missed out in the copying of Peter's writing and should be put back in.

(Although it involves the use of Greek some readers may be interested to see how Rendel Harris arrived at this famous emendation. In the top line in italic print, we have set down the Greek of the passage in English lettering and beneath each Greek word its English translation:

thanatotheis (GSN2289)	men (GSN3303)	sarki (GSN4561)
having been put to death		in the flesh

zoopoiethis (GSN2227)	de (GSN1161)	pneumati (GSN4151)
having been raised to life		in the Spirit

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1 Peter 3:18b-20; 4:6

en (GSN1722) ho (GSN3588) kai (GSN2532) tois (GSN3588)
in which also to the

en (GSN1722) phulake (GSN5438) pneumasi (GSN4151)
in prison spirits

poreutheis (GSN4198) ekeruxen (GSN2784)
having gone he preached.

(Men (GSN3303) and de (GSN1161) are what are called particles; they are not translated but merely mark the contrast between sarki, GSN4561, and pneumati, GSN4151). It was Rendel Harris' suggestion that between kai (GSN2532) and tois (GSN3588) the word Enoch (GSN1802) had dropped out. His explanation was that, since most manuscript copying was done to dictation, scribes were very liable to miss words which followed each other, if they sounded very similar. In this passage:

en (GSN1722) ho (GSN3588) kai (GSN2532) and Enoch (GSN1802)

sound very much alike, and Rendel Harris thought it very likely that Enoch (GSN1802) had been mistakenly omitted for that reason).

What reason is there for bringing Enoch (GSN1802) into this passage at all? He has always been a fascinating and mysterious person. "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him" (Gen.5:24). In between the Old and New Testaments many legends sprang up about Enoch and famous and important books were written under his name. One of the legends was that Enoch, though a man, acted as "God's envoy" to the angels who sinned by coming to earth and lustfully seducing mortal women (Gen.6:2). In the Book of Enoch it is said that he was sent down from heaven to announce to these angels their final doom (Enoch 12: 1) and that he proclaimed that for them, because of their sin, there was neither peace nor forgiveness ever (Enoch 12 and 13).

So then, according to Jewish legend, Enoch did go to Hades and preach doom to the fallen angels. And Rendel Harris thought that this passage referred, not to Jesus, but to Enoch, and Moffatt so far agreed with him as to put Enoch into his translation. That is an extremely interesting and ingenious suggestion but without doubt it must be rejected. There is no evidence for it at all; and it is not natural to bring in Enoch, for the whole picture is of the work of Christ.

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1 Peter 3:18b-20; 4:6

THE DESCENT INTO HELL (3)

1 Peter 3:18b-20; 1Pet.4:6 (Part 3)

We have seen that the attempt at the elimination of this passage fails.

(ii) The second attitude is limitation. This attitude--and it is that of some very great New Testament interpreters--believes that Peter is indeed saying that Jesus went to Hades and preached, but that he by no means preached to all the inhabitants of Hades. Different interpreters limit that preaching in different ways.

(a) It is argued that Jesus preached in Hades only to the spirits of the men who were disobedient in the days of Noah. Those who hold this view often go on to argue that, since these sinners were desperately disobedient, so much so that God sent the flood and destroyed them (Gen.6:12-13), we may believe that no man is outside the mercy of God. They were the worst of all sinners and yet they were given another chance of repentance; therefore, the worst of men still have a chance in Christ.

(b) It is argued that Jesus preached to the fallen angels, and preached, not salvation, but final and awful doom. We have already mentioned these angels. Their story is told in Gen.6:1-8. They were tempted by the beauty of mortal women; they came to earth, seduced them and begat children; and because of their action, it is inferred, the wickedness of man was great and his thoughts were always evil. 2Pet.2:4 speaks of these sinning angels as being imprisoned in hell, awaiting judgment. It was to them that Enoch did, in fact, preach; and there are those who think that what this passage means is not that Christ preached mercy and another chance; but that, in token of his complete triumph, he preached terrible doom to those angels who had sinned.

(c) It is argued that Christ preached only to those who had been righteous and that he led them out of Hades into the paradise of God. We have seen how the Jews believed that all the dead went to Hades, the shadowy land of forgetfulness. The argument is that before Christ that was indeed so but he opened the gates of heaven to mankind; and, when he did so, he went to Hades and told the glad news to all the righteous men of all past generations and led them out to God. That is a magnificent picture. Those who hold this view often go on to say that, because of Christ, there is now no time spent in the shadows of Hades and the way to paradise is open as soon as this world closes on us.

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1 Peter 3:18b-20; 4:6

THE DESCENT INTO HELL (4)

1 Peter 3:18b-20; 1Pet.4:6 (Part 4)

(iii) There is the attitude that what Peter is saying is that Jesus Christ, between his death and resurrection, went to the world of the dead and preached the gospel there. Peter says that Jesus Christ was put to death in the flesh but raised to life in the Spirit, and that it was in the Spirit that he so preached. The meaning is that Jesus lived in a human body and was under all the limitations of time and space in the days of his flesh; and died with that body broken and bleeding upon the Cross. But when he rose again, he rose with a spiritual body, in which he was rid of the necessary weaknesses of humanity and liberated from the necessary limitations of time and space. It was in this spiritual condition of perfect freedom that the preaching to the dead took place.

As it stands this doctrine is stated in categories which are outworn. It speaks of the descent into Hades and the very word descent suggests a three-storey universe in which heaven is localized above the sky and Hades beneath the earth. But, laying aside the physical categories of this doctrine, we can find in it truths which are eternally valid and precious, three in particular.

(a) If Christ descended into Hades, then his death was no sham. It is not to be explained in terms of a swoon on the Cross, or anything like that. He really experienced death, and rose again. At its simplest, the doctrine of the descent into Hades lays down the complete identity of Christ with our human condition, even to the experience of death.

(b) If Christ descended into Hades, it means that his triumph is universal. This, in fact, is a truth which is ingrained into the New Testament. It is Paul's dream that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth (Php.2:10). In the Revelation the song of praise comes from every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth and under the earth (Rev.5:13). He who ascended into Heaven is he who first descended into the lower parts of the earth (Eph.4:9-10). The total submission of the universe to Christ is woven into the thought of the New Testament.

(c) If Christ descended into Hades and preached there, there is no corner of the universe into which the message of grace has not come. There is in this passage the solution of one of the most haunting questions raised by the Christian faith--what is to happen to those who lived before Jesus Christ and to those to whom the gospel never came? There can be no salvation without repentance but how can repentance come to those who have never been confronted with the love and holiness of God? If there is no other name by which men may be saved, what is to happen to those who never heard it? This is the point that Justin Martyr fastened on long ago: "The Lord, the Holy God of Israel, remembered his dead, those sleeping in the earth, and came down to them to tell them the good news of salvation." The doctrine of the descent into Hades conserves the precious truth that no man who ever lived is left without a sight of Christ and without the offer of the salvation of God.

Many in repeating the creed have found the phrase "He descended into hell" either meaningless or bewildering, and have tacitly agreed to set it on one side and forget it. It may well be that we

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1 Peter 3:18b-20; 4:6

ought to think of this as a picture painted in terms of poetry rather than a doctrine stated in terms of theology. But it contains these three great truths--that Jesus Christ not only tasted death but drained the cup of death, that the triumph of Christ is universal and that there is no corner of the universe into which the grace of God has not reached.

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1 Peter 3:18-22

THE BAPTISM OF THE CHRISTIAN

1 Peter 3:18-22

For Christ also died once and for all for our sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but he was raised to life in the Spirit, in which also he went and preached to the spirits who are in prison, the spirits who were once upon a time disobedient in the time when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built, in which some few--that is, eight souls--were brought in safety through the water. And water now saves you, who were symbolically represented in Noah and his company, I mean the water of baptism; and baptism is not merely the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge to God of a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, because he went to heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been made subject to him.

Peter has been speaking about the wicked men who were disobedient and corrupt in the days of Noah; they were ultimately destroyed. But in the destruction by the flood eight people--Noah and his wife, his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their wives--were brought to safety in the ark. Immediately the idea of being brought to safety through the water turns Peter's thoughts to Christian baptism, which is also a bringing to safety through the water. What Peter literally says is that baptism is an antitype of Noah and his people in the ark.

This word introduces us to a special way of looking at the Old Testament. There are two closely connected words. There is *tupos* (GSN5179), type, which means a seal, and there is *antitupos* (GSN0499), antitype, which means the impression of the seal. Clearly, between the seal and its impression there is the closest possible correspondence. So there are people and events and customs in the Old Testament which are types, and which find their antitypes in the New Testament. The Old Testament event or person is like the seal; the New Testament event or person is like the impression; the two answer to each other. We might put it that the Old Testament event symbolically represents and foreshadows the New Testament event. The science of finding types and antitypes in the Old and the New Testaments is very highly developed. But to take very simple and obvious examples, the Passover Lamb and the scapegoat, who bore the sins of the people, are types of Jesus; and the work of the High Priest in making sacrifice for the sins of the people is a type of his saving work. Here Peter sees the bringing safely through the waters of Noah and his family as a type of baptism.

In this passage Peter has three great things to say about baptism. It must be remembered that at this stage of the Church's history we are still dealing with adult baptism, the baptism of people who had come straight from heathenism into Christianity and who were taking upon themselves a new way of life.

(i) Baptism is not merely a physical cleansing; it is a spiritual cleansing of the whole heart and soul and life. Its effect must be on a man's very soul and on his whole life.

(ii) Peter calls baptism the pledge of a good conscience to God (1Pet.3:21). The word Peter uses for pledge is *eperotema* (GSN1906). In every business contract there was a definite question and

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1 Peter 3:18-22

answer which made the contract binding. The question was: "Do you accept the terms of this contract, and bind yourself to observe them?" And the answer, before witnesses was: "Yes." Without that question and answer the contract was not valid. The technical word for that question and answer clause is *epitoma* (GSN1906) in Greek, *stipulatio* in Latin.

Peter is, in effect, saying that in baptism God said to the man coming direct from heathenism: "Do you accept the terms of my service? Do you accept its privileges and promises, and do you undertake its responsibilities and its demands?" And in the act of being baptized the man answered: "Yes."

Some use the word sacrament. Sacrament is derived from the Latin *sacramentum*, which means a soldier's oath of loyalty on entering the army. Here we have basically the same picture. We cannot very well apply this question and answer in infant baptism, unless it be to the parents; but, as we have said, baptism in the very early church was of adult men and women coming spontaneously from heathenism into the Church. The modern parallel is entering upon full membership of the Church. When we enter upon Church membership, God asks us: "Do you accept the conditions of my service, with all privileges and all its responsibilities, with all its promises and all its demands?" and we answer; "Yes." It would be well if all were clearly to understand what they are doing when they take upon themselves membership of the Church.

(iii) The whole idea and effectiveness of baptism is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the grace of the Risen Lord which cleanses us; it is to the Risen, Living Lord that we pledge ourselves; it is to the Risen, Living Lord that we look for strength to keep the pledge that we have given. Once again, where infant baptism is the practice, we must take these great conceptions and apply them to the time when we enter upon full membership of the Church.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Peter 4:1-5

THE OBLIGATION OF THE CHRISTIAN

1 Peter 4:1-5

Since then, Christ suffered in the flesh, you too must arm yourselves with the same conviction, that he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, and as a result of this the aim of such a man now is to spend the time that remains to him of life in obedience to the will of God. For the time that is past is sufficient to have done what the Gentiles will to do, to have lived a life of licentiousness, lust, drunkenness, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatry. They think it strange when you do not rush to join them in the same flood of profligacy, and they abuse you for not doing so. They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

The Christian is committed to abandon the ways of heathenism and to live as God would have him to do.

Peter says, "He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." What exactly does he mean? There are three distinct possibilities.

(i) There is a strong line in Jewish thought that suffering is in itself a great purifier. In the Apocalypse of Baruch the writer, speaking of the experiences of the people of Israel, says, "Then, therefore, were they chastened that they might be sanctified" (13: 10). In regard to the purification of the spirits of men Enoch says, "And in proportion as the burning of their body becomes severe, a corresponding change will take place in their spirit for ever and ever; for before the Lord of spirits there will be none to utter a lying word" (67: 9). The terrible sufferings of the time are described in 2 Maccabees, and the writer says, "I beseech those that read this book that they be not discouraged, terrified or shaken for these calamities, but that they judge these punishments not to be for destruction but for chastening of our nation. For it is a token of his great goodness, when evil-doers are not suffered to go on in their ways any long time, but forthwith punished. For not as with other nations, whom the Lord patiently forbearth to punish, till the day of judgment arrive, and they be come to the fullness of their sins, so dealeth he with us, lest that, being come to the height of sin, afterwards he should take vengeance on us. And though he punish sinners with adversity, yet doth he never forsake his people" (2Macc.6:12-16). The idea is that suffering sanctifies and that not to be punished is the greatest punishment which God can lay upon a man. "Blessed is the man whom thou dost chasten, O Lord," said the Psalmist (Ps.94:12). "Happy is the man whom God reproves," said Eliphaz (Jb.5:17). "For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Heb.12:6).

If this is the idea, it means that he who has been disciplined by suffering has been cured of sin. That is a great thought. It enables us, as Browning said, "to welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough." It enables us to thank God for the experiences which hurt but save the soul. But great as this thought is, it is not strictly relevant here.

(ii) Bigg thinks that Peter is speaking in terms of the experience which his people had of suffering for the Christian faith. He puts it this way: "He who has suffered in meekness and in fear, he who has endured all that persecution can do to him rather than join in wicked ways can be trusted to do

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1 Peter 4:1-5

right; temptation has manifestly no power over him." The idea is that if a man has come through persecution and not denied the name of Christ, he comes out on the other side with a character so tested and a faith so strengthened, that temptation cannot touch him any more.

Again there is a great thought here, the thought that every trial and every temptation are meant to make us stronger and better. Every temptation resisted makes the next easier to resist; and every temptation conquered makes us better able to overcome the next attack. But again it is doubtful if this thought comes in very relevantly here.

(iii) The third explanation is most probably the right one. Peter has just been talking about baptism. Now the great New Testament picture of baptism is in Rom.6. In that chapter Paul says that the experience of baptism is like being buried with Christ in death and raised with him to newness of life. We think that this is what Peter is thinking of here. He has spoken of baptism; and now he says, "He who in baptism has shared the sufferings and the death of Christ, is risen to such newness of life with him that sin has no more dominion over him" (Rom.6:14). Again we must remember that this is the baptism of the man who is voluntarily coming over from paganism into Christianity. In that act of baptism he is identified with Christ; he shares his sufferings and even his death; and he shares his risen life and power, and is, therefore, victor over sin.

When that has happened, a man has said good-bye to his former way of life. The rule of pleasure, pride and passion is gone, and the rule of God has begun. This was by no means easy. A man's former associates would laugh at the new puritanism which had entered his life. But the Christian knows very well that the judgment of God will come, when the judgments of earth will be reversed and the pleasures that are eternal will compensate a thousandfold for the transitory pleasures which had to be abandoned in this life.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Peter 4:6

THE ULTIMATE CHANCE

1 Peter 4:6

For this is the reason why the gospel was preached to the dead, so that, although they have been judged in the flesh like men, they may live in the Spirit like God.

This very difficult passage ends with a very difficult verse. Once again we have the idea of the gospel being preached to the dead. At least three different meanings have been attached to dead. (i) It has been taken to mean those who are dead in sin, not those who are physically dead. (ii) It has been taken to mean those who died before the Second Coming of Christ; but who heard the gospel before they died and so will not miss the glory. (iii) It has been taken to mean quite simply all the dead. There can be little doubt that this third meaning is correct; Peter has just been talking about the descent of Christ to the place of the dead, and here he comes back to the idea of Christ preaching to the dead.

No fully satisfactory meaning has ever been found for this verse; but we think that the best explanation is as follows. For mortal man, death is the penalty of sin. As Paul wrote: "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom.5:12). Had there been no sin, there would have been no death; and, therefore, death in itself is a judgment. So Peter says, all men have already been judged when they die; in spite of that Christ descended to the world of the dead and preached the gospel there, giving them another chance to live in the Spirit of God.

In some ways this is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, for, if our explanation is anywhere near the truth, it gives a breath-taking glimpse of a gospel of a second chance.

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1 Peter 4:7a

THE APPROACHING END

1 Peter 4:7a

The end of all things is near.

Here is a note which is struck consistently all through the New Testament. It is the summons of Paul that it is time to wake out of sleep, for the night is far spent and the day is at hand (Rom.13:12). "The Lord is at hand," he writes to the Philippians (Php.4:5). "The coming of the Lord is at hand," writes James (Jas.5:8). John says that the days in which his people are living are the last hour (1Jn.2:18). "The time is near," says the John of the Revelation, and he hears the Risen Christ testify: "Surely I am coming soon" (Rev.1:3; Rev.22:20).

There are many for whom all such passages are problems, for, if they are taken literally, the New Testament writers were mistaken; nineteen hundred years have passed and the end is not yet come. There are four ways of looking at them.

(i) We may hold that the New Testament writers were in fact mistaken. They looked for the return of Christ and the end of the world in their own day and generation; and these events did not take place. The curious thing is that the Christian Church allowed these words to stand although it would not have been difficult quietly to excise them from the New Testament documents. It was not until late in the second century that the New Testament began to be fixed in the form in which we have it today; and yet statements such as these became unquestioned parts of it. The clear conclusion is that the people of the early church still believed these words to be true.

(ii) There is a strong line of New Testament thought which, in effect, holds that the end has come. The consummation of history was the coming of Jesus Christ. In him time was invaded by eternity. In him God entered into the human situation. In him the prophecies were all fulfilled. In him the end has come. Paul speaks of himself and his people as those on whom the ends of the ages have come (1Cor.10:11). Peter in his first sermon speaks of Joel's prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit and of all that should happen in the last days, and then says that at that very time men were actually living in those last days (Ac.2:16-21).

If we accept that, it means that in Jesus Christ the end of history has come. The battle has been won; there remain only skirmishes with the last remnants of opposition. It means that at this very moment we are living in the "end time," in what someone has called "the epilogue to history." That is a very common point of view; but the trouble is that it flies in the face of facts. Evil is as rampant as ever; the world is still far from having accepted Christ as King. It may be the "end time," but the dawn seems as far distant as ever it was.

(iii) It may be that we have to interpret near in the light of history's being a process of almost unimaginable length. It has been put this way. Suppose all time to be represented by a column the height of Cleopatra's Needle with a single postage stamp on top, then the length of recorded history is represented by the thickness of the postage stamp and the unrecorded history which went before it by the height of the column. When we think of time in terms like that near becomes an entirely

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1 Peter 4:7a

relative word. The Psalmist was literally right when he said that in God's sight a thousand years were just like a watch in the night (Ps.90:4). In that case near can cover centuries and still be correctly used. But it is quite certain that the Biblical writers did not take near in that sense, for they had no conception of history in terms like that.

(iv) The simple fact is that behind this there is one inescapable and most personal truth. For everyone of us the time is near. The one thing which can be said of every man is that he will die. For every one of us the Lord is at hand. We cannot tell the day and the hour when we shall go to meet him; and, therefore, all life is lived in the shadow of eternity.

"The end of all things is near," said Peter. The early thinkers may have been wrong if they thought that the end of the world was round the corner, but they have left us with the warning that for every one of us personally the end is near; and that warning is as valid today as ever it was.

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1 Peter 4:7b-8

THE LIFE LIVED IN THE SHADOW OF ETERNITY

1 Peter 4:7b-8 (Part 1)

Be, therefore, steady and sober in mind so that you will really be able to pray as you ought. Above all cherish for each other a love that is constant and intense, because love hides a multitude of sins.

When a man realizes the nearness of Jesus Christ, he is bound to commit himself to a certain kind of life. In view of that nearness Peter makes four demands.

(i) He says that we must be steady in mind. We might render it: "Preserve your sanity." The verb Peter uses is *sophronein* (GSN4994); connected with that verb is the noun *sophrosune* (GSN4997), which the Greeks derived from the verb *sozein* (GSN4982), to keep safe, and the noun *phronesis* (GSN5428), the mind. *Sophrosune* (GSN4997) is the wisdom which characterizes a man who is preeminently sane; and *sophronein* (GSN4993) means to preserve one's sanity. The great characteristic of sanity is that it sees things in their proper proportions; it sees what things are important and what are not; it is not swept away by sudden and transitory enthusiasms; it is prone neither to unbalanced fanaticism nor to unrealizing indifference. It is only when we see the affairs of earth in the light of eternity that we see them in their proper proportions; it is when God is given his proper place that everything takes its proper place.

(ii) He says that we must be sober in mind. We might render it: "Preserve your sobriety." The verb Peter uses is *nephein* (GSN3525) which originally meant to be sober in contradistinction to being drunk and then came to mean to act soberly and sensibly. This does not mean that the Christian is to be lost in a gloomy joylessness; but it does mean that his approach to life must not be frivolous and irresponsible. To take things seriously is to be aware of their real importance and to be ever mindful of their consequences in time and in eternity. It is to approach life, not as a jest, but as a serious matter for which we are answerable.

(iii) He says that we must do this in order to pray as we ought. We might render it: "Preserve your prayer life." When a man's mind is unbalanced and his approach to life is frivolous and irresponsible, he cannot pray as he ought. We learn to pray only when we take life so wisely and so seriously that we begin to say in all things: "Thy will be done." The first necessity of prayer is the earnest desire to discover the will of God for ourselves.

(iv) He says that we must cherish for each other a love that is constant and intense. We might render it: "Preserve your love." The word Peter uses to describe this love is *ektenes* (GSN1618) which has two meanings, both of which we have included in the translation. It means outstretching in the sense of consistent; our love must be the love that never fails. It also means stretching out as a runner stretches out. As C. E. B. Cranfield reminds us it describes a horse at full gallop and denotes "the taut muscle of strenuous and sustained effort, as of an athlete." Our love must be energetic. Here is a fundamental Christian truth. Christian love is not an easy, sentimental reaction. It demands everything a man has of mental and spiritual energy. It means loving the unlovely and the unlovable; it means loving in spite of insult and injury; it means loving when love is not returned. Bengel translates *ektenes* (GSN1618) by the Latin *vehemens*, vehement.

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1 Peter 4:7b-8

Christian love is the love which never fails and into which every atom of man's strength is directed.

The Christian, in the light of eternity, must preserve his sanity, preserve his sobriety, preserve his prayers and preserve his love.

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1 Peter 4:7b-8

THE POWER OF LOVE

1 Peter 4:7b-8 (Part 2)

"Love," says Peter, "hides a multitude of sins." There are three things which this saying may mean; and it is not necessary that we should choose between them, for they are all there.

(i) It may mean that our love can overlook many sins. "Love covers all offences," says the writer of the Proverbs (Prov. 10:12). If we love a person, it is easy to forgive. It is not that love is blind, but that it loves a person just as he is. Love makes patience easy. It is much easier to be patient with our own children than with the children of strangers. If we really love our fellow-men, we can accept their faults, and bear with their foolishness, and even endure their unkindness. Love indeed can cover a multitude of sins.

(ii) It may mean that, if we love others, God will overlook a multitude of sins in us. In life we meet two kinds of people. We meet those who have no faults at which the finger may be pointed; they are moral, orthodox, and supremely respectable; but they are hard and austere and unable to understand why others make mistakes and fall into sin. We also meet those who have all kinds of faults; but they are kind and sympathetic and they seldom or never condemn. It is the second kind of person to whom the heart more readily warms; and in all reverence we may say that it is so with God. He will forgive much to the man who loves his fellow-men.

(iii) It may mean that God's love covers the multitude of our sins. That is blessedly and profoundly true. It is the wonder of grace that, sinners as we are, God loves us; that is why he sent his Son.

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1 Peter 4:9-10

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

1 Peter 4:9-10

Be hospitable to one another and never grudge it. As each has received a gift from God, so let all use such gifts in the service of one another, like good stewards of the grace of God.

Peter's mind is dominated in this section by the conviction that the end of all things is near. It is of the greatest interest and significance to note that he does not use that conviction to urge men to withdraw from the world and to enter on a kind of private campaign to save their own souls; he uses it to urge them to go into the world and serve their fellow-men. As Peter sees it, a man will be happy if the end finds him, not living as a hermit, but out in the world serving his fellow-men.

(i) First, Peter urges upon his people the duty of hospitality. Without hospitality the early church could not have existed. The travelling missionaries who spread the good news of the gospel had to find somewhere to stay and there was no place for them to stay except in the homes of Christians. Such inns as there were were impossibly dear, impossibly filthy and notoriously immoral. Thus we find Peter lodging with one Simon a tanner (Ac.10:6), and Paul and his company were to lodge with one Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple (Ac.21:16). Many a nameless one in the early church made Christian missionary work possible by opening the doors of his house and home.

Not only did the missionaries need hospitality; the local churches also needed it. For two hundred years there was no such thing as a church building. The church was compelled to meet in the houses of those who had bigger rooms and were prepared to lend them for the services of the congregation. Thus we read of the church which was in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom.16:5; 1Cor.16:19), and of the church which was in the house of Philemon (Phm.2). Without those who were prepared to open their homes, the early church could not have met for worship at all.

It is little wonder that again and again in the New Testament the duty of hospitality is pressed upon the Christians. The Christian is to be given to hospitality (Rom.12:13). A bishop is to be given to hospitality (1Tim.3:2); the widows of the Church must have lodged strangers (1Tim.5:10). The Christian must not forget to entertain strangers and must remember that some who have done so have entertained angels unawares. (Heb.13:2). The bishop must be a lover of hospitality (Tit.1:8). And it is ever to be remembered that it was said to those on the right hand: "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" while the condemnation of those on the left hand was: "I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me" (Matt.25:35,43).

In the early days the Church depended on the hospitality of its members; and to this day no greater gift can be offered than the welcome of a Christian home to the stranger in a strange place.

(ii) Such gifts as a man has he must place ungrudgingly at the service of the community. This again is a favourite New Testament idea which is expanded by Paul in Rom.12:3-8 and 1Cor.12. The Church needs every gift that a man has. It may be a gift of speaking, of music, of the ability to visit people. It may be a craft or skill which can be used in the practical service of the Church. It

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1 Peter 4:9-10

may be a house which a man possesses or money which he has inherited. There is no gift which cannot be placed at the service of Christ.

The Christian has to regard himself as a steward of God. In the ancient world the steward was very important. He might be a slave but his master's goods were in his hands. There were two main kinds of stewards, the dispensator, the dispenser, who was responsible for all the domestic arrangements of the household and laid in and divided out the household supplies; and the vilicus, the bailiff, who was in charge of his master's estates and acted as landlord to his master's tenants. The steward knew well that none of the things over which he had control belonged to him; they all belonged to his master. In everything he did he was answerable to his master and always it was his interests he must serve.

The Christian must always be under the conviction that nothing he possesses of material goods or personal qualities is his own; it all belongs to God and he must ever use what he has in the interests of God to whom he is always answerable.

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1 Peter 4:11

THE SOURCE AND OBJECT OF ALL CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR

1 Peter 4:11

If anyone speaks, let him speak as one uttering sayings sent from God. If anyone renders any service, let him do so as one whose service comes from the strength which God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ to whom belong glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

Peter is thinking of the two great activities of the Christian Church, preaching and practical service. The word he uses for sayings is *logia* (GSN3048). That is a word with a kind of divine background. The heathen used it for the oracles which came to them from their gods; the Christians used it for the words of scripture and the words of Christ. So Peter is saying, "If a man has the duty of preaching, let him preach not as one offering his own opinions or propagating his own prejudices, but as one with a message from God." It was said of one great preacher: "First he listened to God, and then he spoke to men." It was said of another that ever and again he paused, "as if listening for a voice." There lies the secret of preaching power.

Peter goes on to say that if a Christian is engaged in practical service, he must render that service in the strength which God supplies. It is as if he said, "When you are engaged in Christian service, you must not do it as if you were conferring a personal favour or distributing bounty from your own store, but in the consciousness that what you give you first received from God." Such an attitude preserves the giver from pride and the gift from humiliation.

The aim of everything is that God should be glorified. Preaching is not done to display the preacher but to bring men face to face with God. Service is rendered not to bring prestige to the giver but to turn men's thoughts to God. E. G. Selwyn reminds us that the motto of the great Benedictine Order of monks is four letters--I-O-G-D--which stand for the Latin words (*ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus* (in order that in all things God may be glorified)). A new grace and glory would enter the Church, if all church people ceased doing things for themselves and did them for God.

Barclay's Commentary

1 Peter 4:12-13

THE INEVITABILITY OF PERSECUTION

1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not regard the fiery ordeal through which you are passing and which has happened to you to test you, as something strange, as if some alien experience were happening to you, but rejoice in so far as you share the sufferings of Christ so that you may also rejoice with rapture when his glory shall be revealed.

In the nature of things persecution must have been a much more daunting experience for Gentiles than it was for Jews. The average Gentile had little experience of it; but the Jews have always been the most persecuted people upon earth. Peter was writing to Christians who were Gentiles and he had to try to help them by showing them persecution in its true terms. It is never easy to be a Christian. The Christian life brings its own loneliness, its own unpopularity, its own problems, its own sacrifices and its own persecutions. It is, therefore, well to have certain great principles in our minds.

(i) It is Peter's view that persecution is inevitable. It is human nature to dislike and to regard with suspicion anyone who is different; the Christian is necessarily different from the man of the world. The particular impact of the Christian difference makes the matter more acute. To the world the Christian brings the standards of Jesus Christ. That is another way of saying that he inevitably is a kind of conscience to any society in which he moves; and many a man would gladly eliminate the troublesome twinges of conscience. The very goodness of Christianity can be an offence to a world in which goodness is regarded as a handicap.

(ii) It is Peter's view that persecution is a test. It is a test in a double sense. A man's devotion to a principle can be measured by his willingness to suffer for it; therefore, any kind of persecution is a test of a man's faith. But it is equally true that it is only the real Christian who will be persecuted. The Christian who compromises with the world will not be persecuted. In a double sense persecution is the test of the reality of a man's faith.

(iii) Now we come to the uplifting things. Persecution is a sharing in the sufferings of Jesus Christ. When a man has to suffer for his Christianity he is walking the way his Master walked and sharing the Cross his Master carried. This is a favourite New Testament thought. If we suffer with him, we will be glorified with him (Rom.8:17). It is Paul's desire to enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ (Php.3:10). If we suffer with him, we shall reign with him (2Tim.2:12). If we remember that, anything we must suffer for the sake of Christ becomes a privilege and not a penalty.

(iv) Persecution is the way to glory. The Cross is the way to the crown. Jesus Christ is no man's debtor and his joy and crown await the man who, through thick and thin, remains true to him.

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1 Peter 4:14-16

THE BLESSEDNESS OF SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

1 Peter 4:14-16

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the presence of the glory and the Spirit of God rest upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer or a busybody. But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him by this name bring glory to God.

Here Peter says the greatest thing of all. If a man suffers for Christ, the presence of the glory rests upon him. This is a very strange phrase. We think it can mean only one thing. The Jews had the conception of the Shekinah, the luminous glow of the very presence of God. This conception constantly recurs in the Old Testament. "In the morning," said Moses, "you shall see the glory of the Lord" (Exo.16:7). "The glory of the Lord settled upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days," when the law was being delivered to Moses (Exo.24:16). In the tabernacle God was to meet with Israel and it was to be sanctified with his glory (Exo.29:43). When the tabernacle was completed, "then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exo.40:34).

When the ark of the covenant was brought into Solomon's temple, "a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1Kgs.8:10-11). Repeatedly this idea of the Shekinah, the luminous glory of God, occurs in the Old Testament.

It is Peter's conviction that something of that glow of glory rests on the man who suffers for Christ. When Stephen was on trial for his life and it was certain that he would be condemned to death, to those who looked on him his face was as the face of an angel (Ac.6:15).

Peter goes on to point out that it is as a Christian that a man must suffer and not as an evil-doer. The evils which he singles out are all clear enough until we come to the last. A Christian, Peter says, is not to suffer as an allotriepiskopos (GSN0244). The trouble is that there is no other instance of this word in Greek and Peter may well have invented it. It can have three possible meanings, all of which would be relevant. It comes from two words, allotrios (GSN0245), belonging to another and episkopos (GSN1985), looking upon or looking into. Therefore, it literally means looking upon, or into, that which belongs to another.

(i) To look on that which is someone else's might well be to cast covetous eyes upon it. That is how both the Latin Bible and Calvin take this word--to mean that the Christian must not be covetous.

(ii) To look upon that which belongs to another might well mean to be too interested in other people's affairs and to be a meddling busybody. That is by far the most probable meaning. There are Christians who do an infinite deal of harm with misguided interference and criticism. This would mean that the Christian must never be an interfering busybody. That gives good sense and, we believe, the best sense.

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1 Peter 4:14-16

(iii) There is a third possibility. Allotrios (GSN0245) means that which belongs to someone else; that is to say, that which is foreign to oneself. Along that line allotriepiskopos (GSN0244) will mean looking upon that which is foreign to oneself. That would mean, of a Christian, entering upon undertakings which do not befit the Christian life. This would mean that a Christian must never interest himself in things which are alien to the life that a Christian should lead.

While all three meanings are possible, we think that the third is the right one.

It is Peter's injunction that, if a Christian has to suffer for Christ, he must do so in such a way that his suffering brings glory to God and to the name he bears. His life and conduct must be the best argument that he does not deserve the suffering which has come upon him and his attitude to it must commend the name he bears.

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1 Peter 4:17-19

ENTRUSTING ALL LIFE TO GOD

1 Peter 4:17-19

For the time has come for judgment to begin from the household of God. And, if it begins from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the good news which comes from God? And, if the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious man and the sinner appear? So, then, let those who suffer in accordance with the will of God, entrust their souls to him who is a Creator on whom you can rely, and continue to do right.

As Peter saw it, it was all the more necessary for the Christian to do right because judgment was about to begin.

It was to begin with the household of God. Ezekiel hears the voice of God proclaiming judgment upon his people, "Begin at my sanctuary" (Eze.9:6). Where the privilege has been greatest, there the judgment will be sternest.

If judgment is to fall upon the Church of God, what will be the fate of those who have been utterly disobedient to the invitation and command of God? Peter confirms his appeal with a quotation from Prov.11:31: "If the righteous is requited on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!"

Finally, Peter exhorts his people to continue to do good and, whatever happens to them to entrust their lives to God, the Creator on whom they can rely. The word he uses for to entrust is *paratithesthai* (GSN3908), which is the technical word for depositing money with a trusted friend. In the ancient days there were no banks and few really safe places in which to deposit money. So, before a man went on a journey, he often left his money in the safe-keeping of a friend. Such a trust was regarded as one of the most sacred things in life. The friend was absolutely bound by all honour and all religion to return the money intact.

Herodotus (6: 86) has a story about such a trust. A certain Milesian came to Sparta, for he had heard of the strict honour of the Spartans, and entrusted his money to a certain Glaucus. He said that in due time his sons would reclaim the money and would bring tokens which would establish their identity beyond doubt. The time passed and the sons came. Glaucus treacherously said that he had no recollection of any money being entrusted to him and said that he wished four months to think about it. The Milesians departed sad and sorry. Glaucus consulted the gods as to what he ought to do, and they warned him that he must return the money. He did so, but before long he died and all his family followed him, and in the time of Herodotus there was not a single member of his family left alive because the gods were angry that he had even contemplated breaking the trust reposed in him. Even to think of evading such a trust was a mortal sin.

If a man entrusts himself to God, God will not fail him. If such a trust is sacred to men, how much more is it sacred to God? This is the very word used by Jesus, when he says "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk.23:46). Jesus unhesitatingly entrusted his life to God, certain that he

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1 Peter 4:17-19

would not fail him--and so may we. The old advice is still good advice--trust in God and do the right.

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1 Peter 5:1-4

THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH

1 Peter 5:1-4 (Part 1)

So, then, as your fellow-elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as a sharer in the glory which is going to be revealed, I urge the elders who are among you, shepherd the flock of God which is in your charge, not because you are coerced into doing so, but of your own free-will as God would have you to do, not to make a shameful profit out of it, but with enthusiasm, not as if you aimed to be petty tyrants over those allotted to your care, but as being under the obligation to be examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Few passages show more clearly the importance of the eldership in the early church. It is to the elders that Peter specially writes and he, who was the chief of the apostles, does not hesitate to call himself a fellow-elder. It will be worth our while to look at something of the background and history of the eldership, the most ancient and the most important office in the Church.

(i) It has a Jewish background. The Jews traced the beginning of the eldership to the days when the children of Israel were journeying through the wilderness to the Promised Land. There came a time when Moses felt the burdens of leadership too heavy for him to bear alone, and to help him seventy elders were set apart and granted a share of the spirit of God (Num.11:16-30). Thereafter elders became a permanent feature of Jewish life. We find them as the friends of the prophets (2Kgs.6:32); as the advisers of kings (1Kgs.20:8; 1Kgs.21:11); as the colleagues of the princes in the administration of the affairs of the nation (Ezr.10:8). Every village and city had its elders; they met at the gate and dispensed justice to the people (Deut.25:7). The elders were the administrators of the synagogue; they did not preach, but they saw to the good government and order of the synagogue, and they exercised discipline over its members.

The elders formed a large section of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews, and they are regularly mentioned along with the Chief Priests and the rulers and the Scribes and the Pharisees (Matt.16:21; Matt.21:23; Matt.26:3; Matt.26:57; Matt.27:1,3; Lk.7:3; Ac.4:5; Ac.6:12; Ac.24:1). In the vision of the Revelation in the heavenly places there are twenty-four elders around the throne. The elders were woven into the very structure of Judaism, both in its civil and its religious affairs.

(ii) The eldership has a Greek background. Especially in Egyptian communities we find that elders are the leaders of the community and responsible for the conduct of public affairs, much as town councillors are today. We find a woman who had suffered an assault appealing to the elders for justice. When corn is being collected as tribute on the visit of a governor, we find that "the elders of the cultivators" are the officials concerned. We find them connected with the issuing of public edicts, the leasing of land for pasture, the ingathering of taxation. In Asia Minor, also, the members of councils were called elders. Even in the religious communities of the pagan world we find "elder priests" who were responsible for discipline. In the Socnopaeus temple we find the elder priests dealing with the case of a priest who is charged with allowing his hair to grow too long and with wearing woollen garments--an effeminacy and a luxury of which no priest should have been guilty.

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1 Peter 5:1-4

We can see that long before Christianity took it over "elder" was a title of honour both in the Jewish and in the Graeco-Roman world.

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1 Peter 5:1-4

THE CHRISTIAN ELDERSHIP

1 Peter 5:1-4 (Part 2)

When we turn to the Christian Church we find that the eldership is its basic office.

It was Paul's custom to ordain elders in every community to which he preached and in every church which he founded. On the first missionary journey elders were ordained in every church (Ac.14:23). Titus is left in Crete to ordain elders in every city (Tit.1:5). The elders had charge of the financial administration of the Church; it is to them that Paul and Barnabas delivered the money sent to relieve the poor of Jerusalem in the time of the famine (Ac.11:30). The elders were the councillors and the administrators of the Church. We find them taking a leading part in the Council of Jerusalem at which it was decided to fling open the doors of the Church to the Gentiles. At that Council the elders and the apostles are spoken of together as the chief authorities of the Church (Ac.15:2; Ac.16:4). When Paul came on his last visit to Jerusalem, it was to the elders that he reported and they suggested the course of action he should follow (Ac.21:18-25).

One of the most moving passages in the New Testament is Paul's farewell to the elders of Ephesus. We find there that the elders, as he sees them, are the overseers of the flock of God and the defenders of the faith (Ac.20:28-29). We learn from James that the elders had a healing function in the Church through prayers and anointing with oil (Jas.5:14). From the Pastoral Epistles we learn that they were rulers and teachers, and by that time paid officials (1Tim.5:17; the phrase double honour is better translated double pay).

When a man enters the eldership, no small honour is conferred upon him, for he is entering on the oldest religious office in the world, whose history can be traced through Christianity and Judaism for four thousand years; and no small responsibility falls upon him, for he has been ordained a shepherd of the flock of God and a defender of the faith.

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1 Peter 5:1-4

THE PERILS AND PRIVILEGES OF THE ELDERSHIP

1 Peter 5:1-4 (Part 3)

Peter sets down in a series of contrasts the perils and the privileges of the eldership; and everything he says is applicable, not only to the eldership, but also to all Christian service inside and outside the Church.

The elder is to accept office, not under coercion, but willingly. This does not mean that a man is to grasp at office or to enter upon it without self-examining thought. Any Christian will have a certain reluctance to accept high office, because he knows only too well his unworthiness and inadequacy. There is a sense in which it is by compulsion that a man accepts office and enters upon Christian service. "Necessity," said Paul, "is laid upon me; Woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel" (1Cor.9:16). "The love of Christ controls us," he said (2Cor.5:14). But, on the other hand, there is a way of accepting office and of rendering service as if it was a grim and unpleasant duty. It is quite possible for a man to agree to a request in such an ungracious way that his whole action is spoiled. Peter does not say that a man should be conceitedly or irresponsibly eager for office; but that every Christian should be anxious to render such service as he can, although fully aware how unworthy he is to render it.

The elder is to accept office, not to make a shameful profit out of it, but eagerly. The word for making a shameful profit is *aischrokerdes* (GSN0146). The noun from this is *aischrokerdeia*, and it was a characteristic which the Greek loathed. Theophrastus, the great Greek delineator of character, has a character sketch of this *aischrokerdeia*. Meanness--as it might be translated--is the desire for base gain. The mean man is he who never sets enough food before his guests and who gives himself a double portion when he is carving the joint. He waters the wine; he goes to the theatre only when he can get a free ticket. He never has enough money to pay the fare and always borrows from his fellow-passengers. When he is selling corn (American: grain), he uses a measure in which the bottom is pushed up, and even then he carefully levels the top. He counts the half radishes left over from dinner in case the servants eat any.

Rather than give a wedding present, he will go away from home when a wedding is in the offing.

Meanness is an ugly fault. It is quite clear that there were people in the early church who accused the preachers and missionaries of being in the job for what they could get out of it. Paul repeatedly declares that he coveted no man's goods and worked with his hands to meet his own needs so that he was burdensome to no man (Ac.20:33; 1Th.2:9; 1Cor.9:12; 2Cor.12:14). It is certain that the payment any early office-bearer received was pitifully small and the repeated warnings that the office-bearers must not be greedy for gain shows that there were those who coveted more (1Tim.3:3,8; Tit.1:7,11). The point that Peter is making--and it is ever valid--is that no man dare accept office or render service for what he can get out of it. His desire must ever be to give and not to get.

The elder is to accept office, not to be a petty tyrant, but to be the shepherd and the example of the flock. Human nature is such that for many people prestige and power are even more attractive than money. There are those who love authority, even if it be exercised in a narrow sphere. Milton's

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1 Peter 5:1-4

Satan thought it better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven. Shakespeare spoke about proud man, dressed in a little brief authority, playing such fantastic tricks before high heaven as would make the angels weep. The great characteristic of the shepherd is his selfless care and his sacrificial love for the sheep. Any man who enters on office with the desire for preeminence, has got his whole point of view upside down. Jesus said to his ambitious disciples, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.

But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mk.10:42-44).

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1 Peter 5:1-4

THE IDEAL OF THE ELDERSHIP

1 Peter 5:1-4 (Part 4)

One thing in this passage which defies translation and is yet one of the most precious and significant things in it is what we have translated "petty tyrants over those allotted to your care." The phrase which we have translated those allotted is curious in Greek; it is *ton* (GSN3588) *kleron* (GSN2819), the genitive plural of *kleros* (GSN2819) which is a word of extraordinary interest.

(i) It begins by meaning a dice or a lot. It is so used in Matt.27:35 which tells how the soldiers beneath the Cross were throwing dice (*kleroi*, GSN2819) to see who should possess the seamless robe of Jesus.

(ii) Second, it means an office gained or assigned by lot. It is the word used in Ac.1:26 which tells how the disciples cast lots to see who should inherit the office of Judas the traitor.

(iii) It then comes to mean an inheritance allotted to someone, as used in Col.1:12 for the inheritance of the saints.

(iv) In classical Greek it very often means a public allotment or estate of land. These allotments were distributed by the civic authorities to the citizens; and very often the distribution was made by drawing lots for the various pieces of land available for distribution.

Even if we were to go no further than this, it would mean that the office of the eldership and, indeed, any piece of service offered to us is never earned by any merit of our own but always allotted to us by God. It is never something that we have deserved but always something given to us by the grace of God.

But we can go further than this. *Kleros* (GSN2819) means something which is allotted to a man. In Deut.9:29 we read that Israel is the heritage (*kleros*, GSN2819) of God. That is to say, Israel is the people specially assigned to God by his own choice. Israel is the *kleros* (GSN2819) of God; the congregation is the *kleros* (GSN2819) of the elder. Just as Israel is allotted to God, an elder's duties in the congregation are allotted to him. This must mean that the whole attitude of the elder to his people must be the same as the attitude of God to his people.

Here we have another great thought. In 1Pet.5:2 there is a phrase in the best Greek manuscripts which is not in the King James or the Revised Standard Versions. We have translated it: "Shepherd the flock of God, which is in your charge, not because you are coerced into doing so, but of your own free-will as God would have you to do." As God would have you to do is in Greek *kata* (GSN2596) *theon* (GSN2316), and that could well mean quite simply like God. Peter says to the elders, "Shepherd your people like God." Just as Israel is God's special allotment, the people we have to serve in the Church or anywhere else are our special allotment; and our attitude to them must be the attitude of God.

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1 Peter 5:1-4

What an ideal! And what a condemnation! It is our task to show to people God's forbearance, his forgiveness, his seeking love, his illimitable service. God has allotted to us a task and we must do it as he himself would do it. That is the supreme ideal of service in the Christian Church.

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1 Peter 5:1-4

MEMORIES OF JESUS

1 Peter 5:1-4 (Part 5)

One of the lovely things about this passage is Peter's attitude throughout it. He begins by, as it were, taking his place beside those to whom he speaks. "Your fellow-elder" he calls himself. He does not separate himself from them but comes to share the Christian problems and the Christian experience with them. But in one thing he is different; he has memories of Jesus and these memories colour this whole passage. Even as he speaks, they are crowding into his mind.

(i) He describes himself as a witness of the sufferings of Christ. At first sight we might be inclined to question that statement, for we are told that, after the arrest in the garden, "All the disciples forsook him and fled" (Matt.26:56). But, when we think a little further, we realise that it was given to Peter to see the suffering of Jesus in a more poignant way than was given to any other human being. He followed Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest's house and there in a time of weakness he three times denied his Master. The trial came to an end and Jesus was taken away; and there comes what may well be the most tragic sentence in the New Testament: "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter...and Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Lk.22:61-62). In that look Peter saw the suffering of the heart of a leader whose follower had failed him in the hour of his bitterest need.

Of a truth Peter was a witness of the suffering that comes to Christ when men deny him; and that is why he was so eager that his people might be staunch in loyalty and faithful in service.

(ii) He describes himself as a sharer in the glory which is going to be revealed. That statement has a backward and a forward look. Peter had already had a glimpse of that glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. There the sleeping three had been awakened, and, as Luke puts it, "they kept awake and they saw his glory" (Lk.9:32). Peter had seen the glory. But he also knew that there was glory to come, for Jesus had promised to his disciples a share in the glory when the Son of Man should come to sit on his glorious throne (Matt.19:28). Peter remembered both the experience and the promise of glory.

(iii) There can surely be no doubt that, when Peter speaks of shepherding the flock of God, he is remembering the task that Jesus had given to him when he had bidden him feed his sheep (Jn.21:15-17). The reward of love was the appointment as a shepherd; and Peter is remembering it.

(iv) When Peter speaks of Jesus as the Chief Shepherd, many a memory must be in his mind. Jesus had likened himself to the shepherd who sought at the peril of his life for the sheep which was lost (Matt.18:12-14; Lk.15:4-7). He had sent out his disciples to gather in the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt.10:6). He was moved with pity for the crowds, for they were as sheep without a shepherd (Matt.9:36; Mk.6:34). Above all, Jesus had likened himself to the Good Shepherd who was ready to lay down his life for the sheep (Jn.10:1-18). The picture of Jesus as the Shepherd was a precious one, and the privilege of being a shepherd of the flock of Christ was for Peter the greatest privilege that a servant of Christ could enjoy.

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1 Peter 5:5

THE GARMENT OF HUMILITY

1 Peter 5:5

In the same way, you younger people must be submissive to those who are older. In your relationships with one another you must clothe yourselves with the garment of humility, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Peter returns to the thought that the denial of self must be the mark of the Christian. He clinches his argument with a quotation from the Old Testament: "Toward the scorers God is scornful, but to the humble he shows favour" (Prov.3:34).

Here again it may well be that the memories of Jesus are in Peter's heart and are colouring all his thought and language. He tells his people that they must clothe themselves with the garment of humility. The word he uses for to clothe oneself is very unusual; it is egkombousthai (GSN1463) which is derived from kombos which describes anything tied on with a knot. Connected with it is egkomboma, a garment tied on with a knot. It was commonly used for protective clothing; it was used for a pair of sleeves drawn over the sleeves of a robe and tied behind the neck. And it was used for a slave's apron. There was a time when Jesus had put upon himself just such an apron. At the Last Supper John says of him that he took a towel and girded himself, and took water and began to wash his disciples' feet (Jn.13:4-5). Jesus girded himself with the apron of humility; and so must his followers.

It so happens that egkombousthai (GSN1463) is used of another kind of garment. It is also used of putting on a long, stole-like garment which was the sign of honour and preeminence.

To complete the picture we must put both images together. Jesus once put on the slave's apron and undertook the humblest of all duties, washing his disciples' feet; so we must in all things put on the apron of humility in the service of Christ and of our fellow-men; but that very apron of humility will become the garment of honour for us, for it is he who is the servant of all who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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1 Peter 5:6-11

THE LAWS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (1)

1 Peter 5:6-11 (Part 1)

So, then, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that in his good time he may exalt you.

Cast all your anxiety upon him because he cares for you.

Be sober; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Stand up to him, staunch in the faith, knowing how to pay the same tax of suffering as your brethren in the world.

And after you have experienced suffering for a little while, the God of every grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, settle you.

To him be dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Here Peter speaks in imperatives, laying down certain laws for the Christian life.

(i) There is the law of humility before God. The Christian must humble himself under his mighty hand. The phrase the mighty hand of God is common in the Old Testament; and it is most often used in connection with the deliverance which God wrought for his people when he brought them out of Egypt. "With a strong hand," said Moses, "the Lord has brought you out of Egypt" (Exo.13:9). "Thou hast only begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand" (Deut.3:24). God brought his people forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand (Deut.9:26). The idea is that God's mighty hand is on the destiny of his people, if they will humbly and faithfully accept his guidance. After all the varied experiences of life, Joseph could say to the brothers who had once sought to eliminate him: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Gen.50:20).

The Christian never resents the experiences of life and never rebels against them, because he knows that the mighty hand of God is on the tiller of his life and that he has a destiny for him.

(ii) There is the law of Christian serenity in God. The Christian must cast all his anxiety upon God. "Cast your burden on the Lord," said the Psalmist (Ps.55:22). "Do not be anxious about tomorrow," said Jesus (Matt.6:25-34). The reason we can do this with confidence is that we can be certain that God cares for us. As Paul had it, we can be certain that he who gave us his only Son will with him give us all things (Rom.8:32). We can be certain that, since God cares for us, life is out not to break us but to make us; and, with that assurance, we can accept any experience which comes to us, knowing that in everything God works for good with those who love him (Rom.8:28).

(iii) There is the law of Christian effort and of Christian vigilance. We must be sober and watchful. The fact that we cast everything upon God does not give us the right to sit back and to do nothing. Cromwell's advice to his troops was: "Trust in God, and keep your powder dry." Peter knew how hard this vigilance was, for he remembered how in Gethsemane he and his fellow-disciples slept when they should have been watching with Christ (Matt.26:38-46). The Christian is

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1 Peter 5:6-11

the man who trusts but at the same time puts all his effort and all his vigilance into the business of living for Christ.

(iv) There is the law of Christian resistance. The devil is ever out to see whom he can ruin. Again Peter must have been remembering how the devil had overcome him and he had denied his Lord. A man's faith must be like a solid wall against which the attacks of the devil exhaust themselves in vain. The devil is like any bully and retreats when he is bravely resisted in the strength of Jesus Christ.

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1 Peter 5:6-11

THE LAWS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (2)

1 Peter 5:6-11 (Part 2)

(v) Finally, Peter speaks of the law of Christian suffering. He says that, after the Christian has gone through suffering, God will restore, establish, strengthen and settle him. Every one of the words which Peter uses has behind it a vivid picture. Each tells us something about what suffering is designed by God to do for a man.

(a) Through suffering God will restore a man. The word for restore is difficult in this case to translate. It is *kartarizein* (GSN2675), the word commonly used for setting a fracture, the word used in Mk.1:19 for mending nets. It means to supply that which is missing, to mend that which is broken. So suffering, if accepted in humility and trust and love, can repair the weaknesses of a man's character and add the greatness which so far is not there. It is said that Sir Edward Elgar once listened to a young girl singing a solo from one of his own works. She had a voice of exceptional purity and clarity and range, and an almost perfect technique.

When she had finished, Sir Edward said softly, "She will be really great when something happens to break her heart." Barrie tells how his mother lost her favourite son, and then says, "That is where my mother got her soft eyes, and that is why other mothers ran to her when they had lost a child." Suffering had done something for her that an easy way could never have done. Suffering is meant by God to add the grace notes to life.

(b) Through suffering God will establish a man. The word is *sterixein* (GSN4741), which means to make as solid as granite. Suffering of body and sorrow of heart do one of two things to a man. They either make him collapse or they leave him with a solidity of character which he could never have gained anywhere else. If he meets them with continuing trust in Christ, he emerges like toughened steel that has been tempered in the fire.

(c) Through suffering God will strengthen a man. The Greek is *sthenoun* (GSN4599), which means to fill with strength. Here is the same sense again. A life with no effort and no discipline almost inevitably becomes a flabby life. No one really knows what his faith means to him until it has been tried in the furnace of affliction. There is something doubly precious about a faith which has come victoriously through pain and sorrow and disappointment. The wind will extinguish a weak flame; but it will fan a strong flame into a still greater blaze. So it is with faith.

(d) Through suffering God will settle a man. The Greek is *themelioun* (GSN2311), which means to lay the foundations. When we have to meet sorrow and suffering we are driven down to the very bedrock of faith. It is then that we discover what are the things which cannot be shaken. It is in time of trial that we discover the great truths on which real life is founded.

Suffering is very far from doing these precious things for every man. It may well drive a man to bitterness and despair; and may well take away such faith as he has. But if it is accepted in the trusting certainty that a father's hand will never cause his child a needless tear, then out of suffering come things which the easy way may never bring.

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1 Peter 5:12

A FAITHFUL HENCHMAN OF THE APOSTLES

1 Peter 5:12

I have written this brief letter to you through Silvanus, the faithful brother, as I reckon him to be, to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

Peter bears witness that what he has written is indeed the grace of God, and he bids his people, amidst their difficulties, to stand fast in it.

He says that he has written through Silvanus. The Greek phrase (dia, GSN1223, Silouanou, GSN4610) means that Silvanus was his agent in writing. Silvanus is the full form of the name Silas and he is almost certainly to be identified with the Silvanus of Paul's letters and the Silas of Acts. When we gather up the references to Silas or Silvanus, we find that he was one of the pillars of the early church.

Along with Judas Barsabas, Silvanus was sent to Antioch with the epoch-making decision of the Council of Jerusalem that the doors of the Church were to be opened to the Gentiles; and in the account of that mission Silvanus and Judas are called leading men among the brethren (Ac.15:22,27). Not only did he simply bear the message, he commended it in powerful words, for Silvanus was also a prophet (Ac.15:32). During the first missionary journey Mark left Paul and Barnabas and returned home from Pamphylia (Ac.13:13); in preparing for the second missionary journey Paul refused to have Mark with him again; the result was that Barnabas took Mark as his companion and Paul took Silvanus (Ac.15:37-40). From that time forward Silvanus was for long Paul's right-hand man. He was with Paul in Philippi, where he was arrested and imprisoned with him (Ac.16:19,25,29). He rejoined Paul in Corinth and with him preached the gospel there (Ac.18:5; 2Cor.1:19).

So closely was he associated with Paul that in both the letters to the Thessalonians he is joined with Paul and Timothy as the senders of the letters (1Th.1:1; 2Th.1:1). It is clear that Silvanus was a most notable man in the early church.

As we saw in the introduction, it is most probable that Silvanus was far more than merely the scribe who wrote this letter for Peter and the bearer who delivered it. One of the difficulties of First Peter is the excellence of the Greek. It is Greek with such a classical tinge that it seems impossible that Peter the Galilaean fisherman should have written it for himself. Now Silvanus was not only a man of weight in the Church; he was also a Roman citizen (Ac.16:37) and he would be much better educated than Peter was. Most probably he had a large share in the composition of this letter. We are told that in China, when a missionary wished to send a message to his people, he often wrote it in the best Chinese he could achieve, and then gave it to a Christian Chinese to correct and put into proper form; or, he might even just tell the Christian Chinese what he wished to say, leaving him to put it into literary form for his approval. That is most likely what Peter did. He either gave his letter to Silvanus to polish into excellent Greek or else he told Silvanus what he wished said and left him to say it, adding the last three verses as his personal greeting.

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1 Peter 5:12

Silvanus was one of those men the Church can never do without. He was content to take the second place and to serve almost in the background so long as God's work was done. It was enough for him that he was Paul's assistant, even if Paul for ever overshadowed him. It was enough for him to be Peter's penman, even if it meant only a bare mention of his name at the end of the letter. For all that, it is no little thing to go down in history as the faithful henchman on whom both Peter and Paul depended. The Church always has need of people like Silvanus and many who cannot be Peters or Pauls can still assist the Peters and Pauls to do their work.

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1 Peter 5:13

GREETINGS

1 Peter 5:13

She who is at Babylon, and who has been chosen as you have been chosen, greets you, and so does Mark my son.

Although it sounds so simple, this is a troublesome verse. It presents us with certain questions difficult of solution.

(i) From whom are these greetings sent? The King James Version has "the Church that is at Babylon elected together with you, saluteth you." But "the Church that is" is in italics, which means that there is no equivalent in the Greek which simply says "the one elected together with you at Babylon" and the phrase is feminine. There are two possibilities.

(a) It is quite possible that the King James Version is correct. That is the way Moffatt takes it when he translates "your sister Church in Babylon." The phrase could well be explained as being based on the fact that the Church is the Bride of Christ and may be spoken of in this way. On the whole, the commonest view is that it is a Church which is meant.

(b) But it does have to be remembered that there is actually no word for Church in the Greek, and this feminine phrase might equally well refer to some well-known Christian lady. If it does, by far the best suggestion is that the reference is to Peter's wife. We know that she did actually accompany him on his preaching journeys (1Cor.9:5). Clement of Alexandria (Stromateis 7.11.63) tells us that she died a martyr, executed in Peter's own sight, while he encouraged her by saying, "Remember the Lord." She was clearly a well-known figure in the early church.

We would not wish to speak dogmatically on this question. It is perhaps more likely that the reference is to a Church; but it is not impossible that Peter is associating his wife and fellow-evangelist in the greetings which he sends.

(ii) From where was this letter written? The greetings are sent from Babylon. There are three possibilities.

(a) There was a Babylon in Egypt, near Cairo. It had been founded by Babylonian refugees from Assyria and was called by the name of their ancestral city. But by this time it was almost exclusively a great military camp; and in any event the name of Peter is never connected with Egypt. This Babylon may be disregarded.

(b) There was the Babylon in the east to which the Jews had been taken in captivity. Many had never come back and it was a centre of Jewish scholarship. The great commentary on the Jewish Law is called the Babylonian Talmud. So important were the Jews of Babylon that Josephus had issued a special edition of his histories for them. There is no doubt that there was a large and important colony of Jews there; and it would have been quite natural for Peter, the apostle of the Jews, to preach and to work there. But we do not find the name of Peter ever connected with

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Babylon and there is no trace of him having ever been there. Scholars so great as Calvin and Erasmus have taken Babylon to be this great eastern city but, on the whole, we think the probabilities are against it.

(c) Regularly Rome was called Babylon, both by the Jews and by the Christians. That is undoubtedly the case in the Revelation where Babylon is the great harlot, drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs (Rev. 17-18). The Godlessness, Just and luxury of ancient Babylon were, so to speak, reincarnated in Rome. Peter is definitely connected in tradition with Rome; and the likelihood is that it was from there that the letter was written.

(iii) Who is the Mark, whom Peter calls his son, and from whom he sends greetings? If we take the elect lady to be Peter's wife. Mark might quite well be literally Peter's son. But it is much more likely that he is the Mark who wrote the gospel. Tradition has always closely connected Peter with Mark, and has handed down the story that he was intimately involved with Mark's gospel. Papias, who lived towards the end of the second century and was a great collector of early traditions, describes Mark's gospel in this way: "Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done. For he was not a hearer of the Lord or a follower of his; he followed Peter, as I have said, at a later date, and Peter adapted his instructions to practical needs, without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically. So that Mark was not wrong in writing down some things in this way from memory, for his one concern was neither to omit nor to falsify anything he had heard." According to Papias, Mark's gospel is nothing other than the preaching material of Peter. In similar vein Irenaeus says that after the death of Peter and Paul at Rome, "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter." It is the consistent story of tradition that Mark, the evangelist, was indeed a son to Peter, and all the likelihood is that these greetings are from him.

So, then, we may gather up the possibilities. "She who is at Babylon, and who has been chosen, as you have been chosen," may either be the Church or the wife of Peter, herself a martyr. Babylon may be the Babylon of the east but is more likely to be the great and wicked city of Rome. Mark might possibly be the actual son of Peter, about whom we know nothing else, but is more likely to be Mark, the writer of the gospel, who was to Peter as a son.

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1 Peter 5:14

AT PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER

1 Peter 5:14

Greet each other with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all that are in Christ.

The most interesting thing here is the injunction to give each other the kiss of love. This was for centuries an integral and precious part of Christian fellowship and worship; and its history and gradual elimination, is of the greatest interest.

With the Jews it was the custom for a disciple to kiss his Rabbi on the cheek and to lay his hands upon his shoulder. That is what Judas did to Jesus (Mk.14:44). The kiss was the greeting of welcome and respect, and we can see how much Jesus valued it, for he was grieved when it was not given to him (Lk.7:45). Paul's letters frequently end with the injunction to salute each other with a holy kiss (Rom.16:16; 1Cor.16:20; 2Cor.13:12; 1Th.5:26).

In the early church the kiss became an essential part of Christian worship. "What prayer is complete," asks Tertullian, "from which the holy kiss is divorced? What kind of sacrifice is that from which men depart without the peace?" (Dex Oratione 18). The kiss, we see here, was called the peace. It was specially a part of the communion service. Augustine says that, when Christians were about to communicate, "they demonstrated their inward peace by the outward kiss" (De Amicitia 6). It was usually given after the catechumens had been dismissed, when only members of the Church were present, and after the prayer before the elements were brought in. Justin Martyr says, "When we have ceased from prayer, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president bread and a cup of wine" (1.65).

The kiss was preceded by the prayer "for the gift of peace and of unfeigned love, undefiled by hypocrisy or deceit," and it was the sign that "our souls are mingled together, and have banished all remembrance of wrongs" (Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures 25.5.3). The kiss was the sign that all injuries were forgotten, all wrongs forgiven, and that those who sat at the Lord's Table were indeed one in the Lord.

This was a lovely custom and yet it is clear that it was sadly open to abuse. It is equally clear from the warnings so often given that abuses did creep in. Athenagoras insists that the kiss must be given with the greatest care, for "if there be mixed with it the least defilement of thought, it excludes us from eternal life" (Legatio Christianis 32). Origen insists that the kiss of peace must be "holy, chaste and sincere," not like the kiss of Judas (Commentaria in Epistolam B. Pauli ad Romanos 10: 33). Clement of Alexandria condemns the shameless use of the kiss, which ought to be mystic, for with the kiss "certain persons make the churches resound, and thereby occasion foul suspicions and evil reports" (Paedagogus 3: 11). Tertullian speaks of the natural reluctance of the heathen husband to think that his wife should be so greeted in the Christian Church (Ad Uxorem 2: 4).

In the Church of the west these inevitable problems gradually brought the end of this lovely custom. By the time of the Apostolic Constitutions in the fourth century, the kiss is confined to those of the same sex--the clergy are to salute the bishop, the men the men and the women the

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women. In this form the kiss of peace lasted in the Church of the west until the thirteenth century. Sometimes substitutes were introduced. In some places a little wooden or metal tablet, with a picture of the crucifixion on it, was used. It was kissed first by the priest, and then passed to the congregation, who each kissed it and handed it on, each man to his neighbour, in token of their mutual love for Christ and in Christ. In the oriental Churches the custom still obtains; it is not extinct in the Greek Church; the Armenian Church substituted a courteous bow.

We may note certain other uses of the kiss in the early church. At baptism the person baptized was kissed, first by the baptizer and then by the whole congregation, as a sign of his welcome into the household and family of Christ. A newly ordained bishop was given "the kiss in the Lord." The marriage ceremony was ratified by a kiss, a natural action taken over from paganism. Those who were dying first kissed the Cross and were then kissed by all present. The dead were kissed before burial.

To us the kiss of peace may seem very far away. It came from the day when the Church was a real family and fellowship, when Christians really did know and love one another. It is a tragedy that the modern Church, often with vast congregations who do not know each other and do not even wish to know each other, could not use the kiss of peace except as a formality. It was a lovely custom which was bound to cease when the reality of fellowship was lost within the Church.

"Peace to all of you that are in Christ," says Peter; and so he leaves his people to the peace of God which is greater than all the troubles and distresses the world can bring.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND LETTER OF PETER

THE NEGLECTED BOOK AND ITS CONTENTS

Second Peter is one of the neglected books of the New Testament. Very few people will claim to have read it, still less to have studied it in detail. E. F. Scott says "it is far inferior in every respect to First Peter"; and goes on "it is the least valuable of the New Testament writings." It was only with the greatest difficulty that Second Peter gained entry into the New Testament, and for many years the Christian Church seemed to be unaware of its existence. But, before we approach its history, let us look at its contents.

THE LAWLESS MEN

Second Peter was written to combat the beliefs and activities of certain men who were a threat to the Church. It begins by insisting that the Christian is a man who has escaped from the corruption of the world (2Pet.1:4) and must always remember that he has been purged of his old sins (2Pet.1:9). There is laid upon him the duty of moral goodness, which culminates in the great Christian virtue of love (2Pet.1:5-8).

Let us set out the characteristics of the men whom Second Peter rebukes. They twist Scripture to make it suit their own purpose (2Pet.1:20; 2Pet.3:16). They bring the Christian faith into disrepute (2Pet.2:2). They are covetous of gain and exploiters of their fellow-men (2Pet.2:3; 2Pet.2:14-15). They are doomed and will share the fate of the sinning angels (2Pet.2:4), the men before the Flood (2Pet.2:5), the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah (2Pet.2:6), and the false prophet Balaam (2Pet.2:15). They are bestial creatures, ruled by their brute instincts (2Pet.2:12), and dominated by their lusts (2Pet.2:10; 2Pet.2:18). Their eyes are full of adultery (2Pet.2:14). They are presumptuous, self-willed and arrogant (2Pet.2:10,18). They spend even the daylight hours in unrestrained and luxurious revelry (2Pet.2:13). They speak of liberty but what they call liberty is unbridled licence and they themselves are the slaves of their own lusts (2Pet.2:19). Not only are they deluded, they also delude others and lead them astray (2Pet.2:14; 2Pet.2:18). They are worse than those who never knew the right, because they knew what goodness is and have relapsed into evil, like a dog returning to its vomit and a sow returning to the mud after it has been washed (2Pet.2:20-22).

It is clear that Peter is describing antinomians, men who used God's grace as a justification for sinning. In all probability they were Gnostics, who said that only spirit was good and that matter was essentially evil and that, therefore, it did not matter what we did with the body and that we could glut its appetites and it made no difference. They lived the most immoral lives and encouraged others to do so; and they justified their actions by perverting grace and interpreting Scripture to suit themselves.

THE DENIAL OF THE SECOND COMING

Further, these evil men denied the Second Coming (2Pet.3:3-4). They argued that this was a stable world in which things remained unalterably the same, and that God was so dilatory that it

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was possible to assume that the Second Coming was never going to happen at all. The answer of Second Peter is that this is not a stable world; that it has, in fact, been destroyed by water in the Flood and that it will be destroyed by fire in the final conflagration (2Pet.3:5-7). What they regard as dilatoriness is in fact God withholding his hand in patience to give men still another chance to repent (2Pet.3:8-9). But the day of destruction is coming (2Pet.3:10). A new heaven and a new earth are on the way; therefore, goodness is an absolute necessity if a man is to be saved in the day of judgment (2Pet.3:11-14). With this Paul agrees, however difficult his letters may be to understand, and however false teachers deliberately misinterpret them (2Pet.3:15-16). The duty of the Christian is to stand fast, firmly founded in the faith, and to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2Pet.3:17-18).

THE DOUBTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Such are the contents of the letter. For long it was regarded with doubt and with something very like misgiving. There is no trace of it until after A.D. 200. It is not included in the Muratorian Canon Of A.D. 170 which was the first official list of New Testament books. It did not exist in the Old Latin Version of the Scriptures; nor in the New Testament of the early Syrian Church.

The great scholars of Alexandria either did not know it or were doubtful about it. Clement of Alexandria, who wrote outlines of the books of Scripture, does not appear to have included Second Peter. Origen says that Peter left behind one epistle which is generally acknowledged; "perhaps also a second, for it is a disputed question." Didymus commented on it, but concluded his work by saying: "It must not be forgotten that this letter is spurious; it may be read in public; but it is not part of the canon of Scripture."

Eusebius, the great scholar of Caesarea, who made a careful investigation of the Christian literature of his day, comes to the conclusion: "Of Peter, one Epistle, which is called his former Epistle, is acknowledged by all; of this the ancient presbyters have made frequent use in their writings as indisputably genuine; but that which is circulated as his second Epistle we have received to be not canonical although, since it appeared to be useful to many, it has been diligently read with the other Scriptures."

It was not until well into the fourth century that Second Peter came to rest in the canon of the New Testament.

THE OBJECTIONS

It is the well-nigh universal judgment of scholars, both ancient and modern, that Peter is not the author of Second Peter. Even John Calvin regarded it as impossible that Peter could have spoken of Paul as Second Peter speaks of him (2Pet.3:15-16), although he was willing to believe that someone else wrote the letter at Peter's request. What, then, are the arguments against Peter's authorship?

(i) There is the extreme slowness, and even reluctance, of the early church to accept it. If it had been truly Peter's, there can be little doubt that the Church would have welcomed and honoured it

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from the first. But the case was very different. For the first two centuries the letter is never quoted at all in any certain instance; it is regarded with doubt and suspicion for more than another century; and only late in the fourth century is it accepted.

(ii) The contents make it difficult to believe that it is Peter's. There is no mention of the Passion, the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus Christ; no mention of the Church as the true Israel; no mention of that faith which is undefeatable hope and trust combined; no mention of the Holy Spirit, of prayer, of baptism; and no passionate desire to call men to the supreme example of Jesus Christ. If one took away these great verities from First Peter there would be little or nothing left, and yet none of them occurs in Second Peter.

(iii) It is wholly different in character and style from First Peter. This was realized as early as Jerome who wrote: "Simon Peter wrote two Epistles which are called Catholic, of which the authenticity of the second is denied by many because of the difference of the style from the first." The Greek style of this letter is very difficult. Clogg calls it ambitious, artificial and often obscure, and remarks that it is the only book in the New Testament which is improved by translation. Bishop Chase writes: "The Epistle does produce the impression of being a somewhat artificial piece of rhetoric. It shows throughout signs of self-conscious effort. The author appears to be ambitious of writing in a style which is beyond his literary power." He concludes that it is hard to reconcile the literary character of this letter with the supposition that Peter wrote it. Moffatt says: "Second Peter is more periodic and ambitious than First Peter, but its linguistic and its stylistic efforts only reveal by their cumbrous obscurity a decided inferiority of conception, which marks it off from First Peter."

It might be claimed, as Jerome claimed, that, while Peter used Silvanus for First Peter, he used a different amanuensis for Second Peter and that this explains the change in style. But J. B. Mayor compares the two letters. He quotes some of the great passages of First Peter and then says: "I think that none who read these words can help feeling that, not even in Paul, not even in John, is there to be found a more beautiful or a more living description of the secret of primitive Christianity, of the force that overcame the world, than in the perfect quaternion of faith and hope and love and joy, which pervades this short epistle (i.e. First Peter). No one could make the same assertion with regard to Second Peter: thoughtful and interesting as it is, it lacks that intense sympathy, that flame of love, which marks First Peter...."

No change of circumstances can account for the change of tone of which we are conscious in passing from one epistle to the other." It is the conclusion of that great and conservative scholar that no explanation, other than difference of authorship, can explain, not so much the difference in style as the difference in atmosphere between First and Second Peter. It is true that from the purely linguistic point of view there are 369 words which occur in First Peter which do not occur in Second Peter; and there are 230 words which occur in Second Peter and not in First Peter. But there is more than a difference in style. A writer can change his style and his vocabulary to suit his audience and his occasion. But the difference between the two letters in atmosphere and attitude is so wide that it is hardly possible that the same person should have written both.

(iv) Certain things within Second Peter point well-nigh irresistibly to a late date. So much time has passed that men have begun to abandon hope of the Second Coming altogether (2Pet.3:4). The

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apostles are spoken of as figures of the past (2Pet.3:2). The fathers, that is the founders of the Christian faith, are now figures of the almost dim and distant past; there have been generations between this letter and the first coming of the Christian faith (2Pet.3:4).

There are references which require the passing of the years to explain them. The reference to Peter's approaching death looks very like a reference to Jesus' prophecy in Jn.21:18-19, and the Fourth Gospel was not written until about A.D. 100. The statement that Peter is going to leave something which will continue his teaching after he has gone looks very like a reference to Mark's Gospel (Mk.1:12-14).

Above all there is the reference to the letters of Paul (2Pet.3:15-16). From this it is quite certain that Paul's letters are known and used throughout all the Church; they are public property, and furthermore they are regarded as Scripture and on a level with "the other Scriptures" (2Pet.3:16). It was not until at least A.D. 90 that these letters were collected and published, and it would take many years for them to acquire the position of sacred Scripture. It is practically impossible that anyone should write like this until midway through the second century A.D.

All the evidence converges to prove that Second Peter is a late book. It is not until the third century that it is quoted. The great scholars of the early church did not regard it as Peter's although they did not question its usefulness. The letter has references which require the passing of the years to explain them. The great interest of Second Peter lies in the very fact that it was the last book in the New Testament to be written and the last to gain entry into the New Testament.

IN PETER'S NAME

How, then, did it become attached to the name of Peter? The answer is that it was deliberately attached. This may seem to us a strange proceeding but in the ancient world this was common practice. Plato's letters were written not by Plato but by a disciple in the master's name. The Jews repeatedly used this method of writing. Between the Old and the New Testament, books were written under the names of Solomon, Isaiah, Moses, Baruch, Ezra, Enoch and many another. And in New Testament times there is a whole literature around the name of Peter--The Gospel of Peter, The Preaching of Peter, The Apocalypse of Peter.

One salient fact makes this method of writing even more intelligible. The heretics used it. They issued misleading and pernicious books under the names of the great apostles, claiming that they were the secret teaching of the great founders of the Church handed down by word of mouth to them. Faced with this, the Church retaliated in kind and issued books in which men set down for their own generation the things they were quite sure that the apostles would have said had they been facing this new situation. There is nothing either unusual or discreditable in a book being issued under the name of Peter although Peter did not write it. The writer in humility was putting the message which the Holy Spirit had given him into the mouth of Peter because he felt his own name was unworthy to appear upon the book.

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We will not find Second Peter easy to read; but it is a book of first-rate importance because it was written to men who were undermining the Christian ethic and the Christian doctrine and who had to be stopped before the Christian faith was wrecked by their perversion of the truth.

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2 Peter 1:1

THE MAN WHO OPENED DOORS

2 Peter 1:1 (Part 1)

Symeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, writes this letter to those to whom there has been allotted a faith equal in honour and privilege with our own, through the impartial justice of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The letter opens with a very subtle and beautiful allusion for those who have eyes to see it and knowledge enough of the New Testament to grasp it. Peter writes to "those to whom there has been allotted a faith equal in honour and privilege with our own" and he calls himself Symeon Peter. Who were these people? There can really be only one answer to that. They must once have been Gentiles in contradistinction to the Jews who were uniquely the chosen people of God. Those who had once been no people are now the chosen people of God (1Pet.2:10); those who were once aliens and strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and who were once far off, have been brought nigh (Eph.2:11-13).

Peter puts this very vividly, using a word which would at once strike an answering chord in the minds of those who heard it. Their faith is equal in honour and privilege. The Greek is isotimos (GSN2472); isos (GSN2470) means "equal" and time (GSN5092) means "honour." This word was particularly used in connection with foreigners who were given equal citizenship in a city with the natives. Josephus, for instance, says that in Antioch the Jews were made isotimoi (GSN2472), equal in honour and privilege, with the Macedonians and the Greeks who lived there. So Peter addresses his letter to those who had once been despised Gentiles but who had been given equal rights of citizenship with the Jews and even with the apostles themselves in the kingdom of God.

Two things have to be noted about this great privilege which had been extended to the Gentiles. (a) It had been allotted to them. That is to say, they had not earned it; it had fallen to them through no merit of their own, as some prize falls to a man by lot. In other words, their new citizenship was all of grace. (b) It came to them through the impartial justice of their God and Saviour Jesus Christ. It came to them because with God there is no "most favoured nation clause"; his grace and favour go out impartially to every nation upon earth.

What has this to do with the name Symeon, by which Peter is here called? In the New Testament, he is most often called Peter; he is fairly often called Simon, which was, indeed, his original name before Jesus gave him the name of Cephas or Peter (Jn.1:41-42); but only once in the rest of the New Testament is he called Simeon. It is in the story of that Council of Jerusalem in Ac.15 which decided that the door of the Church should be opened wide to the Gentiles. There James says, "Symeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name" (Ac.15:14). In this letter which begins with greetings to the Gentiles who have been granted by the grace of God privileges of equal citizenship in the kingdom with the Jews and with the apostles Peter is called by the name of Symeon; and the only other time he is called by that name is when he is the principal instrument whereby that privilege is granted.

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Symeon has in it the memory that Peter is the man who opened doors. He opened the doors to Cornelius, the Gentile centurion (Ac.10); his great authority was thrown on the side of the open door at the Council of Jerusalem (Ac.15).

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2 Peter 1:1

THE GLORIOUS SERVITUDE

2 Peter 1:1 (Part 2)

Peter calls himself the servant of Jesus Christ. The word is *doulos* (GSN1401) which really means slave. Strange as it may seem, here is a title, apparently one of humiliation, which the greatest of men took as a title of greatest honour. Moses the great leader and lawgiver was the *doulos* (GSN1401) of God (Deut.34:5; Ps.105:26; Mal.4:4). Joshua the great commander was the *doulos* (GSN1401) of God (Josh.24:29). David the greatest of the kings was the *doulos* (GSN1401) of God (2Sam.3:18; Ps.78:70). In the New Testament Paul is the *doulos* (GSN1401) of Jesus Christ (Rom.1:1; Php.1:1; Tit.1:1), a title which James (Jas.1:1), and Jude (Jd.1) both proudly claim. In the Old Testament the prophets are the *douloi* (GSN1401) of God (Am.3:7; Isa.20:3). And in the New Testament the Christian man frequently is Christ's *doulos* (GSN1401) (Ac.2:18; 1Cor.7:22; Eph.6:6; Col.4:12; 2Tim.2:24). There is deep meaning here.

(i) To call the Christian the *doulos* (GSN1401) of God means that he is inalienably possessed by God. In the ancient world a master possessed his slaves in the same sense as he possessed his tools. A servant can change his master; but a slave cannot. The Christian inalienably belongs to God.

(ii) To call the Christian the *doulos* (GSN1401) of God means that he is unqualifiedly at the disposal of God. In the ancient world the master could do what he liked with his slave; he had even the power of life and death over him. The Christian has no rights of his own, for all his rights are surrendered to God.

(iii) To call the Christian the *doulos* (GSN1401) of God means that he owes an unquestioning obedience to God. A master's command was a slave's only law in ancient times. In any situation the Christian has but one question to ask: "Lord, what will you have me do?" The command of God is his only law.

(iv) To call the Christian the *doulos* (GSN1401) of God means that he must be constantly in the service of God. In the ancient world the slave had literally no time of his own, no holidays, no leisure. All his time belonged to his master. The Christian cannot, either deliberately or unconsciously, compartmentalize life into the time and activities which belong to God, and the time and activities in which he does what he likes. The Christian is necessarily the man every moment of whose time is spent in the service of God.

We note one further point. Peter speaks of the impartial justice of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. The King James Version translates, "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," as if this referred to two persons, God and Jesus; but, as Moffatt and the Revised Standard Version both show, in the Greek there is only one person involved and the phrase is correctly rendered our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Its great interest is that it does what the New Testament very, very seldom does. It calls Jesus God. The only real parallel to this is the adoring cry of Thomas: "My Lord and my God." (Jn.20:28). This is not a matter to argue about; it is not even a matter of theology; for Peter and Thomas to call Jesus God was not a matter of theology but an

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outrush of adoration. It was simply that they felt human terms could not contain this person they knew as Lord.

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2 Peter 1:2

THE ALL-IMPORTANT KNOWLEDGE

2 Peter 1:2

May grace and peace be multiplied to you by the knowledge of God. and of Jesus. our Lord.

Peter puts this in an unusual way. Grace and peace are to come from knowledge, the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Is he turning Christian experience into something dependent on knowledge? Or is there some other meaning here? First, let us look at the word which he uses for knowledge (epignosis, GSN1922). It can be interpreted in two directions.

(a) It can mean increasing knowledge. Gnosis (GSN1108), the normal Greek word for knowledge, is here preceded by the preposition *epi* (GSN1909) which means towards, in the direction of. Epignosis (GSN1922) then could be interpreted as knowledge which is always moving further in the direction of that which it seeks to know. Grace and peace are multiplied to the Christian as he comes to know Jesus Christ better and better. As it has been put: "The more Christians realize the meaning of Jesus Christ, the more they realize the meaning of grace and the experience of peace."

(b) Epignosis (GSN1922) has a second meaning. Often in Greek it means full knowledge. Plutarch, for instance, uses it of the scientific knowledge of music as opposed to the knowledge of the mere amateur. So it may be that the implication here is that knowledge of Jesus Christ is what we might call "the master-science of life." The other sciences may bring new skill, new knowledge, new abilities, but the master-science, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, alone brings the grace men need and the peace for which their hearts crave.

There is still more. Peter has a way of using words which were commonly on the lips of the pagans of his day and charging them with a new meaning. Knowledge was a much used word in pagan religious thought in the days when this letter was written. To take but one example, the Greeks defined *sophia* (GSN4678), wisdom, as knowledge of things both human and divine. The Greek seekers after God sought that knowledge in two main ways.

(a) They sought it by philosophic speculation. They sought to reach God by the sheer power of human thought. There are obvious troubles there. For one thing, God is infinite; the mind of man is finite; and the finite can never grasp the infinite. Long ago Zophar had asked: "Can you (by searching) find out the deep things of God?" (Jb.11:7). If God is ever to be known, he must be known, not because man's mind discovers him but because he chooses to reveal himself. For another thing, if religion is based on philosophic speculation, at its highest it can be the preserve of only the few, for it is not given to every man to be a philosopher. Whatever Peter meant by knowledge, he did not mean that.

(b) They sought it by mystical experience of the divine, until they could say, "I am thou, and thou art I." This was the way of the Mystery Religions. They were all passion plays; the dramatically acted story of some God who suffered and died and rose again. The initiate was carefully prepared by instruction in the inner meaning of the story, by long fasting and continence, and by the

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2 Peter 1:2

deliberate building up of psychological tension. The play was then played out with a magnificent liturgy, sensuous music, carefully calculated lighting and the burning of incense. The aim was that, as the initiate watched, he should so enter into this experience that he became actually one with the suffering, dying, rising, and eternally triumphant God. Again there are troubles here. For one thing, not every one is capable of mystical experience. For another thing, any such experience is necessarily transient; it may leave an effect, but it cannot be a continual experience. Mystical experience is the privilege of the few.

(e) If this knowledge of Jesus Christ does not come by philosophic speculation or by mystical experience, what is it and how does it come? In the New Testament knowledge is characteristically personal knowledge. Paul does not say, "I know what I have believed"; he says, "I know whom I have believed" (2Tim.1:12). Christian knowledge of Christ is personal acquaintance with him; it is knowing him as a person and entering day by day into a more intimate relationship with him.

When Peter speaks of grace and peace coming through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, he is not intellectualizing religion; he is saying that Christianity means an ever-deepening personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

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2 Peter 1:3-7

THE GREATNESS OF JESUS CHRIST FOR MEN

2 Peter 1:3-7 (Part 1)

Since his divine power has bestowed upon us all things that are necessary for true life and true religion, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, and since through these gifts there have been bestowed upon us precious and very great promises, that through them we might escape the world's corruption caused by lust and become sharers in the divine nature--since this is so, bend all your energy to the task of equipping your faith with courage, your courage with knowledge, your knowledge with self-control, your self-control with steadfastness, your steadfastness with piety, your piety with brotherly affection, your brotherly affection with Christian love.

In 2Pet.1:3-4 there is a tremendous and comprehensive picture of Jesus Christ.

(i) He is the Christ of power. In him there is the divine power which cannot be ultimately defeated or frustrated. In this world one of the tragedies of life is that love is so often frustrated because it cannot give what it wants to give, cannot do what it wants to do and must so often stand helpless while the loved one meets disaster. But always Christ's love is backed by his power and is, therefore, a victorious love.

(ii) He is the Christ of generosity. He bestows on us all things necessary for true life and true religion. The word Peter uses for religion is *eusebeia* (GSN2150), the characteristic meaning of which is practical religion. Peter is saying that Jesus Christ tells us what life is and then enables us to live it as it ought to be lived. He gives us a religion which is not withdrawal from life but triumphant involvement in it.

(iii) He is the Christ of the precious and great promises. That does not so much mean that he brings us the great and precious promises as that in him these promises come true. Paul put the same thing in a different way when he said that all the promises of God are Yes and Amen in Christ (2Cor.1:20). That is to say Christ says, "Yes. So let it be," to these promises; he confirms and guarantees them. It has been put this way--once we know Jesus Christ, every time we meet a promise in Scripture which begins with the word "Whosoever," we can immediately say to ourselves, "That means me."

(iv) He is the Christ by whom we escape the world's corruption. Peter had to meet the antinomians, the people who used the grace of God as an excuse for sin. They declared that grace was wide enough to cover every sin; therefore, sin does not matter any more, the grace of Christ will win forgiveness for it. For any man to speak like that is simply to show that he intends to sin. But Jesus Christ is the person who can help us overcome the fascination of the world's lust and cleanse us by his presence and his power. So long as we live in this world sin will never completely lose its fascination for us; but in the presence of Christ we have our defence against that fascination.

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2 Peter 1:3-7

(v) He is the Christ who makes us sharers in the divine nature. Here again Peter is using an expression which the pagan thinkers well knew. They spoke much about sharing in the divine nature. But there was this difference--they believed that man had a share in the divine nature by virtue of being man. All men had to do was to live in accordance with the divine nature already in them. The trouble about that is that life flatly contradicts it. On every side we see bitterness, hatred, lust, crime; on every side we see moral failure, helplessness and frustration. Christianity says that men are capable of becoming sharers in the divine nature. It realistically faces man's actuality but at the same time sets no limit to his potentiality. "I am come," said Jesus, "that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn.10:10). As one of the great early fathers said, "He became what we are to make us what he is." Man has it in him to share the nature of God--but only in Jesus Christ can that potentiality be realized.

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2 Peter 1:3-7

EQUIPMENT FOR THE WAY

2 Peter 1:3-7 (Part 2)

Peter says that we must bend all our energies to equip ourselves with a series of great qualities. The word he uses for to equip is *epichoregein* (GSN2023) which he uses again in 2Pet.1:11 when he speaks of us being richly gifted with the right of entry into the eternal kingdom.

This is one of the many Greek words which have a pictorial background. The verb *epichoregein* (GSN2023) comes from the noun *choregos* (GSN5524), which literally means "the leader of a chorus." Perhaps the greatest gift that Greece, and especially Athens, gave to the world was the great works of men like Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, which are still among its most cherished possessions. All these plays needed large choruses and were, therefore, very expensive to produce. In the great days of Athens there were public-spirited citizens who voluntarily took on the duty, at their own expense, of collecting, maintaining, training and equipping such choruses. It was at the great religious festivals that these plays were produced. For instance, at the city Dionysia there were produced three tragedies, five comedies and five dithyrambs. Men had to be round to provide the choruses for them all, a duty which could cost as much as 3,000 drachmae.

The men who undertook these duties out of their own pocket and out of love for their city were called *choregoi*, and *choregein* (GSN5524) was the verb used for undertaking such a duty. The word has a certain lavishness in it. It never means to equip in any cheese-paring and miserly way; it means lavishly to pour out everything that is necessary for a noble performance. *Epichoregein* (GSN2023) went out into a larger world and it grew to mean not only to equip a chorus but to be responsible for any kind of equipment. It can mean to equip an army with all necessary provisions; it can mean to equip the soul with all the necessary virtues for life. But always at the back of it there is this idea of a lavish generosity in the equipment.

So Peter urges his people to equip their lives with every virtue; and that equipment must not be simply a necessary minimum, but lavish and generous. The very word is an incitement to be content with nothing less than the loveliest and the most splendid life.

But there is something else at the back of this. In 2Pet.1:5-6 Peter goes on that we must, as the Revised Standard Version has it, add virtue to virtue, until the whole culminates in Christian love. Behind this is a Stoic idea. The Stoics insisted that in life there must continuously be what they called *prokope* (GSN4297), moral progress. *Prokope* can be used for the advance of an army towards its objective. In the Christian life there must be steady moral advance. Moffatt quotes a saying that, "the Christian life must not be an initial spasm followed by a chronic inertia." It is very apt to be just that; a moment of enthusiasm, when the wonder of Christianity is realized, and then a failure to work out the Christian life in continuous progress.

That brings us to still another basic idea here. Peter bids his people bend every energy to do this. That is to say, in the Christian life the supreme effort of man must cooperate with the grace of God. As Paul has it: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work his good pleasure" (Php.2:12-13). It is true that everything is of faith; but a

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2 Peter 1:3-7

faith which does not issue in life is not faith at all, as Paul would heartily have agreed. Faith is not only commitment to the promises of Christ; it is also commitment to his demands.

Bigg well points out that Aristotle, in the Nicomachean Ethics, says that there are three theories of the source of happiness. (i) It is something which can come by training, by learning and by the formation of right habits. (ii) It is a matter of divine allotment, the gift of God. (iii) It is all a matter of chance.

The truth is that, as the Christian sees it, happiness depends both on God's gift and on our effort. We do not earn salvation but at the same time we have to bend every energy towards the Christian objective of a lovely life. Bengel, in commenting on this passage, asks us to compare the Parable of the Ten Virgins, five of whom were wise and five of whom were foolish. He writes: "The flame is that which is imparted to us by God and from God without our own labour; but the oil is that which a man must pour into life by his own study and his own faithful effort, so that the flame may be fed and increased."

Faith does not exempt a man from works; the generosity of God does not absolve a man from effort. Life is at its noblest and its best when our effort cooperates with God's grace to produce the necessary loveliness.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Peter 1:3-7

THE LADDER OF VIRTUES (1)

2 Peter 1:3-7 (Part 3)

Let us then look at the list of virtues which have to be added one to another. it is worth noting that in the ancient world such lists were common. It was a world in which books were not nearly so cheap and so readily available as they are today. Instruction, therefore, had for the most part to be carried in the pupil's head; and easily memorized lists were one of the commonest ways of inculcating instruction. One ingenious way of teaching the child the names of the virtues was by means of a game played with counters which could be won or lost, each of which bore the name of one of the virtues. Lists of virtues were common in the early Christian writings. Paul gives us the fruit of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal.5:22-23). In the Pastoral Epistles the man of God is bidden to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness (1Tim.6:11).

In The Shepherd of Hermas (Visions 3.8.1-7), faith, self-control, simplicity, innocence and reverence, understanding and love are daughters one of another. In the Epistle of Barnabas (2) fear and endurance are the helpers of faith; patience and self-control are our allies; and when these are present a man can develop and possess wisdom, prudence, understanding and knowledge. Let us look one by one at the stages in the list which this letter gives us.

(i) It begins with faith (pistis, GSN4102); everything goes back to that. For Peter faith is the conviction that what Jesus Christ says is true and that we can commit ourselves to his promises and launch ourselves on his demands. It is the unquestioning certainty that the way to happiness and peace and strength on earth and in heaven is to accept him at his word.

(ii) To faith must be added what the Revised Standard Version calls virtue and we have called courage. The word is arete (GSN0703); it is very rare in the New Testament but it is the supreme Greek word for virtue in every sense of the term. It means excellence. It has two special directions in which its meaning moves. (a) Arete (GSN0703) is what we might call operative, or efficient excellence. To take two examples of its usage from widely differing spheres--it can be used of land which is fertile; and it can be used of the mighty deeds of the gods. Arete (GSN0703) is that virtue which makes a man a good citizen and friend; it is that virtue which makes him an expert in the technique of living well. (b) Arete (GSN0703) often means courage. Plutarch says that God is a hope of arete (GSN0703), not an excuse for cowardice.

In 2 Maccabees we read of how Eleazar died rather than be false to the laws of God and his fathers; and the story ends by saying that he left his death for an example of noble courage (arete, GSN0703) and a memorial of virtue, not only to young men, but also to all the nation (2Macc.6:31).

In this passage it is not necessary to choose between these two meanings; they are both there. Faith must issue, not in the retirement of the cloister and the cell, but in a life effective in the service of God and man; and it must issue in the courage always to show whose it is and whom it serves.

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2 Peter 1:3-7

(iii) To courage must be added knowledge. The word is gnosis (GSN1108). In ethical Greek language there are two words which have a similar meaning with a very significant difference. Sophia (GSN4678) is wisdom, in the sense of "knowledge of things both human and divine, and of their causes." It is knowledge of first causes and of deep and ultimate things. Gnosis (GSN1108) is practical knowledge; it is the ability to apply to particular situations the ultimate knowledge which sophia (GSN4678) gives. Gnosis (GSN1108) is that knowledge which enables a man to decide rightly and to act honourably and efficiently in the day to day circumstances of life. So, then, to faith must be added courage and effectiveness; to courage and effectiveness must be added the practical wisdom to deal with life.

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2 Peter 1:3-7

THE LADDER OF VIRTUES (2)

2 Peter 1:3-7 (Part 4)

(iv) To this practical knowledge must be added self-control, or self-mastery. The word is egkrateia (GSN1466), and it means literally the ability, to take a grip of oneself. This is a virtue of which the great Greeks spoke and wrote and thought much. In regard to a man and his passions Aristotle distinguishes four states in life. There is sophrosune (GSN4997), in which passion has been entirely subjugated to reason; we might call it perfect temperance. There is akolasia, which is the precise opposite; it is the state in which reason is entirely subjugated to passion--we might call it unbridled lust. In between these two states there is akrasia (GSN0192), in which reason fights but passion prevails; we might call it incontinence. There is egkrateia (GSN1466), in which reason fights against passion and prevails; we call it self-control, or self-mastery.

Egkrateia (GSN1466) is one of the great Christian virtues; and the place it holds is an example of the realism of the Christian ethic. That ethic does not contemplate a situation in which a man is emasculated of all passion; it envisages a situation in which his passions remain, but are under perfect control and so become his servants, not his tyrants.

(v) To this self-control must be added steadfastness. The word is hupomone (GSN5281). Chrysostom called hupomone (GSN5281) "The Queen of the Virtues." In the King James Version it is usually translated patience; but patience is too passive a word. Hupomone (GSN5281), has always a background of courage. Cicero defines patientia, its Latin equivalent, as: "The voluntary and daily suffering of hard and difficult things, for the sake of honour and usefulness." Didymus of Alexandria writes on the temper of Job: "It is not that the righteous man must be without feeling, although he must patiently bear the things which afflict him; but it is true virtue when a man deeply feels the things he toils against, but nevertheless despises sorrows for the sake of God." Hupomone (GSN5281) does not simply accept and endure; there is always a forward look in it. It is said of Jesus, by the writer to the Hebrews, that for the joy that was set before him, he endured the Cross, despising the shame (Heb.12:2).

That is hupomone (GSN5281), Christian steadfastness. It is the courageous acceptance of everything that life can do to us and the transmuting of even the worst event into another step on the upward way.

(vi) To this steadfastness must be added piety. The word is eusebeia (GSN2150) and is quite untranslatable. Even piety is inadequate, carrying as it does a suggestion sometimes of something not altogether attractive. The great characteristic of eusebeia (GSN2150) is that it looks in two directions. The man who has eusebeia (GSN2150) always correctly worships God and gives him his due; but he always correctly serves his fellow-men and gives them their due. The man who is eusebes (GSN2152) (the corresponding adjective) is in a right relationship both with God and his fellow-men. Eusebeia (GSN2150) is piety but in its most practical aspect.

We may best see the meaning of this word by looking at the man whom the Greeks held to be its finest example. That man was Socrates whom Xenophon describes as follows: "He was so pious and devoutly religious that he would take no step apart from the will of heaven; so just and upright

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2 Peter 1:3-7

that he never did even a trifling injury to any living soul; so self-controlled, so temperate, that he never at any time chose the sweeter instead of the better; so sensible, so wise, and so prudent that in distinguishing the better from the worse he never erred" (Xenophon: Memorabilia 1.5.8--11).

In Latin the word is pietas; and Warde Fowler describes the Roman idea of the man who possesses that quality: "He is superior to the enticements of individual passion and of selfish ease; (pietas is) a sense of duty which never left a man, of duty first to the gods, then to father and to family, to son and to daughter, to his people and to his nation."

Eusebeia (GSN2150) is the nearest Greek word for religion; and, when we begin to define it, we see the intensely practical character of the Christian religion. When a man becomes a Christian, he acknowledges a double duty, to God and to his fellow-men.

(vii) To this piety must be added brotherly affection. The word is philadelphia (GSN5360), which literally means love of the brethren. The point is this--there is a kind of religious devotion which separates a man from his fellow-men. The claims of his fellow-men become an intrusion on his prayers, his study of God's word and his meditation. The ordinary demands of human relationships become a nuisance. Epictetus, the great Stoic philosopher, never married. Half-jestingly he said that he was doing far more for the world by being an unfettered philosopher than if he had produced "two or three dirty-nosed children." "How can he who has to teach mankind run to get something in which to heat the water to give the baby his bath?" What Peter is saying is that there is something wrong with the religion which finds the claims of personal relationships a nuisance.

(viii) The ladder of Christian virtue must end in Christian love. Not even affection for the brethren is enough; the Christian must end with a love which is as wide as that love of God which causes his sun to rise on the just and on the unjust, and sends his rain on the evil and the good. The Christian must show to all men the love which God has shown to him.

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2 Peter 1:8-11

ON THE WAY

2 Peter 1:8-11

For, if these things exist and increase within you, they will make you not ineffective and not unfruitful in your progress towards the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever does not possess these things is blind, short-sighted, and has lapsed into forgetfulness that the sins of his old way of life have been cleansed away. So, brothers, be the more eager to confirm your calling and your choice. For, if you do practise these virtues, you will never slip, for you will be richly gifted with the right of entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter strongly urges his people to keep climbing up this ladder of virtues which he has set before them. The more we know of any subject the more we are fit to know. It is always true that "to him that hath it shall be given." Progress is the way to more progress. Moffatt says of ourselves and Jesus Christ: "We learn him as we live with him and for him." As the hymn has it:

May every heart confess thy name,
And ever thee adore,
And, seeking thee, itself inflame
To seek thee more and more.

To keep climbing up the ladder of the virtues is to come ever nearer to knowing Jesus Christ; and the further we climb, the further we are able to climb.

On the other hand, if we refuse to make the effort of the upward climb, certain things happen. (a) We grow blind; we are left without the guiding light that the knowledge of Jesus Christ brings. As Peter sees it, to walk without Christ is to walk in the dark and not to be able to see the way. (b) We grow what Peter calls *muopazon* (GSN3467). This word can have either of two meanings. It can mean short-sighted. It is easy to become short-sighted in life, to see things only as they appear at the moment and to be unable to take the long view of things, to have our eyes so fixed upon earth that we never think of the things beyond. It can also mean blinking, shutting the eyes. Again, it is easy in life to shut our eyes to what we do not wish to see, and to walk, as it were, in blinkers. To walk without Christ is to be in danger of taking the short-sighted or the blinkered view of life.

Further, to fail to climb the ladder of virtue is to forget that the sins of the old way of life have been cleansed away. Peter is thinking of baptism. At that time baptism was adult baptism; it was a deliberate act of decision to leave the old way and to enter upon the new. The man who, after baptism, does not begin upon the upward climb has forgotten, or never realized, the meaning of the experience through which he has passed. For many of us the parallel to baptism in this sense is entry into the membership of the Christian Church. To make our commitment and then to remain exactly the same, is to fail to understand what church membership means, for our entry into it should be the beginning of a climb upon the upward way.

In view of all this, Peter urges his people to make every effort to confirm their calling by God. Here is a most significant demand. In one way all is of God; it is God's call which gives us entry

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2 Peter 1:8-11

into the fellowship of his people; without his grace and his mercy we could do nothing and could expect nothing. But that does not absolve us from every possible effort.

Let us take an analogy, which, although not perfect, may help us to understand. Suppose a man who is wealthy and kind picks out a poor lad, who would never otherwise have had the chance, and offers him the privilege of a university education. The benefactor is giving the lad something which he could never have achieved for himself; but the lad cannot make use of that privilege unless he is prepared to work, and the harder he works the more he will enter into the privilege offered to him. The gracious free offer and the personal hard work have to combine before the privilege becomes fully effective.

It is so with us and God. God has called us in his free mercy and his unmerited grace; but at the same time we have to bend every effort to toil upwards and onwards on the way.

If we follow this upward way, Peter says, we shall in the end be richly gifted with the right of entry into his eternal kingdom; and we shall not slip upon the way. By this Peter does not mean that we will never sin. The picture in his mind is of a march and he means that we will never fall out upon the march and be left behind. If we set out upon this upward and onward way, the effort will be great but God's help will also be great; and in spite of all the toil, he will enable us to keep going until we reach our journey's end.

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2 Peter 1:12-15

THE PASTOR'S CARE

2 Peter 1:12-15

It is for this reason that I intend constantly to remind you of these things, although you already know them, and although you are already firmly established in the truth which you possess. I think it is right, so long as I am in this tent, to rouse you by reminding you, for I know that the time to put off my tent is coming soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has told me. Yes, and I will make it my endeavour to see to it that after my departure you will constantly remember these things.

Here speaks the pastor's care. In this passage Peter shows us two things about preaching and teaching. First, preaching is very often reminding a man of what he already knows. It is the bringing back to his memory that truth which he has forgotten, or at which he refuses to look, or whose meaning he has not fully appreciated. Second, Peter is going to go on to uncompromising rebuke and warning, but he begins with something very like a compliment. He says that his people already possess the truth and are firmly established in it. Always a preacher, a teacher or a parent will achieve more by encouragement than by scolding. We do more to reform people and to keep them safe by, as it were, putting them on their honour than by flaying them with invective. Peter was wise enough to know that the first essential to make men listen is to show that we believe in them.

Peter looks forward to his early death. He talks of his body as his tent, as Paul does (2Cor.5:4). This was a favourite picture with the early Christian writers. The Epistle to Diognetus says, "The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tent." The picture comes from the journeyings of the patriarchs in the Old Testament. They had no abiding residence but lived in tents because they were on the way to the Promised Land. The Christian knows well that his life in this world is not a permanent residence but a journey towards the world beyond. We get the same idea in 2Pet.1:15. There Peter speaks of his approaching death as his exodos, his departure. Exodos is, of course, the word which is used for the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, and their setting out to the Promised Land. Peter sees death, not as the end but as the going out into the Promised Land of God.

Peter says that Jesus Christ has told him that for him the end will soon be coming. This may be a reference to the prophecy in Jn.21:18-19, when Jesus foretells that there will come a day when Peter also will be stretched out upon a cross. That time is about to come.

Peter says that he will take steps to see that what he has got to say to them will be held before their memory even when he is gone from this earth. That may well be a reference to the Gospel according to St. Mark. The consistent tradition is that it is the preaching material of Peter. Irenaeus says that, after the death of Peter and Paul, Mark, who had been his disciple and interpreter, handed on in writing the things which it had been Peter's custom to preach. Papias, who lived towards the end of the second century and collected many traditions about the early days of the Church, hands down the same tradition about Mark's gospel: "Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done. For he was not a bearer of the Lord, or a follower of his; he followed Peter, as I have said, at a later date and

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2 Peter 1:12-15

Peter adapted his instruction to practical needs, without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically.

So that Mark was not wrong in writing down some things in this way from memory, for his one concern was neither to omit nor to falsify anything that he had heard." It may well be that the reference here means that Peter's teaching was made still available to his people in Mark's Gospel after his death.

In any event, the pastor's aim was to bring to his people God's truth while he was still alive and to take steps to keep it in their memories after he was dead. He wrote, not to preserve his own name, but the name of Jesus Christ.

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2 Peter 1:16-18

THE MESSAGE AND THE RIGHT TO GIVE IT

2 Peter 1:16-18

For it was not cleverly invented fables that we followed when we made known to you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; it was because we were made eye-witnesses of his majesty. This happened to us on that occasion when he received honour and glory from God the Father, when this voice was borne to him by the majestic glory--"This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased." It was this voice that we heard, borne from heaven, when we were with him in the sacred mountain.

Peter comes to the message which it was his great aim to bring to his people, concerning "the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." As we shall see quite clearly as we go on, the great aim of this letter is to recall men to certainty in regard to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The heretics whom Peter is attacking no longer believed in it; it was so long delayed that people had begun to think it would never happen at all.

Such, then, was Peter's message. Having stated it, he goes on to speak of his right to state it; and does something which is, at least at first sight, surprising. His right to speak is that he was with, Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and that there he saw the glory and the honour which were given to him and heard the voice of God speak to him. That is to say, Peter uses the transfiguration story, not as a foretaste of the Resurrection of Jesus, as it is commonly regarded, but as a foretaste of the triumphant glory of the Second Coming. The transfiguration story is told in Matt.17:1-8; Mk.9:2-8; Lk.9:28-36. Was Peter right in seeing in it a foretaste of the Second Coming rather than a prefiguring of the Resurrection?

There is one particularly significant thing about the transfiguration story. In all three gospels, it immediately follows the prophecy of Jesus which said that there were some standing there who would not pass from the world until they had seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom (Matt.16:29; Mk.9:1; Lk.9:27). That would certainly seem to indicate that the transfiguration and the Second Coming were in some way linked together.

Whatever we may say, this much is certain, that Peter's great aim in this letter is to recall his people to a living belief in the Second Coming of Christ and he bases his right to do so on what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration.

In 2Pet.1:16 there is a very interesting word. Peter says, "We were made eye-witnesses of his majesty." The word he uses for eye-witness is *epoptes* (GSN2030). In the Greek usage of Peter's day this was a technical word. We have already spoken about the Mystery Religions. They were all of the nature of passion plays, in which the story of a god who lived, suffered, died, and rose again was played out. It was only after a long course of instruction and preparation that the worshipper was finally allowed to be present at the passion play, and to be offered the experience of becoming one with the dying and rising God. When he reached this stage, he was an initiate and the technical word to describe him was *epoptes* (GSN2030); he was a privileged eye-witness of the experiences of God. So Peter says that the Christian is an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ. With the eye

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2 Peter 1:16-18

of faith he sees the Cross; in the experience of faith he dies with Christ to sin and rises to righteousness.

His faith has made him one with Jesus Christ in his death and in his risen life and power.

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2 Peter 1:19-21

THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

2 Peter 1:19-21

So this makes the word of the prophets still more certain for us; and you will do well to pay attention to it, as it shines like a lamp in a dingy place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises within your hearts. For you must first and foremost realize that no prophecy in Scripture permits of private interpretation; for no prophecy was ever borne to us by the will of man, but men spoke from God, when they were carried away by the Holy Spirit.

This is a particularly difficult passage, because in both halves of it the Greek can mean quite different things. We look at these different possibilities and in each case we take the less probable first.

(i) The first sentence can well mean: "In prophecy we have an even surer guarantee, that is, of the Second Coming." If Peter did say this, he means that the words of the prophets are an even surer guarantee of the reality of the Second Coming than his own experience on the Mount of Transfiguration.

However unlikely it may seem, it is by no means impossible that he did say just that. When he was writing there was a tremendous interest in the words of prophecy whose fulfillment in Christianity was seen to prove its truth. We get case after case of people converted in the days of the early church by reading the Old Testament books and seeing their prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. It would be quite in line with that to declare that the strongest argument for the Second Coming is that the prophets foretold it.

(ii) But we think that the second possibility is to be preferred: "What we saw on the Mount of Transfiguration makes it even more certain that what is foretold in the prophets about the Second Coming must be true."

However we take it, the meaning is that the glory of Jesus on the mountain top and the visions of the prophets combine to make it certain that the Second Coming is a living reality which all men must expect and for which all men must prepare.

There is also a double possibility about the second part of this passage. "No prophecy of the Scripture," as the Revised Standard Version has it, "is a matter of one's own interpretation."

(i) Many of the early scholars took this to mean: "When any of the prophets interpreted any situation in history or told how history was going to unfold itself, they were not expressing a private opinion of their own; they were passing on a revelation which God had given them." This is a perfectly possible meaning. In the Old Testament the mark of a false prophet was that he was speaking of himself, as it were, privately, and not saying what God had told him to say. Jeremiah condemns the false prophets: "They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord" (Jer.23:16). Ezekiel says, "Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing" (Eze.13:3). Hippolytus describes the way in which the words of the true prophets

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2 Peter 1:19-21

came: "They did not speak of their own power, nor did they proclaim what they themselves wished, but first they were given right wisdom by the word, and were then instructed by visions."

On this view the passage means that, when the prophets spoke, it was no private opinion they were giving; it was a revelation from God and, therefore, their words must be carefully heeded.

(ii) The second way to take this passage is as referring to our interpretation of the prophets. A situation was confronting Peter in which the heretics and the evil men were interpreting the prophets to suit themselves. On this view, which we support, Peter is saying: "No man can go to Scripture and interpret it as it suits himself."

This is of first-rate practical importance. Peter is saying that no man has the right to interpret Scripture, to use his own word, privately. How then must it be interpreted? To answer that question we must ask another. How did the prophets receive their message? They received it from the Spirit. It was sometimes even said that the Spirit of God used the prophets as a writer uses a pen or as a musician uses a musical instrument. In any event the Spirit gave the prophet his message. The obvious conclusion is that it is only through the help of that same Spirit that the prophetic message can be understood. As Paul had already said, spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1Cor.2:14-15). As the Jews viewed the Holy Spirit, he has two functions--he brings God's truth to men and he enables men to understand that truth when it is brought. So, then, Scripture is not to be interpreted by private cleverness or private prejudice; it is to be interpreted by the help of the Holy Spirit by whom it was first given.

Practically that means two things.

(a) Throughout all the ages the Spirit has been working in devoted scholars who under the guidance of God have opened the Scriptures to men. If, then, we wish to interpret Scripture, we must never arrogantly insist that our own interpretation must be correct; we must humbly go to the works of the scholars to learn what they have to teach us because of what the Spirit taught them.

(b) There is more than that. The one place in which the Spirit specially resides and is specially operative is the Church; and, therefore, Scripture must be interpreted in the light of the teaching, the belief and the tradition of the Church. God is our Father in the faith, but the Church is our mother in the faith. If a man finds that his interpretation of Scripture is at variance with the teaching of the Church, he must humbly examine himself and ask whether his guide has not been his own private wishes rather than the Holy Spirit.

It is Peter's insistence that Scripture does not consist of any man's private opinions but is the revelation of God to men through his Spirit; and that, therefore, its interpretation must not depend on any man's private opinions but must ever be guided by that same Spirit who is still specially operative within the Church.

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2 Peter 2:1

FALSE PROPHETS

2 Peter 2:1 (Part 1)

There were times when false prophets arose among the people, even as amongst you too there will be false teachers, men who will insidiously introduce destructive heresies and deny the Lord who bought them; and by so doing they will bring swift destruction on themselves.

That there should arise false prophets within the Church was something only to be expected, for in every generation false prophets had been responsible for leading God's people astray and for bringing disaster on the nation. It is worth while looking at the false prophets in the Old Testament story for their characteristics were recurring in the time of Peter and are still recurring today.

(i) The false prophets were more interested in gaining popularity than in telling the truth. Their policy was to tell people what they wanted to hear. The false prophets said, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer.6:14). They saw visions of peace, when the Lord God was saying that there was no peace (Eze.13:16). In the days of Jehosaphat, Zedekiah, the false prophet, donned his horns of iron and said that Israel would push the Syrians out of the way as he pushed with these horns; Micaiah the true prophet foretold disaster if Jehosaphat went to war. Of course, Zedekiah was popular and his message was accepted; but Jehosaphat went forth to war with the Syrians and perished tragically (1Kgs.22). In the days of Jeremiah, Hananiah prophesied the swift end of the power of Babylon, while Jeremiah prophesied the servitude of the nation to her; and again the prophet who told people what they wished to hear was the popular one (Jer.28). Diogenes, the great cynic philosopher, spoke of the false teachers of his day whose method was to follow wherever the applause of the crowd led. One of the first characteristics of the false prophet is that he tells men what they want to hear and not the truth they need to hear.

(ii) The false prophets were interested in personal gain. As Micah said, "Its priests teach for hire, and its prophets divine for money" (Mic.3:11). They teach for filthy lucre's sake (Tit.1:11), and they identify godliness and gain, making their religion a money-making thing (1Tim.6:5). We can see these exploiters at work in the early church. In The Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, which is what might be called the first service-order book, it is laid down that a prophet who asks for money or for a table to be spread in front of him, is a false prophet. "Traffickers in Christ," the Didache (compare GSN1322) calls such men (The Didache 11). The false prophet is a covetous creature who regards men as dupes to be exploited for his own ends.

(iii) The false prophets were dissolute in their personal life. Isaiah writes: "The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink; they are confused with wine" (Isa.28:7). Jeremiah says, "In the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing; they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evil-doers.... They lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness" (Jer.23:14; Jer.23:32). The false prophet in himself is a seduction to evil rather than an attraction to good.

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(iv) The false prophet was above all a man who led other men further away from God instead of closer to him. The prophet who invites the people: "Let us go after other gods," must be mercilessly destroyed (Deut.13:1-5; Deut.18:20). The false prophet takes men in the wrong direction.

These were the characteristics of the false prophets in the ancient days and in Peter's time; and they are their characteristics still.

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2 Peter 2:1

THE SINS OF THE FALSE PROPHETS AND THEIR END

2 Peter 2:1 (Part 2)

In this verse Peter has certain things to say about these false prophets and their actions.

(i) They insidiously introduce destructive heresies. The Greek for heresy is *hairesis* (GSN0139). It comes from the verb *haireisthai* (compare GSN0140), which means to choose; and originally it was a perfectly honourable word. It simply meant a line of belief and action which a man had chosen for himself. In the New Testament we read of the *hairesis* (GSN0139) of the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Nazarenes (Ac.5:17; Ac.15:5; Ac.24:5). It was perfectly possible to speak of the *hairesis* (GSN0139) of Plato and to mean nothing more than those who were Platonist in their thought. It was perfectly possible to speak of a group of doctors who practised a certain method of treatment as a *hairesis* (GSN0139). But very soon in the Christian Church *hairesis* (GSN0139) changed its complexion.

In Paul's thought heresies and schisms go together as things to be condemned (1Cor.11:18-19); *haireseis* (GSN0139) (the plural form of the word) are part of the works of the flesh; a man that is a heretic is to be warned and even given a second chance, and then rejected (Tit.3:10).

Why the change? The point is that before the coming of Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, there was no such thing as definite, God-given truth. A man was presented with a number of alternatives any one of which he was perfectly free to choose to believe. But with the coming of Jesus, God's truth came to men and they had either to accept or to reject it. A heretic then became a man who believed what he wished to believe instead of accepting the truth of God which he ought to believe.

What was happening in the case of Peter's people was that certain self-styled prophets were insidiously persuading men to believe the things they wished to be true rather than the things which God had revealed to be true. They did not set themselves up as opponents of Christianity. Far from it. They set themselves up as the finest fruits of Christian thinking; and so it was gradually and subtly that people were being lured away from God's truth to other men's private opinions, which is what heresy is.

(ii) These men denied the Lord who had bought them. This idea of Christ buying men for himself is one which runs through the whole New Testament. It comes from his own word that he had come to give his life a ransom for many (Mk.10:45). The idea was that men were slaves to sin and Jesus purchased them at the cost of his life for himself, and, therefore, for freedom. "You were bought with a price," says Paul (1Cor.7:23). "Christ redeemed us (bought us out) from the curse of the law" (Gal.3:13). In the new song in the Revelation the hosts of heaven tell how Jesus Christ bought them with his blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation (Rev.5:9). This clearly means two things. It means that the Christian by right of purchase belongs absolutely to Christ; and it means that a life which cost so much cannot be squandered on sin or on cheap things.

The heretics in Peter's letter were denying the Lord who bought them. That could mean that they were saying that they did not know Christ; and it could mean that they were denying his authority.

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2 Peter 2:1

But it is not as simple as that; one might say that it is not as honest as that. We have seen that these men claimed to be Christians; more, they claimed to be the wisest and the most advanced of Christians. Let us take a human analogy. Suppose a man says that he loves his wife and yet is consistently unfaithful to her. By his acts of infidelity he denies, gives the lie to his words of love. Suppose a man protests eternal friendship to someone, and yet is consistently disloyal to him. His actions deny, give the lie to, his protestations of friendship. What these evil men, who were troubling Peter's people, were doing, was to say that they loved and served Christ, while the things they taught and did were a complete denial of him.

(iii) The end of these evil men was destruction. They were insidiously introducing destructive heresies, but these heresies would in the end destroy themselves. There is no more certain way to ultimate condemnation than to teach another to sin.

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2 Peter 2:2-3

THE WORK OF FALSEHOOD

2 Peter 2:2-3

And many will follow the way of their blatant immoralities and through them the true way will be brought into disrepute. In their evil ambition they will exploit you with cunningly forged arguments. Their sentence was settled long ago, and now it is not inactive, and their destruction is not asleep.

In this short passage we see four things about the false teachers and their teaching.

(i) We see the cause of false teaching. It is evil ambition. The word is pleonexia (GSN4124); pleon (GSN4119) means more and -exia comes from the verb echein (GSN2192), which means to have. Pleonexia (GSN4124) is the desire to possess more but it acquires a certain flavour. It is by no means always a sin to desire to possess more; there are many cases in which that is a perfectly honourable desire, as in the case of virtue, or knowledge, or skill. But pleonexia (GSN4124) comes to mean the desire to possess that which a man has no right to desire, still less to take. So it can mean covetous desire for money and for other people's goods; lustful desire for someone's person; unholy ambition for prestige and power. False teaching comes from the desire to put its own ideas in the place of the truth of Jesus Christ; the false teacher is guilty of nothing less than of usurping the place of Christ.

(ii) We see the method of false teaching. It is the use of cunningly forged arguments. Falsehood is easily resisted when it is presented as falsehood; it is when it is disguised as truth that it becomes menacing. There is only one touchstone. Any teacher's teaching must be tested by the words and presence of Jesus Christ himself.

(iii) We see the affect of the false teaching. It was twofold. It encouraged men to take the way of blatant immorality. The word is aselgeia (GSN0766) which describes the attitude of the man who is lost to shame and cares for the judgment of neither man nor God. We must remember what was at the back of this false teaching. It was perverting the grace of God into a justification for sin. The false teachers were telling men that grace was inexhaustible and that, therefore, they were free to sin as they liked for grace would forgive.

This false teaching had a second effect. It brought Christianity into disrepute. In the early days, just as now, every Christian was a good or bad advertisement for Christianity and the Christian Church. It is Paul's accusation to the Jews that through them the name of God has been brought into disrepute (Rom.2:24). In the Pastoral Epistles the younger women are urged to behave with such modesty and chastity that the Church will never be brought into disrepute (Tit.2:5). Any teaching which produces a person who repels men from Christianity instead of attracting them to it is false teaching, and the work of those who are enemies of Christ.

(iv) We see the ultimate end of false teaching and that is destruction. Sentence was passed on the false prophets long ago; the Old Testament pronounced their doom (Deut.13:1-5). It might look as if that sentence had become inoperative or was slumbering, but it was still valid, and the day would

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come when the false teachers would pay the terrible price of their falsehood. No man who leads another astray will ever escape his own judgment.

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2 Peter 2:4-11

THE FATE OF THE WICKED AND THE RESCUE OF THE RIGHTEOUS

2 Peter 2:4-11 (Part 1)

If God did not spare even angels who had sinned, but condemned them to the lowest hell and committed them to the pits of darkness, where they remain kept for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved in safety Noah, the preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when he despatched the flood on a world of impious men; if he reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, when he sentenced them to destruction and so gave an example of what would happen to those who would one day act with impiety, but rescued righteous Lot, who was distressed by the blatantly immoral conduct of lawless men, for, to such a man, righteous in his looking and in his hearing, it was torture for his righteous soul to live his daily life amidst such people and amidst such lawless deeds--if all this is so, you can be sure that the Lord knows how to rescue truly religious men from trial and how to preserve the unrighteous under punishment, until the day of judgment comes, especially those whose lives are dominated by the polluting lusts of the flesh and who despise the celestial powers. Audacious, self-willed men they are. they do not shrink from speaking evil of the angelic glories, whereas angels who are greater in strength and power do not bring an accusation of evil against them in the presence of the Lord.

Here is a passage which for us combines undoubted power and equally undoubted obscurity. The white heat of its rhetorical intensity glows through it to this day; but it moves in allusions which would be terrifyingly effective to those who heard it for the first time, but which have become unfamiliar to us today. It cites three notorious examples of sin and its destruction; and in two of the cases it shows how, when sin was obliterated, righteousness was rescued and preserved by the mercy and the grace of God. Let us look at these examples one by one.

1. THE SIN OF THE ANGELS

Before we retell the story which lies behind this in Jewish legend, there are two separate words at which we must look.

Peter says that God condemned the sinning angels to the lowest depths of hell. Literally the Greek says that God condemned the angels to Tartarus (tartaroun, GSN5020). Tartarus was not a Hebrew conception but Greek. In Greek mythology Tartarus was the lowest hell; it was as far beneath Hades as the heaven is high above the earth. In particular it was the place into which there had been cast the Titans who had rebelled against Zeus, the Father of gods and men.

The second word is that which speaks of the pits of darkness. Here there is a doubt. There are two Greek words, both rather uncommon, which are confused in this passage. One is siros or seiros which originally meant a great earthenware jar for the storing of grain. Then it came to mean the great underground pits in which grain was stored and which served as granaries. Siros has come into English via Provencal in the form of silo, which still describes the towers in which grain is stored. Still later the word went on to mean a pit in which a wolf or other wild animal was trapped. If we think that this is the word which Peter uses, and according to the best manuscripts it is, it will

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mean that the wicked angels were cast into great subterranean pits and kept there in darkness and in punishment. This well suits the idea of a Tartarus beneath the lowest depths of Hades.

But there is a very similar word seira (GSN4577), which means a chain. This is the word which the King James Version translates when it speaks of chains of darkness (2Pet.2:4). The Greek manuscripts of Second Peter vary between seiroi (GSN4577), pits, and seirai (GSN4577), chains. But the better manuscripts have seiroi (GSN4577), and pits of darkness makes better sense than chains of darkness; so we may take seiros (GSN4577) as right, and assume that here the King James Version is in error.

The story of the fall of the angels is one which rooted itself deeply in Hebrew thought and which underwent much development as the years went on. The original story is in Gen.6:1-5. There the angels are called the sons of God, as they commonly are in the Old Testament. In Job, the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan comes amongst them (Jb.1:6; compare Jb.2:1; Jb.38:7). The Psalmist speaks of the sons of gods (Ps.89:6). These angels came to earth and seduced mortal women. The result of this lustful union was the race of giants; and through them wickedness came upon the earth. Clearly this is an old, old story belonging to the childhood of the race.

This story was much developed in the Book of Enoch, and it is from it that Peter is drawing his allusions, for in his day that was a book which everyone would know. In Enoch the angels are called The Watchers. Their leader in rebellion was Semjaza or Azazel. At his instigation they descended to Mount Hermon in the days of Jared, the father of Enoch. They took mortal wives and instructed them in magic and in arts which gave them power. They produced the race of the giants, and the giants produced the nephilim (HSN5303), the giants who inhabited the land of Canaan and of whom the people were afraid (Num.13:33).

These giants became cannibals and were guilty of every kind of lust and crime, and especially of insolent arrogance to God and man. The apocryphal literature has many references to them and their pride. Wisdom (Wis.14:6) tells how the proud giants perished. Ecclesiasticus (Sir.16:7) tells how the ancient giants fell away in the strength of their foolishness. They had no wisdom and they perished in their folly (Bar.3:26-28). Josephus says that they were arrogant and contemptuous of all that was good and trusted in their own strength (Antiquities 1.3.1). Job says that God charged his angels with folly (Jb.4:18).

This old story makes a strange and fleeting appearance in the letters of Paul. In 1Cor.11:10 Paul says that women must have their hair covered in the Church because of the angels. Behind that strange saying lies the old belief that it was the loveliness of the long hair of the women of the olden times which moved the angels to desire, and Paul wishes to see that the angels are not tempted again.

In the end even men complained of the sorrow and misery brought into the world by these giants through the sin of the angels. The result was that God sent out his archangels. Raphael bound Azazel hand and foot and shut him up in darkness; Gabriel slew the giants; and the Watchers, the sinning angels, were shut up in the abysses of darkness under the mountains for seventy generations

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and then confined for ever in everlasting fire. Here is the story which is in Peter's mind; and which his readers well knew. The angels had sinned and God had sent his destruction, and they were shut up for ever in the pits of darkness and the depths of hell. That is what happens to rebellious sin.

The story does not stop there; and it reappears in another of its forms in this passage of Second Peter. In 2Pet.2:10 Peter speaks of those who live lives dominated by the polluting lusts of the flesh and who despise the celestial powers. The word is *kuriotes* (GSN2963), which is the name of one of the ranks of angels. They speak evil of the angelic glories. The word is *doxai* (GSN1391), which also is a word for one of the ranks of angels. They slander the angels and bring them into disrepute.

Here is where the second turn of the story comes in. Obviously this story of the angels is very primitive and, as time went on, it became rather an awkward and embarrassing story because of its ascription of lust to angels. So in later Jewish and Christian thought two lines of thought developed. First, it was denied that the story involved angels at all. The sons of God were said to be good men who were the descendants of Seth, and the daughters of men were said to be evil women who were the daughters of Cain and corrupted the good men. There is no scriptural evidence for this distinction and this way of escape. Second, the whole story was allegorised. It was claimed, for instance by Philo, that it was never meant to be taken literally and described the fall of the human soul under the attack of the seductions of lustful pleasures. Augustine declared that no man could take this story literally and talk of the angels like that.

Cyril of Alexandria said that it could not be taken literally, for did not Jesus say that in the after-life men would be like angels and there would be no marrying or giving in marriage (Matt.22:30)? Chrysostom said that, if the story was taken literally, it was nothing short of blasphemy. And Cyril went on to say that the story was nothing other than an incentive to sin, if it was taken as literally true.

It is clear that men began to see that this was indeed a dangerous story. Here we get our clue as to what Peter means when he speaks of men who despise the celestial powers and bring the angelic glories into disrepute by speaking slanderously of them. The men whom Peter was opposing were turning their religion into an excuse for blatant immorality. Cyril of Alexandria makes it clear that in his day the story could be used as an incentive to sin. Most probably what was happening was that the wicked men of Peter's time were citing the example of the angels as a justification for their own sin. They were saying, "If angels came from heaven and took mortal women, why should not we?" They were making the conduct of the angels an excuse for their own sin.

We have to go still further with this passage. In 2Pet.2:11 it finishes very obscurely. It says that angels who are greater in strength and in power do not bring a slanderous charge against them in the presence of God. Once again Peter is speaking allusively, in a way that would be clear enough to the people of his day but which is obscure to us. His reference may be to either of two stories.

(a) He may be referring to the story to which Jude refers in Jd.9; that the archangel Michael was entrusted with the burying of the body of Moses. Satan claimed the body on the grounds that all matter belonged to him and that once Moses had murdered an Egyptian. Michael did not bring a railing charge against Satan; all he said was: "The Lord rebuke you." The point is that even an angel so great as Michael would not bring an evil charge against an angel so dark as Satan. He left

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the matter to God. If Michael refrained from slandering an evil angel, how can men bring slanderous charges against the angels of God?

(b) He may be referring to a further development of the Enoch story. Enoch tells that when the conduct of the giants on earth became intolerable, men made their complaint to the archangels Michael, Uriel, Gabriel and Raphael. The archangels took this complaint to God; but they did not rail against the evil angels who were responsible for it all; they simply took the story to God, for him to deal with (Enoch 9).

As far as we can see today, the situation behind Peter's allusions is that the wicked men who were the slaves of lust claimed that the angels were their examples and their justification and so slandered them; Peter reminds them that not even archangels dared slander other angels and demands how men can dare to do so.

This is a strange and difficult passage; but the meaning is clear. Even angels, when they sinned, were punished. How much more shall men be punished? Angels could not rebel against God and escape the consequences. How shall men escape? And men need not seek to put the blame on others, not even on angels; nothing but their own rebelliousness is responsible for their sin.

2. THE MEN OF THE FLOOD AND THE RESCUE OF NOAH

The second illustration of the destruction of wickedness which Peter chooses may be said to lead on from the first. The sin introduced into the world by the sinning angels led to that intolerable sin which ended in the destruction by the deluge (Gen.6:5). In the midst of this destruction God did not forget those who had clung to him, Noah was saved together with seven others, his wife, his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japhet, and their wives. In Jewish tradition Noah acquired a very special place. Not only was he regarded as the one man who had been saved; but also as the preacher who had done his best to turn men from the evil of their ways. Josephus says, "Many angels of God lay with women and begat sons, who were violent and who despised all good, on account of their reliance on their own strength.... But Noah displeased and distressed at their behaviour, tried to induce them to alter their dispositions and conduct for the better" (Antiquities 1.3.1).

Attention in this passage is concentrated not so much on the people who were destroyed as on the man who was saved. Noah is offered as the type of man who, amidst the destruction of the wicked, receives the salvation of God. His outstanding qualities were two.

(i) In the midst of a sinning generation he remained faithful to God. Later Paul was to urge his people to be not conformed to the world but transformed from it (Rom.12:2). It may well be said that often the most dangerous sin of all is conformity. To be the same as others is always easy; to be different is always difficult. But from the days of Noah until now he who would be the servant of God must be prepared to be different from the world.

(ii) The later legends pick out another characteristic of Noah. He was the preacher of righteousness. The word for preacher used here is *kerux* (GSN2783), which literally means a herald. Epictetus called the philosopher the *kerux* (GSN2783) of the gods. The preacher is the man

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who brings to men an announcement from God. Here is something of very considerable significance. The good man is concerned not only with the saving of his own soul but just as much with the saving of the souls of others. He does not, in order to preserve his own purity live apart from men. He is concerned to bring God's message to them. A man ought never to keep to himself the grace which he has received. It is always his duty to bring light to those who sit in darkness, guidance to the wanderer and warning to those who are going astray.

3. THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH AND THE RESCUE OF LOT

The third example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the rescue of Lot.

The terrible and dramatic story is told in Gen.18-19. It begins with Abraham's plea that God should not destroy the righteous with the guilty and his request that, if even ten just men are found in these cities, they may be spared (Gen.18:16-33). Then follows one of the grimmest tales in the Old Testament.

The angelic visitors came to Lot and he persuaded them to stay with him; but his house was surrounded by the men of Sodom demanding that these strangers might be brought out for them to use for their unnatural lust (Gen.19:1-11). By that terrible deed--at once the abuse of hospitality, the insulting of angels and the raging of unnatural lust--the doom of the cities was sealed. As the destruction of heaven came upon them Lot and his family were saved, except his wife, who lingered and looked back and turned into a pillar of salt (Gen.19:12-26). "So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt" (Gen.19:29). Here again is the story of the destruction of sin and the rescue of righteousness. As in Noah, we see in Lot the characteristics of the righteous man.

(i) Lot lived in the midst of evil, and the very sight of it was a constant distress to him. Moffatt reminds us of the saying of Newman: "Our great security against sin lies in being shocked at it." Here is something very significant. It often happens that, when evils first emerge, people are shocked at them; but, as time goes on, they cease to be shocked at them and accept them as a matter of course. There are many things at which we ought to be shocked. In our own generation there are the problems of prostitution and promiscuity, drunkenness and drugs, the extraordinary gambling fever which has the country in its grip, the breakdown of the marriage bond, violence, vandalism and crime, death upon the roads, still-existing slum conditions and many others. In many cases the tragedy is that these things have ceased to shock and are accepted in a matter-of-fact style as part of the normal order of things.

For the good of the world and of our own souls, we must keep alive the sensitiveness which is shocked by sin.

(ii) Lot lived in the midst of evil, and yet he escaped its taint. Amidst the sin of Sodom he remained true to God. If a man will remember it, he has in the grace of God an antiseptic which will preserve him from the infection of sin. No man need be the slave of the environment in which he happens to find himself.

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(iii) When the worst came to the worst, Lot was willing to make a clean break with his environment. He was prepared, however much he did not want to do so, to leave it for ever. It was because his wife was not prepared to make the clean break that she perished. There is a strange verse in the Old Testament story. It says that, when Lot lingered, the angelic messengers took hold of his hand (Gen.19:16). There are times when the influence of heaven tries to force us out of some evil situation. It may come to any man to have to make the choice between security and the new start; and there are times when a man can save his soul only by breaking clean away from his present situation and beginning all over again. It was in doing just this that Lot found his salvation; and it was in failing to do just this that his wife lost hers.

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THE PICTURE OF THE EVIL MAN

2 Peter 2:4-11 (Part 2)

2Pet.2:9-11 give us a picture of the evil man. Peter with a few swift, vivid strokes of the pen paints the outstanding characteristics of him who may properly be called the bad man.

(i) He is the desire-dominated man. His life is dominated by the lusts of the flesh. Such a man is guilty of two sins.

(a) Every man has two sides to his nature. He has a physical side; he has instincts, passions and impulses which he shares with the animal creation. These instincts are good--if they are kept in their proper place. They are even necessary for the preservation of individual life and the continuation of the race. The word temperament literally means a mixture. The picture behind it is that human nature consists of a large variety of ingredients all mixed together. It is clear that the efficacy of any mixture depends on each ingredient being there in its proper proportion. Wherever there is either excess or defect the mixture is not what it ought to be. Man has a physical nature and also a spiritual nature; and manhood depends on a correct mixture of the two. The desire-dominated man has allowed his animal nature to usurp a place it should not have; he has allowed the ingredients to get out of proportion and the recipe for manhood has gone wrong.

(b) There is a reason for this loss of proportion--selfishness. The root evil of the lust-dominated life is that it proceeds on the assumption that nothing matters but the gratification of its own desires and the expression of its own feelings. It has ceased to have any respect or care for others. Selfishness and desire go hand in hand.

The bad man is he who has allowed one side of his nature a far greater place than it ought to have and who has done so because he is essentially selfish.

(ii) He is the audacious man. The Greek is *tolmetes* (GSN5113), from the verb *tolman* (GSN5111), to dare. There are two kinds of daring. There is the daring which is a noble thing, the mark of true courage. There is the daring which is an evil thing, the shameless performance of things which are an affront to decency and right. As the character in Shakespeare had it: "I dare do all becomes a man. Who dares do more is none." The bad man is he who has the audacity to defy the will of God as it is known to him.

(iii) He is the self-willed man. Self-willed is not really an adequate translation. The Greek is *authades* (GSN0829), derived from *autos* (GSN0846), self, and *hadon*, pleasing, and used of a man who had no idea of anything other than pleasing himself. In it there is always the element of obstinacy. If a man is *authades* (GSN0829), no logic, nor common sense, nor appeal, nor sense of decency will keep him from doing what he wants to do. As R. C. Trench says, "Thus obstinately maintaining his own opinion, or asserting his own rights, he is reckless of the rights, opinions and interests of others." The man who is *authades* (GSN0829) is stubbornly and arrogantly and even brutally determined on his own way. The bad man is he who has no regard for either human appeal or divine guidance.

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2 Peter 2:4-11

(iv) He is the man who is contemptuous of the angels. We have already seen how this goes back to allusions in Hebrew tradition which are obscure to us. But it has a wider meaning. The bad man insists on living in one world. To him the spiritual world does not exist and he never hears the voices from beyond. He is of the earth earthy. He has forgotten that there is a heaven and is blind and deaf when the sights and sounds of heaven break through to him.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Peter 2:12-14

DELUding SELF AND DELUding OTHERS

2 Peter 2:12-14

But these, like brute beasts, knowing no law but their instincts, born only for capture and corruption, speak evil of the things about which they know nothing; they will be destroyed with their own corruption, and, like a man who is cheated, they will even lose the reward at which their iniquity aimed. They regard daylight debauchery as pleasure. They are spots and blots, revelling in their dissipations, carousing in their cliques amongst you. They have eyes full of adultery, eyes which can never gaze their fill on sin. They entrap souls which are not firmly founded in the faith. They have a heart which is trained in unbridled ambition for the things they have no right to have. They are accursed.

Peter launches out into a long passage of magnificent invective. Through it glows the fiery heat of flaming moral indignation.

The evil men are like brute beasts, slaves of their animal instincts. But a beast is born only for capture and death, says Peter; it has no other destiny. Even so, there is something self-destroying in fleshly pleasure. To make such pleasure the be-all and the end-all of life is a suicidal policy and in the end even the pleasure is lost. The point Peter is making is this, and it is eternally valid--if a man dedicates himself to these fleshly pleasures, in the end he so ruins himself in bodily health and in spiritual and mental character, that he cannot enjoy even them. The glutton destroys his appetite in the end, the drunkard his health, the sensualist his body, the self-indulgent his character and peace of mind.

These men regard daylight debauchery, dissipated revelling, abandoned carousing as pleasure. They are blots on the Christian fellowship; they are like the blemishes on an animal, which make it unfit to be offered to God. Once again we must note that what Peter is saying is not only religious truth but also sound common sense. The pleasures of the body are demonstrably subject to the law of diminishing returns. In themselves they lose their thrill, so that as time goes on it takes more and more of them to satisfy. The luxury must become ever more luxurious; the wine must flow ever more freely; everything must be done to make the thrill sharper and more intense. Further, a man becomes less and less able to enjoy these pleasures. He has given himself to a life that has no future and to pleasure which ends in pain.

Peter goes on. In 2Pet.2:14 he uses an extraordinary phrase which, strictly, will not translate into English at all. We have translated it: "They have eyes full of adultery." The Greek literally is: "They have eyes which are full of an adulteress." Most probably the meaning is they see a possible adulteress in every woman, wondering how she can be persuaded to gratify their lusts. "The hand and the eye," said the Jewish teachers, "are the brokers of sin." As Jesus said, such people look in order to lust (Matt.5:28). They have come to such a stage that they cannot look on anyone without lust's calculation.

As Peter speaks of this, there is a terrible deliberateness about it. They have hearts trained in unbridled ambition for the things they have no right to have. We have taken a whole phrase to

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2 Peter 2:12-14

translate the one word pleonexia (GSN4124) which means the desire to have more of the things which a man has no right even to desire, let alone have. The picture is a terrible one. The word used for trained is used for an athlete exercising himself for the games. These people have actually trained their minds to concentrate on nothing but the forbidden desire. They have deliberately fought with conscience until they have destroyed it; they have deliberately struggled with their finer feelings until they have strangled them.

There remains in this passage one further charge. It would be bad if these people deluded only themselves; it is worse that they delude others. They entrap souls not firmly founded in the faith. The word used for to entrap is delezain (GSN1185), which means to catch with a bait. A man becomes really bad when he sets out to make others as bad as himself. The hymn has it:

All the mischief we have wrought,
All forbidden things we've sought,
All the sin to others taught:
Forgive, O Lord, for Jesus' sake.

Every man must bear the responsibility for his own sins, but to add to that the responsibility for the sins of others is to carry an intolerable burden.

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2 Peter 2:15-16

ON THE WRONG ROAD

2 Peter 2:15-16

They have left the straight road and have gone awandering, and have followed the road of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the profit which unrighteousness brings and who was convicted of his lawlessness. A dumb ass spoke with a man's voice and checked the prophet's folly.

Peter likens the evil men of his time to the prophet Balaam. In the popular Jewish mind Balaam had come to stand as the type of all false prophets. His story is told in Num.22-24. Balak, King of Moab, was alarmed at the steady and apparently irresistible advance of the Israelites. In an attempt to check it he sent for Balaam to come and curse the Israelites for him, offering him great rewards. To the end of the day Balaam refused to curse the Israelites, but his covetous heart longed after the rich rewards which Balak was offering. At Balak's renewed request Balaam played with fire enough to agree to meet him. On the way his ass stopped, because it saw the angel of the Lord standing in its path, and rebuked Balaam.

It is true that Balaam did not succumb to Balak's bribes, but if ever a man wanted to accept a bribe, that man was he. In Num.25 there follows another story. It tells how the Israelites were seduced into the worship of Baal and into lustful alliances with Moabite women. Jewish belief was that Balaam was responsible for leading the children of Israel astray; and when the Israelites entered into possession of the land, "Balaam the son of Beor they slew with the sword" (Num.31:8). In view of all this Balaam became increasingly the type of the false prophet. He had two characteristics which were repeated in the evil men of Peter's day.

(i) Balaam was covetous. As the Numbers story unfolds we can see his fingers itching to get at the gold of Balak. True, he did not take it; but the desire was there. The evil men of Peter's day were covetous; out for what they could get and ready to exploit their membership of the Church for gain.

(ii) Balaam taught Israel to sin. He led the people out of the straight and into the crooked way. He persuaded them to forget their promises to God. The evil men of Peter's day were seducing Christians from the Christian way and causing them to break the pledges of loyalty they had given to Jesus Christ.

The man who loves gain and who lures others to evil for ever stands condemned.

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2 Peter 2:17-22

THE PERILS OF RELAPSE

2 Peter 2:17-22

These people are waterless springs, mists driven by a squall of wind; and the gloom of darkness is reserved for them. With talk at once arrogant and futile, they ensnare by appeals to shameless, sensual passions those who are only just escaping from the company of those who live in error. promising them freedom, while they themselves are the slaves of moral corruption; for a man is in a state of slavery to that which has reduced him to helplessness.

If they have escaped the pollution of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and if they allow themselves again to become involved in these things and to be reduced to moral helplessness by them, the last state is for them worse than the first. It would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to turn back from the holy commandment which was handed down to them. In them the truth of the proverb is plain to see: "A dog returns to his own vomit" and "The sow which has been washed returns to rolling in the mud."

Peter is still rolling out his tremendous denunciation of the evil men.

They flatter only to deceive. They are like wells with no water and like mists blown past by a squall of wind. Think of a traveller in the desert being told that ahead lies a spring where he can quench his thirst and then arriving at that spring to find it dried up and useless. Think of the husbandman praying for rain for his parched crops and then seeing the cloud that promised rain blown uselessly by. As Bigg has it: "A teacher without knowledge is like a well without water." These men are like Milton's shepherds whose "hungry sheep look up and are not fed." They promise a gospel and in the end have nothing to offer the thirsty soul.

Their teaching is a combination of arrogance and futility. Christian liberty always carries danger. Paul tells his people that they have indeed been called to liberty but that they must not use it for an occasion to the flesh (Gal.5:13). Peter tells his people that indeed they are free but they must not use their freedom as a cloak of maliciousness (1Pet.2:16). These false teachers offered freedom, but it was freedom to sin as much as a man liked. They appealed not to the best but to the worst in a man. Peter is quite clear that they did this because they were slaves to their own lusts. Seneca said, "To be enslaved to oneself is the heaviest of all servitudes." Persius spoke to the lustful debauchees of his day of "the masters that grow up within that sickly breast of yours." These teachers were offering liberty when they themselves were slaves, and the liberty they were offering was the liberty to become slaves of lust.

Their message was arrogant because it was the contradiction of the message of Christ; it was futile because he who followed it would find himself a slave. Here again in the background is the fundamental heresy which makes grace a justification for sin instead of a power and a summons to nobility.

If they have once known the real way of Christ and have relapsed into this, their case is even worse. They are like the man in the parable whose last state was worse than his first (Matt.12:45;

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2 Peter 2:17-22

Lk.11:26). If a man has never known the right way, he cannot be condemned for not following it. But, if he has known it and then deliberately taken the other way, he sins against the light; and it were better for him that he had never known the truth, for his knowledge of the truth has become his condemnation. A man should never forget the responsibility which knowledge brings.

Peter ends with contempt. These evil men are like dogs who return to their vomit (Prov.26:11) or like a sow which has been scrubbed and then goes back to rolling in the mud. They have seen Christ but are so morally degraded by their own choice that they prefer to wallow in the depths of sin rather than to climb the heights of virtue. It is a dreadful warning that a man can make himself such that in the end the tentacles of sin are inextricably around him and virtue for him has lost its beauty.

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2 Peter 3:1-2

THE PRINCIPLES OF PREACHING

2 Peter 3:1-2

Beloved, this is now the second letter that I have written to you, and my object in both of them is to rouse by reminder your pure mind to remember the words spoken by the prophets in former times, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour which was brought to you by your apostles.

In this passage we see clearly displayed the principles of preaching which Peter observed.

(i) He believed in the value of repetition. He knows that it is necessary for a thing to be said over and over again if it is to penetrate the mind. When Paul was writing to the Philippians, he said that to repeat the same thing over and over again was not a weariness to him, and for them it was the only safe way (Php.3:1). It is by continued repetition that the rudiments of knowledge are settled in the mind of the child. There is something of significance here. It may well be that often we are too desirous of novelty, too eager to say new things, when what is needed is a repetition of the eternal truths which men so quickly forget and whose significance they so often refuse to see. There are certain foods of which a man does not get tired, necessary for his daily sustenance they are set before him every day. We speak about a man's daily bread And there are certain great Christian truths which have to be repeated again and again and which must never be pushed into the background in the desire for novelty.

(ii) He believed in the need for reminder. Again and again the New Testament makes it clear that preaching and teaching are so often not the introducing of new truth but the reminding of a man of what he already knows. Moffatt quotes a saying of Dr. Johnson: "It is not sufficiently considered that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed." The Greeks spoke of "time which wipes all things out," as if the human mind were a slate and time a sponge which passes across it with a certain erasing quality. We are so often in the position of men whose need is not so much to be taught as to be reminded of what we already know.

(iii) He believed in the value of a compliment. It is his intention to rouse their pure mind. The word he uses for pure is *eilikrines* (GSN1506), which may have either of two meanings. It may mean that which is sifted until there is no admixture of chaff left; or it may mean that which is so flawless that it may be held up to the light of the sun. Plato uses this same phrase--*eilikrines* (GSN1506) *dianoia* (GSN1271)--in the sense of pure reason, reason which is unaffected by the seductive influence of the senses. By using this phrase Peter appeals to his people as having minds uncontaminated by heresy. It is as if he said to them: "You really are fine people--if you would only remember it." The approach of the preacher should so often be that his hearers are not wretched creatures who deserve to be damned but splendid creatures who must be saved. They are not so much like rubbish fit to be burned as like jewels to be rescued from the mud into which they have fallen.

Donald Hankey tells of "the beloved captain" whose men would follow him anywhere. He looked at them and they looked at him, and they were filled with the determination to be what he believed them to be. We always get further with people when we believe in them than when we despise them.

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2 Peter 3:1-2

(iv) He believed in the unity of Scripture. As he saw it there was a pattern in Scripture; and the Bible was a book centred in Christ. The Old Testament foretells Christ; the gospels tell of Jesus the Christ; and the apostles bring the message of that Christ to men.

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2 Peter 3:3-4

THE DENIAL OF THE SECOND COMING

2 Peter 3:3-4

To begin with, you are well aware that in the last days there will come mockers with their mocking, guiding their steps by the law of their own lusts and saying, "What has happened to the promise of his Coming? For, since the day when our fathers fell asleep, everything remains the same as it was from the foundation of the world."

The characteristic of the heretics which worried Peter most of all was their denial of the Second Coming of Jesus. Literally, their question was: "Where is the promise of his Coming?" That was a form of Hebrew expression which implied that the thing asked about did not exist at all. "Where is the God of justice?" asked the evil men of Malachi's day (Mal.2:17). "Where is your God?" the heathen demanded of the Psalmist (Ps.42:3; Ps.79:10). "Where is the word of the Lord?" his enemies asked Jeremiah (Jer.17:15). In every case the implication of the question is that the thing or the person asked about does not exist. The heretics of Peter's day were denying that Jesus Christ would ever come again. It will be best here at the beginning to summarize their argument and Peter's answer to it.

The argument of Peter's opponents was twofold (2Pet.3:4). "What has happened," they demanded, "to the promise of the Second Coming?" Their first argument was that the promise had been so long delayed that it was safe to take it that it would never be fulfilled. Their second assertion was that their fathers had died and the world was going on precisely as it always did. Their argument was that this was characteristically a stable universe and convulsive upheavals like the Second Coming did not happen in such a universe.

Peter's response is also twofold. He deals with the second argument first (2Pet.3:5-7). His argument is that, in fact, this is not a stable universe, that once it was destroyed by water in the time of the Flood and that a second destruction, this time by fire, is on the way.

The second part of his reply is in 2Pet.3:8-9. His opponents speak of a delay so long that they can safely assume that the Second Coming is not going to happen at all. Peter's is a double answer. (a) We must see time as God sees it. With him a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. "God does not pay every Friday night." (b) In any event God's apparent slowness to act is not dilatoriness. It is, in fact, mercy. He holds his hand in order to give sinning men another chance to repent and find salvation.

Peter goes on to his conclusion (2Pet.3:10). The Second Coming is on the way and it will come with a sudden terror and destruction which will dissolve the universe in melting heat.

Finally comes his practical demand in face of all this. If we are living in a universe on which Jesus Christ is going to descend and which is hastening towards the destruction of the wicked, surely it behoves us to live in holiness so that we may be spared when the terrible day does come. The Second Coming is used as a tremendous motive for moral amendment so that a man may prepare himself to meet his God.

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2 Peter 3:3-4

Such, then, is the general scheme of this chapter and now we look at it section by section.

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2 Peter 3:5-6

DESTRUCTION BY FLOOD

2 Peter 3:5-6

What they willfully fail to see is that long ago the heavens were created and the earth was composed out of water and through water; and through these waters the ancient world perished, when it was overwhelmed in a deluge of water.

Peter's first argument is that the world is not eternally stable. The point he is making is that the ancient world was destroyed by water, just as the present world is going to be destroyed by fire. The detail of this passage is, however, difficult.

He says that the earth was composed out of water and through water. According to the Genesis story in the beginning there was a kind of watery chaos. "The Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters.... God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters" (Gen. 1:2,6). Out of this watery chaos the world was formed. Further, it is through water that the world is sustained, because life is sustained by the rain which comes down from the skies. What Peter means is that the world was created out of water and is sustained by water; and it was through this same element that the ancient world was destroyed.

Further to clarify this passage we have to note that the flood legend developed. As so often in Second Peter and Jude the picture behind this comes not directly from the Old Testament but from the Book of Enoch. In Enoch 83: 3-5 Enoch has a vision: "I saw in a vision how the heaven collapsed and fell to the earth, and, where it fell to the earth, I saw how the earth was swallowed up in a great abyss." In the later stories the flood involved not only the obliteration of sinners but the total destruction of heaven and earth. So the warning which Peter is giving may be put like this: "You say that as things are, so they have ever been and so they ever will be. You build your hopes on the idea that this is an unchanging universe. You are wrong, for the ancient world was formed out of water and was sustained by water, and it perished in the flood."

We may say that this is only an old legend more than half-buried in the antiquities of the past. But we cannot say that a passage like this has no significance for us. When we strip away the old Jewish legend and its later development, we are still left with this permanent truth that the man who will read history with open eyes can see within it the moral law at work and God's dealings with men. Froude, the great historian, said that history is a voice sounding across the centuries that in the end it is always ill with the wicked and well with the good. When Oliver Cromwell was arranging his son Richard's education, he said, "I would have him know a little history." In fact, the lesson of history is that there is a moral order in the universe and that he who defies it does so at his peril.

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2 Peter 3:7

DESTRUCTION BY FIRE

2 Peter 3:7

But by the same word the present heavens and earth are treasured up for fire, reserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of impious men.

It is Peter's conviction that, as the ancient world was destroyed by water, the present world will be destroyed by fire. He says that that is stated "by the same word." What he means is that the Old Testament tells of the flood in the past and warns of the destruction by fire in the future. There are many passages in the prophets which he would take quite literally and which must have been in his mind. Joel foresaw a time when God would show blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke (Jl.2:30). The Psalmist has a picture in which, when God comes, a devouring fire shall precede him (Ps.50:3). Isaiah speaks of a flame of devouring fire (Isa.29:6; Isa.30:30). The Lord will come with fire; by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh (Isa.66:15-16). Nahum has it that the hills melt and the earth is burned at his presence; his fury is poured out like fire (Nah.1:5-6). In the picture of Malachi the day of the Lord shall burn as an oven (Mal.4:1). If the old pictures are taken literally, Peter has plenty of material for his prophecy.

The Stoics also had a doctrine of the destruction of the world by fire; but it was a grim thing. They held that the universe completed a cycle; that it was consumed in flames; and that everything then started all over again, exactly as it was. They had the strange idea that at the end of the cycle the planets were in exactly the same position as when the world began. "This produces the conflagration and destruction of everything which exists," says Chrysippus. He goes on: "Then again the universe is restored anew in a precisely similar arrangement as before...Socrates and Plato and each individual man will live again, with the same friends and fellow-citizens. They will go through the same experiences and the same activities. Every city and village and field will be restored, just as it was. And this restoration of the universe takes place, not once, but over and over again--indeed to all eternity without end.... For there will never be any new thing other than that which has been before, but everything is repeated down to the minutest detail." History as an eternal tread-mill, the unceasing recurrence of the sins, the sorrows and the mistakes of men--that is one of the grimmest views of history that the mind of man has ever conceived.

It must always be remembered that, as the Jewish prophets saw it, and as Peter saw it, this world will be destroyed with the conflagration of God but the result will not be obliteration and the grim repetition of what has been before; the result will be a new heaven and a new earth. For the biblical view of the world there is something beyond destruction; there is the new creation of God. The worst that the prophet can conceive is not the death agony of the old world so much as the birth pangs of the new.

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2 Peter 3:8-9

THE MERCY OF GOD'S DELAY

2 Peter 3:8-9

Beloved, you must not shut your eyes to this one fact that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. It is not that God is dilatory in fulfilling his promise, as some people reckon dilatoriness; but it is that for your sakes he patiently withholds his hand, because he does not wish any to perish, but wishes all to take the way to repentance.

There are in this passage three great truths on which to nourish the mind and rest the heart.

(i) Time is not the same to God as it is to man. As the Psalmist had it: "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night" (Ps.90:4). When we think of the world's hundreds of thousands of years of existence, it is easy to feel dwarfed into insignificance; when we think of the slowness of human progress, it is easy to become discouraged into pessimism. There is comfort in the thought of a God who has all eternity to work in. It is only against the background of eternity that things appear in their true proportions and assume their real value.

(ii) We can also see from this passage that time is always to be regarded as an opportunity. As Peter saw it, the years God gave the world were a further opportunity for men to repent and turn to him. Every day which comes to us is a gift of mercy. It is an opportunity to develop ourselves; to render some service to our fellow-men; to take one step nearer to God.

(iii) Finally, there is another echo of a truth which so often lies in the background of New Testament thought. God, says Peter, does not wish any to perish. God, says Paul, has shut them all up together in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all (Rom.11:32). Timothy in a tremendous phrase speaks of God who will have all men to be saved (1Tim.2:4). Ezekiel hears God ask: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, and not rather that he should return from his way and live?" (Eze.18:23).

Ever and again there shines in Scripture the glint of the larger hope. We are not forbidden to believe that somehow and some time the God who loves the world will bring the whole world to himself.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Peter 3:10

THE DREADFUL DAY

2 Peter 3:10

But when it does come, the Day of the Lord will come as a thief and in it the heavens will pass away with a crackling roar; the stars will blaze and melt; and the earth and all its works will disappear.

It inevitably happens that a man has to speak and think in the terms which he knows. That is what Peter is doing here. He is speaking of the New Testament doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, but he is describing it in terms of the Old Testament doctrine of the Day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord is a conception which runs all through the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The Jews saw time in terms of two ages--this present age, which is wholly bad and past remedy; and the age to come, which is the golden age of God. How was the one to turn into the other? The change could not come about by human effort or by a process of development, for the world was on the way to destruction. As the Jews saw it, there was only one way in which the change could happen; it must be by the direct intervention of God. The time of that intervention they called the Day of the Lord. It was to come without warning. It was to be a time when the universe was shaken to its foundations. It was to be a time when the judgment and obliteration of sinners would come to pass and, therefore, it would be a time of terror. "Behold the Day of the Lord comes, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it" (Isa.13:9).

"The Day of the Lord is coming, it is near, a day of darkness and of gloom, a day of clouds and of thick darkness" (Jl.2:1-2). "A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zeph.1:14-18). "The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (Jl.2:30-31). "The stars of the heaven and their constellations shall not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light.... Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger" (Isa.13:10-13).

What Peter and many of the New Testament writers did was to identify the Old Testament pictures of the Day of the Lord with the New Testament conception of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Peter's picture here of the Second Coming of Jesus is drawn in terms of the Old Testament picture of the Day of the Lord.

He uses one very vivid phrase. He says that the heavens will pass away with a crackling roar (roizedon, GSN4500). That word is used for the whirring of a bird's wings in the air, for the sound a spear makes as it hurtles through the air, for the crackling of the flames of a forest fire.

We need not take these pictures with crude literalism. It is enough to note that Peter sees the Second Coming as a time of terror for those who are the enemies of Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Peter 3:10

One thing has to be held in the memory. The whole conception of the Second Coming is full of difficulty. But this is sure--there comes a day when God breaks into every life, for there comes a day when we must die; and for that day we must be prepared. We may say what we will about the Coming of Christ as a future event; we may feel it is a doctrine we have to lay on one side; but we cannot escape from the certainty of the entry of God into our own experience.

Barclay's Commentary

2 Peter 3:11-14

THE MORAL DYNAMIC

2 Peter 3:11-14 (Part 1)

Since these things are going to be dissolved like that, what kind of people ought you to be, living a life of constant holiness and true piety, you who are eagerly awaiting and doing your best to hasten on the Day of the Lord, by whose action the heavens will burn and be dissolved and the stars blaze and melt! For it is new heavens and a new earth, as he promised, for which we wait, in which righteousness has its home. So, then, beloved, since these are the things for which you eagerly wait, be eager to be found by him at peace, without spot and blemish.

The one thing in which Peter is supremely interested is the moral dynamic of the Second Coming. If these things are going to happen and the world is hastening to judgment, obviously a man must live a life of piety and of holiness. If there are to be a new heaven and a new earth and if that heaven and earth are to be the home of righteousness, obviously a man must seek with all his mind and heart and soul and strength to be fit to be a dweller in that new world. To Peter, as Moffatt puts it, "it was impossible to give up the hope of the advent without ethical deterioration." Peter was right. If there is nothing in the nature of a Second Coming, nothing in the nature of a goal to which the whole creation moves, then life is going nowhere. That, in fact, was the heathen position. If there is no goal, either for the world or for the individual life, other than extinction, certain attitudes to life become well-nigh inevitable. These attitudes emerge in heathen epitaphs.

(i) If there is nothing to come, a man may well decide to make what he can of the pleasures of this world. So we come on an epitaph like this: "I was nothing: I am nothing. So thou who art still alive, eat, drink, and be merry."

(ii) If there is nothing to live for, a man may well be utterly indifferent. Nothing matters much if the end of everything is extinction, in which a man will not even be aware that he is extinguished. So we come on such an epitaph as this: "Once I had no existence; now I have none. I am not aware of it. It does not Concern me."

(iii) If there is nothing to live for but extinction and the world is going nowhere, there can enter into life a kind of lostness. Man ceases to be in any sense a pilgrim for there is nowhere to which he can make pilgrimage. He must simply drift in a kind of lostness, coming from nowhere and on the way to nowhere. So we come on an epigram like that of Callimachus. "Charidas, what is below?" "Deep darkness." "But what of the paths upward?" "All a lie." "And Pluto?" (The God of the underworld). "Mere talk." "Then we're lost." Even the heathen found a certain almost intolerable quality in a life without a goal.

When we have stripped the doctrine of the Second Coming of all its temporary and local imagery, the tremendous truth it conserves is that life is going somewhere--and without that conviction there is nothing to live for.

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2 Peter 3:11-14

HASTENING THE DAY

2 Peter 3:11-14 (Part 2)

There is in this passage still another great conception. Peter speaks of the Christian as not only eagerly awaiting the Coming of Christ but as actually hastening it on. The New Testament tells us certain ways in which this may be done.

(i) It may be done by prayer. Jesus taught us to pray: "Thy Kingdom come" (Matt.6:10). The earnest prayer of the Christian heart hastens the coming of the King. If in no other way, it does so in this--that he who prays opens his own heart for the entry of the King.

(ii) It may be done by preaching. Matthew tells us that Jesus said, "And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt.24:14). All men must be given the chance to know and to love Jesus Christ before the end of creation is reached. The missionary activity of the Church is the hastening of the coming of the King.

(iii) It may be done by penitence and obedience. Of all things this would be nearest to Peter's mind and heart. The Rabbis had two sayings: "It is the sins of the people which prevent the coming of the Messiah. If the Jews would genuinely repent for one day, the Messiah would come." The other form of the saying means the same: "If Israel would perfectly keep the law for one day, the Messiah would come." In true penitence and in real obedience a man opens his own heart to the coming of the King and brings nearer that coming throughout the world. We do well to remember that our coldness of heart and our disobedience delay the coming of the King.

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2 Peter 3:15-16

PERVERTERS OF SCRIPTURE

2 Peter 3:15-16

Regard the Lord's willingness to wait as an opportunity of salvation, as indeed our beloved brother Paul has written to us, in the wisdom which has been given to him, and as he says in all his letters, when he touches on these subjects, letters which contain some things which are difficult to understand, things which those who lack knowledge and a firm foundation in the faith twist, as they do the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Peter here cites Paul as teaching the same things as he himself teaches. It may be that he is citing Paul as agreeing that a pious and a holy life is necessary in view of the approaching Second Coming of the Lord. More likely, he is citing Paul as agreeing that the fact that God withholds his hand is to be regarded not as indifference on God's part but as an opportunity to repent and to accept Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of those who despise the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and patience, forgetting that his kindness is designed to lead a man to repentance (Rom.2:4). More than once Paul stresses the forbearance and the patience of God (Rom.3:25; Rom.9:22). Both Peter and Paul were agreed that the fact that God withholds his hand is never to be used as an excuse for sinning but always as a means of repentance and an opportunity of amendment.

With its reference to Paul and its tinge of criticism of him, this is one of the most intriguing passages in the New Testament. It was this passage which made John Calvin certain that Peter did not himself write Second Peter because, he says, Peter would never have spoken about Paul like this. What do we learn from it?

(i) We learn that Paul's letters by this time were known and used throughout the Church. They are spoken of in such a way as to make it clear that they have been collected and published, and that they are generally available and widely read. We are fairly certain that it was about the year A.D. 90 that Paul's letters were collected and published in Ephesus. This means that Second Peter cannot have been written before that and, therefore, cannot be the work of Peter, who was martyred in the middle sixties of the century.

(ii) It tells us that Paul's letters have come to be regarded as Scripture. The misguided men twist them as they do the other Scriptures. This again goes to prove that Second Peter must come from a time well on in the history of the early Church, for it would take many generations for the letters of Paul to rank alongside the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

(iii) It is a little difficult to determine just what the attitude to Paul is in this passage. He is writing "in the wisdom which has been given to him." Bigg says neatly that this phrase can be equally a commendation or a caution! The truth is that Paul suffered the fate of all outstanding men. He had his critics. He suffered the fate of all who fearlessly face and fearlessly state the truth. Some regarded him as great but dangerous.

(iv) There are things in Paul's letters which are hard to understand and which ignorant people twist to their own ruin. The word used for hard to understand is *dusnoetos* (GSN1425), which is

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2 Peter 3:15-16

used of the utterance of an oracle. The utterances of Greek oracles were always ambiguous. There is the classic example of the king about to go to war who consulted the oracle at Delphi and was given the answer: "If you go to war, you will destroy a great nation." He took this as a prophecy that he would destroy his enemies; but it happened that he was so utterly defeated that by going to war he destroyed his own country. This was typical of the dangerous ambiguity of the ancient oracles. It is that very word which Peter uses of the writings of Paul. They have things in them which are as difficult to interpret as the ambiguous utterance of an oracle.

Not only, Peter says, are there things in Paul's writings that are hard to understand; there are things which a man may twist to his own destruction. Three things come immediately to mind. Paul's doctrine of grace was twisted into an excuse and even a reason for sin (Rom.6). Paul's doctrine of Christian freedom was twisted into an excuse for unchristian licence (Gal.5:13). Paul's doctrine of faith was twisted into an argument that Christian action was unimportant, as we see in James (Jas.2:14-26).

G. K. Chesterton once said that orthodoxy was like walking along a narrow ridge; one step to either side was a step to disaster. Jesus is God and man; God is love and holiness; Christianity is grace and morality; the Christian lives in this world and lives in the world of eternity. Overstress either side of these great two-sided truths, and at once destructive heresy emerges. One of the most tragic things in life is when a man twists Christian truth and Holy Scripture into an excuse and even a reason for doing what he wants to do instead of taking them as guides for doing what God wants him to do.

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2 Peter 3:17-18

A FIRM FOUNDATION AND A CONTINUAL GROWTH

2 Peter 3:17-18

As far as you are concerned, beloved, you have been forewarned. You must, therefore, be on your guard not to be carried away by the error of lawless men and so to fall from your own foundation; rather, you must see to it that you grow in grace and in understanding of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To him be glory both now and to the day of eternity.

In conclusion Peter tells us certain things about the Christian life.

(i) The Christian is a man who is forewarned. That is to say, he cannot plead ignorance. He knows the right way and its rewards; he knows the wrong way and its disasters. He has no right to expect an easy way, for he has been told that Christianity means a cross, and he has been warned that there will always be those who are ready to attack and to pervert the faith. To be forewarned is to be forearmed; but to be forewarned is also a grave responsibility, for he who knows the right and does the wrong is under a double condemnation.

(ii) The Christian is a man with a basis for life. He ought to be rooted and founded in the faith. There are certain things of which he is absolutely certain. James Agate once declared that his mind was not a bed to be made and remade but that on certain things it was finally made up. There is a certain inflexibility in the Christian life; there is a certain basis of belief which never changes. The Christian will never cease to believe that, "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Php.2:11); and he will never cease to be aware that there is laid on him the duty of making his life fit his belief.

(iii) The Christian is a man with a developing life. The inflexibility of the Christian life is not the rigidity of death. The Christian must daily experience the wonder of grace, and daily grow in the gifts which grace can bring; and he must daily enter more and more deeply into the wonder which is in Jesus Christ. It is only on a firm foundation that a great building can tower into the air; and it is only because it has a deep root that a great tree can reach out to the sky with its branches. The Christian life is at once a life with a firm foundation and with an ever outward and upward growth.

And so the letter finishes by giving glory to Christ, both now and to the end of time.

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Introduction to 1 John

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN

A PERSONAL LETTER AND ITS BACKGROUND

First John is entitled a letter but it has no opening address nor closing greetings such as the letters of Paul have. And yet no one can read it without feeling its intensely personal character. Beyond all doubt the man who wrote it had in his mind's eye a definite situation and a definite group of people. Both the form and the personal character of First John will be explained if we think of it as what someone has called "a loving and anxious sermon" written by a pastor who loved his people and sent out to the various churches over which he had charge.

Any such letter is produced by an actual situation apart from which it cannot be fully understood. If, then, we wish to understand First John we have first of all to try to reconstruct the situation which produced it, remembering that it was written in Ephesus a little after A.D. 100.

THE FALLING AWAY

By A.D. 100 certain things had almost inevitably happened within the Church, especially in a place like Ephesus.

(i) Many were now second or even third generation Christians. The thrill of the first days had, to some extent at least, passed away. Wordsworth said of one of the great moments of modern history:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive."

In the first days of Christianity there was a glory and a splendour, but now Christianity had become a thing of habit, "traditional, half-hearted, nominal." Men had grown used to it and something of the wonder was lost. Jesus knew men and he had said: "Most men's love will grow cold" (Matt.24:12). John was writing at a time when, for some at least, the first thrill was gone and the flame of devotion had died to a flicker.

(ii) One result was that there were members of the Church who found the standards which Christianity demanded a burden and a weariness. They did not want to be saints in the New Testament sense of the term. The New Testament word for saint is *hagios* (GSN0040), which is also commonly translated holy. Its basic meaning is different. The Temple was *hagios* (GSN0039) because it was different from other buildings; the Sabbath was *hagios* (GSN0040) because it was different from other days; the Jewish nation was *hagios* (GSN0040) because it was different from other peoples; and the Christian was called to be *hagios* (GSN0040) because he was called to be different from other men. There was always a distinct cleavage between the Christian and the world. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus says, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn.15:19).

"I have given them thy word," said Jesus in his prayer to God, "and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn.17:14).

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All this involved an ethical demand. It demanded a new standard of moral purity, a new kindness, a new service, a new forgiveness--and it was difficult. And once the first thrill and enthusiasm were gone it became harder and harder to stand out against the world and to refuse to conform to the generally accepted standards and practices of the age.

(iii) It is to be noted that First John shows no signs that the Church to which it was written was being persecuted. The peril, as it has been put, was not persecution but seduction; it came from within. That, too, Jesus had foreseen. "Many false prophets," he said, "will arise, and lead many astray" (Matt.24:11). This was a danger of which Paul had warned the leaders of this very Church of Ephesus when he made his farewell address to them. "I know," he said, "that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them" (Ac.20:29-30).

The trouble which First John seeks to combat did not come from men out to destroy the Christian faith but from men who thought they were improving it. It came from men whose aim was to make Christianity intellectually respectable. They knew the intellectual tendencies and currents of the day and felt that the time had come for Christianity to come to terms with secular philosophy and contemporary thought.

THE CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

What, then, was this contemporary thought and philosophy with which the false prophets and mistaken teachers wished to align the Christian faith? Throughout the Greek world there was a tendency of thought to which the general name of Gnosticism is given. The basic belief of all Gnostic thought was that only spirit was good and matter was essentially evil. The Gnostic, therefore, inevitably despised the world since it was matter. In particular he despised the body which, being matter, was necessarily evil. Imprisoned within this body was the spirit of man. That spirit was a seed of God, who was altogether good. So, then, the aim of life must be to release this heavenly seed imprisoned in the evil of the body. That could be done only by a secret knowledge and elaborate ritual which only the true Gnostic could supply. Here was a tendency of thought which was written deep into Greek thinking--and which has not even yet ceased to exist. Its basis is the conviction that all matter is evil and spirit alone is good, and that the one real aim in life is to liberate man's spirit from the vile prison-house of the body.

THE FALSE TEACHERS

With that in our minds let us turn to First John and gather the evidence as to who these false teachers were and what they taught. They had been within the Church but they had seceded from it. "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1Jn.2:19). They were men of influence for they claimed to be prophets. "Many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1Jn.4:1). Although they had left the Church, they still tried to disseminate their teaching within it and to seduce its members from the true faith (1Jn.2:26).

THE DENIAL OF JESUS'S MESSIAHSHIP

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At least some of these false teachers denied that Jesus was the Messiah. "Who is a liar," demands John, "but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" (1Jn.2:22). It is most likely that these false teachers were not Gnostics proper, but Jews. Things had always been difficult for Jewish Christians, but the events of history made them doubly so. It was very difficult for a Jew to come to believe in a crucified Messiah. But suppose he had begun so to believe, his difficulties were by no means finished. The Christians believed that Jesus would return quickly to vindicate his people. Clearly that would be a hope that would be specially dear to the heart of the Jews. Then in A.D. 70 Jerusalem was captured by the Romans, who were so infuriated with the long intransigence and the suicidal resistance of the Jews that they tore the Holy City stone from stone and drew a plough across the midst of it.

In view of that, how could any Jew easily accept the hope that Jesus would come and save his people? The Holy City was desolate; the Jews were dispersed throughout the world. In face of that how could it be true that the Messiah had come?

THE DENIAL OF THE INCARNATION

There was something even more serious than that. There was false teaching which came directly from an attempt from within the Church to bring Christianity into line with Gnosticism. We must remember the Gnostic point of view that spirit alone was good and matter utterly evil. Given that point of view any real incarnation is impossible. That is exactly what centuries later Augustine was to point out. Before he became a Christian, he was skilled in the philosophies of the various schools. In the Confessions (1Jn.6:9) he tells us that somewhere in the heathen writers he had read in one form or another nearly all the things which Christianity says; but there was one great Christian saying which he had never found in any pagan author and which no one would ever find, and that saying was: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn.1:14). Since the heathen thinkers believed in the essential evil of matter and therefore the essential evil of the body, that was one thing they could never say.

It is clear that the false teachers against whom John was writing in this First Letter denied the reality of the incarnation and of Jesus' physical body. "Every spirit," writes John, "which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God" (1Jn.4:2-3).

In the early Church this refusal to admit the reality of the incarnation took, broadly speaking, two forms.

(i) In its most radical and wholesale form it was called Docetism, which Goodspeed suggests might be translated Seemism. The Greek verb *dokein* (GSN1380) means to seem; and the Docetists taught that Jesus only seemed to have a body. They insisted that he was a purely spiritual being who had nothing but the appearance of having a body. One of the apocryphal books written from this point of view is the Acts of John, which dates from about A.D. 160. In it John is made to say that sometimes when he touched Jesus he seemed to meet with a material body but at other times "the substance was immaterial, as if it did not exist at all," and also that when Jesus walked he never left any footprint upon the ground. The simplest form of Docetism is the complete denial that Jesus ever had a physical body.

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(ii) There was a more subtle, and perhaps more dangerous, variant of this theory connected with the name of Cerinthus. In tradition John and Cerinthus were sworn enemies. Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History 4: 14.6) hands down a story which tells how John went to the public bathhouse in Ephesus to bathe. He saw Cerinthus inside and refused even to enter the building. "Let us flee," he said, "lest even the bathhouse fall, because Cerinthus the enemy of truth is within." Cerinthus drew a definite distinction between the human Jesus and the divine Christ. He said that Jesus was a man, born in a perfectly natural way. He lived in special obedience to God, and after his baptism the Christ in the shape of a dove descended upon him, from that power which is above all powers, and then he brought to men news of the Father who had been as yet unknown. Cerinthus did not stop there. He said that at the end of Jesus' life, the Christ again withdrew from him so that the Christ never suffered at all.

It was the human Jesus who suffered, died and rose again.

This again comes out in the stories of the apocryphal gospels written under the influence of this point of view. In the Gospel of Peter, written about A.D. 130, it is said that Jesus showed no pain upon the Cross and that his cry was: "My power! My power! Why hast thou forsaken me?" It was at that moment that the divine Christ left the human Jesus. The Acts of John go further. They tell how, when the human Jesus was being crucified on Calvary, John was actually talking to the divine Christ in a cave in the hillside and that the Christ said to him, "John, to the multitude down below in Jerusalem I am being crucified, and pierced with lances and with reeds, and gall and vinegar are given me to drink. But I am speaking to you, and listen to what I say.... Nothing, therefore, of the things they will say of me have I suffered" (Acts of John 97).

We may see how widespread this way of thinking was from the Letters of Ignatius. He was writing to a group of Churches in Asia Minor which must have been much the same as that to which First John was written. When Ignatius wrote he was a prisoner and was being conveyed to Rome to be martyred by being flung to the beasts in the arena. He wrote to the Trallians: "Be deaf, therefore, when anyone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David and Mary, who was truly born, both ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died . . . who also was truly raised from the dead.... But if, as some affirm, who are without God that is, who are unbelievers--his suffering was only a semblance ... why am I a prisoner?" (Ignatius: To the Trallians 9 and 10).

To the Christians at Smyrna he wrote: "For he suffered all these things for us that we might attain salvation, and he truly suffered even as he also truly raised himself, not as some unbelievers say that his passion was merely in semblance" (To the Smyrnaeans 2). Polycarp writing to the Philippians used John's very words: "For everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an anti-Christ" (To the Philippians 7: 1).

This teaching of Cerinthus is also rebuked in First John. John writes of Jesus: "This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and the blood" (1Jn.5:6). The point of that verse is that the Gnostic teachers would have agreed that the divine Christ came by water, that is, at the baptism of Jesus; but they would have denied that he came by blood, that is, by the Cross, for they insisted that the divine Christ left the human Jesus before his crucifixion.

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The great danger of this heresy is that it comes from what can only be called a mistaken reverence. It is afraid to ascribe to Jesus full humanity. It regards it as irreverent to think that he had a truly physical body. It is a heresy which is by no means dead but is held to this day, usually quite unconsciously, by not a few devout Christians. But it must be remembered, as John so clearly saw, that man's salvation was dependent on the full identification of Jesus Christ with him. As one of the great early fathers unforgettably put it: "He became what we are to make us what he is."

(iii) This Gnostic belief had certain practical consequences in the lives of those who held it.

(a) The Gnostic attitude to matter and to all created things produced a certain attitude to the body and the things of the body. That attitude might take any one of three different forms.

(1) It might take the form of asceticism, with fasting and celibacy and rigid control, even deliberate ill-treatment, of the body. The view that celibacy is better than marriage and that sex is sin go back to Gnostic influence and belief--and this is a view which still lingers on in certain quarters. There is no trace of that view in this letter.

(2) It might take the form of a contention that the body did not matter and that, therefore, its appetites might be gratified without limit. Since the body was in any event evil, it made no difference what a man did with it. There are echoes of this in this letter. John condemns as a liar the man who says that he knows God and yet does not keep God's commandments; the man who says that he abides in Christ ought to walk as Christ walked (1Jn.1:6; 1Jn.2:4-6). There were clearly Gnostics in these communities who claimed special knowledge of God but whose conduct was far removed from the demand of the Christian ethic.

In certain quarters this Gnostic belief went even further. The Gnostic was the man who had gnosis (GSN1108), knowledge. Some held that the real Gnostic must, therefore, know the best as well as the worst and must enter into every experience of life at its highest or at its deepest level, as the case may be. It might almost be said that such men held that it was an obligation to sin. There is a reference to this kind of belief in the letter to Thyatira in the Revelation, where the Risen Christ refers to those who have known "the deep things of Satan" (Rev.2:24). And it may well be that John is referring to these people when he insists that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1Jn.1:5). These particular Gnostics would have held that there was in God not only blazing light but deep darkness and that a man must penetrate both. It is easy to see the disastrous consequences of such a belief.

(3) There was a third kind of Gnostic belief. The true Gnostic regarded himself as an altogether spiritual man, as having shed all the material things of life and released his spirit from the bondage of matter. Such Gnostics held that they were so spiritual that they were above and beyond sin and had reached spiritual perfection. It is to them that John refers when he speaks of those who deceive themselves by saying that they have no sin (1Jn.1:8-10).

Whichever of these three ways Gnostic belief took, its ethical consequences were perilous in the extreme; and it is clear that its last two were to be found in the society to which John wrote.

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(b) Further, this Gnosticism issued in an attitude to men which was the necessary destruction of Christian fellowship. We have seen that the Gnostic aimed at the release of the spirit from the prison house of the evil body by means of an elaborate and esoteric knowledge. Clearly such a knowledge was not for every man. Ordinary people were too involved in the everyday life and work of the world ever to have time for the study and discipline necessary; and, even if they had had such time, many were intellectually incapable of grasping the involved speculations of Gnostic theosophy and philosophy so-called.

This produced an inevitable result. It divided men into two classes those who were capable of a really spiritual life and those who were not. The Gnostics had names for these two classes of men. The ancients commonly divided the being of man into three parts. There was the soma (GSN4983), the body, the physical part of man. There was the psuche (GSN5590), which we generally translate soul, but we must have a care for it does not mean what we mean by soul. To the Greeks the psuche (GSN5590) was the principle of physical life. Everything which had physical life had psuche (GSN5590). Psuche was that life principle which a man shared with all living creatures. There was the pneuma (GSN4151), the spirit; and it was the spirit which was possessed only by man and made him kin to God.

The aim of Gnosticism was the release of the pneuma (GSN4151) from the soma (GSN4983); but that release could be won only by long and arduous study which only the leisured intellectual could ever undertake. The Gnostics, therefore, divided men into two classes the psuchikoi (GSN5591), who could never advance beyond the principle of physical life and never attain to anything else than what was to all intents and purposes animal living; and the pneumatikoi (GSN4152), who were truly spiritual and truly akin to God.

The result was clear. The Gnostics produced a spiritual aristocracy who looked with contempt and even hatred on lesser men. The pneumatikoi (GSN4152) regarded the psuchikoi (GSN5591) as contemptible, earthbound creatures who could never know what real religion was. The consequence was obviously the annihilation of Christian fellowship. That is why John insists all over his letter that the true test of Christianity is love for the brethren. If we really are walking in the light we have fellowship with one another (1Jn.1:7). He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in fact in darkness (1Jn.2:9-11). The proof that we have passed from dark to light is that we love the brethren (1Jn.3:14-17). The marks of Christianity are belief in Christ and love for the brethren (1Jn.3:23). God is love and he who does not love does not know God at all (1Jn.4:7-8). Because God loved us, we ought to love each other; it is when we love each other that God dwells in us (1Jn.4:10-12).

The commandment is that he who loves God must love his brother also, and he who says he loves God and at the same time hates his brother is branded as a liar (1Jn.4:20-21). The Gnostic, to put it bluntly, would have said that the mark of true religion is contempt for ordinary men; John insists in every chapter that the mark of true religion is love for every man.

Here, then, is a picture of these Gnostic heretics. They talked of being born of God, of walking in the light, of having no sin, of dwelling in God, of knowing God. These were their catch phrases. They had no idea of destroying the Church and the faith; by their way of it they were going to

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cleanse the Church of dead wood and make Christianity an intellectually respectable philosophy, fit to stand beside the great systems of the day. But the effect of their teaching was to deny the incarnation, to eliminate the Christian ethic and to make fellowship within the Church impossible. It is little wonder that John seeks, with such fervent pastoral devotion, to defend the churches he loved from such an insidious attack from within. This was a threat far more perilous than any heathen persecution; the very existence of the Christian faith was at stake.

THE MESSAGE OF JOHN

First John is a short letter and we cannot look within it for a systematic exposition of the Christian faith. None the less it will be of the greatest interest to examine the basic underlying beliefs with which John confronts those threatening to be the wreckers of the Christian faith.

THE OBJECT OF WRITING

John's object in writing is two-fold yet one. He writes that the joy of his people may be complete (1Jn.1:4), and that they may not sin (1Jn.2:1). He sees clearly that, however attractive the wrong way may be, it is not in its nature to bring happiness. To bring them joy and to preserve them from sin is one and the same thing.

THE IDEA OF GOD

John has two great things to say about God. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all (1Jn.1:5). God is love and that made him love us before we loved him and made him send his son as a remedy for our sins (1Jn.4:7-10,16). John's conviction is that God is self-revealing and self-giving. He is light, and not darkness; he is love, and not hate.

THE IDEA OF JESUS

Because the main attack of the false teachers was on the person of Christ, this letter, which is concerned to answer them, is specially rich and helpful in what it has to say about him.

(i) Jesus is he who was from the beginning (1Jn.1:1; 1Jn.2:14). When a man is confronted with Jesus, he is confronted with the eternal.

(ii) Another way of putting this is to say that Jesus is the Son of God and for John it is essential to be convinced of that (1Jn.4:15; 1Jn.5:5). The relationship of Jesus to God is unique and in him is seen God's ever-seeking and ever-forgiving heart.

(iii) Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah (1Jn.2:22; 1Jn.5:1). That again for him is an essential article of belief. It may seem that here we come into a region of ideas which is much narrower and, in fact, specifically Jewish. But there is something essential here. To say that Jesus is from the beginning and that he is the Son of God is to conserve his connection with eternity; to say that he is the Messiah, is to conserve his connection with history. It is to see his coming as the event towards which God's plan, working itself out in his chosen people, was moving.

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(iv) Jesus was most truly and fully man. To deny that Jesus came in the flesh is to be moved by the spirit of Antichrist (1Jn.4:2-3). It is John's witness that Jesus was so truly man that he himself had known and touched and handled him (1Jn.1:1,3). No writer in the New Testament holds with greater intensity the full reality of the incarnation. Not only did he become man, he also suffered for men. It was by water and blood that he came (1Jn.5:6); and he laid down his life for men (1Jn.3:16).

(v) The coming of Jesus, his incarnation, his life, his death, his resurrection and his ascension all combine to deal with the sin of man. Jesus was without sin (1Jn.3:5); and man is essentially a sinner, even though in his arrogance he may claim to be without sin (1Jn.1:8-10); and yet the sinless one came to take away the sin of sinning men (1Jn.3:5). In regard to man's sin Jesus is two things.

(a) He is our advocate with the Father (1Jn.2:1). The word is *parakletos* (GSN3875). A *parakletos* is someone who is called in to help. The word could be used of a doctor; it was often used of a witness called in to give evidence in favour of someone on trial or of a defending lawyer called in to defend someone under accusation. Jesus pleads our case with God; he, the sinless one, is the defender of sinning men.

(b) But Jesus is more than that. Twice John calls him the expiation for our sins (1Jn.2:2; 1Jn.4:10). When a man sins, the relationship which should exist between him and God is broken. An expiatory sacrifice is one which restores that relationship or, rather, a sacrifice in virtue of which that relationship is restored. It is an atoning sacrifice, a sacrifice which once again makes man and God at one. So, then, through what Jesus was and did the relationship between God and man, broken by sin, is restored. Jesus does not only plead the case of the sinner; he sets him at one, with God. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1Jn.1:7).

(vi) In consequence of all this, through Jesus Christ men who believe have life (1Jn.4:9; 1Jn.5:11-12). This is true in a double sense. They have life in the sense that they are saved from death; and they have life in the sense that living has ceased to be mere existence and has become life indeed.

(vii) All this may be summed up by saying that Jesus is the Saviour of the world (1Jn.4:14). Here we have something which has to be set out in full. "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1Jn.4:14). We have already talked of Jesus as pleading men's case before God. If we were to leave that without addition, it might be argued that God wished to condemn men and was deflected from his dire purpose by the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But that is not so because for John, as for every writer in the New Testament, the whole initiative was with God. It was he who sent his son to be the Saviour of men.

Within the short compass of this letter the wonder and the glory and the grace of Christ are most fully set out.

THE SPIRIT

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In this letter John has less to say about the Spirit; for his highest teaching about him we must turn back to the Fourth Gospel. It may be said that in First John the function of the Spirit is in some sense to be the liaison between God and man. It is he who makes us conscious that there is within us the abiding presence of God through Jesus Christ (1Jn.3:24; 1Jn.4:13). We may say that it is the Spirit who enables us to grasp the precious fellowship with God which is being offered to us.

THE WORLD

The world within which the Christian lives is hostile; it is a world without God. It does not know the Christian, because it did not know Christ (1Jn.3:1). It hates the Christian, just as it hated Christ (1Jn.3:13). The false teachers are of the world and not of God, and it is because they speak its language that the world is ready to hear them and accept them (1Jn.4:4-5). The whole world, says John sweepingly, is in the power of the evil one (1Jn.5:19). It is for that reason that the Christian has to overcome it, and his weapon in his struggle with the world is faith (1Jn.5:4).

Hostile as the world is, it is doomed. The world and all its desires are passing away (1Jn.2:17). That, indeed, is why it is folly to give one's heart to the world; it is on the way to dissolution. Although the Christian lives in a hostile world which is passing away, there is no need for despair and fear. The darkness is past, the true light now shines (1Jn.2:8). God in Christ has broken into time; the new age has come. It is not yet fully realized but the consummation is sure.

The Christian lives in an evil and a hostile world, but he possesses that by which he can overcome it and, when the destined end of the world comes, he is safe, because he already possesses that which makes him a member of the new community in the new age.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH

John does more than move in the high realms of theology; he has certain most practical things to say about the Christian Church and the Christian life. No New Testament writer stresses more consistently or more strenuously the necessity of Christian fellowship. Christians, John was convinced, are not only bound to God, they are also bound to each other. When we walk in the light, we have fellowship with each other (1Jn.1:7). The man who claims to walk in the light but hates his brother, is in reality walking in darkness; it is the man who loves his brother who is in the light (1Jn.2:9-11). The proof that a man has passed from darkness to light is the fact that he loves his brother. To hate one's brother man is in essence to be a murderer, as Cain was. If any man is able out of his fullness to help his brother's poverty and does not do so, it is ridiculous for him to claim that the love of God dwells in him.

The essence of religion is to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and to love one another (1Jn.3:11-17,23). God is love; and, therefore, the man who loves is kin to God. God has loved us, and that is the best reason for loving each other (1Jn.4:7-12). If a man says that he loves God and at the same time hates his brother, he is a liar. The command is that he who loves God must love his brother also (1Jn.4:20-21).

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It was John's conviction that the only way in which a man can prove that he loves God is by loving his fellow-men; and that that love must be not only a sentimental emotion but a dynamic towards practical help.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN

No New Testament writer makes a stronger ethical demand than John, or more strongly condemns a so-called religion which fails to issue in ethical action. God is righteous and the life of every one who knows him must reflect his righteousness (1Jn.2:29). Whoever abides in Christ and is born of God, does not sin; whoever does not do right is not of God (1Jn.3:3-10); and the characteristic of this righteousness is that it issues in love for the brethren (1Jn.3:10-11). We show our love to God and to men by keeping God's commandments (1Jn.5:2). Whoever is born of God does not sin (1Jn.5:18).

For John, knowledge of God and obedience to him must ever go hand in hand. It is by keeping his commandments that we prove that we really do know God. The man who says that he knows him and who does not keep his commandments is a liar (1Jn.2:3-5).

It is, in fact, this obedience which is the basis of effective prayer. We receive what we ask of God because we keep his commandments and do what is pleasing in his sight (1Jn.3:22).

The two marks which characterize genuine Christianity are love of the brethren and obedience to the revealed commandments of God.

THE DESTINATION OF THE LETTER

There are certain baffling problems in regard to the letter's destination. The letter itself gives us no clue as to where it was sent. Tradition strongly connects it with Asia Minor, and especially with Ephesus, where, according to tradition, John lived for many years. But there are certain other odd facts which somehow have to be explained.

Cassiodorus says that the First Letter of John was written Ad Parthos, To the Parthians (compare GSN3934); and Augustine has a series of ten tractates written on The Epistle of John ad Parthos. One Geneva manuscript still further complicates the matter by entitling the letter Ad Sparthos. There is no such word as Sparthos. There are two possible explanations of this impossible title: (i) Just possibly it is meant for Ad Sparsos, which would mean To the Christians scattered abroad; (ii) In Greek Ad Parthos would be Pros Parthous. Now in the early manuscripts there was no space between the words and they were all written in capital letters so that the title would run PROSPARTHOS. A scribe writing to dictation could quite easily put that down as PROSSPARTHOS, especially if he did not know what the title meant. Ad Sparthos can be eliminated as a mere mistake.

But where did To the Parthians come from? There is one possible explanation. Second John does tell us of its destination; it is written to The elect lady,, and her children (2Jn.1). Let us turn to the end of First Peter. The King James Version has: "The church that is at Babylon, elected together

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with you, saluteth you" (1Pet.5:13). The phrase: "the church that is" is printed in the King James Version in italics which of course, means that it has no equivalent in the Greek which has, in fact, no actual mention of a church at all. This the Revised Standard Version accurately indicates: "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen (elect), sends you greetings." As far as the Greek goes it would be perfectly possible, and indeed natural, to take that as referring not to a Church but to a lady. That is precisely what certain of the scholars in the very early Church did. Now we get the elect lady again in Second John.

It was easy to identify the two elect ladies and to assume that Second John was also written to Babylon. The natural title for the inhabitants of Babylon was Parthians and hence we have the explanation of the title.

The process went even further. The Greek for the elect lady is *he* (GSN3588) *elekte* (GSN1588). We have already seen that the early manuscripts were written all in capital letters; and it would be just possible to take *Elekte* (GSN1588) not as an adjective meaning elect but as a proper name, *Elekta*. This is, in fact, what Clement of Alexandria may have done, for we have information that he said that the Johannine letters were written to a certain Babylonian lady, *Elekta* by name, and to her children.

It may well be then, that the title *Ad Parthos* arose from a series of misunderstandings. The elect one in First Peter is quite certainly the church, as the King James Version rightly saw. Moffatt translates: "Your sister church in Babylon, elect like yourselves, salutes you." Further, it is almost certain that in any event Babylon there stands for Rome which the early writers identified with Babylon, the great harlot, drunk with the blood of the saints (compare Rev.17:5). The title *Ad Parthos* has a most interesting history but clearly it arose from an ingenious misunderstanding.

There is one further complication. Clement of Alexandria referred to John's letters as "written to virgins." On the face of it that is improbable, for it would not be a specially relevant title for them. How, then, could it come about? The Greek would be *Pros Parthenous* (compare GSN3933) which closely resembles *Pros Parthous* (GSN3934); and, it so happens, John was regularly called *Ho Parthenos* (GSN3933), the Virgin, because he never married and because of the purity of his life. This further title must have come from a confusion between *Ad Parthos* (GSN3934) and *Ho Parthenos* (GSN3933).

This is a case where we may take it that tradition is right and all the ingenious theories mistaken. We may take it that these letters were written in Ephesus and to the surrounding Churches in Asia Minor. When John wrote, it would certainly be to the district where his writ ran, and that was Ephesus and the surrounding territory. He is never mentioned in connection with Babylon.

IN DEFENCE OF THE FAITH

John wrote his great letter to meet a threatening situation and in defence of the faith. The heresies which he attacked are by no means altogether echoes of "old unhappy far off things and battles long ago." They are still beneath the surface and sometimes they even still raise their heads. To study his letter will confirm us in the true faith and enable us to have a defence against that which would seduce us from it.

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1 John 1:1-4

THE PASTOR'S AIM

1 John 1:1-4 (Part 1)

What we are telling you about is that which was from the beginning, that which we heard, that which we saw with our eyes, that which we gazed upon, and which our hands touched. It is about the word of life that we are telling you. (And the life appeared to us, and we saw it, and testify to it; and we are now bringing you the message of this eternal life, which was with the Father and which appeared to us). It is about what we saw and heard that we are bringing the message to you, that you too may have fellowship with us, for our fellowship is with the Father and with Jesus Christ, the Son. And we are writing these things to you that your joy may be completed.

Every man, when he sits down to write a letter or rises to preach a sermon, has some object in view. He wishes to produce some effect in the minds and hearts and lives of those to whom his message is addressed. And here at the very beginning of his letter John sets down his objects in writing to his people.

(i) It is his wish to produce fellowship with men and fellowship with God (1Jn.1:3). The pastor's aim must always be to bring men closer to one another and closer to God. Any message which is productive of division is a false message. The Christian message can be summed up as having two great aims--love for men and love for God.

(ii) It is his wish to bring his people joy (1Jn.1:4), Joy is the essence of Christianity. A message whose only effect is to depress and to discourage those who hear it has stopped halfway. It is quite true that often the aim of the preacher and the teacher must be to awaken a godly sorrow which will lead to a true repentance. But after the sense of sin has been produced, men must be led to the Saviour in whom sins are all forgiven. The ultimate note of the Christian message is joy.

(iii) To that end his aim is to set Jesus Christ before them. A great teacher always used to tell his students that their one aim as preachers must be "to speak a good word for Jesus Christ"; and it was said of another great saint that wherever his conversation began it cut straight across country to Jesus Christ.

The simple fact is that if men are ever to find fellowship with one another and fellowship with God, and if they are ever to find true joy, they must find them in Jesus Christ.

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1 John 1:1-4

THE PASTOR'S RIGHT TO SPEAK

1 John 1:1-4 (Part 2)

Here at the very beginning of his letter John sets down his right to speak; and it consists in one thing--in personal experience of Christ (1Jn.1:2-3).

(i) He says that he has heard Christ. Long ago Zedekiah had said to Jeremiah: "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jer.37:17). What men are interested in is not someone's opinions and guesses but a word from the Lord. It was said of one great preacher that first he listened to God and then he spoke to men; and it was said of John Brown of Haddington that, when he preached, he paused ever and again, as if listening for a voice. The true teacher is the man who has a message from Jesus Christ because he has heard his voice.

(ii) He says that he has seen Christ. It is told of Alexander Whyte, the great Scottish preacher, that someone once said to him, "You preached today as if you had come straight from the presence." And Whyte answered, "Perhaps I did." We cannot see Christ in the flesh as John did; but we can still see him with the eye of faith.

"And, warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is he;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee."

(iii) He says that he has gazed on Christ. What, then, is the difference between seeing Christ and gazing upon him? In the Greek the verb for to see is *horan* (GSN3708) and it means simply to see with physical sight. The verb for to gaze is *theasthai* (GSN2300) and it means to gaze at someone or something until something has been grasped of the significance of that person or thing. So Jesus, speaking to the crowds of John the Baptist, asked: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see (*theasthai*, GSN2300)?" (Lk.7:24); and in that word he describes how the crowds flocked out to gaze at John and wonder who and what this man might be. Speaking of Jesus in the prologue to his gospel, John says, "We beheld his glory" (Jn.1:14). The verb is again *theasthai* (GSN2300) and the idea is not that of a passing glance but of a steadfast searching gaze which seeks to discover something of the mystery of Christ.

(iv) He says that his hands actually touched Christ. Luke tells of how Jesus came back to his disciples, when he had risen from the dead, and said, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Lk.24:39). Here John is thinking of those people called the Docetists who were so spiritually-minded that they insisted that Jesus never at any time had a flesh and blood body but was only a phantom in human form. They refused to believe that God could ever soil himself by taking human flesh and blood upon himself. John here insists that the Jesus he had known was, in truth, a man amongst men; he felt there was nothing in all the world more dangerous--as we shall see than to doubt that Jesus was fully man.

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1 John 1:1-4

THE PASTOR'S MESSAGE

1 John 1:1-4 (Part 3)

John's message is of Jesus Christ; and of Jesus he has three great things to say. First, he says that Jesus was from the beginning. That is to say, in him eternity entered time; in him the eternal God personally entered the world of men. Second, that entry into the world of men was a real entry, it was real manhood that God took upon himself. Third, through that action there came to men the word of life, the word which can change death into life and mere existence into real living. Again and again in the New Testament the gospel is called a word; and it is of the greatest interest to see the various connections in which this term is used.

(i) Oftener than anything else the gospel message is called the word of God (Ac.4:31; Ac.6:2,7; Ac.11:1; Ac.13:5,7; Ac.13:44; Ac.16:32; Php.1:14; 1Th.2:13; Heb.13:7; Rev.1:2,9; Rev.6:9; Rev.20:4). It is not a human discovery; it comes from God. It is news of God which man could not have discovered for himself.

(ii) Frequently the gospel message is called the word of the Lord (Ac.8:25; Ac.12:24; Ac.13:49; Ac.15:35; 1Th.1:8; 2Th.3:1). It is not always certain whether the Lord is God or Jesus, but more often than not it is Jesus who is meant. The gospel is, therefore, the message which God could have sent to men in no other way than through his son.

(iii) Twice the gospel message is called the word of hearing (logos (GSN3056) akoes GSN0189) (1Th.2:13; Heb.4:2). That is to say, it depends on two things, on a voice ready to speak it and an ear ready to hear it.

(iv) The gospel message is the word of the Kingdom (Matt.13:19). It is the announcement of the kingship of God and the summons to render to God the obedience which will make a man a citizen of that kingdom.

(v) The gospel message is the word of the gospel (Ac.15:7; Col.1:5). Gospel means good news; and the gospel is essentially good news to man about God.

(vi) The gospel is the word of grace (Ac.14:3; Ac.20:32). It is the good news of God's generous and undeserved love for man; it is the news that man is not saddled with the impossible task of earning God's love but is freely offered it.

(vii) The gospel is the word of salvation (Ac.13:26). It is the offer of forgiveness for past sin and of power to overcome sin in the future.

(viii) The gospel is the word of reconciliation (2Cor.5:19). It is the message that the lost relationship between man and God is restored in Jesus Christ who has broken down the barrier between man and God which sin had erected.

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1 John 1:1-4

(ix) The gospel is the word of the Cross (1Cor.1:18). At the heart of the gospel is the Cross on which is shown to man the final proof of the forgiving, sacrificing, seeking love of God.

(x) The gospel is the word of truth (2Cor.6:7; Eph.1:13; Col.1:5; 2Tim.2:15). With the coming of the gospel it is no longer necessary to guess and grope for Jesus Christ has brought to us the truth about God.

(xi) The gospel is the word of righteousness (Heb.5:13). It is by the power of the gospel that a man is enabled to break from the power of evil and to rise to the righteousness which is pleasing in the sight of God.

(xii) The gospel is the health-giving word (2Tim.1:13; 2Tim.2:8). It is the antidote which cures the poison of sin and the medicine which defeats the disease of evil.

(xiii) The gospel is the word of life (Php.2:16). It is through its power that a man is delivered from death and enabled to enter into life at its best.

Barclay's Commentary

1 John 1:5

GOD IS LIGHT

1 John 1:5 (Part 1)

And this is the message which we have heard from him, and which we pass on to you, that God is light, and there is no darkness in him.

A man's own character will necessarily be determined by the character of the god whom he worships; and, therefore, John begins by laying down the nature of the God and Father of Jesus Christ whom Christians worship. God, he says, is light, and there is no darkness in him. What does this statement tell us about God?

(i) It tells us that he is splendour and glory. There is nothing so glorious as a blaze of light piercing the darkness. To say that God is light tells us of his sheer splendour.

(ii) It tells us that God is self-revealing. Above all things light is seen; and it illumines the darkness round about it. To say that God is light is to say that there is nothing secretive or furtive about him. He wishes to be seen and to be known by men.

(iii) It tells us of God's purity and holiness. There is none of the darkness which cloaks hidden evil in God. That he is light speaks to us of his white purity and stainless holiness.

(iv) It tells us of the guidance of God. It is one of the great functions of light to show the way. The road that is lit is the road that is plain. To say that God is light is to say that he offers his guidance for the footsteps of men.

(v) It tells us of the revealing quality in the presence of God. Light is the great revealer. Flaws and stains which are hidden in the shade are obvious in the light. Light reveals the imperfections in any piece of workmanship or material. So the imperfections of life are seen in the presence of God. Whittier wrote:

"Our thoughts lie open to thy sight;
And naked to thy glance;
Our secret sins are in the light
Of thy pure countenance."

We can never know either the depth to which life has fallen or the height to which it may rise until we see it in the revealing light of God.

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1 John 1:5

THE HOSTILE DARK

1 John 1:5 (Part 2)

In God, says John, there is no darkness at all. Throughout the New Testament darkness stands for the very opposite of the Christian life.

(i) Darkness stands for the Christless life. It represents the life that a man lived before he met Christ or the life that he lives if he strays away from him. John writes to his people that, now that Christ has come, the darkness is past and the true light shines (1Jn.2:8). Paul writes to his Christian friends that once they were darkness but now they are light in the Lord (Eph.5:8). God has delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son (Col.1:13). Christians are not in darkness, for they are children of the day (1Th.5:4-5). Those who follow Christ shall not walk in darkness, as others must, but they will have the light of life (Jn.8:12). God has called the Christians out of darkness into his marvellous light (1Pet.2:9).

(ii) The dark is hostile to the light. In the prologue to his gospel John writes that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (Jn.1:5). It is a picture of the darkness seeking to obliterate the light--but unable to overpower it. The dark and the light are natural enemies.

(iii) The darkness stands for the ignorance of life apart from Christ. Jesus summons his friends to walk in the light lest the darkness come upon them, for the man who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going (Jn.12:35). Jesus is the light, and he has come that those who believe in him should not walk in darkness (Jn.12:46). The dark stands for the essential lostness of life without Christ.

(iv) The darkness stands for the chaos of life without God. God, says Paul, thinking of the first act of creation, commanded his light to shine out of the darkness (2Cor.4:6). Without God's light the world is a chaos, in which life has neither order nor sense.

(v) The darkness stands for the immorality of the Christless life. It is Paul's appeal to men that they should cast off the works of darkness (Rom.13:12). Men, because their deeds were evil, loved the darkness rather than the light (Jn.3:19). The darkness stands for the way that the Christless life is filled with things which seek the shadows because they cannot stand the light.

(vi) The darkness is characteristically unfruitful. Paul speaks of the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph.5:11). If growing things are despoiled of the light, their growth is arrested. The darkness is the Christless atmosphere in which no fruit of the Spirit will ever grow.

(vii) The darkness is connected with lovelessness and hate. If a man hates his brother, it is a sign that he walks in darkness (1Jn.2:9-11). Love is sunshine and hatred is the dark.

(viii) The dark is the abode of the enemies of Christ and the final goal of those who will not accept him. The struggle of the Christian and of Christ is against the hostile rulers of the darkness

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1 John 1:5

of this world (Eph.6:12). Consistent and rebellious sinners are those for whom the mist of darkness is reserved (2Pet.2:9; Jd.13). The darkness is the life which is separated from God.

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1 John 1:6-7

THE NECESSITY OF WALKING IN THE LIGHT

1 John 1:6-7 (Part 1)

If we say that we have fellowship with him and at the same time walk in darkness, we lie and are not doing the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other and the blood of Jesus Christ is steadily cleansing us from all sin.

Here John is writing to counteract one heretical way of thought. There were those who claimed to be specially intellectually and spiritually advanced, but whose lives showed no sign of it. They claimed to have advanced so far along the road of knowledge and of spirituality that for them sin had ceased to matter and the laws had ceased to exist. Napoleon once said that laws were made for ordinary people, but were never meant for the like of him. So these heretics claimed to be so far on that, even if they did sin, it was of no importance whatsoever. In later days Clement of Alexandria tells us that there were heretics who said that it made no difference how a man lived. Irenaeus tells us that they declared that a truly spiritual man was quite incapable of ever incurring any pollution, no matter what kind of deeds he did.

In answer John insists on certain things.

(i) He insists that to have fellowship with the God who is light a man must walk in the light and that, if he is still walking in the moral and ethical darkness of the Christless life, he can not have that fellowship. This is precisely what the Old Testament had said centuries before. God said, "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am Holy" (Lev. 19:2; compare Lev. 20:7; Lev. 20:26). He who would find fellowship with God is committed to a life of goodness which reflects God's goodness. C. H. Dodd writes: "The Church is a society of people who, believing in a God of pure goodness, accept the obligation to be good like him." This does not mean that a man must be perfect before he can have fellowship with God; if that were the case, all of us would be shut out. But it does mean that he will spend his whole life in the awareness of his obligations, in the effort to fulfil them and in penitence when he fails.

It will mean that he will never think that sin does not matter; it will mean that the nearer he comes to God, the more terrible sin will be to him.

(ii) He insists that these mistaken thinkers have the wrong idea of truth. He says that, if people who claim to be specially advanced still walk in darkness, they are not doing the truth. Exactly the same phrase is used in the Fourth Gospel, when it speaks of him, who does the truth (Jn. 3:21). This means that for the Christian truth is never only intellectual; it is always moral. It is not something which exercises only the mind; it is something which exercises the whole personality. Truth is not only the discovery of abstract things; it is concrete living. It is not only thinking; it is also acting. The words which the New Testament uses along with truth are significant. It speaks of obeying the truth (Rom. 2:8; Gal. 3:7); following the truth (Gal. 2:14; 3Jn. 4); of opposing the truth (2Tim. 3:8); of wandering from the truth (Jas. 5:19).

There is such a thing as might be called "discussion circle Christianity." It is possible to look on Christianity as a series of intellectual problems to be solved and on the Bible as a book about which illuminating information is to be amassed. But Christianity is something to be followed and the

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1 John 1:6-7

Bible a book to be obeyed. It is possible for intellectual eminence and moral failure to go hand in hand. For the Christian the truth is something first to be discovered and then to be obeyed.

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1 John 1:6-7

THE TESTS OF TRUTH

1 John 1:6-7 (Part 2)

As John sees it, there are two great tests of truth.

(i) Truth is the creator of fellowship. If men are really walking in the light, they have fellowship one with another. No belief can be fully Christian if it separates a man from his fellow-men. No Church can be exclusive and still be the Church of Christ. That which destroys fellowship cannot be true.

(ii) He who really knows the truth is daily more and more cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus. The Revised Standard Version is correct enough here but it can very easily be misunderstood. It runs: "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." That can be read as a statement of a general principle. But it is a statement of what ought to be happening in the individual life. The meaning is that all the time, day by day, constantly and consistently, the blood of Jesus Christ ought to be carrying out a cleansing process in the life of the individual Christian.

The Greek for to cleanse is katharizein (GSN2511) which was originally a ritual word, describing the ceremonies and washings and so on which qualified a man to approach his gods. But the word, as religion developed, came to have a moral sense; and it describes the goodness which enables a man to enter into the presence of God. So what John is saying is, "If you really know what the sacrifice of Christ has done and are really experiencing its power, day by day you will be adding holiness to your life and becoming more fit to enter the presence of God."

Here indeed is a great conception. It looks on the sacrifice of Christ as something which not only atones for past sin but equips a man in holiness day by day.

True religion is that by which every day a man comes closer to his fellow-men and closer to God. It produces fellowship with God and fellowship with men--and we can never have the one without the other.

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1 John 1:6-7

THE THREEFOLD LIE

1 John 1:6-7 (Part 3)

Four times in his letter John bluntly accuses the false teachers of being liars; and the first of these occasions is in this present passage.

(i) Those who claim to have fellowship with the God who is altogether light and who yet walk in the dark are lying (1Jn.1:6). A little later he repeats this charge in a slightly different way. The man who says that he knows God and yet does not keep God's commandments is a liar (1Jn.2:4). John is laying down the blunt truth that the man who says one thing with his lips and another thing with his life is a liar. He is not thinking of the man who tries his hardest and yet often fails. "A man," said H. G. Wells, "may be a very bad musician, and may yet be passionately in love with music"; and a man may be very conscious of his failures and yet be passionately in love with Christ and the way of Christ. John is thinking of the man who makes the highest possible claims to knowledge, to intellectual eminence and to spirituality, and who yet allows himself things which he well knows are forbidden. The man who professes to love Christ and deliberately disobeys him, is guilty of a lie.

(ii) The man who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar (1Jn.2:22). Here is something which runs through the whole New Testament. The ultimate test of any man is his reaction to Jesus. The ultimate question which Jesus asks every man is: "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt.16:13). A man confronted with Christ cannot but see the greatness that is there; and, if he denies it, he is a liar.

(iii) The man who says that he loves God and at the same time hates his brother is a liar (1Jn.4:20). Love of God and hatred of man cannot exist in the same person. If there is bitterness in a man's heart towards any other, that is proof that he does not really love God. All our protestations of love to God are useless if there is hatred in our hearts towards any man.

Barclay's Commentary

1 John 1:8-10

THE SINNER'S SELF-DECEPTION

1 John 1:8-10

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, we can rely on him in his righteousness to forgive us our sins and to make us clean from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

In this passage John describes and condemns two further mistaken ways of thought.

(i) There is the man who says that he has no sin. That may mean either of two things.

It may describe the man who says that he has no responsibility for his sin. It is easy enough to find defences behind which to seek to hide. We may blame our sins on our heredity, on our environment, on our temperament, on our physical condition. We may claim that someone misled us and that we were led astray. It is characteristic of us all that we seek to shuffle out of the responsibility for sin. Or it may describe the man who claims that he can sin and take no harm.

It is John's insistence that, when a man has sinned, excuses and self-justifications are irrelevant. The only thing which will meet the situation is humble and penitent confession to God and, if need be, to men.

Then John says a surprising thing. He says that we can depend on God in his righteousness to forgive us if we confess our sins. On the face of it, we might well have thought that God in his righteousness would have been much more likely to condemn than to forgive. But the point is that God, because he is righteous, never breaks his word; and Scripture is full of the promise of mercy to the man who comes to him with penitent heart. God has promised that he will never despise the contrite heart and he will not break his word. If we humbly and sorrowfully confess our sins, he will forgive. The very fact of making excuses and seeking for self-justification debars us from forgiveness, because it debars us from penitence; the very fact of humble confession opens the door to forgiveness, for the man with the penitent heart can claim the promises of God.

(ii) There is the man who says that he has not in fact sinned. That attitude is not nearly so uncommon as we might think. Any number of people do not really believe that they have sinned and rather resent being called sinners. Their mistake is that they think of sin as the kind of thing which gets into the newspapers. They forget that sin is hamartia (GSN0266) which literally means a missing of the target. To fail to be as good a father, mother, wife, husband, son, daughter, workman, person as we might be is to sin; and that includes us all.

In any event the man who says that he has not sinned is in effect doing nothing less than calling God a liar, for God has said that all have sinned.

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1 John 1:8-10

So John condemns the man who claims that he is so far advanced in knowledge and in the spiritual life that sin for him has ceased to matter; he condemns the man who evades the responsibility for his sin or who holds that sin has no effect upon him; he condemns the man who has never even realized that he is a sinner. The essence of the Christian life is first to realize our sin; and then to go to God for that forgiveness which can wipe out the past and for that cleansing which can make the future new.

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1 John 2:1-2

A PASTOR'S CONCERN

1 John 2:1-2 (Part 1)

My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. But, if anyone does sin, we have one who will plead our cause to the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. For he is the propitiating sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

The first thing to note in this passage is the sheer affection in it. John begins with the address, "My little children." Both in Latin and in Greek diminutives carry a special affection. They are words which are used, as it were, with a caress. John is a very old man; he must be, in fact, the last survivor of his generation, maybe the last man alive who had walked and talked with Jesus in the days of his flesh. So often age gets out of sympathy with youth and acquires even an impatient irritableness with the new and laxer ways of the younger generation. But not John, in his old age he has nothing but tenderness for those who are his little children in the faith. He is writing to tell them that they must not sin but he does not scold. There is no cutting edge in his voice; he seeks to love them into goodness. In this opening address there is the yearning, affectionate tenderness of a pastor for people whom he has known for long in all their wayward foolishness and still loves.

His object in writing is that they may not sin. There is a two-fold connection of thought here--with what has gone before and with what comes afterwards. There is a two-fold danger that they may indeed think lightly of sin.

John says two things about sin. First, he has just said that sin is universal; anyone who says that he has not sinned is a liar. Second, there is forgiveness of sins through what Jesus Christ has done, and still does, for men. Now it would be possible to use both these statements as an excuse to think lightly of sin. If all have sinned, why make a fuss about it and what is the use of struggling against something which is in any event an inevitable part of the human situation? Again, if there is forgiveness of sins, why worry about it?

In face of that, John, as Westcott points out, has two things to say.

First, the Christian is one who has come to know God; and the inevitable accompaniment of knowledge must be obedience. We shall return to this more fully; but at the moment we note that to know God and to obey God must, as John sees it, be twin parts of the same experience.

Second, the man who claims that he abides in God (1Jn.2:6) and in Jesus Christ must live the same kind of life as Jesus lived. That is to say, union with Christ necessarily involves imitation of Christ.

So John lays down his two great ethical principles; knowledge involves obedience, and union involves imitation. Therefore, in the Christian life there can never be any inducement to think lightly of sin.

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1 John 2:1-2

JESUS CHRIST, THE PARACLETE

1 John 2:1-2 (Part 2)

It will take us some considerable time to deal with these two verses for there are hardly any other two in the New Testament which so succinctly set out the work of Christ.

Let us first set out the problem. It is clear that Christianity is an ethical religion; that is what John is concerned to stress. But it is also clear that man is so often an ethical failure. Confronted with the demands of God, he admits them and accepts them--and then fails to keep them. Here, then, there is a barrier erected between man and God. How can man, the sinner, ever enter into the presence of God, the all-holy? That problem is solved in Jesus Christ. And in this passage John uses two great words about Jesus Christ which we must study, not simply to acquire intellectual knowledge but to understand and so to enter into the benefits of Christ.

He calls Jesus Christ our Advocate with the Father. The word is *parakletos* (GSN3875) which in the Fourth Gospel the King James Version translates Comforter. It is so great a word and has behind it so great a thought that we must examine it in detail. *Parakletos* (GSN3875) comes from the verb *parakalein* (GSN3870). There are occasions when *parakalein* (GSN3870) means to comfort. It is, for instance, used with that meaning in Gen.37:35, where it is said that all Jacob's sons and daughters rose up to comfort him at the loss of Joseph; in Isa.61:2, where it is said that the function of the prophet is to comfort all that mourn; and in Matt.5:4, where it is said that those who mourn will be comforted.

But that is neither the commonest nor the most literal sense of *parakalein* (GSN3870); its commonest sense is to call someone to one's side in order to use him in some way as a helper and a counsellor. In ordinary Greek that is a very common usage. Xenophon (*Anabasis* 1.6.5) tells how Cyrus summoned (*parakalein*, GSN3870) Clearchos into his tent to be his counsellor, for Clearchos was a man held in the highest honour by Cyrus and by the Greeks. Aeschines, the Greek orator, protests against his opponents calling in Demosthenes, his great rival, and says: "Why need you call Demosthenes to your support? To do so is to call in a rascally rhetorician to cheat the ears of the jury" (*Against Ctesiphon* 200).

Parakletos (GSN3875) itself is a word which is passive in form and literally means someone who is called to one's side; but since it is always the reason for the calling in that is uppermost in the mind, the word, although passive in form, has an active sense, and comes to mean a helper, a supporter and, above all, a witness in someone's favour, an advocate in someone's defence. It too is a common word in ordinary secular Greek. Demosthenes (*De Fals. Leg.* 1) speaks of the importunities and the party spirit of advocates (*parakletoi*, GSN3875) serving the ends of private ambition instead of public good. Diogenes Laertius (4: 50) tells of a caustic saying of the philosopher Bion. A very talkative person sought his help in some matter. Bion said, "I will do what you want, if you will only send someone to me to plead your case (i.e., send a *parakletos*, GSN3875), and stay away yourself." When Philo is telling the story of Joseph and his brethren, he says that, when Joseph forgave them for the wrong that they had done him, he said, "I offer you an amnesty for all that you did to me; you need no other *parakletos* (GSN3875)"

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1 John 2:1-2

(Life of Joseph 40). Philo tells how the Jews of Alexandria were being oppressed by a certain governor and determined to take their case to the emperor. "We must find," they said, "a more powerful parakletos (GSN3875) by whom the Emperor Gaius will be brought to a favourable disposition towards us" (Leg. in Flacc. 968 B).

So common was this word that it came into other languages just as it stood. In the New Testament itself the Syriac, Egyptian, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions all keep the word parakletos (GSN3875) just as it stands. The Jews especially adopted the word and used it in this sense of advocate, someone to plead one's cause. They used it as the opposite of the word accuser and the Rabbis had this saying about what would happen in the day of God's judgment.

"The man who keeps one commandment of the Law has gotten to himself one parakletos (GSN3875); the man who breaks one commandment of the Law has gotten to himself one accuser." They said, "If a man is summoned to court on a capital charge, he needs powerful parakletoi (GSN3875) (the plural of the word) to save him; repentance and good works are his parakletoi (GSN3975) in the judgment of God." "All the righteousness and mercy which an Israelite does in this world are great peace and great parakletoi (GSN3875) between him and his father in heaven." They said that the sin-offering is a man's parakletos (GSN3875) before God.

So the word came into the Christian vocabulary. In the days of the persecutions and the martyrs, a Christian pleader called Vettius Epagathos ably pled the case of those who were accused of being Christians. "He was an advocate (parakletos, GSN3875) for the Christians, for he had the Advocate within himself, even the Spirit" (Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History, 5: 1). The Letter of Barnabas (20) speaks of evil men who are the advocates of the wealthy and the unjust judges of the poor. The writer of Second Clement asks: "Who shall be your parakletos (GSN3875) if it be not clear that your works are righteous and holy?" (2 Clement 6: 9).

A parakletos (GSN3875) has been defined as "one who lends his presence to his friends." More than once in the New Testament there is this great conception of Jesus as the friend and the defender of man. In a military court-martial the officer who defends the soldier under accusation is called the prisoner's friend. Jesus is our friend. Paul writes of that Christ who is at the right hand of God and "who intercedes for us" (Rom.8:34). The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus Christ as the one who "ever lives to make intercession" for men (Heb.7:25); and he also speaks of him as "appearing in the presence of God for us" (Heb.9:24).

The tremendous thing about Jesus is that he has never lost his interest in, or his love for, men. We are not to think of him as having gone through his life upon the earth and his death upon the Cross, and then being finished with men. He still bears his concern for us upon his heart; he still pleads for us; Jesus Christ is the prisoner's friend for all.

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1 John 2:1-2

JESUS CHRIST, THE PROPITIATION

1 John 2:1-2 (Part 3)

John goes on to say that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. The word is *hilasmos* (GSN2434). This is a more difficult picture for us fully to grasp. The picture of the advocate is universal for all men have experience of a friend coming to their aid; but the picture in propitiation is from sacrifice and is more natural to the Jewish mind than to ours. To understand it we must get at the basic ideas behind it.

The great aim of all religion is fellowship with God, to know him as friend and to enter with joy, and not fear, into his presence. It therefore follows that the supreme problem of religion is sin, for it is sin that interrupts fellowship with God. It is to meet that problem that all sacrifice arises. By sacrifice fellowship with God is restored. So the Jews offered, night and morning, the sin-offering in the Temple. That was the offering, not for any particular sin but for man as a sinner; and so long as the Temple lasted it was made to God in the morning and in the evening. The Jews also offered their trespass-offerings to God; these were the offerings for particular sins. The Jews had their Day, of Atonement, whose ritual was designed to atone for all sins, known and unknown. It is with that background that we must come at this picture of propitiation.

As we have said, the Greek word for propitiation is *hilasmos* (GSN2434), and the corresponding verb is *hilaskesthai* (GSN2433). This verb has three meanings. (i) When it is used with a man as the subject, it means to placate or to pacify, someone who has been injured or offended, and especially to placate a god. It is to bring a sacrifice or to perform a ritual whereby a god, offended by sin, is placated. (ii) If the subject is God, the verb means to forgive, for then the meaning is that God himself provides the means whereby the lost relationship between him and men is restored. (iii) The third meaning is allied with the first. The verb often means to perform some deed, by which the taint of guilt is removed. A man sins; at once he acquires the taint of sin; he needs something, which, to use C. H. Dodd's metaphor, will disinfect him from that taint and enable him once again to enter into the presence of God.

In that sense *hilaskesthai* (GSN2433) means, not to propitiate but to expiate, not so much to pacify God as to disinfect man from the taint of sin and thereby fit him again to enter into fellowship with God.

When John says that Jesus is the *hilasmos* (GSN2434) for our sins, he is, we think, bringing all these different senses into one. Jesus is the person through whom guilt for past sin and defilement from present sin are removed. The great basic truth behind this word is that it is through Jesus Christ that man's fellowship with God is first restored and then maintained.

We note one other thing. As John sees it, this work of Jesus was carried out not only for us but for the whole world. There is in the New Testament a strong line of thought in which the universality of the salvation of God is stressed. God so loved the world that he sent his son (Jn.3:16). Jesus is confident that, if he is lifted up, he will draw all men to him (Jn.12:32). God will have all men to be saved (1Tim.2:4). He would be a bold man who would set limits to the grace and love of God or to the effectiveness of the work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Truly the love of God is broader than the

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1 John 2:1-2

measures of man's mind; and in the New Testament itself there are hints of a salvation whose arms are as wide as the world.

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1 John 2:3-6

THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

1 John 2:3-6

And it is by this that we know that we have come to know him--if we keep his commandments. He who says, "I have come to know him" and who does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a man. The love of God is truly perfected in any man who keeps his word. This is the way in which we know that we are in him. He who claims that he abides in him ought himself to live the same kind of life as he lived.

This passage deals in phrases and thoughts which were very familiar to the ancient world. It talked much about knowing God and about being in God. It is important that we should see wherein the difference lay between the pagan world in all its greatness and Judaism and Christianity. To know God, to abide in God, to have fellowship with God has always been the quest of the human spirit, for Augustine was right when he said that God had made men for himself and that they were restless until they found their rest in him. We may say that in the ancient world there were three lines of thought in regard to knowing God.

(i) In the great classical age of their thought and literature, in the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ, the Greeks were convinced that they could arrive at God by the sheer process of intellectual reasoning and argument. In *The World of the New Testament*, T. R. Glover has a chapter on The Greek in which he brilliantly and vividly sketches the character of the Greek mind in its greatest days when the Greek glorified the intellect. "A harder and more precise thinker than Plato it will be difficult to discover," said Marshall Macgregor. Xenophon tells how Socrates had a conversation with a young man. "How do you know that?" asked Socrates. "Do you know it or are you guessing?" The young man had to say, "I am guessing." "Very well," answered Socrates, "when we are done with guessing and when we know, shall we talk about it then?" Guesses were not good enough for the Greek thinker.

To the classical Greek curiosity was not a fault but was the greatest of the virtues, for it was the mother of philosophy. Glover writes of this outlook: "Everything must be examined; all the world is the proper study of man; there is no question which it is wrong for man to ask; nature in the long run must stand and deliver; God too must explain himself, for did he not make man so?" For the Greeks of the great classical age the way to God was by the intellect.

It has to be noted that an intellectual approach to religion is not necessarily ethical at all. If religion is a series of mental problems, if God is the goal at the end of intense mental activity, religion becomes something not very unlike the higher mathematics. It becomes intellectual satisfaction and not moral action; and the plain fact is that many of the great Greek thinkers were not specially good men. Even men so great as Plato and Socrates saw no sin in homosexuality. A man could know God in the intellectual sense but that need not make him a good man.

(ii) The later Greeks, in the immediate background time of the New Testament, sought to find God in emotional experience. The characteristic religious phenomenon of these days was the Mystery Religions. In any view of the history of religion they are an amazing feature. Their aim

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1 John 2:3-6

was union with the divine and they were all in the form of passion plays. They were all founded on the story of some god who lived, and suffered terribly, and died a cruel death, and rose again. The initiate was given a long course of instruction; he was made to practise ascetic discipline. He was worked up to an intense pitch of expectation and emotional sensitivity. He was then allowed to come to a passion play in which the story of the suffering, dying, and rising god was played out on the stage. Everything was designed to heighten the emotional atmosphere. There was cunning lighting; sensuous music; perfumed incense; a marvellous liturgy.

In this atmosphere the story was played out and the worshipper identified himself with the experiences of the god until he could cry out: "I am thou, and thou art I"; until he shared the god's suffering and also shared his victory and immortality.

This was not so much knowing God as feeling God. But it was a highly emotional experience and, as such, it was necessarily transient. It was a kind of religious drug. It quite definitely found God in an abnormal experience and its aim was to escape from ordinary life.

(iii) Lastly, there was the Jewish way of knowing God which is closely allied with the Christian way. To the Jew knowledge of God came, not by man's speculation or by an exotic experience of emotion, but by God's own revelation. The God who revealed himself was a holy God and his holiness brought the obligation to his worshipper to be holy, too. A. E. Brooke says, "John can conceive of no real knowledge of God which does not issue in obedience." Knowledge of God can be proved only by obedience to God; and knowledge of God can be gained only by obedience to God. C. H. Dodd says, "To know God is to experience his love in Christ, and to return that love in obedience."

Here was John's problem. In the Greek world he was faced with people who saw God as an intellectual exercise and who could say, "I know God" without being conscious of any ethical obligation whatever. In the Greek world he was faced with people who had had an emotional experience and who could say, "I am in God and God is in me," and who yet did not see God in terms of commandments at all.

John is determined to lay it down quite unmistakably and without compromise that the only way in which we can show that we know God is by obedience to him, and the only way we can show that we have union with Christ is by imitation of him. Christianity is the religion which offers the greatest privilege and brings with it the greatest obligation. Intellectual effort and emotional experience are not neglected--far from it but they must combine to issue in moral action.

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1 John 2:7-8

THE COMMANDMENT WHICH IS OLD AND NEW

1 John 2:7-8 (Part 1)

Beloved, it is not a new commandment which I am writing to you, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning, the old commandment is the word which you heard. Again, it is a new commandment which I am writing to you, a thing which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the light is now shining.

Beloved is John's favourite address to his people (compare 1Jn.3:2; 1Jn.3:21; 1Jn.4:1,7; 3Jn.1-2,5,11). The whole accent of his writing is love. As Westcott puts it: "St. John, while enforcing the commandment of love, gives expression to it." There is something very lovely here. So much of this letter is a warning; and parts of it are rebuke. When we are warning people or rebuking them, it is so easy to become coldly critical; it is so easy to scold; it is even possible to take a cruel pleasure in seeing people wince under our verbal lash. But, even when he has to say hard things, the accent of John's voice is love. He had learned the lesson which every parent, every preacher, every teacher, every leader must learn; he had learned to speak the truth in love.

John speaks about a commandment which is at one and the same time old and new. Some would take this as referring to the implied commandment in 1Jn.2:6 that he who abides in Jesus Christ must live the same kind of life as his Master lived. But almost certainly John is thinking of the words of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: "A new commandment I give to you, That you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn.13:34). In what sense was that commandment both old and new?

(i) It was old in the sense that it was already there in the Old Testament. Did not the Law say, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself?" (Lev.19:18). It was old in the sense that this was not the first time that John's hearers had heard it. From the very first day of their entry into the Christian life they had been taught that the law of love must be the law of their lives. This commandment went a long way back in history and a long way back in the lives of those to whom John was speaking.

(ii) It was new in that it had been raised to a completely new standard in the life of Jesus--and it was as Jesus had loved men that men were now to love each other. It could well be said that men did not really know what love was until they saw it in him. In every sphere of life it is possible for a thing to be old in the sense that it has for long existed and yet to reach a completely new standard in someone's performance of it. A game may become a new game to a man when he has seen some master play it. A piece of music may become a new thing to a man when he has heard some great orchestra play it under the baton of some master conductor. Even a dish of food can become a new thing to a man when he tastes it after it has been prepared by someone with a genius for cooking. An old thing can become a new experience in the hands of a master. In Jesus love became new in two directions.

(a) It became new in the extent to which it reached. In Jesus love reached out to the sinner. To the orthodox Jewish Rabbi the sinner was a person whom God wished to destroy. "There is joy in

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1 John 2:7-8

heaven," they said, "when one sinner is obliterated from the earth." But Jesus was the friend of outcast men and women and of sinners, and he was sure that there was joy in heaven when one sinner came home. In Jesus love reached out to the Gentile. As the Rabbis saw it: "The Gentiles were created by God to be fuel for the fires of Hell." But in Jesus God so loved the world that he gave his Son. Love became new in Jesus because he widened its boundaries until there were none outside its embrace.

(b) It became new in the lengths to which it would go. No lack of response, nothing that men could ever do to him, could turn Jesus' love to hate. He could even pray for God's mercy on those who were nailing him to his Cross.

The commandment to love was old in the sense that men had known of it for long; but it was new because in Jesus Christ love had reached a standard which it had never reached before and it was by that standard that men were bidden to love.

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1 John 2:7-8

THE DEFEAT OF THE DARK

1 John 2:7-8 (Part 2)

John goes on to say that this commandment of love is true in Jesus Christ and true in the people to whom he is writing. To John, as we have seen, truth was not only something to be grasped with the mind; it was something to be done. What he means is that the commandment to love one another is the highest truth; in Jesus Christ we can see that commandment in all the glory of its fullness; in him that commandment is true; and in the Christian we can see it, not in the fullness of its truth but coming true. For John, Christianity is progress in love.

He goes on to say that the light is shining and the darkness is passing away. This must be read in context. By the time John wrote, at the end of the first century, men's ideas were changing. In the very early days they had looked for the Second Coming of Jesus as a sudden and shattering event within their own life time. When that did not happen, they did not abandon the hope but allowed experience to change it. To John the Second Coming of Christ is not one sudden, dramatic event but a process in which the darkness is steadily being defeated by the light; and the end of the process will be a world in which the darkness is totally defeated and the light triumphant.

In this passage and in 1Jn.2:10-11, the light is identified with love and the dark with hate. That is to say, the end of this process is a world where love reigns supreme and hate is banished for ever. Christ has come in the individual heart when a man's whole being is ruled by love; and he will have come in the world of men when all men obey his commandment of love. The coming and reign of Jesus is identical with the coming and reign of love.

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1 John 2:9-11

LOVE AND HATE, AND LIGHT AND DARK

1 John 2:9-11 (Part 1)

He who says that he is in the light, and who at the same time hates his brother, is still in the darkness. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is nothing in him which makes him stumble. He who hates his brother is in the darkness and he is walking in darkness, and he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

The first thing which strikes us about this passage is the way in which John sees personal relationships in terms of black and white. In regard to our brother man, it is a case of either love or hate; as John sees it, there is no such thing as neutrality in personal relationships. As Westcott put it: "Indifference is impossible; there is no twilight in the spiritual world."

It is further to be noted that what John is speaking about is a man's attitude to his brother, that is, to the man next door, the man beside whom he lives and works, the man with whom he comes into contact every day. There is a kind of Christian attitude which enthusiastically preaches love to people in other lands, but has never sought any kind of fellowship with its next door neighbour or even managed to live at peace within its own family circle. John insists on love for the man with whom we are in daily contact. As A. E. Brooke puts it, this is not "vapid philosophy, or a pretentious cosmopolitanism"; it is immediate and practical.

John was perfectly right when he drew his sharp distinction between light and dark, love and hate, without shades and halfway stages. Our brother cannot be disregarded; he is part of the landscape. The question is how, do we regard him?

(i) We may regard our brother man as negligible. We can make all our plans without taking him into our calculations at all. We can live on the assumption that his need and his sorrow and his welfare and his salvation have nothing to do with us. A man may be so self-centred often quite unconsciously that in his world no one matters except himself.

(ii) We may regard our brother man with contempt. We may treat him as a fool in comparison with our intellectual attainment and as one whose opinions are to be brushed aside. We may regard him much as the Greeks regarded slaves, a necessary lesser breed, useful enough for the menial duties of life, but not to be compared with themselves.

(iii) We may regard our brother man as a nuisance. We may feel that law and convention have given him a certain claim upon us, but that claim is nothing more than an unfortunate necessity. Thus a man may regard any gift he has to make to charity and any tax he has to pay for social welfare as regrettable. Some in their heart of hearts regard those who are in poverty or in sickness and those who are under-privileged as mere nuisances.

(iv) We may regard our brother man as an enemy. If we regard competition as the principle of life, that is bound to be so. Every other man in the same profession or trade is a potential competitor and, therefore, a potential enemy.

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1 John 2:9-11

(v) We may regard our brother man as a brother. We may regard his needs as our needs, his interests as our interests, and to be in fellowship with him as the true joy of life.

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1 John 2:9-11

THE EFFECT OF LOVE AND HATE

1 John 2:9-11 (Part 2)

John has something further to say. As he sees it, our attitude to our brother man has an effect not only on him but also on ourselves.

(i) If we love our brother, we are walking in the light and there is nothing in us which causes us to stumble. The Greek could mean that, if we love our brother, there is nothing in us which causes others to stumble and, of course, that would be perfectly true. But it is much more likely that John is saying that, if we love our brother, there is nothing in us which causes ourselves to stumble. That is to say, love enables us to make progress in the spiritual life and hatred makes progress impossible. When we think of it, that is perfectly obvious. If God is love and if the new commandment of Christ is love, then love brings us nearer to men and to God and hatred separates us from men and from God. We ought always to remember that he who has in his heart hatred, resentment and the unforgiving spirit, can never grow up in the spiritual life.

(ii) John goes on to say that he who hates his brother walks in darkness and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. That is to say, hatred makes a man blind and this, too, is perfectly obvious. When a man has hatred in his heart, his powers of judgment are obscured; he cannot see an issue clearly. It is no uncommon sight to see a man opposing a good proposal simply because he dislikes, or has quarrelled with, the man who made it. Again and again progress in some scheme of a church or an association is held up because of personal animosities. No man is fit to give a verdict on anything while he has hatred in his heart; and no man can rightly direct his own life when hatred dominates him.

Love enables a man to walk in the light; hatred leaves him in the dark--even if he does not realise that it is so.

Barclay's Commentary

1 John 2:12-14

REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE

1 John 2:12-14 (Part 1)

I am writing to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you through his name. I am writing to you, fathers, Because you have come to know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, Because you have overcome the Evil One. I have written to you, little ones, Because you have come to know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, Because you have come to know him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, And the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the Evil One.

This is a very lovely passage and yet for all its beauty it has its problems of interpretation. We may begin by noting two things which are certain.

First, as to its form, this passage is not exactly poetry but it is certainly poetical and strongly rhythmical. Therefore, it is to be interpreted as poetry ought to be.

Second, as to its contents, John has been warning his people of the perils of the dark and the necessity of walking in the light and now he says that in every case their best defence is to remember what they are and what has been done for them. No matter who they are, their sins have been forgiven; no matter who they are, they know him who is from the beginning; no matter who they are, they have the strength which can face and overcome the Evil One. When Nehemiah was urged to seek a cowardly safety, his answer was: "Should such a man as I flee?" (Neh.6:11). And when the Christian is tempted, his answer may well be: "Should such a man as I stoop to this folly or stain my hands with this evil?" The man who is forgiven, who knows God and who is aware that he can draw on a strength beyond his own, has a great defence against temptation in simply remembering these things.

But in this passage there are problems. The first is quite simple. Why does John say three times I am writing and three times I have written? The Vulgate translates both by the present tense scribo); and it has been argued that John varies the tense simply to avoid the monotony that six successive present tenses would bring. It has also been argued that the past tenses are what Greek calls the epistolary aorist. Greek letter-writers had a habit of using the past instead of the present tense because they put themselves in the position of the reader. To the writer of a letter a thing may be present because at the moment he is doing it; but to the reader of the letter it will be past because by that time it has been done. To take a simple instance, a Greek letter-writer might equally well say, "I am going to town today," or "I went to town today." That is the Greek epistolary or letter-writer's aorist. if that be the case here, there is no real difference between John's I am writing and I have written.

More likely the explanation is this. When John says I am writing he is thinking of what he is at the moment writing and of what he still has to say; when he says I have written he is thinking of what has already been written and his readers have already read. The sense would then be that the whole letter, the part already written, the part being written and the part still to come, is all designed to remind Christians of who and whose they are and of what has been done for them.

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For John it was of supreme importance that the Christian should remember the status and the benefits he has in Jesus Christ, for these would be his defence against error and against sin.

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1 John 2:12-14

AT EVERY STAGE

1 John 2:12-14 (Part 2)

The second problem which confronts us is more difficult, and also more important. John uses three titles of the people to whom he is writing. He calls them little children; in 1Jn.2:12 the Greek is *teknia* (GSN5040) and in 1Jn.2:13 *paidia* (GSN3816); *teknia* (GSN5040) indicates a child young in age and *paidia* (GSN3816) a child young in experience, and, therefore, in need of training and discipline. He calls them fathers. He calls them young men. The question then is: to whom is John writing and three answers have been given.

(i) It is suggested that we are to take these words as representing three age groups in the church--children, fathers, and young men. The children have the sweet innocence of childhood and of forgiveness. The fathers have the mature wisdom which Christian experience can bring. The young men have the strength which enables them to win their personal battle with the Evil One. That is most attractive; but there are three reasons which make us hesitate to adopt it as the only meaning of the passage.

(a) Little children is one of John's favourite expressions. He also uses it in 1Jn.2:1; 1Jn.2:28; 1Jn.3:7; 1Jn.4:4; 1Jn.5:21; and it is clear in the other cases that he is not thinking of little children in terms of age but of Christians whose spiritual father he is. By this time he must have been very nearly a hundred years old; all the members of his churches were of a far younger generation and to him they were all little children in the same way as a teacher or professor may still think of his boys after the boys have long since become men.

(b) The fact that the passage is kin to poetry makes us think twice before insisting that so literal a meaning must be given to the words and so cut and dried a classification be taken as intended. Literalism and poetry do not go comfortably hand in hand.

(e) Perhaps the greatest difficulty is that the blessings of which John speaks are not the exclusive possession of any one age group. Forgiveness does not belong to the child alone; a Christian may be young in the faith, and yet have a wonderful maturity; strength to overcome the tempter does not--thank God--belong to youth alone. These blessings are the blessings not of any one age but of the Christian life.

We do not say that there is no thought of age groups in this. There almost certainly is; but John has a way of saying things which can be taken in two ways, a narrower and a wider; and, while the narrower meaning is here, we must go beyond it to find the full meaning.

(ii) It is suggested that we are to find two groups here. The argument is that little children describes Christians in general and that Christians in general are then divided into two groups, the fathers and the young men, that is, the young and the old, the mature and the as yet immature. That is perfectly possible, because John's people must have become so used to hearing him call them my little children that they would not connect the words with age at all but would always include themselves in that address.

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1 John 2:12-14

(iii) It is suggested that in every case the words include all Christians and that no classification is intended. All Christians are like little children, for all can regain their innocence by the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. All Christians are like fathers, like full-grown, responsible men, who can think and learn their way deeper and deeper into the knowledge of Jesus Christ. All Christians are like young men, with a vigorous strength to fight and win their battles against the tempter and his power. It seems to us that indeed this is John's wider meaning. We may begin by taking his words as a classification of Christians into three age groups, but we come to see that the blessings of each group are the blessings of all the groups and that each one of us finds himself included in all of them.

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1 John 2:12-14

GOD'S GIFTS IN CHRIST

1 John 2:12-14 (Part 3)

This passage finely sets out God's gifts to all men in Jesus Christ.

(i) There is the gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. This was the essential message of the gospel and of the early preachers. They were sent out to preach repentance and remission of sins (Lk.24:47). It was Paul's message at Antioch in Pisidia that to men there was proclaimed through Jesus Christ forgiveness of sins (Ac.13:38). To be forgiven is to be at peace with God and that is precisely the gift that Jesus brought to men.

John uses the curious phrase through his name (1Jn.2:12). Forgiveness comes through the name of Jesus Christ. The Jews used the name in a very special way. The name is not simply that by which a person is called; it stands for the whole character of a person in so far as it has been made known to men. This use is very common in the Book of Psalms. "Those who know thy name put their trust in thee" (Ps.9:10). This clearly does not mean that those who know that God is called Yahweh (HSN3068 and HSN3069) will put their trust in him; it means that those who know God's nature in so far as it has been revealed to men will be ready to put their trust in him, because they know what he is like. The Psalmist prays: "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt" (Ps.25:11), which to all intents and purposes means for thy love and mercy's sake. The grounds of the Psalmist's prayer are the character of God as he knows it to be. "For thy name's sake," prays the Psalmist, "lead me, and guide me" (Ps.31:3).

He can bring his request only because he knows the the name--the character of God. "Some boast of chariots," says the Psalmist, "and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the Lord our God" (Ps.20:7). Some people put their trust in earthly helps but we will trust God because we know his nature.

So, then, John means that we are assured of forgiveness because we know the character of Jesus Christ. We know that in him we see God. We see in him sacrificial love and patient mercy; therefore we know that God is like that; and, therefore, we can be sure that there is forgiveness for us.

(ii) There is the gift of increasing knowledge o God. John no doubt was thinking of his own experience. He was an old man now; he was writing about A.D. 100. For seventy years he had lived with Christ and he had thought about him and come to know him better every day. For the Jew knowledge was not merely an intellectual thing. To know God was not merely to know him as the philosopher knows him, it was to know him as a friend knows him. In Hebrew to know is used of the relationship between husband and wife and especially of the sexual act, the most intimate of all relationships (compare Gen.4:1). When John spoke of the increasing knowledge of God, he did not mean that the Christian would become an ever more learned theologian; he meant that throughout the years he would become more and more intimately friendly with God.

(iii) There is the gift of victorious strength. John looks on the struggle with temptation as a personal struggle. He dos not speak in the abstract of conquering evil; he speaks of conquering the

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1 John 2:12-14

Evil One. He sees evil as a personal power which seeks to seduce us from God. Once Robert Louis Stevenson, speaking of an experience which he never told in detail, said, "You know the Caledonian Railway Station in Edinburgh? Once I met Satan there." There can be none of us who has not experienced the attack of the tempter, the personal assault on our virtue and on our loyalty. It is in Christ we receive the power to meet and to defeat this attack. To take a very simple human analogy we all know that there are some people in whose presence it is easy to be bad and some in whose presence it is necessary to be good. When we walk with Jesus, we are walking with him whose company can enable us to defeat the assaults of the Evil One.

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1 John 2:15-17

RIVALS FOR THE HUMAN HEART

1 John 2:15-17 (Part 1)

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything that is in the world--the flesh's desire, the eye's desire, life's empty pride--does not come from the Father but comes from the world. And the world is passing away, and so is its desire; but he who does God's will abides for ever.

It was characteristic of ancient thought to see the world in terms of two conflicting principles. We see this very vividly in Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Persians. That was a religion with which the Jews had been brought into contact and which had left a mark upon their thinking. Zoroastrianism saw the world as the battle-ground between the opposing forces of the light and the dark. The god of the light was Ahura-Mazda, the god of the dark was Ahura-Mainyu; and the great decision in life was which side to serve. Every man had to decide to ally himself either with the light or with the dark; that was a conception which the Jews knew well.

But for the Christian the cleavage between the world and the Church had another background. The Jews had for many centuries a basic belief which divided time into two ages, this present age, which was wholly evil, and the age to come, which was the age of God and, therefore, wholly good. It was a basic belief of the Christian that in Christ the age to come had arrived; the Kingdom of God was here. But the Kingdom of God had not arrived in and for the world; it had arrived only in and for the Church. Hence the Christian was bound to draw a contrast. The life of the Christian within the Church was the life of the age to come, which was wholly good; on the other hand the world was still living in this present age, which was wholly evil. It followed inevitably that there was a complete cleavage between the Church and the world, and that there could be no fellowship, and even no compromise, between them.

But we must be careful to understand what John meant by the world, the kosmos (GSN2889). The Christian did not hate the world as such. It was God's creation; and God made all things well. Jesus had loved the beauty of the world; not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of the scarlet anemones which bloomed for a day and died. Jesus again and again took his illustrations from the world. In that sense the Christian did not hate the world. The earth was not the devil's; the earth was the Lord's and the fullness thereof. But kosmos (GSN2889) acquired a moral sense. It began to mean the world apart from God. C. H. Dodd defines this meaning of kosmos (GSN2889): "Our author means human society in so far as it is organized on wrong principles, and characterized by base desires, false values, and egoism." In other words, to John the world was nothing other than pagan society with its false values and its false gods.

The world in this passage does not mean the world in general, for God loved the world which he had made; it means the world which, in fact, had forsaken the God who made it.

It so happened that there was a factor in the situation of John's people which made the circumstances even more perilous. It is clear that, although they might be unpopular, they were not undergoing persecution. They were, therefore, under the great and dangerous temptation to

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compromise with the world. It is always difficult to be different, and it was specially difficult for them.

To this day the Christian cannot escape the obligation to be different from the world. In this passage John sees things as he always sees them--in terms of black and white. As Westcott has it: "There cannot be a vacuum in the soul." This is a matter in which there is no neutrality; a man either loves the world or he loves God, Jesus himself said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matt.6:24). The ultimate choice remains the same. Are we to accept the world's standards or the standards of God?

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1 John 2:15-17

THE LIFE IN WHICH THERE IS NO FUTURE

1 John 2:15-17 (Part 2)

John has two things to say about the man who loves the world and compromises with it.

First, he sets out three sins which are typical of the world.

(i) There is the flesh's desire. This means far more than what we mean by sins of the flesh. To us that expression has to do exclusively with sexual sin. But in the New Testament the flesh is that part of our nature which, when it is without the grace of Jesus Christ, offers a bridgehead to sin. It includes the sins of the flesh but also all worldly ambitions and selfish aims. To be subject to the flesh's desire is to judge everything in this world by purely material standards. It is to live a life dominated by the senses. It is to be gluttonous in food; effeminate in luxury; slavish in pleasure; lustful and lax in morals; selfish in the use of possessions; regardless of all the spiritual values; extravagant in the gratification of material desires. The flesh's desire is regardless of the commandments of God, the judgment of God, the standards of God and the very existence of God. We need not think of this as the sin of the gross sinner.

Anyone who demands a pleasure which may be the ruin of someone else, anyone who has no respect for the personalities of other people in the gratification of his own desires, anyone who lives in luxury while others live in want, anyone who has made a god of his own comfort and of his own ambition in any part of life, is the servant of the flesh's desire.

(ii) There is the eye's desire. This, as C. H. Dodd puts it is "the tendency to be captivated by outward show." It is the spirit which identifies lavish ostentation with real prosperity. It is the spirit which can see nothing without wishing to acquire it and which, having acquired it, flaunts it. It is the spirit which believes that happiness is to be found in the things which money can buy and the eye can see; it has no values other than the material.

(iii) There is life's empty pride. Here John uses a most vivid Greek word, *alazoneia* (GSN0212). To the ancient moralists the *alazon* (GSN0213) was the man who laid claims to possessions and to achievements which did not belong to him in order to exalt himself. The *alazon* (GSN0213) is the braggart; and C. H. Dodd calls *alazoneia* (GSN0212), pretentious egoism. Theophrastus, the great Greek master of the character study, has a study of the *Alazon* (GSN0213), he stands in the harbour and boasts of the ships that he has at sea; he ostentatiously sends a messenger to the bank when he has a shilling to his credit; he talks of his friends among the mighty and of the letters he receives from the famous. He details at length his charitable benefactions and his services to the state. All that he occupies is a hired lodging, but he talks of buying a bigger house to match his lavish entertaining.

His conversation is a continual boasting about things which he does not possess and all his life is spent in an attempt to impress everyone he meets with his own nonexistent importance.

As John sees him, the man of the world is the man who judges everything by his appetites, the man who is the slave of lavish ostentation, the boastful braggart who tries to make himself out a far bigger man than he is.

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Then comes John's second warning. The man who attaches himself to the world's aims and the world's ways is giving his life to things which literally have no future. All these things are passing away and none has any permanency. But the man who has taken God as the centre of his life has given himself to the things which last for ever. The man of the world is doomed to disappointment; the man of God is certain of lasting joy.

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1 John 2:18

THE TIME OF THE LAST HOUR

1 John 2:18 (Part 1)

Little children, it is the time of the last hour; and now many antichrists have risen, just as you heard that Antichrist was to come. That is how we know that it is the time of the last hour.

It is important that we should understand what John means when he speaks of the time of the last hour. The idea of the last days and of the last hour runs all through the Bible; but there is a most interesting development in its meaning.

(i) The phrase occurs frequently in the very early books of the Old Testament. Jacob, for instance, before his death assembles his sons to tell them what will befall them in the last days (Gen.49:1; compare Num.24:14). At that time the last days were when the people of Israel would enter into the Promised Land, and would at last enter into full enjoyment of the promised blessings of God.

(ii) The phrase frequently occurs in the prophets. In the last days the mountain of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it (Isa.2:2; Mic.4:1). In the last days God's Holy City will be supreme; and Israel will render to God the perfect obedience which is his due (compare Jer.23:20; Jer.30:24; Jer.48:47). In the last days there will be the supremacy of God and the obedience of his people.

(iii) In the Old Testament itself, and in the times between the Old and the New Testaments, the last days become associated with the Day of the Lord. No conception is more deeply interwoven into Scripture than this. The Jews had come to believe that all time was divided into two ages. In between this present age, which was wholly evil, and the age to come, which was the golden time of God's supremacy there was the Day of the Lord, the last days, which would be a time of terror, of cosmic dissolution and of judgment, the birthpangs of the new age.

The last hour does not mean a time of annihilation whose end will be a great nothingness as there was at the beginning. In biblical thought the last time is the end of one age and the beginning of another. It is last in the sense that things as they are pass away; but it leads not to world obliteration but to world re-creation.

Here is the centre of the matter. The question then becomes: "Will a man be wiped out in the judgment of the old or will he enter into the glory of the new?" That is the alternative with which John--like all the biblical writers--is confronting men. Men have the choice of allying themselves with the old world, which is doomed to dissolution, or of allying themselves with Christ and entering into the new world, the very world of God. Here lies the urgency. If it was a simple matter of utter obliteration, no one could do anything about it. But it is a matter of re-creation, and whether a man will enter the new world or not depends on whether or not he gives his life to Jesus Christ.

In fact John was wrong. It was not the last hour for his people. Eighteen hundred years have gone by and the world still exists. Does the whole conception, then, belong to a sphere of thought which must be discarded? The answer is that in this conception there is an eternal relevance. Every hour is

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1 John 2:18

the last hour. In the world there is a continual conflict between good and evil, between God and that which is anti-God. And in every moment and in every decision a man is confronted with the choice of allying himself either with God or with the evil forces which are against God; and of thereby ensuring, or failing to ensure, his own share in eternal life. The conflict between good and evil never stops; therefore, the choice never stops; therefore, in a very real sense every hour is the last hour.

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1 John 2:18

THE ANTICHRIST

1 John 2:18 (Part 2)

In this verse we meet the conception of Antichrist. Antichrist is a word which occurs only in John's letters in the New Testament (1Jn.2:22; 1Jn.4:3; 2Jn.7); but it is the expression of an idea which is as old as religion itself.

From its derivation Antichrist can have two meanings. Anti (GSN0473) is a Greek preposition which can mean either against or in place of. Strategos (GSN4755) is the Greek word for a commander, and antistrategos can mean either the hostile commander or the deputy commander. Antichrist can mean either the opponent of Christ or the one who seeks to put himself in the place of Christ. In this case the meaning will come to the same thing, but with this difference. If we take the meaning to be the one who is opposed to Christ, the opposition is plain. If we take the meaning to be the one who seeks to put himself in the place of Christ, Antichrist can be one who subtly tries to take the place of Christ from within the church and the Christian community. The one will be an open opposition; the other a subtle infiltration. We need not choose between these meanings, for Antichrist can act in either way.

The simplest way to think of it is that Christ is the incarnation of God and goodness, and Antichrist is the incarnation of the devil and evil.

We began by saying that this is an idea which is as old as religion itself; men have always felt that in the universe there is a power which is in opposition to God. One of its earliest forms occurs in the Babylonian legend of creation. According to it there was in the very beginning a primeval sea monster called Tiamat; this sea monster was subdued by Marduk but not killed; it was only asleep and the final battle was still to come. That mythical idea of the primeval monster occurs in the Old Testament again and again. There the monster is often called Rahab or the crooked serpent or leviathan. "Thou didst crush Rahab like a carcass," says the Psalmist (Ps.89:10). "His hand pierced the fleeing serpent," says Job (Jb.26:13). Isaiah speaking of the arm of the Lord, says, "Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the dragon?" (Isa.51:9).

Isaiah writes: "In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan the fleeing serpent, leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea" (Isa.27:1). All these are references to the primeval dragon. This idea is obviously one which belongs to the childhood of mankind and its basis is that in the universe there is a power hostile to God.

Originally this power was conceived of as the dragon. Inevitably as time went on it became personalized. Every time there arose a very evil man who seemed to be setting himself against God and bent on the obliteration of his people, the tendency was to identify him with this anti-God force. For instance, about 168 B.C. there emerged the figure of Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria. He resolved on a deliberate attempt to eliminate Judaism from this earth. He invaded Jerusalem, killed thousands of Jews, and sold tens of thousands into slavery. To circumcise a child or to own a copy of the Law was made a crime punishable by instant death. In the Temple courts was erected a great altar to Zeus. Swine's flesh was offered on it. The Temple chambers were made

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into public brothels. Here was a cold-blooded effort to wipe out the Jewish religion. It was Antiochus whom Daniel called "The abomination that makes desolate" (Dn.11:31; Dn.12:11). Here men thought was the anti-God force become flesh.

It was this same phrase that men took in the days of Mark's gospel when they talked of "The Abomination of Desolation"--"The Appalling Horror," as Moffatt translates it--being set up in the Temple (Mk.13:14; Matt.24:15). Here the reference was to Caligula, the more than half-mad Roman Emperor, who wished to set up his own image in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. It was felt that this was the act of anti-God incarnate.

In 2Th.2:3-4, Paul speaks of "the man of sin," the one who exalts himself above all that is called God and all that is worshipped and who sets himself up in the very Temple of God. We do not know whom Paul was expecting, but again there is this thought of one who was the incarnation of everything which was opposed to God.

In Revelation there is the beast (Rev.13:1; Rev.16:13; Rev.19:20; Rev.20:10). Here is very probably another figure. Nero was regarded by all as a human monster. His excesses disgusted the Romans and his savage persecution tortured the Christians. In due time he died; but he had been so wicked that men could not believe that he was really dead. And so there arose the Nero Redivivus, Nero resurrected, legend, which said that Nero was not dead but had gone to Parthia and would come with the Parthian hordes to descend upon men. He is the beast, the Antichrist, the incarnation of evil.

All down history there have been these identifications of human figures with Antichrist. The Pope, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, have all in their day received this identification.

But the fact is that Antichrist is not so much a person as a principle, the principle which is actively opposed to God and which may well be thought of as incarnating itself in those men in every generation who have seemed to be the blatant opponents of God.

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1 John 2:18

THE BATTLE OF THE MIND

1 John 2:18 (Part 3)

John has a view of Antichrist which is characteristically his own. To him the sign that Antichrist is in the world is the false belief and the dangerous teaching of the heretics. The Church had been well forewarned that in the last days false teachers would come. Jesus had said, "Many will come in my name, saying, I am he; and they will lead many astray" (Mk.13:6; compare Matt.24:5). Before he left them, Paul had warned his Ephesian friends: "After my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Ac.20:29-30). The situation which had been foretold had now arisen.

But John had a special view of this situation. He did not think of Antichrist as one single individual figure but rather as a power of falsehood speaking in and through the false teachers. Just as the Holy Spirit was inspiring the true teachers and the true prophets, so there was an evil spirit inspiring the false teachers and the false prophets.

The great interest and relevance of this is that for John the battleground was in the mind. The spirit of Antichrist was struggling with the Spirit of God for the possession of men's minds. What makes this so significant is that we can see exactly this process at work today. Men have brought the indoctrination of the human mind to a science. We see men take an idea and repeat it and repeat it and repeat it until it settles into the minds of others and they begin to accept it as true simply because they have heard it so often. This is easier today than ever it was with so many means of mass communication--books, newspapers, wireless, television, and the vast resources of modern advertising. A skilled propagandist can take an idea and infiltrate it into men's minds until, all unaware, they are indoctrinated with it. We do not say that John foresaw all this but he did see the mind as the field of operations for Antichrist.

He no longer thought in terms of a single demonic figure but in terms of a force of evil deliberately seeking to pervade men's minds; and there is nothing more potent for evil than that.

If there is one special task which confronts the Church today, it is to learn how to use the power of the media of mass communication to counteract the evil ideas with which the minds of men are being deliberately indoctrinated.

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1 John 2:19-21

THE SIFTING OF THE CHURCH

1 John 2:19-21

They have gone out from among us but they are not of our number. If they had been of our number, they would have remained with us. But things have happened as they have happened, that it may be clearly demonstrated that all of them are not of us. But you have received anointing from the Holy One and you all possess knowledge. I have not written this letter to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.

As things have turned out, John sees in the Church a time of sifting. The false teachers had voluntarily left the Christian fellowship; and that fact had shown that they did not really belong there. They were aliens and their own conduct had shown it to be so.

The last phrase of 1Jn.2:19 can have two meanings.

(i) It may mean, as in our translation: "All of them are not of us," or, as we might better put it, "None of them are from us." That is to say, however attractive some of them may be and however fine their teaching sounds, they are all alike alien to the Church.

(ii) It is just possible that what the phrase means is that these men have gone out from the Church to make it clear that "all who are in the Church do not really belong to it." As C. H. Dodd puts it: "Membership of the Church is no guarantee that a man belongs to Christ and not to Antichrist." As A. E. Brooke puts it although he does not agree that it is the meaning of the Greek "External membership is no proof of inward union." As Paul had it: "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rom.9:6). A time such as had come upon John's people had its value, for it sifted the false from the true.

In 1Jn.2:20 John goes on to remind his people that all of them possess knowledge. The people who had gone out were Gnostics who claimed that there had been given to them a secret, special and advanced knowledge which was not open to the ordinary Christian. John reminds his people that in matters of faith the humblest Christian need have no feeling of inferiority to the most learned scholar. There are, of course, matters of technical scholarship, of language, of history, which must be the preserve of the expert; but the essentials of the faith are the possession of every man.

This leads John to his last point in this section. He writes to them, not because they did not know the truth, but because they did. Westcott puts it in this way: "The object of the apostle in writing was not to communicate fresh knowledge, but to bring into active and decisive use the knowledge which his readers already possessed." The greatest Christian defence is simply to remember what we know. What we need is not new truth, but that the truth which we already know become active and effective in our lives.

This is an approach which Paul continually uses. He writes to the Thessalonians: "But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have any one write to you, for you yourselves have been

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1 John 2:19-21

taught by God to love one another" (1Th.4:9). What they need is not new truth but to put into practice the truth they already know. He writes to the Romans: "I myself, am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God" (Rom.15:14-15). What they need is not so much to be taught as to be reminded.

It is the simple fact of the Christian life that things would be different at once if we would only put into practice what we already know. That is not to say that we never need to learn anything new; but it is to say that, even as we are, we have light enough to walk by if we would only use it.

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1 John 2:22-23

THE MASTER LIE

1 John 2:22-23

Who is the liar but the man who denies that Jesus is the Anointed One of God? Antichrist is he who denies the Father and the Son. Anyone who denies the Son does not even have the Father; and everyone who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

As someone has put it, to deny that Jesus is the Christ is the master lie, the lie par excellence; the lie of all lies.

John says that he who denies the Son has not the Father either. What lies behind that saying is this. The false teachers pleaded, "It may be that we have different ideas from yours about Jesus; but you and we do believe the same things about God." John's answer is that that is an impossible position; no man can deny the Son and still have the Father. How does he arrive at this view?

He arrives at it because no one who accepts New Testament teaching can arrive at any other. It is the consistent teaching of the New Testament and it is the claim of Jesus himself that apart from him no man can know God. Jesus said quite clearly that no man knows the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son reveals that knowledge (Matt.11:27; Lk.10:22). Jesus said, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me" (Jn.12:44-45). When, toward the end, Philip said that they would be content if Jesus would only show them the Father, Jesus' answer was: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn.14:6-9). It is through Jesus that men know God; it is in Jesus that men can approach God. If we deny Jesus' right to speak, if we deny his special knowledge and his special relationship to God, we can have no more confidence in what he says. His words become no more than the guesses which any good and great man could make.

Apart from Jesus we have no secure knowledge of God; to deny him is at the same time to lose all grip of God.

Further, it is Jesus' claim that a man's reaction to him is, in fact, a reaction to God and that that reaction settles his destiny in time and in eternity. He said, "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt.10:32-33). To deny Jesus is to be separated from God, for on our reaction to Jesus our relationship to God depends.

To deny Jesus is indeed the master lie, for it is to lose entirely the faith and the knowledge which he alone makes possible.

We may say that there are three New Testament confessions of Jesus. There is the confession that he is the Son of God (Matt.16:16; Jn.9:35-38); there is the confession that he is Lord (Php.2:11); and there is the confession that he is Messiah (1Jn.2:22). The essence of every one of them is the affirmation that Jesus stands in a unique relationship to God; and to deny that relationship is to deny the certainty that everything Jesus said about God is true. The Christian faith depends on the

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1 John 2:22-23

unique relationship of Jesus to God. John is, therefore, right; the man who denies the Son has lost the Father, too.

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1 John 2:24-29

THE UNIVERSAL PRIVILEGE

John 2:24-29 (Part 1)

If that which you have heard from the beginning remains within you, you too will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which he made to you eternal life. I am writing these things to you to warn you about those who are seeking to lead you astray. As for you, if that anointing which you have received from him remains in you, you have no need for anyone to teach you. But, as his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is no lie, and as he has taught you, remain in him. And now, little children, remain in him, so that, if he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink in shame away from him at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you must be aware that everyone who does righteousness is born of him.

John is pleading with his people to abide in the things which they have learned, for, if they do, they will abide in Christ. The great interest of this passage lies in an expression which John has already used. In 1Jn.2:20 he has already spoken of the anointing which his people had had from the Holy One and through which all of them were equipped with knowledge. Here he speaks of the anointing which they have received and the anointing which teaches them all things. What is the thought behind this word anointing? We shall have to go back some distance in Hebrew thought to get at it.

In Hebrew thought and practice anointing was connected with three kinds of people. (i) Priests were anointed. The ritual regulation runs: "You shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his (the priest's) head and anoint him" (Exo.29:7; compare Exo.40:13; Lev.16:32). (ii) Kings were anointed. Samuel anointed Saul as king of the nation (1Sam.9:16; 1Sam.10:1). Later, Samuel anointed David as king (1Sam.16:3,12). Elijah was bidden to anoint Hazael and Jehu (1Kgs.19:15-16). Anointing was the symbol of coronation, as it still is. (iii) Prophets were anointed. Elijah was bidden to anoint Elisha as his successor (1Kgs.19:16). The Lord had anointed the prophet Isaiah to bring good tidings to the nation (Isa.61:1).

Here, then, is the first significant thing. In the old days anointing had been the privilege of the chosen few, the priests, the prophets and the kings; but now it is the privilege of every Christian, however humble he may be. First, then, the anointing stands for the privilege of the Christian in Jesus Christ.

The High Priest was called The Anointed; but the supreme Anointed One was the Messiah. (Messiah, GSN3323 and compare HSN4899 and HSN4886, is the Hebrew for The Anointed One and Christos, GSN5547, is the Greek equivalent). So Jesus was supremely The Anointed One. The question then arose: when was he anointed? The answer which the Church always gave was that at his baptism Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Ac.10:38).

The Greek world also knew of anointing. Anointing was one of the ceremonies of initiation into the Mystery Religions in which a man was supposed to gain special knowledge of God. We know that some at least of the false teachers claimed a special anointing which brought them a special knowledge of God. Hippolytus tells us how these false teachers said, "We alone of all men are

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1 John 2:24-29

Christians, who complete the mystery at the third portal and are anointed there with speechless anointing." John's answer is that it is the ordinary Christian who has the only true anointing, the anointing which Jesus gives.

When did that anointing come to the Christian and of what does it consist?

The first question is easy to answer. There was only one ceremony that all Christians passed through, and that was baptism; it was, indeed, in later days the standard practice at baptism to anoint Christians with holy oil, as Tertullian tells us.

The second question is not so easy. There are, in fact, two equally possible answers:

(i) It may be that the anointing means the coming of the Spirit upon the Christian in baptism. In the early Church that happened in the most visible way (Ac.8:17). If in this passage we were to substitute the Holy Spirit for anointing we would get excellent sense.

(ii) But there is another possibility. 1Jn.2:24 and 1Jn.2:27 are almost exactly parallel in expression. In 1Jn.2:24 we read: "Let what you have heard from the beginning abide in you." And in 1Jn.2:27 we read: "But the anointing which you received from him abides in you." That which you have received from the beginning and the anointing are exactly parallel. Therefore, it may well be that the anointing which the Christian receives is the instruction in the Christian faith which is given him when he enters the Church.

It may well be that we do not need to choose between these two interpretations and that they are both present. This would mean something very valuable. It would mean that we have two tests by which to judge any new teaching offered to us. (i) Is it in accordance with the Christian tradition which we have been taught? (ii) Is it in accordance with the witness of the Holy Spirit speaking within?

Here are the Christian criteria of truth. There is an external test. All teaching must be in accordance with the tradition handed down to us in Scripture and in the Church. There is an internal test. All teaching must undergo the test of the Holy Spirit witnessing within our hearts.

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1 John 2:24-29

ABIDING IN CHRIST

1 John 2:24-29 (Part 2)

Before we leave this passage we must note two great and practical things in it.

(i) In 1Jn.2:28, John urges his people to abide continually in Christ so that, when he does come back in power and glory, they may not shrink from him in shame. By far the best way to be ready for the coming of Christ is to live with him every day. If we do that, his coming will be no shock to us but simply the entry into the nearer presence of one with whom we have lived for long.

Even if we have doubts and difficulties about the physical Second Coming of Christ, this still remains true. For every man life will some day come to an end; God's summons comes to all to rise and bid this world farewell. If we have never thought of God and if Jesus has been but a dim and distant memory, that will be a summons to voyage into a frightening unknown. But if we have lived consciously in the presence of Christ, if day by day we have talked and walked with God, that will be a summons to come home and to enter into the nearer presence of one who is not a stranger but a friend.

(ii) In 1Jn.2:29 John comes back to a thought which is never far from his mind. The only way in which a man can prove that he is abiding in Christ is by the righteousness of his life. The profession a man makes will always be proved or disproved by his practice.

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1 John 3:1-2

REMEMBER THE PRIVILEGES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 John 3:1-2 (Part 1)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God--and such we indeed are. The reason why the world does not recognize us is that it did not recognize him. Beloved, even as things are we are children of God, and it has not yet been made clear what we shall be. We know that, if it shall be made clear, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

It may well be that the best illumination of this passage is the Scottish Paraphrase of it:

Behold the amazing gift of love
the Father hath bestow'd
On us, the sinful sons of men,
to call us sons of God!

Concealed as yet this honour lies,
by this dark world unknown,
A world that knew not when he came,
even God's eternal Son.

High is the rank we now possess,
but higher we shall rise;
Though what we shall hereafter be
is hid from mortal eyes.

Our souls, we know, when he appears,
shall bear his image bright;
For all his glory, full disclosed,
shall open to our sight.

A hope so great, and so divine,
may trials well endure;
And purge the soul from sense and sin,
as Christ himself is pure.

John begins by demanding that his people should remember their privileges. It is their privilege that they are called the children of God. There is something even in a name. Chrysostom, in a sermon on how to bring up children, advises parents to give their boy some great scriptural name, to teach him repeatedly the story of the original bearer of the name, and so to give him a standard to live up to when he grows to manhood. So the Christian has the privilege of being called the child of God. Just as to belong to a great school, a great regiment, a great church, a great household is an inspiration to fine living, so, even more, to bear the name of the family of God is something to keep a man's feet on the right way and to set him climbing.

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1 John 3:1-2

But, as John points out, we are not merely called the children of God; we are the children of God.

There is something here which we may well note. It is by the gift of God that a man becomes a child of God. By nature a man is the creature of God, but it is by grace that he becomes the child of God. There are two English words which are closely connected but whose meanings are widely different, paternity and fatherhood. Paternity describes a relationship in which a man is responsible for the physical existence of a child; fatherhood describes an intimate, loving, relationship. In the sense of paternity all men are children of God; but in the sense of fatherhood men are children of God only when he makes his gracious approach to them and they respond.

There are two pictures, one from the Old Testament and one from the New, which aptly and vividly set out this relationship. In the Old Testament there is the covenant idea. Israel is the covenant people of God. That is to say, God on his own initiative had made a special approach to Israel; he was to be uniquely their God, and they were to be uniquely his people. As an integral part of the covenant God gave to Israel his law, and it was on the keeping of that law that the covenant relationship depended.

In the New Testament there is the idea of adoption (Rom.8:14-17; 1Cor.1:9; Gal.3:26-27; Gal.4:6-7). Here is the idea that by a deliberate act of adoption on the part of God the Christian enters into his family.

While all men are children of God in the sense that they owe their lives to him, they become his children in the intimate and loving sense of the term only by an act of God's initiating grace and the response of their own hearts.

Immediately the question arises: if men have that great honour when they become Christians, why are they so despised by the world? The answer is that they are experiencing only what Jesus Christ has already experienced. When he came into the world, he was not recognized as the Son of God; the world preferred its own ideas and rejected his. The same is bound to happen to any man who chooses to embark on the way of Jesus Christ.

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1 John 3:1-2

REMEMBER THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 John 3:1-2 (Part 2)

John, then, begins by reminding his people of the privileges of the Christian life. He goes on to set before them what is in many ways a still more tremendous truth, the great fact that this life is only a beginning. Here John observes the only true agnosticism. So great is the future and its glory that he will not even guess at it or try to put it into inevitably inadequate words. But there are certain things he does say about it.

(i) When Christ appears in his glory, we shall be like him. Surely in John's mind there was the saying of the old creation story that man was made in the image and in the likeness of God (Gen.1:26). That was God's intention; and that was man's destiny. We have only to look into any mirror to see how far man has fallen short of that destiny. But John believes that in Christ a man will finally attain it, and at last bear the image and the likeness of God. It is John's belief that only through the work of Christ in his soul can a man reach the true manhood God meant him to reach.

(ii) When Christ appears, we shall see him and be like him. The goal of all the great souls has been the vision of God. The end of all devotion is to see God. But that vision of God is not for the sake of intellectual satisfaction; it is in order that we may become like him. There is a paradox here. We cannot become like God unless we see him; and we cannot see him unless we are pure in heart, for only the pure in heart shall see God (Matt.5:8). In order to see God, we need the purity which only he can give. We are not to think of this vision of God as something which only the great mystics can enjoy. There is somewhere the story of a poor and simple man who would often go into a cathedral to pray; and he would always pray kneeling before the crucifix. Someone noticed that, though he knelt in the attitude of prayer, his lips never moved and he never seemed to say anything. He asked what he was doing kneeling like that and the man answered: "I look at him; and he looks at me." That is the vision of God in Christ that the simplest soul can have; and he who looks long enough at Jesus Christ must become like him.

One other thing we must note. John is here thinking in terms of the Second Coming of Christ. It may be that we can think in the same terms; or it may be that we cannot think so literally of a coming of Christ in glory. Be that as it may, there will come for every one of us the day when we shall see Christ and behold his glory. Here there is always the veil of sense and time, but the day will come when that veil, too, will be torn in two.

When death these mortal eyes shall seal,
And still this throbbing heart,
The rending veil shall thee reveal
All glorious as thou art.

Therein is the Christian hope and the vast possibility of the Christian life.

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1 John 3:3-8

THE OBLIGATION OF PURITY

1 John 3:3-8

Anyone who rests this hope on him purifies himself as he is pure. Anyone who commits sin commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that he appeared that he might take away our sins and there is no sin in him. Anyone who abides in him does not sin. Anyone who sins has not seen him, and does not know him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He who does sin is of the devil, because the devil is a sinner from the beginning. The purpose for which the Son of God appeared was that he might destroy the works of the devil.

John has just said that the Christian is on the way to seeing God and being like him. There is nothing like a great aim for helping a man to resist temptation. A novelist draws the picture of a young man who always refused to share in the lower pleasures to which his comrades often invited and even urged him. His explanation was that some day something fine was going to come to him, and he must keep himself ready for it. The man who knows that God is at the end of the road will make all life a preparation to meet him.

This passage is directed against the Gnostic false teachers. As we have seen they produced more than one reason to justify sin. They said that the body was evil and that, therefore, there was no harm in sating its lusts, because what happened to it was of no importance. They said that the truly spiritual man was so armoured with the Spirit that he could sin to his heart's content and take no harm from it. They even said that the true Gnostic was under obligation both to scale the heights and to plumb the depths so that he might be truly said to know all things. Behind John's answer there is a kind of analysis of sin.

He begins by insisting that no one is superior to the moral law. No one can say that it is quite safe for him to allow himself certain things, although they may be dangerous for others. As A. E. Brooke puts it: "The test of progress is obedience." Progress does not confer the privilege to sin; the further on a man is the more disciplined a character he will be. John goes on to imply certain basic truths about sin.

(i) He tells us what sin is. It is the deliberate breaking of a law which a man well knows. Sin is to obey oneself rather than to obey God.

(ii) He tells us what sin does. It undoes the work of Christ. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn.1:29). To sin is to bring back what he came into the world to abolish.

(iii) He tells us why sin is. It comes from the failure to abide in Christ. We need not think that this is a truth only for advanced mystics. It simply means this--so long as we remember the continual presence of Jesus, we will not sin; it is when we forget that presence that we sin.

(iv) He tells us whence sin comes. It comes from the devil; and the devil is he who sins, as it were, on principle. That probably is the meaning of the phrase from the beginning (1Jn.3:8). We sin

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1 John 3:3-8

for the pleasure that we think it will bring to us; the devil sins as a matter of principle. The New Testament does not try to explain the devil and his origin; but it is quite convinced--and it is a fact of universal experience that in the world there is a power hostile to God; and to sin is to obey that power instead of God.

(v) He tells us how sin is conquered. It is conquered because Jesus Christ destroyed the works of the devil. The New Testament often dwells on the Christ who faced and conquered the powers of evil (Matt.12:25-29; Lk.10:18; Col.2:15; 1Pet.3:22; Jn.12:31). He has broken the power of evil, and by his help that same victory can be ours.

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1 John 3:9

THE MAN WHO IS BORN OF GOD

1 John 3:9 (Part 1)

Anyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because his seed abides in him; and he cannot be a consistent and deliberate sinner, because he has been born of God.

This verse bristles with difficulties, and yet it is obviously of the first importance to find out what it means.

First, what does John mean by the phrase: "Because his seed abides in him"? There are three possibilities.

(i) Frequently the Bible uses the word seed to mean a man's family and descendants. Abraham and his seed are to keep the covenant of God (Gen.17:9). God made his promise to Abraham and to his seed for ever (Lk.1:55). The Jews claim to be Abraham's seed (Jn.8:33,37). In Gal.3, Paul speaks about Abraham's seed (Gal.3:16; Gal.3:29). If we take seed in that sense here, we need to take him as referring to God and then we get very good sense. "Anyone who has been born of God does not sin, because God's family constantly abide in God." God's family live so near to God that they may be said to abide in him. The man who lives like that has a strong defence against sin.

(ii) It is human seed which produces human life, and the child may be said to have his father's seed in him. Now the Christian is reborn through God and, therefore, has God's seed in him. This was an idea with which the people of John's age were very familiar. The Gnostics said that God had sowed seeds into this world and through the action of these seeds the world was being perfected; and they claimed that it was the true Gnostics who had received these seeds. Some Gnostics said that man's body was a material and evil thing; but into some bodies Wisdom secretly sowed seeds and the truly spiritual men have these seeds of God for souls. This was closely connected with the Stoic belief that God was fiery spirit and a man's soul, that which gave him life and reason, was a spark (scintilla) of that divine fire which had come from God to reside in a man's body.

If we take John's words this way, it means that every reborn man has the seed of God in him, and that, therefore, he cannot sin. There is no doubt that John's readers would know this idea.

(iii) There is a much simpler idea. Twice at least in the New Testament the word of God is that which is said to bring rebirth to men. James has it: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (Jas.1:18). The word of God is like the seed of God which produces new life. Peter has this idea even more clearly, "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (1Pet.1:23). There the word of God is definitely identified with the imperishable seed of God. If we take it this way, John means that the man who is born of God cannot sin because he has the strength and guidance of the word of God within him. This third way is simplest and, on the whole best. The Christian is preserved from sin by the indwelling power of the word of God.

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1 John 3:9

THE MAN WHO CANNOT SIN

1 John 3:9 (Part 2)

Second, this verse presents us with the problem of relating it with certain other things which John has already said about sin. Let us set the verse down, as it is in the Revised Standard Version:

No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.

Taken at its face value this means that it is impossible for the man who is born of God to sin. Now John has already said, "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"; and "if we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar"; and he urges us to confess our sins (1Jn.1:8-10). He goes on to say, "if we do sin, we have an advocate with the Father in the person of Jesus Christ." On the face of it there is contradiction here. In the one place John is saying that man cannot be anything other than a sinner and that, there is an atonement for his sin. In the other place he is saying equally definitely that the man who is born of God cannot sin. What is the explanation?

(i) John thinks in Jewish categories because he could do no other. We have already seen that he knew and accepted the Jewish picture of the two ages, this present age and the age to come. We have also seen that it was John's belief that, whatever the world was like, Christians by virtue of the work of Christ had already entered into the new age. It was exactly one of the characteristics of the new age that those who lived in it would be free from sin. In Enoch we read: "Then too will wisdom be bestowed on the elect, and they will all live and never again sin, either through heedlessness or through pride" (Enoch 5: 8). If that is true of the new age, it ought to be true of Christians who are living in it. But, in fact, it is still not true because Christians have not even yet escaped from the power of sin. We might then say that in this passage John is setting down the ideal of what should be and in the other two passages he is facing the actuality of what is. We might put it that he knows the ideal and confronts men with it; but also faces the facts and sees the cure in Christ for them.

(ii) That may well be so but there is more to it. In the Greek there is a subtle difference in tenses which makes a very wide difference in meaning. In 1Jn.2:1 it is John's injunction that you may not sin. In that verse sin is in the aorist tense which indicates a particular and definite act. So what John is saying is quite clearly that Christians must not commit individual acts of sin; but if they do lapse into sin, they have in Christ an advocate to plead their cause and a sacrifice to atone. On the other hand, in our present passage in both cases sin is in the present tense and indicates habitual action.

What John is saying may be put down in four stages. (a) The ideal is that in the new age sin is gone for ever. (b) Christians must try to make that true and with the help of Christ struggle to avoid individual acts of sin. (c) In fact all men have these lapses and when they do, they must humbly confess them to God, who will always forgive the penitent heart. (d) In spite of that, no Christian can possibly be a deliberate and consistent sinner; no Christian can live a life in which sin is dominant in all his actions.

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1 John 3:9

John is not setting before us a terrifying perfectionism; but he is demanding a life which is ever on the watch against sin, a life in which sin is not the normal accepted way but the abnormal moment of defeat. John is not saying that the man who abides in God cannot sin; but he is saying that the man who abides in God cannot continue to be a deliberate sinner.

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1 John 3:10-18

THE MARKS OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

1 John 3:10-18 (Part 1)

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are made plain; anyone who does not do righteousness is not of God, and neither is he who does not love his brother, because the message that we have heard from the beginning is the message that we should love one another, that we should not be like Cain, who was of the Evil One and slew his brother. And why did he slay him? Because his works were evil and his brother's works were just. Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers. He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. He does not possess eternal life abiding within him. In this we recognize his love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our life for the brothers.

Whoever possesses enough for his livelihood in this world and sees his brother in need and shuts his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? My dear children, do not make love a matter of talking and of the tongue, but love in deed and in truth.

This is a passage with a closely-knit argument and a kind of parenthesis in the middle.

As Westcott has it: "Life reveals the children of God." There is no way of telling what a tree is other than by its fruits, and there is no way of telling what a man is other than by his conduct. John lays it down that any one who does not do righteousness is thereby demonstrated to be not of God. At present we shall omit the parenthesis and go straight on with the argument.

Although John is a mystic, he has a very practical mind; and, therefore, he will not leave righteousness vague and undefined. Someone might say, "Very well, I accept the fact that the only thing which proves that a man belongs to God is the righteousness of his life. But what is righteousness?" John's answer is clear and unequivocal. To be righteous is to love our brother men. That, says John, is a duty about which we should never be in any doubt. And he goes on to adduce various reasons why that commandment is so central and so binding.

(i) It is a duty which has been inculcated into the Christian from the first moment that he entered the Church. The Christian ethic can be summed up in the one word love and from the moment that a man pledges himself to Christ, he pledges himself to make love the mainspring of his life.

(ii) For that very reason the fact that a man loves his brother men is the final proof that he has passed from death to life. As A. E. Brooke puts it: "Life is a chance of learning how to love." Life without love is death. To love is to be in the light; to hate is to remain in the dark. We need no further proof of that than to look at the face of a man who is in love and the face of a man who is full of hate; it will show the glory or the blackness in his heart.

(iii) Further, not to love is to become a murderer. There can be no doubt that John is thinking of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-22). Jesus said that the old law forbade murder but the new law declared that anger and bitterness and contempt were just as serious sins. Whenever there is hatred in the heart a man becomes a potential murderer. To allow hatred to settle

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1 John 3:10-18

in the heart is to break a definite commandment of Jesus. Therefore, the man who loves is a follower of Christ and the man who hates is no follower of his.

(iv) There follows still another step in this closely-knit argument. A man may say, "I admit this obligation of love and I will try to fulfil it; but I do not know what it involves." John's answer (1Jn.3:16) is: "If you want to see what this love is, look at Jesus Christ. In his death for men on the Cross it is fully displayed." In other words, the Christian life is the imitation of Christ. "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus" (Php.2:5). "He left us an example that we should follow in his steps" (1Pet.2:21). No man can look at Christ and then say that he does not know what the Christian life is.

(v) John meets one more possible objection. A man may say, "How can I follow in the steps of Christ? He laid down his life upon the Cross. You say I ought to lay down my life for the brothers. But opportunities so dramatic as that do not come into my life. What then?" John's answer is: "True. But when you see your brother in need and you have enough, to give to him of what you have is to follow Christ. To shut your heart and to refuse to give is to show that that love of God which was in Jesus Christ has no place in you." John insists that we can find plenty of opportunities to show forth the love of Christ in the life of the every day. C. H. Dodd writes finely on this passage: "There were occasions in the life of the early church, as there are certainly tragic occasions at the present day, for a quite literal obedience to this precept (i.e., to lay down our life for the brothers). But not all life is tragic; and yet the same principle of conduct must apply all through.

Thus it may call for the simple expenditure of money we might have spent upon ourselves, to relieve the need of someone poorer. It is, after all, the same principle of action, though at a lower level of intensity: it is the willingness to surrender that which has value for our own life, to enrich the life of another. If such a minimum response to the law of charity, called for by such an everyday situation, is absent, then it is idle to pretend we are within the family of God, the realm in which love is operative as the principle and the token of eternal life."

Fine words will never take the place of fine deeds; and no amount of talk of Christian love will take the place of a kindly action to a man in need, involving some self-sacrifice, for in that action the principle of the Cross is operative again.

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1 John 3:10-18

THE WORLD'S RESENTMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN WAY

1 John 3:10-18 (Part 2)

In this passage there is a parenthesis; we return to it now.

The parenthesis is 1Jn.3:11 and the conclusion drawn from it is in 1Jn.3:12. The Christian must not be like Cain who murdered his brother.

John goes on to ask why Cain murdered his brother; and his answer is that it was because his works were evil and his brother's were good. Then he drops the remark: "Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you."

An evil man will instinctively hate a good man. Righteousness always provokes hostility in the minds of those whose actions are evil. The reason is that the good man is a walking rebuke to the evil man, even if he never speaks a word to him, his life passes a silent judgment. Socrates was the good man par excellence; Alcibiades was brilliant but erratic and often debauched. He used to say to Socrates: "Socrates, I hate you, because every time I meet you you show me what I am."

The Wisdom of Solomon has a grim passage (Wis.2:10-20). In it the evil man is made to express his attitude to the good man: "Let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn, and he is clean contrary to our doings.... He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold: for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits: he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness." The very sight of the good man made the evil man hate him.

Wherever the Christian is, even though he speak no word, he acts as the conscience of society; and for that very reason the world will often hate him.

In ancient Athens the noble Aristides was unjustly condemned to death; and, when one of the jurymen was asked how he could have cast his vote against such a man, his answer was that he was tired of hearing Aristides called "The Just." The hatred of the world for the Christian is an ever-present phenomenon, and it is due to the fact that the worldly man sees in the Christian the condemnation of himself; he sees in the Christian what he is not and what in his heart of hearts he knows he ought to be; and, because he will not change, he seeks to eliminate the man who reminds him of the lost goodness.

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1 John 3:19-24a

THE ONLY TEST

1 John 3:19-24a (Part 1)

By this we know that we are of the truth, and by this we will reassure our heart before him, when our heart condemns us in anything, for God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we can come confidently to God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do the things which are well pleasing to him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we should love one another, even as he gave us his commandment. And he who keeps his commandment abides in him and he in him.

Into the human heart there are bound to come doubts. Any man with a sensitive mind and heart must sometimes wonder if he really is a Christian at all. John's test is quite simple and far-reaching. It is love. If we feel love for our fellow-men welling up within our hearts, we can be sure that the heart of Christ is in us. John would have said that a so-called heretic whose heart was overflowing with love and whose life was beautiful with service, was far nearer Christ than someone who was impeccably orthodox, yet cold and remote from the needs of others.

John goes on to say something which, as far as the Greek goes, can mean two things. That feeling of love can reassure us in the presence of God. Our hearts may condemn us but God is greater than our hearts. The question is: what is the meaning of this last phrase?

(i) It could mean: since our hearts condemn us and God is infinitely greater than our hearts, God must condemn us even more. If we take it that way, it leaves us only with the fear of God and with nothing to say but: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." That is a possible translation and no doubt it is true; but it is not what John is saying in this context, for here he is thinking of our confidence in God and not our dread of him.

(ii) The passage must therefore mean this. Our hearts condemn us--that is inevitable. But God is greater than our hearts; he knows all things. Not only does he know our sins; he also knows our love, our longings, the nobility that never fully works itself out, our penitence; and the greatness of his knowledge gives him the sympathy which can understand and forgive.

It is this very knowledge of God which gives us our hope. "Man," as Thomas a Kempis said, "sees the deed, but God knows the intention." Men can judge us only by our actions, but God can judge us by the longings which never became deeds and the dreams which never came true. When Solomon was dedicating the Temple, he spoke of how David had wished to build a house for God and how that privilege had been denied to him. "It was in the heart of David, my father, to build a house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. And the Lord said unto David, my father, 'Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart'" (1Kgs.8:17-18). The French proverb says, "To know all is to forgive all." God judges us by the deep emotions of the heart; and, if in our heart there is love, then, however feeble and imperfect that love may be, we can with confidence enter into his presence. The perfect knowledge which belongs to God, and to God alone, is not our terror but our hope.

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1 John 3:19-24a

THE INSEPARABLE COMMANDS

1 John 3:19-24a (Part 2)

John goes on to speak of the two things which are well-pleasing in God's sight, the two commandments on obedience to which our relationship to God depends.

(i) We must believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. Here we have that use of the word name which is peculiar to the biblical writers. It does not mean simply the name by which a person is called; it means the whole nature and character of that person as far as it is known to us. The Psalmist writes: "Our help is in the name of the Lord" (Ps.124:8). Clearly that does not mean that our help lies in the fact that God is called Jehovah; it means that our help is in the love and mercy and power which have been revealed to us as the nature and character of God. So, then, to believe in the name of Jesus Christ, means to believe in the nature and character of Jesus Christ. It means to believe that he is the Son of God, that he does stand in relation to God in a way in which no other person in the universe ever stood or ever can stand, that he can perfectly reveal God to men and that he is the Saviour of our souls. To believe in the name of Jesus Christ is to accept him for what he really is.

(ii) We must love one another, even as he gave us his commandment. This commandment is in Jn.13:34. We must love each other with that same selfless, sacrificial, forgiving love with which Jesus Christ loved us.

When we put these two commandments together, we find the great truth that the Christian life depends on right belief and right conduct combined. We cannot have the one without the other. There can be no such thing as a Christian theology without a Christian ethic; and equally there can be no such thing as a Christian ethic without a Christian theology. Our belief is not real belief unless it issues in action; and our action has neither sanction nor dynamic unless it is based on belief.

We cannot begin the Christian life until we accept Jesus Christ for what he is; and we have not accepted him in any real sense of the term until our attitude to men is the same as his own attitude of love.

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1 John 3:24b-4:1

THE PERILS OF THE SURGING LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

1 John 3:24b-4:1

This is how we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he gave to us. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if their source is God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Behind this warning is a situation of which we in the modern church know little or nothing. In the early church there was a surging life of the Spirit which brought its own perils. There were so many and such diverse spiritual manifestations that some kind of test was necessary. Let us try to think ourselves back into that electric atmosphere.

(i) Even in Old Testament times men realized the perils of false prophets who were men of spiritual power. Deut.13:1-5 demands that the false prophet who sought to lure men away from the true God should be put to death; but it frankly and freely admits that he may promise signs and wonders and perform them. The spiritual power is there, but it is evil and misdirected.

(ii) In the early church the spiritual world was very near. All the world believed in a universe thronged with demons and spirits. Every rock and tree and river and grove and lake and mountain had its spiritual power; and these spiritual powers were always seeking entry into men's bodies and minds. In the time of the early church all men lived in a haunted world and men were never so conscious of being surrounded by spiritual powers.

(iii) That ancient world was very conscious of a personal power of evil. It did not speculate about its source, but it was sure that it was there and that it was seeking for men who might be its instruments. It follows that not only the universe but also the minds of men provided the battleground on which the power of the light and the power of the dark fought out the issue.

(iv) In the early church the coming of the Spirit was a much more visible phenomenon than is common nowadays. It was usually connected with baptism; and when the Spirit came things happened that anyone could see. The man who received the Spirit was visibly affected. When the apostles came down to Samaria, after the preaching of Philip, and conferred the gift of the Spirit on the new converts, the effects were so startling that the local magician, Simon Magus, wished to buy the power to produce them (Ac.8:17-18). The coming of the Spirit on Cornelius and his people was something which anyone could see (Ac.10:44-45). In the early church there was an ecstatic element in the coming of the Spirit whose effects were violent and obvious.

(v) This had its effect in the congregational life of the early church. The best commentary on this passage of John is, in fact, 1Cor.14. Because of the power of the Spirit men spoke with tongues. That is to say, they poured out a flood of Spirit-given sounds in no known language, which no one could understand unless there was someone present who had the Spirit-given power to interpret. So extraordinary was this phenomenon that Paul does not hesitate to say that, if a stranger came into a congregation in which it was in action, he would think that he had arrived in an assembly of madmen (1Cor.14:2; 1Cor.14:23,27). Even the prophets, who delivered their message in plain

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1 John 3:24b-4:1

language, were a problem. They were so moved by the Spirit that they could not wait for each other to finish and each would leap to his feet determined to shout out his Spirit-given message (1Cor.14:26-27,33). A service of worship in an early Christian congregation was very different from the placidity of most modern church services.

So diverse were the manifestations of the Spirit that Paul numbers the discerning of spirits among the spiritual gifts which a Christian might possess (1Cor.12:10). We can see what might happen in such a case when Paul speaks of the possibility of a man saying in a spirit that Christ is accursed (1Cor.12:3).

When we come further down in Christian history we find the problem still more acute. The Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, is the first service order book and is to be dated not long after A.D. 100. It has regulations on how to deal with the wandering apostles and prophets who came and went amongst the Christian congregations. "Not every one who speaks in a spirit is a prophet; he is only a prophet if he walks in the ways of the Lord" (Didache 11 and 12). The matter reached its peak and ne plus ultra when, in the third century, Montanus burst upon the Church with the claim that he was nothing less than the promised Paraclete and that he proposed to tell the Church the things which Christ had said his apostles could not at the moment bear.

The early church was full of this surging life of the Spirit. The exuberance of life had not been organized out of the Church. It was a great age; but its very exuberance had its dangers. If there was a personal power of evil, men could be used by him. If there were evil spirits as well as the Holy Spirit, men could be occupied by them. Men could delude themselves into a quite subjective experience in which they thought--quite honestly--that they had a message from the Spirit.

All this is in John's mind; and it is in face of that surging atmosphere of pulsating spiritual life that he sets out his criteria to judge between the true and the false. We, for our part, may well feel that with all its perils, the exuberant vitality of the early church was a far better thing than the apathetic placidity of so much of the life of the modern church. It was surely better that men should expect the Spirit everywhere than that they should expect him nowhere.

A Note on the Translation of 1Jn.4:1-7

There is a recurring Greek phrase in this passage which is by no means easy to translate. It is the phrase which the Revised Standard Version consistently renders of God. Its occurrences are as follows:

1Jn.4:1: Test the spirits to see whether they are of God.

1Jn.4:2: Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

1Jn.4:3: Every spirit which does not confess Jesus Christ is not of God.

1Jn.4:4: Little children, you are of God.

1Jn.4:6: We are of God.... He who is not of God does not listen to us.

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1 John 3:24b-4:1

1Jn.4:7: Love is of God.

The difficulty can be seen in the expedients to which various translators are driven.

Moffatt, in 1Jn.4:1-3, translates comes from God; and in 1Jn.4:4,6,7 belongs to God.

Weymouth, in 1Jn.4:1-3, translates is from God. In 1Jn.4:4 he translates: You are God's children. In 1Jn.4:6 he translates: We are God's children.... He who is not a child of God does not listen to us. In 1Jn.4:7 he has: Love has its origin in God.

In every case, except 1Jn.4:7, Kingsley Williams translates from God; in 1Jn.4:7 he has of God.

The difficulty is easy to see; and yet it is of the first importance to be able to attach a precise meaning to this phrase. The Greek is ek (GSN1537) tou (GSN3588) theou (GSN2316). Ho (GSN3588) theos (GSN2316) means God, and tou (GSN3588) theou (GSN2316) is the genitive case after the preposition ek (GSN1537). Ek (GSN1537) is one of the most common Greek prepositions and means "out of" or "from." To say that a man came ek (GSN1537) tes (GSN3588) poleos (GSN4172) would mean that he came either out of or from the city. What then does it mean that a person, or a spirit, or a quality is ek (GSN1537) tou (GSN5120) theou (GSN2316)? The simplest translation is "from God." But what does "from" mean in that phrase? Quite certainly it means that the person, the spirit or the quality has its origin in God. It comes "from" God in the sense that it takes its origin in Him and its life from Him. So John, for instance, bids his people to test the spirits to see whether they really have their source in God. Love, he says, has its origin in God.

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1 John 4:2-3

THE ULTIMATE HERESY

1 John 4:2-3

This is how you recognize the spirit whose source is God. Every spirit which openly acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh and is Christ has its origin in God. And every spirit which is such that it does not make this confession about Jesus has not its source in God; and this is the spirit of Antichrist, about which you heard that it was to come and which is now here present in the world.

For John Christian belief could be summed up in one great sentence: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn.1:14). Any spirit which denied the reality of the Incarnation was not of God. John lays down two tests of belief.

(i) To be of God a spirit must acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. As John saw it, to deny that is to deny three things about Jesus. (a) It is to deny that he is the centre of history, the one for whom all previous history had been a preparation. (b) It is to deny that he is the fulfilment of the promises of God. All through their struggles and their defeats, the Jews had clung to the promises of God. To deny that Jesus is the promised Messiah is to deny that these promises were true. (c) It is to deny his Kingship. Jesus came, not only to sacrifice, but to reign; and to deny his Messiahship is to leave out his essential kingliness.

(ii) To be of God a spirit must acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh. It was precisely this that the Gnostics could never accept. Since, in their view, matter was altogether evil, a real incarnation was an impossibility, for God could never take flesh upon himself. Augustine was later to say that in the pagan philosophers he could find parallels for everything in the New Testament except for one saying--"The Word became flesh." As John saw it, to deny the complete manhood of Jesus Christ was to strike at the very roots of the Christian faith.

To deny the reality of the incarnation has certain definite consequences.

(i) It is to deny that Jesus can ever be our example. If he was not in any real sense a man, living under the same conditions as men, he cannot show men how to live.

(ii) It is to deny that Jesus can be the High Priest who opens the way to God. The true High Priest, as the writer to the Hebrews saw, must be like us in all things, knowing our infirmities and our temptations (Heb.4:14-15). To lead men to God the High Priest must be a man, or else he will be pointing them to a road which it is impossible for them to take.

(iii) It is to deny that Jesus can in any real sense be Saviour. To save men he had to identify himself with the men he came to save.

(iv) It is to deny the salvation of the body. Christian teaching is quite clear that salvation is the salvation of the whole man. The body as well as the soul is saved. To deny the incarnation is to deny the possibility that the body can ever become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

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1 John 4:2-3

(v) By far the most serious and terrible thing is that it is to deny that there can ever be any real union between God and man. If spirit is altogether good and the body is altogether evil, God and man can never meet, so long as man is man. They might meet when man has sloughed off the body and become a disembodied spirit. But the great truth of the incarnation is that here and now there can be real communion between God and man.

Nothing in Christianity is more central than the reality of the manhood of Jesus Christ.

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1 John 4:4-6

THE CLEAVAGE BETWEEN THE WORLD AND GOD

1 John 4:4-6

You have your origin in God, dear children, and you have won the victory over them, because that power which is in you is greater than the power which is in the world. This is why the source of their speaking is the world, and is the reason why the world listens to them. Our source is God. He who knows God listens to us. He who has not his source in God does not listen to us. This is how we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

John lays down a great truth and faces a great problem.

(i) The Christian need not fear the heretic. In Christ the victory over all the powers of evil was won. The powers of evil did their worst to him, even to killing him on a Cross, and in the end he emerged victorious. That victory belongs to the Christian. Whatever things may look like, the powers of evil are fighting a losing battle. As the Latin proverb has it: "Great is the truth, and in the end it will prevail." All that the Christian has to do is remember the truth he already knows and cling to it. The truth is that by which men live; error is ultimately that by which men die.

(ii) The problem remains that the false teachers will neither listen to, nor accept, the truth which the true Christian offers. How is that to be explained? John returns to his favourite antithesis, the opposition between the world and God. The world, as we have seen before, is human nature apart from, and in opposition to, God. The man whose source is God will welcome the truth; the man whose source is the world will reject it.

When we come to think of it, that is an obvious truth. How can a man whose watchword is competition even begin to understand an ethic whose key-note is service? How can a man whose aim is the exaltation of the self and who holds that the weakest must go to the wall, even begin to understand a teaching whose principle for living is love? How can a man who believes that this is the only world and that, therefore, material things are the only ones which matter, even begin to understand life lived in the light of eternity, where the unseen things are the greatest values? A man can hear only what he has fitted himself to hear and he can utterly unfit himself to hear the Christian message.

That is what John is saying. We have seen again and again that it is characteristic of him to see things in terms of black and white. His thinking does not deal in shades. On the one side there is the man whose source and origin is God and who can hear the truth; on the other side there is the man whose source and origin is the world and who is incapable of hearing the truth. There emerges a problem, which very likely John did not even think of. Are there people to whom all preaching is quite useless? Are there people whose defences can never be penetrated, whose deafness can never hear, and whose minds are for ever shut to the invitation and command of Jesus Christ?

The answer must be that there are no limits to the grace of God and that there is such a person as the Holy Spirit. It is the lesson of life that the love of God can break every barrier down. It is true that a man can resist; it is, maybe, true that a man can resist even to the end. But what is also true is

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1 John 4:4-6

that Christ is always knocking at the door of every heart, and it is possible for any man to hear the voice of Christ, even above the many voices of the world.

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1 John 4:7-21

LOVE HUMAN AND DIVINE

1 John 4:7-21 (Part 1)

Beloved, let us love one another, because love has its source in God, and everyone who loves has God as the source of his birth and knows God. He who does not love has not come to know God. In this God's love is displayed within us, that God sent his only Son into the world that through him we might live. In this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Brothers, if God so loved us, we too ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other God dwells in us and his love is perfected in us. It is by this that we know that we dwell in him and he in us, because he has given us a share of his Spirit. We have seen and we testify that the Father sent the Son as the Saviour of the world. Whoever openly acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he in God. We have come to know and to put our trust in the love which God has within us.

God is love and he who dwells in love dwells in God and God dwells in him. With us love finds its peak in this, that we should have confidence in the day of judgment because, even as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, for fear is connected with punishment and he who fears has not reached love's perfect state. We love because he first loved us. If any one says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. It is this command that we have from him, that he who loves God, loves his brother also.

This passage is so closely interwoven that we are better to read it as a whole and then bit by bit to draw out its teaching. First of all, then, let us look at its teaching on love.

(i) Love has its origin in God (1Jn.4:7). It is from the God who is love that all love takes its source. As A. E. Brooke puts it: "Human love is a reflection of something in the divine nature itself." We are never nearer to God than when we love. Clement of Alexandria said in a startling phrase that the real Christian "practises being God." He who dwells in love dwells in God (1Jn.4:16). Man is made in the image and the likeness of God (Gen.1:26). God is love and, therefore, to be like God and be what he was meant to be, man must also love.

(ii) Love has a double relationship to God. It is only by knowing God that we learn to love and it is only by loving that we learn to know God (1Jn.4:7-8). Love comes from God, and love leads to God.

(iii) It is by love that God is known (1Jn.4:12). We cannot see God, because he is spirit; what we can see is his effect. We cannot see the wind, but we can see what it can do. We cannot see electricity, but we can see the effect it produces. The effect of God is love. It is when God comes into a man that he is clothed with the love of God and the love of men. God is known by his effect on that man. It has been said, "A saint is a man in whom Christ lives again" and the best demonstration of God comes not from argument but from a life of love.

(iv) God's love is demonstrated in Jesus Christ (1Jn.4:9). When we look at Jesus we see two things about the love of God. (a) It is a love which holds nothing back. God was prepared to give

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1 John 4:7-21

his only Son and make a sacrifice beyond which no sacrifice can possibly go in his love for men.
(b) It is a totally undeserved love. It would be no wonder if we loved God, when we remember all the gifts he has given to us, even apart from Jesus Christ; the wonder is that he loves poor and disobedient creatures like us.

How thou canst think so well of us,
And be the God thou art,
Is darkness to my intellect,
But sunshine to my heart.

(v) Human love is a response to divine love (1Jn.1:19). We love because God loved us. It is the sight of his love which wakens in us the desire to love him as he first loved us and to love our fellow-men as he loves them.

(vi) When love comes, fear goes (1Jn.4:17-18). Fear is the characteristic emotion of someone who expects to be punished. So long as we regard God as the Judge, the King, the Law-giver, there can be nothing in our heart but fear for in face of such a God we can expect nothing but punishment. But once we know God's true nature, fear is swallowed up in love. The fear that remains is the fear of grieving his love for us.

(vii) Love of God and love of man are indissolubly connected (1Jn.4:7,11,20,21). As C. H. Dodd finely puts it: "The energy of love discharges itself along lines which form a triangle, whose points are God, self, and neighbour." If God loves us, we are bound to love each other, because it is our destiny to reproduce the life of God in humanity and the life of eternity in time. John says, with almost crude bluntness, that a man who claims to love God and hates his brother is nothing other than a liar. The only way to prove that we love God is to love the men whom God loves. The only way to prove that God is within our hearts is constantly to show the love of men within our lives.

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1 John 4:7-21

GOD IS LOVE

1 John 4:7-21 (Part 2)

In this passage there occurs what is probably the greatest single statement about God in the whole Bible, that God is love. It is amazing how many doors that single statement unlocks and how many questions it answers.

(i) It is the explanation of creation. Sometimes we are bound to wonder why God created this world. The disobedience, and the lack of response in men is a continual grief to him. Why should he create a world which was to bring him nothing but trouble? The answer is that creation was essential to his very nature. If God is love, he cannot exist in lonely isolation. Love must have someone to love and someone to love it.

(ii) It is the explanation of free-will. Unless love is a free response it is not love. Had God been only law he could have created a world in which men moved like automata, having no more choice than a machine. But, if God had made men like that, there would have been no possibility of a personal relationship between him and them. Love is of necessity the free response of the heart; and, therefore, God, by a deliberate act of self-limitation, had to endow men with free will.

(iii) It is the explanation of providence. Had God been simply mind and order and law, he might, so to speak, have created the universe, wound it up, set it going and left it. There are articles and machines which we are urged to buy because we can fit them and forget them; their most attractive quality is that they can be left to run themselves. But, because God is love, his creating act is followed by his constant care.

(iv) It is the explanation of redemption. If God had been only law and justice, he would simply have left men to the consequences of their sin. The moral law would operate; the soul that sinned would die; and the eternal justice would inexorably hand out its punishments. But the very fact that God is love meant that he had to seek and save that which was lost. He had to find a remedy for sin.

(v) It is the explanation of the life beyond. If God were simply creator, men might live their brief span and die for ever. The life which ended early would be only another flower which the frost of death had withered too soon. But the fact that God is love makes it certain that the chances and changes of life have not the last word and that his love will readjust the balance of this life.

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1 John 4:7-21

SON OF GOD AND SAVIOUR OF MEN

1 John 4:7-21 (Part 3)

Before we leave this passage we must note that it has also great things to say about Jesus Christ.

(i) It tells us that Jesus is the bringer of life. God sent him that through him we might have life (1Jn.4:9). There is a world of difference between existence and life. All men have existence but all do not have life. The very eagerness with which men seek pleasure shows that there is something missing in their lives. A famous doctor once said that men would find a cure for cancer more quickly than they would find a cure for boredom. Jesus gives a man an object for which to live; he gives him strength by which to live; and he gives him peace in which to live. Living with Christ turns mere existence into fullness of life.

(ii) It tells us that Jesus is the restorer of the lost relationship with God. God sent him to be the atoning sacrifice for sin (1Jn.4:10). We do not move in a world of thought in which animal sacrifice is a reality. But we can fully understand what sacrifice meant. When a man sinned, his relationship with God was broken; and sacrifice was an expression of penitence, designed to restore the lost relationship. Jesus, by his life and death, made it possible for man to enter into a new relationship of peace and friendship with God. He bridged the awful gulf between man and God.

(iii) It tells us that Jesus is the Saviour of the world (1Jn.4:14). When he came into the world, men were conscious of nothing so much as their own weakness and helplessness. Men, said Seneca, were looking *ad salutem*, for salvation. They were desperately conscious of "their weakness in necessary things." They wanted "a hand let down to lift them up." It would be quite inadequate to think of salvation as mere deliverance from the punishment of hell. Men need to be saved from themselves; they need to be saved from the habits which have become their fetters; they need to be saved from their temptations; they need to be saved from their fears and their anxieties; they need to be saved from their follies and mistakes. In every case Jesus offers men salvation; he brings that which enables them to face time and to meet eternity.

(iv) It tells us that Jesus is the Son of God (1Jn.4:15). Whatever that may mean, it certainly means that Jesus Christ is in a relationship to God in which no other person ever stood or ever will stand. He alone can show men what God is like; he alone can bring to men God's grace, love, forgiveness and strength.

One other thing emerges in this passage. It has taught us of God and it has taught us of Jesus; and it teaches us of the Spirit. In 1Jn.4:13 John says it is because we have a share of the Spirit that we know that we dwell in God. It is the work of the Spirit that in the beginning makes us seek God at all; it is the work of the Spirit that makes us aware of God's presence; and it is the work of the Spirit that gives us the certainty that we are truly at peace with God. It is the Spirit in our hearts which makes us dare to address God as Father (Rom.8:15-16). The Spirit is the inner witness who, as C. H. Dodd puts it, gives us the "immediate, spontaneous, unanalysable awareness of a divine presence in our lives."

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1 John 4:7-21

"And his that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.

And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are his alone."

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1 John 5:1-2

LOVE WITHIN THE DIVINE FAMILY

1 John 5:1-2

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has experienced the birth which comes from God; and everyone who loves the father loves the child. This is how we know that we must be loving the children of God, whenever we love God and keep his commandments.

As John wrote this passage, there were two things in the background of his mind.

(i) There was the great fact which was the basis of all his thinking, the fact that love of God and love of man are inseparable parts of the same experience. In answer to the questioning scribe Jesus had said that there were two great commandments. The first laid it down that we must love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength; and the second laid it down that we must love our neighbour as ourselves. Than these commandments there are none greater (Mk.12:28-31). John had in mind this word of his Lord.

(ii) But he also had in mind a natural law of human life. Family love is a part of nature. The child naturally loves his parents; and he just as naturally loves his brothers and sisters. The second part of 1Jn.5:1 literally runs: "Everyone who loves him who begat, loves him who was begotten of him." Put much more simply that is: "If we love a father, we also love his child." John is thinking of the love which naturally binds a man to the father who begat him and to the other children whom the father has begotten.

John transfers this to the realm of Christian thought and experience. The Christian undergoes the experience of being reborn; the father is God; and the Christian is bound to love God for all that he has done for his soul. But birth is always into a family; and the Christian is reborn into the family of God. As it was for Jesus, so it is for him--those who do the will of God, as he himself does, become his mother, his sisters and his brothers (Mk.3:35). If, then, the Christian loves God the Father who begat him, he must also love the other children whom God has begotten. His love of God and his love of his Christian brothers and sisters must be parts of the same love, so closely interlocked that they can never be separated.

It has been put: "Man is not only born to love, he is also born to be loved." A. E. Brooke put it: "Everyone who has been born of God must love those who have been similarly ennobled."

Long before this the Psalmist had said that, "God gives the desolate a home to dwell in" (Ps.68:6). The Christian by virtue of his rebirth is set within the family of God and as he loves the Father, so must he also love the children who are of the same family as he is.

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1 John 5:3-4a

THE NECESSARY OBEDIENCE

1 John 5:3-4a

For this is the love of God, that we should keep his commandments; and his commandments are not heavy, because everything that is born of God conquers the world.

John reverts to an idea which is never far from the surface of his mind. Obedience is the only proof of love. We cannot prove our love to anyone other than by seeking to please him and bring him joy.

Then John quite suddenly says a most surprising thing. God's commandments, he says, are not heavy. We must note two general things here.

He certainly does not mean that obedience to God's commandments is easy to achieve. Christian love is no easy matter. It is never an easy thing to love people whom we do not like or people who hurt our feelings or injure us. It is never an easy thing to solve the problem of living together; and when it becomes the problem of living together on the Christian standard of life, it is a task of immense difficulty.

Further, there is in this saying an implied contrast. Jesus spoke of the Scribes and Pharisees as "binding heavy burdens and hard to bear, and laying them on men's shoulders" (Matt.23:4). The Scribal and Pharisaic mass of rules and regulations could be an intolerable burden on the shoulders of any man. There is no doubt that John is remembering that Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt.11:30).

How then is this to be explained? How can it be said that the tremendous demands of Jesus are not a heavy burden? There are three answers to that question.

(i) It is the way of God never to lay a commandment on any man without also giving him the strength to carry it out. With the vision comes the power; with the need for it comes the strength. God does not give us his commandments and then go away and leave us to ourselves. He is there by our side to enable us to carry out what he has commanded. What is impossible for us becomes possible with God.

(ii) But there is another great truth here. Our response to God must be the response of love; and for love no duty is too hard and no task too great. That which we would never do for a stranger we will willingly attempt for a loved one. What would be an impossible sacrifice, if a stranger demanded it, becomes a willing gift when love needs it.

There is an old story which is a kind of parable of this. Someone once met a lad going to school long before the days when transport was provided. The lad was carrying on his back a smaller boy who was clearly lame and unable to walk. The stranger said to the lad, "Do you carry him to school every day?" "Yes," said the boy. "That's a heavy burden for you to carry," said the stranger. "He's no' a burden," said the boy. "He's my brother."

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1 John 5:3-4a

Love turned the burden into no burden at all. It must be so with us and Christ. His commandments are not a burden but a privilege and an opportunity to show our love.

Difficult the commandments of Christ are, burdensome they are not; for Christ never laid a commandment on a man without giving him the strength to carry it; and every commandment laid upon us provides another chance to show our love.

We must leave the third answer to our next section.

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1 John 5:4b-5

THE CONQUEST OF THE WORLD

1 John 5:4b-5

And this is the conquest which has conquered the world, our faith. Who is he who conquers the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

(iii) We have seen that the commandments of Jesus Christ are not grievous because with the commandment there comes the power and because we accept them in love. But there is another great truth. There is something in the Christian which makes him able to conquer the world. The kosmos (GSN2889) is the world apart from God and in opposition to him. That which enables us to conquer the kosmos (GSN2889) is faith.

John defines this conquering faith as the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. It is belief in the Incarnation. Why should that be so victory-giving? If we believe in the incarnation, it means that we believe that in Jesus God entered the world and took our human life upon himself. If he did that, it means that he cared enough for men to take upon himself the limitations of humanity, which is the act of a love that passes human understanding. If God did that, it means that he shares in all the manifold activities of human life and knows the many and varied trials and temptations and sorrows of this world. It means that everything that happens to us is fully understood by God and that he is in this business of living along with us. Faith in the incarnation is the conviction that God shares and God cares. Once we possess that faith certain things follow.

(i) We have a defence to resist the infections of the world. On all sides there is the pressure of worldly standards and motives; on all sides the fascinations of the wrong things. From within and without come the temptations which are part of the human situation in a world and a society not interested in and sometimes hostile to God. But once we are aware of the presence of God in Jesus Christ ever with us, we have a strong prophylactic against the infections of the world. It is a fact of experience that goodness is easier in the company of good people; and if we believe in the incarnation, we have the continual presence of God in Jesus Christ.

(ii) We have a strength to endure the attacks of the world. The human situation is full of things which seek to take our faith away. There are the sorrows and the perplexities of life; there are the disappointments and the frustrations of life; there are for most of us the failures and discouragements of life. But if we believe in the incarnation, we believe in a God who himself went through all this, even to the Cross and who can, therefore, help others who are going through it.

(iii) We have the indestructible hope of final victory. The world did its worst to Jesus. It hounded him and slandered him. It branded him heretic and friend of sinners. It judged him and crucified him and buried him. It did everything humanly possible to eliminate him--and it failed. After the Cross came the Resurrection; after the shame came the glory. That is the Jesus who is with us, one who saw life at its grimmest, to whom life did its worst, who died, who conquered death, and who offers us a share in that victory which was his. If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we have with us always Christ the Victor to make us victorious.

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1 John 5:6-8

THE WATER AND THE BLOOD

1 John 5:6-8 (Part 1)

This is he who came through water and blood--Jesus Christ. It was not only by water that he came, but by water and by blood. And it is the Spirit which testifies to this, because the Spirit is truth; because there are three who testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three agree in one.

Plummer, in beginning to comment on this passage says: "This is the most perplexing passage in the Epistle, and one of the most perplexing in the New Testament." No doubt, if we knew the circumstances in which John was writing and had full knowledge of the heresies against which he was defending his people, the meaning would become clear but, as it is, we can only guess. We do, however, know enough of the background to be fairly sure that we can come at the meaning of John's words.

It is clear that the words water and blood in connection with Jesus had for John a special mystical and symbolic meaning. In his story of the Cross there is a curious pair of verses:

One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth--that you also may believe (Jn.19:34-35).

Clearly John attaches particular importance to that incident and he guarantees it with a very special certificate of evidence. To him the words water and blood in connection with Jesus conveyed an essential part of the meaning of the gospel.

The first verse of the passage is obscurely expressed--"This is he who came through water and blood Jesus Christ." The meaning is that this is he who entered into his Messiahship or was shown to be the Christ through water and blood.

In connection with Jesus water and blood can refer only to two events of his life. The water must refer to his baptism; the blood to his Cross. John is saying that both the baptism and the Cross of Jesus are essential parts of his Messiahship. He goes on to say that it was not by water only that he came, but by water and by blood. It is, then, clear that some were saying that Jesus came by water, but not by blood; in other words that his baptism was an essential part of his Messiahship but his Cross was not. This is what gives us our clue to what lies behind this passage.

We have seen again and again that behind this letter lies the heresy of Gnosticism. And we have also seen that Gnosticism, believing that Spirit was altogether good and matter altogether evil, denied that God came in the flesh. So they had a belief of which Irenaeus tells us connected with the name of Cerinthus, one of their principal representatives and an exact contemporary of John. Cerinthus taught that at the baptism the divine Christ descended into the man Jesus in the form of a dove; Jesus, allied as it were with the Christ who had descended upon him, brought to men the

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1 John 5:6-8

message of the God who had hitherto been unknown and lived in perfect virtue; then the Christ departed from the man Jesus and returned to glory, and it was only the man Jesus who was crucified on Calvary and afterwards resurrected. We might put it more simply by saying that Cerinthus taught that Jesus became divine at the baptism, that divinity left him before the Cross and that he died simply a man.

It is clear that such teaching robs the life and death of Jesus of all value for us. By seeking to protect God from contact with human pain, it removes him from the act of redemption.

What John is saying is that the Cross is an essential part of the meaning of Jesus and that God was in the death of Jesus every bit as much as he was in his life.

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1 John 5:6-8

THE TRIPLE WITNESS

1 John 5:6-8 (Part 2)

John goes on to speak of the triple witness.

There is the witness of the Spirit. In this John is thinking of three things. (i) The New Testament story is clear that at his baptism the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the most special way (Mk.1:9-11; Matt.3:16-17; Lk.3:21-22; Ac.10:38; Jn.1:32-34). (ii) The New Testament is also clear that, while John came to baptize with water, Jesus came to baptize with the Spirit (Mk.1:8; Matt.3:11; Lk.3:16; Ac.1:5; Ac.2:33). He came to bring men the Spirit with a plenitude and a power hitherto quite unknown. (iii) The history of the early church is the proof that this was no idle claim. It began at Pentecost (Ac.2:4), and it repeated itself over and over again in the history and experience of the Church (Ac.8:17; Ac.10:44). Jesus had the Spirit and he could give the Spirit to men; and the continuing evidence of the Spirit in the Church was--and is--an undeniable witness to the continuing power of Jesus Christ.

There is the witness of the water. At Jesus' own baptism there was the witness of the Spirit descending upon him. It was, in fact, that event which revealed to John the Baptist who Jesus was. It is John's point that in the early church that witness was maintained in Christian baptism. We must remember that thus early in the Church's history baptism was adult baptism, the confession of faith and the reception into the Church of men and women coming direct from heathenism and beginning an absolutely new way of life. In Christian baptism things happened. A man plunged below the water and died with Christ; he emerged and was resurrected with Christ to a new life. Therefore, Christian baptism was a witness to the continuing power of Jesus Christ. It was a witness that he was still alive and that he was indeed divine.

There was the witness of the blood. The blood was the life. In any sacrifice the blood was sacred to God and to God alone. The death of Christ was the perfect sacrifice; in the Cross his blood was poured out to God. It was the experience of men that that sacrifice was availing, that it did redeem them and reconcile them to God and give them peace with God. Continuously in the Church the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, was and is observed. In it the sacrifice of Christ is full displayed; and in it there is given to men the opportunity not only to give thanks to Christ for his sacrifice made once for all, but also to appropriate its benefits and to avail themselves of its healing power. That happened in John's time. At the Lord's Table men met the Christ and experienced his forgiveness and the peace with God which he brings. Men still have that experience; and, therefore that feast is a continuing witness to the atoning power of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit and the water and the blood all combine to demonstrate the perfect Messiahship, the perfect Sonship, the perfect Saviourhood of this man Jesus in whom was God. The continued gift of the Spirit, the continued death and resurrection of baptism, the continued availability of the sacrifice of the Cross at the Lord's Table are still the witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Note on 1Jn.5:7:

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1 John 5:6-8

In the King James Version there is a verse which we have altogether omitted. It reads, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one."

The English Revised Version omits this verse, and does not even mention it in the margin, and none of the newer translations includes it. It is quite certain that it does not belong to the original text.

The facts are as follows. First, it does not occur in any Greek manuscript earlier than the 14th century. The great manuscripts belong to the 3rd and 4th centuries, and it occurs in none of them. None of the great early fathers of the Church knew it. Jerome's original version of the Vulgate does not include it. The first person to quote it is a Spanish heretic called Priscillian who died in A.D. 385. Thereafter it crept gradually into the Latin texts of the New Testament although, as we have seen, it did not gain an entry to the Greek manuscripts.

How then did it get into the text? Originally it must have been a scribal gloss or comment in the margin. Since it seemed to offer good scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity, through time it came to be accepted by theologians as part of the text, especially in those early days of scholarship before the great manuscripts were discovered.

But how did it last, and how did it come to be in the King James Version? The first Greek testament to be published was that of Erasmus in 1516. Erasmus was a great scholar and, knowing that this verse was not in the original text, he did not include it in his first edition. By this time, however, theologians were using the verse. It had, for instance, been printed in the Latin Vulgate of 1514. Erasmus was therefore criticized for omitting it. His answer was that if anyone could show him a Greek manuscript which had the words in it, he would print them in his next edition. Someone did produce a very late and very bad text in which the verse did occur in Greek; and Erasmus, true to his word but very much against his judgment and his will, printed the verse in his 1522 edition.

The next step was that in 1550 Stephanus printed his great edition of the Greek New Testament. This 1550 edition of Stephanus was called--he gave it that name himself--The Received Text, and it was the basis of the King James Version and of the Greek text for centuries to come. That is how this verse got into the King James Version. There is, of course, nothing wrong with it; but modern scholarship has made it quite certain that John did not write it and that it is a much later commentary on, and addition to, his words; and that is why all modern translations omit it.

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1 John 5:9-10

THE UNDENIABLE WITNESS

1 John 5:9-10

If we accept the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne testimony about his Son. He who believes in the Son of God has that testimony within himself. He who does not believe God has made God a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony which God bore to his Son.

Behind this passage there are two basic ideas.

There is the Old Testament idea of what constitutes an adequate witness. The law was quite clear: "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained" (Deut.19:15; compare Deut.17:6). A triple human witness is enough to establish any fact. How much more must a triple divine witness, the witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, be regarded as convincing.

Second, the idea of witness is an integral part of John's thought. In his gospel we find different witnesses all converging on Jesus Christ. John the Baptist is a witness to Jesus (Jn.1:15; Jn.1:32-34; Jn.5:33). Jesus' deeds are a witness to him (Jn.5:36). The Scriptures are a witness to him (Jn.5:39). The Father who sent him is a witness to him (Jn.5:30-32,37; Jn.8:18). The Spirit is a witness to him. "When the Counsellor comes...even the Spirit of truth... he will bear witness to me" (Jn.15:26).

John goes on to use a phrase which is a favourite of his in his gospel. He speaks of the man who "believes in the Son of God." There is a wide difference between believing a man and believing in him. If we believe a man, we do no more than accept whatever statement he may be making at the moment as true. If we believe in a man, we accept the whole man and all that he stands for in complete trust. We would be prepared not only to trust his spoken word, but also to trust ourselves to him. To believe in Jesus Christ is not simply to accept what he says as true; it is to commit ourselves into his hands, for time and for eternity.

When a man does that, the Holy Spirit within him testifies that he is acting aright. It is the Holy Spirit who gives him the conviction of the ultimate value of Jesus Christ and assures him that he is right to make this act of commitment to him. The man who refuses to do that is refusing the promptings of the Holy Spirit within his heart.

If a man refuses to accept the evidence of men who have experienced what Christ can do, the evidence of the deeds of Christ, the evidence of the Scriptures, the evidence of God's Holy Spirit, the evidence of God himself, in effect he is calling God a liar--and that is the very limit of blasphemy.

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1 John 5:11-13

THE ESSENCE OF THE FAITH

1 John 5:11-13

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life and that that life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life. I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

With this paragraph the letter proper comes to an end. What follows is in the nature of a postscript. The end is a statement that the essence of the Christian life is eternal life.

The word for eternal is *aionios* (GSN0166). It means far more than simply lasting for ever. A life which lasted for ever might well be a curse and not a blessing, an intolerable burden and not a shining gift. There is only one person to whom *aionios* may properly be applied and that is God. In the real sense of the term it is God alone who possesses and inhabits eternity. Eternal life is, therefore, nothing other than the life of God himself. What we are promised is that here and now there can be given us a share in the very life of God.

In God there is peace and, therefore, eternal life means serenity. It means a life liberated from the fears which haunt the human situation. In God there is power and, therefore, eternal life means the defeat of frustration. It means a life filled with the power of God and, therefore, victorious over circumstance. In God there is holiness and, therefore, eternal life means the defeat of sin. It means a life clad with the purity of God and armed against the soiling infections of the world. In God there is love and, therefore, eternal life means the end of bitterness and hatred. It means a life which has the love of God in its heart and the undefeatable love of man in all its feelings and in all its action. In God there is life and, therefore eternal life means the defeat of death. It means a life which is indestructible because it has in it the indestructibility of God himself.

It is John's conviction that such a life comes through Jesus Christ and in no other way. Why should that be? If eternal life is the life of God, it means that we can possess that life only when we know God and are enabled to approach him and rest in him. We can do these two things only in Jesus Christ. The Son alone fully knows the Father and, therefore, only he can fully reveal to us what God is like. As John had it in his gospel: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (Jn. 1:18). And Jesus Christ alone can bring us to God. It is in him that there is open to us the new and living way into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19-23). We may take a simple analogy. If we wish to meet someone whom we do not know and who moves in a completely different circle from our own, we can achieve that meeting only by finding someone who knows him and is willing to introduce us to him. That is what Jesus does for us in regard to God.

Eternal life is the life of God and we can find that life only through Jesus Christ.

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1 John 5:14-15

THE BASIS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF PRAYER

1 John 5:14-15

And this is the confidence that we have towards him, that, if we ask anything which is in accordance with his will, he hears us; and, if we know that he hears anything that we ask, we know that we possess the requests that we have made from him.

Here are set down both the basis and the principle of prayer.

(i) The basis of prayer is the simple fact that God listens to our prayers. The word which John uses for confidence is interesting. It is *parrhesia* (GSN3954). Originally *parrhesia* meant freedom of speech, that freedom to speak boldly which exists in a true democracy. Later it came to denote any kind of confidence. With God we have freedom of speech. He is always listening, more ready to hear than we are to pray. We never need to force our way into his presence or compel him to pay attention. He is waiting for us to come. We know how we often wait for the knock of the postman or the ring of the telephone bell to bring us a message from someone whom we love. In all reverence we can say that God is like that with us.

(ii) The principle of prayer is that to be answered it must be in accordance with the will of God. Three times in his writings John lays down what might be called the conditions of prayer. (a) He says that obedience is a condition of prayer. We receive whatever we ask because we keep his commandments (1Jn.3:22). (b) He says that remaining in Christ is a condition of prayer. If we abide in him and his words abide in us, we will ask what we will and it will be done for us (Jn.15:7). The closer we live to Christ, the more we shall pray aright; and the more we pray aright, the greater the answer we receive. (c) He says that to pray in his name is a condition of prayer. If we ask anything in his name, he will do it (Jn.14:14). The ultimate test of any request is, can we say to Jesus, "Give me this for your sake and in your name"?

Prayer must be in accordance with the will of God. Jesus teaches us to pray: "Thy will be done," not, "Thy will be changed." Jesus himself, in the moment of his greatest agony and crisis, prayed, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt.... Thy will be done" (Matt.26:39,42). Here is the very essence of prayer. C. H. Dodd writes: "Prayer rightly considered is not a device for employing the resources of omnipotence to fulfil our own desires, but a means by which our desires may be redirected according to the mind of God, and made into channels for the forces of his will." A. E. Brooke suggests that John thought of prayer as "Including only requests for knowledge of, and acquiescence in, the will of God." Even the great pagans saw this. Epictetus wrote: "Have courage to look up to God and say, Deal with me as thou wilt from now on. I am as one with thee; I am thine; I flinch from nothing so long as thou dost think that it is good. Lead me where thou wilt; put on me what raiment thou wilt. Wouldst thou have me hold office or eschew it, stay or flee, be rich or poor? For all this I will defend thee before men."

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1 John 5:14-15

Here is something on which to ponder. We are so apt to think that prayer is asking God for what we want, whereas true prayer is asking God for what he wants. Prayer is not only talking to God, even more it is listening to him.

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1 John 5:16-17

PRAYING FOR THE BROTHER WHO SINS

1 John 5:16-17 (Part 1)

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which is not a sin whose end is death, he will ask life for him and he will give it to him, that is, to those whose sin is not a sin whose end is death. There is a sin whose end is death. it is not about that that I mean he should ask. All wrongdoing is sin; but there is a sin whose end is not death.

There is no doubt that this is a most difficult and disturbing passage. Before we approach its problems, let us look at its certainties.

John has just been speaking about the Christian privilege of prayer; and now he goes on to single out for special attention the prayer of intercession for the brother who needs praying for. It is very significant that, when John speaks about one kind of prayer, it is not prayer for ourselves; it is prayer for others. Prayer must never be selfish; it must never be concentrated entirely upon our own selves and our own problems and our own needs. It must be an outgoing activity. As Westcott put it: "The end of prayer is the perfection of the whole Christian body."

Again and again the New Testament writers stress the need for this prayer of intercession. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "Brothers, pray for us" (1Th.5:25). The writer to the Hebrews says: "Pray for us" (Heb.13:18-19). James says that, if a man is sick, he ought to call the elders, and the elders should pray over him (Jas.5:14). It is the advice to Timothy that prayer must be made for all men (1Tim.2:1). The Christian has the tremendous privilege of bearing his brother man to the throne of grace. There are three things to be said about this.

(i) We naturally pray for those who are ill, and we should just as naturally pray for those who are straying away from God. It should be just as natural to pray for the cure of the soul as it is to pray for the cure of the body. It may be that there is nothing greater that we can do for the man who is straying away and who is in peril of making shipwreck of his life than to commit him to the grace of God.

(ii) But it must be remembered that, when we have prayed for such a man, our task is not yet done. In this, as in all other things, our first responsibility is to seek to make our own prayers come true. It will often be our duty to speak to the man himself. We must not only speak to God about him, we must also speak to the man about himself. God needs a channel through which his grace can come and an agent through whom he can act; and it may well be that we are to be his voice in this instance.

(iii) We have previously thought about the basis of prayer and about the principle of prayer; but here we meet the limitation of prayer. It may well be that God wishes to answer our prayer; it may well be that we pray with heartfelt sincerity; but God's aim and our prayer can be frustrated by the man for whom we pray. If we pray for a sick person and he disobeys his doctors and acts foolishly, our prayer will be frustrated. God may urge, God may plead, God may warn, God may offer, but

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1 John 5:16-17

not even God can violate the freedom of choice which he himself has given to us. It is often the folly of man which frustrates our prayers and cancels the grace of God.

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1 John 5:16-17

SIN WHOSE END IS DEATH

1 John 5:16-17 (Part 2)

This passage speaks of the sin whose end is death and the sin whose end is not death. The Revised Standard Version translates "mortal" sin.

There have been many suggestions in regard to this.

The Jews distinguished two kinds of sins. There were the sins which a man committed unwittingly or, at least, not deliberately. These were sins which a man might commit in ignorance, or when he was swept away by some over-mastering impulse, or in some moment of strong emotion when his passions were too strong for the leash of the will to hold. On the other hand, there were the sins of the high hand and the haughty heart, the sins which a man deliberately committed, the sins in which he defiantly took his own way in spite of the known will of God for him. It was for the first kind of sin that sacrifice atoned; but for the sins of the haughty heart and the high hand no sacrifice could atone.

Plummer lists three suggestions. (i) Mortal sins may be sins which are punishable by death. But it is quite clear that more is meant than that. This passage is not thinking of sins which are a breach of man-made laws, however serious. (ii) Mortal sins may be sins which God visits with death. Paul writes to the Corinthians that, because of their unworthy conduct at the table of the Lord, many among them are weak and many are asleep, that is, many have died (1Cor.11:30); and the suggestion is that the reference is to sins which are so serious that God sends death. (iii) Mortal sins may be sins punishable with excommunication from the Church. When Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the notorious sinner with whom they have not adequately dealt, he demands that he should be "delivered to Satan." That was the phrase for excommunication. But he goes on to say that, serious as this punishment is and sore as its bodily consequence may be, it is designed to save the man's soul in the Day of the Lord Jesus (1Cor.5:5). It is a punishment which does not end in death. None of these explanations will do.

There are three further suggestions as to the identification of this mortal sin.

(a) There is a line of thought in the New Testament which points to the fact that some held that there was no forgiveness for post-baptismal sin. There were those who believed that baptism cleansed from all previous sins but that after baptism there was no forgiveness. There is an echo of that line of thought in Hebrews: "It is impossible to restore again to repentance, those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy" (Heb.6:4-6). In early Christian terminology to be enlightened was often a technical term for to be baptized. It was indeed that belief which made many postpone baptism until the last possible moment. But the real essence of that statement in Hebrews is that restoration becomes impossible when penitence has become impossible; the connection is not so much with baptism as with penitence.

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1 John 5:16-17

(b) Later on in the early church there was a strong line of thought which declared that apostasy could never be forgiven. In the days of the great persecutions some said that those who in fear or in torture had denied their faith could never have forgiveness; for had not Jesus said, "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matt.10:33; compare Mk.8:38; Lk.9:26). But it must always be remembered that the New Testament tells of the terrible denial of Peter and of his gracious restoration. As so often happens, Jesus was gentler and more sympathetic and understanding than his Church was.

(c) It could be argued from this very letter of John that the most deadly of all sins was to deny that Jesus really came in the flesh, for that sin was nothing less than the mark of Antichrist (1Jn.4:3). If the mortal sin is to be identified with any one sin that surely must be it. But we think that there is something more to it even than that.

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1 John 5:16-17

THE ESSENCE OF SIN

1 John 5:16-17 (Part 3)

First of all, let us try to fix more closely the meaning of the mortal sin. In the Greek it is the sin *pros* (GSN4314) *thanaton* (GSN2288). That means the sin which is going towards death, the sin whose end is death, the sin which, if continued in, must finish in death. The terrible thing about it is not so much what it is in itself, as where it will end, if a man persists in it.

It is a fact of experience that there are two kinds of sinners. On the one hand, there is the man who may be said to sin against his will; he sins because he is swept away by passion or desire, which at the moment is too strong for him; his sin is not so much a matter of choice as of a compulsion which he is not able to resist. On the other hand, there is the man who sins deliberately, of set purpose taking his own way, although well aware that it is wrong.

Now these two men began by being the same man. It is the experience of every man that the first time that he does a wrong thing, he does it with shrinking and with fear; and, after he has done it, he feels grief and remorse and regret. But, if he allows himself again and again to flirt with temptation and to fall, on each occasion the sin becomes easier; and, if he thinks he escapes the consequences, on each occasion the self-disgust and the remorse and the regret become less and less; and in the end he reaches a state when he can sin without a tremor. It is precisely that which is the sin which is leading to death.

So long as a man in his heart of hearts hates sin and hates himself for sinning, so long as he knows that he is sinning, he is never beyond repentance and, therefore, never beyond forgiveness; but once he begins to revel in sin and to make it the deliberate policy of his life, he is on the way to death, for he is on the way to a state where the idea of repentance will not, and cannot, enter his head.

The mortal sin is the state of the man who has listened to sin and refused to listen to God so often, that he loves his sin and regards it as the most profitable thing in the world.

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1 John 5:18-20

THE THREEFOLD CERTAINTY

1 John 5:18-20

We know that he who has received his birth from God does not sin, but he whose birth was from God keeps him, and the Evil One does not touch him.

We know that it is from God that we draw our being, and the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One.

We know that the Son of God has come, and that he has given us discernment to come to know the Real One; and we are in the Real One, even through his Son Jesus Christ. This is the real God and this is eternal life.

John draws to the end of his letter with a statement of the threefold Christian certainty.

(i) The Christian is emancipated from the power of sin. We must be careful to see what this means. It does not mean that the Christian never sins; but it does mean that he is not the helpless slave of sin. As Plummer put it: "A child of God may sin, but his normal condition is resistance to evil." The difference lies in this. The pagan world was conscious of nothing so much as moral defeat. It knew its own evil and felt there was no possible escape. Seneca spoke of "our weakness in necessary things." He said that men "hate their sins but cannot leave them." Persius, the Roman satirist, in a famous picture spoke of "filthy Natta, a man deadened by vice...who has no sense of sin, no knowledge of what he is losing, and is sunk so deep that he sends up no bubble to the surface." The pagan world was utterly defeated by sin.

But the Christian is the man who never can lose the battle. Because he is a man, he will sin; but he never can experience the utter moral defeatedness of the pagan. F. W. H. Myers makes Paul speak of the battle with the flesh:

"Well, let me sin, but not with my consenting,
Well, let me die, but willing to be whole:
Never, O Christ--so stay me from relenting--
Shall there be truce betwixt my flesh and soul."

The reason for the Christian's ultimate undefeatedness is that he who has his birth from God keeps him. That is to say, Jesus keeps him. As Wescott has it: "The Christian has an active enemy, but he has also a watchful guardian." The heathen is the man who has been defeated by sin and has accepted defeat. The Christian is the man who may sin but never accepts the fact of defeat. "A saint," as someone has said, "is not a man who never falls; he is a man who gets up and goes on every time he falls."

(ii) The Christian is on the side of God against the world. The source of our being is God, but the world lies in the power of the Evil One. In the early days the cleavage between the Church and the world was much clearer than it is now. At least in the Western world, we live in a civilization

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1 John 5:18-20

permeated by Christian principles. Even if men do not practise them, they still, on the whole, accept the ideals of chastity, mercy, service, love. But the ancient world knew nothing of chastity, and little of mercy, and of service, and of love. John says that the Christian knows that he is with God, while the world is in the grip of the Evil One. No matter how the situation may have changed, the choice still confronts men whether they will align themselves with God or with the forces which are against God. As Myers makes Paul say:

"Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest,
Cannot confound nor doubt him nor deny:
Yea with one voice, O World, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

(iii) The Christian is conscious that he has entered into that reality which is God. Life is full of illusions and impermanencies; by himself man can but guess and grope; but in Christ he enters into the knowledge of reality. Xenophon tells of a discussion between Socrates and a young man. "How do you know that?" says Socrates. "Do you know it, or are you guessing?" "I am guessing," is the answer. "Very well," says Socrates, "when we are done with guessing and when we know, shall we talk about it then?" Who am I? What is life? What is God? Whence did I come? Whither do I go? What is truth and where is duty? These are the questions to which men can reply only in guesses apart from Jesus Christ. But in Christ we reach the reality, which is God. The time of guessing is gone and the time of knowing has come.

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1 John 5:21

THE CONSTANT PERIL

1 John 5:21

My dear children, guard yourselves from idols.

With this sudden, sharp injunction John brings his letter to an end. Short as it is, there is a world of meaning in this phrase.

(i) In Greek the word idol has in it the sense of unreality. Plato used it for the illusions of this world as opposed to the unchangeable realities of eternity. When the prophets spoke of the idols of the heathen, they meant that they were counterfeit gods, as opposed to the one true God. This may well mean, as Westcott has it, "Keep yourselves from all objects of false devotion."

(ii) An idol is anything in this life which men worship instead of God and allow to take the place of God. A man may make an idol of his money, of his career, of his safety, of his pleasure. Again to quote Westcott: "An idol is anything which occupies the place due to God."

(iii) It is likely that John means something more definite than either of these two things. It was in Ephesus that he was writing, and it was of conditions in Ephesus that he was thinking. It is likely that he means simply and directly, "Keep yourselves from the pollutions of heathen worship." No town in the world had so many connections with the stories of the ancient gods; and no town was more proud of them. Tacitus writes of Ephesus: "The Ephesians claimed that Diana and Apollo were not born at Delos, as was commonly supposed; they possessed the Cenchrean stream and the Ortygian grove where Latona, in travail, had reposed against an olive tree, which is still in existence, and had given birth to these deities.... It was there that Apollo himself, after slaying the Cyclops, had escaped the wrath of Jupiter: and again that father Bacchus in his victory had spared the suppliant Amazons who had occupied his shrine."

Further, in Ephesus there stood the great Temple of Diana, one of the wonders of the ancient world. There were at least three things about that Temple which would justify John's stern injunction to have nothing to do with heathen worship.

(a) The Temple was the centre of immoral rites. The priests were called the Megabyzi. They were eunuchs. It was said by some that the goddess was so fastidious that she could not bear a real male near her; it was said by others that the goddess was so lascivious that it was unsafe for any real male to approach her. Heraclitus, the great philosopher, was a native of Ephesus. He was called the weeping philosopher, for he had never been known to smile. He said that the darkness to the approach of the altar of the Temple was the darkness of vileness; that the morals of the Temple were worse than the morals of beasts; that the inhabitants of Ephesus were fit only to be drowned, and that the reason that he could never smile was that he lived in the midst of such terrible uncleanness. For a Christian to have any contact with that was to touch infection.

(b) The Temple had the right of asylum. Any criminal, if he could reach the Temple of Diana, was safe. The result was that the Temple was the haunt of criminals. Tacitus accused Ephesus of

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1 John 5:21

protecting the crimes of men and calling it the worship of the gods. To have anything to do with the Temple of Diana was to be associated with the very dregs of society.

(c) The Temple of Diana was the centre of the sale of Ephesian letters. These were charms, worn as amulets, which were supposed to be effective in bringing about the wishes of those who wore them. Ephesus was "preeminently the city of astrology, sorcery, incantations, amulets, exorcisms, and every form of magical imposture." To have anything to do with the Temple at Ephesus was to be brought into contact with commercialized superstition and the black arts.

It is hard for us to imagine how much Ephesus was dominated by the Temple of Diana. It would not be easy for a Christian to keep himself from idols in a city like that. But John demands that it must be done. The Christian must never be lost in the illusions of pagan religion; he must never erect in his heart an idol which will take the place of God; he must keep himself from the infections of all false faiths; and he can do so only when he walks with Christ.

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Introduction to 2nd & 3rd John

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND AND THIRD LETTERS OF JOHN

The very shortness of these two letters is the best guarantee of their genuineness. They are so brief and so comparatively unimportant that no one would have gone to the trouble of inventing them and of attaching them to the name of John. A standard papyrus sheet measured ten by eight inches and the length of these letters is to be explained by the fact that they would each take up almost exactly one sheet.

THE ELDER

Each of them is said to come from "The elder." Second John begins: "The elder to the elect lady and her children." Third John begins: "The elder to the beloved Gaius." It is in the last degree unlikely that The elder is an official or ecclesiastical title. Elders were officials attached to one congregation whose jurisdiction did not extend outside that congregation, whereas the writer of these letters certainly assumes that he has the right to speak and that his word will carry weight in congregations where he is not actually present. He speaks as one whose authority goes out to the Church at large. The word is presbuteros (GSN4245), which originally meant an elder, not in the official but in the natural sense of the term. We would be better to translate it "The ancient", or "The aged", for it is not from an ecclesiastical position but from his age and personal qualities that the writer of these letters draws his authority.

In fact we know that in Ephesus there was an aged John who held a very special position. In the days of the early church there was a churchman called Papias who lived from A.D. 70 to 146. He had a passion for collecting all the information he could lay hands on about the early days of the church. He was not a great scholar, Eusebius dismisses him as "a man of very limited intelligence"; but he does transmit to us some most interesting information. He became Bishop of Hierapolis but he had a close connection with Ephesus, and he tells us of his own methods of acquiring information. He frequently uses elder in the sense of one of the fathers of the Church, and he mentions a particularly distinguished elder whose name was John. "I shall not hesitate," he writes, "to put down for you, along with my own interpretations, whatsoever things I have at any time learned carefully from the elders, and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those that speak much, but in those that teach the truth; not in those who relate strange commandments, but in those who deliver the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and springing from the truth itself. If, then, anyone came who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders--what Andrew, or what Peter, had said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord; and what things Aristion, or the Elder John say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice." Clearly the Elder John, John the aged, was a notable figure in Ephesus, although he is clearly distinguished from John the apostle.

It must be this John who wrote these two little letters. By this time he was an old man, one of the last surviving links with Jesus and his disciples. He was a man who had the authority of a bishop in Ephesus and in the places around it; and when he saw that a church was threatened with trouble and

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heresy, he wrote with gracious and loving correction to his people. Here are the letters of an aged saint, one of the last of the first generation of Christians, a man whom all loved and respected.

COMMON AUTHORSHIP

That the two letters are from the one hand there is no doubt. Short as they are, they have much in common. Second John begins: "The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth." Third John begins: "The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." Second John goes on: "I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children following the truth" (2Jn.4); and Third John goes on: "No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth." Second John comes to an end: "Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete" (2Jn.12). Third John comes to an end: "I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face" (3Jn.13-14). There is the closest possible similarity between the two letters.

There is further the closest possible connection between the situation of these letters and that in First John. In 1Jn.4:3 we read: "Every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of Antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already." In 2Jn.7 we read: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is a deceiver and the Antichrist."

It is clear that Second and Third John are closely connected with each other; and that both are closely connected with First John. They are dealing with the same situation, the same dangers and the same people.

THE PROBLEM OF THE SECOND LETTER

These two little letters confront us with few serious problems. The only real one is to decide whether the Second Letter was sent to an individual or to a church. It begins: "The elder to the elect lady and her children." The problem centres on this phrase the elect lady. The Greek is *eklekte* (GSN1588) *kuria* (GSN2959) and there are three possible ways of taking it.

(i) It is just barely possible, though not really likely, that *Eklekte* is a proper name and that *kuria* (GSN2959) is a quite usual affectionate address. *Kurios* (GSN2962) (the masculine form) has many meanings. It very commonly means sir; it means master of slaves and owner of possessions; on a much higher level it means lord and is the word so often used as a title for Jesus. In letters *kurios* (GSN2962) has a special use. It is practically the equivalent of the English phrase My Dear. So a soldier writes home saying, *Kurie* (GSN2962) *mou* (GSN3450) *pater* (GSN3962), My Dear Father. In letters *kurios* is an address combining affection and respect. So it is just possible that this letter is addressed to My Dear *Eklekte*. Rendel Harris, indeed, went the length of saying that Second John is nothing other than a Christian love letter. This is unlikely, as we shall see, for more than one reason. But one thing is decisive against it.

Second John ends: "The children of your elect sister greet you." The Greek is again *eklekte* (GSN1588); and, if it is a proper name at the beginning of the letter, it must also be a proper name

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at the end. This would mean that there were two sisters both called by the very unusual name of Eklekte--which is simply unbelievable.

(ii) It is possible to take Kuria (GSN2959) as a proper name, for there are examples of this usage. We would then take eklekte (GSN1588) in its normal New Testament sense; and the letter would be written to the elect Kuria (GSN2959). The objections are threefold. (a) It seems unlikely that any single individual could be spoken of as loved by all those who have known the truth (2Jn.1). (b) 2Jn.4 says that John rejoiced when he found some of her children walking in the truth; the implication is that others did not so walk. This would seem to imply a number greater than one woman's family could contain. (c) The decisive objection is that throughout the letter the eklekte (GSN1588) kuria (GSN2959) is addressed sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural. The singular occurs in verses 2Jn.4-5 and 2Jn.13; and the plural occurs in 2Jn.6,8,10,12. It would be almost impossible that an individual would be so addressed.

(iii) So, then, we must come to the conclusion that the elect lady means a church. There is, in fact, good evidence that the expression was so used. First Peter, in the King James Version, ends with greetings from "the church that is at Babylon elected together with you" (1Pet.5:13). In the King James Version the words church that is are in italics; that, of course, means that they are not in the Greek and have been supplied in translation to fill out the sense. The Greek literally reads: "The Elect One at Babylon" and The Elect One is feminine. Few have ever doubted that the phrase means The church which is at Babylon, and that is how we must take it in John's letter also. No doubt The Elect Lady goes back to the idea of the church as the Bride of Christ. We can be certain that Second John is written, not to an individual but to a church.

THE PROBLEM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Second and Third John throw vivid light on a problem which sooner or later had to arise within the organization of the early church. Let us see if we can reconstruct the situation which lies behind them. It is clear that John the aged regards himself as having a right to act as guide and counsellor and to administer warning and rebuke in the churches whose members are his children. In Second John he writes of those who are doing well (2Jn.4), and by implication infers that there are others who are not so satisfactory. He further makes it clear that there are itinerant teachers in the district, some of whom are preaching false and dangerous doctrine, and he gives orders that such teachers are not to be accepted and not to be given hospitality (2Jn.7-11). Here, then, John is exercising what is to him an unquestioned right to issue orders to his churches and is seeking to guard against a situation in which itinerant teachers of falsehood may arrive at any moment.

The situation behind Third John is somewhat more complicated. The letter is written to one called Gaius, whose character and actions John most thoroughly approves (3Jn.3-5). Wandering missionaries have come to the church, men who are fellow-helpers of the truth, and Gaius has given them true Christian hospitality (3Jn.6-8). In the same church is another man called Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence (3Jn.9). Diotrephes is depicted as a dictatorial character who will brook no rival to his authority. Diotrephes has refused to receive the wandering teachers of the truth and has actually tried to drive out of the church those who did receive them. He will have nothing to do with wandering teachers even when they are true preachers of the word (3Jn.10). Then into the

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picture comes a man called Demetrius, to whom John gives a personal testimonial as a good man and one to be hospitably welcomed (3Jn.12).

The simplest explanation of Demetrius is that he must be the leader of a wandering band of teachers who are on their way to the church to which John is writing. Diotrephes will certainly refuse to have anything to do with them and will try to eject those who do receive them; and John is writing to urge Gaius to receive the wandering teachers and not to be intimidated by the domineering Diotrephes, whom he (John) will deal with when he visits the church in question (3Jn.10). The whole situation turns on the reception of the wandering teachers. Gaius has received such teachers before, and John urges him to receive them and their leader Demetrius again. Diotrephes has shut the door on them and defied the authority of John the aged.

THE THREEFOLD MINISTRY

All this looks like a very unhappy situation, and indeed it was. None the less, it was one which was bound to arise. In the nature of things a problem of ministry was bound to emerge within the church. In its earliest days the church had three different kinds of ministries.

(i) Unique, and above all others, stood the apostles, those who had companied with Jesus and been witnesses of the resurrection. They were the undisputed leaders of the church. Their writ ran throughout the whole church; in any country and in any congregation their ministry was supreme.

(ii) There were the prophets. They were not attached to any one congregation. They were wandering preachers, going where the Spirit moved them and giving to men the message which the Spirit of God gave to them. They had given up home and occupation and the comfort and security of settled life to be the wandering messengers of God. They, too, had a very special place in the church. The Didache, or, to give it its English name, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, is the earliest book of church order. In it the unique position of the prophets is made clear. The order of service for the Eucharist is laid down and the prayers are given; the service ends with the prayer of thanksgiving which is given in full; and then comes the sentence: "But suffer the prophets to give thanks as much as they will" (Didache 10: 7). The prophets were not to be brought under the rules and regulations which governed ordinary people.

So, then, the church had two sets of people whose authority was not confined to any one congregation and who had right of entry to every congregation.

(iii) There were the elders. During their first missionary journey part of the work of Paul and Barnabas was to ordain elders in all the local churches which they founded (Ac.14:23). The elders were the officials of the settled community; their work was within their congregation and they did not move outside it. It is clear that they were the backbone of the organization of the early church; on them the routine work and the solidity of the individual congregations depended.

THE PROBLEM OF THE WANDERING PREACHERS

The position of the apostles presented no real problem; they were unique and their position could never really be disputed. But the wandering prophets did present a problem. Their position was one which was singularly liable to abuse. They had an enormous prestige; and it was possible for the

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most undesirable characters to enter into a way of life in which they moved from place to place, living in very considerable comfort at the expense of the local congregations. A clever rogue could make a very comfortable living as an itinerant prophet. Even the pagan satirists saw this. Lucian, the Greek writer, in his work called the *Peregrinus*, draws the picture of a man who had found the easiest possible way of making a living without working. He was an itinerant charlatan who lived on the fat of the land by travelling round the various communities of the Christians, settling down wherever he liked and living luxuriously at their expense.

The *Didache* clearly saw this danger and laid down definite regulations to meet it. The regulations are long but so vivid a light do they throw on the life of the early church that they are worth quoting in full (*Didache* 11 and 12).

Whosoever, therefore, shall come and teach you all these things aforesaid, receive him. But if the teacher himself turn and teach another doctrine to pervert, hear him not. But unto the increase of righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. And as touching the apostles and prophets, according to the decree of the gospel, so do ye. But let every apostle that cometh unto you be received as the Lord. And he shall stay one day, and, if need be, the next also, but, if he stay three, he is a false prophet. And, when the apostle goeth forth, let him take nothing save bread, till he reach his lodging, but, if he ask money, he is a false prophet. And every prophet that speaketh in the Spirit ye shall not try nor judge: for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. But not everyone that speaketh in the Spirit is a prophet, but if he has the manners of the Lord. By their manners, therefore, shall the prophet and the false prophet be known. And no prophet who ordereth a table in the Spirit shall eat of it, else he is a false prophet. And every prophet that teacheth the truth, if he doeth not what he teacheth, is a false prophet.... Whosoever shall say in the Spirit: Give me money, or any other thing, ye shall not hearken to him: but, if he bid you give for others who are in need, let no man judge him.

Let everyone that cometh in the name of the Lord be received, and then, when ye have proved him, ye shall know, for ye shall have understanding to distinguish between the right hand and the left. If he that cometh is a passer-by, succour him as far as ye can; but he shall not stay with you longer than two or three days, unless there be necessity. But, if he be minded to settle among you, and be a craftsman, let him work and eat. But, if he hath no trade, according to your understanding, provide that he shall not live idle among you, being a Christian. But, if he will not do this, he is a Christmonger: of such men beware.

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The Didache even invents the word Christmonger, trafficker in Christ, Christemporos, to describe this kind of person.

John was entirely justified in warning his people that the wrong kind of wandering prophets might come claiming hospitality and in saying that they must on no account be received. There is no doubt that in the early church these wandering prophets became a problem. Some of them were heretical teachers, even if they were sincerely convinced of their own teaching. Some were nothing better than plausible rogues who had found an easy way to make a comfortable living. That is the picture which lies behind Second John.

THE CLASH OF MINISTRIES

But the situation behind Third John is in some ways even more serious. The problem figure is Diotrephes. He is the man who will have nothing to do with wandering teachers and who seeks to eject anyone who dares to give them a welcome. He is the man who will not accept the authority of John and whom John brands as a domineering character. There is much more behind this than meets the eye. This was no storm in a tea-cup; it was a fundamental cleavage between the local and the itinerant ministry.

Obviously the whole structure of the church depended on a strong settled ministry. That is to say, its very existence depended on a strong and authoritative eldership. As time went on the settled ministry was bound to chafe under the remote control of even one so famous as John the aged; and to resent the possibly upsetting invasions of wandering prophets and evangelists. It was by no means impossible that, however well-intentioned they were, these itinerants could do far more harm than good.

Here is the situation behind Third John. John represents the old apostolic remote control; Demetrius and his band of missionaries represent the wandering prophets and preachers; Diotrephes represents the settled ministry of the local elders, who wish to run their own congregation and regard the wandering preachers as dangerous intruders; Gaius represents the good, well-meaning man who is torn in two and cannot make up his mind.

What happened in this case, we do not know. But the end of the matter in the church was that the wandering preachers faded from the scene and the apostles in the nature of things passed from this earth, and the settled ministry became the ministry of the church. In a sense even in the modern church the problem of the itinerant evangelist and the settled ministry is not fully solved; but these two little letters are of the most fascinating interest because they show the organization of the church in a transition stage, when the clash between the itinerant and the settled ministry was beginning to emerge and--who knows?--Diotrephes may not have been as bad as he is painted nor altogether wrong.

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2 John 1:1-3

THE ELECT LADY

2 John 1-3 (Part 1)

The Elder to the Elect Lady and to her children, whom I love in truth (it is not only I who love you and them, but so do all who love the truth) because of the truth which abides in us and which will be with us for ever. Grace, mercy and peace will be with you from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

The writer designates himself simply by the title of The Elder. Elder can have three different meanings.

(i) It can mean simply an older man, one who by reason of his years and experience is deserving of affection and of respect. There will be something of that meaning here. The letter is from an aged servant of Christ and the church.

(ii) In the New Testament the elders are the officials of the local churches. They were the first of all the church officials, and Paul ordained elders in his churches on his missionary journeys, as soon as it was possible to do so (Ac.4:21-23). The word cannot be used in that sense here, because these elders were local officials, whose authority and duties were confined to their own congregation, whereas The Elder of this letter clearly has an authority which extends over a much wider area. He claims the right to advise congregations in places where he himself is not a resident.

(iii) Almost certainly this letter was written in Ephesus in the province of Asia. In the church there Elder was used in a special sense. The elders were men who had been direct disciples of the apostles; it is from these men that both Papias and Irenaeus, who lived and worked and wrote in Asia, tell us that they got their information. The elders were the direct links between the second generation of Christians and the followers of Christ in the flesh. It is undoubtedly in that sense that the word is used here. The writer of the letter is one of the last direct links with Jesus Christ; and therein lies his right to speak.

As we have already said in the introduction, The Elect Lady is something of a problem. There are two suggestions.

(i) There are those who hold that the letter is written to an individual person. In Greek the phrase is Eklekte (GSN1588) Kuria (GSN2959). Kurios (GSN2962) (the masculine form of the adjective) is a common form of respectful address and Eklekte (GSN1588) could just possibly--though not probably--be a proper name, in which case the letter would be written to My Dear Eklekte. Kuria (GSN2959), besides being a title of respectful address, can be a proper name, in which case eklekte (GSN1588) would be an adjective and the letter would be to The Elect Kuria. Just possibly both words are proper names, in which case the letter would be to a lady called Eklekte Kuria.

But, if this letter is written to an individual, it is much more likely that neither word is a proper name and that the Revised Standard Version is correct in translating the phrase The elect lady. There has been much speculation as to who The Elect Lady might be. We mention only two of the

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2 John 1:1-3

suggestions. (a) It has been suggested that The Elect Lady is Mary, the mother of our Lord. She was to be a mother to John and he was to be a son to her (Jn.19:26-27), and a personal letter from John might well be a letter to her. (b) Kurios (GSN2962) means Master; and Kuria (GSN2959) as a proper name would mean Mistress. In Latin, Domina is the same name and in Aramaic, Martha; both meaning Mistress or Lady. It has, therefore, been suggested that the letter was written to Martha of Bethany.

(ii) It is much more likely that the letter is written to a church. It is far more likely that it is a church which all men love who know the truth (2Jn.1). 2Jn.4 says that some of the children are walking in the truth. In 2Jn.4,8,10,12 the word you is in the plural, which suggests a church. Peter uses almost exactly the same phrase when he sends greetings from The Elect One (the form is feminine) which is at Babylon (1Pet.5:13).

It may well be that the address is deliberately unidentifiable. The letter was written at a time when persecution was a real possibility. If it were to fall into the wrong hands, there might well be trouble. And it may be that the letter is addressed in such a way that to the insider its destination is quite clear, while to the outsider it would look like a personal letter from one friend to another.

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2 John 1:1-3

LOVE AND TRUTH

2 John 1-3 (Part 2)

It is of great interest to note how in this passage love and truth are inseparably connected. It is in the truth that the elder loves the elect lady. It is because of the truth that he loves and writes to the church. In Christianity we learn two things about love.

(i) Christian truth tells us the way in which we ought to love. Agape (GSN0026) is the word for Christian love. Agape (GSN0026) is not passion with its ebb and flow, its flicker and its flame; nor is it an easy-going and indulgent sentimentalism. And it is not an easy thing to acquire or a light thing to exercise. Agape (GSN0026) is undefeatable goodwill; it is the attitude towards others which, no matter what they do, will never feel bitterness and will always seek their highest good. There is a love which seeks to possess; there is a love which softens and enervates; there is a love which withdraws a man from the battle; there is a love which shuts its eyes to faults and to ways which end in ruin. But Christian love will always seek the highest good of others and will accept all the difficulties, all the problems and all the toil which that search involves. It is of significance that John writes in love to warn.

(ii) Christian truth tells us the reason for the obligation of love. In his first letter, John clearly lays it down. He has talked of the suffering, sacrificing, incredibly generous love of God; and then he says, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1Jn.4:11). The Christian must love because he is loved. He cannot accept the love of God without showing love to the men God loves. Because God loves us, we must love others with the same generous and sacrificial love.

Before we leave this passage we must note one other thing. John begins this letter with a greeting, but it is a very unusual greeting. He says, "Grace, mercy and peace will be with us." In every other New Testament letter the greeting is in the form of a wish or a prayer. Paul usually says, "Grace be to you and peace." Peter says, "May grace and peace be multiplied to you" (1Pet.1:2). Jude says, "May mercy, peace and love, be multiplied to you" (Jd.2). But here the greeting is a statement: "Grace, mercy and peace will be with us." John is so sure of the gifts of the grace of God in Jesus Christ that he does not pray that his friends should receive them; he assures them that they will receive them. Here is the faith which never doubts the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

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2 John 1:4-6

TROUBLE AND CURE

2 John 4-6

It gave me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, as we have received commandment from the Father. And now, Lady, not as if I were writing a new commandment to you, but a commandment which we have had from the beginning, I beg you that we should love one another. And this is love, that we should walk according to his commandments; and this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that we should walk in it.

In the church to which he is writing there are things to make John's heart glad and things to make it sad. It brings him joy to know that some of its members are walking in the truth; but that very statement implies that some are not. That is to say, within the church there is division, for there are those who have chosen to walk different roads. For all things John has one remedy and that is love. It is no new remedy and no new commandment; it is the word of Jesus himself: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn.13:34-35). Only love can mend a situation in which personal relationships are broken. Rebuke and criticism are liable to awaken only resentment and hostility; argument and controversy are liable only to widen the breach; love is the one thing to heal the breach and restore the lost relationship.

But it is possible that those who, as John sees it, have gone the wrong way might say, "We do indeed love God." Immediately John's thoughts go to another saying of Jesus: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (Jn.14:15). Jesus' actual commandment was to love one another and, therefore, anyone who does not keep this commandment does not really love God, however much he may claim to do so. The only proof of our love for God is our love for the brethren. This is the commandment, says John, which we have heard from the beginning and in which we must walk.

As we go on we shall see that there is another side to this and that there is no soft sentimentality in John's attitude towards those who were seducing men from the truth; but it is significant that his first cure for all the troubles of the church is love.

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2 John 1:7-9

THE THREATENING PERIL

2 John 7-9

There is all the more reason to speak like this because there have gone out into the world many deceivers, men who do not confess that Jesus is Christ, and his coming in the flesh. Such a man is the deceiver and the Antichrist. Look to yourselves that you do not ruin that which we have wrought, but see to it that you receive a full reward. Everyone who advances too far and who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not possess God; it is he who abides in that teaching who has both the Father and the Son.

Already, in Jn.4:2, John has dealt with the heretics who deny the reality of the incarnation. There is one difficulty. In 1Jn.4:2 the Greek is that Jesus has come in the flesh. The idea is expressed in a participle and the participle is in the past tense. It is the fact that the incarnation has happened which is stressed. Here there is a change and the participle is in the present tense: the literal translation would be that Jesus comes or is coming in the flesh. As far as the language goes this could mean either of two things.

(i) It could mean that Jesus is always coming in the flesh, that there is a kind of permanence about the incarnation, that it was not one act which finished in the thirty years during which Jesus was in Palestine but is timeless. That would be a great thought and would mean that now and always Jesus Christ, and God through him, is entering into the human situation and into human life.

(ii) It could be a reference to the Second Coming; and it could mean that Jesus is coming again in the flesh. It may well be that there was a belief in the early church that there was to be a second coming of Jesus in the flesh, a kind of incarnation in glory to follow the incarnation of humiliation. That, too, would be a great thought.

But it may well be that C. H. Dodd is right when he says that in a late Greek writer like John, who did not know Greek as the great classical writers knew it, we cannot lay all this stress on tenses; and that we are better to take it that he means the same as he meant in 1Jn.4:2. That is, these deceivers are denying the reality of the incarnation and therefore denying that God can fully enter into the life of man.

It is intensely significant to note how the great thinkers held on with both hands to the reality of the incarnation. In the second century, again and again Ignatius insists that Jesus was truly born, that he truly became man, that he truly suffered and that he truly died. Vincent Taylor, in his book on The Person of Christ, reminds us of two great statements of the incarnation. Martin Luther said of Jesus: "He ate, drank, slept, waked; was weary, sorrowful, rejoicing; he wept and he laughed; he knew hunger and thirst and sweat; he talked, he toiled, he prayed...so that there was no difference between him and other men, save only this, that he was God, and had no sin." Emil Brunner cites that passage, and then goes on to say, "The Son of God in whom we are able to believe must be such a One that it is possible to mistake him for an ordinary man."

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2 John 1:7-9

If God could enter into life only as a disembodied phantom, the body stands for ever despised; then there can be no real communion between the divine and the human; then there can be no real salvation. He had to become what we are to make us what he is.

In 2Jn.8-9 we hear beneath the words of John the claims of the false teachers.

It is their claim that they are developing Christianity discovering more truly what it means. John insists that they are destroying Christianity and wrecking the foundation which has been laid and on which everything must be built.

2Jn.9 is interesting and significant. We have translated the first phrase everyone who goes too far. The Greek is proagon (GSN4254). The verb means to go on ahead. The false teachers claimed that they were the progressives, the advanced thinkers, the men of the open and adventurous mind. John himself was one of the most adventurous thinkers of the New Testament. But he insists that, however far a man may advance, he must abide in the teaching of Jesus Christ or he loses touch with God. Here, then, is the great truth. John is not condemning advanced thinking; but he is saying that Jesus Christ must be the touchstone of all thinking and that whatever is out of touch with him can never be right. John would say, "Think--but take your thinking to the touchstone of Jesus Christ and the New Testament picture of him." Christianity is not a nebulous, uncontrolled theosophy; it is anchored to the historical figure of Jesus Christ.

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2 John 1:10-13

NO COMPROMISE

2 John 10-13

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not greet him on the street; for he who greets him becomes a partner in his evil deeds.

Although I have many things to write to you, I do not wish to do so with paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and to speak to you face to face, that our joy may be completed.

The children of your Elect Sister send their greetings to you.

Here we see very clearly the danger which John saw in these false teachers. They are to be no hospitality; and the refusal of hospitality would be the most effective way of stopping their work. John goes further; they are not even to be given a greeting on the street. This would be to indicate that to some extent you had sympathy with them. It must be made quite clear to the world that the church has no tolerance for those whose teaching destroys the faith. This passage may seem on the face of it to run counter to Christian love; but C. H. Dodd has certain very wise things to say about it.

It is by no means without parallel. When the saintly Polycarp met the heretic Marcion, Marcion said: "Do you recognize me?" "I recognize Satan's first-born," answered Polycarp. It was John himself who fled from the public baths when Cerinthus, the heretic, entered them. "Let us hurry away lest the building collapse on us," he said, "because Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, is here."

We have to remember the situation. There was a time when it was touch and go whether the Christian faith would be destroyed by the speculations of pseudo-philosophic heretics. Its very existence was in peril. The church dared not even seem to compromise with this destructive corrosion of the faith.

This, as C. H. Dodd points out, is an emergency regulation and "emergency regulations make bad law." We may recognize the necessity of this way of action in the situation in which John and his people found themselves, without in the least holding that we must treat mistaken thinkers in the same way. And yet, to return to C. H. Dodd, a good-humoured tolerance can never be enough. "The problem is to find a way of living with those whose convictions differ from our own upon the most fundamental matters, without either breaking charity or being disloyal to the truth." It is there that love must find a way. The best way to destroy our enemies, as Abraham Lincoln said, is to make them our friends. We can never compromise with mistaken teachers but we are never free from the obligation of seeking to lead them into the truth.

So John comes to an end. He will not write any more for he hopes to come to see his friends and to speak to them face to face. Both Greek and Hebrew say, not face to face, but mouth to mouth. In the Old Testament God says of Moses: "With him I speak mouth to mouth" (Num.12:8). John was wise and he knew that letters can often only bedevil a situation and that five minutes heart to heart talk can do what a whole file of letters is powerless to achieve. In many a church and in many a

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2 John 1:10-13

personal relationship, letters have merely succeeded in exacerbating a situation; for the most carefully written letter can be misinterpreted, when a little speech together might have mended matters. Cromwell never understood John Fox, the Quaker, and much disliked him. Then he met him, and after he had spoken to him, he said, "If you and I had but an hour together, we would be better friends than we are." Church courts and Christian people would do well to make a resolution never to write when they could speak.

The letter closes with greetings from John's church to the friends to whom he writes, greetings, as it were, from one sister's children to another's, for all Christians are members of one family in the faith.

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Introduction to 2nd & 3rd John

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND AND THIRD LETTERS OF JOHN

The very shortness of these two letters is the best guarantee of their genuineness. They are so brief and so comparatively unimportant that no one would have gone to the trouble of inventing them and of attaching them to the name of John. A standard papyrus sheet measured ten by eight inches and the length of these letters is to be explained by the fact that they would each take up almost exactly one sheet.

THE ELDER

Each of them is said to come from "The elder." Second John begins: "The elder to the elect lady and her children." Third John begins: "The elder to the beloved Gaius." It is in the last degree unlikely that The elder is an official or ecclesiastical title. Elders were officials attached to one congregation whose jurisdiction did not extend outside that congregation, whereas the writer of these letters certainly assumes that he has the right to speak and that his word will carry weight in congregations where he is not actually present. He speaks as one whose authority goes out to the Church at large. The word is presbuteros (GSN4245), which originally meant an elder, not in the official but in the natural sense of the term. We would be better to translate it "The ancient", or "The aged", for it is not from an ecclesiastical position but from his age and personal qualities that the writer of these letters draws his authority.

In fact we know that in Ephesus there was an aged John who held a very special position. In the days of the early church there was a churchman called Papias who lived from A.D. 70 to 146. He had a passion for collecting all the information he could lay hands on about the early days of the church. He was not a great scholar, Eusebius dismisses him as "a man of very limited intelligence"; but he does transmit to us some most interesting information. He became Bishop of Hierapolis but he had a close connection with Ephesus, and he tells us of his own methods of acquiring information. He frequently uses elder in the sense of one of the fathers of the Church, and he mentions a particularly distinguished elder whose name was John. "I shall not hesitate," he writes, "to put down for you, along with my own interpretations, whatsoever things I have at any time learned carefully from the elders, and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those that speak much, but in those that teach the truth; not in those who relate strange commandments, but in those who deliver the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and springing from the truth itself. If, then, anyone came who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders--what Andrew, or what Peter, had said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord; and what things Aristion, or the Elder John say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice." Clearly the Elder John, John the aged, was a notable figure in Ephesus, although he is clearly distinguished from John the apostle.

It must be this John who wrote these two little letters. By this time he was an old man, one of the last surviving links with Jesus and his disciples. He was a man who had the authority of a bishop in Ephesus and in the places around it; and when he saw that a church was threatened with trouble and

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heresy, he wrote with gracious and loving correction to his people. Here are the letters of an aged saint, one of the last of the first generation of Christians, a man whom all loved and respected.

COMMON AUTHORSHIP

That the two letters are from the one hand there is no doubt. Short as they are, they have much in common. Second John begins: "The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth." Third John begins: "The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." Second John goes on: "I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children following the truth" (2Jn.4); and Third John goes on: "No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth." Second John comes to an end: "Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete" (2Jn.12). Third John comes to an end: "I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face" (3Jn.13-14). There is the closest possible similarity between the two letters.

There is further the closest possible connection between the situation of these letters and that in First John. In 1Jn.4:3 we read: "Every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of Antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already." In 2Jn.7 we read: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is a deceiver and the Antichrist."

It is clear that Second and Third John are closely connected with each other; and that both are closely connected with First John. They are dealing with the same situation, the same dangers and the same people.

THE PROBLEM OF THE SECOND LETTER

These two little letters confront us with few serious problems. The only real one is to decide whether the Second Letter was sent to an individual or to a church. It begins: "The elder to the elect lady and her children." The problem centres on this phrase the elect lady. The Greek is eklekte (GSN1588) kuria (GSN2959) and there are three possible ways of taking it.

(i) It is just barely possible, though not really likely, that Eklekte is a proper name and that kuria (GSN2959) is a quite usual affectionate address. Kurios (GSN2962) (the masculine form) has many meanings. It very commonly means sir; it means master of slaves and owner of possessions; on a much higher level it means lord and is the word so often used as a title for Jesus. In letters kurios (GSN2962) has a special use. It is practically the equivalent of the English phrase My Dear. So a soldier writes home saying, Kurie (GSN2962) mou (GSN3450) pater (GSN3962), My Dear Father. In letters kurios is an address combining affection and respect. So it is just possible that this letter is addressed to My Dear Eklekte. Rendel Harris, indeed, went the length of saying that Second John is nothing other than a Christian love letter. This is unlikely, as we shall see, for more than one reason. But one thing is decisive against it.

Second John ends: "The children of your elect sister greet you." The Greek is again eklekte (GSN1588); and, if it is a proper name at the beginning of the letter, it must also be a proper name

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at the end. This would mean that there were two sisters both called by the very unusual name of Eklekte--which is simply unbelievable.

(ii) It is possible to take Kuria (GSN2959) as a proper name, for there are examples of this usage. We would then take eklekte (GSN1588) in its normal New Testament sense; and the letter would be written to the elect Kuria (GSN2959). The objections are threefold. (a) It seems unlikely that any single individual could be spoken of as loved by all those who have known the truth (2Jn.1). (b) 2Jn.4 says that John rejoiced when he found some of her children walking in the truth; the implication is that others did not so walk. This would seem to imply a number greater than one woman's family could contain. (c) The decisive objection is that throughout the letter the eklekte (GSN1588) kuria (GSN2959) is addressed sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural. The singular occurs in verses 2Jn.4-5 and 2Jn.13; and the plural occurs in 2Jn.6,8,10,12. It would be almost impossible that an individual would be so addressed.

(iii) So, then, we must come to the conclusion that the elect lady means a church. There is, in fact, good evidence that the expression was so used. First Peter, in the King James Version, ends with greetings from "the church that is at Babylon elected together with you" (1Pet.5:13). In the King James Version the words church that is are in italics; that, of course, means that they are not in the Greek and have been supplied in translation to fill out the sense. The Greek literally reads: "The Elect One at Babylon" and The Elect One is feminine. Few have ever doubted that the phrase means The church which is at Babylon, and that is how we must take it in John's letter also. No doubt The Elect Lady goes back to the idea of the church as the Bride of Christ. We can be certain that Second John is written, not to an individual but to a church.

THE PROBLEM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Second and Third John throw vivid light on a problem which sooner or later had to arise within the organization of the early church. Let us see if we can reconstruct the situation which lies behind them. It is clear that John the aged regards himself as having a right to act as guide and counsellor and to administer warning and rebuke in the churches whose members are his children. In Second John he writes of those who are doing well (2Jn.4), and by implication infers that there are others who are not so satisfactory. He further makes it clear that there are itinerant teachers in the district, some of whom are preaching false and dangerous doctrine, and he gives orders that such teachers are not to be accepted and not to be given hospitality (2Jn.7-11). Here, then, John is exercising what is to him an unquestioned right to issue orders to his churches and is seeking to guard against a situation in which itinerant teachers of falsehood may arrive at any moment.

The situation behind Third John is somewhat more complicated. The letter is written to one called Gaius, whose character and actions John most thoroughly approves (3Jn.3-5). Wandering missionaries have come to the church, men who are fellow-helpers of the truth, and Gaius has given them true Christian hospitality (3Jn.6-8). In the same church is another man called Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence (3Jn.9). Diotrephes is depicted as a dictatorial character who will brook no rival to his authority. Diotrephes has refused to receive the wandering teachers of the truth and has actually tried to drive out of the church those who did receive them. He will have nothing to do with wandering teachers even when they are true preachers of the word (3Jn.10). Then into the

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picture comes a man called Demetrius, to whom John gives a personal testimonial as a good man and one to be hospitably welcomed (3Jn.12).

The simplest explanation of Demetrius is that he must be the leader of a wandering band of teachers who are on their way to the church to which John is writing. Diotrephes will certainly refuse to have anything to do with them and will try to eject those who do receive them; and John is writing to urge Gaius to receive the wandering teachers and not to be intimidated by the domineering Diotrephes, whom he (John) will deal with when he visits the church in question (3Jn.10). The whole situation turns on the reception of the wandering teachers. Gaius has received such teachers before, and John urges him to receive them and their leader Demetrius again. Diotrephes has shut the door on them and defied the authority of John the aged.

THE THREEFOLD MINISTRY

All this looks like a very unhappy situation, and indeed it was. None the less, it was one which was bound to arise. In the nature of things a problem of ministry was bound to emerge within the church. In its earliest days the church had three different kinds of ministries.

(i) Unique, and above all others, stood the apostles, those who had companied with Jesus and been witnesses of the resurrection. They were the undisputed leaders of the church. Their writ ran throughout the whole church; in any country and in any congregation their ministry was supreme.

(ii) There were the prophets. They were not attached to any one congregation. They were wandering preachers, going where the Spirit moved them and giving to men the message which the Spirit of God gave to them. They had given up home and occupation and the comfort and security of settled life to be the wandering messengers of God. They, too, had a very special place in the church. The Didache, or, to give it its English name, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, is the earliest book of church order. In it the unique position of the prophets is made clear. The order of service for the Eucharist is laid down and the prayers are given; the service ends with the prayer of thanksgiving which is given in full; and then comes the sentence: "But suffer the prophets to give thanks as much as they will" (Didache 10: 7). The prophets were not to be brought under the rules and regulations which governed ordinary people.

So, then, the church had two sets of people whose authority was not confined to any one congregation and who had right of entry to every congregation.

(iii) There were the elders. During their first missionary journey part of the work of Paul and Barnabas was to ordain elders in all the local churches which they founded (Ac.14:23). The elders were the officials of the settled community; their work was within their congregation and they did not move outside it. It is clear that they were the backbone of the organization of the early church; on them the routine work and the solidity of the individual congregations depended.

THE PROBLEM OF THE WANDERING PREACHERS

The position of the apostles presented no real problem; they were unique and their position could never really be disputed. But the wandering prophets did present a problem. Their position was one which was singularly liable to abuse. They had an enormous prestige; and it was possible for the

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most undesirable characters to enter into a way of life in which they moved from place to place, living in very considerable comfort at the expense of the local congregations. A clever rogue could make a very comfortable living as an itinerant prophet. Even the pagan satirists saw this. Lucian, the Greek writer, in his work called the *Peregrinus*, draws the picture of a man who had found the easiest possible way of making a living without working. He was an itinerant charlatan who lived on the fat of the land by travelling round the various communities of the Christians, settling down wherever he liked and living luxuriously at their expense.

The *Didache* clearly saw this danger and laid down definite regulations to meet it. The regulations are long but so vivid a light do they throw on the life of the early church that they are worth quoting in full (*Didache* 11 and 12).

Whosoever, therefore, shall come and teach you all these things aforesaid, receive him. But if the teacher himself turn and teach another doctrine to pervert, hear him not. But unto the increase of righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. And as touching the apostles and prophets, according to the decree of the gospel, so do ye. But let every apostle that cometh unto you be received as the Lord. And he shall stay one day, and, if need be, the next also, but, if he stay three, he is a false prophet. And, when the apostle goeth forth, let him take nothing save bread, till he reach his lodging, but, if he ask money, he is a false prophet. And every prophet that speaketh in the Spirit ye shall not try nor judge: for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. But not everyone that speaketh in the Spirit is a prophet, but if he has the manners of the Lord. By their manners, therefore, shall the prophet and the false prophet be known. And no prophet who ordereth a table in the Spirit shall eat of it, else he is a false prophet. And every prophet that teacheth the truth, if he doeth not what he teacheth, is a false prophet.... Whosoever shall say in the Spirit: Give me money, or any other thing, ye shall not hearken to him: but, if he bid you give for others who are in need, let no man judge him.

Let everyone that cometh in the name of the Lord be received, and then, when ye have proved him, ye shall know, for ye shall have understanding to distinguish between the right hand and the left. If he that cometh is a passer-by, succour him as far as ye can; but he shall not stay with you longer than two or three days, unless there be necessity. But, if he be minded to settle among you, and be a craftsman, let him work and eat. But, if he hath no trade, according to your understanding, provide that he shall not live idle among you, being a Christian. But, if he will not do this, he is a Christmonger: of such men beware.

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The Didache even invents the word Christmonger, trafficker in Christ, Christemporos, to describe this kind of person.

John was entirely justified in warning his people that the wrong kind of wandering prophets might come claiming hospitality and in saying that they must on no account be received. There is no doubt that in the early church these wandering prophets became a problem. Some of them were heretical teachers, even if they were sincerely convinced of their own teaching. Some were nothing better than plausible rogues who had found an easy way to make a comfortable living. That is the picture which lies behind Second John.

THE CLASH OF MINISTRIES

But the situation behind Third John is in some ways even more serious. The problem figure is Diotrephes. He is the man who will have nothing to do with wandering teachers and who seeks to eject anyone who dares to give them a welcome. He is the man who will not accept the authority of John and whom John brands as a domineering character. There is much more behind this than meets the eye. This was no storm in a tea-cup; it was a fundamental cleavage between the local and the itinerant ministry.

Obviously the whole structure of the church depended on a strong settled ministry. That is to say, its very existence depended on a strong and authoritative eldership. As time went on the settled ministry was bound to chafe under the remote control of even one so famous as John the aged; and to resent the possibly upsetting invasions of wandering prophets and evangelists. It was by no means impossible that, however well-intentioned they were, these itinerants could do far more harm than good.

Here is the situation behind Third John. John represents the old apostolic remote control; Demetrius and his band of missionaries represent the wandering prophets and preachers; Diotrephes represents the settled ministry of the local elders, who wish to run their own congregation and regard the wandering preachers as dangerous intruders; Gaius represents the good, well-meaning man who is torn in two and cannot make up his mind.

What happened in this case, we do not know. But the end of the matter in the church was that the wandering preachers faded from the scene and the apostles in the nature of things passed from this earth, and the settled ministry became the ministry of the church. In a sense even in the modern church the problem of the itinerant evangelist and the settled ministry is not fully solved; but these two little letters are of the most fascinating interest because they show the organization of the church in a transition stage, when the clash between the itinerant and the settled ministry was beginning to emerge and--who knows?--Diotrephes may not have been as bad as he is painted nor altogether wrong.

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3 John 1:1-4

THE TEACHER'S JOY

3 John 1-4

The Elder to Gaius, the beloved, whom I love in truth.

Beloved, I pray that everything is going well with you, and that you are in good health of body, as it goes well with your soul. It gave me great joy when certain brothers came and testified of the truth of your life, as indeed you do walk in the truth. No news brings me greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

No New Testament letter better shows that the Christian letters were exactly on the model which all letter-writers used in the time of the early church. There is a papyrus letter from Irenaeus, a ship's captain, to his brother Apolinarius:

Irenaeus to Apolinarius his brother, my greetings. Continually I pray that you may be in health, even as I myself am in health. I wish you to know that I arrived at land on the 6th of the month Epeiph, and I finished unloading my ship on the 18th of the same month, and went up to Rome on the 25th of the same month, and the place welcomed us, as God willed. Daily we are waiting for our discharge, so that up till today no one of us in the corn service has been allowed to go. I greet your wife much, and Serenus, and all who love you, by name. Good bye.

The form of Irenaeus' letter is exactly that of John's. There is first the greeting, next the prayer for good health, after that the main body of the letter with its news, and then the final greetings. The early Christian letters were not something remote and ecclesiastical; they were the kind of letters which people wrote to each other every day.

John writes to a friend called Gaius. In the world of the New Testament Gaius was the commonest of all names. In the New Testament there are three men with that name. There is Gaius, the Macedonian who, along with Aristarchus, was with Paul at the riot in Ephesus (Ac.19:29). There is Gaius of Derbe, who was the delegate of his church to convey the collection for the poor to Jerusalem (Ac.20:4). There is the Gaius of Corinth who had been Paul's host, and who was such a hospitable soul that he could be called the host of the whole church (Rom.16:23), and who was one of the very few people whom Paul had personally baptized (1Cor.1:14), and who, according to tradition, became the first Bishop of Thessalonica. Gaius was the commonest of all names; and there is no reason to identify our Gaius with any of these three. According to tradition he was made the Bishop of Pergamum by John himself. Here he stands before us as a man with an open house and an open heart.

Twice in the first two verses of this little letter John uses the word beloved. (The well-beloved and beloved of the King James Version's first two verses translate the same Greek word, *agapetos*, GSN0027.) In this group of letters John uses *agapetos* (GSN0027) no fewer than ten times. This is

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3 John 1:1-4

a very notable fact. These letters are letters of warning and rebuke; and yet their accent is the accent of love. It was the advice of a great scholar and preacher: "Never scold your congregation." Even if he has to rebuke, John never speaks with irritation. The whole atmosphere of his writing is that of love.

3Jn.2 shows us the comprehensive care of the good and devoted pastor. John is interested both in the physical and the spiritual health of Gaius. John was like Jesus; he never forgot that men have bodies as well as souls and that they matter, too.

In 3Jn.4 John tells us of the teacher's greatest joy. It is to see his pupils walking in the truth. The truth is not simply something to be intellectually assimilated; it is the knowledge which fills a man's mind and the charity which clothes his life. The truth is what makes a man think and act like God.

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3 John 1:5-8

CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

3 John 5-8 (Part 1)

Beloved, whatever service you render to the brothers, strangers as they are, is an act of true faith and they testify to your love before the church. It will be a further kindness, if you send them on their way worthily of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the Name and they take no assistance from pagans. It is a duty to support such men, that we may show ourselves fellow-workers with the truth.

Here we come to John's main object in writing. A group of travelling missionaries is on its way to the church of which Gaius is a member, and John urges him to receive them, to give them every support and to send them on their way in a truly Christian manner.

In the ancient world hospitality was a sacred duty. Strangers were under the protection of Zeus Xenios, Zeus the god of strangers (Xenos, GSN3581, is the Greek for a stranger). In the ancient world inns were notoriously unsatisfactory. The Greek had an instinctive dislike of taking money for the giving of hospitality; and, therefore, the profession of innkeeper ranked very low. Inns were notoriously dirty and flea-infested. Innkeepers were notoriously rapacious so that Plato compared them to pirates who hold their guests to ransom before they allow them to escape. The ancient world had a system of guest-friendships whereby families in different parts of the country undertook to give each other's members hospitality when the occasion arose. This connection between families lasted throughout the generations and when it was claimed, the claimant brought with him a sunbolon, or token, which identified him to his hosts.

Some cities kept an official called the Proxenos in the larger cities to whom their citizens, when travelling, might appeal for shelter and for help.

If the heathen world accepted the obligation of hospitality, it was only to be expected that the Christians would take it even more seriously. It is Peter's injunction: "Practise hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1Pet.4:9). "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers" says the writer to the Hebrews, and adds: "for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb.13:2). In the Pastoral Epistles a widow is to be honoured if she has "shown hospitality" (1Tim.5:9). Paul bids the Romans to "practise hospitality" (Rom.12:13).

Hospitality was to be specially the characteristic of the leaders of the church. A bishop must be a man given to hospitality (1Tim.3:2). Titus is told to be "hospitable" (Tit.1:8). When we come down to the time of Justin Martyr, (A.D. 170) we find that on the Lord's Day the well-to-do contributed as they would and it was the duty of the president of the congregation "to succour the orphans and the widows, and those who through sickness or any other cause are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning amongst us" (Justin Martyr: First Apology 1: 67).

In the early church the Christian home was the place of the open door and the loving welcome. There can be few nobler works than to give a stranger the right of entry to a Christian home. The Christian family circle should always be wide enough to have a place for the stranger, no matter where he comes from or what his colour.

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3 John 1:5-8

THE CHRISTIAN ADVENTURERS

3 John 5-8 (Part 2)

Further, this passage tells us about the wandering missionaries who gave up home and comfort to carry afield the word of God. In 3Jn.7 Paul says that they have gone forth for the sake of the Name and take no assistance from pagans. (It is just possible that 3Jn.7 might refer to those who had come out from the Gentiles taking nothing with them, those who for the sake of Christianity had left their work and their home and their friends and had no means of support.) In the ancient world the "begging friar," with his wallet, was well known. There is, for instance, a record of a man calling himself "the slave of the Syrian goddess," who went out begging and claimed that he never came back with fewer than seventy bags of money for his goddess. But these Christian wandering preachers would take nothing from the Gentiles, even if they would have given it.

John commends these adventurers of the faith to the hospitality and the generosity of Gaius. He says that it is a duty to help them so that we may show ourselves fellow-workers in the truth (3Jn.8). Moffatt translates this very vividly: "We are bound to support such men to prove ourselves allies of the truth."

There is a great Christian thought here. A man's circumstances may be such that he cannot become a missionary or a preacher. Life may have put him in a position where he must get on with a secular job, staying in the one place and carrying out the routine duties of life and living. But where he cannot go, his money and his prayers and his practical support can go. Not everyone can be, so to speak, in the front line; but by supporting those who are there, he can make himself an ally of the truth. When we remember that, all giving to the wider work of Christ and his church must become not an obligation but a privilege, not a duty but a delight. The church needs those who will go out with the truth, but it also needs those who will be allies of the truth at home.

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3 John 1:9-15

LOVE'S APPEAL

3 John 9-15

I have already written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who is ambitious for the leadership, does not accept our authority. So, then, when I come, I will bring up the matter of his actions, for he talks nonsensically about us with wicked words; he refuses to receive the brothers and attempts to stop those who wish to do so and tries to eject them from the church.

Beloved do not imitate the evil but the good. He who does good has the source of his life in God; he who does evil has not seen God.

Everybody testifies to the worth of Demetrius, and so does the truth itself; and so do we testify, and you know that our testimony is true.

I have many things to write to you; but I do not wish to write to you with ink and pen. I hope to see you soon, and we shall talk face to face.

Peace be to you. The friends send their greetings. Greet the friends by name.

Here we come to the reason why this letter was written and are introduced to two of the main characters in the story.

There is Diotrephes. In the introduction we have already seen the situation in which John and Diotrephes and Demetrius are all involved. In the early church there was a double ministry. There were the apostles and the prophets whose sphere was not confined to any one congregation and whose authority extended all over the church. There were also the elders; they were the permanent settled ministry of the local congregations and their very backbone.

In the early days this presented no problem, for the local congregations were still very much infants who had not yet learned to walk by themselves and to handle their own affairs. But as time went on there came a tension between the two kinds of ministry. As the local churches became stronger and more conscious of their identity, they inevitably became less and less willing to submit to remote control or to the invasion of itinerant strangers.

The problem is still to some extent with us. There is the itinerant evangelist who may well have a theology and work with methods and in an atmosphere very different from that of the settled local congregation. In the younger churches there is the question of how long the missionaries should remain in control and of when the time has come for them to withdraw and allow the indigenous churches to rule their own affairs.

In this letter Diotrephes is the representative of the local congregation. He will not accept the authority of John, the apostolic man and he will not receive the itinerant missionaries. He is so determined to see that the local congregation manages its own affairs that he will even eject those who are still prepared to accept the authority of John and to receive the wandering preachers. What

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3 John 1:9-15

exactly Diotrephes is we cannot tell. He certainly is not a bishop in anything like the modern sense of the word. He may be a very strong-minded elder. Or he may even be an aggressive member of the congregation who by the force of his personality is sweeping all before him. Certainly he emerges as a strong and dominant character.

Demetrius is most likely the leader of the wandering preachers and probably the actual bearer of this letter. John goes out of his way to give him a testimonial as to character and ability, and it may well be that there are certain circumstances attaching to him which give Diotrephes a handle for his opposition.

Demetrius is by no means an uncommon name. Attempts have been made to identify him with two New Testament characters. He has been identified with Demetrius, the silversmith of Ephesus and the leader of the opposition to Paul (Ac.19:21ff.). It may be that he afterwards became a Christian and that his early opposition was still a black mark against him. He has been identified with Demas (a shortened form of Demetrius), who had once been one of Paul's fellow-labourers but who had forsaken him because he loved this present world (Col.4:14; Phm.24; 2Tim.4:10). It may be that Demas came back to the faith and that his desertion of Paul was always held against him.

Into this situation comes John, whose authority is being flouted; and Gaius, a kindly soul but probably not so strong a character as the aggressive Diotrephes, whom John is seeking to align with himself, for Gaius, left on his own, might well succumb to Diotrephes.

There is our situation. We may have a good deal of sympathy with Diotrephes; we may well think that he was taking a stand which sooner or later had to be taken. But for all his strength of character he had one fault--he was lacking in charity. As C. H. Dodd has put it: "There is no real religious experience which does not express itself in charity." That is why, for all his powers of leadership and for all his dominance of character, Diotrephes was not a real Christian, as John saw it. The true Christian leader must always remember that strength and gentleness must go together and that leading and loving must go hand in hand. Diotrephes was like so many leaders in the church. He may well have been right, but he took the wrong way to achieve his end, for no amount of strength of mind can take the place of love of heart.

What the issue of all this was we do not know. But John comes to the end in love. Soon he will come and talk, when his presence will do what no letter can ever do; and for the present he sends his greetings and his blessing. And we may well believe that the "Peace be to you" of the aged Elder indeed brought calm to the troubled church to which he wrote.

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Introduction to Jude

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER OF JUDE

THE DIFFICULT AND NEGLECTED LETTER

It may well be said that for the great majority of modern readers reading the little letter of Jude is a bewildering rather than a profitable undertaking. There are two verses which everyone knows-- the resounding and magnificent doxology with which it ends:

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.

But, apart from these two great verses, Jude is largely unknown and seldom read. The reason for its difficulty is that it is written out of a background of thought, against the challenge of a situation, in pictures and with quotations, which are all quite strange to us. Beyond a doubt it would hit those who read it for the first time like a hammer-blow. It would be like a trumpet call to defend the faith. Moffatt calls Jude "a fiery cross to rouse the churches." But, as J. B. Mayor, one of its greatest editors, has said: "To a modern reader it is curious rather than edifying with the exception of the beginning and the end."

This is one of the great reasons for addressing ourselves to the study of Jude; for, when we understand Jude's thought and disentangle the situation against which he was writing, his letter becomes of the greatest interest for the history of the earliest church and by no means without relevance for today. There have indeed been times in the history of the church, and especially in its revivals when Jude was not far from being the most relevant book in the New Testament. Let us begin by simply setting down the substance of the letter without waiting for the explanations which must follow later.

MEETING THE THREAT

It had been Jude's intention to write a treatise on the faith which all Christians share; but that task had to be laid aside in view of the rise of men whose conduct and thought were a threat to the Christian Church (Jd.3). In view of this situation the need was not so much to expound the faith as to rally Christians in its defence. Certain men who had insinuated themselves into the church were busily engaged in turning the grace of God into an excuse for open immorality and were denying the only true God and Jesus Christ the Lord (Jd.4). These men were immoral in life and heretical in belief.

THE WARNINGS

Against these men Jude marshals his warnings. Let them remember the fate of the Israelites. They had been brought in safety out of Egypt but they had never been permitted to enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief (Jd.5). The reference is to Num.13:26-33; Num.14:1-29. Although a

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man had received the grace of God, he might still lose his eternal salvation if he drifted into disobedience and unbelief. Some angels with the glory of heaven as their own had come to earth and corrupted mortal women with their lust (Gen.6:2); and now they were imprisoned in the abyss of darkness, awaiting judgment (Jd.6). He who rebels against God must look for judgment. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah had given themselves over to lust and to unnatural vice, and their destruction in flames is a dreadful warning to everyone who similarly goes astray (Jd.7).

THE EVIL LIFE

These men are visionaries of evil dreams; they defile their flesh; and they speak evil of the angels (Jd.8). Not even Michael the archangel, dare speak evil even of the evil angels. It had been given to Michael to bury the body of Moses. The devil had tried to stop him and claim the body for himself. Michael had spoken no evil against the devil, even in circumstances like that, but had simply said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jd.9). Angels must be respected, even when evil and hostile. These evil men condemn everything which they do not understand, and spiritual things are beyond their understanding. They do understand their fleshly instincts and allow themselves to be governed by them as the brute beasts do (Jd.10).

They are like Cain, the cynical, selfish murderer; they are like Balaam, whose one desire was for gain and who led the people into sin; they are like Korah, who rebelled against the legitimate authority of Moses and was swallowed up by the earth for his arrogant disobedience (Jd.11).

They are like the hidden rocks on which a ship may founder; they have their own clique in which they consort with people like themselves, and thus destroy Christian fellowship; they deceive others with their promises, like clouds which promise the longed-for rain and then pass over the sky; they are like fruitless and rootless trees, which have no harvest of good fruit; as the foaming spray of the waves casts the sea-weed and the wreckage on the beaches, they foam out shameless deeds; they are like disobedient stars who refuse to keep their appointed orbit and are doomed to the dark (Jd.13). Long ago the prophet Enoch had described these men and had prophesied their divine destruction (Jd.15). They murmur against all true authority and discipline as the children of Israel murmured against Moses in the desert; they are discontented with the lot which God has appointed to them; their lusts are their dictators; their speech is arrogant and proud; they are toadies of the great for sake of gain (Jd.16).

WORDS TO THE FAITHFUL

Having castigated the evil men with this torrent of invective, Jude turns to the faithful. They could have expected all this to happen, for the apostles of Jesus Christ had foretold the rise of evil men (Jd.18-19). But the duty of the true Christian is to build his life on the foundation of the most holy faith; to learn to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit; to remember the conditions of the covenant into which the love of God has called him; to wait for the mercy of Jesus Christ (Jd.20-21).

As for the false thinkers and the loose livers--some of them may be saved with pity while they are still hesitating on the brink of their evil ways; others have to be snatched like brands from the

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burning; and, in all his rescue work, the Christian must have that godly fear which will love the sinner but hate the sin and must avoid the pollution of those he seeks to save (Jd.22-23).

And all the time there will be with him the power of that God who can keep him from falling and bring him pure and joyful into his presence (Jd.24-25).

THE HERETICS

Who were the heretics whom Jude blasts, and what were their beliefs and what their way of life? Jude never tells us. He was not a theologian but, as Moffatt says, "a plain, honest leader of the church." "He denounces rather than describes" the heresies he attacks. He does not seek to argue and to refute, for he writes as one "who knows when round indignation is more telling than argument." But from the letter itself we can deduce three things about these heretics.

(i) They were antinomians. Antinomians have existed in every age of the church. They are people who pervert grace. Their position is that the law is dead and they are under grace. The prescriptions of the law may apply to other people, but they no longer apply to them. They can do absolutely what they like. Grace is supreme; it can forgive any sin; the more the sin, the more the opportunities for grace to abound (Rom.6). The body is of no importance; what matters is the inward heart of man. All things belong to Christ, and, therefore, all things are theirs. And so for them there is nothing forbidden.

So Jude's heretics turn the grace of God into an excuse for flagrant immorality (Jd.4); they even practise shameless unnatural vices, as the people of Sodom did (Jd.7). They defile the flesh and think it no sin (Jd.8). They allow their brute instincts to rule their lives (Jd.10). With their sensual ways, they are like to make shipwreck of the love feasts of the church (Jd.12). It is by their own lusts that they direct their lives (Jd.16).

MODERN EXAMPLES OF THE ANCIENT HERESY

It is a curious and tragic fact of history that the church has never been entirely free of this antinomianism; and it is natural that it has flourished most in the ages when the wonder of grace was being rediscovered.

It appeared in the Ranters of the seventeenth century. The Ranters were pantheists and antinomians. A pantheist believes that God is everything; literally all things are Christ's, and Christ is the end of the law. They talked of "Christ within them," and paid no heed to the church or its ministry, and belittled scripture. One of them called Bottomley wrote: "It is not safe to go to the Bible to see what others have spoken and written of the mind of God as to see what God speaks within me, and to follow the doctrine and leading of it in me." When George Fox rebuked them for their lewd practices, they answered, "We are God." This may sound very fine, but, as John Wesley was to say, it most often resulted in "a gospel of the flesh." It was their argument that "swearing, adultery, drunkenness and theft are not sinful unless the person guilty of them apprehends them to be so." When Fox was a prisoner at Charing Cross they came to see him and mightily offended him by calling for drink and tobacco.

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They swore terribly and when Fox rebuked them, justified themselves by saying that Scripture tells us that Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the priests, and the angel all swore. To which Fox replied that he who was before Abraham commanded, "Swear not at all." Richard Baxter said of them, "They conjoined a cursed doctrine of libertinism, which brought them to all abominable filthiness of life; they taught ...that God regardeth not the actions of the outward man, but of the heart; and that to the pure all things are pure (even things forbidden) and so, as allowed by God, they spoke most hideous words of blasphemy, and many of them committed whoredoms commonly.... The horrid villainies of this sect did speedily extinguish it." Doubtless many of the Ranters were insane; doubtless some of them were pernicious and deliberate sensualists; but doubtless, too, some of them were earnest but misguided men, who had misunderstood the meaning of grace and freedom from the law.

Later John Wesley was to have trouble with the antinomians. He talks of them preaching a gospel of flesh and blood. At Jenninghall he says that "the antinomians had laboured hard in the Devil's service." At Birmingham he says that "the fierce, unclean, brutish, blasphemous antinomians" had utterly destroyed the spiritual life of the congregation. He tells of a certain Roger Ball who insinuated himself into the life of the congregation at Dublin. At first he seemed to be so spiritually-minded a man that the congregation welcomed him as being preeminently suited for the service and ministry of the church. He showed himself in time to be "full of guile and of the most abominable errors, one of which was that a believer had a right to all women." He would not communicate, for under grace a man must "touch not, taste not, handle not." He would not preach and abandoned the church services because, he said, "The dear Lamb is the only preacher."

Wesley, deliberately to show the position of these antinomians, related in his Journal a conversation which he had with one of them at Birmingham. It ran as follows. "Do you believe that you have nothing to do with the law of God?" "I have not; I am not under the law; I live by faith." "Have you, as living by faith, a right to everything in the world?" "I have. All is mine, since Christ is mine." "May you then take anything you will anywhere? Suppose out of a shop without the consent or knowledge of the owner?" "I may, if I want, for it is mine. Only I will not give offence." "Have you a right to all the women in the world?" "Yes, if they consent." "And is not that a sin?" "Yes, to him who thinks it is a sin; but not to those whose hearts are free."

Repeatedly Wesley had to meet these people, as George Fox had to meet them. John Bunyan, too, came up against the Ranters who claimed complete freedom from the moral law and looked with contempt on the ethics of the stricter Christian. "These would condemn me as legal and dark, pretending that they only had attained perfection that could do what they would and not sin." One of them, whom Bunyan knew, "gave himself up to all manner of filthiness, especially uncleanness...and would laugh at all exhortations to sobriety. When I laboured to rebuke his wickedness, he would laugh the more."

Jude's heretics have existed in every Christian generation and, even if they do not go all the way, there are still many who in their heart of hearts trade upon God's forgiveness and make his grace an excuse to sin.

THE DENIAL OF GOD AND OF JESUS CHRIST

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(ii) Of the antinomianism and blatant immorality of the heretics whom Jude condemns there is no doubt. The other two faults with which he charges them are not so obvious in their meaning. He charges them with, as the Revised Standard Version has it, "denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jd.4). The closing doxology is to "the only God," a phrase which occurs again in Rom.16:27; 1Tim.1:17; 1Tim.6:15. The reiteration of the word only is significant. If Jude talks about our only Master and Lord and, about the only God, it is natural to assume that there must have been those who questioned the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and of God. Can we trace any such line of thought in the early church and, if so, does it fit in with any other evidence which hints within the letter itself may supply?

As so often in the New Testament, we are again in contact with that type of thought which came to be known as Gnosticism. Its basic idea was that this was a dualistic universe, a universe with two eternal principles in it. From the beginning of time there had always been spirit and matter. Spirit was essentially good; matter was essentially evil. Out of this flawed matter the world was created. Now God is pure spirit and, therefore, could not possibly handle this essentially evil matter. How then was creation effected? God put out a series of aeons or emanations; each of these aeons was farther away from him. At the end of this long chain, remote from God, there was an aeon who was able to touch matter; and it was this aeon, this distant and secondary god, who actually created the world.

Nor was this all that was in Gnostic thought. As the aeons in the series grew more distant from God, they grew more ignorant of him; and also grew more hostile to him. The creating aeon, at the end of the series, was at once totally ignorant of and totally hostile to God.

Having got that length, the Gnostics took another step. They identified the true God with the God of the New Testament and they identified the secondary, ignorant and hostile god with the God of the Old Testament. As they saw it, the God of creation was a different being from the God of revelation and redemption. Christianity on the other hand believes in the only God, the one God of creation, providence and redemption.

This was the Gnostic explanation of sin. It was because creation was carried out, in the first place, from evil matter and, in the second place, by an ignorant god, that sin and suffering and all imperfection existed.

This Gnostic line of thought had one curious, but perfectly logical, result. If the God of the Old Testament was ignorant of and hostile to the true God, it must follow that the people whom that ignorant God hurt were in fact good people. Clearly the hostile God would be hostile to the people who were the true servants of the true God. The Gnostics, therefore, so to speak, turned the Old Testament upside down and regarded its heroes as villains and its villains as heroes. So there was a sect of these Gnostics called Ophites, because they worshipped the serpent of Eden; and there were those who regarded Cain and Korah and Balaam as great heroes. It is these very people whom Jude uses as tragic and terrible examples of sin.

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So we may take it that the heretics whom Jude attacks are Gnostics who denied the oneness of God, who regarded the God of creation as different from the God of redemption, who saw in the Old Testament God an ignorant enemy of the true God and who, therefore, turned the Old Testament upside down to regard its sinners as servants of the true God and its saints as servants of the hostile God.

Not only did these heretics deny the oneness of God, they also denied "our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ." That is to say, they denied the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. How does that fit in with the Gnostic ideas so far as they are known to us? We have seen that, according to Gnostic belief, God put out a series of aeons between himself and the world. The Gnostics regarded Jesus Christ as one of these aeons. They did not regard him as our only, Master and Lord; he was only one among the many who were links between God and man, although he might be the highest and the closest of all.

There is still one other hint about these heretics in Jude, a hint which also fits in with what we know about the Gnostics. In Jd.19, Jude describes them as "these who set up divisions." The heretics introduce some kind of class distinctions within the fellowship of the Church. What were these distinctions?

We have seen that between man and God there stretched an infinite series of aeons. The aim of man must be to achieve contact with God. To obtain this his soul must traverse this infinite series of links between God and man. The Gnostics held that to achieve this a very special and esoteric knowledge was required. So deep was this knowledge that only very few could attain to it.

The Gnostics, therefore, divided men into two classes, the pneumatikoi (GSN4152) and the psuchikoi (GSN5591). The pneuma (GSN4151) was the spirit of man, that which made him kin to God--and the pneumatikoi (GSN4152) were the spiritual people, the people whose spirits were so highly developed and intellectual that they were able to climb the long ladder and reach God. These pneumatikoi (GSN4152), the Gnostics claimed, were so spiritually and intellectually equipped that they could become as good as Jesus--Irenaeus says that some of them believed that the pneumatikoi (GSN4152) could become better than Jesus and attain direct union with God.

On the other hand, the psuche (GSN5590) was simply the principle of physical life. All things which live had psuche (GSN5590); it was something which man shared with the animal creation and even with growing plants. The psuchikoi (GSN5591) were ordinary people; they had physical life but their pneuma (GSN4151) was undeveloped and they were incapable of ever gaining the intellectual wisdom which would enable them to climb the long road to God. The pneumatikoi (GSN4152) were a very small and select minority; the psuchikoi (GSN5591) were the vast majority of ordinary people.

It is clear to see that this kind of belief was inevitably productive of spiritual snobbery and pride. It introduced into the church the worst kind of class distinction.

So, then, the heretics whom Jude attacks were men who denied the oneness of God and split him into an ignorant creating God and a truly spiritual God; who denied the uniqueness of Jesus Christ

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and saw him as only one of the links between God and man; who erected class distinctions within the church and limited fellowship with God to the intellectual few.

THE DENIAL OF THE ANGELS

(iii) It is further inferred that these heretics denied and insulted the angels. It is said they "reject authority, and revile the glorious ones" (Jd.8). The words "authority" and "glorious ones" describe ranks in the Jewish hierarchy of angels. Jd.9 is a reference to a story in the Assumption of Moses. It is there told that Michael was given the task of burying the body of Moses. The devil tried to stop him and claim the body. Michael made no charge against the devil and said nothing against him. He said only, "The Lord rebuke you!" If Michael, the archangel, on such an occasion said nothing against the prince of evil angels, clearly no man can speak ill of the angels.

The Jewish belief in angels was very elaborate. Every nation had its protecting angel. Every person, even every child, had its angel. All the forces of nature, the wind and the sea and the fire and all the others, were under the control of angels. It could even be said "Every blade of grass has its angel." Clearly the heretics attacked the angels. It is likely that they said that the angels were the servants of the ignorant and hostile creator God and that a Christian must have nothing to do with them. We cannot quite be sure what lies behind this, but to all their other errors the heretics added the despising of the angels; and to Jude this seemed an evil thing.

JUDE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

We must now examine the questions regarding the date and the authorship of Jude.

Jude had some difficulty in getting into the New Testament at all; it is one of the books whose position was always insecure and which were late in gaining full acceptance as part of the New Testament. Let us briefly set out the opinions of the great fathers and scholars of the early church about it.

Jude is included in the Muratorian Canon, which dates to about A.D. 170, and may be regarded as the first semi-official list of the books accepted by the Church. The inclusion of Jude is strange when we remember that the Muratorian Canon does not include in its list Hebrews and First Peter. But thereafter Jude is for long spoken of with a doubt. In the middle of the third century Origen knew and used it, but he was well aware that there were many who questioned its right to be scripture. Eusebius, the great scholar of the middle of the fourth century, made a deliberate examination of the position of the various books which were in use and he classes Jude amongst the books which are disputed.

Jerome, who produced the Vulgate, had his doubts about Jude; and it is in him that we find one of the reasons for the hesitation which was felt towards it. The strange thing about Jude is the way in which it quotes as authorities books which are outside the Old Testament. It uses as scripture certain books which were written between the Old and the New Testaments and were never generally regarded as scripture. Here are two definite instances. The reference in Jd.9 to Michael disputing with the devil about the body of Moses is taken from an apocryphal book called The

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Assumption of Moses. In Jd.14-15 Jude confirms his argument with a quotation from prophecy, as, indeed, is the habit of all the New Testament writers; but Jude's quotation is, in fact, taken from the Book of Enoch, which he appears to regard as scripture.

Jerome tells us that it was Jude's habit of using non-scriptural books as scripture which made some people regard him with suspicion; and towards the end of the third century in Alexandria it was from the very same charge that Didymus defended him. It is perhaps the strangest thing in Jude that he uses these non-scriptural books as other New Testament writers use the prophets; and in Jd.17-18 he makes use of a saying of the apostles which is not identifiable at all.

Jude, then, was one of the books which took a long time to gain an assured place in the New Testament; but by the fourth century its place was secure.

THE DATE

There are definite indications that Jude is not an early book. It speaks of the faith that was once delivered to the saints (Jd.3). That way of speaking seems to look back a long way and to come from the time when there was a body of belief which was orthodoxy. In Jd.17-18 he urges his people to remember the words of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. That seems to come from a time when the apostles were no longer there and the Church was looking back on their teaching. The atmosphere of Jude is of a book which looks back.

Beside that we have to set the fact that, as it seems to us, Second Peter makes use of Jude to a very large extent. Anyone can see that its second chapter has the closest possible connection with Jude. It is quite certain that one of these writers was borrowing from the other. On general grounds it is much more likely that the author of Second Peter would incorporate the whole of Jude into his work than that Jude would, for no apparent reason, take over only one section of Second Peter. Now, if we believe that Second Peter uses it, Jude cannot be very late, even if it is not early.

It is true that Jude looks back on the apostles; but it is also true that, with the exception of John, all the apostles were dead by A.D. 70. Taking together the fact that Jude looks back on the apostles and the fact that Second Peter uses it, a date about A.D. 80 to 90 would suit the writing of Jude.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF JUDE

Who was this Jude, or Judas, who wrote this letter? He calls himself the servant of Jesus Christ and the brother of James. In the New Testament there are five people called Judas.

(i) There is the Judas of Damascus in whose house Paul was praying after his conversion on the Damascus road (Ac.9:11).

(ii) There is Judas Barsabas, a leading figure in the councils of the church who, along with Silas, was the bearer to Antioch of the decision of the Council of Jerusalem when the door of the church was opened to the Gentiles (Ac.15:22,27,32). This Judas was also a prophet (Ac.15:32).

(iii) There is Judas Iscariot.

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None of these three has ever seriously been considered as the author of this letter.

(iv) There is the second Judas in the apostolic band. John calls him Judas, not Iscariot (Jn.14:22). In Luke's list of the Twelve there is an apostle whom the King James Version calls Judas the brother of James (Lk.6:16; Ac.1:13). If we were to depend solely on the King James Version we might well think that here we have a serious candidate for the authorship of this letter, and, indeed, Tertullian calls the writer the Apostle Judas. But in the Greek this man is simply called Judas of James. This is a very common idiom in Greek and almost always it means not brother of, but son of; so that Judas of James in the list of the Twelve is not Judas the brother of James but Judas the son of James, as all the newer translations show.

(v) There is the Judas who was the brother of Jesus (Matt.13:55; Mk.6:3). If any of the New Testament Judases is the writer of this letter, it must be this one, for only he could truly be called the brother of James.

Is this little letter to be taken as a letter of the Judas who was the brother of our Lord? If so, it would give it a special interest. But there are objections.

(i) If Jude to use the form of his name with which we are familiar--was the brother of Jesus, why does he not say so? Why does he identify himself as Jude the brother of James rather than as Jude the brother of Jesus? It would surely be explanation enough to say that he shrank from taking so great a title of honour to himself. Even if it was true that he was the brother of Jesus, he might well prefer in humility to call himself his servant, for Jesus was not only his brother but his Lord. Further, Jude the brother of James would in all probability never be outside Palestine in all his life. The church he would know would be that at Jerusalem, and of that church James was the undoubted head. If he was writing to churches in Palestine, his relationship to James was the natural thing to stress. When we come to think of it, it would be more surprising that Jude should call himself the brother of Jesus than that he should call himself the servant of Jesus Christ.

(ii) It is objected that Jude calls himself the servant of Jesus Christ and thereby calls himself an apostle. "Servants of God" was the Old Testament title for the prophets. God would not do anything without revealing it first to his servants the prophets (Am.3:7). What had been a prophetic title in the Old Testament became an apostolic title in the New Testament. Paul speaks of himself as the servant of Jesus Christ (Rom.1:1; Php.1:1). He is spoken of as the servant of God in the Pastoral Epistles (Tit.1:1), and that is also the title which James takes to himself (Jas.1:1). It is concluded, therefore, that by calling himself "the Servant of Jesus Christ" Jude is claiming to be an apostle.

There are two answers to that. First, the title servant of Jesus Christ is not confined to the Twelve, for it is given by Paul to Timothy (Php.1:1). Second, even if it is regarded as a title confined to the apostles in the wider sense of the word, we find the brethren of the Lord associated with the eleven after the Ascension (Ac.1:14), and Jude, like James, may well have been among them; and we learn that the brothers of Jesus were prominent in the missionary work of the Church (1Cor.9:5). Such evidence as we have would tend to prove that Jude, the brother of our Lord, was one of the apostolic circle and that the title servant of Jesus Christ is perfectly applicable to him.

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(iii) It is argued that the Jude of Palestine, who was the brother of Jesus, could not have written the Greek of this letter as he would be an Aramaic speaker. That is not a safe argument. Jude would certainly know Greek, for it was the lingua franca of the ancient world, which all men spoke in addition to their own language. The Greek of Jude is rugged and forceful; it might well be within Jude's competence to write it for himself and, even if he could not do so, he may well have had a helper and translator such as Peter had in Silvanus.

(iv) It might be argued that the heresy which Jude is attacking is Gnosticism and that Gnosticism is much more a Greek than a Jewish way of thought--and what would Jude of Palestine be doing writing to Greeks? But an odd fact about this heresy is that it is the very opposite of orthodox Judaism. The controller of all Jewish action was the sacred law; basic belief of Jewish religion was that there was one God; the Jewish belief in angels was highly developed. It is by no means difficult to suppose that when certain Jews entered the Christian faith, they swung to the other extreme. It is easy to imagine a Jew who had all his life been in servitude to the law suddenly discovering grace and plunging into antinomianism as a reaction against his former legalism; and reacting similarly against the traditional Jewish belief in one God and in angels. It is, in fact, easy to see in the heretics whom Jude attacks Jews who had come into the Christian Church rather as renegades from Judaism than as truly convinced Christians.

(v) Lastly, it might be argued that, if this letter had been known to have been the work of Jude the brother of Jesus, it would not have been so long in gaining an entry into the New Testament. But before the end of the first century the church was largely Gentile and the Jews were regarded as the enemies and the slanderers of the church. During his life-time Jesus' brothers had in fact been his enemies; and it could well have happened that a letter as Jewish as Jude might have had a struggle against prejudice to get into the New Testament, even if its author was the brother of Jesus.

JUDE THE BROTHER OF JESUS

If this letter is not the work of Jude, the brother of Jesus, what are the alternatives suggested? On the whole, they are two.

(i) The letter is the work of a man called Jude of whom nothing is otherwise known. This theory has to meet a twofold difficulty. First, there is the coincidence that this Jude is also the brother of James. Second, it is hard to explain how so small a letter ever came to have any authority at all, if it is the work of someone quite unknown.

(ii) The letter is pseudonymous. That is to say, it was written by someone else and then attached to the name of Jude. That was a common practice in the ancient world. Between the Old and New Testament scores of books were written and attached to the names of Moses, Enoch, Baruch, Isaiah, Solomon and many an other. No one saw anything wrong in that. But two things are to be noted about Jude.

(a) In all such publications the name to which the book was attached was a famous name; but Jude, the brother of our Lord, was a person who was completely obscure; he is not numbered

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amongst the great names of the early church. There is a story that in the days of Domitian there was a deliberate attempt to see to it that Christianity did not spread. News came to the Roman authority that certain descendants of Jesus were still alive, amongst them the grandsons of Jude. The Romans felt that it was possible that rebellion might gather around these men and they were ordered to appear before the Roman courts. When they did so, they were seen to be horny-handed sons of toil and were dismissed as being unimportant and quite harmless. Obviously Jude was Jude the obscure and there could have been no possible reason for attaching a book to the name of a man whom nobody knew.

(b) When a book was written pseudonymously, the reader was never left in any doubt as to the person whose name it was being attached to. If this letter had been issued as the work of Judas the brother of our Lord, he would certainly have been given that title in such a way that no one could mistake it; and yet, in fact, it is quite unclear who the author is.

Jude is obviously Jewish; its references and allusions are such that only a Jew could understand. It is simple and rugged; it is vivid and pictorial. It is clearly the work of a simple thinker rather than of a theologian. It fits Jude the brother of our Lord. It is attached to his name, and there could be no reason for so attaching it unless he did in fact write it.

It is our opinion that this little letter is actually the work of Judas, the brother of Jesus.

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Jude 1:1-2

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN

Jude 1-2 (Part 1)

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and the brother of James, sends this letter to the called who are beloved in God and kept by Jesus Christ. May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.

Few things tell more about a man than the way in which he speaks of himself; few things are more revealing than the titles by which he wishes to be known. Jude calls himself the servant of Jesus Christ and the brother of James. At once this tells us two things about him.

(i) Jude was a man well content with the second place. He was not nearly so well known as James; and he is content to be known as the brother of James. In this he was the same as Andrew. Andrew is Simon Peter's brother (Jn.6:8). He, too, was described by his relationship to a more famous brother. Jude and Andrew might well have been resentful of the brothers in whose shadow they had to live; but both had the great gift of gladly taking the second place.

(ii) The only title of honour which Jude would allow himself was the servant of Jesus Christ. The Greek is *doulos* (GSN1401), and it means more than servant, it means slave. That is to say, Jude regarded himself as having only one object and one distinction in life--to be for ever at the disposal of Jesus for service in his cause. The greatest glory which any Christian can attain is to be of use to Jesus Christ.

In this introduction Jude uses three words to describe Christians.

(i) Christians are those who are called by God. The Greek for to call is *kalein* (GSN2564); and *kalein* (GSN2564) has three great areas of use. (a) It is the word for summoning a man to office, to duty, and to responsibility. The Christian is summoned to a task, to duty, to responsibility in the service of Christ. (b) It is the word for summoning a man to a feast or a festival. It is the word for an invitation to a happy occasion. The Christian is the man who is summoned to the joy of being the guest of God. (c) It is the word for summoning a man to judgment. It is the word for calling a man to court that he may give account of himself. The Christian is in the end summoned to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

(ii) Christians are those who are beloved in God. It is this great fact which determines the nature of the call. The call to men is the call to be loved and to love. God calls men to a task, but that task is an honour, not a burden. God calls men to service, but it is the service of fellowship, not of tyranny. In the end God calls men to judgment, but it is the judgment of love as well as of justice.

(iii) Christians are those who are kept by Christ. The Christian is never left alone; Christ is always the sentinel of his life and the companion of his way.

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Jude 1:1-2

THE CALL OF GOD

Jude 1-2 (Part 2)

Before we leave this opening passage, let us think a little more about this calling of God and try to see something of what it means.

(i) Paul speaks about being called to be an apostle (Rom.1:1; 1Cor.1:1). In Greek the word is apostolos (GSN0652); it comes from the verb apostellein (GSN0649), to send out, and an apostle is therefore, one who is sent out. That is to say, the Christian is the ambassador of Christ. He is sent out into the world to speak for Christ, to act for Christ, to live for Christ. By his life he commends, or fails to commend, Christ to others.

(ii) Paul speaks about being called to be saints (Rom.1:7; 1Cor.1:2). The word for saint is hagios (GSN0040), which is also very commonly translated holy. Its root idea is difference. The Sabbath is holy because it is different from other days; God is supremely holy because he's different from men. To be called to be a saint is to be called to be different. The world has its own standards and its own scale of values. The difference for the Christian is that Christ is the only standard and loyalty to Christ the only value.

(iii) The Christian is called according to the purpose of God (Rom.8:28). God's call goes out to every man, although every man does not accept it; and this means that for every man God has a purpose. The Christian is the man who submits himself to the purpose God has for him.

Paul has much to say about this calling of God, and we can set it down only very summarily. It sets before a man a great hope (Eph.1:18; Eph.4:4). It should be a unifying influence binding men together by the conviction that they all have a part in the purpose of God (Eph.4:4). It is an upward calling (Php.3:14), setting a man's feet on the way to the stars. It is a heavenly calling (Heb.3:1), making a man think of the things which are invisible and eternal. It is a holy calling, a call to consecration to God. It is a calling which covers a man's ordinary every-day task (1Cor.7:20). It is a calling which does not alter because God does not change his mind (Rom.11:29). It knows no human distinctions and cuts across the world's classifications and scale of importances (1Cor.1:26). It is something of which the Christian must be worthy (Eph.4:1; 2Th.1:11); and all life must be one long effort to make it secure (2Pet.1:10).

The calling of God is the privilege, the challenge and the inspiration of the Christian life.

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Jude 1:3

DEFENDING THE FAITH

Jude 3

Beloved, when I was in the midst of devoting all my energy to writing to you about the faith which we all share, I felt that I was compelled to write a letter to you to urge you to engage upon the struggle to defend the faith which was once and for all delivered to God's consecrated people.

Here we have the occasion of the letter. Jude had been engaged on writing a treatise about the Christian faith; but there had come news that evil and misguided men had been spreading destructive teaching. The conviction had come to him that he must lay aside his treatise and write this letter.

Jude fully realized his duty to be the watchman of the flock of God. The purity of their faith was threatened and he rushed to defend both them and the faith. That involved setting aside the work on which he had been engaged; but often it is much better to write a tract for the times than a treatise for the future. It may be that Jude never again got the chance to write the treatise he had planned; but the fact is that he did more for the church by writing this urgent little letter than he could possibly have done by leaving a long treatise on the faith.

In this passage there are certain truths about the faith which we hold.

(i) The faith is something which is delivered to us. The facts of the Christian faith are not something which we have discovered for ourselves. In the true sense of the word they are tradition, something which has been handed down from generation to generation until it has come to us. They go back in an unbroken chain to Jesus Christ himself.

There is something to be added to that. The facts of the faith are indeed something which we have not discovered for ourselves. It is, therefore, true that the Christian tradition is not something handed down in the cold print of books; it is something which is passed on from person to person through the generations. The chain of Christian tradition is a living chain whose links are men and women who have experienced the wonder of the facts.

(ii) The Christian faith is something which is once and for all delivered to us. There is in it an unchangeable quality. That is not to say that each age has not to rediscover the Christian faith; but it does say that there is an unchanging nucleus in it--and the permanent centre of it is that Jesus Christ came into the world and lived and died to bring salvation to men.

(iii) The Christian faith is something which is entrusted to God's consecrated people. That is to say, the Christian faith is not the possession of any one person but of the church. It comes down within the church, it is preserved within the church, and it is understood within the church.

(iv) The Christian faith is something which must be defended. Every Christian must be its defender. If the Christian tradition comes down from generation to generation, each generation must hand it on uncorrupted and unperturbed. There are times when that is difficult. The word Jude

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Jude 1:3

uses for to defend is epagonizesthai (GSN1864), which contains the root of our English word agony. The defence of the faith may well be a costly thing; but that defence is a duty which falls on every generation of the Church.

Barclay's Commentary

Jude 1:4

THE PERIL FROM WITHIN

Jude 4

For certain men have wormed their way into the Church--long before this they were designated for judgment impious creatures they are--who twist the grace of God into a justification of blatant immorality and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Here is the peril which made Jude lay aside the treatise he was about to write and take up his pen to write this burning letter. The peril came from within the church.

Certain men, as the King James Version has it, had crept in unawares. The Greek (pareisduein, GSN3921) is a very expressive word. It is used of the spacious and seductive words of a clever pleader seeping gradually into the minds of a judge and jury; it is used of an outlaw slipping secretly back into the country from which he has been expelled; it is used of the slow and subtle entry of innovations into the life of state, which in the end undermine and break down the ancestral laws. It always indicates a stealthy insinuation of something evil into a society or situation.

Certain evil men had insinuated themselves into the church. They were the kind of men for whom judgment was waiting. They were impious creatures, godless in their thought and life. Jude picks out two characteristics about them.

(i) They perverted the grace of God into an excuse for blatant immorality. The Greek which we have translated blatant immorality is a grim and terrible word (aselgeia, GSN0766). The corresponding adjective is aselges (GSN0766). Most men try to hide their sin; they have enough respect for common decency not to wish to be found out. But the aselges (GSN0766) is the man who is so lost to decency that he does not care who sees his sin. It is not that he arrogantly and proudly flaunts it; it is simply that he can publicly do the most shameless things, because he has ceased to care for decency at all.

These men were undoubtedly tinged with Gnosticism and its belief that, since the grace of God was wide enough to cover any sin, a man could sin as he liked. The more he sinned, the greater the grace, therefore, why worry about sin? Grace was being perverted into a justification for sin.

(ii) They denied our only Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. There is more than one way in which a man can deny Jesus Christ. (a) He can deny him in the day of persecution. (b) He can deny him for the sake of convenience. (c) He can deny him by his life and conduct. (d) He can deny him by developing false ideas about him.

If these men were Gnostics, they would have two mistaken ideas about Jesus. First, since the body, being matter, was evil, they would hold that Jesus only seemed to have a body and was a kind of spirit ghost in the apparent shape of a man. The Greek for "to seem" is dokein (GSN1380); and these men were called Docetists. They would deny the real manhood of Jesus Christ. Second, they would deny his uniqueness. They believed that there were many stages between the evil matter

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Jude 1:4

of this world and the perfect spirit which is God; and they believed that Jesus was only one of the many stages on the way.

No wonder Jude was alarmed. He was faced with a situation in which there had wormed their way into the church men who were twisting the grace of God into a justification, and even a reason, for sinning in the most blatant way; and who denied both the manhood and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

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Jude 1:5-7

THE DREADFUL EXAMPLES

Jude 5-7 (Part 1)

It is my purpose to remind you--although you already possess full and final knowledge of all that matters--that, after the Lord had brought the people out of Egypt in safety, he subsequently destroyed those who were unbelieving; and that he has placed under guard in eternal chains in the abyss of darkness, to await the judgment which shall take place on the great day, the angels who did not keep their own rank but left their own proper habitation. Just so Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, who in the same way as these took their fill of sexual sin and strayed after perverted sexual immorality, are a warning by the way in which they paid the penalty of eternal fire.

1. THE FATE OF ISRAEL

Jude issues a warning to the evil men who were perverting the belief and conduct of the church. He tells them that he is, in fact, doing nothing other than remind them of things of which they are perfectly well aware. In a sense it is true to say that all preaching within the Christian church is not so much bringing to men new truth as confronting them with truth they already know, but have forgotten or are disregarding.

To understand the first two examples which Jude cites from history we must understand one thing. The evil men who were corrupting the church did not regard themselves as enemies of the church and of Christianity; they regarded themselves as the advanced thinkers, a cut above the ordinary Christian, the spiritual elite. Jude chooses his examples to make clear that, even if a man has received the greatest privileges, he may still fall away into disaster, and even those who have received the greatest privileges from God cannot consider themselves safe but must be on constant watch against the mistaken things.

The first example is from the history of Israel. He goes for his story to Num.13-14. The mighty hand of God had delivered the people from slavery in Egypt. What greater act of deliverance could there be than that? The guidance of God had brought the people safely across the desert to the borders of the Promised Land. What greater demonstration of his Providence could there be than that? So, at the very borders of the Promised Land, at Kadesh-Barnea, spies were sent out to spy out the land before the final invasion took place. With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, the spies came back with the opinion that the dangers ahead were so terrible and the people so strong, that they could never win their way into the Promised Land. The people rejected the report of Caleb and Joshua, who were for going on, and accepted the report of those who insisted that the case was hopeless. This was a clear act of disobedience to God and of complete lack of faith in him. The consequence was that God gave sentence that of these people, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, all over twenty would never enter the Promised Land but would wander in the wilderness until they were dead (Num.14:32-33; Num.32:10-13).

This was a picture which haunted the mind of both Paul and the writer to the Hebrews (1Cor.10:5-11; Heb.3:18-19; Heb.4:2). It is the proof that even the man with the greatest privilege

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Jude 1:5-7

can meet with disaster before the end, if he falls away from obedience and lapses from faith. Johnstone Jeffrey tells of a great man who absolutely refused to have his life-story written before his death. "I have seen," he said, "too many men fall out on the last lap." John Wesley warned, "Let, therefore, none presume on past mercies, as if they were out of danger." In his dream John Bunyan saw that even from the gates of heaven there was a way to hell.

Jude warns these men that, great as their privileges have been, they must still have a care lest disaster come upon them. It is a warning which each of us would do well to heed.

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Jude 1:5-7

THE DREADFUL EXAMPLES

2. THE FATE OF THE ANGELS

Jude 5-7 (Part 2)

The second dreadful example which Jude takes is the fallen angels.

The Jews had a very highly developed doctrine of angels, the servants of God. In particular the Jews believed that every nation had its presiding angel. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, Deut.32:8 reads, "When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God." That is to say, to each nation there was an angel.

The Jews believed in a fall of the angels and much is said about this in the Book of Enoch which is so often behind the thought of Jude. In regard to this there were two lines of tradition.

(i) The first saw the fall of the angels as due to pride and rebelliousness. That legend gathered especially round the name of Lucifer, the light-bringer, the son of the morning. As the King James Version has it, Isaiah writes, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isa.14:12). When the seventy returned from their mission and told Jesus of their successes, he warned them against pride, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk.10:18). The idea was that there was civil war in heaven. The angels rose against God and were cast out; and Lucifer was the leader of the rebellion.

(ii) The second stream of tradition finds its scriptural echo in Gen.6:1-4. In this line of thought the angels, attracted by the beauty of mortal women, left heaven to seduce them and so sinned.

In the first case the fall of the angels was due to pride; in the second case it was due to lust for forbidden things.

In effect Jude takes the two ideas and puts them together. He says that the angels left their own rank; that is to say, they aimed at an office which was not for them. He also says that they left their own proper habitation; that is to say, they came to earth to live with the daughters of men.

All this seems strange to us; it moves in a world of thought and traditions from which we have moved away.

But Jude's warning is clear. Two things brought ruin to the angels--pride and lust. Even although they were angels and heaven had been their dwelling-place, they none the less sinned and for their sin were reserved for judgment. To those reading Jude's words for the first time the whole line of thought was plain, for Enoch had much to say about the fate of these fallen angels. So Jude was speaking to his people in terms that they could well understand and telling them that, if pride and lust ruined the angels in spite of all their privileges, pride and lust could ruin them. The evil men within the church were proud enough to think that they knew better than the church's teaching and

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Jude 1:5-7

lustful enough to pervert the grace of God into a justification for blatant immorality. Whatever be the ancient background of his words, Jude's warning is still valid. The pride which knows better than God and the desire for forbidden things are the way to ruin in time and in eternity.

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Jude 1:5-7

THE DREADFUL EXAMPLES

3. SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Jude 5-7 (Part 3)

The third example Jude chose is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Notorious for their sins, these cities were obliterated by the fire of God. Sir George Adam Smith in *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* points out that no incident in history ever made such an impression on the Jewish people, and that Sodom and Gomorrah are time and time again used in Scripture as the examples par excellence of the sin of man and the judgment of God; they are so used even by Jesus himself (Deut.29:23; Deut.32:32; Am.4:11; Isa.1:9; Isa.3:9; Isa.13:19; Jer.23:14; Jer.49:18; Jer.50:40; Zeph.2:9; Lam.4:6; Eze.16:46,49,53,55; Matt.10:15; Matt.11:24; Lk.10:12; Lk.17:29; Rom.9:29; 2Pet.2:6; Rev.11:8). "The glare of Sodom and Gomorrah is flung down the whole length of Scripture history."

The story of the final wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah is told in Gen.19:1-11, and the tragic tale of their destruction in the passage immediately following (Gen.19:12-28). The sin of Sodom is one of the most horrible stories in history. Ryle has called it a "repulsive incident." The real horror of the incident is cloaked a little in the King James and English Revised Versions by a Hebrew turn of speech. Two angelic visitors had come to Lot. At his pressing invitation they came into his house to be his guests. When they were there, the inhabitants of Sodom surrounded the house, demanding that Lot should bring out his visitors that they should know them. In Hebrew to know is the word for sexual intercourse. It is said, for instance, that Adam knew his wife, and she conceived, and bore Cain (Gen.4:1). What the men of Sodom were bent on was homosexual intercourse with Lot's two visitors--sodomy, the word in which their sin is commemorated.

It was after this that Sodom and Gomorrah were obliterated from the face of the earth. The neighbouring cities were Zoar, Admah and Zeboim (Deut.29:23; Hos.11:8). This disaster was localized in the dreadful desert in the region of the Dead Sea, a region which Sir George Adam Smith calls, "This awful hollow, this bit of the infernal regions come to the surface, this hell with the sun shining into it." It was there that the cities were said to have been; and it was said that under that scorched and barren earth there still smouldered an eternal fire of destruction. The soil is bituminous with oil below, and Sir George Adam Smith con-lectures that what happened was this: "In this bituminous soil took place one of these terrible explosions and conflagrations which have broken out in the similar geology of North America. In such soil reservoirs of oil and gas are formed, and suddenly discharged by their own pressure or by earthquake. The gas explodes, carrying high into the air masses of oil which fall back in fiery rain, and are so inextinguishable that they float afire on water." It was by such an eruption of fire that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. That awful desert was only a day's journey from Jerusalem and men never forgot this divine judgment on sin.

So, then, Jude reminds these evil men of the fate of those who in ancient times defied the moral law of God. It is reasonable to suppose that those whom Jude attacks had also descended to sodomy and that they were perverting the grace of God to cover even this.

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Jude 1:5-7

Jude is insisting that they should remember that sin and judgment go hand in hand, and that they should repent in time.

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Jude 1:8-9

CONTEMPT FOR THE ANGELS

Jude 8-9

In the same way these, too, with their dreams, defile the flesh, and set at naught the celestial powers, and speak evil of the angelic glories. When the archangel Michael himself was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, he did not venture to launch against him an evil-speaking accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Jude begins this passage by comparing the evil men with the false prophets whom Scripture condemns. Deut.13:1-5 sets down what is to be done with "the prophet or the dreamer of dreams" who corrupts the nations and seduces the people, from their loyalty to God. Such a prophet is to be mercilessly killed. These men whom Jude attacks are false prophets, dreamers of false dreams, seducers of the people, and must be treated as such. Their false teaching issued in two things.

(i) It made them defile the flesh. We have already seen the twofold direction of their teaching on the flesh. First, the flesh was entirely evil, and, therefore, of no importance; and so the instincts of the body could be given their way without control. Second, the grace of God was all-forgiving and all-sufficient and therefore, sin did not matter since grace would forgive every sin. Sin was only the means whereby grace was given its opportunity to operate.

(ii) They despised angels. Celestial powers and angelic glories are names for ranks of angels within the angelic hierarchy. This follows immediately after the citing of Sodom and Gomorrah as dreadful examples; and part of the sin of Sodom was the desire of its people to misuse its angelic visitors (Gen.19:1-11). The men Jude attacks spoke evil of the angels. To prove how terrible a thing that was Jude cites an instance from an apocryphal book, The Assumption of Moses. One of the strange things about Jude is that he so often makes his quotations from these apocryphal books. Such quotations seem strange to us; but these books were very widely used at the time when Jude was writing and the quotations would be very effective.

The story in The Assumption of Moses runs as follows. The strange story of the death of Moses is told in Deut.34:1-6. The Assumption of Moses goes on to add the further story that the task of burying the body of Moses was given to the archangel Michael. The devil disputed with Michael for possession of the body. He based his claim on two grounds. Moses' body was matter; matter was evil; and, therefore, the body belonged to him, for matter was his domain. Second, Moses was a murderer, for had not he slain the Egyptian whom he saw smiting the Hebrew (Exo.2:11-12). And, if he was a murderer, the devil had a claim on his body. The point Jude is making is this. Michael was engaged on a task given him by God; the devil was seeking to stop him and was making claims he had no right to make. But even in a collection of circumstances like that Michael spoke no evil of the devil but simply said, "The Lord rebuke you!" If the greatest of the good angels refused to speak evil of the greatest of the evil angels, even in circumstances like that, surely no human being may speak evil of any angel.

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Jude 1:8-9

What the men Jude is attacking were saying about the angels we do not know. Perhaps they were saying that they did not exist; perhaps they were saying they were evil. This passage means very little to us, but no doubt it would be a weighty rebuke to those to whom Jude addressed it.

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Jude 1:10

THE GOSPEL OF THE FLESH

Jude 10

But these people speak evil of everything which they do not understand, whereas they allow themselves to be corrupted by the knowledge which their instincts give them, living at the mercy of their instincts, like beasts without reason.

Jude says two things about the evil men whom he is attacking.

(i) They criticize everything which they do not understand. Anything which is out of their orbit and their experience they disregard as worthless and irrelevant. "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned" (1Cor.2:14). They have no spiritual discernment, and, therefore, they are blind to, and contemptuous of, all spiritual realities.

(ii) They allow themselves to be corrupted by the things they do understand. What they do understand are the fleshly instincts which they share with the brute beasts. Their way of life is to allow these instincts to have their way; their values are fleshly values. Jude describes men who have lost all awareness of spiritual things and for whom the things demanded by the animal instincts are the only standards.

The terrible thing is that the first condition is the direct result of the second. The tragedy is that no man is born without a sense of the spiritual things but can lose that sense until for him the spiritual things cease to exist. A man may lose any faculty, if he refuses to use it. We discover that with such simple things as games and skills. If we give up playing a game, we lose the ability to play it. If we give up practising a skill--such as playing the piano--we lose it. We discover that in such things as abilities. We may know something of a foreign language, but if we never speak or read it, we lose it. Every man can hear the voice of God; and every man has the animal instincts on which, indeed, the future existence of the race depends. But, if he consistently refuses to listen to God and makes his instincts the sole dynamic of his conduct, in the end he will be unable to hear the voice of God and will have nothing left to be his master but his brute desires.

It is a terrible thing for a man to reach a stage where he is deaf to God and blind to goodness; and that is the stage which the men whom Jude attacks had reached.

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Jude 1:11

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Jude 11

Woe to them because they walk in the way of Cain; they fling themselves into the error of Balaam; they perish in Korah's opposition to God.

Jude now goes to Hebrew history for parallels to the wicked men of his own day; and from it he draws the examples of three notorious sinners.

(i) First, there is Cain, the murderer of his brother Abel (Gen.4:1-15). In Hebrew tradition Cain stood for two things. (a) He was the first murderer in the world's history; and, as The Wisdom of Solomon has it, "he himself perished in the fury wherewith he murdered his brother" (Wis.10:3). It may well be that Jude is implying that those who delude others are nothing other than murderers of the souls of men and, therefore, the spiritual descendants of Cain. (b) But in Hebrew tradition Cain came to stand for something more than that. In Philo he stands for selfishness. In the Rabbinic teaching he is the type of the cynical man.

In the Jerusalem Targum he is depicted as saying: "There is neither judgment nor judge; there is no other world; no good reward will be given to the good and no vengeance taken on the wicked; nor is there any pity in the creation or the government of the world." To the Hebrew thinkers Cain was the cynical, materialistic unbeliever who believed neither in God nor in the moral order of the world and who, therefore, did exactly as he liked. So Jude is charging his opponents with defying God and denying the moral order of the world. It remains true that the man who chooses to sin has still to reckon with God and to learn, always with pain and sometimes with tragedy, that no man can defy the moral order of the world with impunity.

(ii) Second, there is Balaam. In Old Testament thought, in Jewish teaching and even in the New Testament (Rev.2:14) Balaam is the great example of those who taught Israel to sin. In the Old Testament there are two stories about him. One is quite clear, and very vivid and dramatic. The other is more shadowy, but much more terrible; and it is it which left its mark on Hebrew thought and teaching.

The first is in Num.22-24. There it is told how Balak attempted to persuade Balaam to curse the people of Israel, for he feared their power, five times offering him large rewards. Balaam refused to be persuaded by Balak, but his covetousness stands out and it is clear that only the fear of what God would do to him kept him from striking a dreadful bargain. Balaam already emerges as a detestable character.

In Num.25 there is the second story. Israel is seduced into the worship of Baal with dreadful and repulsive moral consequences. As we read later (Num.31:8,16), it was Balaam who was responsible for that seduction, and he perished miserably because he taught others to sin.

Out of this composite story Balaam stands for two things. (a) He stands for the covetous man who was prepared to sin in order to gain reward. (b) He stands for the evil man who was guilty of the greatest of all sins--that of teaching others to sin. So Jude is declaring of the wicked men of his own

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Jude 1:11

day that they are ready to leave the way of righteousness to make gain; and that they are teaching others to sin. To sin for the sake of gain is bad; but to teach another to sin is the worst of all.

(iii) Third, there was Korah. His story is in Num.16:1-35. The sin of Korah was that he rebelled against the guidance of Moses when the sons of Aaron and the tribe of Levi were made the priests of the nation. That was a decision which Korah was not willing to accept; he wished to exercise a function which he had no right to exercise; and when he did so he perished terribly and all his companions in wickedness with him. Korah stands for the man who refuses to accept authority and reaches out for things which he has no right to have. So Jude is charging his opponents with defying the legitimate authority of the church, and of, thereto re, preferring their own way to the way of God. We should remember that if we take certain things which pride incites us to take, the consequences can be disastrous.

Barclay's Commentary

Jude 1:12-16

THE PICTURE OF WICKED MEN

Jude 12-16 (Part 1)

These people are hidden rocks which threaten to wreck your Love Feasts. These are the people who at your feasts revel with their own cliques without a qualm. They have no feeling of responsibility to anyone except themselves. They are clouds which drop no water but are blown past by the wind. They are fruitless trees in autumn's harvest time, twice dead and torn up by the roots. They are wild sea waves, frothing out their own shameless deeds. They are wandering stars and the abyss of darkness has been prepared for them for ever. It was of these, too, that Enoch, who was the seventh from Adam, prophesied when he said:

Behold the Lord has come with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment upon all and to convict all the impious for all the deeds of their impiousness, which they have impiously committed, and for the harsh things which impious sinners have said against him.

For these people are grumblers. They querulously complain against the part in life which God has allotted to them. Their conduct is governed by their desires. Their mouths speak swelling words. They toady to men for what they can get out of it.

This is one of the great passages of invective of the New Testament. It is blazing moral indignation at its hottest. As Moffatt puts it: "Sky, land and sea are ransacked for illustrations of the character of these men." Here is a series of vivid pictures, every one with significance. Let us take them one by one.

(i) They are like hidden rocks which threaten to wreck the Love Feasts of the Church. This is the one case in which there is doubt about what Jude is actually saying but of one thing there is no doubt--the evil men were a peril to the Love Feasts. The Love Feast, the Agape (GSN0026), was one of the earliest features of the Church. It was a meal of fellowship held on the Lord's Day. To it everyone brought what he could, and all shared alike. It was a lovely idea that the Christians in each little house church should sit down on the Lord's Day to eat in fellowship together. No doubt there were some who could bring much and others who could bring only little. For many of the slaves it was perhaps the only decent meal they ever ate.

But very soon the Agape (GSN0026) began to go wrong. We can see it going wrong in the church at Corinth, when Paul declares that at the Corinthian Love Feasts there is nothing but division. They are divided into cliques and sections; some have too much, and others starve; and the meal for some has become a drunken revel (1Cor.11:17-22). Unless the Agape (GSN0026) was a true fellowship, it was a travesty, and very soon it had begun to belie its name.

Jude's opponents were making a travesty of the Love Feasts. The Revised Standard Version says that he calls them "blemishes on your love feasts" (Jd.12); and that agrees with the parallel passage in Second Peter--"blots and blemishes" (2Pet.2:13). We have translated Jude's expression "hidden rocks."

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Jude 1:12-16

The difficulty is that Peter and Jude do not use the same word, although they use words which are very similar. The word in Second Peter is *spilos* (GSN4696), which unquestionably means a blot or spot; but the word in Jude is *spilas* (GSN4694), which is very rare. Just possibly it may mean a blot, because in later Greek it could be used for the spots and markings on an opal stone. But in ordinary Greek by far its most common meaning was a submerged, or half-submerged, rock on which a ship could be easily ship-wrecked. We think that here the second meaning is much more likely.

In the Love Feast people were very close together in heart and there was the kiss of peace. These wicked men were using the Love Feasts as a cloak under which to gratify their lusts. It is a dreadful thing, if men enter into the church and use the opportunities which its fellowship gives for their own perverted ends. These men were like sunken rocks on which the fellowship of the Love Feasts was in danger of being wrecked.

Barclay's Commentary

Jude 1:12-16

THE SELFISHNESS OF WICKED MEN

Jude 12-16 (Part 2)

(ii) These wicked men revel in their own cliques and have no feeling of responsibility for anyone except themselves. These two things go together for they both stress their essential selfishness.

(a) They revel in their own cliques without a qualm. This is exactly the situation which Paul condemns in First Corinthians. The Love Feast was supposed to be an act of fellowship; and the fellowship was demonstrated by the sharing of all things. Instead of sharing, the wicked men kept to their own clique and kept to themselves all they had. In First Corinthians Paul actually goes the length of saying that the Love Feast could become a drunken revel in which every man grabbed at all that he could get (1Cor.11:21). No man can ever claim to know what church membership means, if in the church he is out for what he can get and remains within his own little group.

(b) We have translated the next phrase: "They have no feeling of responsibility for anyone except themselves." The Greek literally means "shepherding themselves." The duty of a leader of the Church is to be a shepherd of the flock of God (Ac.20:28). The false shepherd cared far more for himself than for the sheep which were supposed to be within his care. Ezekiel describes the false shepherds from whom their privileges were to be taken away: "As I live, says the Lord God, because my sheep have become a prey and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep.... Behold I am against the shepherds; and I will require my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep" (Eze.34:8-10). The man who feels no responsibility for the welfare of anyone except himself stands condemned.

So, then, Jude condemns the selfishness which destroys fellowship and the lack of the sense of responsibility for others.

(iii) The wicked men are like clouds blown past by the wind, which drop no rain and like trees in harvest time which have no fruit. These two phrases go together, for they describe people who make great claims but are essentially useless. There were times in Palestine when people would pray for rain. At such a time a cloud might pass across the sky, bringing with it the promise of rain. But there were times when the promise was only an illusion, the cloud was blown on and the rain never came. In any harvest time there were trees which looked as if they were heavy with fruit but which, when men came to gather from them, gave no fruit at all.

At the heart of this lies a great truth. Promise without performance is useless and in the New Testament nothing is so unsparingly condemned as uselessness. No amount of outward show or fine words will take the place of usefulness to others. As it has been put: "If a man is not good for something, he is good for nothing."

Barclay's Commentary

Jude 1:12-16

THE FATE OF DISOBEDIENCE

Jude 12-16 (Part 3)

Jude goes on to use a vivid picture of these evil men. "They are like wild sea waves frothing out their own shameless deeds." The picture is this. After a storm, when the waves have been lashing the shore with their frothing spray and their spume, there is always left on the shore a fringe of seaweed and driftwood and all kinds of unsightly litter from the sea. That is always an unlovely scene. But in the case of one sea it is grimmer than in any other. The waters of the Dead Sea can be whipped up, into waves, and these waves, too, cast up driftwood on the shore; but in this instance there is a unique circumstance. The waters of the Dead Sea are so impregnated with salt that they strip the bark of any driftwood in them; and, when such wood is cast up on the shore, it gleams bleak and white, more like dried bones than wood. The deeds of the wicked men are like the useless and unsightly litter which the waves leave scattered on the beach after a storm and resemble the skeleton-like relics of Dead Sea storms.

The picture vividly portrays the ugliness of the deeds of Jude's opponents.

Jude uses still another picture. The wicked men are like the wandering stars that are kept in the abyss of darkness for their disobedience. This is a picture directly taken from the Book of Enoch. In that book the stars and the angels are sometimes identified; and there is a picture of the fate of the stars who, disobedient to God, left their appointed orbit and were destroyed. In his journey through the, earth Enoch came to a place where he saw, "neither a heaven above nor a firmly founded earth, but a place chaotic and horrible." He goes on: "And there I saw seven stars of the heaven bound together in it, like great mountains and burning with fire.

Then I said, 'For what sin are they bound, and on account of what have they been cast in hither?' Then said Uriel, one of the holy angels, who was with me and who was chief over them, 'Enoch, why dost thou ask and why art thou eager for the truth? These are the numbers of the stars of heaven which have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and are bound here till ten thousand years, the time entailed by their sins, are consummated'" (Enoch 21: 1-6). The fate of the wandering stars is typical of the fate of the man who disobeys God's commandments and, as it were, takes his own way.

Jude then confirms all this with a prophecy; but the prophecy is again taken from Enoch. The actual passage runs: "And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of his holy ones to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly; and to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Enoch 1: 9).

This quotation has raised many questions in regard to Jude and Enoch. There is no doubt that in the days of Jude, and in the days of Jesus, Enoch was a very popular book which every pious Jew would know and read. Ordinarily, when the New Testament writers wish to confirm their words, they do so with a quotation from the Old Testament, using it as the word of God. Are we then to regard Enoch as sacred Scripture, since Jude uses it exactly as he would have used one of the prophets? Or, are we to take the view of which Jerome speaks, and say that Jude cannot be Scripture, because it makes the mistake of using as Scripture a book which is, in fact, not Scripture?

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Jude 1:12-16

We need waste no time upon this debate. The fact is that Jude, a pious Jew, knew and loved the Book of Enoch and had grown up in a circle where it was regarded with respect and even reverence; and he takes his quotation from it perfectly naturally, knowing that his readers would recognize it, and respect it. He is simply doing what all the New Testament writers do, as every writer must in every age, and speaking to men in language which they will recognize and understand.

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Jude 1:12-16

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EVIL MEN

Jude 12-16 (Part 4)

In Jd.16 Jude sets down three last characteristics of the evil men.

(i) They are grumblers, for ever discontented with the life which God has allotted to them. In this picture he uses two words, one which was very familiar to his Jewish readers and one which was very familiar to his Greek readers.

(a) The first is goggustes (GSN1113). (gg in Greek is pronounced ng). The word describes the discontented voices of the murmurers and is the same as is so often used in the Greek Old Testament for the murmurings of the children of Israel against Moses as he led them through the wilderness (Exo.15:24; Exo.17:3; Num.14:29). Its very sound describes the low mutter of resentful discontent which rose from the rebellious people. These wicked men in the time of Jude are the modern counterparts of the murmuring children of Israel in the desert, people full of sullen complaints against the guiding hand of God.

(b) The second is mempsimoiros (GSN3202). It is made up of two Greek words, memphesthai, which means to blame and moira, which means one's allotted fate or life. A mempsimoiros (GSN3202) was a man who was for ever grumbling about life in general. Theophrastus was the great master of the Greek character sketch, and he has a mocking study of the mempsimoiros (GSN3202), which is worth quoting in full:

Querulousness is an undue complaining about one's lot; the querulous man will say to him that brings him a portion from his friend's table: "You begrudged me your soup or your collops, or you would have asked me to dine with you in person." When his mistress is kissing him he says, "I wonder whether you kiss me so warmly from your heart." He is displeased with Zeus, not because he sends no rain, but because he has been so long about sending it. When he finds a purse in the street, it is: "Ah! but I never found a treasure." When he has bought a slave cheap with much importuning the seller, he cries: "I wonder if my bargain's too cheap to be good." When they bring him the good news that he has a son born to him, then it is: "If you add that I have lost half my fortune, you'll speak the truth." Should this man win a suit-at-law by a unanimous verdict, he is sure to find fault with his speech-writer for omitting so many of the pleas. And if a subscription has been got up for him among his friends, and one of them says to him: "You can cheer up now," he will say: "What? when I must repay each man his share, and be beholden to him into the bargain?"

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Jude 1:12-16

Here, vividly drawn by Theophrastus' subtle pen, is the picture of a man who can find something to grumble about in any situation. He can find some fault with the best of bargains, the kindest of deeds, the most complete of successes, the richest of good fortune. "There is great gain in godliness with contentment" (1Tim.6:6); but the evil men are chronically discontented with life and with the place in life that God has given to them. There are few people more unpopular than chronic grumblers and all such might do well to remember that such grumbling is in its own way an insult to God.

(ii) Jude reiterates a point about these wicked men, which he has made again and again--their conduct is governed by their desires. To them self-discipline and self-control are nothing; to them the moral law is only a burden and a nuisance; honour and duty have no claim upon them; they have no desire to serve and no sense of responsibility. Their one value is pleasure and their one dynamic is desire. If all men were like that, the world would be in complete chaos.

(iii) They speak with pride and arrogance, yet at the same time they are ready to pander to the great, if they think that they can get anything out of it. It is perfectly possible for a man at one and the same time to be a bombastic creature towards the people he wishes to impress and a flattering lick-spittle to the people whom he thinks important. Jude's opponents are glorifiers of themselves and flatterers of others, as they think the occasion demands; and their descendants are sometimes still among us.

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Jude 1:17-19

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ERROR (1)

Jude 17-19 (Part 1)

But you, beloved, you must remember the words which were once spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; you must remember that they said to us: "In the last time there will be mockers, whose conduct is governed by their own impious desires." These are the people who set up divisions--fleshly creatures, without the Spirit.

Jude points out to his own people that nothing has happened which they might not have expected. The apostles had given warning that in the last times just such evil men as are now among them would come. The actual words of Jude's quotation are not in any New Testament book. He may be doing any one of three things. He may be quoting some apostolic book which we no longer possess. He may be quoting, not a book, but some oral tradition of the apostolic preaching; or some sermon which he himself had heard from the apostles. He may be giving the general sense of a passage like 1Tim.4:1-3. In any event he is telling his people that error was only to be expected in the church. From this passage we can see certain of the characteristics of these evil men.

(i) They mock at goodness and their conduct is governed by their own evil desires. The two things go together. These opponents of Jude had two characteristics, as we have already seen. They believed the body, being matter, was evil; and that, therefore, it made no difference if a man sated its desires. Further, they argued that, since grace could forgive any sin, sin did not matter. These heretics had a third characteristic. They believed that they were the advanced thinkers; and they regarded those who observed the old moral standards as old-fashioned and out of date.

That point of view is by no means dead. There are still those who believe that the once--accepted standards of morality and fidelity, especially in matters of sex, are quite out of date. There is a terrible text in the Old Testament: "The fool says in his heart, There is no God" (Ps.53:1). In that text fool does not mean the brainless man; it means the man who is playing the fool. And the fact that he says there is no God is entirely due to wishful thinking. He knows that, if there is a God, he is wrong and can look for judgment; therefore, he eliminates him. In the last analysis those who eliminate the moral law and give free rein to their passions and desires, do so because they want to do as they like. They listen to themselves instead of listening to God--and they forget that there will come a day when they will be compelled to listen to him.

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Jude 1:17-19

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ERROR (2)

Jude 17-19 (Part 2)

(ii) These evil men have a second characteristic. They set up divisions--they are fleshly creatures, without the Spirit. Here is a most significant thought--to set up divisions within the church is always sin. These men set up divisions in two ways.

(a) As we have already seen, even at the Love Feasts they had their own little cliques. By their conduct they were steadily destroying fellowship within the church. They were drawing a circle to shut men out instead of drawing a circle to take them in.

(b) But they went further. There were certain thinkers in the early church who had a way of looking at human nature which essentially split men into two classes. To understand this we must know something of Greek psychology. To the Greek man was body (soma, GSN4983), soul (psuche, GSN5590) and spirit (pneuma, GSN4151). Soma (GSN4983) was simply man's physical construction. Psuche (GSN5590) is more difficult to understand. To the Greeks soul, psuche (GSN5590), was simply physical life; everything that lived and breathed had psuche (GSN5590). Pneuma (GSN4151), spirit, was quite different, it belonged to man alone, and was that which made him a thinking creature, kin to God, able to speak to God and to hear him.

These thinkers went on to argue that all men possessed psuche (GSN5590), but very few really possessed pneuma (GSN4151). Only the really intellectual, the elite, possessed pneuma (GSN4151); and, therefore, only the very few could rise to real religion. The rest must be content to walk on the lower levels of religious experience.

They, therefore, divided men into two classes. There were the psuchikoi (GSN5591), who were physically alive but intellectually and spiritually dead. We might call them the fleshly creatures. All they possessed was flesh and blood life; intellectual progress and spiritual experience were beyond them. There were the pneumatikoi (GSN4152), who were capable of real intellectual knowledge, real knowledge of God and real spiritual experience. Here was the creation of an intellectual and spiritual aristocracy over against the common herd of men.

Further, these people who believed themselves to be the pneumatikoi (GSN4152), believed that they were exempt from all the ordinary laws governing a man's conduct. Ordinary people might have to observe the accepted standards but they were above that. For them sin did not exist; they were so advanced that they could do anything and be none the worse. We may well remember that there are still people who believe that they are above the laws, who say in their hearts that it could never happen to them and believe that they can get away with anything.

We can now see how cleverly Jude deals with these people who say that the rest of the world are the psuchikoi (GSN5591), while they are the pneumatikoi (GSN4152). Jude takes their words and reverses them. "It is you," he thunders at them, "who are the psuchikoi (GSN5591), the flesh-dominated; it is you who possess no pneuma (GSN4151), no real knowledge and no experience of God." Jude is saying to these people that, although they think themselves the only truly religious

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Jude 1:17-19

people, they have no real religion at all. Those whom they despise are, in fact, much better than they are themselves.

The truth about these so-called intellectual and spiritual people was that they desired to sin and twisted religion into a justification for sin.

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Jude 1:20-21

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOODNESS

Jude 20-21

But you, beloved, must build yourselves up on the foundation of your most holy faith; you must pray in the Holy Spirit; you must keep yourselves in the love of God; while you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ which will bring you to life eternal.

In the previous passage Jude described the characteristics of error, here he describes the characteristics of goodness.

(i) The good man builds up his life on the foundation of the most holy faith. That is to say, the life of the Christian is founded, not on something which he manufactured himself, but on something which he received. There is a chain in the transmission of the faith. The faith came from Jesus to the apostles; it came from the apostles to the church; and it comes from the church to us. There is something tremendous here. It means that the faith which we hold is not merely someone's personal opinion; it is a revelation which came from Jesus Christ and was preserved and transmitted within his church, always under the care and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, from generation to generation.

That faith is a most holy faith. Again and again we have seen the meaning of this word holy. Its root meaning is different. That which is holy is different from other things, as the priest is different from other worshippers, the Temple different from other buildings, the Sabbath different from other days and God supremely different from men.

Our faith is different in two ways. (a) It is different from other faiths and from philosophies in that it is not man-made but God-given, not opinion but revelation, not guessing but certainty. (b) It is different in that it has the power to make those who believe it different. It is not only a mind-changer but also a life-changer; not only an intellectual belief but also a moral dynamic.

(ii) The good man is a man of prayer. It has been put this way: "Real religion means dependence." The essence of religion is the admission of our total dependence on God; and prayer is the acknowledging of that dependence, and the going to God for the help we need. As Moffatt has it in a magnificent definition: "Prayer is love in need appealing to love in power." The Christian must be a man of prayer for at least two reasons. (a) He knows that he must test everything by the will of God and, therefore, he must take everything to God for his approval. (b) He knows that of himself he can do nothing but that with God all things are possible and, therefore, he must ever be taking his insufficiency to God's sufficiency.

Prayer, says Jude, is to be in the Holy Spirit. What he means is this. Our human prayers are at least sometimes bound to be selfish and blind. It is only when the Holy Spirit takes full possession of us that our desires are so purified that our prayers are right. The truth is that as Christians we are bound to pray to God, but he alone can teach us how to pray and what to pray for.

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Jude 1:20-21

(iii) The good man keeps himself in the love of God. What Jude is thinking of here is the old covenant relationship between God and his people as described in Exo.24:1-8. God came to his people promising that he would be their God and they would be his people; but that relationship depended on their accepting and obeying the law which he gave them. "God's love," Moffatt comments, "has its own terms of communion." It is true in one sense that we can never drift beyond God's love and care; but it is also true that, if we desire to remain in close communion with God, we must give him the perfect love and the perfect obedience which must ever go hand in hand.

(iv) The good man waits with expectation. He waits for the coming of Jesus Christ in mercy, love and power; for he knows that Christ's purpose for him is to bring him to life eternal, which is nothing other than the life of God himself.

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Jude 1:22-23

RECLAIMING THE LOST

Jude 22-23

Some of them you must argue out of their error, while they are still wavering. Others you must rescue by snatching them out of the fire. Others you must pity and fear at the same time, hating the garment stained by the flesh.

Different translators give differing translations of this passage. The reason is that there is much doubt as to what the true Greek text is. We have given the translation which we believe to be nearest to the sense of the passage.

Even to the worst heretics, even to those most far gone in error and to those whose beliefs are most dangerous, the Christian has a binding duty not to destroy but to save. His aim must be, not to banish them from the Christian church, but to win them back into the Christian fellowship. James Denney said that, to put the matter at its simplest, Jesus came to make bad men good. Sir John Seeley said: "When the power of reclaiming the lost dies out of the church, it ceases to be the church." As we have taken this passage, Jude divides the troublers of the church into three classes, to each of whom a different approach is necessary.

(i) There are those who are flirting with falsehood. They are obviously attracted by the wrong way and are on the brink of committing themselves to error, but are still hesitating before taking the final step. They must be argued out of their error while there is time. From this two things emerge as a duty.

(a) We must study to be able to defend the faith and to give a reason for the hope that is in us. We must know what we believe so that we can meet error with truth; and we must make ourselves able to defend the faith in such a way that our graciousness and sincerity may win others to it. To do this we must banish all uncertainty from our minds and all arrogance and intolerance from our approach to others.

(b) We must be ready to speak in time. Many a person would have been saved from error of thought and of action, if someone else had only spoken in time. Sometimes we hesitate to speak, but there are many times when silence is cowardly and can cause more harm than speech could ever cause. One of the greatest tragedies in life is when someone comes to us and says, "I would never have been in the mess I am now in, if someone--you, perhaps--had only spoken to me."

(ii) There are those who have to be snatched from the fire. They have actually started out on the wrong way and have to be stopped, as it were, forcibly, and even against their will. It is all very well to say that we must leave a man his freedom and that he has a right to do what he likes. All these things are in one sense true, but there are times when a man must be even forcibly saved from himself.

(iii) There are those whom we must pity and fear at one and the same time. Here Jude is thinking of something which is always true. There is danger to the sinner; but there is also danger to the

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Jude 1:22-23

rescuer. He who would cure an infectious disease runs the risk of infection. Jude says that we must hate the garment stained by the flesh. Almost certainly he is thinking here of the regulations in Lev.13:47-52, where it is laid down that the garment worn by a person discovered to be suffering from leprosy must be burned. The old saying remains true--we must love the sinner but hate the sin. Before a man can rescue others, he must himself be strong in the faith. His own feet must be firm on the dry land before he can throw a lifebelt to the man who is likely to be swept away. The simple fact is that the rescue of those in error is not for everyone to attempt.

Those who would win others for Christ must themselves be very sure of him; and those who would fight the disease of sin must themselves have the strong antiseptic of a healthy faith. Ignorance can never be met with ignorance, nor even with partial knowledge; it can be met only by the affirmation, "I know whom I have believed."

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Jude 1:24-25

THE FINAL ASCRIPTION OF PRAISE

Jude 24-25

Unto him who is able to keep you from slipping and to make you stand blameless and exultant in the presence of his glory, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, at this present time, and for all time. Amen.

Jude comes to an end with a tremendous ascription of praise.

Three times in the New Testament praise is given to the God who is able. In Rom.16:25 Paul gives praise to the God who is able to strengthen us. God is the one person who can give us a foundation for life which nothing and no one can ever shake. In Eph.3:20 Paul gives praise to the God who is able to do far more than we can ever ask or even dream of. He is the God whose grace no man has every exhausted and on whom no claim can ever be too much.

Here Jude offers his praise to the God who is able.

(i) God is able to keep us from slipping. The word is *aptaistos* (GSN0679). It is used both of a sure-footed horse which does not stumble and of a man who does not fall into error. "He will not let your foot be moved," or as the Scottish metrical version has it, "Thy foot he'll not let slide" (Ps.121:3). To walk with God is to walk in safety even on the most dangerous and the most slippery path. In mountaineering climbers are roped together so that even if the inexperienced climber should slip, the skilled mountaineer can take his weight and save him. Even so, when we bind ourselves to God, he keeps us safe.

(ii) He can make us stand blameless in the presence of his glory. The word for blameless is *amomos* (GSN0299). This is characteristically a sacrificial word; and it is commonly and technically used of an animal which is without spot or blemish and is therefore fit to be offered to God. The amazing thing is that when we submit ourselves to God, his grace can make our lives nothing less than a sacrifice fit to offer to him.

(iii) He can bring us into his presence exultant. Surely the natural way to think of entry into the presence of God is in fear and in shame. But by the work of Jesus Christ and in the grace of God, we know that we can go to God with joy and with all fear banished. Through Jesus Christ, God the stern Judge has become known to us as God the loving Father.

We note one last thing. Usually we associate the word Saviour with Jesus Christ, but here Jude attaches it to God. He is not alone in this, for God is often called Saviour in the New Testament (Lk.1:47; 1Tim.1:1; 1Tim.2:3; 1Tim.4:10; Tit.1:3; Tit.2:10; Tit.3:4). So we end with the great and comforting certainty that at the back of everything there is a God whose name is Saviour. The Christian has the joyous certainty that in this world he lives in the love of God and that in the next world he goes to that love. The love of God is at once the atmosphere and the goal of all his living.

Barclay's Commentary

Introduction to Revelation

INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION OF JOHN

THE STRANGE BOOK

When a student of the New Testament embarks upon the study of the Revelation he feels himself projected into a different world. Here is something quite unlike the rest of the New Testament. Not only is the Revelation different; it is also notoriously difficult for a modern mind to understand. The result is that it has sometimes been abandoned as quite unintelligible and it has sometimes become the playground of religious eccentrics, who use it to map out celestial time-tables of what is to come or find in it evidence for their own eccentricities. One despairing commentator said that there are as many riddles in the Revelation as there are words, and another that the study of the Revelation either finds or leaves a man mad.

Luther would have denied the Revelation a place in the New Testament. Along with James, Jude, Second Peter and Hebrews he relegated it to a separate list at the end of his New Testament. He declared that in it there are only images and visions such as are found nowhere else in the Bible. He complained that, notwithstanding the obscurity of his writing, the writer had the boldness to add threats and promises for those who kept or disobeyed his words, unintelligible though they were. In it, said Luther, Christ is neither taught nor acknowledged; and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is not perceptible in it. Zwingli is equally hostile to the Revelation. "With the Apocalypse," he writes, "we have no concern, for it is not a biblical book.... The Apocalypse has no savour of the mouth or the mind of John. I can, if I so will, reject its testimonies." Most voices have stressed the unintelligibility of the Revelation and not a few have questioned its right to a place in the New Testament.

On the other hand there are those in every generation who have loved this book. T. S. Kepler quotes the verdict of Philip Carrington and makes it his own: "In the case of the Revelation we are dealing with an artist greater than Stevenson or Coleridge or Bach. St. John has a better sense of the right word than Stevenson; he has a greater command of unearthly supernatural loveliness than Coleridge; he has a richer sense of melody and rhythm and composition than Bach.... It is the only masterpiece of pure art in the New Testament.... Its fulness and richness and harmonic variety place it far above Greek tragedy."

We shall no doubt find this book difficult and bewildering; but doubtless, too, we shall find it infinitely worthwhile to wrestle with it until it gives us its blessing and opens its riches to us.

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

In any study of the Revelation we must begin by remembering the basic fact that although unique in the New Testament, it is nonetheless representative of a kind of literature which was the commonest of all between the Old and the New Testaments. The Revelation is commonly called the Apocalypse, being in Greek Apokalupsis. Between the Old and the New Testaments there grew up a great mass of what is called Apocalyptic literature, the product of an indestructible Jewish hope.

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Introduction to Revelation

The Jews could not forget that they were the chosen people of God. To them that involved the certainty that some day they would arrive at world supremacy. In their early history they looked forward to the coming of a king of David's line who would unite the nation and lead them to greatness. There was to come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse (Isa.11:1,10). God would raise up a righteous branch for David (Jer.23:5). Some day the people would serve David their king (Jer.30:9). David would be their shepherd and their king (Eze.34:23; Eze.37:24). The booth of David would be repaired (Am.9:11); out of Bethlehem there would come a ruler who would be great to the ends of the earth (Mic.5:2-4).

But the whole history of Israel gave the lie to these hopes. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom, small enough to begin with, split into two under Rehoboam and Jeroboam and so lost its unity. The northern kingdom, with its capital at Samaria, vanished in the last quarter of the eighth century B.C. before the assault of the Assyrians, never again reappeared in history and is now the lost ten tribes. The southern kingdom, with its capital at Jerusalem, was reduced to slavery and exile by the Babylonians in the early part of the sixth century B.C. It was later the subject state of the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. History for the Jews was a catalogue of disasters from which it became clear that no human deliverer could rescue them.

THE TWO AGES

Jewish thought stubbornly held to the conviction of the chosenness of the Jews but had to adjust itself to the facts of history. It did so by working out a scheme of history. The Jews divided all time into two ages. There was this present age, which is wholly bad and beyond redemption. For it there can be nothing but total destruction. The Jews, therefore, waited for the end of things as they are. There was the age which is to come which was to be wholly good, the golden age of God in which would be peace, prosperity and righteousness and God's chosen people would at last be vindicated and receive the place that was theirs by right.

How was this present age to become the age which is to come? The Jews believed that the change could never be brought about by human agency and, therefore, looked for the direct intervention of God. He would come striding on to the stage of history to blast this present world out of existence and bring in his golden time. The day of the coming of God was called The Day of the Lord and was to be a terrible time of terror and destruction and judgment which would be the birthpangs of the new age.

All apocalyptic literature deals with these events, the sin of the present age, the terrors of the time between, and the blessings of the time to come. It is entirely composed of dreams and visions of the end. That means that all apocalyptic literature is necessarily cryptic. It is continually attempting to describe the indescribable, to say the unsayable, to paint the unpaintable.

This is further complicated by another fact. It was only natural that these apocalyptic visions should flame the more brightly in the minds of men living under tyranny and oppression. The more some alien power held them down, the more they dreamed of the destruction of that power and of their own vindication. But it would only have worsened the situation, if the oppressing power could have understood these dreams. Such writings would have seemed the works of rebellious

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revolutionaries. Such books, therefore, were frequently written in code, deliberately couched in language which was unintelligible to the outsider; and there are many cases in which they must remain unintelligible because the key to the code no longer exists. But the more we know about the historical background of such books, the better we can interpret them.

THE REVELATION

All this is the precise picture of our Revelation. There are any number of Jewish Apocalypses-- Enoch, The Sibylline Oracles, The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Ascension of Isaiah, The Assumption of Moses, The Apocalypse of Baruch, Fourth Ezra. Our Revelation is a Christian Apocalypse. It is the only one in the New Testament, although there were many others which did not gain admission. It is written exactly on the Jewish pattern and follows the basic conception of the two ages. The only difference is that for the day of the Lord it substitutes the coming in power of Jesus Christ. Not only the pattern but the details are the same. The Jewish apocalypses had a standard apparatus of events which were to happen at the last time; these events all have their place in Revelation.

Before we go on to outline that pattern of events, another question arises. Both apocalyptic and prophecy deal with the events which are to come. What, then, is the difference between them?

APOCALYPTIC AND PROPHECY

The difference between the prophets and the apocalyptists was very real. There were two main differences, one of message and one of method.

(i) The prophet thought in terms of this present world. His message was often a cry for social, economic and political justice; and was always a summons to obey and serve God within this present world. To the prophet it was this world which was to be reformed and in which God's kingdom would come. This has been expressed by saying that the prophet believed in history. He believed that in the events of history God's purpose was being worked out. In one sense the prophet was an optimist, for, however sternly he condemned things as they were, he nonetheless believed that they could be mended, if men would accept the will of God. To the apocalyptist the world was beyond mending. He believed, not in the reformation, but in the dissolution of this present world. He looked forward to the creation of a new world, when this one had been shattered by the avenging wrath of God. In one sense, therefore, the apocalyptist was a pessimist, for he did not believe that things as they were could ever be cured. True, he was quite certain that the golden age would come, but only after this world had been destroyed.

(ii) The prophet's message was spoken; the message of the apocalyptist was always written. Apocalyptic is a literary production. Had it been delivered by word of mouth, men would never have understood it. It is difficult, involved, often unintelligible; it has to be pored over before it can be understood. Further, the prophet always spoke under his own name; all apocalyptic writings-- except our New Testament one--are pseudonymous. They are put into the mouths of great ones of the past, like Noah, Enoch, Isaiah, Moses, The Twelve Patriarchs, Ezra and Baruch. There is

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something pathetic about this. The men who wrote the apocalyptic literature had the feeling that greatness was gone from the earth; they were too self-distrusting to put their names to their works and attributed them to the great figures of the past, thereby seeking to give them an authority greater than their own names could have given. As Julicher put it: "Apocalyptic is prophecy turned senile."

THE APPARATUS OF APOCALYPTIC

Apocalyptic literature has a pattern; it seeks to describe the things which will happen at the last times and the blessedness which will follow; and the same pictures occur over and over again. It always, so to speak, worked with the same materials; and these materials find their place in our Book of the Revelation.

(i) In apocalyptic literature the Messiah was a divine, preexistent, otherworldly figure of power and glory, waiting to descend into the world to begin his all-conquering career. He existed in heaven before the creation of the world, before the sun and the stars were made, and he is preserved in the presence of the Almighty (Enoch 48: 3, 6; 62: 7; 4 Ezra 13: 25-26). He will come to put down the mighty from their seats, to dethrone the kings of the earth, and to break the teeth of sinners (Enoch 42: 2-6; 48: 2-9; 62: 5-9; 69: 26-29). In apocalyptic there was nothing human or gentle about the Messiah; he was a divine figure of avenging power and glory before whom the earth trembled in terror.

(ii) The coming of the Messiah was to be preceded by the return of Elijah who would prepare the way for him (Mal.4:5-6). Elijah was to stand upon the hills of Israel, so the Rabbis said, and announce the coming of the Messiah with a voice so great that it would sound from one end of the earth to the other.

(iii) The last terrible times were known as "the travail of the Messiah." The coming of the Messianic age would be like the agony of birth. In the Gospels Jesus is depicted as foretelling the signs of the end and is reported as saying: "All these things are the beginnings of sorrows" (Matt.24:8; Mk.13:8). The word for sorrows is *odinai* (GSN5604), and it literally means birthpangs.

(iv) The last days will be a time of terror. Even the mighty men will cry bitterly (Zeph.1:14); the inhabitants of the land shall tremble (Jl.2:1); men will be affrighted with fear and will seek some place to hide and will find none (Enoch 102: 1,3).

(v) The last days will be a time when the world will be shattered, a time of cosmic upheaval when the universe, as men know it, will be disintegrated. The stars will be extinguished; the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood (Isa.13:10; Jl.2:30-31; Jl.3:15). The firmament will crash in ruins; there will be a cataract of raging fire, and creation will become a molten mass (Sibylline Oracles 3: 83-89). The seasons will lose their order, and there will be neither night nor dawn (Sibylline Oracles 3: 796-806).

(vi) The last days will be a time when human relationships will be destroyed. Hatred and enmity will reign upon the earth. Every man's hand will be against his neighbour (Zech.14:13). Brothers

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will kill each other; parents will murder their own children; from dawn to sunset they shall slay one another (Enoch 100: 1-2). Honour will be turned into shame, and strength into humiliation, and beauty into ugliness. The man of humility will become the man of envy; and passion will hold sway over the man who once was peaceful (2 Baruch 48: 31-37).

(vii) The last days will be a time of judgment. God will come like a refiner's fire, and who can endure the day of his coming? (Mal.3:1-3). It is by the fire and the sword that God will plead with men (Isa.66:15-16). The Son of Man will destroy sinners from the earth (Enoch 69: 27), and the smell of brimstone will pervade all things (Sibylline Oracles 3: 58-61). The sinners will be burned up as Sodom was long ago (Jubilees 36: 10-11).

(viii) In all these visions the Gentiles have their place, but it is not always the same place.

(a) Sometimes the vision is that the Gentiles will be totally destroyed. Babylon will become such a desolation that there will be no place for the wandering Arab to plant his tent among the ruins, no place for the shepherd to graze his sheep; it will be nothing more than a desert inhabited by the beasts (Isa.13:19-22). God will tread down the Gentiles in his anger (Isa.63:6). The Gentiles will come over in chains to Israel (Isa.45:14).

(b) Sometimes there is depicted one last gathering of the Gentiles against Jerusalem, and one last battle in which they are destroyed (Eze.38:14-23; Eze.39:1-16; Zech.14:1-11). The kings of the nations will throw themselves against Jerusalem; they will seek to ravage the shrine of the Holy One; they will place their thrones in a ring round the city, with their infidel people with them; but it will be only for their final destruction (Sibylline Oracles 3: 663-672).

(c) Sometimes there is the picture of the conversion of the Gentiles through Israel. God has given Israel for a light to the Gentiles, that she may be God's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa.49:6). The isles wait upon God (Isa.51:5); the ends of the earth are invited to look to God and be saved (Isa.45:20-22). The Son of Man will be a light to the Gentiles (Enoch 48: 4-5). Nations shall come from the ends of the earth to Jerusalem to see the glory of God (Wis.17:34).

Of all the pictures in connection with the Gentiles the commonest is that of the destruction of the Gentiles and the exaltation of Israel.

(ix) In the last days the Jews who have been scattered throughout the earth will be ingathered to the Holy City again. They will come back from Assyria and from Egypt and will worship the Lord in his holy mountain (Isa.27:12-13). The hills will be removed and the valleys will be filled in, and even the trees will gather to give them shade, as they come back (Bar.5:5-9). Even those who died as exiles in far countries will be brought back.

(x) In the last days the New Jerusalem, which is already prepared in heaven with God (4 Ezra 10: 44-59; 2 Baruch 4: 2-6), will come down among men. It will be beautiful beyond compare with foundations of sapphires, and pinnacles of agate, and gates of carbuncles, on borders of pleasant stones (Isa.54:12-13; Tob.13:16-17). The glory of the latter house will be greater than the glory of the former (Hag.2:7-9).

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(xi) An essential part of the apocalyptic picture of the last days was the resurrection of the dead. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dn.12:2-3). Sheol and the grave will give back that which has been entrusted to them (Enoch 51: 1). The scope of the resurrection of the dead varied. Sometimes it was to apply only to the righteous in Israel; sometimes to all Israel; and sometimes to all men everywhere. Whichever form it took, it is true to say that now for the first time we see emerging a strong hope of a life beyond the grave.

(xii) There were differences as to how long the Messianic kingdom was to last. The most natural--and the most usual--view was to think of it as lasting for ever. The kingdom of the saints is an everlasting kingdom (Dn.7:27). Some believed that the reign of the Messiah would last for 400 years. They arrived at this figure from a comparison of Gen.15:13 and Ps.90:15. In Genesis Abraham is told that the period of affliction of the children of Israel will be 400 years; the psalmist's prayer is that God will make the nation glad according to the days wherein he has afflicted them and the years wherein they have seen evil. In the Revelation the view is that there is to be a reign of the saints for a thousand years; then the final battle with the assembled powers of evil; then the golden age of God.

Such were the events which the apocalyptic writers pictured in the last days; and practically all of them find their place in the pictures of the Revelation. To complete the picture we may briefly summarize the blessings of the coming age.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE AGE TO COME

(i) The divided kingdom will be united again. The house of Judah will walk again with the house of Israel (Jer.3:18; Isa.11:13; Hos.1:11). The old divisions will be healed and the people of God will be one.

(ii) There will be in the world an amazing fertility. The wilderness will become a field (Isa.32:15), it will become like the garden of Eden (Isa.51:3); the desert will rejoice and blossom like the crocus (Isa.35:1). The earth will yield its fruit ten thousandfold; on each vine will be a thousand branches, on each branch a thousand clusters, in each cluster a thousand grapes, and each grape will give a cor (120 gallons) of wine (2 Baruch 29: 5-8). There will be a plenty such as the world has never known and the hungry will rejoice.

(iii) A consistent part of the dream of the new age was that in it all wars would cease. The swords will be beaten into ploughshares and the spears into pruning-hooks (Isa.2:4). There will be no sword or battle-din. There will be a common law for all men and a great peace throughout the earth, and king will be friendly with king (Sibylline Oracles 3: 751-760).

(iv) One of the loveliest ideas concerning the new age was that in it there would be no more enmity between the beasts or between man and the beasts. The leopard and the kid, the cow and the bear, the lion and the falling will play and lie down together (Isa.11:6-9; Isa.65:25). There will be a new covenant between man and the beasts of the field (Hos.2:18). Even a child will be able to play

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where the poisonous reptiles have their holes and their dens (Isa.11:6-9; 2 Baruch 73: 6). In all nature there will be a universal reign of friendship in which none will wish to do another any harm.

(v) The coming age will bring the end of weariness, of sorrow and of pain. The people will not sorrow any more (Jer.31:12); everlasting joy will be upon their heads (Isa.35:10). There will be no such thing as an untimely death (Isa.65:20-22); no man will say: "I am sick" (Isa.33:24); death will be swallowed up in victory and God will wipe tears from all faces (Isa.25:8). Disease will withdraw; anxiety, anguish and lamentation will pass away; childbirth will have no pain; the reaper will not grow weary and the builder will not be toilworn (2 Baruch 73: 2-74: 4). The age to come will be one when what Virgil called "the tears of things" will be no more.

(vi) The age to come will be an age of righteousness. There will be perfect holiness among men. Mankind will be a good generation, living in the fear of the Lord in the days of mercy (Wis.17:28-49; Wis.18:9-10).

The Revelation is the New Testament representative of all these apocalyptic works which tell of the terrors before the end of time and of the blessings of the age to come; and it uses all the familiar imagery. It may often be difficult and even unintelligible to us, but for the most part it was using pictures and ideas which those who read it would know and understand.

THE AUTHOR OF THE REVELATION

(i) The Revelation was written by a man called John. He begins by saying that God sent the visions he is going to relate to his servant John (Rev.1:1). He begins the body of his book by saying that it is from John to the Seven Churches in Asia (Rev.1:4). He speaks of himself as John the brother and companion in tribulation of those to whom he writes (Rev.1:9). "I John," he says, "am he who heard and saw these things" (Rev.22:8).

(ii) This John was a Christian who lived in Asia in the same sphere as the Christians of the Seven Churches. He calls himself the brother of those to whom he writes; and he says he too shares in the tribulations through which they are passing (Rev.1:9).

(iii) He was most probably a Jew of Palestine who had come to Asia Minor late in life. We can deduce that from the kind of Greek he writes. It is vivid, powerful, and pictorial; but from the point of view of grammar it is easily the worst Greek in the New Testament. He makes mistakes which no schoolboy who knew Greek could make. Greek is certainly not his native language; and it is often clear that he is writing in Greek and thinking in Hebrew. He is steeped in the Old Testament. He quotes it or alludes to it 245 times. These quotations come from about twenty Old Testament books; his favourites are Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Psalms, Exodus, Jeremiah, Zechariah. Not only does he know the Old Testament intimately; he is also familiar with the apocalyptic books written between the Testaments.

(iv) His claim for himself is that he is a prophet, and it is on that fact that he rests his right to speak. The command of the Risen Christ to him is that he must prophesy (Rev.10:11). It is through the spirit of prophecy that Jesus gives his witness to the Church (Rev.19:10). God is the God of the

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holy prophets and sends his angel to show his servants what is going to happen in the world (Rev.22:6). The angel speaks to him of his brothers the prophets (Rev.22:9). His book is characteristically prophecy or the words of prophecy (Rev.22:7,10; Rev.22:18-19).

It is here that John's authority lies. He does not call himself an apostle, as Paul does when he wishes to underline his right to speak. He has no "official" or administrative position in the Church; he is a prophet. He writes what he sees; and since what he sees comes from God, his word is faithful and true (Rev.1:11,19).

When John was writing, the prophets had a very special place in the Church. He was writing, as we shall see, about A.D. 90. By that time the Church had two kinds of ministry. There was the local ministry; those engaged in it were settled permanently in one congregation, the elders, the deacons and the teachers. And there was the itinerant ministry of those whose sphere of labour was not confined to any one congregation. In it were the apostles, whose writ ran throughout the whole Church; and there were the prophets, who were wandering preachers. The prophets were greatly respected; to question the words of a true prophet was to sin against the Holy Spirit, the Didache says (Rev.11:7). The accepted order of service for the celebration of the Eucharist is laid down in the Didache, but at the end comes the sentence: "But allow the prophets to hold the Eucharist as they will" (Rev.10:7). The prophets were regarded as uniquely the men of God, and John was a prophet.

(v) It is not likely that he was an apostle. Otherwise he would hardly have so stressed the fact that he was a prophet. Further, he speaks of the apostles as if he was looking back on them as the great foundations of the Church. He speaks of the twelve foundations of the wall of the Holy City and then says, "and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev.21:14). He would scarcely have spoken of the apostles like that if he himself was one of them.

This conclusion is rendered even more likely by the title of the book. In the King James and English Revised Versions it is called The Revelation of St. John the Divine. In the Revised Standard Version and in Moffatt's and in J. B. Phillips' translations the Divine is omitted, because it is absent from the majority of the oldest Greek manuscripts; but it does go very far back. The Greek is theologos (GSN2312') and the word is here used in the sense in which we speak of "the Puritan divines" and means, not John the saintly but John the theologian; and the very addition of that title seems to distinguish this John from the John who was the apostle.

As long ago as A.D. 250 Dionysius, the great scholar who was head of the Christian school at Alexandria, saw that it was well nigh impossible that the same man could have written the Revelation and the Fourth Gospel, if for no other reason than that the Greek is so different. The Greek of the Fourth Gospel is simple but correct; the Greek of the Revelation is rugged and vivid, but notoriously incorrect. Further, the writer of the Fourth Gospel studiously avoids any mention of his own name; the John of the Revelation repeatedly mentions it. Still further, the ideas of the two books are different. The great ideas of the Fourth Gospel, light, life, truth and grace, do not dominate the Revelation. At the same time there are enough resemblances in thought and language to make it clear that both books come from the same centre and from the same world of thought.

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THE DATE OF THE REVELATION

We have two sources which enable us to fix the date.

(i) There is the account which tradition gives to us. The consistent tradition is that John was banished to Patmos in the time of Domitian; that he saw his visions there; at the death of Domitian was liberated and came back to Ephesus; and there set down the visions he had seen. Victorinus, who wrote towards the end of the third century A.D., says in his commentary on the Revelation: "John, when he saw these things, was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the mines by Domitian the Emperor. There, therefore, he saw the revelation... When he was afterwards set free from the mines, he handed down this revelation which he had received from God." Jerome is even more detailed: "In the fourteenth year after the persecution of Nero, John was banished to the island of Patmos, and there wrote the Revelation..."

Upon the death of Domitian, and upon the repeal of his acts by the senate, because of their excessive cruelty, he returned to Ephesus, when Nerva was emperor." Eusebius says: "The apostle and evangelist John related these things to the Churches, when he had returned from exile in the island after the death of Domitian." Tradition makes it certain that John saw his visions in exile in Patmos; the only thing that is doubtful--and it is not important--is whether he wrote them down during the time of his banishment or when he returned to Ephesus. On this evidence we will not be wrong if we date the Revelation about A.D. 95.

(ii) The second line of evidence is the material in the book. There is a completely new attitude to Rome and to the Roman Empire.

In Acts the tribunal of the Roman magistrate was often the safest refuge of the Christian missionaries against the hatred of the Jews and the fury of the mob. Paul was proud that he was a Roman citizen and again and again claimed the rights to which every Roman citizen was entitled. In Philippi he brought the local magistrates to heel by revealing his citizenship (Ac.16:36-40). In Corinth Gallio dismissed the complaints against him with impartial Roman justice (Ac.18:1-17). In Ephesus the Roman authorities were careful for his safety against the rioting mob (Ac.19:13-41). In Jerusalem the Roman tribune rescued him from what might have become a lynching (Ac.21:30-40). When the Roman tribune in Jerusalem heard that there was to be an attempt on Paul's life on the way to Caesarea, he took every possible step to ensure his safety (Ac.23:12-31). When Paul despaired of justice in Palestine, he exercised his right as a citizen and appealed direct to Caesar (Ac.25:10-11).

When he wrote to the Romans, he urged upon them obedience to the powers that be, because they were ordained by God and were a terror only to the evil, and not to the good (Rom.13:1-7). Peter's advice is exactly the same. Governors and kings are to be obeyed, for their task is given them by God. It is a Christian's duty to fear God and honour the emperor (1Pet.2:12-17). In writing to the Thessalonians it is likely that Paul points to the power of Rome as the one thing which is controlling the threatening chaos of the world (2Th.2:7).

In the Revelation there is nothing but blazing hatred for Rome. Rome is a Babylon, the mother of harlots, drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs (Rev.17:5-6). John hopes for nothing but her total destruction.

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The explanation of this change in attitude lies in the wide development of Caesar worship which, with its accompanying persecution, is the background of the Revelation.

By the time of the Revelation Caesar worship was the one religion which covered the whole Roman Empire; and it was because of their refusal to conform to its demands that Christians were persecuted and killed. Its essence was that the reigning Roman Emperor, as embodying the spirit of Rome, was divine. Once a year everyone in the Empire had to appear before the magistrates to burn a pinch of incense to the god-head of Caesar and to say: "Caesar is Lord." After he had done that, a man might go away and worship any god or goddess he liked, so long as that worship did not infringe decency and good order; but he must go through this ceremony in which he acknowledged the Emperor's divinity.

The reason was very simple. Rome had a vast heterogeneous empire, stretching from one end of the known world to another. It had in it many tongues, races and traditions. The problem was how to weld this varied mass into a self-conscious unity. There is no unifying force like that of a common religion but none of the national religions could conceivably have become universal. Caesar worship could. It was the one common act and belief which turned the Empire into a unity. To refuse to burn the pinch of incense and to say: "Caesar is Lord," was not an act of irreligion; it was an act of political disloyalty. That is why the Romans dealt with the utmost severity with the man who would not say: "Caesar is Lord." And no Christian could give the title Lord to any other than Jesus Christ. This was the centre of his creed.

We must see how this Caesar worship developed and how it was at its peak when the Revelation was written

One basic fact must be noted. Caesar worship was not imposed on the people from above. It arose from the people; it might even be said that it arose in spite of efforts by the early emperors to stop it, or at least to curb it. And it is to be noted that of all the people in the Empire only the Jews were exempt from it.

Caesar worship began as a spontaneous outburst of gratitude to Rome. The people of the provinces well knew what they owed to Rome. Impartial Roman justice had taken the place of capricious and tyrannical oppression. Security had taken the place of insecurity. The great Roman roads spanned the world; and the roads were safe from brigands and the seas were clear of pirates. The pax Romana, the Roman peace, was the greatest thing which ever happened to the ancient world. As Virgil had it, Rome felt her destiny to be "to spare the fallen and to cast down the proud." Life had a new order about it. E. J. Goodspeed writes: "This was the pax Romana. The provincial under Roman sway found himself in a position to conduct his business, provide for his family, send his letters, and make his journeys in security, thanks to the strong hand of Rome."

Caesar worship did not begin with the deification of the Emperor. It began with the deification of Rome. The spirit of the Empire was deified under the name of the goddess Roma. Roma stood for all the strong and benevolent power of the Empire. The first temple to Roma was erected in Smyrna as far back as 195 B.C. It was no great step to think of the spirit of Rome being incarnated in one

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man, the Emperor. The worship of the Emperor began with the worship of Julius Caesar after his death. In 29 B.C. the Emperor Augustus granted to the provinces of Asia and Bithynia permission to erect temples in Ephesus and Nicaea for the joint worship of the goddess Roma and the deified Julius Caesar. At these shrines Roman citizens were encouraged and even exhorted to worship. Then another step was taken. To provincials who were not Roman citizens Augustus gave permission to erect temples in Pergamum in Asia and in Nicomedia in Bithynia, for the worship of Roma and himself.

At first the worship of the reigning Emperor was considered to be something permissible for provincial non-citizens, but not for those who had the dignity of the citizenship.

There was an inevitable development. It is human to worship a god who can be seen rather than a spirit. Gradually men began more and more to worship the Emperor himself instead of the goddess Roma. It still required special permission from the senate to erect a temple to the living Emperor, but by the middle of the first century that permission was more and more freely given. Caesar worship was becoming the universal religion of the Roman Empire. A priesthood developed and the worship was organized into presbyteries, whose officials were held in the highest honour.

This worship was never intended to wipe out other religions. Rome was essentially tolerant. A man might worship Caesar and his own god. But more and more Caesar worship became a test of political loyalty; it became, as has been said, the recognition of the dominion of Caesar over a man's life and soul. Let us, then trace the development of this worship up to, and immediately beyond, the writing of the Revelation.

(i) Augustus, who died in A.D. 14, allowed the worship of Julius Caesar, his great predecessor. He allowed non-citizens in the provinces to worship himself but he did not permit citizens to do so; and he made no attempt to enforce this worship.

(ii) Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) could not halt Caesar worship. He forbade temples to be built and priests to be appointed for his own worship; and in a letter to Gythion, a Laconian city, he definitely refused divine honours for himself. So far from enforcing Caesar worship, he actively discouraged it.

(iii) Caligula (A.D. 37-41), the next Emperor, was an epileptic, a madman and a megalomaniac. He insisted on divine honours. He attempted to enforce Caesar worship even on the Jews, who had always been and who always were to remain exempt from it. He planned to place his own image in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem, a step which would certainly have provoked unyielding rebellion. Mercifully he died before he could carry out his plans. But in his reign we have an episode when Caesar worship became an imperial demand.

(iv) Caligula was succeeded by Claudius (A.D. 41-54) who completely reversed his insane policy. He wrote to the governor of Egypt--there were a million Jews in Alexandria--fully approving the Jewish refusal to call the Emperor a god and granting them full liberty to enjoy their own worship. On his accession to the throne, he wrote to Alexandria saying: "I deprecate the appointment of a High Priest to me and the erection of temples, for I do not wish to be offensive to

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my contemporaries, and I hold that sacred fanes and the like have been by all ages attributed to the immortal gods as peculiar honours."

(v) Nero (A.D. 54-68) did not take his own divinity seriously and did nothing to insist on Caesar worship. It is true that he persecuted the Christians; but this was not because they would not worship him, but because he had to find scapegoats for the great fire of Rome.

(vi) On the death of Nero there were three Emperors in eighteen months--Galba, Otto and Vitellius, and in such a time of chaos the question of Caesar worship did not arise.

(vii) The next two Emperors, Vespasian (A.D. 69-79) and Titus (A.D. 79-81), were wise rulers, who made no insistence on Caesar worship.

(viii) The coming of Domitian (A.D. 81-96) brought a complete change. He was a devil. He was the worst of all things--a cold-blooded persecutor. With the exception of Caligula, he in as the first Emperor to take his divinity seriously and to demand Caesar worship. The difference was that Caligula was an insane devil; Domitian was a sane devil, which is much more terrifying. He erected a monument to "the deified Titus son of the deified Vespasian." He began a campaign of bitter persecution against all who would not worship the ancient gods--"the atheists" as he called them. In particular he launched his hatred against the Jews and the Christians. When he arrived in the theatre with his empress, the crowd were urged to rise and shout: "All hail to our Lord and his Lady!" He enacted that he himself was a god.

He informed all provincial governors that government announcements and proclamations must begin: "Our Lord and God Domitian commands..." Everyone who addressed him in speech or in writing must begin: "Lord and God."

Here is the background of the Revelation. All over the Empire men and women must call Domitian god--or die. Caesar worship was the deliberate policy; all must say: "Caesar is Lord." There was no escape.

What were the Christians to do? What hope had they? They had not many wise and not many mighty. They had no influence or prestige. Against them had risen the might of Rome which no nation had ever resisted. They were confronted with the choice--Caesar or Christ. It was to encourage men in such times that the Revelation was written. John did not shut his eyes to the terrors; he saw dreadful things and he saw still more dreadful things on the way; but beyond them he saw glory for those who defied Caesar for the love of Christ. The Revelation comes from one of the most heroic ages in all the history of the Christian Church. It is true that Domitian's successor Nerva (A.D. 96-98) repealed the savage laws; but the damage was done, the Christians were outlaws, and the Revelation is a clarion call to be faithful unto death in order to win the crown of life.

THE BOOK WORTH STUDYING

No one can shut his eyes to the difficulty of the Revelation. It is the most difficult book in the Bible; but it is infinitely worth studying, for it contains the blazing faith of the Christian Church in

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Introduction to Revelation

the days when life was an agony and men expected the end of the heavens and the earth as they knew them but still believed that beyond the terror was the glory and above the raging of men was the power of God.

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Revelation 1:1-3

GOD'S REVELATION TO MEN

Revelation 1:1-3 (Part 1)

This is the revelation revealed by Jesus Christ, the revelation which God gave to him to show to his servants, the revelation which tells of the things which must soon happen. This revelation Jesus Christ sent and explained through his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word sent to him by God and attested by the witness borne by Jesus Christ everything which he saw.

This book is called sometimes the Revelation and sometimes the Apocalypse. It begins with the words "The revelation of Jesus Christ," which mean not the revelation about Jesus Christ but the revelation given by Jesus Christ. The Greek word for revelation is apokalupsis (GSN0602) which is a word with a history.

(i) Apokalupsis (GSN0602) is composed of two parts. Apo (GSN0575) means "away from" and kalupsis (compare GSN2572) "a veiling." Apokalupsis (GSN0602), therefore, means an unveiling, a revealing. It was not originally a specially religious word; it meant simply the disclosure of any fact. There is an interesting use of it in Plutarch (How to tell a Flatterer from a Friend, 32). Plutarch tells how once Pythagoras severely rebuked a devoted disciple of his in public and the young man went out and hanged himself. "From that time on Pythagoras never admonished anyone when anyone else was present. For error should be treated as a foul disease, and all admonition and disclosure (apokalupsis, GSN0602) should be in secret." But apokalupsis (GSN0602) became specially a Christian word.

(ii) It is used for the revealing of God's will to us for our actions. Paul says that he went up to Jerusalem by apokalupsis (GSN0602). He went because God told him he wanted him to go (Gal.2:2).

(iii) It is used of the revelation of God's truth to men. Paul received his gospel, not from men, but by apokalupsis (GSN0602) from Jesus Christ (Gal.1:12). In the Christian assembly the message of the preacher is an apokalupsis (GSN0602) (1Cor.14:6).

(iv) It is used of God's revealing to men of his own mysteries, especially in the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Rom.16:25; Eph.3:3).

(v) It is specially used of the revelation of the power and the holiness of God which is to come at the last days. That will be an unveiling of judgment (Rom.2:5); but for the Christian it will be an unveiling of praise and glory (1Pet.1:7); of grace (1Pet.1:13); of joy (1Pet.4:13).

Before we remind ourselves of the more technical use of apokalupsis (GSN0602), we may note two things.

(i) This revelation is connected specially with the work of the Holy Spirit (Eph.1:17).

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Revelation 1:1-3

(ii) We are bound to see that here we have a picture of the whole of the Christian life. There is no part of it which is not lit by the revelation of God. God reveals to us what we must do and say; in Jesus Christ he reveals himself to us, for he who has seen Jesus has seen the Father (Jn.14:9); and life moves on to the great and final revelation in which there is judgment for those who have not submitted to God but grace and glory and joy for those who are in Jesus Christ. Revelation is no technical theological idea; it is what God is offering to all who will listen.

Now we look at the technical meaning of apokalupsis (GSN0602), for that meaning is specially connected with this book.

The Jews had long since ceased to hope that they would be vindicated as the chosen people by human means. They hoped now for nothing less than the direct intervention of God. To that end they divided all time into two ages--this present age, wholly given over to evil; and the age to come, the age of God. Between the two there was to be a time of terrible trial. Between the Old and the New Testaments the Jews wrote many books which were visions of the dreadful time before the end and of the blessedness to come. These books were called Apokalypses; and that is what the Revelation is. Although there is nothing like it in the New Testament, it belongs to a class of literature which was common between the Testaments. All these books are wild and unintelligible, for they are trying to describe the indescribable. The very subject with which the Revelation deals is the reason why it is so difficult to understand.

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Revelation 1:1-3

THE MEANS OF GOD'S REVELATION

Revelation 1:1-3 (Part 2)

This short section gives us a concise account of how revelation comes to men.

(i) Revelation begins with God, the fountain of all truth. Every truth which men discover is two things--a discovery of the human mind and a gift of God. But it must always be remembered that men never create the truth; they receive it from God. We must also remember that that reception comes in two ways. It comes from earnest seeking. God gave men minds and it is often through our minds that he speaks to us. Certainly he does not grant his truth to the man who is too lazy to think. It comes from reverent waiting. God sends his truth to the man who not only thinks strenuously, but waits quietly in prayer and in devotion. But it must be remembered that prayer and devotion are not simply passive things. They are the dedicated listening for the voice of God.

(ii) God gives this revelation to Jesus Christ. The Bible never, as it were, makes a second God of Jesus; rather it stresses his utter dependence on God. "My teaching," said Jesus, "is not mine, but his who sent me" (Jn.7:16). "I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me" (Jn.8:28). "I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak" (Jn.12:49). It is God's truth that Jesus brings to men; and that is precisely why his teaching is unique and final.

(iii) Jesus sends that truth to John through his angel (Rev.1:1). Here the writer of the Revelation was a child of his day. At this time in history men were specially conscious of the transcendence of God. That is to say, they were impressed above all things with the difference between God and man. So much so that they felt direct communication between God and man was impossible and that there must always be some intermediary. In the Old Testament story Moses received the Law directly from the hands of God (Exo.19-20); but twice in the New Testament it is said that the Law was given by angels (Ac.7:53; Gal.3:19).

(iv) Finally, the revelation is given to John. It is most uplifting to remember the part men play in the coming of God's revelation. God must find a man to whom he can entrust his truth and whom he can use as his mouthpiece.

(v) Let us note the content of the revelation which comes to John. It is the revelation of "the things which must quickly happen" (Rev.1:1). There are two important words here. There is must. History is not haphazard; it has purpose. There is quickly. Here is the proof that it is quite wrong to use the Revelation as a kind of mysterious timetable of what is going to happen thousands of years from now. As John sees it, the things it deals with are working themselves out immediately. The Revelation must be interpreted against the background of its own time.

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Revelation 1:1-3

SERVANTS OF GOD

Revelation 1:1-3 (Part 3)

Twice the word servant appears in this passage. God's revelation was sent to his servants and it was sent through his servant John. In Greek the word is *doulos* (GSN1401) and in Hebrew *`ebed* (HSN5650). Both are difficult fully to translate. The normal translation of *doulos* (GSN1401) is slave. The real servant of God is, in fact, his slave. A servant can leave his service when he likes; he has stated hours of work and stated hours of freedom; he works for a wage; he has a mind of his own and can bargain as to when and for what he will give his labour. A slave can do none of these things; he is the absolute possession of his owner, with neither time nor will of his own. *Doulos* (GSN1401) and *`ebed* (HSN5650) bring out how absolutely we must surrender life to God.

It is of the greatest interest to note to whom these words are applied in Scripture.

Abraham is the servant of God (Gen.26:24; Ps.105:26; Dn.9:11). Jacob is the servant of God (Isa.44:1-2; Isa.45:4; Eze.37:25). Caleb and Joshua are the servants of God (Num.14:24; Josh.24:29; Judg.6:49; 2Chr.24:6; Neh.1:7; Neh.10:29; Ps.105:26; Dn.9:11). Jacob is the servant of God (Isa.44:1-2; Isa.45:4; Eze.37:25). Caleb and Joshua are the servants of God (Num.14:24; Josh.24:29; Judg.2:8). David is second only to Moses as characteristically the servant of God (Ps.132:10; Ps.144:10; 1Kgs.8:66; 1Kgs.11:36; 2Kgs.19:34; 2Kgs.20:6; 1Chr.17:4; in the titles of Ps.18 and Ps.36; Ps.89:3; Eze.34:24). Elijah is the servant of God (2Kgs.9:36; 2Kgs.10:10). Isaiah is the servant of God (Isa.20:3). Job is the servant of God (Jb.1:8; Jb.42:7). The prophets are the servants of God (2Kgs.21:10; Am.3:7). The apostles are the servants of God (Php.1:1; Tit.1:1; Jas.1:1; Jd.1; Rom.1:1; 2Cor.4:5). A man like Epaphras is the servant of God (Col.4:12). All Christians are the servants of God (Eph.6:6).

Two things emerge from this.

(i) The greatest men regarded as their greatest honour the fact that they were servants of God.

(ii) We must note the width of this service. Moses, the law-giver; Abraham, the adventurous pilgrim; David, shepherd boy, sweet singer of Israel, king of the nation; Caleb and Joshua, soldiers and men of action; Elijah and Isaiah, prophets and men of God; Job, faithful in misfortune; the apostles, who bore to men the story of Jesus; every Christian--all are servants of God. There is none whom God cannot use, if he will submit to his service.

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Revelation 1:1-3

THE BLESSED'S OF GOD

Revelation 1:1-3 (Part 4)

This passage ends with a threefold blessing.

(i) The man who reads these words is blessed. The reader here mentioned is not the private reader, but the man who publicly reads the word in the presence of the congregation. The reading of Scripture was the centre of any Jewish service (Lk.4:16; Ac.13:15). In the Jewish synagogue scripture was read to the congregation by seven ordinary members of the congregation, although if a priest or levite was present he took precedence. The Christian Church took much of its service from the synagogue order and the reading of scripture remained a central part of the service. Justin Martyr gives the earliest account of what a Christian service was like; and it includes the reading of "the memoirs of the apostles (i.e. the Gospels), and the writings of the prophets" (Justin Martyr 1: 67). Reader became in time an official office in the Church. One of Tertullian's complaints about the heretical sects was the way in which a man could too speedily arrive at office without any training for it.

He writes: "And so it comes to pass that today one man is their bishop, and tomorrow another; today he is a deacon who tomorrow is a reader" (Tertullian, On Prescription against Heretics, 41).

(ii) The man who hears these words is blessed. We do well to remember how great a privilege it is to hear the word of God in our own tongue, a privilege which was dearly bought. Men died to give it to us; and the professional clergy sought for long to keep it to themselves. To this day the task of giving men the Scriptures in their own language goes on.

(iii) The man who keeps these words is blessed. To hear God's word is a privilege; to obey it is a duty. There is no real Christianity in the man who hears and forgets or deliberately disregards.

That is all the more true because the time is short. The time is near (Rev.1:3). The early church lived in vivid expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ and that expectation was "the ground of hope in distress and constant heed to warning." Apart altogether from that, no man knows when the call will come to take him from this earth, and in order to meet God with confidence he must add the obedience of his life to the listening of his ear.

We may note that there are seven blessed in the Revelation.

(i) There is the blessed we have just studied. We may call it the blessedness of reading, hearing and obeying the Word of God.

(ii) Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth (Rev.14:13). We may call it the blessedness in heaven of Christ's friends on earth.

(iii) Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments (Rev.16:15). We may call it the blessedness of the watchful pilgrim.

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Revelation 1:1-3

(iv) Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev.19:9). We may, call it the blessedness of the invited guests of God.

(v) Blessed is he who shares in the first resurrection (Rev.20:6). We may call it the blessedness of the man whom death cannot touch.

(vi) Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book (Rev.22:7). We may call it the blessedness of the wise reader of God's Word.

(vii) Blessed are those who do his commandments (Rev.22:14). We may call it the blessedness of those who hear and obey.

Such blessedness is open to every Christian.

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Revelation 1:4-6

THE MESSAGE AND ITS DESTINATION

Revelation 1:4-6 (Part 1)

This is John writing to the seven Churches which are in Asia. Grace be to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits which are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the witness on whom you can rely, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and who set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood, and who made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever. Amen.

The Revelation is a letter, written to the seven Churches which are in Asia. In the New Testament Asia is never the continent but always the Roman province. Once the kingdom of Attalus the Third, he had willed it to the Romans at his death. It included the western sea-coast of Asia Minor, on the shores of the Mediterranean, with Phrygia, Mysia, Caria and Lycia in the hinterland; and its capital was the city of Pergamum.

The seven Churches are named in Rev.1:11--Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea. These were by no means the only Churches in Asia. There were Churches at Colossae (Col.1:2); Hierapolis (Col.4:13); Troas (2Cor.2:12; Ac.20:5); Miletus (Ac.20:17); Magnesia and Tralles, as the letters of Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, show. Why did John single out only these seven? There can be more than one reason for his selection.

(i) These Churches might be regarded as the centres of seven postal districts, being all on a kind of ring road which circled the interior of the province. Troas was off the beaten track. But Hierapolis and Colossae were within walking distance of Laodicea; and Tralles, Magnesia and Miletus were close to Ephesus. Letters delivered to these seven cities would easily circulate in the surrounding areas; and since every letter had to be hand-written, each letter would need to be sent where it would reach most easily the greatest number of people.

(ii) Any reading of the Revelation will show John's preference for the number seven. It occurs fifty-four times. There are seven candle-sticks (Rev.1:12), seven stars (Rev.1:16), seven lamps (Rev.4:5), seven seals (Rev.5:1), seven horns and seven eyes (Rev.5:6), seven thunders (Rev.10:3), seven angels, plagues and bowls (Rev.15:6-8). The ancient peoples regarded seven as the perfect number, and it runs all through the Revelation.

From this certain of the early commentators drew an interesting conclusion. Seven is the perfect number because it stands for completeness. It is, therefore, suggested that, when John wrote to seven Churches, he was, in fact, writing to the whole Church. The first list of New Testament books, called the Muratorian Canon, says of the Revelation: "For John also, though he wrote in the Revelation to seven Churches, nevertheless speaks to them all." This is all the more likely when we remember how often John says: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches" (Rev.2:7; Rev.2:11, Rev.2:17; Rev.2:29; Rev.3:6; Rev.3:13; Rev.3:22).

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Revelation 1:4-6

(iii) Although the reasons we have adduced for the choice of these seven Churches may be valid, it may be still more valid that he chose them because in them he had a special authority. They were in a special sense his Churches, and by speaking to them he sent a message first to those who knew and loved him best, and then through them to every Church in every generation.

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Revelation 1:4-6

THE BLESSING AND ITS SOURCE

Revelation 1:4-6 (Part 2)

He begins by sending them the blessing of God.

He sends them grace, and this means all the undeserved gifts of the wondrous love of God. He sends them peace, which R. C. Charles finely describes as "the harmony restored between God and man through Christ." But there are two extra-ordinary things in this greeting.

(i) John sends blessings from him who is and who was and who is to come. That is in itself a common title for God. In Exo.3:14 the word of God to Moses is "I am who I am." The Jewish Rabbis explained that by saying that God meant: "I was; I still am; and in the future I will be." The Greeks spoke of "Zeus who was, Zeus who is, and Zeus who will be." The Orphic worshippers said: "Zeus is the first and Zeus is the last; Zeus is the head and Zeus is the middle; and from Zeus all things come." This is what in Hebrews so beautifully became: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever" (Heb.13:8).

But to get the full meaning of this we must look at it in the Greek, for John bursts the bonds of grammar to show his reverence for God. We translate the first phrase from him who is; but that is not what the Greek says. A Greek noun is in the nominative case when it is the subject of a sentence, but, when it is governed by a preposition it changes its case and its form. It is so in English. He is the subject of a sentence; him is the object. When John says that the blessing comes from him who is he should have put him who is in the genitive case after the preposition; but quite ungrammatically he leaves it in the nominative. It is as if we said in English from he who is, refusing to change he into him. John has such an immense reverence for God that he refuses to alter the form of his name even when the rules of grammar demand it.

John is not finished with his amazing use of language. The second phrase is from him who was. Literally, John says from the he was. The point is that who was would be in Greek a participle. The odd thing is that the verb eimi (GSN1510) (to be) has no past participle. Instead there is used the participle genomenos from the verb gignomai, which means not only to be but also to become. Becoming implies change and John utterly refuses to apply any word to God that will imply any change; and so he uses a Greek phrase that is grammatically impossible and that no one ever used before.

In the terrible days in which he was writing John stayed his heart on the changelessness of God and used defiance of grammar to underline his faith.

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Revelation 1:4-6

THE SEVENFOLD SPIRIT

Revelation 1:4-6 (Part 3)

Anyone who reads this passage must be astonished at the form of the Trinity which we meet here. We speak of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here we have God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son but instead of the Holy Spirit we have the seven Spirits who are before his throne. These seven Spirits are mentioned more than once in the Revelation (Rev.3:1; Rev.4:5; Rev.5:6). Three main explanations have been offered of them.

(i) The Jews talked of the seven angels of the presence, whom they beautifully called "the seven first white ones" (I Enoch 90: 21). They were what we call the archangels, and "they stand and enter before the glory of the Lord" (Tob.12:15). Their names are not always the same but they are often called Uriel, Rafael, Raguel, Michael, Gabriel, Saiquael and Jeremiel. They had the care of the elements of the world--fire, air and water--and were the guardian angels of the nations. They were the most illustrious and the most intimate servants of God. Some think that they are the seven Spirits mentioned here. But that cannot be; great as the angels were, they were still created beings.

(ii) The second explanation connects them with the famous passage in Isa.11:2; as the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, has it: "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety; by this spirit he shall be filled with the fear of God." This passage is the basis of the great conception of the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit.

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire
And lighten with celestial fire;
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

The Spirit, as Beatus said, is one in name but sevenfold in virtues. If we think of the sevenfold gift of the Spirit, it is not difficult to think of the Spirit as seven Spirits, each giving great gifts to men. So it is suggested that the conception of the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit gave rise to the idea of the seven Spirits before the throne of God.

(iii) The third explanation connects the idea of the seven Spirits with the fact of the seven Churches. In Heb.2:4 we read of God giving "gifts of the Holy Spirit." The word translated gifts is *merismos* (GSN3311), and it really means shares, as if the idea was that God gives a share of his Spirit to every man. So the idea here would be that the seven Spirits stand for the share of the Spirit which God gave to each of the seven Churches. It would mean that no Christian fellowship is left without the presence and the power and the illumination of the Spirit.

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Revelation 1:4-6

THE TITLES OF JESUS

Revelation 1:4-6 (Part 4)

In this passage three great titles are ascribed to Jesus Christ.

(i) He is the witness on whom we can rely. It is a favourite idea of the Fourth Gospel that Jesus is a witness of the truth of God. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen" (Jn.3:11). Jesus said to Pilate: "For this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn.18:37). A witness is essentially a person who speaks from first-hand knowledge. That is why Jesus is God's witness. He is uniquely the person with first-hand knowledge about God.

(ii) He is the first-born of the dead. The word for first-born is *prototokos* (GSN4416). It can have two meanings. (a) It can mean literally first-born. If it is used in this sense, the reference must be to the Resurrection. Through his Resurrection Jesus gained a victory over death, which all who believe in him may share. (b) Since the first-born was the son who inherited his father's honour and power, *prototokos* (GSN4416) comes to mean one with power and honour, one who occupies the first place, a prince among men. When Paul speaks of Jesus as the first-born of all creation (Col.1:15), he means that to him the first place of honour and glory belongs. If we take the word in this sense--and probably we should--it means that Jesus is Lord of the dead as he is Lord of the living. There is no part of the universe, in this world or in the world to come, and nothing in life or in death of which Jesus Christ is not Lord.

(iii) He is the ruler of kings on earth. There are two things to note here. (a) This is a reminiscence of Ps.89:27: "I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth." That was always taken by Jewish scholars to be a description of the coming Messiah; and, therefore, to say that Jesus is the ruler of kings on earth is to claim that he is the Messiah. (b) Swete very beautifully points out the connection between this title of Jesus and the temptation story. In that story the devil took Jesus up into a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory and said: "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me" (Matt.4:8-9; Lk.4:6-7). It was the devil's claim that the kingdoms of the earth were delivered into his power (Lk.4:6); and it was his suggestion that, if Jesus would strike a bargain with him, he would give him a share in them. The amazing thing is that what the devil promised Jesus--and could never have given him--Jesus won for himself by the suffering of the Cross and the power of the Resurrection. Not compromise with evil, but the unswerving loyalty and the unfailing love which accepted the Cross brought Jesus his universal lordship.

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Revelation 1:4-6

WHAT JESUS DID FOR MEN

Revelation 1:4-6 (Part 5)

Few passages set down with such splendour what Jesus did for men.

(i) He loves us and he set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood. The King James Version is in error here. It reads: "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." The words "to wash" and "to set free" are in Greek very alike. "To wash" is louein (GSN3068); "to set free" is luein (GSN3089); and they are pronounced exactly in the same way. But there is no doubt that the oldest and best Greek manuscripts read luein (GSN3089). Again "in his own blood" is a mistranslation. The word translated "in" is en (GSN1722) which, indeed, can mean "in"; but here it is a translation of the Hebrew word "be-" (the e is pronounced very short as in "the"), which means "at the price of."

What Jesus did, as John sees it, is that he freed us from our sins at the cost of his own blood. This is exactly what he says later on when he speaks of those who were ransomed for God by the blood of the Lamb (Rev.5:9). It is exactly what Paul meant when he spoke of us being redeemed from the curse of the Law (Gal.3:13); and when he spoke of redeeming those who were under the Law (Gal.4:5). In both cases the word used is exagorazein (GSN1805), which means to buy out from, to pay the price of buying a person or a thing out of the possession of him who holds that person or thing in his power.

This is a very interesting and important correction of the King James Version. It is made in all the newer translations and it means that the well-worn phrases which speak of being "washed in the blood of the Lamb" have little scriptural authority. These phrases convey a staggering picture; and it must come to many with a certain relief to know that what John said was that we are set free from our sins at the cost of the blood, that is, at the cost of the life of Jesus Christ.

There is another very significant thing here. We must carefully note the tenses of the verbs. John says that Jesus loves us and set us free. Loves is the present tense and it means that the love of God in Christ Jesus is something which is continuous. Set us free is the past tense, the Greek aorist, which tells of one act completed in the past and it means that in the one act of the Cross our liberation from sin was achieved. That is to say, what happened on the Cross was one availing act in time which was an expression of the continuous love of God.

(ii) Jesus made us a kingdom, priests to God. That is a quotation of Exo.19:6: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." Jesus has done two things for US.

(a) He has given us royalty. Through him we may become the true sons of God; and, if we are sons of the King of kings, we are of lineage than which there can be none more royal.

(b) He made us priests. The point is this. Under the old way, only the priest had the right of access to God. When a Jew entered the Temple, he could pass through the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of the Israelites--but there he must stop; into the Court of the

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Revelation 1:4-6

Priests he could not go; no nearer the Holy of Holies could he come. In the vision of the great days to come Isaiah said: "You shall be called the priests of the Lord" (Isa.61:6). In that day every one of the people would be a priest and have access to God. That is what John means; because of what Jesus Christ did access to the presence of God is now open to every man. There is a priesthood of all believers. We can come boldly to the throne of grace (Heb.4:16), because for us there is a new and living way into the presence of God (Heb.10:19-22).

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Revelation 1:7

THE COMING GLORY

Revelation 1:7

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and the people who pierced him will see him; and all the tribes of the earth shall lament over him. Yea! Amen!

From now on in almost every passage, we shall have to note John's continuous use of the Old Testament. He was so soaked in the Old Testament that it was almost impossible for him to write a paragraph without quoting it. This is interesting and significant. John was living in a time when to be a Christian was an agonizing thing. He himself knew banishment and imprisonment and hard labour; and there were many who knew death in its most cruel forms. The best way to maintain courage and hope in such a situation was to remember that God had never failed in the past; and that his power was not grown less now.

In this passage John sets down the motto and the text of his whole book, his confidence in the triumphant return of Christ, which would rescue Christians in distress from the cruelty of their enemies.

(i) To Christians the return of Christ is a promise on which to feed the soul. John takes as his picture of that return Daniel's vision of the four bestial powers who have held the world in their grip (Dn.7:1-14). There was Babylon, the power that was like a lion with eagle's wings (Dn.7:4). There was Persia, the power that was like a savage bear (Dn.7:5). There was Greece, the power that was like a winged leopard (Dn.7:6). There was Rome, a beast with iron teeth, beyond description (Dn.7:7). But the day of these bestial empires was over, and the dominion was to be given to a gentle power like a son of man. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him, and to him was given dominion, and glory, and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him" (Dn.7:13-14).

It is from that passage in Daniel there emerges the ever-recurring picture of the Son of Man coming on the clouds (Mk.13:26; Mk.14:62; Matt.24:30; Matt.26:64). When we strip away the purely temporary imagery--we, for instance, no longer think of heaven as a localized place above the sky--we are left with the unchanging truth that the day will come when Jesus Christ will be Lord of all. In that hope have ever been the strength and the comfort of Christians for whom life was difficult and for whom faith meant death.

(ii) To the enemies of Christ, the return of Christ is a threat. To make this point John again quotes the Old Testament, from Zech.12:10 which contains the words: "When they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born." The story behind the Zechariah saying is this. God gave his people a good shepherd; but the people in their disobedient folly killed him and took to themselves evil and self-seeking shepherds. But the day will come when in the grace of God they will bitterly repent, and in that day they will look on the good shepherd whom they pierced and will sorrowfully lament for him and for what they have done. John takes that picture and applies it to Jesus. Men crucified him but the day will come when they will look on him again; and this time, he

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Revelation 1:7

will not be a broken figure on a cross but a regal figure to whom universal dominion has been given.

The first reference of these words is to the Jews and the Romans who actually crucified Jesus. But in every age all who sin crucify him again. The day will come when those who disregarded and those who opposed Jesus Christ will find him the Lord of the universe and the judge of their souls.

The passage closes with the two exclamations--"Even so. Amen!" In the Greek the words are nai (GSN3483) and amen (GSN0281). Nai (GSN3483) is the Greek and amen (GSN0281) is the Hebrew (compare HSN0539) for a solemn affirmation--"Yes, indeed! So let it be!" By using the expression both in Greek and Hebrew John underlines its awful solemnity.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 1:8

THE GOD IN WHOM WE TRUST

Revelation 1:8

I am alpha and omega, says the Lord God, he who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Here is a tremendous description of the God in whom we trust and whom we adore.

(i) He is alpha and omega. Alpha (GSN0001) is the first letter and omega (GSN5598) the last of the Greek alphabet; and the phrase alpha (GSN0001) to omega (GSN5598) indicates completeness. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is aleph and the last is tau; and the Jews used the same kind of expression. The Rabbis said that Adam transgressed the Law and Abraham kept it from aleph to tau. They said that God had blessed Israel from aleph to tau. This expression indicates that God is absolutely complete: he has in himself what H. B. Swete called "the boundless life which embraces all and transcends all."

(ii) God is he who is and who was and who is to come. That is to say, he is the Eternal. He was before time began; he is now; and he will be when time ends. He has been the God of all who have trusted in him; he is the God in whom at this present moment we can put our trust; and there can be no event and no time in the future which can separate us from him.

Nor death nor life, nor earth nor hell,
nor time's destroying sway,
Can e'er efface us from his heart,
or make his love decay.

Each future period that will bless,
as it has bless'd the past;
He lov'd us from the first of time,
He loves us to the last.

(iii) God is the Almighty. The word for Almighty is pantokrator (GSN3841) which describes the one who has dominion over all things.

The suggestive fact is that this word occurs in the New Testament seven times. Once it occurs in 2Cor.6:18, in a quotation from the Old Testament, and all the six other instances are in the Revelation. This word is distinctive of John. Think of the circumstances in which he was writing. The embattled might of Rome had risen up to crush the Christian Church. No empire had ever been able to withstand Rome; what possible chance against Rome had "the panting, huddled flock whose crime was Christ"? Humanly speaking the Christian Church had none; but if men thought that, they had left the most important factor of all out of the reckoning--God the pantokrator (GSN3841), in the grip of whose hand were all things.

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It is this word which in the Greek Old Testament describes the Lord of Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts (Am.9:5; Hos.12:5). It is this word which John uses in the tremendous text: "The Lord our God the Almighty reigns" (Rev.19:6). If men are in the hands of a God like that, nothing can pluck them away. If behind the Christian Church there is a God like that, so long as she the Church is true to her Lord, nothing can destroy her.

My times are in thy hand:
I'll always trust in thee;
And, after death, at thy right hand
I shall for ever be.

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Revelation 1:9

THROUGH TRIBULATION TO THE KINGDOM

Revelation 1:9 (Part 1)

I, John, your brother and partner in tribulation, in the kingdom, and in that steadfast endurance which life in Christ alone can give, was in the island which is called Patmos, for the sake of the word given by God and confirmed by Jesus Christ.

John introduces himself, not by any official title but as your brother and partner in tribulation. His right to speak was that he had come through all that those to whom he was writing were going through. Ezekiel writes in his book: "Then I came to the exiles at Telabib, who dwelt by the river Chebar, and I sat there overwhelmed among them" (Eze.3:15). Men will never listen to one who preaches endurance from the comfort of an easy chair, nor to one who preaches heroic courage to others while he himself has sought a prudent safety. It is the man who has gone through it who can help others who are going through it. As the Indians have it: "No man can criticize another man until he has walked for a day in his moccasins." John and Ezekiel could speak because they had sat where their people were sitting.

John puts three words together--tribulation, kingdom, steadfast endurance. Tribulation is *thlipsis* (GSN2347). Originally *thlipsis* meant simply pressure and could, for instance, describe the pressure of a great stone on a man's body. At first it was used quite literally, but in the New Testament it has come to describe that pressure of events which is persecution. Steadfast endurance is *hupomone* (GSN5281). *Hupomone* (GSN5281) does not describe the patience which simply passively submits to the tide of events; it describes the spirit of courage and conquest which leads to gallantry and transmutes even suffering into glory. The situation of the Christians was this. They were in *thlipsis* (GSN2347) and, as John saw it, in the midst of the terrible events which preceded the end of the world. They were looking towards *basileia* (GSN0932), the kingdom, into which they desired to enter and on which they had set their hearts.

There was only one way from *thlipsis* (GSN2347) to *basileia* (GSN0932), from affliction to glory, and that was through *hupomone* (GSN5281), conquering endurance. Jesus said: "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt.24:13). Paul told his people: "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Ac.14:22). In Second Timothy we read: "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2Tim.2:12).

The way to the kingdom is the way of endurance. But before we leave this passage we must note one thing. That endurance is to be found in Christ. He himself endured to the end and he is able to enable those who walk with him to achieve the same endurance and to reach the same goal.

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Revelation 1:9

THE ISLAND OF BANISHMENT

Revelation 1:9 (Part 2)

John tells us that, when the visions of the Revelation came to him, he was in Patmos. It was the unanimous tradition of the early church that he was banished to Patmos in the reign of Domitian. Jerome says that John was banished in the fourteenth year after Nero and liberated on the death of Domitian (Concerning Illustrious Men, 9). This would mean that he was banished to Patmos about A.D. 94 and liberated about A.D. 96.

Patmos, a barren rocky little island belonging to a group of islands called the Sporades, is ten miles long by five miles wide. It is crescent-shaped, with the horns of the crescent pointing to the east. Its shape makes it a good natural harbour. It lies forty miles off the coast of Asia Minor and it was important because it was the last haven on the voyage from Rome to Ephesus and the first in the reverse direction.

Banishment to a remote island was a common form of Roman punishment. It was usually meted out to political prisoners and, as far as they were concerned, there were worse punishments. Such banishment involved the loss of civil rights and all property except enough for a bare existence. People so banished were not personally ill-treated and were not confined in prison on their island but free to move within its narrow limits. Such would be banishment for a political prisoner; but it would be very different for John. He was a leader of the Christians and Christians were criminals. The wonder is that he was not executed straight away. Banishment for him would involve hard labour in the quarries. Sir William Ramsay says his banishment would be "preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, work under the lash of the military overseer."

Patmos left its mark on John's writing. To this day they show visitors a cave in a cliff overlooking the sea, where, they say, the Revelation was written. There are magnificent views of the sea from Patmos, and, as Strahan says, the Revelation is full of "the sights and the sounds of the infinite sea." The word *thalassa* (GSN2281), sea, occurs in the Revelation no fewer than twenty-five times. Strahan writes: "Nowhere is 'the voice of many waters' more musical than in Patmos; nowhere does the rising and setting sun make a more splendid 'sea of glass mingled with fire'; yet nowhere is the longing more natural that the separating sea should be no more."

It was to all the hardships and pain and weariness of banishment and hard labour on Patmos that John went for the sake of the word given by God. So far as the Greek goes, that phrase is capable of three interpretations. It could mean that John went to Patmos to preach the word of God. It could mean that he withdrew to the loneliness of Patmos to receive the word of God and the visions of the Revelation. But it is quite certain that it means that it was John's unshakeable loyalty to the word of God, and his insistence on preaching the message of Jesus Christ which brought him to banishment in Patmos.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 1:10-11

IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD'S DAY

Revelation 1:10-11

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a great voice, like the sound of a trumpet, saying: "Write what you see in a book, and send it to the seven Churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Historically this is an extremely interesting passage for it is the first reference in literature to the Lord's Day.

We have often spoken of the Day of the Lord, that day of wrath and judgment when this present age with all its evil was to be shatteringly changed into the age to come. Some think that John is saying that he was transported in a vision to that Day of the Lord and saw in advance all the astonishing things which were to happen then. Those who hold that view are very few and it is not a natural meaning for the words.

It is quite certain that when John uses the expression the Lord's Day he is using it as we use it--its very first mention in literature.

How did the Christian Church cease to observe the Sabbath, Saturday, and come to observe the Lord's Day, Sunday? The Sabbath commemorated the rest of God after the creation of the world; the Lord's Day commemorates the rising of Jesus from the dead.

The three earliest references to the Lord's Day may well be the following. The Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, the first manual of Christian worship and instruction, says of the Christian Church: "On the Lord's Day we meet and break bread" (Didache 14: 1). Ignatius of Antioch, writing to the Magnesians, describes the Christians as "no longer living for the Sabbath, but for the Lord's Day" (Ignatius, To the Magnesians, 9: 1). Melito of Sardis wrote a treatise Concerning the Lord's Day. By early in the second century the Sabbath had been abandoned and the Lord's Day was the accepted Christian day.

One thing seems certain. All these early references come from Asia Minor and it was there that the observance of the Lord's Day first came in. But what was it that suggested to the Christians a weekly observance of the first day of the week? In the east there was a day of the month and a day of the week called Sebaste (GSN4575), which means The Emperor's Day; it was no doubt this which made the Christians decide that the first day of the week must be dedicated to their Lord.

John was in the Spirit. This phrase means that he was in an ecstasy in which he was lifted beyond the things of space and time into the world of eternity. "The Spirit lifted me up," said Ezekiel (Eze.3:12), "and I heard behind me the sound of a great earthquake." For John the voice was like the sound of a trumpet. The sound of the trumpet is woven into the language of the New Testament (Matt.24:31; 1Cor.15:52; 1Th.4:16). There is no doubt that in the mind of John there is here another Old Testament picture. In the account of the giving of the Law it is said: "There were thunders and

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Revelation 1:10-11

lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast" (Exo.19:16). The voice of God sounds with the commanding, unmistakable clarity of a trumpet call.

John is told to write the vision which he sees. It is his duty to share the message which God gives to him. A man must first hear and then transmit, even if the price of the transmission is costly indeed. It may be that a man must withdraw to see his vision, but he must also go forth to tell it.

Two phrases go together. John was in Patmos; and John was in the Spirit. We have seen what Patmos was like, and we have seen the pain and the hardship that John was undergoing. No matter where a man is, no matter how hard his life, no matter what he is passing through, he may still be in the Spirit. And, if he is in the Spirit, even on Patmos, the glory and the message of God will come to him.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 1:12-13

THE DIVINE MESSENGER

Revelation 1:12-13

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me; and, when I had turned, I saw seven golden lampstands, and, in the midst of the lampstands, one like a son of man, clothed in a robe that reached to his feet, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle.

We now begin on the first of John's visions; and we shall see that his mind is so saturated with Scripture that element after element in the picture has an Old Testament background and counterpart.

He says that he turned to see the voice. We would say: "I turned to see whose was the voice which was speaking to me."

When he turned, he saw seven golden lampstands. John does not only allude to the Old Testament; he takes items from many places in it and out of them he forms a composite picture. The picture of the seven golden lampstands has three sources.

(a) It comes from the picture of the candlestick of pure gold in the Tabernacle. It was to have six branches, three on one side and three on the other, and seven lamps to give light (Exo.25:31-37).

(b) It comes from the picture of Solomon's Temple. In it there were to be five candlesticks of pure gold on the right hand and five on the left (1Kgs.7:49).

(c) It comes from the vision of Zechariah. Zechariah saw "a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it" (Zech.4:2).

When John sees a vision, he sees it in terms of scenes from the Old Testament places and occasions when God had already revealed himself to his people. Surely there is a lesson here. The best way to prepare oneself for new revelation of truth is to study the revelation which God has already given.

In the midst of the lampstands he saw one like a son of man. Here we are back to the picture of Dn.7:13, in which the kingdom and the power and the dominion are given by the Ancient of Days to one like a son of man. As we well know from Jesus' use of it, Son of Man became nothing less than the title of the Messiah; and by using it here John makes it plain that the revelation which he is to receive is coming from Jesus Christ himself

This figure was clothed with a robe which reached down to his feet, and he was girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. Here again we have three pictures.

(a) The word which describes the robe is *poderes* (GSN4158), reaching down to the feet. This is the word which the Greek Old Testament uses to describe the robe of the High Priest (Exo.28:4; Exo.29:5; Lev.16:4). Josephus also describes carefully the garments which the priests and the High

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Revelation 1:12-13

Priest wore when they were serving in the Temple. They wore "a long robe reaching to the feet," and around the breast, "higher than the elbows," they wore a girdle which was loosely wound round and round the body. The girdle was embroidered with colours and flowers, with a mixture of gold interwoven (Josephus: The Antiquities of the Jews, 3.7: 2, 4). All this means that the description of the robe and the girdle of the glorified Christ is almost exactly that of the dress of the priests and of the High Priest. Here, then, is the symbol of the high priestly character of the work of the Risen Lord.

A priest, as the Jews saw it, was a man who himself has access to God and who opens the way for others to come to him; even in the heavenly places Jesus, the great High Priest, is still carrying on his priestly work, opening the way for all men to the presence of God.

(b) But other people besides priests wore the long robe reaching to the feet and the high girdle. It was the dress of great ones, of princes and of kings. Poderes (GSN4158) is the description of the robe of Jonathan (1Sam.18:4); of Saul (1Sam.24:5,11); of the princes of the sea (Eze.26:16). The robe the Risen Christ was wearing was the robe of royalty. No longer was he a criminal on a cross; he was dressed like a king.

Christ is Priest and Christ is King.

(c) There is still another part of this picture. In the vision of Daniel, the divine figure who came to tell him the truth of God was clothed in fine linen (the Greek Old Testament calls his garment poderes, GSN4158) and girt with fine gold (Dn.10:5). This, then, is the dress of the messenger of God. So this presents Jesus Christ as the supreme messenger of God.

Here is a tremendous picture. When we trace the origins of the thought of John, we see that by the very dress of the Risen Lord he is showing him to us in his threefold eternal office of Prophet, Priest and King, the one who brings the truth of God, the one who enables others to enter into the presence of God and the one to whom God has given the power and dominion for ever.

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Revelation 1:14-18

THE PICTURE OF THE RISEN CHRIST

Revelation 1:14-18 (Part 1)

His head and his hair were white, as white as wool, like snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet were like beaten brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice was as the voice of many waters; he had seven stars in his right hand; and out of his mouth there was coming a sharp two-edged sword; and his face was as the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man. And he put his right hand on me and said: "Stop being afraid. I am the first and the last; I am the living one although I was dead, and, behold, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

Before we begin to look at this passage in detail, there are two general facts we must note.

(i) It is easy to miss seeing how carefully wrought the Revelation is. It is not a book which was flung together in a hurry; it is a closely integrated and artistic literary whole. In this passage we have a whole series of descriptions of the Risen Christ; and the interesting thing is that each of the letters to the seven Churches, which follow in the next two chapters, with the exception of the letter to Laodicea, opens with a description of the Risen Christ taken from this chapter. It is as if this chapter sounded a series of themes which were later to become the texts for the letters to the Churches. Let us set down the beginning of each of the first six letters and see how it corresponds to the description of the Risen Christ here.

To the angel of the Church in Ephesus, write: The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand (Rev.2:1).

To the angel of the Church in Smyrna, write: The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life (Rev.2:8).

To the angel of the Church in Pergamum, write: The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword (Rev.2:12).

To the angel of the Church in Thyatira, write: The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze (Rev.2:18).

To the angel of the Church in Sardis, write: The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (Rev.3:1).

To the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, write: The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens (Rev.3:7).

This is literary craftsmanship of a very high standard.

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Revelation 1:14-18

(ii) The second thing to note is that in this passage John takes titles which in the Old Testament are descriptions of God and applies them to the Risen Christ.

His head and his hair were white, as white wool, like snow.

In Dn.7:9 that is a description of the Ancient of Days.

His voice was as the sound of many waters.

In Eze.43:2 that is a description of God's own voice.

He had the seven stars in his hand.

In the Old Testament it is God himself who controls the stars. It is God's question to Job: "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion?" (Jb.38:31).

I am the first and the last.

Isaiah hears the voice of God saying: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no God" (Isa.44:6; compare Isa.48:12).

I am the living one.

In the Old Testament God is characteristically "the living God" (Josh.3:10; Ps.42:2; Hos.1:10).

I have the keys of death and of Hades.

The Rabbis had a saying that there were three keys which belonged to God and which he would share with no other--of birth, rain and raising the dead.

Nothing could better show the reverence in which John holds Jesus Christ. He holds him so high that he can give him nothing less than the titles which in the Old Testament belong to God.

The highest place that heaven affords
Is his, is his by right,
The King of kings, and Lord of lords,
And heaven's eternal Light.

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Revelation 1:14-18

THE TITLES OF THE RISEN LORD (1)

Revelation 1:14-18 (Part 2)

Let us look very briefly at each of the titles by which the Risen Lord is here called.

His head and his hair were white, as white wool, like snow.

This, taken from the description of the Ancient of Days in Dn.7:9, is symbolic of two things. (a) It stands for great age; and it speaks to us of the eternal existence of Jesus Christ. (b) It speaks to us of divine purity. The snow and the white wool are the emblems of stainless purity. "Though your sins are like scarlet," said Isaiah, "they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Isa.1:18). Here we have the symbols of the preexistence and the sinlessness of Christ.

His eyes were as a flame of fire.

Daniel is always in John's mind, and this is part of the description of the divine figure who brought the vision to Daniel. "His eyes like flaming torches" (Dn.10:6). When we read the gospel story, we get the impression that he who had once seen the eyes of Jesus could never forget them. Again and again we have the vivid picture of his eyes sweeping round a circle of people (Mk.3:34; Mk.10:23; Mk.11:11); sometimes his eyes flashed in anger (Mk.3:5); sometimes they fastened on someone in love (Mk.10:21); and sometimes they had in them all the sorrow of one whose friends had wounded him to the quick (Lk.22:61).

His feet were like beaten brass, as if it had been refined by fire in a furnace.

The word translated beaten brass is chalkolibanos (GSN5474). No one really knows what the metal is. Perhaps it was that fabulous compound called electrum, which the ancients believed to be an alloy of gold and silver and more precious than either. Here again it is the Old Testament which gives John his vision. In Daniel it is said of the divine messenger that "his feet were like the gleam of burnished bronze" (Dn.10:6); in Ezekiel it is said of the angelic beings that "their feet sparkled like burnished bronze" (Eze.1:7). It may be that we are to see two things in the picture. The brass stands for strength, for the steadfastness of God; and the shining rays stand for speed, for the swiftness of the feet of God to help his own or to punish sin.

His voice was as the sound of many waters.

This is the description of the voice of God in Eze.43:2. But it may be that we can catch an echo of the little island of Patmos. As H. B. Swete has it: "The roar of the Aegean was in the ears of the seer." H. B. Swete goes on to say that the voice of God is not confined to one note. Here, it is like the thunder of the sea, but it can also be like a still small voice (1Kgs.19:12), or, as the Greek version of the Old Testament has it, like a gentle breeze. It can thunder a rebuke; and it can croon with the soothing comfort of a mother over her hurt child.

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Revelation 1:14-18

He had seven stars in his right hand

Here again, we have something which was the prerogative of God alone. But there is also something lovely. When the seer fell in awed terror before the vision of the Risen Christ, the Christ stretched out his right hand and placed it on him and bade him not to be afraid. The hand of Christ is strong enough to uphold the heavens and gentle enough to wipe away our tears.

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Revelation 1:14-18

THE TITLES OF THE RISEN LORD (2)

Revelation 1:14-18 (Part 3)

There was coming forth from his mouth a sharp, two-edged sword

The sword referred to was not long and narrow like a fencer's blade; it was a short, tongue-shaped sword for close righting. Again the seer has gone here and there in the Old Testament for his picture. Isaiah says of God: "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth" (Isa.11:4); and of himself: "He made my mouth like a sharp sword" (Isa.49:2). The symbolism tells us of the penetrating quality of the word of God. If we listen to it, no shield of self-deception can withstand it; it strips away our self-deludings, lays bare our sin and leads to pardon. "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb.4:12). "The Lord will slay the wicked with the breath of his mouth" (2Th.2:8).

His face was as the sun shining in its strength.

In Judges there is a great picture which may well have been in John's mind, The enemies of God shall perish, "but thy friends be like the sun as he rises in his might" (Judg.5:31). If that is true of them that love God, how much truer it must be of God's beloved Son. Swete sees something even lovelier here, nothing less than a memory of the Transfiguration. On that occasion Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John, "and his face shone like the sun" (Matt.17:2). No one who had seen that sight could ever forget the glow and if the writer of this book is that same John perhaps he saw again on the face of the Risen Christ the glory he had glimpsed on the Mount of Transfiguration.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead man.

This was the experience of Ezekiel when God spoke to him (Eze.1:28; Eze.3:23; Eze.43:3). But surely we can find again a memory of the Gospel story. On that day in Galilee when there was the great catch of fish and Peter glimpsed who Jesus was, he fell down at his knees, conscious only that he was a sinful man (Lk.5:1-11). To the end of the day there can be nothing but reverence in the presence of the holiness and the glory of the Risen Christ.

Stop being afraid.

Surely here, too, we have reminiscence of the Gospel story, for these were words which the disciples had heard more than once from the lips of Jesus. It was thus he spoke to them when he came to them across the water (Matt.14:27; Mk.6:50); and it was thus above all that he spoke to them on the Mount of Transfiguration, when they were terrified at the sound of the divine voice (Matt.17:7). Even in heaven, when we come near the unapproachable glory, Jesus is saying: "I am here; do not be afraid."

I am the first and the last.

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Revelation 1:14-18

In the Old Testament this is nothing other than the self-description of God (Isa.44:6; Isa.48:12). It is the promise of Jesus that he is there at the beginning and the end. He is there in the moment of birth and at the time of death. He is there when we set out upon the Christian way and when we finish our course. As F. W. H. Myers makes Paul say:

Yea thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning
He shall suffice me, for he hath sufficed:
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.

I am the living one, although I was dead and I am alive for ever
and for ever.

Here is at once the claim and the promise of Christ, the claim of one who conquered death and the promise of one who is alive for evermore to be with his people.

I have the keys of death and Hades.

Death has its gates (Psa.9:13; Ps.107:18; Isa.38:10); and Christ has the keys of these gates. There were those who took this claim--and some still do--as a reference to the descent into hell (1Pet.3:18-20). There was a conception in the ancient Church that when Jesus descended into Hades, he unlocked the doors and brought out Abraham and all God's faithful people who had lived and died in the generations before. But we may take it in an even wider sense; for we who are Christians believe that Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2Tim.1:10), that because he lives we shall live also (Jn.14:19), and that, therefore, for us and for those whom we love the bitterness of death is for ever past.

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Revelation 1:20

THE CHURCHES AND THEIR ANGELS

Revelation 1:20

Here is the secret meaning of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches and the seven lampstands are the seven Churches.

This passage begins with a word which throughout the New Testament is used in a very special case. The King James Version speaks of the mystery of the seven stars and of the seven golden candlesticks. The Greek, *mysterion* (GSN3466), does not mean a mystery in our sense of the term. It means something which is meaningless to the outsider but meaningful to the initiate who possesses the key. So here the Risen Christ goes on to give the inner meaning of the seven stars and the seven lampstands.

The seven lampstands stand for the seven Churches. One of the great titles of the Christian is that he is the light of the world (Matt.5:14; Php.2:15). But one of the old Greek commentators has a penetrating comment on this. He says that the Churches are called, not the light itself, but the lampstand on which the light is set. It is not the Churches themselves which produce the light; the giver of light is Jesus Christ; and the Churches are only the vessels within which the light shines. The Christian's light is always a borrowed light.

One of the great problems of the Revelation is to decide what John means by the angels of the Churches. More than one explanation has been offered.

(i) The word *aggelos* (GSN0032)--*gg* in Greek is pronounced *ng*--has two meanings. It means an angel; but far oftener it means a messenger. It is suggested that messengers of all the Churches have assembled to receive a message from John and take it back to their congregations. If that is so, each letter will begin: "To the messenger of the Church of...." As far as the Greek goes this is perfectly possible; and it gives good sense; but the difficulty is that *aggelos* (GSN0032) is used in the Revelation about fifty times apart from its use here and in the letters to the seven Churches, and without exception it means angel.

(ii) It is suggested that *aggelos* (GSN0032) means a bishop of the Churches. It is suggested, either that the bishops of the Churches have gathered to meet John or that he is directing these letters to them. In favour of this theory there is quoted the words of Malachi: "The lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal.2:7). In the Greek Old Testament messenger is *aggelos* (GSN0032); and it is suggested that the title could very easily be transferred to the bishops of the Churches. They are the messengers of the Lord to their Churches and to them John speaks. Again this explanation gives good sense; but it suffers from the same objection as the first. It attaches *aggelos* (GSN0032) to a human person and that John never elsewhere does.

(iii) It is suggested that this has to do with the idea of guardian angels. In Hebrew thought every nation had its presiding angel (compare Dn.10:13; Dn.10:20-21). Michael, for instance, was held to

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be the guardian angel of Israel (Dn.12:1). People, too, had their guardian angels. When Rhoda came with the news that Peter had escaped from prison, they would not believe her and said it was his angel (Ac.12:15). Jesus himself spoke of the angels who guard a little child (Matt.18:10). If we take it in this sense, the difficulty is that then the guardian angels of the Churches are being rebuked for the sins of the Churches. In fact Origen believed that this was the case. He said that the guardian angel of a Church was like the tutor of a child. If a child went wrong, the tutor was blamed; and if a Church went wrong, God in his mercy blamed its angel.

The difficulty is that, though the angel of the Church is mentioned in the address of each letter, undoubtedly it is the members of the Church who are being addressed.

(iv) Both Greeks and Jews believed that every earthly thing had a heavenly counterpart; and it is suggested that the angel is the ideal of the Church; and that the Churches are being addressed as their ideal selves to bring them back to the right way.

None of the explanations is fully satisfactory; but maybe the last is the best, for there is no doubt that in the letters the angel and the Church are one and the same.

We now go on to study the letters to the Seven Churches. In each case we shall give an outline of the history and the contemporary background of the city in which the Church was; and once we have studied the general background we will go on to study each letter in detail.

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Revelation 2:1-7

THE LETTER TO EPHESUS

Revelation 2:1-7 (Part 1)

These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand and who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. I know your works--I mean your toil and your steadfast endurance, and I know that you cannot bear evil men, and that you have put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and who are not, and have proved them liars. I know that you possess steadfast endurance. I know all that you have borne for my name's sake and I know that you have not been worn out by your efforts. All the same I have this against you--that you have left your first love. Remember, then, whence you have fallen, and repent, and make your conduct such as it was at first. If you do not, I am coming to you, and I will remove your lampstand from its place, if you do not repent.

But you do possess this virtue--you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I too hate.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. I will give to him who overcomes to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God. :elines

To the angel of the Church in Ephesus, write:

EPHESUS

FIRST AND GREATEST

When we know something of the history of Ephesus and learn something of its conditions at this time, it is easy to see why it comes first in the list of the seven Churches.

Pergamum was the official capital of the province of Asia but Ephesus was by far its greatest city. It claimed as its proud title "The first and the greatest metropolis of Asia." A Roman writer called it Lumen Asiae, The Light of Asia. Let us see, then, the factors which gave it its preeminent greatness.

(i) In the time of John, Ephesus was the greatest harbour in Asia. All the roads of the Cayster Valley--the Cayster was the river on which it stood--converged upon it. But the roads came from further afield than that. It was at Ephesus that the road from the far-off Euphrates and Mesopotamia reached the Mediterranean, having come by way of Colossae and Laodicea. It was at Ephesus that the road from Galatia reached the sea, having come by way of Sardis. And from the south came up the road from the rich Maeander Valley. Strabo, the ancient geographer, called Ephesus "The Market of Asia," and it may well be that in Rev. 18:12-13 John was setting down a description of the varied riches of the marketplace at Ephesus.

Ephesus was the Gateway of Asia. One of its distinctions, laid down by statute, was that when the Roman proconsul came to take up office as governor of Asia, he must disembark at Ephesus and enter his province there. For all the travellers and the trade, from the Cayster and the Maeander Valleys, from Galatia, from the Euphrates and from Mesopotamia, Ephesus was the highway to

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Rome. In later times, when the Christians were brought from Asia to be flung to the lions in the arena in Rome, Ignatius called Ephesus the Highway of the Martyrs.

Its position made Ephesus the wealthiest and the greatest city in all Asia and it has been aptly called the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.

(ii) Ephesus had certain important political distinctions. It was a free city. In the Roman Empire certain cities were free cities; they had had that honour conferred upon them because of their services to the Empire. A free city was within its own limits self-governing; and it was exempted from ever having Roman troops garrisoned there. It was an assize town. The Roman governors made periodical tours of their provinces; and at certain specially chosen cities and towns courts were held where the governor tried the most important cases. Further, Ephesus held yearly the most famous games in Asia which attracted people from all over the province.

(iii) Ephesus was the centre of the worship of Artemis or, as the King James Version calls her, Diana of the Ephesians. The Temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was four hundred and twenty-five feet long by two hundred and twenty feet wide; it had one hundred and twenty columns, each sixty feet high and the gift of a king, and thirty-six of them were richly gilded and inlaid. Ancient temples consisted mostly of colonnades with only the centre portion roofed over. The centre portion of the Temple of Artemis was roofed over with cypress wood. The image of Artemis was one of the most sacred images in the ancient world. It was by no means beautiful but a squat, black, many-breasted figure; so ancient that none knew its origin. We have only to read Ac.19 to see how precious Artemis and her temple were to Ephesus. Ephesus had also famous temples to the godhead of the Roman Emperors, Claudius and Nero, and in after days was to add temples to Hadrian and Severus. In Ephesus pagan religion was at its strongest.

(iv) Ephesus was a notorious centre of pagan superstition. It was famous for the Ephesian Letters, amulets and charms which were supposed to be infallible remedies for sickness, to bring children to those who were childless and to ensure success in any undertaking; and people came from all over the world to buy them.

(v) The population of Ephesus was very mixed. Its citizens were divided into six tribes. One consisted of those who were descendants of the original natives of the country; one consisted of those who were direct descendants of the original colonists from Athens; three consisted of other Greeks; and one, it is probable, consisted of Jews. Besides being a centre of religion the Temple of Artemis was also a centre of crime and immorality. The Temple area possessed the right of asylum; any criminal was safe if he could reach it. The temple possessed hundreds of priestesses who were sacred prostitutes. All this combined to make Ephesus a notoriously evil place. Heraclitus, one of the most famous of ancient philosophers, was known as "the weeping philosopher." His explanation of his tears was that no one could live in Ephesus without weeping at its immorality.

Such was Ephesus; a more unpromising soil for the sowing of the seed of Christianity can scarcely be imagined; and yet it was there that Christianity had some of its greatest triumphs. R. C.

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Revelation 2:1-7

Trench writes: "Nowhere did the word of God find a kindlier soil, strike root more deeply or bear fairer fruits of faith and love."

Paul stayed longer in Ephesus than in any other city (Ac.20:31). It was with Ephesus that Timothy was connected so that he is called its first bishop (1Tim.1:3). It is in Ephesus that we find Aquila, Priscilla and Apollos (Ac.18:19,24,26). Surely to no one was Paul ever more close than to the Ephesian elders, as his farewell address so beautifully shows (Ac.20:17-38). In later days John was the leading figure of Ephesus. Legend has it that he brought Mary the mother of Jesus to Ephesus and that she was buried there. When Ignatius of Antioch wrote to Ephesus, on his way to being martyred in Rome, he could write: "You were ever of one mind with the apostles in the power of Jesus Christ."

There can be few places which better prove the conquering power of the Christian faith.

We may note one more thing. We have spoken of Ephesus as the greatest harbour of Asia. Today there is little left of Ephesus but ruins and it is no less than six miles from the sea. The coast is now "a harbourless line of sandy beach, unapproachable by a ship." What was once the Gulf of Ephesus and the harbour is "a marsh dense with reeds." It was ever a fight to keep the harbour of Ephesus open because of the silt which the Cayster brings down. The fight was lost and Ephesus vanished from the scene.

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Revelation 2:1-7

EPHESUS - CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

Revelation 2:1-7 (Part 2)

John begins the letter to Ephesus with two descriptions of the Risen Christ.

(i) He holds the seven stars in his right hand. That is to say, Christ holds the Churches in his hand. The word for to hold is *kratein* (GSN2902), and it is a strong word. It means that Christ has complete control over the Church. If the Church submits to that control, it will never go wrong; and more than that--our security lies in the fact that we are in the hand of Christ. "They shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (Jn.10:28).

There is another point here which emerges only in the Greek. *Kratein* (GSN2902) normally takes a genitive case after it (the case which in English we express by the word of). Because, when we take hold of a thing, we seldom take hold of the whole of it but of part of it. When *kratein* (GSN2902) takes an accusative after it, it means that the whole object is gripped within the hand. Here, *kratein* (GSN2902) takes the accusative and that means that Christ clasps the whole of the seven stars in his hand. That means he holds the whole Church in his hand.

We do well to remember that. It is not only our Church which is in the hand of Christ; the whole Church is in his hand. When men put up barriers between Church and Church, they do what Christ never does.

(ii) He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. The lampstands are the Churches. This expression tells us of Christ's unwearied activity in the midst of his Churches. He is not confined to any one of them; wherever men are met to worship in his name, Christ is there.

John goes on to say certain things about the people of the Church of Ephesus.

(i) The Risen Christ praises their toil. The word is *kopos* (GSN2884) and it is a favourite New Testament word. Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis all work hard into the Lord (Rom.16:12). The one thing that Paul claims is that he has worked harder than all (1Cor.15:10). He fears lest the Galatians slip back, and his labour is in vain (Gal.4:11). In each case--and there are many others--the word is either *kopos* (GSN2884) or the verb *kopian* (GSN2872). The special characteristic of these words is that they describe the kind of toil which takes everything of mind and sinew that a man can put into it. The Christian way is not for the man who fears to break sweat. The Christian is to be a toiler for Christ, and, even if physical toil is impossible, he can still toil in prayer.

(ii) The Risen Christ praises their steadfast endurance. Here is the word *hupomone* (GSN5281) which we have come upon again and again. It is not the grim patience which resignedly accepts things. It is the courageous gallantry which accepts suffering and hardship and turns them into grace and glory. It is often said that suffering colours life; but when we meet life with the *hupomone* (GSN5281) which Christ can give, the colour of life is never grey or black; it is always tinged with glory.

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Revelation 2:1-7

EPHESUS - WHEN ORTHODOXY COSTS TOO MUCH

Revelation 2:1-7 (Part 3)

The Risen Christ goes on to praise the Christians of Ephesus because they have tested evil men and proved them liars.

Many an evil man came into the little congregations of the early church. Jesus had warned of the false prophets who are wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt.7:15). In his farewell speech to the elders of this very Church at Ephesus, Paul had warned them that grievous wolves would invade the flock (Ac.20:29). These evil men were of many kinds. There were emissaries of the Jews who sought to entangle Christians again in the Law and followed Paul everywhere, trying to undo his work. There were those who tried to turn liberty into licence. There were professional beggars who preyed on the charity of the Christian congregations. The Church at Ephesus was even more open to these itinerant menaces than any other Church. It was on the highway to Rome and to the east, and what R. C. Trench called "the whole rabble of evil-doers" was liable to descend upon it.

More than once the New Testament insists on the necessity of testing. John in his First Letter insists that the spirits who claim to come from God should be tested by their willingness to accept the Incarnation in all its fullness (1Jn.4:1-3). Paul insists that the Thessalonians should test all things and then hold on to that which is good (1Th.5:21). He insists that, when the prophets preach, they are subject to the testing of the other prophets (1Cor.14:29). A man cannot proclaim his private views in the assembly of God's people; he must abide in the tradition of the Church. Jesus demanded the hardest test of all: "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt.7:15-20).

The Church at Ephesus had faithfully applied its tests and had weeded out all evil and misguided men; but the trouble was that something had got lost in the process. "I have this against you," says the Risen Christ, "that you have lost your first love." That phrase may have two meanings.

(a) It can mean that the first enthusiasm is gone. Jeremiah speaks of the devotion of Israel to God in the early days. God says to the nation that he remembers, "the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride" (Jer.2:2). There had been a honeymoon period, but the first flush of enthusiasm is past. It may be that the Risen Christ is saying that all the enthusiasm has gone out of the religion of the Church of Ephesus.

(b) Much more likely this means that the first fine rapture of love for the brotherhood is gone. In the first days the members of the Church at Ephesus had really loved each other; dissension had never reared its head; the heart was ready to kindle and the hand was ready to help. But something had gone wrong. It may well be that heresy-hunting had killed love, and orthodoxy had been achieved at the price of fellowship. When that happens, orthodoxy has cost too much. All the orthodoxy in the world will never take the place of love.

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EPHESUS - THE STEPS ON THE RETURN JOURNEY

Revelation 2:1-7 (Part 4)

In Ephesus something had gone wrong. The earnest toil was there; the gallant endurance was there; the unimpeachable orthodoxy was there; but the love was gone. So the Risen Christ makes his appeal and it is for the three steps of the return journey.

(i) First, he says "Remember". He is not here speaking to someone who has never been inside the Church; he is speaking to those who are inside but have somehow lost the way. Memory can often be the first step on the way back. In the far country the prodigal son suddenly remembered his home (Lk.15:17).

O. Henry has a short story. There was a lad who had been brought up in a village; and in the village school he had sat beside a village girl, innocent and sweet. The lad found his way to the city; fell into bad company; became an expert pickpocket. He was on the street one day; he had just picked a pocket--a neat job, well done--and he was pleased with himself. Suddenly he saw the girl he used to sit beside at school. She was still the same--innocent and sweet. She did not see him; he took care of that. But suddenly he remembered what he had been, and realized what he was. He leaned his burning head against the cool iron of a lamp post. "God," he said, "how I hate myself." Memory was offering him the way back.

William Cowper wrote:

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?

A verse like that may sound like nothing but tragedy and sorrow, but in fact it can be the first step of the way back; for the first step to amendment is to realize that something has gone wrong.

(ii) Second, he says "Repent". When we discover that something has gone wrong, there is more than one possible reaction. We may feel that nothing can sustain its first lustre, and so accept what we consider inevitable. We may be filled with a feeling of resentment and blame life instead of facing ourselves. We may decide that the old thrill is to be found along forbidden pathways and try to find spice for life in sin. But the Risen Christ says, "Repent!" Repentance is the admission that the fault is ours and the feeling of sorrow for it. The prodigal's reaction is: "I will arise and go to my father and say I have sinned." (Lk.15:18). It is Saul's cry of the heart when he realizes his folly: "I have played the fool and I have erred exceedingly" (1Sam.26:21). The hardest thing about repentance is the acceptance of personal responsibility for our failure, for once the responsibility is accepted the godly sorrow will surely follow.

(iii) Third, he says "Do". The sorrow of repentance is meant to drive a man to two things. First, it is meant to drive him to fling himself on the grace of God, saying only: "God, be merciful to me a

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sinner." Second, it is meant to drive him to action in order to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. No man has truly repented when he does the same things again. Fosdick said that the great truth of Christianity is that "no man need stay the way he is." The proof of repentance is a changed life, a life changed by our effort in cooperation with the grace of God.

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Revelation 2:1-7

EPHESUS - A RUINOUS HERESY

Revelation 2:1-7 (Part 5)

We meet here a heresy which the Risen Christ says that he hates and which he praises Ephesus for also hating. It may seem strange to attribute hatred to the Risen Christ; but two things are to be remembered. First, if we love anyone with passionate intensity, we will necessarily hate anything which threatens to ruin that person. Second, it is necessary to hate the sin but love the sinner.

The heretics we meet here are the Nicolaitans. They are only named, not defined. But we meet them again in Pergamum (Rev.2:15). There they are very closely connected with those "who hold the teaching of Balaam," and that in turn is connected with eating things offered to idols and with immorality (Rev.2:14). We meet precisely the same problem at Thyatira where the wicked Jezebel is said to cause Christians to practise immorality and to eat things offered to idols.

We may first note that this danger is coming not from outside the Church but from inside. The claim of these heretics was that they were not destroying Christianity but presenting an improved version.

We may, second, note that the Nicolaitans and those who hold the teaching of Balaam were, in fact, one and the same. There is a play on words here. The name Nicolaos (GSN3532), the founder of the Nicolaitans, could be derived from two Greek words, nikan (GSN3528), to conquer, and laos (GSN2992), the people. Balaam (HSN1109) can be derived from two Hebrew words, bela, to conquer, and ha'am (HSN5971), the people. The two names, then, are the same and both can describe an evil teacher, who has won victory over the people and subjugated them to poisonous heresy.

In Num.25:1-5 we find a strange story in which the Israelites were seduced into illegal and sacrilegious unions with Moabite women and into the worship of Baal-peor, a seduction which, if it had not been sternly checked, might have ruined the religion of Israel and destroyed her as a nation. When we go on to Num.31:16 we find that seduction definitely attributed to the evil influence of Balaam. Balaam, then, in Hebrew history stood for an evil man who seduced the people into sin.

Let us now see what the early church historians have to tell us about these Nicolaitans. The majority identify them with the followers of Nicolaus, the proselyte of Antioch, who was one of the seven commonly called deacons (Ac.6:5). The idea is that Nicolaus went wrong and became a heretic. Irenaeus says of the Nicolaitans that "they lived lives of unrestrained indulgence" (Against Heresies, 1.26.3). Hippolytus says that he was one of the seven and that "he departed from correct doctrine, and was in the habit of inculcating indifference of food and life" (Refutation of Heresies, 7: 24).

The Apostolic Constitutions (6: 8) describe the Nicolaitans as "shameless in uncleanness." Clement of Alexandria says they "abandon themselves to pleasure like goats...leading a life of self-indulgence." But he acquits Nicolaus of all blame and says that they perverted his saying "that the flesh must be abused." Nicolaus meant that the body must be kept under; the heretics perverted it

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into meaning that the flesh can be used as shamelessly as a man wishes (The Miscellanies 2: 20). The Nicolaitans obviously taught loose living.

Let us see if we can identify their point of view and their teaching a little more definitely. The letter to Pergamum tells us that they seduced people into eating meat offered to idols and into immorality. When we turn to the decree of the Council of Jerusalem, we find that two of the conditions on which the Gentiles were to be admitted to the Church were that they were to abstain from things offered to idols and from immorality (Ac.15:28-29). These are the very conditions that the Nicolaitans broke.

They were almost certainly people who argued on these lines. (a) The Law is ended; therefore, there are no laws and we are entitled to do what we like. They confused Christian liberty with unchristian licence. They were the very kind of people whom Paul urged not to use their liberty as an opportunity for the flesh (Gal.5:13). (b) They probably argued that the body is evil anyway and that a man could do what he liked with it because it did not matter. (c) They probably argued that the Christian was so defended by grace that he could do anything and take no harm.

What lay behind this Nicolaitan perversion of the truth? The trouble was the necessary difference between the Christian and the pagan society in which he moved. The heathen had no hesitation in eating meat offered to idols and it was set before him at every social occasion. Could a Christian attend such a feast? The heathen had no idea of chastity and sexual relations outside marriage were accepted as completely normal and brought no shame. Must a Christian be so very different? The Nicolaitans were suggesting that there was no reason why a Christian should not come to terms with the world. Sir William Ramsay describes their teaching thus: "It was an attempt to effect a reasonable compromise with the established usages of the Graeco-Roman society and to retain as many as possible of those usages in the Christian system of life." This teaching naturally affected most the upper classes because they had most to lose if they went all the way with the Christian demand.

To John the Nicolaitans were worse than pagans, for they were the enemy within the gates.

The Nicolaitans were not prepared to be different; they were the most dangerous of all heretics from a practical point of view, for, if their teaching had been successful, the world would have changed Christianity and not Christianity the world.

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EPHESUS - THE GREAT REWARD

Revelation 2:1-7 (Part 6)

Finally, the Risen Christ makes his great promise to those who overcome. In this picture there are two very beautiful conceptions.

(i) There is the conception of the tree of life. This is part of the story of the Garden of Eden; in the midst of the garden there was the tree of life (Gen.2:9); it was the tree of which Adam was forbidden to eat (Gen.2:16-17); the tree whose fruit would make a man like God, and for eating which Adam and Eve were driven from Eden (Gen.3:22-24).

In later Jewish thought the tree came to stand for that which gave man life indeed. Wisdom is a tree of life to them that lay hold of her (Prov.3:18); the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life (Prov.11:30); hope fulfilled is a tree of life (Prov.13:12); a tongue is a tree of life (Prov.15:4).

To this is to be added another picture. Adam was first forbidden to eat of the tree of life and then he was barred from the garden so that the tree of life was lost for ever. But it was a regular Jewish conception that, when the Messiah came and the new age dawned, the tree of life would be in the midst of men and those who had been faithful would eat of it. The wise man said: "They that do the things that please thee shall receive the fruit of the tree of immortality" (Ecc.19:19). The rabbis had a picture of the tree of life in paradise. Its boughs overshadowed the whole of paradise; it had five hundred thousand fragrant perfumes and its fruit as many pleasant tastes, every one of them different. The idea was that what Adam had lost the Messiah would restore. To eat of the tree of life means to have all the joys that the faithful conquerors will have when Christ reigns supreme.

(ii) There is the conception of paradise, and the very sound of the word is lovely. It may be that we do not attach any very definite meaning to it but when we study history, we come upon some of the most adventurous thinking the world has ever known.

(a) Originally paradise was a Persian word. Xenophon wrote much about the Persians, and it was he who introduced the word into the Greek language. Originally it meant a pleasure garden. When Xenophon is describing the state in which the Persian king lived, he says that he takes care that, wherever he resides, there are paradises, full of all the good and beautiful things the soil can produce (Xenophon: Oeconomicus, 4: 13). Paradise is a lovely word to describe a thing of serene beauty.

(b) In the Septuagint paradise has two uses. First, it is regularly used for the Garden of Eden (Gen.2:8; Gen.3:1). Second, it is regularly used of any stately garden. When Isaiah speaks of a garden that has no water, it is the word paradise that is used (Isa.1:30). It is the word used when Jeremiah says: "Plant gardens and eat their produce" (Jer.29:5). It is the word used when the preacher says: "I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees" (Ecc.2:5).

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(iii) In early Christian thought the word has a special meaning. In Jewish thought after death the souls of all alike went to Hades, a grey and shadowy place. Early Christian thought conceived of an intermediate state between earth and heaven to which all men went and in which they remained until the final judgment. This place was conceived of by Tertullian as a vast cavern beneath the earth. But there was a special part in which the patriarchs and the prophets lived, and that was paradise. Philo describes it as a place "vexed by neither rain, nor snow, nor waves, but which the gentle Zephyr refreshes, breathing ever on it from the ocean." As Tertullian saw it, only one kind of person went straight to this paradise, and that was the martyr. "The sole key," he said, "to unlock paradise is your own life's blood" (Tertullian: Concerning the Soul, 55).

Origen was one of the most adventurous thinkers the Church ever produced. He writes like this: "I think that all the saints (saints means Christians) who depart from this life will remain in some place situated on the earth, which holy Scripture calls paradise, as in some place of instruction and, so to speak, class-room or school of souls.... If anyone indeed be pure in heart and holy in mind, and more practised in perception, he will by making more rapid progress, quickly ascend to a place in the air, and reach the kingdom of heaven, through these mansions (stages) which the Greeks called spheres and which holy Scripture calls heavens.... He will in the end follow him who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who said: 'I will that where I am, these may be also.' It is of this diversity of places he speaks, when he said: 'In my Father's house are many mansions'" (Origen: De Principiis, 2: 6).

The great early thinkers did not identify paradise and heaven; paradise was the intermediate stage, where the souls of the righteous were fitted to enter the presence of God. There is something very lovely here. Who has not felt that the leap from earth to heaven is too great for one step and that there is need of a gradual entering into the presence of God? May it have been of this that Charles Wesley was thinking when he sang:

Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

(iv) In the end in Christian thought paradise did not retain this idea of an intermediate state. It came to be equivalent to heaven. Our minds must turn to the words of Jesus to the dying and penitent thief: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk.23:43). We are in the presence of mysteries about which it would be irreverent to dogmatize; but is there any better definition of paradise than to say that it is life for ever in the presence of our Lord?

When death these mortal eyes shall seal,
And still this throbbing heart,
The rending veil shall thee reveal
All glorious as thou art--

and that is paradise.

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Revelation 2:8-11

THE LETTER TO SMYRNA

Revelation 2:8-11 (Part 1)

And to the angel of the Church in Smyrna, write:

These things says the first and the last, who passed through death, and who came to life again.

I know the affliction and the poverty you endure--you are rich in spite of it--and I know the slanders which proceed from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but who are a synagogue of Satan. Have no fear of what you will have to go through Behold! the devil is going to throw some of you into prison in order to test you, and you will have a time of affliction which will last for ten days. Show yourselves loyal to death and I will give you the crown of life.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.

SMYRNA THE CROWN OF ASIA

If it was inevitable that Ephesus should come first in the list of the seven Churches, it was but natural that Smyrna its great rival should come second. Of all the cities of Asia, Smyrna was the loveliest. Men called it the ornament of Asia, the crown of Asia and the flower of Asia. Lucian said that it was "the fairest of the cities of Ionia." Aristides, who sang the praise of Smyrna with such splendour, spoke of "the grace which extends over every part like a rainbow...the brightness which pervades every part, and reaches up to the heavens, like the glitter of the bronze of armour in Homer." It added to the charm of Smyrna that the west wind, the gentle zephyr ever blew through its streets. "The wind," said Aristides, "blows through every part of the city, and makes it as fresh as a grove of trees." The constant west wind had only one disadvantage. The sewage of the city drained into the gulf on which the city stood, and the west wind tended to blow it back upon the city rather than out to sea.

Smyrna was magnificently situated. It stood at the end of the road which crossed Lydia and Phrygia and travelled out to the far east, and it commanded the trade of the rich Hermus valley. Inevitably it was a great trading city. The city itself stood at the end of a long arm of the sea, which ended in a small land-locked harbour in the city's heart. It was the safest of all harbours and the most convenient; and it had the added advantage that in time of war it could be easily closed by a chain across its mouth. It was fitting that on the coins of Smyrna there should be an inscription of a merchant ship ready for sea.

The setting of the city was equally beautiful. It began at the harbour; it traversed the narrow foothills; and then behind the city there rose the Pagos, a hill covered with temples and noble buildings which were spoken of as "The Crown of Smyrna." A modern traveller describes it as "a queenly city crowned with towers." Aristides likened Smyrna to a great statue with the feet in the sea; the middle parts in the plain and the foothills; and the head, crowned with great buildings, on

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the Pagos behind. He called it "a flower of beauty such as earth and sun had never showed to mankind."

Its history had not a little to do with the beauty of Smyrna, for it was one of the very few planned cities in the world. It had been founded as a Greek colony as far back as 1000 B.c. Round about 600 B.C. disaster had befallen it, for then the Lydians had broken in from the east and destroyed it. For four hundred years Smyrna had been no city, but a collection of little villages; then Lysimachus had rebuilt it as a planned whole. It was built with great, straight, broad streets. Strabo speaks of the handsomeness of the streets, the excellence of the paving and the great rectangular blocks in which it was built. Most famous of all the streets was the Street of Gold, which began with the Temple of Zeus and ended with the Temple of Cybele. It ran cross-wise across the foothills of the Pagos; and, if the buildings which encircled the Pagos were the crown of Smyrna, the Street of Gold was the necklace round the hill.

Here we have an interesting and a significant thing which shows the care and knowledge with which John set down his letters from the Risen Christ. The Risen Christ is called, "He who died and came to life." That was an echo of the experience of Smyrna itself.

Smyrna had other claims to greatness besides its city. It was a free city and it knew what loyalty was. Long before Rome was undisputed mistress of the world, Smyrna had cast in its lot with her, never to waver in its fidelity. Cicero called Smyrna "one of our most faithful and our most ancient allies." In the campaign against Mithradates in the far east things had gone badly with Rome. And when the soldiers of Rome were suffering from hunger and cold, the people of Smyrna stripped off their own clothes to send to them.

Such was the reverence of Smyrna for Rome that as far back as 195 B.c. it was the first city in the world to erect a temple to the goddess Roma. And in A.D. 26, when the cities of Asia Minor were competing for the privilege of erecting a temple to the godhead of Tiberius, Smyrna was picked out for that honour, overcoming even Ephesus.

Not only was Smyrna great in trade, in beauty, in political and in religious eminence; it was also a city where culture flourished. Apollonius of Tyana had urged upon Smyrna the truth that only men can make a city great. He said: "Though Smyrna is the most beautiful of all cities under the sun, and makes the sea its own, and holds the fountains of the zephyr, yet it is a greater charm to wear a crown of men than a crown of porticoes and pictures and gold beyond the standard of mankind: for buildings are seen only in their own place, but men are seen everywhere and spoken about everywhere and make their city as vast as the range of countries which they can visit." So Smyrna had a stadium in which famous games were yearly held; a magnificent public library; an Odeion which was the home of music; a theatre which was one of the largest in Asia Minor. In particular, Smyrna was one of the cities which laid claim to being the birthplace of Homer; it had a memorial building called the Homereion and put Homer's head on its coinage. This was a disputed claim. Thomas Heywood, the seventeenth century poet, wrote the famous epigram:

Seven cities warr'd for Homer, being dead,
Who, living, had no roof to shroud his head.

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In such a city we would expect magnificent architecture, and in Smyrna there was a host of temples, to Cybele, to Zeus, to Apollo, to the Nemeseis, to Aphrodite, and to Asclepios.

Smyrna had rather more than its share of a characteristic which was common to all Greek cities. Mommsen said that Asia Minor was "a paradise of municipal vanity", and Smyrna of all cities was noted for "its municipal rivalry and its local pride." Everyone in it wished to exalt Smyrna and wished himself to climb to the top of the municipal tree. It is not without point that in the address of the letter the Risen Christ is called "the first and the last." In comparison with his glory all earthly distinctions are worthless.

There remains one feature of Smyrna which stands out in the letter and which had serious consequences for the Christians there. The Jews were specially numerous and influential (Rev.2:9). We find them, for instance, contributing 10,000 denarii for the beautification of the city. It is clear that in Smyrna they were specially hostile to the Christian Church, no doubt because it was from them and from those interested in Judaism that Christianity drew many of its converts. So, then, we may well end this study of Smyrna with the story of the most famous Christian martyrdom which happened there.

Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred on Saturday, 23rd February, A.D. 155. It was the time of the public-games; the city was crowded; and the crowds were excited. Suddenly the shout went up: "Away with the atheists; let Polycarp be searched for." No doubt Polycarp could have escaped; but already he had had a dream vision in which he saw the pillow under his head burning with fire and he had awakened to tell his disciples: "I must be burnt alive."

His whereabouts was betrayed by a slave who collapsed under torture. They came to arrest him. He ordered that they should be given a meal and provided with all they wished, while he asked for himself the privilege of one last hour in prayer. Not even the police captain wished to see Polycarp die. On the brief journey to the city, he pled with the old man: "What harm is it to say, 'Caesar is Lord' and to offer sacrifice and be saved?" But Polycarp was adamant that for him only Jesus Christ was Lord.

When he entered the arena there came a voice from heaven saying: "Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man." The proconsul gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar or death. "Eighty and six years have I served him," said Polycarp, "and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" The proconsul threatened him with burning, and Polycarp replied: "You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will."

So the crowds came flocking with faggots from the workshops and from the baths, and the Jews, even although they were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying such burdens, were foremost in bringing wood for the fire. They were going to bind him to the stake. "Leave me as I am," he said, "for he who gives me power to endure the fire, will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even

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without the security you will give by the nails." So they left him loosely bound in the flames, and Polycarp prayed his great prayer:

O Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of thee, God of angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before thee, I bless thee that thou hast granted unto me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I today be received among them before thee, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as thou, the God without falsehood and of truth, hast prepared beforehand and shown forth and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise thee for all things. I bless thee, I glorify thee through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Child, through whom be glory to thee with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come. Amen.

So much is plain fact, but then the story drifts into legend, for it goes on to tell that the flames made a kind of tent around Polycarp and left him untouched. At length the executioner stabbed him to death to achieve what the flames could not do. "And when he did this there came out a dove, and much blood, so that the fire was quenched, and all the crowd marvelled that there was such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect."

What is sure is that Polycarp died, a martyr for the faith.

It can have been no easy engagement to be a Christian at Smyrna, and yet the letter to Smyrna is one of the two in which there is undiluted praise.

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SMYRNA - UNDER TRIAL

Revelation 2:8-11 (Part 2)

The Church of Smyrna was in trouble and further trial was imminent.

There are three things that the letter says about this trial.

(i) It is thlipsis (GSN2347), affliction. Thlipsis originally meant crushing beneath a weight. The pressure of events is on the Church at Smyrna.

(ii) It is ptocheia (GSN4432), poverty. In the New Testament poverty and Christianity are closely connected. "Blessed are you poor," said Jesus (Lk.6:20). Paul described the Christians at Corinth as being poor yet making many rich (2Cor.6:10). James speaks of God choosing the poor in this world to be rich in faith (Jas.2:5).

In Greek there are two words for poverty. Penia (compare GSN3993) describes the state of the man who is not wealthy and who, as the Greeks defined it, must satisfy his needs with his own hands. Ptocheia (GSN4432) describes complete destitution. It has been put this way--penia describes the state of the man who has nothing superfluous; ptocheia (GSN4432) describes the state of the man who has nothing at all.

The poverty of the Christians was due to two things. It was due to the fact that most of them belonged to the lower classes of society. The gulf between the top and the bottom of the social scale was very wide. We know, for instance, that in Rome the poorer classes literally starved because contrary winds delayed the corn ships from Alexandria and the corn dole could not be distributed.

There was another reason for the poverty of the Christians. Sometimes they suffered from the spoiling of their goods (Heb.10:4). There were times when the heathen mob would suddenly attack the Christians and wreck their homes. Life was not easy for a Christian in Smyrna or anywhere else in the ancient world.

(iii) There is imprisonment. John forecasts an imprisonment of ten days. That is not to be taken literally. Ten days was an expression for a short time which was soon to come to an end. So this prophecy is at once a warning and a promise. Imprisonment is coming, but the time of trouble, although sharp, will be short. Two things are to be noted.

First, this is exactly the way in which persecution came. To be a Christian was against the law, but persecution was not continuous. The Christians might be left in peace for a long time, but at any moment a governor might acquire a fit of administrative energy or the mob might set up a shout to find the Christians--and then the storm burst. The terror of being a Christian was the uncertainty.

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Second, imprisonment does not sound so bad to us. We might say: "Imprisonment? Well, that is not so bad as death anyway." But in the ancient world imprisonment was merely the prelude to death. A man was only a prisoner until he was led out to die.

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SMYRNA - THE CAUSE OF THE TROUBLE

Revelation 2:8-11 (Part 3)

The instigators of persecution were the Jews. Again and again in Acts we see how the Jews stirred up the authorities against the Christian preachers. It happened at Antioch (Ac.13:50); at Iconium (Ac.14:2,5); at Lystra (Ac.14:19); at Thessalonica (Ac.17:5).

The story of what happened at Antioch shows us how the Jews often succeeded in moving the authorities to take action against the Christians (Ac.13:50). Round the Jewish synagogues gathered many "god-fearers." These were Gentiles who were not prepared to go the whole way and to become proselytes but they were attracted by the preaching of one God instead of many gods, and were attracted specially by the purity of the Jewish ethic as compared with the heathen life. In particular women were attracted to Judaism for these reasons. Often these women were of high station, the wives of magistrates and governors, and it was through them that the Jews got at the authorities and moved them to persecute.

John calls the Jews the synagogue of Satan. He is taking a favourite expression of the Jews and reversing it. When the people of Israel met together they loved to call themselves "the assembly of the Lord" (Num.16:3; Num.20:4; Num.31:16). Synagogue is in Greek sunagoge (GSN4864), which literally means a coming together, an assembly, a congregation. It is as if John said: "You call yourselves the assembly of God when, in fact, you are the assembly of the devil." Once John Wesley said of certain men who were presenting a crude Picture of God: "Your God is my devil." It is a terrible thing when religion becomes the means of evil things. It has happened. In the days of the French Revolution, Madame Roland uttered her famous cry: "Liberty, what crimes are committed in your name!" There have been tragic times when the same could be said about religion.

Six slanders were regularly levelled against the Christians.

(i) On the basis of the words of the Sacrament--this is my body, and this is my blood--the story went about that the Christians were cannibals.

(ii) Because the Christians called their common meal the Agape (GSN0026), the Love Feast, it was said that their gatherings were orgies of lust.

(iii) Because Christianity did, in fact, often split families, when some members became Christians and some did not, the Christians were accused of "tampering with family relationships."

(iv) The heathen accused the Christians of atheism because they could not understand a worship which had no images of the gods such as they themselves had.

(v) The Christians were accused of being politically disloyal because they would not say: "Caesar is Lord."

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(vi) The Christians were accused of being incendiaries because they foretold the end of the world in flames.

It was not difficult for maliciously-minded people to disseminate dangerous slanders about the Christian Church.

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SMYRNA - CHRIST'S CLAIM AND CHRIST'S DEMAND

Revelation 2:8-11 (Part 4)

We have seen that the Church at Smyrna was battling with difficulties and threatened with worse to come. In view of that the letter to Smyrna opens with two resounding titles of Christ which tell what he can offer to a man confronted with such a situation as faced the Christians at Smyrna.

(i) Christ is the first and the last. In the old Testament that is a title belonging to God. "I am the first," Isaiah heard God say, "and I am the last" (Isa.44:6; Isa.48:12). This title has two aspects. To the Christian it is a tremendous promise. Come what will, from the first day of life to the last the Risen Christ is with us. Of whom then shall we be afraid?

But to the pagans of Smyrna it was a warning. They loved their city calling it the first in Asia, and they themselves were all striving every man to be one better than his neighbours. The Risen Christ said: "I am the first and the last." Here is the death of human pride. Beside the glory of Christ all human titles are of no importance and all human claims become ridiculous. When Julian, the Roman Emperor, had failed in his attempt to banish Christianity and bring back the old gods, and when he had come to death in the attempt, he said: "To shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche was not for me."

(ii) Christ is he who was dead and is alive again. The tenses of the verb are of the first importance. The Greek for "was" is *genomenos* (compare GSN1510), which means became. It describes what we might call a passing phase. Christ became dead; it was episode through which he passed. In the Greek the verb which the King James Version translates "is alive" is not a present tense but an aorist, which describes one action completed in the past. The right translation is "came to life again" (as in the Revised Standard Version), and the reference is to the event of the Resurrection. The Risen Christ is he who experienced death came to life again in the triumphant event of the Resurrection, and is alive for evermore. Here again there are two aspects.

(a) The Risen Christ is one who has experienced the worst that life could do to him. He had died in the agony of the Cross. No matter what happened to the Christians of Smyrna, Jesus Christ had been through it. Jesus Christ can help because he knows what life is like at its worst and has experienced even the bitterness of death.

(b) The Risen Christ has conquered the worst that life can do. He triumphed over pain and over death; and he offers us through himself the way to victorious living.

In this passage there is also a demand, and the demand is for loyalty, loyal even when death is the price to be paid. Loyalty was a quality of which the people of Smyrna knew something, for their city had flung in its lot with Rome, when Rome's greatness was only a far off possibility, and had never wavered from in its allegiance, in fair weather and in foul. If all the other noble qualities of life were placed in the balance against it, loyalty would outweigh them all. It was R. L. Stevenson's prayer that "in all the chances of fortune, and down to the gates of death" we should be "loyal and loving to one another."

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SMYRNA - THE PROMISED REWARD

Revelation 2:8-11 (Part 5)

Jesus Christ will be in no man's debt and loyalty to him brings its own reward. In this passage two rewards are mentioned.

(i) There is the crown of life. Again and again the crown of the Christian is mentioned in the New Testament. Here and in, Jas.1:12 it is the crown of life. Paul speaks of the crown of righteousness (2Tim.4:8), and of the crown of boasting (1Th.2:19). Peter speaks of the crown of glory (1Pet.5:4). Paul contrasts the immortal crown of the Christian with the fading crown of laurel which was the prize of the victor in the games (1Cor.9:25), and Peter speaks of the unfading crown of glory (1Pet.5:4).

"Of" in each of these phrases means "which consists of". To win the crown of righteousness or glory or life is to be crowned with righteousness or glory or with life. But we must understand the idea behind this word crown (stephanos, GSN4735). In Greek there are two words for crown, diadema (GSN0000), which means the royal crown, and stephanos (GSN4735), which has usually something to do with joy and victory. It is not the royal crown which is being offered to the Christian; it is the crown of joy and victory. Stephanos (GSN4735) has many associations, and all of them contribute something to the riches of thought behind it.

(a) First to the mind comes the victor's crown in the games. Smyrna had games which were famous all over Asia. As in the Olympic Games, the reward of the victorious athlete was the laurel crown. The Christian can win the crown of victory in the contest of life.

(b) When a man had faithfully performed the work of a magistrate, at the end of his term of office he was granted a crown. He who throughout life faithfully serves Christ and his fellow-men will receive his crown.

(c) The heathen world was in the habit of wearing crowns, chaplets of flowers, at banquets. At the end of the day, if the Christian is loyal, he will have the joy of sitting as a guest at the banquet of God.

(d) The heathen worshippers were in the habit of wearing crowns when they approached the temples of their gods. At the end of the day, if he has been faithful, the Christian will have the joy of entering into the nearer presence of God.

(e) Some scholars have seen in this crown a reference to the halo or the nimbus which is round the head of divine beings in pictures. If that is so, it means that the Christian, if he is faithful, will be crowned with the life which belongs to God himself. As John said: "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1Jn.3:2).

In this life it may be that the Christian's loyalty will bring him a crown of thorns, but in the life to come it will surely bring him the crown of glory.

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(ii) Cyprian uses two great phrases to describe those who are faithful unto death. He describes them as "illustrious with the heraldry of a good name," and he calls them "the white-robed cohort of the soldiers of Christ." To the faithful another promise is made: they will not be hurt by the second death. The second death is a mysterious phrase which occurs nowhere in the New Testament outside the Revelation (Rev.20:6,14; Rev.21:8). The Rabbis talked of "the second death whereof the wicked die in the next world." The phrase may have two origins.

(a) The Sadducees believed that after death there was absolutely nothing; the Epicureans held the same doctrine. This belief finds its place even in the Old Testament for that pessimistic book Ecclesiastes is the work of a Sadducee. "A living dog is better than a dead lion; for the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing" (Ecc.9:4-5). For the Sadducees and the Epicureans death was extinction. To the orthodox Jew this was too easy, for it meant that for the wise and for the fool the end was the same (Ecc.2:15, Ecc.16; Ecc.19:2). They, therefore, came to believe that there were, so to speak, two deaths--physical death which every man must undergo and after that a death which was the judgment of God.

(b) This is very closely connected with the ideas which we touched on when studying the word paradise (Rev.2:7). We saw that many of the Jews and the early Christian thinkers believed that there was an intermediate state into which all men passed until the time of judgment. If that were so, then indeed there would be two deaths, the physical death which no man can escape and the spiritual death into which the wicked would enter after the final judgment.

Of such things it is not given to any man to speak with confidence but, when John spoke of the faithful being unharmed by the second death, he meant precisely the same as Paul when he said that nothing in life or in death, in time or in eternity can separate those who love him from Jesus Christ. Such a man is safe from all that life or death can do to him (Rom.8:38-39).

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Revelation 2:12-17

THE LETTER TO PERGAMUM

Revelation 2:12-17 (Part 1)

And to the angel of the Church in Pergamum, write:

These things says he who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know where your home is. I know that it is where the throne of Satan is; and yet you hold fast to my name, and have not denied your loyalty to me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan has his home. But I have a few things against you. You have among you some people who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat meat offered to idols and to commit fornication. So you, too, have those who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. So, then, repent. If you do not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will go to war with them with the sword of my mouth.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. To him who overcomes I will give a share of the hidden manna; and I will give him a white stone, and written on the stone a new name, which no one but him who receives it knows.

PERGAMUM, THE SEAT OF SATAN

There is a difference in the name of this city in the different translations of the New Testament. The King James Version calls it Pergamos, while the English Revised Version, the Revised Standard Version and Moffatt call it Pergamum. Pergamos (GSN4010) is the feminine form of the name and Pergamum the neuter. In the ancient world it was known by both forms but Pergamum was much the commoner and the newer translations are right to prefer it.

Pergamum had a place all its own in Asia. It was not on any of the great roads, as Ephesus and Smyrna were, but historically it was the greatest city in Asia. Strabo called it an illustrious (epiphanes, GSN2016) city and Pliny called it "by far the most famous city in Asia" (longe clarissimum Asiae). The reason was that, by the time John was writing, Pergamum had been a capital city for almost four hundred years. Back in 282 B.C. it was made the capital of the Seleucid kingdom, one of the sections into which the empire of Alexander the Great was broken up. It remained the capital until 133 B.C. In that year Attalus the Third died and before he died he willed his dominions into the possession of Rome. Out of the dominions of Attalus, Rome formed the province of Asia and Pergamum still remained its capital.

Its geographical position made Pergamum even more impressive. It was built on a tall conical hill, which dominated the valley of the River Caicus, from the top of which the Mediterranean could be seen, fifteen miles away. Sir William Ramsay describes it: "Beyond all other cities in Asia Minor, it gives the traveller the impression of a royal city, the home of authority; the rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, and dominates the broad plain of the Caicus so proudly and so boldly." History and honour gathered around Pergamum. Let us then set down its outstanding characteristics.

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(i) Pergamum could never achieve the commercial greatness of Ephesus or of Smyrna but it was a centre of culture which surpassed both. It was famous for its library, which contained no fewer than 200,000 parchment rolls. It was second only to the unique library of Alexandria.

It is interesting to note that the word parchment is derived from Pergamum (GSN4010). In the ancient world parchment was the pergamene charta, the Pergamene sheet; and to this name attaches a story. For many centuries ancient rolls were written on papyrus, a substance made of the pith of a very large bulrush which grows beside the Nile. The pith was extracted, cut into strips, pressed into sheets and smoothed. There emerged a substance not unlike brown paper, and this was universally used for writing. In the third century B.C. a Pergamene king called Eumenes was very anxious to make the library of the city supreme. In order to do so he persuaded Aristophanes of Byzantium, the librarian at Alexandria, to agree to leave Alexandria and come to Pergamum. Ptolemy of Egypt, enraged at this seduction of his outstanding scholar, promptly imprisoned Aristophanes and by way of retaliation put an embargo on the export of papyrus to Pergamum.

Faced with this situation, the scholars of Pergamum invented parchment or vellum, which is made of the skins of beasts, smoothed and polished. In fact parchment is a much superior vehicle for writing and, although it did not do so for many centuries, it in the end ousted papyrus altogether as writing material.

(ii) Pergamum was one of the great religious centres. In particular it had two famous shrines. In the letter of the Risen Christ Pergamum is said to be the place where "Satan's seat" is. Obviously this must refer to something which the Christian Church regarded as particularly evil. Some have found the reference explained in Pergamum's religious splendour.

(a) Pergamum regarded itself as the custodian of the Greek way of life and of the Greek worship. About 240 B.C. it had won a great victory against the savage invading Galatae or Gauls. In memory of that victory a great altar to Zeus was built in front of the Temple of Athene which stood eight hundred feet up on Pergamum's conical hill. Forty feet high, it stood on a projecting ledge of rock and looked exactly like a great throne on the hillside. All day it smoked with the smoke of sacrifices offered to Zeus. Around its base was carved one of the greatest achievements in the world of sculpture, the frieze which showed the Battle of the Giants, in which the gods of Greece were victorious over the giants of the barbarians. It has been suggested that this great altar was Satan's seat. But it is unlikely that a Christian writer would call that altar Satan's seat, for even by this time the old Greek gods were anachronisms and it would have been a waste of the powder and shot of Christian invective to attack them.

(b) Pergamum was particularly connected with the worship of Asclepios, so much so that Asclepios was known as "the Pergamene god." When Galen was mentioning favourite oaths, he said that people commonly swore by Artemis of Ephesus, or Apollo of Delphi, or Asclepios of Pergamum. Asclepios was the god of healing and his temples were the nearest approach to hospitals in the ancient world. From all over the world people flocked to Pergamum for relief for their sicknesses. R. H. Charles has called Pergamum "the Lourdes of the ancient world." The task of healing was partly the work of the priests; partly the work of doctors--Galen, second only to Hippocrates in the medical history of the ancient world, was born in Pergamum; and partly the

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work of Asclepius himself. Was there anything in that worship to move the Christians to call the Temple of Asclepius Satan's seat? There may have been two things.

First, the commonest and most famous title for Asclepius was Asclepius Soter (GSN4990), Asclepius the Saviour. It might well be that the Christians felt a shudder of horror that the name Saviour should be given to anyone other than Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Second, the emblem of Asclepius was the serpent, which still appears on the cap badge of the Royal Army Medical Corps. Many of the coins of Pergamum have Asclepius' serpent as part of their design. It might well be that Jew or Christian might regard a religion which took the serpent as its emblem as a Satanic cult. Again this explanation seems unlikely. As has been pointed out, the Christians would regard the place where men went to be healed--and often were--with pity rather than with indignation. The worship of Asclepius surely would not give adequate ground for calling Pergamum Satan's seat.

It seems then that we must look elsewhere for the explanation of this phrase.

(iii) Pergamum was the administrative centre of Asia. That meant that it was the centre of Caesar worship for the province. We have already described Caesar worship and the dire dilemma in which it placed the Christian.

It was organized with a provincial centre and an administration like that of a presbytery or diocese. The point here is that Pergamum was the centre of that worship for the province of Asia. Undoubtedly that is why Pergamum was Satan's seat; it was the place where men were required on pain of death to take the name of Lord and give it to Caesar instead of to Christ; and to a Christian there could be nothing more Satanic than that.

And here is the explanation of the beginning of the letter to Pergamum. The Risen Christ is called he who has the sharp two-edged sword. Roman governors were divided into two classes--those who had the *ius gladii*, the right of the sword, and those who had not. Those who had the right of the sword had the power of life and death; on their word a man could be executed on the spot. Humanly speaking the proconsul, who had his headquarters at Pergamum, had the *ius gladii*, the right of the sword, and at any moment he might use it against any Christian; but the letter bids the Christian not to forget that the last word is still with the Risen Christ, who has the sharp two-edged sword. The power of Rome might be satanically powerful; the power of the Risen Lord is greater yet.

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PERGAMUM - AN ENGAGEMENT VERY DIFFICULT

Revelation 2:12-17 (Part 2)

To be a Christian in Pergamum was to face what Cromwell would have called "an engagement very difficult."

We have already seen what a concentration of pagan religion had its centre in Pergamum. There was the worship of Athene and Zeus, with its magnificent altar dominating the city; there was the worship of Asclepios, bringing sick people from far and near; and above all there were the demands of Caesar worship, hanging for ever like a poised sword above the heads of the Christians.

So the Risen Christ says to the Christians of Pergamum: "I know where you stay." The word for to stay is here *katoikein* (GSN2730); and it means to have one's permanent residence in a place. It is a very unusual word to use of Christians in the world. Usually the word used of them is *paroikein* (GSN3939), which means to be a sojourner. Peter writes his letter to the sojourners throughout the provinces of Asia Minor. But here the matter is being regarded from another point of view. The Christians of Pergamum have their permanent residence, so far as this world is concerned, in Pergamum; and Pergamum is the place where Satan's rule is strongest.

Here is something very important. The principle of the Christian life is not escape, but conquest. We may feel it would be very much easier to be a Christian in some other place and in some other circumstances but the duty of the Christian is to witness for Christ where life has set him. We once heard of a girl who was converted in an evangelistic campaign. A reporter on a secular newspaper, her first step after her conversion was to get a new job on a small Christian newspaper where she was constantly in the society of professing Christians. It was strange that the first thing that her conversion did was to make her run away. The more difficult it is to be a Christian in any set of circumstances, the greater the obligation to remain within these circumstances. If in the early days Christians had run away every time they were confronted with a difficult engagement, there would have been no chance of a world for Christ.

The Christians at Pergamum proved that it was perfectly possible to be a Christian under such circumstances. Even when martyrdom was in the air they did not flinch. Of Antipas we know nothing; there is a late legend in Tertullian that he met his death by being slowly roasted to death within a brazen bull. But there is a point in the Greek impossible to reproduce in English which is intensely suggestive. The Risen Christ calls Antipas my faithful *martus* (GSN3144). We have translated that "martyr"; but *martus* (GSN3144) is the normal Greek word for witness. In the early church to be a martyr and to be a witness were one and the same thing. Witness meant so often martyrdom. Here is a rebuke to us. So many are prepared to demonstrate their Christianity in Christian circles but are equally prepared to play it down in circles where Christianity is met with opposition.

We must note another thing. The Risen Christ calls Antipas my faithful *martus* (GSN3144) and so gives him nothing less than his own title. In Rev.1:5 and Rev.3:14 Christ himself is called the faithful *martus* (GSN3144); to those who are true to him he gives nothing less than his own name.

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PERGAMUM - THE DOOM OF ERROR

Revelation 2:12-17 (Part 3)

In spite of the fidelity of the Church at Pergamum there is error. There are those who hold the teaching of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. We have already discussed these people in connection with Ephesus and we meet them again when we come to study the letter of Thyatira. They sought to persuade Christians that there was nothing wrong with a prudent conformity to the world's standards.

The man who is not prepared to be different need not start on the Christian way at all. The commonest word for the Christian in the New Testament is *hagios* (GSN0040) whose basic meaning is different or separate. The Temple is *hagios* (GSN0039) because it is different from other buildings; the Sabbath day is *hagios* (GSN0040) because it is different from other days; God is supremely *hagios* (GSN0040) because he is totally different from men; and the Christian is *hagios* (GSN0040) because he is different from other men.

We must be clear what this difference means, for there is a paradox in it. It is Paul's summons to the Corinthians that they should be different from the world. "Come out from among them" (2Cor.6:17). This difference from the world does not involve separation from it nor hatred for it. Paul says in writing to the very same Church: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1Cor.9:22). It was Paul's claim that he could get alongside all men; but--and here is the point--his getting alongside them was that he might save some. It was not a question of bringing Christianity down to their level; it was a question of bringing them up. The fault of the Nicolaitans was that they were following a policy of compromise solely to save themselves from trouble.

It is the word of the Risen Christ that he will make war with them. We must note that he did not say: "I will go to war with you"; he said: "I will go to war with them." His wrath was not directed against the whole Church but against those who were seducing her; for those who were led astray, he had nothing but pity.

It is the threat of the Risen Christ that he will make war against them with the sword of his mouth. The Christ of the sword is a startling idea. Thinking of past conquerors and comparing them with Jesus Christ, the poet wrote:

Then all these vanished from the scene,
Like flickering shadows on a glass;
And conquering down the centuries came
The swordless Christ upon an ass.

What then is the sword of Christ? The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the word of God which is sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb.4:12). Paul speaks of "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" (Eph.6:17). The sword of Christ is the word of Christ.

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In the word of Christ there is conviction of sin; in it a man is confronted with the truth and thereby with his own failure to obey it. In the word of Christ there is invitation to God; it convicts a man of sin and then invites him back to the love of God. In the word of Christ there is assurance of salvation; it convicts a man of sin, it leads him to the Cross, and it assures him that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Ac.4:12). The conquest of Christ is his power to win men to the love of God.

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PERGAMUM - THE BREAD OF HEAVEN

Revelation 2:12-17 (Part 4)

In this letter the Risen Christ promises two things to the man who overcomes; the first is a share of the hidden manna to eat. Here is a Jewish conception which has two aspects.

(i) When the children of Israel had no food in the desert God gave them manna to eat (Exo.16:11-15). When the need of the manna passed, the memory did not A pot of the manna was put into the ark and laid up before God in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and in the Temple (Exo.16:33-34; Heb.9:4). Early in the sixth century B.c. the Temple which Solomon had built was destroyed; and the rabbis had a legend that, when that happened, Jeremiah hid away the pot of manna in a cleft in Mount Sinai and that, when the Messiah came, he would return and the pot of manna would be discovered again. To a Jew "to eat of the hidden manna" meant to enjoy the blessings of the Messianic age. TO a Christian it meant to enter into the blessedness of the new world which would emerge when the Kingdom came.

(ii) There may be a wider and more general meaning. Of the manna it is said: "This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat" (Exo.16:15). The manna is called "grain of heaven" (Ps.78:24); and it is said to be the "bread of the angels," (Ps.78:25). Here the manna may mean heavenly food. In that case John would be saying: "In this world you cannot share with the heathen in their feasts because you cannot sit down to meat which is part of a sacrifice that has been offered to an idol. You may think that you are being called upon to give up much but the day will come when you will feast in heaven upon heavenly food." If that is so, the Risen Christ is saying that a man must abstain from the seductions of earth if he wishes to enjoy the blessings of heaven.

(iii) There is one possible further interpretation of this. Some have suggested that the hidden manna is the bread of God given to the Christian at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. John tells us that when the Jews said to him that their fathers had eaten manna in the wilderness, so receiving bread, and Jesus said "I am the bread of life" (Jn.6:31-35). If the hidden manna and the bread of life are the same, the hidden manna is not only the bread of the sacrament but stands for nothing less than Christ, the bread of life; and this is a promise that to him who is faithful he will give himself.

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PERGAMUM - THE WHITE STONE AND THE NEW NAME

Revelation 2:12-17 (Part 5)

The final promise of Christ to the faithful in Pergamum is that he will give them the white stone with the new name on it. This is a passage of which there are almost endless interpretations. In the ancient world a white stone might stand for many things.

(i) There was a Rabbinic legend that precious stones fell from heaven along with the manna. The white stone would then simply stand for the precious gifts of God to his people.

(ii) In the ancient world coloured stones were used as counters for working out calculations. This would mean that the Christian is counted among the number of the faithful.

(iii) In the ancient law courts white and black stones were used for registering the verdict of juries, black for condemnation, white for acquittal. This would mean that the Christian is acquitted in the sight of God because of the work of Jesus Christ.

(iv) In the ancient world objects called tesserae were much used. A tessera was a little tablet made of wood or metal or stone; it had writing on it; and, generally speaking, the possession of a tessera conferred some kind of privilege upon a man. Three of these tesserae add something to the picture.

(a) In Rome the great houses had their clients, dependents who every morning received from their patron food and money for the day. They were often given a tessera by which they identified themselves as having the right to the free gifts. This would mean that the Christian has the right to the free gifts for life which Christ can give.

(b) To win a victory at the games was one of the greatest honours the ancient world could give. Outstanding victors were given, by the master of the games, a tessera which in the days to come conferred upon them the right of free entry to all public spectacles. This would mean that the Christian is the victorious athlete of Christ who is a sharer in the glory of his Lord.

(c) In Rome a great gladiator was the admired hero of all. Often a gladiator had to fight on until he was killed in combat. But if he had had a specially illustrious career, when he grew old, he was allowed to retire in honour. Such men were given a tessera with the letters "SP" on it. "SP" stands for the Latin word spectatus, which means a man whose valour has been proved beyond a doubt. This would mean that the Christian is the gladiator of Christ and that, when he has proved his valour in the battle of life, he is allowed to enter into the rest which Christ gives with honour.

(v) In the ancient world a specially happy day was called a white day. Plutarch tells that when Pericles was besieging Samos he knew that the siege would be long; he did not wish his army to grow weary; so he divided it into eight parts; every day the eight companies drew lots; one was a white bean; and the company which drew the white bean was exempt from duty for the day and could enjoy itself as it wished. So it was that a happy day came to be called a white day (Plutarch:

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Life of Pericles 64). Pliny in one of his letters tells a friend that that day he had had the joy of hearing in the law courts two magnificent young pleaders in whose hands the future of Roman oratory was safe; and, he says, that experience made that day one marked candidissimo calculo, with the whitest of stones (Pliny: Letters 6: 11).

It was said that the Thracians and the Scythians kept in their homes an urn into which for every happy day they threw a white stone and for every unhappy day a black stone; at the end of their lives the stones were counted, and as the white or the black preponderated, a man was said to have had a wretched or a happy life. This would mean that through Jesus Christ the Christian can have the joy that no man takes from him (Jn.16:22).

(vi) Along this line there is another and most likely interpretation. One of the commonest of all customs in the ancient world was to carry an amulet or charm. It might be made of a precious metal or a precious stone but often it was nothing more than a pebble. On the pebble there was a sacred name; to know a god's name was to have a certain power over him, to be able to summon him to one's aid in time of difficulty and to have mastery over the demons. Such an amulet was thought to be doubly effective, if no one other than the owner knew the name that was inscribed upon it. Most likely what John is saying is: "Your heathen friends--and you did the same in your heathen days--carry amulets with superstitious inscriptions on them and they think they will keep them safe. You need nothing like that; you are safe in life and in death because you know the name of the only true God."

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PERGAMUM - RENAMED BY GOD

Revelation 2:12-17 (Part 6)

It is just possible that we ought to look for the meaning of the new name and the white stone in another direction altogether.

The words white and new are characteristic of the Revelation. R. H. Charles has said that in the Revelation "white is the colour and livery of heaven." The word used does not describe a dull, flat whiteness but one which glistens like snow in the winter sun. So in the Revelation we find white garments (Rev.3:5); white robes (Rev.7:9); white linen (Rev.19:8,14); and the great white throne of God himself (Rev.20:11). White, then, is heaven's colour.

In Greek there are two words for "new." There is *neos* (GSN3501), which means new in point of time. A thing can be *neos* (GSN3501), and yet exactly like any number of things. On the other hand there is *kainos* (GSN2537), which is new not only in point of time but also in point of quality; nothing like it has ever been made before. So in the Revelation there is the new Jerusalem (Rev.3:12); the new song (Rev.5:9); the new heavens and the new earth (Rev.21:1); and God makes all things new (Rev.21:5). With this in mind two lines of thought have been suggested.

It has been suggested that the white stone is the man himself; that the Risen Christ is promising his faithful ones a new self, cleansed of all earthly stains and glistening with the purity of heaven.

As to the new name, one of the features of the Old Testament is the giving to a man of a new name to mark a new status. So Abram becomes Abraham when the great promise is made that he will be the father of many nations and when he, as it were, acquires a new status in the plan of God for men (Gen.17:5). So after the wrestling at Peniel, Jacob becomes Israel, which means the prince of God, because he had prevailed with God (Gen.32:28). Isaiah hears the promise of God to the nation of Israel: "The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give" (Isa.62:2).

This custom of giving a new name to mark a new status was known in the heathen world as well. The name of the first of the Roman Emperors was Octavius; but when he became Emperor he was given the name Augustus to mark his new status.

A curious superstitious parallel to this comes from peasant life in Palestine. When a person was very ill and in danger of death, he was often given the name of someone who had lived a long and saintly life, as if this turned him into a new person over whom the illness might lose its power.

On this basis of interpretation, Christ promises a new status to those who are faithful to him.

This is attractive. It suggests that the white stone means that Jesus Christ gives to the man who is true to him a new self and that the new name means the new status of glory into which the man who has been true to Christ will enter when this life ends and when the next begins. It remains to

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say that, attractive as that interpretation is, the view which traces back the white stone and the new name to the use of amulets is more likely to be correct.

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Revelation 2:18-29

THE LETTER TO THYATIRA

Revelation 2:18-29 (Part 1)

And to the angel of the Church in Thyatira write:

These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire and whose feet are like beaten brass.

I know your works--I mean your love and your loyalty and your service and your steadfast endurance; and I know that your last works are more than your first.

But I hold it against you that you make no effort to deal with the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and whose misleading teaching causes my servants to commit fornication and to eat meat offered to idols. I have given her a time within which to repent and she refuses to repent from her fornication. Behold, I am going to cast her into a bed and I am going to cast her paramours into great affliction, unless they repent from her deeds; and I will slay her children with death; and all the Churches will know that I am he who searches the inmost desires and thoughts of a man's being; and I will give to each one of you what your works deserve.

To the rest of you in Thyatira, to all those who do not hold this teaching, to such as have not known the depths of Satan, as they call them, I say this--I am not going to put any other burden on you. All I say is, hold on to what you have until I come. I will give to him who overcomes, and who keeps my works to the end, authority over the Gentiles; and he will smite them with a rod of iron; like vessels of pottery they will be smashed; for this is the authority that I have received from my Father; and I will give him the morning star.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

THYATIRA, THE PERIL OF COMPROMISE

The longest of the seven letters is written to the least important of the seven cities. None the less, the problem which faced Thyatira and the danger which threatened it were those which were universally involved in the position of the Christians in Asia.

Thyatira lies in the long valley connecting the valleys of the Hermus and the Caicus rivers through which the railway runs today; and it was its geographical position which gave it its importance.

(i) Thyatira lay on the road which connected Pergamum with Sardis and went on to Philadelphia and to Laodicea, linking up with both Smyrna and Byzantium. That was the road by which the imperial post travelled; and it was crowded with the commerce of Asia and the east. Therefore, first and foremost Thyatira was a great commercial town.

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(ii) Strategically the importance of Thyatira was that it was the gateway to Pergamum, the capital of the province. The first we hear of Thyatira is that it is an armed garrison, manned by a company of Macedonian troops, placed there as an outpost to protect Pergamum. The difficulty was that Thyatira was not capable of any prolonged defence. It lay in an open valley. There was no height that could be fortified; and all that Thyatira could ever hope to do was to fight a delaying action until Pergamum could prepare to meet the invaders.

(iii) Thyatira had no special religious significance. It was not a centre of either Caesar or of Greek worship. Its local hero-god was called Tyrimnus and he appears on its coins on horseback armed with battle-axe and club. The only notable thing about Thyatira from the religious point of view was that it possessed a fortune-telling shrine, presided over by a female oracle called the Sambathe. Certainly no threat of persecution hung over the Thyatiran Church.

(iv) What, then, was the problem in Thyatira? We know less about Thyatira than about any other of the seven cities and are, therefore, seriously handicapped in trying to reconstruct the situation. The one thing we do know is that it was a great commercial centre, specially of the dyeing industry and of the trade in woollen goods. It was from Thyatira that Lydia, the seller of purple, came (Ac.16:14). From inscriptions discovered we learn that it had an extraordinary number of trade guilds. These were associations for mutual profit and pleasure of people employed in certain trades. There were guilds of workers in wool, leather, linen and bronze, makers of outer garments, dyers, potters, bakers and slave-dealers.

Here, we think, was the problem of the Church in Thyatira. To refuse to join one of these guilds would be much the same as to refuse to join a trade union today. It would mean to give up all prospect of commercial existence. Why should a Christian not join one of these guilds? They held common meals. These would very often be held in a temple and even if not, they would begin and end with a formal sacrifice to the gods, and the meat eaten would be meat which had already been offered to idols. Further, it often happened that these communal meals were occasions of drunken revelry and slack morality. Was it possible for a Christian to be part of such occasions?

Here was the problem at Thyatira; the threat came from inside the Church. There was a strong movement, led by the woman addressed as Jezebel, which pled for compromise with the world's standards in the interests of business and commercial prosperity, maintaining, no doubt, that the Holy Spirit could preserve them from any harm. The answer of the Risen Christ is unequivocal. With such things the Christian must have nothing to do.

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THYATIRA - THE STATE OF THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

Revelation 2:18-29 (Part 2)

R. H. Charles points out that by far the longest of the seven letters is written to the most unimportant of the seven cities; but its problem was far from being unimportant.

Of all the seven letters this is the most enigmatic. Our trouble is that we have so little definite information about Thyatira and we are presented with a series of four questions--What was the situation of the Church in Thyatira? Who was Jezebel? What did she teach? What do the promises made to the Church at Thyatira mean?

(i) The letter opens with a description of the Risen Christ which has a threat in it. His eyes are like a flame of fire and his feet like burnished bronze. The description is taken from that of the angelic messenger in Dn.10:6: "His face was like the appearance of lightning, and his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze." The flaming eyes must stand for two things, blazing anger against sin and the awful penetration of that gaze which strips the disguises away and sees into a man's inmost heart. The brazen feet must stand for the immovable power of the Risen Christ. A message which begins like that will certainly be no soothing tranquillizer.

The letter goes on to terms of the highest praise. The love and loyalty and service and endurance of the Church at Thyatira are matters for congratulation. We must note how these great qualities go in pairs. Service is the outcome of love and patient endurance the product of loyalty.

Then comes the condemnation of the woman Jezebel and all her ways and teaching; and one can hardly avoid the conclusion that she had very considerable influence in the Church at Thyatira.

The necessary conclusion seems to be this. On the surface the Church at Thyatira was strong and flourishing. If a stranger went into it, he would be impressed with its abounding energy and its generous liberality and its apparent steadfastness. For all that, there was something essential missing.

Here is a warning. A church which is crowded with people and which is a hive of energy is not necessarily a real Church. It is possible for a Church to be crowded because its people come to be entertained instead of instructed, and to be soothed instead of confronted with the fact of sin and the offer of salvation; it maybe a highly successful Christian club rather than a real Christian congregation.

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THYATIRA - THE SOURCE OF THE ERROR

Revelation 2:18-29 (Part 3)

(2) The source of the trouble in Thyatira centred round a woman whom the letter calls Jezebel. A variety of answers have been given to the question of her identity.

(i) We begin with an answer which is very interesting, although it is doubtful if it is possible. The King James Version calls her: "that woman Jezebel." Moffatt translates "that Jezebel of a woman." The Greek is: ten (GSN3588) gunaika (GSN1135) Iezabel (GSN2403). A few manuscripts have after gunaika (GSN1135) the word sou (GSN4675), which means "your." The noun gune (GSN1135)--the nominative of the word of which gunaika (GSN1135) is the accusative form--not only means "woman" but also "wife"; and if with these manuscripts we read ten (GSN3588) gunaika GSN1135) sou (GSN4675) Iezabel (GSN2403), the phrase will mean: "your wife Jezebel."

Early on we saw that the angel of the Church may be the bishop of the Church. If, then, the letter is addressed to the bishop of the Church and there is a reference to your wife Jezebel, it means that the cause of all the trouble is the bishop's wife! That would be an interesting sidelight on the early Christian congregations and it would not be the last time that the wives of church officials were the sources of trouble in a congregation. But this interpretation must be rejected because the evidence for inserting sou (GSN4675) is not good enough.

(ii) One of the few claims to distinction which Thyatira possessed was an oracle called the Sambathe, a woman fortune-teller. The Greeks made great use of oracles. The oracle at Delphi was world famous and the expression a Delphic utterance has become proverbial. It may be that this oracle was a Jewess, for the Jews in the ancient world went in largely for this business of fortune telling. There are those who see in the Sambathe the evil influence which was threatening the Church at Thyatira; but this, too, must be rejected, for it is quite clear that Jezebel was a member of the Church and her influence was being exerted from within.

(iii) Some, on no grounds whatever, have identified Jezebel with Lydia, the seller of purple from Thyatira, whom Paul met and converted at Philippi. It is suggested that she came back to Thyatira and became an evil influence in the Church because of her wealth and her business interests. That theory is merely a slander on Lydia.

(iv) The only reasonable conclusion is that we have no idea who Jezebel was, although we can with certainty trace the kind of person that she was.

That she claimed to be a prophetess is not so very surprising. It is true that Paul would have nothing to do with women speaking in the Church (1Cor.14:34). But it is also true that in both the Old and the New Testaments there are prophetesses. In the Old Testament there are Miriam (Exo.15:20), Deborah (Judg.4:4) and Huldah (2Kgs.22:14); and in the New Testament there are Anna (Lk.2:36), and the four virgin daughters of Philip (Ac.21:9).

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Revelation 2:18-29

This woman is called Jezebel and, therefore, her character must be discovered in the original Jezebel than whom few women have acquired such a reputation for wickedness. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, and the wife of Ahab (1Kgs.16:31). When she came from Sidon, she brought her own gods and caused Ahab and his people to worship Baal. It was not that she would have wished to banish the worship of Jehovah, if the prophets of Jehovah would have accepted Baal in addition to Jehovah. She slew the prophets of the Lord and at her own table supported four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal (1Kgs.18:13,19). She was Ahab's evil genius; in particular, she was responsible for the murder of Naboth in order that Ahab might enter into the possession of the ground where his vineyard stood (1Kgs.21). And she left behind her a name for "harlotries and sorceries" (2Kgs.9:22).

All this must mean that Jezebel of Thyatira was an evil influence on the life and worship of the Christian Church. It must be clearly understood that she had no wish to destroy the Church; but she wished to bring into it new ways which were, in fact, destructive of the faith.

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Revelation 2:18-29

THYATIRA - THE TEACHING OF JEZEBEL (1)

Revelation 2:18-29 (Part 4)

(3) This Jezebel of a woman is accused of teaching two things--eating meat offered to idols and committing fornication.

(a) One of the great problems of the Christian Church was that of meat offered to idols and it was one which met the Christian every day. When a man made a sacrifice in a Greek temple, very little of the meat was burned on the altar. Sometimes all that was actually burned was a few hairs cut from the forehead of the animal. The priests received a share of the meat of the animal as their perquisite; and the worshipper received the rest. With it he did one of two things. He might hold a feast of his friends within the temple precincts. A common form of invitation to a festal meal ran: "I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Serapis." Or he might take the meat home and hold a feast in his own house. Here was the Christian problem. Could a Christian, in a temple or anywhere else, eat meat which had been consecrated to idols? Paul discusses this very problem in 1Cor.8-10.

The problem was complicated by the fact that even the meat in butchers' shops might well have been offered to idols previously. The priests in the temples could not possibly consume all the meat which fell to them and therefore, sold much of their share to the butchers' shops. Such meat was the best meat. What was a Christian going to do about that?

The Church had no doubt as to where a Christian's duty lay. Abstention from things offered to idols was one of the conditions on which the Gentiles received the right of entry into the Christian Church (Ac.15:29).

The prohibition of meat offered to idols had one far-reaching consequence. It came near to cutting off a Christian from all social fellowship with non-Christians; there were few social occasions, and almost no banquets, which he could share with the heathen world.

This had another consequence which, as we have already said, we think was at the back of the situation in Thyatira. It meant that the Christian could not join any trade guild for all the guilds had a common meal as a central part of their practice which might well be held in a heathen temple and would largely consist of meat offered to idols. His abstention from guild membership was equivalent to commercial suicide.

Here is where Jezebel came in. She urged upon the Christians that there was no need to cut themselves off from society or abstain from the guilds. When she did so, she was not proceeding on grounds of principle but was simply trying to protect her business interests. Jezebel is to be counted amongst those to whom the claims of commercial success speak more loudly than the claims of Christ.

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Revelation 2:18-29

THYATIRA - THE TEACHING OF JEZEBEL (2)

Revelation 2:18-29 (Part 5)

(b) The other part of Jezebel's teaching is not so clear. She is said to teach the people to commit fornication (Rev.2:20); she is urged to repent from her fornication (Rev.2:21); and her paramours and her children are threatened along with her (Rev.2:22-23). Is this reference to be taken literally or in the metaphorical sense which is so common in Scripture to sexual immorality or to spiritual infidelity?

(i) There is no doubt that in Scripture infidelity to God is expressed in terms of fornication and adultery. Israel is the Bride of God (Isa.54:5; Jer.3:20); and in the New Testament the Church is the Bride of Christ (2Cor.11:1-2; Eph.5:24-28). Again and again in the Old Testament the Israelites are, therefore, said to "play the harlot after strange gods" (Exo.34:15-16; Deut.31:16; Hos.9:1). In the New Testament the age which is unfaithful to Jesus Christ is an "evil and adulterous generation" (Matt.12:39; Matt.16:4; Mk.8:38). Is the fornication which Jezebel's teaching inculcated a spiritual infidelity to Jesus Christ? If that is the meaning, her paramours (Rev.2:22) will be those who are flirting with this kind of teaching and her children (Rev.2:23) those who have accepted it.

It may well be that the teaching of Jezebel was that the Christians did not need to be so exclusive in their worship of Jesus Christ and, above all, that there was no need for them to refuse to say, "Caesar is Lord," and to burn their pinch of incense. If the Christian Church as a whole had accepted that form of teaching, the inevitable consequence would have been that Christianity would have become nothing more than still another of those religions of which the Roman Empire was so full. The claim of Christianity is not that Jesus Christ is one of the Saviours nor even the chief of Saviours; but that he is the only Saviour.

(ii) One thing in the letter militates against that view. We read that the followers of Jezebel claimed to know the depths of Satan (Rev.2:24). Some scholars think that this is the Risen Christ's contemptuous description of the false teaching. The real Christian knows what Paul called the deep things of God (1Cor.2:10); what Jezebel and her company know is the deep things of Satan. But that will not do, for the letter unmistakably speaks of "the deep things of Satan, as they call them." This is quite certainly a reference to a kind of belief that was not uncommon among the heretics. Some of them held that it was a plain duty to experience every kind of sin. The real achievement was to allow the body to wallow in sin and to keep the soul unaffected. Those who knew the deep things of Satan were those who had deliberately plumbed evil to its depths. Jezebel may well have been teaching that it was a duty to sin.

It seems to us that in this case all the threads tie up and there is no necessity to make a choice between views. All the probability is that Jezebel was teaching that a Christian ought to accommodate himself to the world; in other words she was urging on the Church a spiritual infidelity which was bound to issue in physical fornication. It is in the mercy of God that the teaching of Jezebel and her like did not become the view of the Church. If that had happened, the Church would have become a kind of pleasant paganism. On this Paul said: "Do not be conformed

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Revelation 2:18-29

to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom.12:2). And Jesus said the last word on the matter: "No one can serve two masters.... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt.6:24). The old choice is still the new choice: "Choose you this day whom you will serve" (Deut.30:19; Josh.24:15).

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Revelation 2:18-29

THYATIRA - PROMISES AND THREATS

Revelation 2:18-29 (Part 6)

(4) The letter to Thyatira finishes with a series of great threats and great promises. Jezebel has been given all the latitude the divine mercy can give her. If she does not repent, she will be cast into a bed of sickness and her paramours and followers will share her fate. This will prove to all men that indeed the Risen Christ, as the King James Version has it, "searches the reins and hearts." The phrase is a translation of Jer.11:20. In Jeremiah the prerogative of searching the inmost thoughts of men belongs to God; but in the Revelation, as so often, the prerogatives of God have become the prerogatives of the Risen Christ.

The reins are the kidneys; strange as it may seem to us, Hebrew psychology believed that the seat of emotion was in the lower viscera, the kidneys and the bowels; and the seat of thought was in the heart. When the Risen Christ says that he will search the reins and the heart, it means that every emotion and every thought will be open to his gaze.

There is real point here. When we began to study the letter to Thyatira we saw that anyone coming into that Church for the first time would have believed it to be surging with life and fruitful in every good work. No doubt those who prospered in business because of their compromise with the world were lavish in their liberality. No doubt those who attended the trade guilds gave generously to charitable funds. They looked like real Christians. No doubt Jezebel seemed to many a fine character. She must have had a command of language and a fine presence to be regarded as a prophetess. The point here is that the Risen Christ can see beyond the outward disguise; he will know whether or not her repentance is real.

To those who are faithful the promise is made and it is twofold.

(i) The first part comes from Ps.2:8-9; "Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." In Jewish belief that was a Messianic Psalm, thinking of a conquering Messiah who would smash the heathen and extend the rule of Israel to the ends of the earth. But it has also been one of the great missionary inspirations of the Christian Church. Many a missionary claimed that promise: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage."

(ii) The second part is the promise of the morning star. Four main interpretations have been given.

(a) It is taken as a promise of the first resurrection. As the morning star rises after the night, so the Christian will rise after the night of death.

(b) It is taken as the conquest of Lucifer. Lucifer is the devil, the angel who was so proud that he rebelled against God and was cast over the battlements of heaven (Isa.14:12). Lucifer means light-bringer and it is the name of the morning star. If that be so, this is a promise of complete power over Satan and over sin.

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(iii) This has been referred to Dn.12:3. There the promise is: "and those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever." If that be so, the morning star is the glory which will come to those who are righteous and have helped others to walk in the paths of righteousness.

(iv) All these are very lovely and may all be involved in this promise; but we are quite certain that the correct interpretation is this. The Revelation itself calls Jesus "the bright morning star" (Rev.22:16). The promise of the morning star is the promise of Christ himself. If the Christian is true, when life comes to an end he will possess Christ, never to lose him any more.

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Revelation 3:1-6

THE LETTER TO SARDIS

Revelation 3:1-6 (Part 1)

And to the angel of the Church in Sardis, write:

These things says he who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.

I know your works; I know that you have a reputation for life, but that you are dead. Show yourself watchful, and strengthen what remains and what is going to die. I have not found your works completed before my God. Remember, then, how you received and heard the gospel, and keep it, and repent. If, then, you are not on the watch, I will come as a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

But you have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their garments and they will walk with me in white raiment, because they are worthy. He who overcomes will be thus clothed in white raiment and I will not wipe his name out of the Book of Life, but I will acknowledge his name before my Father and before his angels.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

SARDIS, PAST SPLENDOR AND PRESENT DECAY

Sir W. M. Ramsay said of Sardis that nowhere was there a greater example of the melancholy contrast between past splendour and present decay. Sardis was a city of degeneration.

Seven hundred years before this letter was written Sardis had been one of the greatest cities in the world. There the king of Lydia ruled over his empire in oriental splendour. At that time Sardis was a city of the east and was hostile to the Greek world, Aeschylus wrote of it: "They that dwelt by Tmolus pledged themselves to cast the yoke on Hellas."

Sardis stood in the midst of the plain of the valley of the River Hermus. To the north of that plain rose the long ridge of Mount Tmolus; from that ridge a series of hills went out like spurs, each forming a narrow plateau. On one of these spurs, fifteen hundred feet up, stood the original Sardis. Clearly such a position made it almost impregnable. The sides of the ridge were smoothly precipitous; and only where the spur met the ridge of Mount Tmolus was there any possible approach into Sardis and even that was hard and steep. It has been said that Sardis stood like some gigantic watch-tower, guarding the Hermus valley. The time came when the narrow space on the top of the plateau was too small for the expanding city; and Sardis grew round the foot of the spur on which the citadel stood. The name Sardis (Sardeis, GSN4454, in Greek) is really a plural noun, for there were two towns, one on the plateau and one in the valley beneath.

The wealth of Sardis was legendary. Through the lower town flowed the River Pactolus, which was said in the old days to have had gold-bearing waters from which much of the wealth of Sardis

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Revelation 3:1-6

came. Greatest of the Sardian kings was Croesus, whose name is still commemorated in the proverb, "As rich as Croesus." It was with him that Sardis reached its zenith and it was with him that it plunged to disaster.

It was not that Croesus was not warned where Sardis was heading. Solon, the wisest of the Greeks, came on a visit and was shown the magnificence and the luxury. He saw the blind confidence of Croesus and his people that nothing could end this splendour; but he also saw that the seeds of softness and of degeneration were being sown. And it was then that he uttered his famous saying to Croesus: "Call no man happy until he is dead." Solon knew only too well the chances and changes of life which Croesus had forgotten.

Croesus embarked upon a war with Cyrus of Persia which was the end of the greatness of Sardis. Again Croesus was warned, but he failed to see the warning. To get at the armies of Cyrus he had to cross the River Halys. He took counsel of the famous oracle at Delphi and was told: "If you cross the River Halys, you will destroy a great empire. Croesus took it as a promise that he would annihilate the Persians; it never crossed his mind that it was a prophecy that the campaign on which he had embarked would be the end of his own power.

He crossed the Halys, engaged in battle and was routed. He was not in the least worried, for he thought that all he had to do was to retire to the impregnable citadel of Sardis, recuperate and fight again. Cyrus initiated the siege of Sardis, waited for fourteen days, then offered a special reward to anyone who would find an entry into the city.

The rock on which Sardis was built was friable, more like close packed dried mud than rock. The nature of the rock meant that it developed cracks. A certain Mardian soldier called Hyeroeades had seen a Sardian soldier accidentally drop his helmet over the battlements, and then make his way down the precipice to retrieve it. Hyeroeades knew that there must be a crack in the rock there by means of which an agile man could climb up. That night he led a party of Persian troops up by the fault in the rock. When they reached the top they found the battlements completely unguarded.

The Sardians had thought themselves too safe to need a guard; and so Sardis fell. A city with a history like that knew what the Risen Christ was talking about when he said: "Watch!"

There were a few futile attempts at rebellion; but Cyrus followed a deliberate policy. He forbade any Sardian to possess a weapon of war. He ordered them to wear tunics and buskins, that is, actor's boots, instead of sandals. He ordered them to teach their sons lyre-playing, the song and the dance, and retail trading. Sardis had been flabby already but the last vestige of spirit was banished from its people and it became a city of degeneration.

It vanished from history under Persian rule for two centuries. In due time it surrendered to Alexander the Great and through him it became a city of Greek culture. Then history repeated itself. After the death of Alexander there were many claimants for the power. Antiochus, who became the ruler of the area in which Sardis stood, was at war with a rival called Achaeus who sought refuge in Sardis. For a year Antiochus besieged him; then a soldier called Lagoras repeated the exploit of Hyeroeades. At night with a band of brave men he climbed the steep cliffs. The

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Sardians had forgotten their lesson. There was no guard and once again Sardis fell because it was not upon the watch.

In due time the Romans came. Sardis was still a wealthy city. It was a centre of the woollen trade; and it was claimed that the art of dyeing wool was actually discovered there. It became a Roman assize town. In A.D. 17 it was destroyed by an earthquake which devastated the area. Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, in his kindness remitted all tribute for five years and gave a donation of 10,000,000 sesterces, that is, £400,000. towards rebuilding and Sardis recovered itself by the easy way.

When John wrote his letter to Sardis, it was wealthy but degenerate. Even the once great citadel was now only an ancient monument on the hill top. There was no life or spirit there. The once great Sardians were soft, and twice they had lost their city because they were too lazy to watch. In that enervating atmosphere the Christian Church too had lost its vitality and was a corpse instead of a living Church.

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Revelation 3:1-6

SARDIS - DEATH IN LIFE

Revelation 3: 1-6 (Part 2)

In the introduction to this letter the Risen Christ is described in two phrases.

(i) He is he who has the seven Spirits of God. We have already come upon this strange phrase in Rev.1:4. It has two aspects of meaning. (a) It denotes the Holy Spirit with his sevenfold gifts, an idea founded on the description of the Spirit in Isa.11:2. (b) It denotes the Spirit in his sevenfold operation. There are seven Churches, yet in each of them the Spirit operates with all his presence and power. The seven spirits signifies the completeness of the gifts of the Spirit and the universality of his presence.

(ii) He is he who has the seven stars. The stars stand for the Churches and their angels. The Church is the possession of Jesus Christ. Many a time men act as if the Church belonged to them, but it belongs to Jesus Christ and all in it are his servants. In any decision regarding the Church, the decisive factor must be not what any man wishes the Church to do but what Jesus Christ wishes to be done.

The terrible accusation against the Church at Sardis is that, although it has a reputation for life, it is, in fact, spiritually dead. The New Testament frequently likens sin to death. In the Pastoral Epistles we read: "She who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives" (1Tim.5:6), The Prodigal Son is he who was dead and is alive again (Lk.15:24). The Roman Christians are men who have been brought from death to life (Rom.6:13). Paul says that his converts in their pre-Christian days were dead through trespasses and sins (Eph.2:1,5).

(i) Sin is the death of the will. If a man accepts the invitations of sin for long enough, the time comes when he cannot accept anything else. Habits grow upon him until he can no longer break them. A man comes, as Seneca had it, to hate his sins and to love them at the same time. There can be few of us who have not experienced the power of some habit into which we have fallen.

(ii) Sin is the death of the feelings. The process of becoming the slave of sin does not happen overnight. The first time a man sins he does so with many a qualm. But the day comes, if he goes on taking what is forbidden, when he does without a qualm that which once he would have been horrified to do. Sin, as Burns had it, "petrifies the feeling."

(iii) Sin is the death of all loveliness. The terrible thing about sin is that it can take the loveliest things and turn them into ugliness. Through sin the yearning for the highest can become the craving for power; the wish to serve can become the intoxication of ambition; the desire of love can become the passion of lust. Sin is the killer of life's loveliness.

It is only by the grace of God that we can escape the death of sin.

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Revelation 3:1-6

SARDIS - A LIFELESS CHURCH

Revelation 3:1-6 (Part 3)

The lifelessness of the Church at Sardis had a strange effect.

(i) The Church at Sardis was untroubled by any heresy. Heresy is always the product of the searching mind; it is, in fact, the sign of a Church that is alive. There is nothing worse than a state in which a man is orthodox because he is too lazy to think for himself. He is actually better with a heresy which he holds intensely than with an orthodoxy about which in his heart of hearts he does not care.

(ii) The Church at Sardis was untroubled by any attack from the outside, neither by the heathen or by the Jews. The truth was that it was so lifeless that it was not worth attacking. The Pastoral Epistles describe those who had drifted away from the true faith by saying that they had a form of godliness but denied its power (2Tim.3:5). Moffatt translates it: "Though they keep up a form of religion, they will have nothing to do with it as a force." Phillips puts it: "They will maintain a facade of 'religion,' but their conduct will deny its validity."

A truly vital Church will always be under attack. "Woe to you," said Jesus, "when all men speak well of you!" (Lk.6:26). A Church with a positive message is bound to be one to which there will be opposition.

A Church which is so lethargic as to fail to produce a heresy is mentally dead; and a Church which is so negative as to fail to produce opposition is dead in its witness to Christ.

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Revelation 3:1-6

SARDIS - WATCH!

Revelation 3:1-6 (Part 4)

If anything is to be rescued from the impending ruin of the Church in Sardis the Christians there must wake from their deadly lethargy and watch. No commandment appears more frequently in the New Testament than that to watch.

(i) Watchfulness should be the constant attitude of the Christian life. "It is full time," says Paul, "to wake from sleep" (Rom.13:11). "Be watchful, stand firm in your faith," he urges (1Cor.16:13). It has been said that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" and eternal watchfulness is the price of salvation.

(ii) The Christian must be on the watch against the wiles of the devil (1Pet.5:8). The history of Sardis had its vivid examples of what happens to the garrison whose watch is slack. The Christian is under continual attack by the powers which seek to seduce him from his loyalty to Christ. Often these attacks are subtle. He must, therefore, be ever on the watch.

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Revelation 3:1-6

SARDIS - THE IMPERATIVES OF THE RISEN LORD

Revelation 3:1-6 (Part 5)

In Rev.3:3 we have a series of imperatives.

(i) The Risen Christ says: "Remember how you received and heard the gospel." It is the present imperative and means: "Keep on remembering; never allow yourself to forget." The Risen Christ is telling the lethargic Sardians to remember the thrill with which they first heard the good news. It is a fact of life that certain things sharpen memory which has grown dull. When, for instance, we return to a graveside, the sorrow from which the years have taken the edge grows piercingly poignant again. Ever and again the Christian must stand before the Cross and remember again what God has done for him.

(ii) The Risen Christ says: "Repent!" This is an aorist imperative and describes one definite action. In the Christian life there must be a decisive moment, when a man decides to be done with the old way and to begin on the new.

(iii) The Risen Christ says: "Keep the commands of the gospel." Here again we have a present imperative indicating continuous action. It means: "Never stop keeping the commands of the gospel." Here is a warning against what we might call "spasmodic Christianity." Too many of us are Christian one moment and unchristian the next.

(iv) There is the command to watch. There is an old Latin saying that "the gods walk on feet that are wrapped in wool." Their approach is silent and unobserved, until a man finds himself without warning facing eternity. But that cannot happen if every day a man lives in the presence of Christ; he who walks hand-in-hand with Christ cannot be taken unawares by his coming.

(iii) The Christian must be on the watch against temptation "Watch and pray," said Jesus, "that you may not enter into temptation" (Matt.26:41). Temptation waits for our unguarded moments and then attacks. In the Christian life there must be unceasing vigilance against it.

(iv) Repeatedly the New Testament urges the Christian to be on the watch for the coming of his Lord. "Watch, therefore," said Jesus, "for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." "What I say to you, I say to all: watch" (Matt.24:42-43; Mk.13:37). "Let us not sleep, as others do," writes Paul to the Thessalonians. "Let us keep awake and be sober" (1Th.5:6). No man knows the day and the hour when for him eternity will invade time. "The last day is a secret," says Augustine, "that every day may be watched." A man should live every day as if it were his last.

(v) The Christian must be on the watch against false teaching. In Paul's last address to the elders of Ephesus he warns them that grievous wolves will invade the flock from outside and from inside men will arise to speak perverse things. "Therefore," he says, "watch!" (Ac.20:29-31).

(vi) Nor must the Christian forget that, even as he must watch for Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is watching him. "I have not found your works perfect," says the Risen Christ, "in the sight of my

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Revelation 3:1-6

God." Here two great truths meet us. (a) Christ is looking for something from us. We so often regard him as the one to whom we look for things; for his strength, his help, his support, his comfort. But we must never forget that he is looking for our love, our loyalty and our service. (b) The things a man must do lie to his hand. The old saying is true: "Fate is what we must do; destiny is what we are meant to do." The Christian does not believe in an inescapable fate; but he does believe in a destiny which he can accept or refuse.

From everyone of us Jesus Christ is looking for something; and for everyone of us there is something to do.

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Revelation 3:1-6

SARDIS - THE FAITHFUL FEW

Revelation 3:1-6 (Part 6)

In Rev.3:4 there shines through the darkness a ray of hope. Even in Sardis there are the faithful few. When Abraham is pleading with God for Sodom, he appeals to God: "To slay the righteous with the wicked, far be that from thee" (Gen.18:25). In the old story of the kings, Abijah alone of all the sons of Jeroboam was spared because in him was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel (1Kgs.14:13). God never abandons his search for the faithful few and they are never lost to his sight in the mass of the wicked.

It is said of the faithful that they "have not soiled their garments." James spoke with respect and admiration of the man who kept himself "unstained from the world" (Jas.1:27). There are two possible pictures here.

(i) In the heathen world no worshipper was allowed to approach a temple of the gods with soiled clothes. For the heathen this was an external thing; but this may describe the man who has kept his soul clean so that he can enter into the presence of God and not be ashamed.

(ii) Swete thinks that the white garments stand for the profession a man made at baptism; and that the phrase described the man who had not broken his baptismal vows. At this stage in the Church's history baptism was adult baptism, and at baptism a man took his personal pledge to Jesus Christ. This is all the more likely because it was common at baptism to clothe a man, after he had emerged from the water, in clean white robes, symbolic of the cleansing of his life. The man who is faithful to his pledge will, beyond a doubt, some day hear God say: "Well done!"

To those who have been true the promise is that they will walk with God. Again there is a double background.

(a) There may be a heathen background. At the Persian court the king's most trusted favourites were given the privilege of walking in the royal gardens with the king and were called "The Companions of the Garden." Those who have been true to God will some day walk with him in Paradise.

(b) There may be a reference to the old story of Enoch. "And Enoch walked with God, and he was not; for God took him" (Gen.5:24). Enoch walked with God on earth and continued to walk with him in the heavenly places. The man whose walk with God is close on earth will enter into a nearer companionship with him when the end of life comes.

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Revelation 3:1-6

SARDIS - THE THREEFOLD PROMISE

Revelation 3:1-6 (Part 7)

To those who have been faithful comes the threefold promise.

(i) They will be clothed with white raiment. It is said of the righteous that "they will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Matt.13:43); and it is said of God that he covers himself with light as with a garment (Ps.104:2). What do the white robes signify?

(a) In the ancient world white robes stood for festivity. "Let your garments be always white," said the preacher, "and let not oil be lacking on your head" (Ecc.9:8). The white robes may stand for the fact that the faithful will be guests at the banquet of God.

(b) In the ancient world white robes stood for victory. On the day when a Roman triumph was celebrated, all the citizens clad themselves in white; the city itself was called *urbs candida*, the city in white. The white robes may stand for the reward of those who have won the victory.

(c) In any land and time white is the colour of purity, and the white robes may stand for the purity whose reward is to see God. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt.5:8).

(d) It has been suggested that the white robes stand for the resurrection bodies which the faithful will some day wear. They who are faithful will share in that whiteness of light which is the garment of God himself.

We need not make a choice between these various meanings; we may well believe that they are all included in the greatness of the promise.

(ii) Their names will not be wiped out of the Book of Life. The Book of Life is a conception which occurs often in the Bible. Moses is willing to be wiped out of the book which God has written, if by his sacrifice he can save his people from the consequence of their sin (Exo.32:32-33). It is the hope of the Psalmist that the wicked will be blotted out of the book of the living (Ps.69:28). In the time of judgment those who are written in the book will be delivered (Dn.12:1). The names of Paul's fellow-labourers for God are written in the book of life (Php.4:3). He who is not written in the book of life is cast into the lake of fire (Rev.20:15); only they who are written in the Lamb's book of life shall enter into blessedness (Rev.21:27).

In the ancient world a king kept a register of his citizens. When a man committed a crime against the state, or when he died, his name was erased from that register. To have one's name written in the book of life is to be numbered amongst the faithful citizens of the Kingdom of God.

(iii) Jesus Christ will confess their names before his Father and the angels. It was Jesus' promise that, if a man confessed him before men, he would confess him before his Father; and if a man denied him before men, he would deny him before his Father (Matt.10:32-33; Lk.12:8-9). Jesus Christ is for ever true to the man who is true to him.

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Revelation 3:7-13

THE LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA

Revelation 3:7-13 (Part 1)

And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, write:

These things says he who is holy, he who is true, he who has the key of David, he who opens and no man will shut, and shuts and no man opens. I know your works. Behold, I have set before you a door which stands open and which no man shuts, because you have a little strength and because you have kept my word, and have not denied my name. Behold, I will give you those who belong to the synagogue of Satan, who call themselves Jews and who are not, but who lie. Behold, I will make them come and kneel before your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. Because you have kept my command to endure, I, too, will keep you safe from the hour of testing, which is to come upon the whole inhabited world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have, that no one may take your crown.

I will make him who overcomes a pillar in the temple of my God and he will go out no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, of the new Jerusalem, which is coming down from heaven from my God, and my new name.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

PHILADELPHIA, CITY OF PRAISE

Philadelphia was the youngest of all the seven cities. It was founded by colonists from Pergamum under the reign of Attalus the Second, who ruled in Pergamum from 159 to 138 B.C. Philadelphos (GSN5361) is the Greek for one who loves his brother. Such was the love of Attalus for his brother Eumenes that he was called Philadelphos, and it was after him that Philadelphia was named.

It was founded for a special purpose. It was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met. But it was not as a garrison town that Philadelphia was founded, for there was little danger there. It was founded with the deliberate intention that it might be a missionary of Greek culture and language to Lydia and Phrygia; and so well did it do its work that by A.D. 19 the Lydians had forgotten their own language and were all but Greeks. Ramsay says of Philadelphia that it was "the centre for the diffusion of Greek language and Greek letters in a peaceful land and by peaceful means." That is what the Risen Christ means when he speaks of the open door that is set before Philadelphia. Three centuries before, Philadelphia had been given an open door to spread Greek ideas in the lands beyond; and now there has come to it another great missionary opportunity, to carry to men who never knew it the message of the love of Jesus Christ.

Philadelphia had a great characteristic which has left its mark upon this letter. It was on the edge of a great plain called the Katakekaumene (GSN2618), which means the Burned Land. The Katakekaumene was a great volcanic plain bearing the marks of the lava and the ashes of volcanoes then extinct. Such land is fertile; and Philadelphia was the centre of a great grape-growing area and a famous producer of wines. But that situation had its perils, and these perils had left their mark

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more deeply on Philadelphia than on any other city. In A.D. 17 there came a great earthquake which destroyed Sardis and ten other cities. In Philadelphia the tremors went on for years; Strabo describes it as a "city full of earthquakes."

It often happens that, when a great earthquake comes, people meet it with courage and self-possession, but ever-recurring minor shocks drive them to sheer panic. That is what happened in Philadelphia. Strabo describes the scene. Shocks were an everyday occurrence. Gaping cracks appeared in the walls of the houses. Now one part of the city was in ruins, now another. Most of the population lived outside the city in huts and feared even to go on the city streets lest they should be killed by falling masonry. Those who still dared to live in the city were reckoned mad; they spent their time shoring up the shaking buildings and every now and then fleeing to the open spaces for safety. These terrible days in Philadelphia were never wholly forgotten, and people in it ever waited subconsciously for the ominous tremors of the ground, ready to flee for their lives to the open spaces. People in Philadelphia well knew what security lay in a promise that "they would go out no more."

But there is more of Philadelphia's history than that in this letter. When this earthquake devastated it, Tiberius was as generous to Philadelphia as he had been to Sardis. In gratitude it changed its name to Neocaesarea--the New City of Caesar. In the time of Vespasian Philadelphia was in gratitude to change its name again to Flavia, for Flavius was the Emperor's family name. It is true that neither of these new names lasted and "Philadelphia" was restored. But the people of Philadelphia well knew what it was to receive "a new name."

Of all the cities Philadelphia receives the greatest praise and it was to show that it deserved it.

In later days it became a very great city. When the Turks and Mohammedanism flooded across Asia Minor and every other town had fallen, Philadelphia stood erect. For centuries it was a free Greek Christian city amidst a pagan people. It was the last bastion of Asian Christianity. It was not till midway through the fourteenth century that it fell; and to this day there is a Christian bishop and a thousand Christians in it. With the exception of Smyrna the other Churches are in ruins but Philadelphia still holds aloft the banner of the Christian faith.

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PHILADELPHIA - TITLES AND CLAIMS

Revelation 3:7-13 (Part 2)

In the introduction to this letter the Risen Christ is called by three great titles, each of which implies a tremendous claim.

(i) He is he who is holy. Holy is the description of God himself "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts," was the song of the seraphs which Isaiah heard (Isa.6:3). "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One" (Isa.40:25). "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King" (Isa.43:15). All through the Old Testament God is the Holy One; and now that title is given to the Risen Christ. We must remember that holy (hagios, GSN0040) means different, separate from. God is holy because he is different from men; he has that quality of being which belongs to him alone. To say that Jesus Christ is holy is to say that he shares the being of God.

(ii) He is he who is true. In Greek there are two words for true. There is alethes (GSN0227), which means "true" in the sense that a true statement is different from a false statement. There is alethinos (GSN0228), which means "real" as opposed to that which is "unreal." It is the second of these words which is used here. In Jesus is reality. When we are confronted with him, we are confronted with no shadowy outline of the truth but with the truth itself.

(iii) He is he who has the key of David, who opens and no man will shut, who shuts and no man opens. We may first note that the key is the symbol of authority. Here is the picture of Jesus Christ as the one who has the final authority which no one can question.

Behind this there is an Old Testament picture. Hezekiah had a faithful steward called Eliakim, who was over all his house and who alone could admit to the presence of the king. Isaiah heard God say of this faithful Eliakim: "and I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Isa.22:22). It is this picture which is in John's mind. Jesus alone has authority to admit to the new Jerusalem, the new city of David. As the Te Deum has it: "Thou didst open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers." He is the new and living way into the presence of God.

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Revelation 3:7-13

PHILADELPHIA - THE OPEN DOOR

Revelation 3:7-13 (Part 3)

In Rev.3:8-9 there is a problem of punctuation. In the early Greek manuscripts there was no punctuation at all. The problem is that the words "because you have a little strength, and because you have kept my word, and have not denied my name," can go equally well with what precedes them or with what follows. They may express either the reason why the door stands open before the Christians of Philadelphia or the reason why they will be given those who belong to the synagogue of Satan. We have taken them with the words which precede them.

It is the great promise of the Risen Christ that he has set before the Christians of Philadelphia an open door which no man can ever shut. What is the meaning of this open door?

(i) It may be the door of missionary opportunity. Writing to the Corinthians of the work which lies ahead of him, Paul says: "For a wide door for effective work has opened to me" (1Cor.16:9). When he came to Troas, a door was opened to him by the Lord (2Cor.2:12). He asks the Colossians to pray that a door of utterance may be opened for him (Col.4:3). When he came back to Antioch he told how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Ac.14:27).

This meaning is particularly appropriate for Philadelphia. We have seen how it was a border town, standing where the boundaries of Lydia, Mysia and Phrygia met, and founded to be a missionary of Greek language and culture to the barbarous peoples beyond. It was on the road of the imperial postal service, which left the coast at Troas, came to Philadelphia via Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis, and joined the great road out to Phrygia. The armies of Caesar travelled that road; the caravans of the merchant-men travelled it; and now it was beckoning the missionaries of Christ.

Two things emerge here. (a) There is a door of missionary opportunity before every man and he need not go overseas to find it. Within the home, within the circle in which we move, within the parish in which we reside, there are those to be won for Christ. To use that door of opportunity is at once our privilege and our responsibility. (b) In the way of Christ the reward of work well done is more work to do. Philadelphia had proved faithful and the reward for her fidelity was still more work to do for Christ.

(ii) It has been suggested that the door which is set before the Philadelphians is none other than Jesus himself. "I am the door," said Jesus (Jn.10:7,9).

(iii) It has been suggested that the door is the door to the Messianic community. With Jesus Christ the new kingdom of David was inaugurated; and, just as in the ancient kingdom Eliakim had the keys to admit to the royal presence, so Jesus is the door to admit to the kingdom of God.

(iv) Apart from all these things, for any man the door of prayer is always open. That is a door which no man can ever shut and it is one which Jesus opened when he assured men of the seeking love of God the Father.

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PHILADELPHIA - INHERITORS OF THE PROMISE

Revelation 3:7-13 (Part 4)

In Rev.3:9 the promise of the Risen Christ is that some day the Jews who slander the Christians will kneel before them. This is an echo of an expectation of the Jews which finds frequent expression in the Old Testament.

This was that in the new age, all nations would do humble homage to the Jews. This promise recurs again and again in Isaiah. "The sons of those who oppressed you shall come bending low to you; and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet" (Isa.60:14). "The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours, they shall follow you; they shall come over in chains and bow down to you" (Isa.45:14). "Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; with their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet" (Isa.49:23). Zechariah has a vision of the day when all men of all nations and languages shall turn to Jerusalem, "they shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech.8:22-23).

It was the Christian belief that the Jewish nation had lost its place in the plan of God and that that place had passed to the Church. A Jew in God's sense of the term was not one who could claim racial descent from Abraham but one of any nation who had made the same venture of faith as he had (Rom.9:6-9). The Church was the Israel of God (Gal.6:16). It was, therefore, now true that all the promises which had been made to Israel had been inherited by the Church. It was to her that one day all men would humbly make their submission. This promise is a reversal of all that the Jews had expected; they had expected that all nations would kneel before them; but the day was to come when they with all nations would kneel before Christ.

That is what the Philadelphian Church would see, at least in its beginnings, if its members were faithful. Up until now they had been faithful. In the sentence, "You have kept my word, and have not denied my name," both the verbs are in the aorist tense, which describes one definite act in past time; and the implication is that there had been some time of trial out of which the Philadelphian Church had emerged triumphantly true. They may have only a little strength; their resources may be small; but, if they are faithful, they will see the dawn of the triumph of Christ.

Though few and small and weak your bands,
Strong in your Captain's strength,
Go to the conquest of all lands;
All must be his at length.

That which must keep a Christian faithful is the vision of a world for Christ, for the coming of such a world depends on the fidelity of the individual Christian.

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PHILADELPHIA - THOSE WHO KEEP ARE KEPT

Revelation 3:7-13 (Part 5)

It is the promise of the Risen Christ that he who keeps will be kept. "You have kept my commandment," he says, "therefore, I will keep you." Loyalty has its sure reward. In Rev.3:10 in the Greek the phrase my command to endure is highly concentrated. Literally, it is the word of my endurance. The real meaning is that the promise is to those who have practised the same kind of endurance as Jesus displayed in his earthly life.

When we are called upon to show endurance, the endurance of Jesus Christ supplies us with three things. First, it supplies us with an example. Second, it supplies us with an inspiration. We must walk looking to him, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame (Heb.12:1-2). Third the endurance of Jesus Christ is the guarantee of his sympathy with us when we are called upon to endure. "Because he himself has suffered and been tempted he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb.2:18).

In Rev.3:10 we are back again amidst beliefs which are characteristically Jewish. As we have so often seen, the Jews divided time into two ages, the present age which is wholly bad, and the age to come, which is wholly good with in between the terrible time of destruction when judgment will fall upon the world. It is to that terrible time that John refers. Even when time comes to an end, and the world as we know it ceases to exist, he who is faithful to Christ will still be said in his keeping.

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PHILADELPHIA - PROMISE AND WARNING

Revelation 3:7-13 (Part 6)

In Rev.3:11 there is promise and warning combined.

The Risen Christ tells them that he is coming quickly. It has been said that in the New Testament the Coming of Christ is continually used for two purposes.

(i) It is used as a warning to the heedless. Jesus himself tells of the wicked servant, who took advantage of his master's absence to conduct himself evilly and to whom the master made a sudden return that brought judgment. (Matt.24:48-51). Paul warns the Thessalonians of the terrible fate which awaits the disobedient and the unbelieving when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven and shall take swift and final vengeance on his enemies (2Th.1:7-9). Peter warns his people that they will give account for their deeds to him who comes to judge the living and the dead (1Pet.4:5).

(ii) It is used as a comfort to the oppressed. James urges patient endurance on his people because the coming of the Lord is drawing near (Jas.5:8); soon their distresses will be at an end. The writer to the Hebrews urges patience, for soon he that shall come will come (Heb.10:37).

In the New Testament men used the idea of the Coming of Christ as a warning to the heedless and as a comfort to the oppressed. It is quite true that, in the literal sense, Jesus Christ did not come back to those who were so warned and exhorted. But no man knows when eternity will invade his life and God will bid him rise and come; and that must warn the careless to prepare to meet his God and cheer the oppressed with the thought of the coming glory of the faithful soul.

There is another warning here. The Risen Christ bids the Philadelphians hold to what they have, that no one may take their crown (Rev.3:11). It is not a question of someone stealing their crown but of God taking it from them and giving it to someone else, because they were not worthy to wear it. Trench makes a list of people in the Bible who lost their place to someone else because they had shown that they were not fit to hold it. Esau lost his place to Jacob (Gen.25:34; Gen.27:36). Reuben, unstable as water, lost his place to Judah (Gen.49:4,8). Saul lost his place to David (1Sam.16:1, 1Sam.16:13). Shebna lost his place to Eliakim (Isa.22:15-25). Joab and Abiathar lost their places to Benaiah and Zadok (1Kgs.2:25). Judas lost his place to Matthias (Ac.1:25-26). The Jews lost their place to the Gentiles (Rom.11:11).

There is tragedy here. It sometimes happens that a man is given a task to do and goes towards it with the highest hopes; but it begins to be seen that he is too small for the task and he is removed from the task and it is given to someone else. That can happen with the tasks of God. God has a task for every man; but it may be that the man proves himself unfit for the task and it is given to another.

It is blessedly true that even out of failure a man can redeem himself--but only if he casts himself upon the grace of Jesus Christ.

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PHILADELPHIA - MANY PROMISES

Revelation 3:7-13 (Part 7)

In Rev.3:12 we come to the promises of the Risen Christ to those who are faithful. They are many and most would paint pictures which would be vivid and real to the people of Philadelphia.

(i) The faithful Christian will be a pillar in the Temple of God. A pillar of the Church is a great and honoured support. Peter and James and John were the pillars of the early church in Jerusalem (Gal.2:9). Abraham, said the Jewish Rabbis, was the pillar of the world.

(ii) The faithful Christian will go out no more. There may be something of two meanings here.

(a) This may be a promise of security. We have seen how for years Philadelphia was terrorized by recurring earthquakes of the earth and how, when such times came, its citizens fled into the open country to escape and, when the tremors ended, came uncertainly back. Life was lived in an atmosphere of insecurity. There is for the faithful Christian the promise of a settled serenity in the peace which Jesus Christ can give.

(b) Some scholars think that what is here promised is fixity of moral character. In this life even the best of us is sometimes bad. But he who is faithful will in the end come to a time when he is like a pillar fixed in the Temple of God and goodness has become the constant atmosphere of his life. If this is the meaning, this phrase describes the life of untroubled goodness which is lived when, after the battles of earth, we reach the presence of God.

(iii) Jesus Christ will write upon the faithful Christian the name of his God. There may be three pictures here.

(a) In the cities of Asia Minor, and in Philadelphia, when a priest died after a lifetime of faithfulness, men honoured him, by erecting a new pillar in the temple in which he had served and by inscribing his name and the name of his father upon it. This then would describe the lasting honour which Christ pays to his faithful ones.

(b) It is just possible that there is a reference to the custom of branding a slave with the initials of his owner to show that he belongs to him. Just so God will put his mark upon his faithful ones. Whichever picture is behind this, the sense is that the faithful ones will wear the unmistakable badge of God.

(c) It is just possible that we have an Old Testament picture. When God told to Moses the blessing which Aaron and the priests must pronounce over the people, he said: "They shall put my name upon the people of Israel" (Num.6:22-27). It is the same idea again; it is as if the mark of God was upon Israel so that all men may know that they are his people.

(iv) On the faithful Christian the name of the new Jerusalem is to be written. That stands for the gift of citizenship in the city of God to the faithful Christian. According to Ezekiel the name of the

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re-created city of God was to be The Lord is there (Eze.48:35). The faithful ones will be citizens of the city where there is always the presence of God.

(v) On the faithful Christian Christ will write his own new name. The people of Philadelphia knew all about taking a new name. When in A.D. 17 a terrible earthquake devastated their city and Tiberius, the Emperor, dealt kindly with them, remitting taxation and making a generous gift to rebuild it, they in their gratitude, called the city Neocaesarea, the New City of Caesar, and later when Vespasian was kind to them, they called it Flavia, for that was the family name of Vespasian. Jesus Christ will mark his faithful ones with his new name: what that name was we need not even speculate, for no man knows it (Rev.19:12), but in the time to come, when Christ has conquered all, his faithful ones will bear the badge which shows that they are his and share his triumph.

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Revelation 3:14-22

THE LETTER TO LAODICEA

Revelation 3:14-22 (Part 1)

And to the angel of the Church in Laodicea, write:

These things says the Amen, the witness on whom you can rely and who is true, the moving cause of the creation of God. I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are tepid and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich and I have acquired riches, and I need nothing, and are quite unaware that it is you who are the wretched and the pitiable one, the poor and the blind and the naked one, I advise you to buy from me gold that has been refined by fire that you may be rich, white raiment that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness may not be openly displayed, and eye-salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.

I rebuke and discipline all those whom I love. Be eager, therefore, and repent.

Behold, I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and will have my meal with him, and he with me.

I will give to him who overcomes to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and took my seat with my Father in his throne.

Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

LAODICEA, THE CHURCH CONDEMNED

Laodicea has the grim distinction of being the only Church of which the Risen Christ has nothing good to say.

In the ancient world there were at least six cities called Laodicea and this one was called Laodicea on the Lycus to distinguish it from the others. It was founded about 250 B.C. by Antiochus of Syria and was named after his wife Laodice.

Its importance was due entirely to its position. The road from Ephesus to the east and to Syria was the most important in Asia. It began at the coast at Ephesus and it had to find a way to climb up to the central plateau 8,500 feet up. It set out along the valley of the River Maeander until it reached what were known as the Gates of Phrygia. Beyond this point lay a broad valley where Lydia, Phrygia and Caria met. The Maeander entered that valley by a narrow, precipitous gorge through which no road could pass. The road, therefore, detoured through the Lycus valley. In that valley Laodicea stood.

It was literally astride the great road to the east which went straight through Laodicea, entering by the Ephesian Gate and leaving by the Syrian Gate. That in itself would have been enough to make Laodicea one of the great commercial and strategic centres of the ancient world. Originally

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Laodicea had been a fortress; but it had the serious handicap that all its water supply had to come by underground aqueduct from springs no less than six miles away, a perilous situation for a town besieged. Two other roads passed through the gates of Laodicea, that from Pergamum and the Hermus Valley to Pisidia and Pamphylia and the coast at Perga and that from eastern Caria to central and west Phrygia.

As Ramsay says: "It only needed peace to make Laodicea a great commercial and financial centre." That peace came with the dominion of Rome. When the Roman peace gave it its opportunity it became, as Pliny called it, "a most distinguished city."

Laodicea had certain characteristics which have left their mark on the letter written to it.

(i) It was a great banking and financial centre. When Cicero was travelling in Asia Minor it was at Laodicea that he cashed his letters of credit. It was one of the wealthiest cities in the world. In A.D. 61 it was devastated by an earthquake; but so rich and independent were its citizens that they refused any help from the Roman government and out of their own resources rebuilt their city. Tacitus writes: "One of the most famous cities of Asia, Laodicea, was in that same year overthrown by an earthquake and without any relief from us recovered itself by its own resources" (Tacitus: Annals 14: 27). No wonder that Laodicea could boast that it was rich and had amassed wealth and had need of nothing. It was so wealthy that it did not even need God.

(ii) It was a great centre of clothing manufacture. The sheep which grazed round Laodicea were famous for their soft, violet-black, glossy wool. It mass-produced cheap outer garments. It was specially connected with a tunic called the trimita, so much so, indeed, that it was sometimes called Trimitaria. Laodicea was so proud of the garments it produced that it never realized it was naked in the sight of God.

(iii) It was a very considerable medical centre. Thirteen miles to the west, between Laodicea and the Gate of Phrygia, stood the temple of the Carian god Men. At one time that temple was the social, administrative and commercial centre of the whole area. Until less than a hundred years ago great markets were regularly held on its site. In particular the temple was the centre of a medical school which was transferred to Laodicea itself. So famous were its doctors that the names of some appear on the coins of Laodicea. Two of them were called Zeuxis and Alexander Philaethes.

This medical school was famous for two things throughout the world, ointment for the ear and ointment for the eyes. The King James and Revised Standard Versions speak of eye-salve. The word for salve is kollourion (GSN2854) which literally means a little roll of bread. The reason for the word is that this famous tephra Phrygia, Phrygian powder, was exported all over the world in solidified tablet form in the shape of little rolls. Laodicea was so conscious of its medical skill in the care of the eyes that it never realized that it was spiritually blind.

The words of the Risen Christ arise directly from the prosperity and the skill in which Laodicea took so much pride and which had in the minds of its citizens, and even of its Church, eliminated the need for God.

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(iv) We add a final fact about Laodicea. It was in an area where there was a very large Jewish population. So many Jews emigrated here that the Rabbis inveighed against the Jews who sought the wines and baths of Phrygia. In 62 B.C. Flaccus, the governor of the province, became alarmed at the amount of currency which the Jews were exporting in payment of the Temple tax which every male Jew paid and put an embargo on the export of currency. The result was that twenty pounds weight of gold was seized as contraband in Laodicea and one hundred pounds in Apameia in Phrygia. That amount of gold would be equal to 15,000 silver drachmae. The Jewish Temple tax amounted to half a shekel, which was equal to two drachmae. This means that in the district there were at least 7,500 male Jews. In Hierapolis, six miles away from Laodicea, there was a "Congregation of Jews" which had power to levy and to retain fines, and an archive office where Jewish legal documents were specially kept. There can have been few areas where the Jews were wealthier and more influential.

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Revelation 3:14-22

LAODICEA - THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

Revelation 3:14-22 (Part 2)

Of all the seven Churches that of Laodicea is most unsparingly condemned. In it there is no redeeming feature. It is interesting to note that the third century work *The Apostolic Constitutions* (8: 46) says that Archippus was the first Bishop of the Church in Laodicea. When Paul was writing to the neighbouring Church of Colossae, he says sternly: "Say to Archippus, See that you fulfil the ministry which you have received in the Lord" (Col.4:17). It would seem that Archippus was somehow failing in his duty. That was thirty years before the Revelation was written; but it may be that as long ago as that the rot had set in in the Church in Laodicea and an unsatisfactory ministry had sown the seeds of degeneration.

Like all the letters it begins with a series of great titles of Jesus Christ.

(i) He is the Amen. This is a strange title and may go back to either of two origins.

(a) In Isa.65:16 God is called the God of truth; but in the Hebrew he is called the God of Amen. Amen is the word which is often put at the end of a solemn statement in order to guarantee its truth. If God is the God of Amen, he is utterly to be relied upon. This would mean that Jesus Christ is the One whose promises are true beyond all doubt.

(b) In John's gospel Jesus' statements often begin: "Truly, truly, I say to you" (e.g. Jn.1:51; Jn.3:3,5,11). The Greek for truly is Amen. It is possible that when Jesus Christ is called the Amen it is a reminiscence of his own way of speaking. The meaning would be the same, Jesus is one whose promises can be relied upon.

(ii) He is the witness on whom we can rely and who is true. Trench points out that a witness must satisfy three essential conditions. (a) He must have seen with his own eyes that of which he tells. (b) He must be absolutely honest, so that he repeats with accuracy that which he has heard and seen. (c) He must have the ability to tell what he has to say, so that his witness may make its true impression on those who hear. Jesus Christ perfectly satisfied these conditions. He can tell of God, because he came from him. We can rely on his words for he is the Amen. He is able to tell his message, for never did man speak as he did.

(iii) As the Revised Standard Version has it, he is the beginning of God's creation. This phrase, as it stands in English, is ambiguous. It could mean, either, that Jesus was the first person to be created or that he began the process of creation, as Trench put it, "dynamically the beginning." It is the second meaning which is intended here. The word for beginning is arche (GSN0746). In early Christian writings we read that Satan is the arche (GSN0746) of death, that is to say, death takes its origin in him; and that God is the arche (GSN0746) of all things, that is, all things find their beginning in him.

The connection of the Son with creation is frequently made in the New Testament. John begins his gospel by saying of the Word: "All things were made through him, and without him was not

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Revelation 3:14-22

anything made that was made" (Jn.1:3). "In him," says Paul, "all things were created" (Col.1:15,18). The insistence on the Son's part in creation was due to the heretics who explained sin and disease by saying that the world had been created by a false and inferior god. It is the Christian insistence that this world is God's creation and that its sin and sorrow are not his fault, but are caused by the disobedience of men. As the Christian sees it, the God of creation and the God of redemption are one and the same.

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LAODICEA - NEITHER ONE THING NOR ANOTHER

Revelation 3:14-22 (Part 3)

The condemnation of Laodicea begins with a picture of almost crude vividness; because the Laodiceans are neither cold nor hot, they have about them a kind of nauseating quality, which will make the Risen Christ vomit them out of his mouth.

The exact meaning of the words is to be noted. Cold is *psuchros* (GSN5593); and it can mean cold to the point of freezing. Ecclesiasticus (Sir.43:20) speaks of the cold north wind which makes the ice congeal upon the waters. Hot is *zestos* (GSN2200); and it means hot to boiling point. Tepid is *chliaros* (GSN5513). Things which are tepid often have a nauseating effect. Hot food and cold food can both be appetizing, but tepid food will often make the stomach turn. Directly opposite Laodicea, on the other bank of the Lycus, and in full view, stood Hierapolis, famous for its hot mineral springs. Often hot mineral springs are nauseating in their taste and make the person who drinks them want to be physically sick. That is the way in which the Church at Laodicea affected the Risen Christ. Here is something to make us think:

(i) The one attitude which the Risen Christ unsparingly condemns is indifference. It has been said that an author can write a good biography if he loves his subject or hates him but not if he is coldly indifferent. Of all things indifference is the hardest to combat. The problem of modern evangelism is not hostility to Christianity; it would be better if it were so. The problem is that to so many Christianity and the Church have ceased to have any relevance and men regard them with complete indifference. This indifference can be broken down only by the actual demonstration that Christianity is a power to make life strong and a grace to make life beautiful.

(ii) The one impossible attitude to Christianity is neutrality. Jesus Christ works through men; and the man who remains completely detached in his attitude to him has by that very fact refused to undertake the work which is the divine purpose for him. The man who will not submit to Christ has necessarily resisted him.

(iii) Hard as it may sound, the meaning of this terrible threat of the Risen Christ is that it is better not even to start on the Christian way than to start and then to drift into a conventional and meaningless Christianity. The fire must be kept burning. There is an unwritten saying of Jesus: "He who is near me is near the fire." And the way to "maintain the spiritual glow" (Rom.12:11, Moffatt) is to live close to Christ.

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LAODICEA - THE WEALTH THAT IS POVERTY

Revelation 3:14-22 (Part 4)

The tragedy of Laodicea was that it was convinced of its own wealth and blind to its own poverty. Humanly speaking, anyone would say that there was not a more prosperous town in Asia Minor. Spiritually speaking, the Risen Christ declares that there was not a more poverty-stricken community. Laodicea prided itself on three things; and each is taken in turn and shown at its true value.

(i) It prided itself on its financial wealth. It was rich and had acquired wealth and had need of nothing--so it thought. The Risen Christ advises Laodicea to buy gold refined in the fire. It may be that gold tried in the fire stands for faith for it is thus that Peter describes faith (1Pet.1:7). Wealth can do much but there are things that it can never do. It cannot buy happiness nor give a man health either of body or of mind; it cannot bring comfort in sorrow nor fellowship in loneliness. If all that a man has to meet life with is wealth, he is poor indeed. But if a man has a faith tried and refined in the crucible of experience, there is nothing which he cannot face; and he is rich indeed.

(ii) Laodicea prided itself on its clothing trade. The garments made there were famous over all the world, and the wool of the sheep of Laodicea was a luxury article which all men knew, But, says the Risen Christ, Laodicea is spiritually naked; if it wants really to be clothed it must come to him. The Risen Christ speaks of "the shame of the nakedness of Laodicea."

This would mean even more in the ancient world than now. In the ancient world to be stripped naked was the worst humiliation. It was thus that Hanun treated the servants of David (2Sam.10:4). The threat to Egypt is that Assyria will lead her people naked and barefoot (Isa.20:4). It was Ezekiel's threat to Israel that her enemies would strip her of her clothes (Eze.16:37-39; Eze.23:26-29; compare Hos.2:3,9; Mic.1:8,11). God's threat passed on by Nahum to the disobedient people was: "I will let nations look on your nakedness, and on your kingdoms shame" (Nah.3:5). On the other hand, to be clothed in fine raiment was the greatest honour. Pharaoh honoured Joseph by clothing him in vestures of fine linen (Gen.41:42). Daniel is clothed in purple by Belshazzar (Dn.5:29). The royal apparel is for the man whom the king honours (Esth.6:6-11). When the prodigal son returns, it is the best robe that is put upon him (Lk.15:22).

Laodicea prides itself on the magnificent garments it produces but spiritually it is naked and nakedness is shame. The Risen Christ urges it to buy white raiment from him. This may well stand for the beauties of life and character which only the grace of Christ can give. There is little point in a man adorning his body, if he has nothing to adorn his soul. Not all the clothes in the world will beautify a person whose nature is twisted and whose character is ugly.

(iii) Laodicea prided itself on its famous eye-salve; but the facts of the case show that it was blind to its own poverty and nakedness. Trench says: "The beginning of all true amendment is to see ourselves as we are." All eye-salves in the ancient world caused the eyes to smart at their first application, and Laodicea had no wish to see itself as it was.

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LAODICEA - LOVE'S CHASTISEMENT

Revelation 3:14-22 (Part 5)

Rev.3:19 is one whose teaching runs throughout Scripture. "I rebuke and discipline all those whom I love." There is a very lovely thing about the way this is put. It is a quotation from Prov.3:12, but one word is altered. In the Greek of the Septuagint the word for love is agapan (GSN0025) which indicates the unconquerable attitude of goodwill which nothing can turn to hate; but it is a word which maybe has more of the head than the heart in it; and in the quotation the Risen Christ changes agapan (GSN0025) to philein (GSN5368) which is the most tender affection. We might well paraphrase it: "It is the people who are dearest to me on whom I exercise the sternest discipline."

Let us first take the word rebuke. The Greek is elegchein (GSN1651) and it describes the kind of rebuke which compels a man to see the error of his ways. Elegchos (GSN1650) is the corresponding noun, and Aristotle defines it: "Elegchos (GSN1650) is the proof that a thing cannot be otherwise than we say." The most vivid example of this kind of rebuke is the way in which Nathan opened David's eyes to his sin (2Sam.12:1-14). The rebuke of God is not so much punishment as illumination.

Let us see how the idea of discipline runs through the Bible.

It is very characteristic of the teaching of Proverbs. "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (Prov.13:24). "Withhold not correction from the child; for, if you beat him with a rod he will not die. If you beat him with the rod you will save his life from Sheol" (Prov.23:13-14). "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov.27:6). "The rod and reproof give wisdom; but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. . . . Discipline your son and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart" (Prov.29:15,17). "Blessed is the man whom thou dost chasten, O Lord, and whom thou dost teach out of thy law" (Ps.94:12). "Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves; therefore, despise not the chastening of the Almighty" (Jb.5:17). "We are chastened of the Lord that we may not be condemned along with the world" (1Cor.11:32). "For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure.

God is testing you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons" (Heb.11:6,8). "He that loveth his son will continue to lay stripes upon him, that he may have joy of him in the end. He that chastiseth his son shall have profit of him and shall glory of him among his acquaintances" (Ecc.30:1).

It is, in fact, God's final punishment to leave a man alone. "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone" (Hos.4:17). As Trench has it: "The great Master-builder squares and polishes with many strokes of the chisel and hammer the stones which shall find a place at last in the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem.... It is the crushed grape, and not the untouched, from which the costly liquor distils." There is no surer way of allowing a child to end in ruin than to allow him to do as he likes. It is a fact of life that the best athlete and the finest scholar receive the most demanding training.

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The discipline of God is not something which we should resent, but something for which we should be devoutly thankful.

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Revelation 3:14-22

LAODICEA - THE CHRIST WHO KNOCKS

Revelation 3:14-22 (Part 6)

In Rev.3:20 we have one of the most famous pictures of Jesus in the whole New Testament. "Behold," says the Risen Christ, "I am standing at the door and knocking." This picture has been derived from two different sources.

(i) It has been taken as a warning that the end is near, and that the Coming of Christ is at hand. The Christian must be ready to open whenever he hears his Lord knocking (Lk.12:36). When the signs come, the Christian will know that the last time is near, even at the doors (Mk.13:29; Matt.24:33). The Christian must live well and live in love because the judge is standing at the doors (Jas.5:9). It is true that the New Testament uses this picture to express the imminence of the coming of Christ. If that is the picture here, this phrase contains a warning and tells men to have a care, for Jesus Christ the Judge and King is at the door.

(ii) We cannot say that that meaning is impossible and yet it does not seem to fit the context, for the atmosphere of the passage is not so much warning as love. It is much better to take this saying of Christ as expressing the appeal of the lover of the souls of men. The origin of the passage is much more likely to be in Solomon's Song when the lover stands at the door of his beloved and pleads with her to open. "Hark! my beloved is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, perfect one" (SS.5:2-6). Here is Christ the lover knocking at the door of the hearts of men. And in this picture we see certain great truths of the Christian religion.

(a) We see the pleading of Christ. He stands at the door of the human heart and knocks. The unique new fact that Christianity brought into this world is that God is the seeker of men. No other religion has the vision of a seeking God.

In his book Out of Nazareth Donald Baillie cites three witnesses to the uniqueness of this conception. Montefiore, the great Jewish scholar, said that the one thing which no Jewish prophet or Rabbi ever conceived of is the "conception of God actually going out in quest of sinful men, who were not seeking him, but who were turned away from him." The National Christian Council of Japan in a document found the distinctive difference of Christianity from all other religions in, "Man not seeking God, but God taking the initiative in seeking man." St. Bernard away back in the twelfth century used often to say to his monks that, "However early they might wake and rise for prayer in their chapel on a cold mid-winter morning or even in the dead of night, they would always find God awake before them, waiting for them--nay, it was he who had awakened them to seek his face."

Here is the picture of Christ searching for sinful men who did not want him. Surely love can go no further than that.

(b) We see the offer of Christ. As the King James Version has it, "I will come in and sup with him." The word translated "sup" is deipnein (GSN1172) and its corresponding noun is deipnon (GSN1173). The Greeks had three meals in the day. There was akratisma, breakfast, which was no

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more than a piece of dried bread dipped in wine. There was *ariston* (GSN0712), the midday meal. A man did not go home for it; it was simply a picnic snack eaten by the side of the pavement, or in some colonnade, or in the city square. There was *deipnon* (GSN1173); this was the evening meal; the main meal of the day; people lingered over it, for the day's work was done. It was the *deipnon* (GSN1173) that Christ would share with the man who answered his knock, no hurried meal, but that where people lingered in fellowship. If a man will open the door, Jesus Christ will come in and linger long with him.

(iii) We see human responsibility. Christ knocks and a man can answer or refuse to answer. Christ does not break in; he must be invited in. Even on the Emmaus road, "He appeared to be going further" (Lk.24:28). Holman Hunt was right when in his famous picture *The Light of the World* he painted the door of the human heart with no handle on the outside, for it can be opened only from within. As Trench has it: "Every man is lord of the house of his own heart; it is his fortress; he must open the gates of it," and he has "the mournful prerogative and privilege of refusing to open." The man who refuses to open is "blindly at strife with his own blessedness." He is a "miserable conqueror."

Christ pleads and offers; but it is all to no avail if a man will not open the door.

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Revelation 3:14-22

THIS MEANS YOU

Revelation 3:14-22 (Part 7)

The promise of the Risen Christ is that the victor will sit with him in his own victorious throne. We will get the picture right if we remember that the eastern throne was more like a couch than a single seat. The victor in life will share the throne of the victorious Christ.

Every letter finishes with the words: "Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches." This saying does two things.

(i) It individualizes the message of the letters. It says to every man: "This means you." So often we listen to a message which comes through a preacher and apply it to everyone but ourselves. In our heart of hearts we believe that the stern words cannot possibly be meant for us and that the promises are too good to be true for us. This phrase says to every one of us: "All these things are meant for you."

(ii) It generalizes the message of the letters. It means that their message was not confined to the people in the seven Churches nineteen hundred years ago, but that through them the Spirit is speaking to every man in every generation. We have set these letters carefully against the local situations to which they were addressed; but their message is not local and temporary. It is eternal and in them the Spirit still speaks to us.

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Revelation 4:1

THE OPENING HEAVENS AND THE OPENING DOOR

Revelation 4:1

After this I saw, and, behold, a door in heaven was standing open, and there came to me the voice that I had heard before, speaking to me like the sound of a trumpet, and the speaker said: "Come up here, and I will show you the events which must follow these things."

In Rev.2-3 we saw the Risen Christ walking amidst his churches upon earth. Now the scene changes to the court of heaven.

A door was opened in heaven for the seer. There are two possibilities here: (a) It may be that he is thought of as already being in heaven, and the door is opening into still more holy parts of heaven. (b) It is much more likely that the door is from earth to heaven. Primitive Jewish thought conceived of the sky as a vast solid dome, set like a roof upon a square flat earth; and the idea here is that beyond the dome of the sky there is heaven, and a door is opened in that dome to give the seer entry into heaven.

In the early chapters of the Revelation there are three of the most important doors in life.

(i) There is the door of opportunity. "Behold," said the Risen Christ to the Church at Philadelphia, "I have set before you an open door" (Rev.3:8). That was the door of the glorious opportunity by which the message of the gospel could be taken to the regions beyond. God sets before every man his own door of opportunity.

(ii) There is the door of the human heart. "Behold," says the Risen Christ, "I stand at the door and knock (Rev.3:20). At the door of every heart there comes the knock of the nail-pierced hand, and a man may open or refuse to open.

(iii) There is the door of revelation. "I saw a door in heaven standing open," says the seer. God offers to every man the door which leads to the knowledge of God and of life eternal.

More than once the New Testament speaks of the heavens being opened; and it is of the greatest significance to see the object of that opening.

(i) There is the opening of the heavens for vision. "The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God" (Eze.1:1). God sends to those who seek him the vision of himself and of his truth.

(ii) There is the opening for the descent of the Spirit. When Jesus was baptized by John, he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon himself (Mk.1:10). When a man's mind and soul seek upwards, the Spirit of God descends to meet them.

(iii) There is the opening for the revelation of the glory of Christ. It was the promise of Jesus to Nathanael that he would see the heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man (Jn.1:51). Some day the heavens will open to disclose the glory of Christ; and

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Revelation 4:1

inevitably that day will bring joy to those who have loved him and amazement and fear to those who have despised him.

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Revelation 4:2-3

THE THRONE OF GOD

Revelation 4:2-3

Immediately, I fell under the influence of the Spirit; and, behold, a throne stood in heaven, and there was One seated on it. And he who was seated on the throne was like a jasper stone and a sardian to look at; and there was a rainbow circling round the throne, like an emerald to look at.

When the seer entered the door into heaven, he fell into an ecstasy.

In heaven he saw a throne and God on the throne. The throne of God is a common Old Testament picture. The prophet said: "I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him" (1Kgs.22:19). The Psalmist has it: "God sits on his holy throne" (Ps.47:8). Isaiah saw the Lord "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Isa.6:1). In the Revelation the throne of God is mentioned in every chapter except Rev.2, Rev.8 and Rev.9. The throne of God stands for the majesty of God. When Handel was asked how he had come to write the Messiah, his answer was: "I saw the heavens opened and God upon his great white throne."

John saw One seated upon the throne. There is something very interesting here. John makes no attempt to describe God in any human shape. As Swete says, "He rigorously shuns anthropomorphic details." He describes God in "the flashing of gem-like colours," but he never mentions any kind of form. It is the Bible's way to see God in terms of light. The Pastorals describe God as "dwelling in the light that no man can approach unto" (1Tim.6:16). And long before that the Psalmist had spoken of God who covers himself with light as a garment (Ps.104:2).

John sees his vision in terms of the lights which flash from precious stones. We do not know what exactly these stones were. The three names here are the jasper, the sardian and the emerald. One thing is certain; these were typical of the most precious stones. Plato mentions the three of them together as representative of precious stones (Plato, Phaedo 111 E). They were part of the rich array of the King of Tyre (Eze.28:13); they were among the precious stones on the breast-plate of the High Priest (Exo.28:17); and they were among the stones which were the foundation of the Holy City (Rev.21:19).

The jasper is nowadays a dull opaque stone, but in the ancient world it seems to have been a translucent rock crystal, through which the light would come with an almost unbearable scintillation. Some think that here it means a diamond, and this is not impossible. The sardian, so called because it was said to be found mainly near Sardis, was blood-red; it was a gem which was frequently used to have engravings incised on it and may correspond to the modern carnelian. The emerald is most likely the green emerald which we know.

The picture of the presence of God which John saw was like the blinding flash of a diamond in the sun, with the dazzling blood-red of the sardian; and there flashed through both the more restful green of the emerald, for in that way alone could the eye bear to look upon the sight.

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Revelation 4:2-3

It may well be that the jasper stands for the unbearable brightness of the purity of God; that the blood-red sardian stands for his avenging wrath; and that the gentle green of the emerald stands for his mercy by which alone we can meet his purity and his justice.

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Revelation 4:4

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

Revelation 4:4

And in a circle round the throne I saw twenty-four thrones, and seated upon the thrones twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns upon their heads.

We now approach one of the difficult passages for which the Revelation is notorious. In it we meet twenty-four elders and then four living creatures; and we have to try to identify them.

We find the twenty-four elders frequently appearing in the Revelation. Let us set down the facts about them. They sit around the throne, clothed in white robes and wearing crowns (Rev.4:4; Rev.14:3); they cast their crowns before the throne (Rev.4:10); they continually worship and praise (Rev.5:11,14; Rev.7:11; Rev.11:16; Rev.14:3; Rev.19:4); they bring to God the prayers of the saints (Rev.5:8); one of them encourages the seer, when he is sad (Rev.5:5); and one of them acts as interpreter of one of the visions (Rev.7:13). We may note five lines of explanation.

(i) In the Old Testament there are indications of a kind of council surrounding God. The prophet sees God sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left (1Kgs.22:19). In Job the sons of God come to meet with him (Jb.1:6; Jb.2:1). Isaiah speaks of God reigning in glory--among his elders (Isa.24:23). In the Genesis story of the garden, the accusation against Adam is that he has eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree and become like one of us (Gen.3:22). It may be that the idea of the elders has something to do with the idea of God's council surrounding him.

(ii) When the Jews were in Babylon, they could not avoid coming into contact with Babylonian ideas. And it might well be that sometimes they incorporated Babylonian ideas into their own thinking, especially if there was some initial resemblance. The Babylonians had twenty-four star gods, for the worship of the stars was a part of Babylonian religion; and it has been suggested that these became in Jewish thought twenty-four angels who surrounded the throne of God, and that the elders stand for these.

(iii) We move on to explanations which we think are much more likely. There were so many priests in Israel that they could not possibly serve in the Temple at the one time and so they were divided into twenty-four different courses (1Chr.24:7-18). Each of these courses had its president, known as an elder of the priests. Sometimes these elders were called princes, or governors, of the house of God (1Chr.24:5). It is suggested that the twenty-four elders stand symbolically for the twenty-four courses of the priests. They present the prayers of the faithful to God (Rev.5:8), and that is priestly work. The Levites were similarly divided into twenty-four courses for the work of the Temple and they praised God with harps and psalteries and cymbals (1Chr.25:6-31), and the elders also have their harps (Rev.5:8). So the twenty-four elders may stand for the heavenly ideal of the earthly worship of the priests and Levites in the Temple.

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(iv) It has been suggested that the twenty-four elders stand for the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles combined. In the new Jerusalem the names of the twelve patriarchs are on the twelve gates and the names of the twelve apostles are on the foundation stones of the wall.

(v) We think that the likeliest explanation is that the twenty-four elders are the symbolic representatives of the faithful people of God. Their white robes are the robes promised to the faithful (Rev.3:4), and their crowns (stephanoi, GSN4735) are those promised to those who are faithful unto death (Rev.2:10). The thrones are those which Jesus promised to those who forsook all and followed him (Matt.19:27-29). The description of the twenty-four elders fits well with the promises made to the faithful.

The question will then be, "Why twenty-four?" The answer is because the Church is composed of Jews and Gentiles. There were originally twelve tribes, but now it is as if the tribes were doubled. Swete says that the twenty-four elders stand for the Church in its totality. We remember that this is a vision, not of what yet is, but of what shall be; and the twenty-four elders stand as representatives of the whole Church which one day in glory will worship in the presence of God himself.

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Revelation 4:5-6a

AROUND THE THRONE

Revelation 4:5-6a

And flashes of lightning and voices and peals of thunder were coming forth from the throne. There were seven torches of fire burning before the throne, and these are the seven Spirits of God. And in front of the throne there was what I can only call a sea of glass like crystal.

John adds more details to his mysterious and awe-inspiring picture of heaven. The voices are the voices of the thunder; and thunder and lightning are often connected with the manifestation of God. In the vision of Ezekiel lightning comes out of the fiery haze around the throne (Eze.1:13). The Psalmist tells how the voice of the thunder of God was heard in the heavens, and the lightnings lightened the world (Ps.77:18). God sends his lightning to the ends of the earth (Jb.37:4). But what is primarily in the mind of John is the description of Mount Sinai as the people waited for the giving of the Law: "There were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast" (Exo.19:16). John is using imagery which is regularly connected with the presence of God.

The seven torches are the seven Spirits of God. We have already met the seven Spirits before the throne (Rev.1:4; Rev.3:1). There are scholars who see Babylonian influence here also. For the Babylonians the seven planets were also divine and within the presence of God; it would be natural to liken the planets to torches and it has been suggested that this imagery is Babylonian in origin.

The "glassy sea" has exercised a strange fascination over the minds of many people, including hymn-writers. The Greek does not say that there was a sea of glass but "as it were a sea of glass." There was something which was beyond all description, but which could be likened only to a great sea of glass. Where did the seer get this picture?

(i) He may have got it from a conception in the most primitive thought of the Old Testament. We have already seen that the firmament is conceived of as a great solid dome arching over the earth. Beneath it is the earth, and above it the heaven. The creation story speaks of the waters under the firmament and the waters above the firmament (Gen.1:7). The Psalmist calls upon the waters that are above the heavens to praise the Lord (Ps.148:4). The belief was that above the firmament, perhaps as the kind of floor of heaven, there was a great sea. Further, it was on that sea that God had set his throne. The Psalmist says of God that he set the beams of his chambers upon the waters (Ps.104:3).

(ii) It may be that John's time in Patmos gave him the idea of this picture. Swete suggests that he saw a vast surface which flashed back the light, "like the Aegan Sea, when on summer days John looked upon it from the heights of Patmos." John had often seen the sea like a sea of molten glass and maybe his picture was born from that.

(iii) There is a further possibility. According to the Koran (Sura 27) Solomon had in his palace a floor of glass so like a sea that, when the Queen of Sheba came to visit him, she picked up her

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Revelation 4:5-6a

skirts thinking she had to wade through water. It may be that John is thinking of the throne of God set in a glass-floored palace.

(iv) There is one other remote possibility. John says that the glassy sea was like crystal (krustallon, GSN2930); but krustallon could mean ice; and then the idea would be an expanse which shimmered like an ice-field. It is a magnificent picture, but it can hardly be the real picture because neither John nor his people would ever have seen such a scene, and it would have meant nothing to them.

There are three things that this sea like shining glass does symbolize.

(i) It symbolizes preciousness. In the ancient world glass was usually dull and semi-opaque, and glass as clear as crystal was as precious as gold. In Jb.28:17 gold and glass are mentioned together as examples of precious things.

(ii) It symbolizes dazzling purity. The blinding light reflected from the glassy sea would be too much for the eyes to look upon, like the purity of God.

(iii) It symbolizes immense distance. The throne of God was in the immense distance, as if at the other side of a great sea. Swete writes of "the vast distance which, even in the case of one who stood in the door of heaven, intervened between himself and the throne of God."

One of the greatest characteristics of the writing of the seer is the reverence which, even in the heavenly places, never dares to be familiar with God, but paints its picture in terms of light and distance.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 4:6b-8

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (1)

Revelation 4:6b-8 (Part 1)

And, between the throne and the elders, in a circle round the throne, were four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind. The first living creature was like a lion; the second living creature was like an ox; the third living creature had what appeared to be a man's face; the fourth living creature was like an eagle in flight. The four living creatures had each of them six wings; and around and within they were full of eyes. Night and day they never rested from saying:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, the Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.

Here we come to another of the symbolic problems of the Revelation. The four living creatures appear frequently in the heavenly scene: so let us begin by collecting what the Revelation itself says about them. They are always found near the throne and the Lamb (Rev.4:6; Rev.5:6; Rev.14:4). They have six wings and they are full of eyes (Rev.4:6,8). They are constantly engaged in praising and in worshipping God (Rev.4:8; Rev.5:9; Rev.5:14; Rev.7:11; Rev.19:4). They have certain functions to perform. They invite the dreadful manifestations of the wrath of God to appear upon the scene (Rev.6:1; Rev.6:7). One of them hands over the vials of the wrath of God (Rev.15:7).

Although there are definite differences, there can be little doubt that we find the ancestors of these living creatures in the visions of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel's vision the four living creatures each have four faces--the faces of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle; and they uphold the firmament (Eze.1:6,10; Eze.1:22,26); the felloes of the wheels are full of eyes (Eze.1:18). In Ezekiel we have all the details of the picture in the Revelation, although the details are differently allocated and arranged. In spite of the differences the family resemblance is clear.

In Ezekiel the four living creatures are definitely identified with the cherubim. (It is to be noted that -im is the Hebrew plural ending; cherubim is simply cherubs and seraphim is simply seraphs.) The identification is made in Eze.10:20,22. The cherubim were part of the decoration of Solomon's Temple, in the place of prayer and on the walls (1Kgs.6:23-30; 2Chr.3:7). They were represented on the hanging veil which shut off the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place (Exo.26:31). There were two cherubim on the lid of the ark, called the mercy-seat; and they were so placed that they faced each other and their wings swept over to form a kind of canopy over the mercy-seat (Exo.25:18-21). One of the commonest pictures of God is sitting between the cherubim, and it is thus that he is often addressed in prayer (2Kgs.19:15; Ps.80:1; Ps.99:1; Isa.37:16). God is represented as flying on the cherubim and on the wings of the wind (Ps.18:10).

It is the cherubim who guard the way to the Garden when Adam and Eve have been banished from it (Gen.3:24). In the later books written between the Testaments, such as Enoch, the cherubim are the guardians of the throne of God (Enoch 71: 7).

From all this one thing emerges clearly--the cherubim are angelic beings who are close to God and the guardians of his throne.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 4:6b-8

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (2)

Revelation 4:6b-8 (Part 2)

What do these four living creatures symbolize?

(i) They are clearly part of the imagery of heaven; and they are not figures whom the writer of the Revelation did not create, but whom he inherited from previous pictures. They may originally have come from Babylonian sources, and they may have stood for the four principal signs of the Zodiac and for the four winds coming from the four quarters of heaven. But the John who wrote the Revelation was not aware of that, and he used them simply as part of the imagery of heaven in which he had been brought up.

(ii) How did John himself think of the symbolism of these living creatures? We think that Swete offers the right explanation. The four living creatures stand for everything that is noblest, strongest, wisest and swiftest in nature. Each has the preeminence in his own particular sphere. The lion is supreme among beasts; the ox is supreme among cattle; the eagle is supreme among birds; and man is supreme among all creatures. The beasts represent all the greatness and the strength and the beauty of nature; here we see nature praising God. In the verses to follow we see the twenty-four elders praising God; and when we put the two pictures together we get the picture of both nature and man engaged in constant adoration of God. "The ceaseless activity of nature under the hand of God is a ceaseless tribute of praise."

The idea of nature praising God is one which occurs in the Old Testament more than once. "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech and night to night declares knowledge" (Ps.19:1-2). "Bless the Lord all his works in all places of his dominion" (Ps.103:22). Ps.148 is a magnificent summons to the whole of nature to join in praising God.

There is a tremendous truth here. The basic idea behind this is that anything which is fulfilling the function for which it was created is praising God. One of the basic conceptions of Stoicism was that in everything there was a spark of God, scintilla. "God," said Seneca, "is near you, with you, within you; a holy spirit sits within us." As Gilbert Murray points out, the sceptics laughed at this and sought to make a fool of the whole idea. "What," said the sceptic, "God in worms? God in dung beetles?" "Why not?" demanded the Stoic.

Cannot an earthworm serve God? Do you suppose that it is only a general who is a good soldier? Cannot the lowest private fight his best? Happy are you, if you are serving God and carrying out his purpose as faithfully as an earthworm. Whatever carries out the function for which it was created is thereby worshipping God.

This is a thought which opens out the most magnificent vistas. The humblest and the most unseen activity in the world can be the true worship of God. Work and worship literally become one. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever; and man carries out that function when he does what God sent him into the world to do. Work well done rises like a hymn of praise to God.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 4:6b-8

This means that the doctor on his rounds, the scientist in his laboratory, the teacher in his classroom, the musician at his music, the artist at his canvas, the shop assistant at his counter, the typist at her typewriter, the housewife in her kitchen--all who are doing the work of the world as it should be done are joining in a great act of worship.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 4:6b-8

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE LIVING CREATURES

Revelation 4:6b-8 (Part 3)

It was not long before the early church found certain symbolisms in the living creatures, in particular of the four Gospels--a representation which is often to be found in stained-glass windows in churches.

The earliest and the fullest identification was made by Irenaeus about A.D. 170. He held that the four living creatures represented four aspects of the work of Jesus Christ, which in turn are represented in the four Gospels.

The lion symbolizes the powerful and effective working of the Son of God, his leadership and his royal power. The ox signifies the priestly side of his work, for it is the animal of sacrifice. The man symbolizes his incarnation. The eagle represents the gift of the Holy Spirit, hovering with his wings over the Church. John represents "the original, effective and glorious generation of the Son from the Father," and tells how all things were made by him; and is, therefore, symbolized by the lion. Luke begins with the picture of Zacharias the priest, and tells the story of the fatted calf killed for the finding of the younger son; and is, therefore, symbolized by the ox. Matthew begins by giving us the human descent of Jesus and "The character of a humble and meek man is kept up throughout the whole gospel," and is, therefore, symbolized by the man.

Mark begins with a reference to the Spirit of prophecy coming down from on high upon men which "points to the winged aspect of the Gospel"; and, therefore, is symbolized by the eagle.

Irenaeus goes on to say that the fourfold form of the beasts represents the four principal covenants which God made with the human race. The first was made with Adam, prior to the flood. The second was made with Noah, after the flood. The third consisted of the giving of the Law to Moses. The fourth is that which renovates man in Christ, "raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom."

But, as we have said, there was a variety of different identifications.

The scheme of Athanasius was:

Matthew = the man	Mark = the ox
Luke = the lion	John = the eagle,

The scheme of Victorinus was:

Matthew = the man	Mark = the lion
Luke = the ox	John = the eagle

The scheme of Augustine was:

Matthew = the lion	Mark = the man
Luke = the ox	John = the eagle.

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Revelation 4:6b-8

It may be said that on the whole Augustine's identifications became the most commonly accepted, because they fit the facts. Matthew is best represented by the lion, because in it Jesus is depicted as the Lion of Judah, the One in whom all the expectations of the prophets came true. Mark. is best represented by the man, because it is the nearest approach to a factual report of the human life of Jesus. Luke is best represented by the ox, because it depicts Jesus as the sacrifice for all classes and conditions of men and women everywhere. John is best represented by the eagle, because of all birds it flies highest and is said to be the only living creature which can look straight into the sun; and John of all the gospels reaches the highest heights of thought.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 4:6b-8

THE SONG OF PRAISE

Revelation 4:6b-8 (Part 4)

Night and day the living creatures never rested from their doxology of praise:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, the Almighty,
Who was, and Who is, and Who is to come.

Here is set out the sleepless praise of nature. "Man rests on the Sabbath, and in sleep, and in the end in death, but the course of nature is unbroken and unbroken in praise." There is never any time when the world God made is not praising him.

As o'er each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

The doxology seizes on three aspects of God.

(i) It praises him for his holiness (compare Isa.6:3). Again and again we have seen that the basic idea of holiness is difference. That is supremely true of God. He is different from men. Precisely there is the reason that we are moved to adoration of God. If he were simply a glorified human person, we could not praise. As the poet had it: "How could I praise, if such as I could understand" The very mystery of God moves us to awed admiration in his presence and to amazed love that that greatness should stoop so low for us men and for our salvation.

(ii) It praises his omnipotence. God is the Almighty. The people to whom the Revelation was written are under the threat of the Roman Empire, a power which no person or nation had ever successfully withstood. Think what it must have meant to be sure that behind them stood the Almighty. The very giving of that name to God affirms the certainty of the safety of the Christian; not a safety which meant release from trouble but which made a man secure in life and in death.

(iii) It praises his everlastingness. Empires might come and empires might go; God lasts for ever. Here is the triumphant affirmation that God endures unchanging amidst the enmity and the rebellion of men.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 4:9-11

GOD, THE LORD AND CREATOR

Revelation 4:9-11

When the living creatures shall give glory and honour and thanksgiving to him who is seated on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders shall fall down before him who is seated on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, and say:

It is right, our Lord and God, that you should receive the glory and the honour and the power, for you have created all things, and through your will all things exist and have been created.

Here is the other section of the choir of thanksgiving. We have seen that the living creatures stand for nature in all its greatness and the twenty-four elders for the great united Church in Jesus Christ. So when the living creatures and the elders unite in praise, it symbolizes nature and the Church both praising God. There are commentators who have made difficulty here. In Rev.4:8 the praise of the living creatures is unceasing by day and night; in this passage the picture is of separate bursts of praise at each of which the elders fall down and worship. But surely to say that there is an inconsistency is unimaginative criticism; we do not look for a strict logic in the poetry of adoration.

John uses a picture which the ancient world would know well. The elders cast their crowns before the throne of God. In the ancient world that was the sign of complete submission. When one king surrendered to another, he cast his crown at the victor's feet. Sometimes the Romans carried with them an image of their emperor and, when they had reduced a monarch to submission, there was a ceremony in which the vanquished one had to cast his crown before the emperor's image. The picture looks on God as the conqueror of the souls of men; and on the Church as the body of people who have surrendered to him. There can be no Christianity without submission.

The doxology of the elders praises God on two counts.

(i) He is Lord and God. Here is something which would be even more meaningful to John's people than it is to us. The phrase for Lord and God is: kurios (GSN2962) kai (2532) theos (GSN2316); and that was the official title of Domitian, the Roman Emperor. It was, indeed, because the Christians would not acknowledge that claim that they were persecuted and killed. Simply to call God Lord and God was a triumphant confession of faith, an assertion that he holds first place in all the universe.

(ii) God is Creator. It is through his will and purpose that all things existed even before creation and were in the end brought into actual being. Man has acquired many powers, but he does not possess the power to create. He can alter and rearrange; he can make things out of already existing materials; but only God can create something out of nothing. That great truth means that in the real sense everything in the world belongs to God, and there is nothing a man can handle which God has not given to him.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 5:1

THE ROLL IN THE HAND OF GOD

Revelation 5:1

And in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne I saw a roll written on the front and on the back, and sealed with seven seals.

We must try to visualize the picture which John is drawing. It is taken from the vision of Ezekiel: "And, when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me; and lo, a written scroll was in it; and he spread it before me; and it had writing on the front and on the back; and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe" (Eze.2:9-10).

We must note that it was a roll and not a book which was in the hand of God. In the ancient world, down to the second century A.D., the form of literary work was the roll, not the book. The roll was made of papyrus, manufactured in single sheets about ten inches by eight. The sheets were joined together horizontally when a great deal of writing had to be done. The writing was in narrow columns about three inches long, with margins of about two and a half inches at the top and at the bottom, and with about three-quarters of an inch between the columns. The roll commonly had a wooden roller at each end. It was held in the left hand, unrolled with the right, and, as the reading went on, the part in the left hand was rolled up again. We may get some idea of the dimensions of a roll from the following statistics. Second and Third John, Jude and Philemon would occupy one sheet of papyrus; Romans would require a roll 11 1/2 feet long; Mark, 19 feet; John, 23 1/2 feet; Matthew, 30 feet; Luke and Acts, 32 feet.

The Revelation itself would occupy a roll 15 feet long. It was such a roll that was in the hand of God. Two things are said about it.

(i) It was written on the front and on the back. Papyrus was a substance made from the pith of a bulrush which grew in the delta of the Nile. The bulrush was about fifteen feet high, with six feet of it below the water; and it was as thick as a man's wrist. The pith was extracted and cut into thin strips with a very sharp knife. A row of strips was laid vertically; on the top of them another row of strips was laid horizontally; the whole was then moistened with Nile water and glue and pressed together. The resulting substance was beaten with a mallet and then smoothed with pumice stone; and there emerged a substance not unlike brown paper.

From this description it will be seen that on one side the grain of the papyrus would run horizontally; that side was known as the recto; and on that side the writing was done, as it was easier to write where the lines of the writing ran with the lines of the fibres. The side on which the fibres ran vertically was called the verso and was not so commonly used for writing.

But papyrus was an expensive substance. So, if a person had a great deal to write, he wrote both on the front and on the back. A sheet written on the back, the verso, was called an opisthograph, that is, a sheet written behind. Juvenal talks of a young tragedian walking about with the papyrus manuscript of a tragedy on Orestes written on both sides; it was a lengthy production! The roll in God's hand was written on both sides; there was so much on it that recto and verso alike were taken up with the writing.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 5:1

(ii) It was sealed with seven seals. That may indicate either of two things.

(a) When a roll was finished, it was fastened with threads and the threads were sealed at the knots. The one ordinary document sealed with seven seals was a will. Under Roman law the seven witnesses to a will sealed it with their seals, and it could only be opened when all seven, or their legal representatives, were present. The roll may be what we might describe as God's will, his final settlement of the affairs of the universe.

(b) It is more likely that the seven seals stand simply for profound secrecy. The contents of the roll are so secret that it is sealed with seven seals. The tomb of Jesus was sealed to keep it safe (Matt.27:66); the apocryphal Gospel of Peter says that it was sealed with seven seals. It was so sealed to make quite certain that no unauthorized person could possibly open it.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 5:2-4

GOD'S BOOK OF DESTINY

Revelation 5:2-4

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming in a great voice: "Who is good enough to open the roll, and to loosen its seals?" And there was no one in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth, who was able to open the roll or to look at it; and I was weeping sorely because there was no one who was found to be good enough to open the roll or to see it.

As John looked at God with the roll in his hand, there came a challenge from a strong angel. A strong angel appears again in Rev.10:1 and Rev.18:21. In this case the angel had to be strong so that the challenge of his voice might reach throughout the universe. His summons was that anyone worthy of the task should come forward and open the book.

There is no doubt that the book is the record of that which is to happen in the last times. That there was such a book is a common conception in Jewish thought. It is common in the Book of Enoch. Uriel the archangel says to Enoch in the heavenly places: "O Enoch, observe the writing of the heavenly tablets, and read what is written thereon, and mark every individual fact." Enoch goes on: "And I observed everything on the heavenly tablets, and read everything which was written thereon, and understood everything, and read the book of all the deeds of men and of all the children of flesh that will be upon the earth to the remotest generations." (I Enoch 81: 1-2). In the same book Enoch has a vision of the Head of Days on the throne of his glory, "and the books of the living were opened before him" (I Enoch 47: 3). Enoch declares that he knows the mystery of the holy ones, because "the Lord showed me and informed me, and I have read in the heavenly tables" (I Enoch 106: 19).

On these tables he saw the history of the generations still to come (I Enoch 107: 1). The idea is that God has a book in which the history of time to come is already written.

When we are seeking to interpret this idea, it is well to remember that it is vision and poetry. It would be a great mistake to take it too literally. It does not mean that everything is settled long ago and that we are in the grip of an inescapable fate. What it does mean is that God has a plan for the universe; and that the purpose of God will be in the end worked out.

God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year:
God is working his purpose out, and the time is drawing near--
Nearer and nearer draws the time--the time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God, as the waters
cover the sea.

In response to the challenge of the angel no one came forward; none was good enough to open the roll. And at this John in his vision fell to weeping sorely. There were two reasons for his tears.

(i) In Rev.4:1 the voice had made the promise to him: "I will show you what must take place after this." It now looked as if the promise had been frustrated.

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Revelation 5:2-4

(ii) There is a deeper reason for his sorrow. It seemed to him that there was no one in the whole universe to whom God could reveal his mysteries. Here, indeed, was a terrible thing. Long ago Amos had said: "Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secrets to his servants the prophets" (Am.3:7). But here was a world so far from God that there was none able to receive his message.

For John that problem was to be triumphantly solved in the emergence of the Lamb. But behind this problem lies a great and a challenging truth. God cannot deliver a message to men unless there be a man fit to receive it. Here is the very essence of the problem of communication. It is the problem of the teacher; he cannot teach truth which his scholars are unable to receive. It is the problem of the preacher; he cannot deliver a message to a congregation totally incapable of comprehending it. It is the eternal problem of love; love cannot tell its truths or give its gifts to those incapable of hearing and receiving. The need of the world is for men and women who will keep themselves sensitive to God. He has a message for the world in every generation; but that message cannot be delivered until there is found a man capable of receiving it. And day by day we either fit or unfit ourselves to receive the message of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 5:5

THE LION OF JUDAH AND THE ROOT OF DAVID

Revelation 5:5

And one of the elders said to me: "Stop weeping. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has won such a victory that he is able to open the book and its seven seals."

We are now approaching one of the most dramatic moments in the Revelation, the emergence of the Lamb in the centre of the scene. Certain things lead up to it.

John has been weeping because there is none to whom God may reveal his secrets. There comes to him one of the elders, acting as the messenger of Christ and saying to him: "Weep not." These words were more than once on the lips of Jesus in the days of his flesh. That is what he said to the widow of Nain when she was mourning her dead son (Lk.7:13); and to Jairus and his family when they were lamenting for their little girl (Lk.8:52). The comforting voice of Christ is still speaking in the heavenly places.

Swete has an interesting comment on this. John was weeping and yet his tears were unnecessary. Human grief often springs from insufficient knowledge. If we had patience to wait and trust, we would see that God has his own solutions for the situations which bring us tears.

The elder tells John that Jesus Christ has won such a victory that he is able to open the book and to loosen the seals. That means three things. It means that because of his victory over death and all the powers of evil and because of his complete obedience to God he is able to know God's secrets; he is able to reveal God's secrets; and it is his privilege and duty to control the things which shall be. Because of what Jesus did, he is the Lord of truth and of history. He is called by two great titles.

(i) He is the Lion of Judah. This title goes back to Jacob's final blessing of his sons before his death. In that blessing he calls Judah "a lion's whelp" (Gen.49:9). If Judah himself is a lion's whelp, it is fitting to call the greatest member of the tribe of Judah The Lion of Judah. In the books written between the Testaments this became a messianic title. 2 Esdras speaks of the figure of a lion and says: "This is the Anointed One, that is, the Messiah" (2Esdr.12:31). The strength of the lion and his undoubted place as king of beasts make him a fitting emblem of the all-powerful Messiah whom the Jews awaited.

(ii) He is the Root of David. This title goes back to Isaiah's prophecy that there will come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a root of Jesse who shall be an ensign to the people (Isa.11:1,10). Jesse was the father of David, and this means that Jesus Christ was the Son of David, the promised Messiah.

So, here we have two great titles which are particularly Jewish. They have their origin in the pictures of the coming Messiah; and they lay it down that Jesus Christ triumphantly performed the work of the Messiah and is, therefore, able to know and to reveal the secrets of God, and to preside over the working out of his purposes in the events of history.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 5:6

THE LAMB

Revelation 5:6

And I saw a Lamb standing in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders. It still bore the marks of having been slain. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God despatched to all the earth

Here is the supreme moment of this vision--the emergence of the Lamb in the scene of heaven. It is possible to think of this scene in two ways. Either we may think of the four living creatures forming a circle around the throne and the twenty-four elders forming a wider circle with a larger circumference, with the Lamb standing between the inner circle of the four living creatures and the outer circle of the twenty-four elders; or, much more likely, the Lamb is the centre of the whole scene.

The Lamb is one of the great characteristic ideas of the Revelation in which Jesus Christ is so called no fewer than twenty-nine times. The word he uses for Lamb is not used of Jesus Christ anywhere else in the New Testament. John the Baptist pointed to him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn.1:29,36). Peter speaks of the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1Pet.1:19). In Isa.53:7, in the chapter so dear to Jesus and to the early Church, we read of the lamb brought to the slaughter. But in all these cases the word is *amnos* (GSN0286), whereas the word that the Revelation uses is *arnion* (GSN0721). This is the word that Jeremiah uses, when he says: "I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter" (Jer.11:19). By using *arnion* (GSN0721) and using it so often, John wishes us to see that this is a new conception which he is bringing to men.

(i) The Lamb still bears the marks of having been slain. There we have the picture of the sacrifice of Christ, still visible in the heavenly places. Even in the heavenly places Jesus Christ is the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

(ii) There is another side to this. This same Lamb, with the marks of sacrifice still on it, is the Lamb with the seven horns and the seven eyes.

(a) The seven horns stand for omnipotence. In the Old Testament the horn stands for two things.

First, it stands for sheer power. In the blessing of Moses the horns of Joseph are like the horns of a wild ox and with them he will push the people together to the ends of the earth (Deut.33:17). Zedekiah, the prophet, made iron horns as a sign of promised triumph over the Syrians (1Kgs.22:11). The wicked is warned not to lift up his horn (Ps.75:4). Zechariah sees the vision of the four horns which stand for the nations who have scattered Israel (Zech.1:18).

Second, it stands for honour. It is the confidence of the Psalmist that in the favour of God our horn shall be exalted (Ps.89:17). The good man's horn shall be exalted with honour (Ps.112:9). God exalts the horn of his people (Ps.148:14).

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Revelation 5:6

We must add still another strand to this picture. In the time between the Testaments the great heroes of Israel were the Maccabees; they were the great warriors who were the liberators of the nations; and they are represented as horned lambs (I Enoch 90: 9).

Here is the great paradox; the Lamb bears the sacrificial wounds upon it; but at the same time it is clothed with the very might of God which can now shatter its enemies. The Lamb has seven horns; the number seven stands for perfection; the power of the Lamb is perfect, beyond withstanding.

(b) The Lamb has seven eyes, and the eyes are the Spirits which are despatched into all the earth. The picture comes from Zechariah. There the prophet sees the seven lamps which are "the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth" (Zech.4:10). It is an eerie picture; but quite clearly it stands for the omniscience of God. In an almost crude way it says that there is no place on earth which is not under the eye of God.

Here is a tremendous picture of Christ. He is the fulfilment of all the hopes and dreams of Israel, for he is the Lion of Judah and the Root of David. He is the one whose sacrifice availed for men, and who still bears the marks of it in the heavenly places. But the tragedy has turned to triumph and the shame to glory; and he is the one whose all-conquering might none can withstand and whose all-seeing eye none can escape.

Few passages of Scripture show at one and the same time what Swete called "the majesty and the meekness" of Jesus Christ and in the one picture combine the humiliation of his death and the glory of his risen life.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 5:7-14

MUSIC IN HEAVEN

Revelation 5:7-14

And the Lamb came and received the roll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. When it had received the roll, the four living creatures fell before the Lamb and so did the twenty-four elders, each of whom had a harp and golden bowls laden with incenses, which are the prayers of God's dedicated people. And they sang a new song and this is what they sang:

Worthy are you to receive the roll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and so at the price of your life blood you bought for God those of every tribe and tongue and people and race and made them a kingdom of priests to our God. and they will reign upon the earth.

And I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels, who were in a circle round the throne, and the living creatures, and the elders; and their number was ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands, and they were singing with a great voice:

The Lamb which has been slain is worthy to receive the power and the riches and the wisdom and the strength and the honour and the glory and the blessing.

And I heard every created creature which was in the heaven and upon the earth and beneath the earth and on the sea and all things in them saying:

Blessing and honour and glory and dominion for ever and ever to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.

And the four living creatures said, Amen; and the elders fell down and worshipped.

It is necessary to look at this passage as a whole before we begin to deal with it in detail. R. H. Charles quotes Christina Rossetti on it; "Heaven is revealed to earth as the homeland of music." Here is the greatest chorus of praise the universe can ever hear. It comes in three waves. First, there is the praise of the four living creatures and of the twenty-four elders. Here we see all nature and all the Church combining to praise the Lamb. Second, there is the praise of the myriads of angels. Here is the picture of all the inhabitants of heaven lifting up their voices in praise. Third, John sees every created creature, in every part of the universe, to its deepest depth and its farthest corner, singing in praise.

Here is the truth that heaven and earth and all that is within them is designed for the praise of Jesus Christ; and it is our privilege to lend our voices and our lives to this vast chorus of praise, for that chorus is necessarily incomplete so long as there is one voice missing from it.

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Revelation 5:8

THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS

Revelation 5:8

The first section in the chorus of praise is the song of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders; and, as we have seen, they represent all that is in nature and in the universal Church.

The picture of the elders is interesting. They have harps. The harp was the traditional instrument to which the Psalms were sung. "Praise the Lord with harp," says the Psalmist (Ps.33:2). "Sing praises to the Lord with the harp; the harp, and the sound of melody" (Ps.98:5). "Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God upon the harp" (Ps.147:7). The harp stands for the music of praise as the Jews knew it.

The elders also have golden bowls full of incense; and the incense is the prayers of God's dedicated people. The likening of prayers to incense comes also from the Psalms. "Let my prayer be before thee counted as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice" (Ps.141:2). But the significant thing is the idea of intermediaries in prayer. In later Jewish literature this idea of heavenly intermediaries bringing the prayers of the faithful to God is very common. In the Testament of Dan (6: 2) we read: "Draw near unto God and to the angel that intercedeth for you, for he is a mediator between God and man." In this literature we find many such angels.

Chief of them all is Michael, the archangel, "the merciful and long-suffering" (I Enoch 40: 9). He is said daily to come down to the fifth heaven to receive men's prayers and to bring them to God (3 Baruch 11). In Tobit it is the archangel Raphael who brings the prayers of men to God; "I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, who present the prayers of the saints, and who go in and out before the glory of the Holy One" (Tob.12:15). It is Gabriel who tells Enoch: "I swear unto you that in heaven the angels are mindful of you before the glory of the Great One" (I Enoch 104: 1). Sometimes it is the guardian angels who bring the prayers of men to God; and it is said that at certain times each day the doors are open so that the prayers may be received (Apocalypse of Paul 7: 10). Sometimes all the angels, or, as Enoch calls them, The Watchers, are engaged in this task. It is to "the Holy Ones of Heaven" that the souls of men complain with their cry for justice (I Enoch 9: 3).

It is the duty of the Watchers of heaven to intercede for men (I Enoch 15: 2). As we have seen, the angels are mindful of men for good (I Enoch 104: 1). Sometimes, it would seem, the blessed dead share in this task. The angels and the holy ones in their resting-places intercede for the children of men (I Enoch 39: 6). There are certain things to be said about this belief in heavenly intermediaries.

(i) From one point of view it is an uplifting thought. We are, so to speak, not left to pray alone. No prayer can be altogether heavy-footed and leaden-winged which has all the citizenry of heaven behind it to help it rise to God.

(ii) From another point of view it is quite unnecessary. Before us is set an open door which no man can ever shut; no man's prayers need any assistance, for God's ear is open to catch the faintest whisper of appeal.

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Revelation 5:8

(iii) The whole conception of intermediaries arises from a line of thought which has met us before. As the centuries went on, the Jews became ever more impressed with the transcendence of God, his difference from men. They began to believe that there never could be any direct contact between God and man and that there must be angelic intermediaries to bridge the gulf. That is exactly the feeling that Jesus Christ came to take away; he came to tell us that God "is closer to us than breathing, nearer than hands or feet" and to be the living way by which for every man, however humble, the door to God is open.

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Revelation 5:9

THE NEW SONG

Revelation 5:9

The song that the four living creatures and the elders sang was a new song. The phrase a new song is very common in the Psalms; and there it is always a song for the new mercies of God. "Sing to him a new song," says the Psalmist (Ps.33:3). God took the Psalmist out of the fearful pit and from the miry clay and set his foot on a rock and put a new song in his mouth to praise God (Ps.40:3). "O sing a new song to the Lord, for he has done marvellous things? (Ps.98:1; compare Ps.96:1). "I will sing a new song to thee, O God" (Ps.144:9). "Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful" (Ps.149:1). The nearest parallel in the Old Testament comes from Isaiah. There God declares new things and the prophet calls upon men to sing to the Lord a new song (Isa.42:9-10).

The new song is always a song for new mercies of God; and it will be noblest of all when it is a song for the mercies of God in Jesus Christ.

One of the characteristics of the Revelation is that it is the book of new things. There is the new name (Rev.2:17; Rev.3:12); there is the new Jerusalem (Rev.3:12; Rev.21:2); there is the new song (Rev.5:9; Rev.14:3); there are the new heavens and the new earth (Rev.21:1); and there is the great promise that God makes all things new (Rev.21:5).

One most significant thing is to be noted. Greek has two words for new, *neos* (GSN3501), which means new in point of time but not necessarily in point of quality, and *kainos* (GSN2537), which means new in point of quality. *Kainos* (GSN2537) describes a thing which has not only been recently produced but whose like has never existed before.

The significance of this is that Jesus Christ brings into life a quality which has never existed before, new joy, new thrill, new strength, new peace. That is why the supreme quality of the Christian life is a kind of sheen. It has been said that "the opposite of a Christian world is a world grown old and sad."

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 5:9-10

THE SONG OF THE LIVING CREATURES AND OF THE ELDERS

Revelation 5:9-10

Let us begin by setting down this song:

Worthy are you to receive the roll, and to open its seals, because you were slain, and so at the price of your life blood you bought for God those of every tribe and tongue and people and race, and made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth.

The praise rendered to the Lamb by the four living creatures and the elders is rendered because he died. In this song there is summed up the results of the death of Jesus Christ.

(i) It was a sacrificial death. That is to say, it was a death with purpose in it. It was not an accident of history; it was not even the tragic death of a good and heroic man in the cause of righteousness and of God; it was a sacrificial death. The object of sacrifice is to restore the lost relationship between God and man; and it was for that purpose, and with that result, that Jesus Christ died.

(ii) The death of Jesus Christ was an emancipating death. From beginning to end the New Testament is full of the idea of the liberation of mankind achieved by him. He gave his life a ransom (lutron, GSN3083) for many (Mk.10:45). He gave himself a ransom (antilutron, GSN0487) for all (1Tim.2:6). He redeemed us--literally bought us out from (exagorazein, GSN1805)--from the curse of the law (Gal.3:13). We are redeemed (lutrousthai, GSN3084) not by any human wealth but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1Pet.1:19). Jesus Christ is the Lord that bought us (agorazein, GSN0059) (2Pet.2:1). We are bought with a price (agorazein, GSN0059) (1Cor.6:20; 1Cor.7:23). The New Testament consistently declares that it cost the death of Jesus Christ to rescue man from the dilemma and the slavery into which sin had brought him. The New Testament has no "official" theory of how that effect was achieved; but of the effect itself it is in no doubt whatever.

(iii) The death of Jesus Christ was universal in its benefits. It was for men and women of every race. There was a day when the Jews could hold that God cared only for them and wished for nothing but the destruction of other peoples. But in Jesus Christ we meet a God who loves the world. The death of Christ was for all men and, therefore, it is the task of the Church to tell all men of it.

(iv) The death of Jesus Christ was an availing death. He did not die for nothing. In this song three aspects of the work of Christ are singled out.

(a) He made us kings. He opened to men the royalty of sonship of God. Men have always been sons of God by creation; but now there is a new sonship of grace open to every man.

(b) He made us priests. In the ancient world the priest alone had the right of approach to God. When an ordinary Jew entered the Temple, he could make his way through the Court of the Gentiles, through the Court of the Women, into the Court of the Israelites; but into the Court of the

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Revelation 5:9-10

Priests he could not go. It was thus far and no farther. But Jesus Christ opened the way for all men to God. Every man becomes a priest in the sense that he has the right of access to God.

(c) He gave us triumph. His people shall reign upon the earth. This is not political triumph or material lordship. It is the secret of victorious living under any circumstances. "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn.16:33). In Christ there is victory over self, victory over circumstance and victory over sin.

When we think of what the death and life of Jesus Christ have done for men, it is no wonder that the living creatures and the elders burst into praise of him.

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Revelation 5:11-12

THE SONG OF THE ANGELS

Revelation 5:11-12

And I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels, who were in a circle round the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and their number was ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands; and they were saying with a great voice:

The Lamb, which has been slain, is worthy to receive the power and the riches and the wisdom and the strength and the honour and the glory and the blessing.

The chorus of praise is taken up by the unnumbered hosts of the angels of heaven. They stand in a great outer circle round the throne and the living creatures and the elders and they begin their song. We have repeatedly seen how John takes his language from the Old Testament; and here there is in his memory David's great thanksgiving to God:

Blessed art thou, O Lord, the God of Israel, our Father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great, and to give strength to all (1Chr.29:10-12).

The song of the living creatures and of the elders told of the work of Christ in his death; now the angels sing of the possessions of Christ in his glory. Seven great possessions belong to the Risen Lord.

(i) To him belongs the power. Paul called Jesus, "Christ the power of God" (1Cor.1:24). He is not one who can plan but never achieve; to him belongs the power. We can say triumphantly of him: "He is able."

(ii) To him belongs the riches. "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor" (2Cor.8:9). Paul speaks of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph.3:8). There is no promise that Jesus Christ has made that he does not possess the resources to carry out. There is no claim on him which he cannot satisfy.

(iii) To him belongs the wisdom. Paul calls Jesus Christ "the wisdom of God" (1Cor.1:24). He has the wisdom to know the secrets of God and the solution of the problems of life.

(iv) To him belongs the strength. Christ is the strong one who can disarm the powers of evil and overthrow Satan (Lk.11:22). There is no situation with which he cannot cope.

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Revelation 5:11-12

(v) To him belongs the honour. The day comes when to him every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that he is Lord (Php.2:11). A strange thing is that even those who are not Christian often honour Christ by admitting that in his teaching alone lies the hope of this distracted world.

(vi) To him belongs the glory. As John has it: "We beheld his glory, from glory as of the only Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:14). Glory is that which by right belongs to God alone. To say that Jesus Christ possesses the glory is to say that he is divine.

(vii) To him belongs the blessing. Here is the inevitable climax of it all. All these things Jesus Christ possesses, and every one of them he uses in the service of the men for whom he lived and died; he does not clutch them to himself.

Therefore, there rises to him from all the redeemed thanksgiving for all that he has done. And that thanksgiving is the one gift that we who have nothing can give to him who possesses all.

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Revelation 5:13-14

THE SONG OF ALL CREATION

Revelation 5:13-14

And I heard every created creature which was in the heaven, and upon the earth, and beneath the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, saying:

Blessing and honour and glory and dominion for ever and ever to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.

And the four living creatures said, Amen; and the elders fell down and worshipped.

Now the chorus of praise goes so far that it cannot go farther, for it reaches throughout the whole of the universe and the whole of creation. There is one vast song of praise to the Lamb. We may note one very significant thing. In this chorus of praise God and the Lamb are joined together. Nothing could better show the height of John's conception of Jesus Christ. In the praise of creation he sets him by the side of God.

In the song itself there are two things to note.

The creatures which are in the heaven add their praise. Who are they? More than one answer has been given and each is lovely in its own way. It has been suggested that the reference is to the birds of the air; the very singing of the birds is a song of praise. It has been suggested that the reference is to the sun, the moon and the stars; the heavenly bodies in their shining are praising God. It has been suggested that the phrase gathers up every possible being in heaven--the living creatures, the elders, the myriads of angels and every other heavenly being.

The creatures which are beneath the earth add their praise. That can only mean the dead who are in Hades, and here is something totally new. In the Old Testament the idea is that the dead are separated altogether from God and man and live a shadowy existence. "In death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?" (Ps.6:5). "Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth? What profit is there in my death if I go down to the pit?" (Ps.30:9). "Dost thou work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise thee? Is thy steadfast love declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in Abaddon? Are thy wonders known in the darkness, or thy saving help in the land of forgetfulness?" (Ps.88:10-12). "For Sheol cannot thank thee, death cannot praise thee; those that go down to the pit cannot hope for thy faithfulness" (Isa.38:18).

Here is a vision which sweeps all this away. Not even the land of the dead is beyond the reign of the Risen Christ. Even from beyond death the chorus of praise rises to him.

The picture here is all-inclusive of all nature praising God. There are in Scripture many magnificent pictures of the praise of God by nature. In the Old Testament itself there is Ps.148. But the noblest song of praise comes from the Apocrypha. In the Greek Old Testament there is an addition to Daniel. It is called The Song of the Three Children and it is sung by Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are there called, before they enter the fiery

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Revelation 5:13-14

furnace. It is long, but it is one of the world's great poems, and we must quote in full the part in which they call upon nature to praise God.

O ye sun and moon, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye stars of heaven, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O every shower and dew, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye winds, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye fire and heat, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye winter and summer, bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye dews and storms of snow, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye nights and days, bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye light and darkness, bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye cold and heat, bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye ice and cold, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye frost and snow, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye lightnings and clouds, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O let the earth bless the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye mountains and little hills, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye herbs of the field, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all things that grow on the earth, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye fountains, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye seas and rivers, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye whales and all that move in the waters, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye fowls of the air, bless ye the Lord:

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Revelation 5:13-14

Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye beasts and cattle, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O all ye creeping things of the earth, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.
O ye children of men, bless ye the Lord:
Praise and exalt him above all for ever.

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Introduction to Revelation 6

THE OPENING OF THE SEALS

As one by one the seals of the roll are opened, history unfolds itself before John's eyes.

As we study this section, we must remember one general fact which is basic to its understanding. In this series of visions John is seeing in advance the end of terror and judgment which could bring in the golden age of God.

Before we study the section in detail, we note one general point. In the first section of the visions, Rev.6:1-8, the King James Version consistently follows a form of the Greek text which makes each of the four living creatures say: "Come and see!" (Rev.6:1,3,5,7). In all the best Greek manuscripts it is simply, "Come!" as translated in the Revised Standard Version. This is not an invitation to John to come and see; it is a summons to the four horses and their riders one by one to come forward on the stage of history.

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Revelation 6:1-8

THE FOUR HORSES AND THEIR RIDERS

Revelation 6:1-8

And I saw when the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a loud voice like the sound of thunder, "Come!" And I saw, and, behold, a white horse, and he who was seated on it had a bow, and a conqueror's crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer.

And, when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" And there came forth another horse blood-red in colour, and to him that sat upon it there was given to take peace from the earth, and to bring it about that men slay one another, and a great sword was given to him.

And, when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And, behold, there came a black horse, and he who sat upon it had the beam of a balance in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the middle of the four living creatures saying: "A measure of wheat for a denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius. But you must not injure the oil and the wine."

And, when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come!" And I saw, and, behold, there came a pale horse, and the name of him who sat upon it was Death, and Hades followed with him; and they were given power over a fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with famine, and with pestilence, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Before we embark on a detailed interpretation of this vision, we note two important points.

(i) We note that the origin of this vision is in Zech.6:1-8. Zechariah sees four horses which are let loose upon the earth to deal out vengeance on Babylon and Egypt and the nations which have oppressed God's people. "These are going forth to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth" (Zech.6:5). The horses stand for the four mighty winds which God is about to let loose on the earth with a blast of destruction. John does not keep the details the same; but for him, too, the horses and their riders are the instruments of the avenging judgment of God.

(ii) We must explain the method of interpretation which we think must be used. The four horses and their riders stand for four great destructive forces which are in the times before the end to be despatched against the evil world by the holy wrath of God. But, John sees these forces in terms of actual events in the world which he knew where life seemed a chaos, the world seemed to be disintegrating, and the earth seemed to be full of terrors. The horses and their riders are forces of destruction and agents of wrath; they are not to be identified with any historical figures but in the events of his own time John saw symbols and types of the destruction to come

Our method of interpretation will, therefore, be to define the destructive force for which each of the horses stands, and then, where possible, to find circumstances in the history of John's own time

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Revelation 6:1-8

which illustrate the destruction to come. We will further see that in more than one case John is dealing in pictures and ideas which were part of the stock in trade of the writers of these visions of the days of the end.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 6:1-2

THE WHITE HORSE OF CONQUEST

Revelation 6:1-2

And I saw, when the Lamb opened the first of the seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a loud voice like the sound of thunder: "Come!" And I saw, and, behold a white horse, and he who was seated on it had a bow, and a conqueror's crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer.

As each of the seven seals is broken and opened, a new terror falls upon the earth. The first terror is depicted under the form of a white horse and its rider. What do they represent? Two explanations have been suggested, one of which is certainly wrong.

(i) It has been suggested that the rider on the white horse is the victorious Christ himself. This conclusion is drawn because this picture is connected by some commentators with that in Rev.19:11-12 which tells of a white horse and on it a rider, called Faithful and True and crowned with many crowns, who is the victorious Christ. It is to be noted that the crown in this passage is different from that in Rev.19. Here the crown is *stephanos* (GSN4735), which is the victor's crown; in Rev.19 it is *diadema* (GSN1238), which is the royal crown. The passage we are here studying is telling of woe upon woe and disaster upon disaster; any picture of the victorious Christ is quite out of place in it. This picture tells of the coming not of the victor Christ but of the terrors of the wrath of God.

(ii) Quite certainly, the white horse and its rider stand for conquest in war. When a Roman general celebrated a triumph, that is, when he paraded through the streets of Rome with his armies and his captives and his spoils after some great victory, his chariot was drawn by white horses, the symbol of victory.

But, as we said in the introduction to this passage, John is clothing his predictions of the future in pictures of the present which his readers would recognize. The rider of the horse had in his hand a bow. In the Old Testament the bow is always the sign of military power. In the final defeat of Babylon her mighty men are taken and their bows--that is, their military power--destroyed (Jer.51:56). God will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel (Hos.1:5). God breaks the bow and shatters the spear in sunder and burns the chariots with fire; that is, against him no human military power can stand (Ps.46:9). The bow, then, would always stand for military power. But there is one particular picture which the Romans and all who dwelt in Asia would at once recognize. The one enemy whom the Romans feared was the Parthian power. The Parthians dwelt on the far eastern frontiers of the Empire and were the scourge of Rome. In A.D. 62 an unprecedented event had occurred; a Roman army had actually surrendered to Vologeses, the king of the Parthians. The Parthians rode white horses and were the most famous bowmen in the world. A "Parthian shot" still means a final, devastating blow, to which there is no possible answer.

So, then, the white horse and its rider with the bow stand for militarism and conquest.

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Revelation 6:1-2

Here is something which it has taken men long to learn. Military conquest has been presented as a thing of glamour; but it is always tragedy. When Euripides wished to depict warfare upon the stage, he did not bring on an army with banners. He brought on a bent and bewildered old woman leading by the hand a weeping child who had lost his parents. During the Spanish civil war a journalist told how he suddenly realized what war was. He was in a Spanish city in which the opposing parties were waging guerrilla warfare. He saw walking along the pavement a little boy, obviously lost, and bewildered and terrified, dragging along a toy which had lost its wheels. Suddenly there was the crack of a rifle shot; and the little boy pitched on the ground, dead. That is war. First among the tragic terrors of the terrible times John sets the white horse and the man with the bow, the vision of the tragedy of militaristic conquest.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 6:3-4

THE BLOOD-RED HORSE OF STRIFE

Revelation 6:3-4

When he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say: "Come!" And there came forth another horse, blood-red in colour, and to him that sat upon it there was given to take peace from the earth, and to bring it about that men should slay each other, and a great sword was given to him.

The function of the second horse and its rider is to take peace from the earth. They stand for that destructive strife which sets man against man and nation against nation in a chaos of tragic destruction. There are two backgrounds to this.

(i) John was writing in a time when internecine strife was tearing the world apart. In the thirty years before the reign of Herod the Great, 67 to 37 B.C., in Palestine alone no fewer than 100,000 men had perished in abortive revolutions. In A.D. 61 in Britain there had arisen the rebellion connected with the name of Queen Boadicea. The Romans crushed it, Boadicea committed suicide and 150,000 men perished.

(ii) In the Jewish pictures of the end time, an essential element is the complete disintegration of all human relationships. Brother will fight against brother, neighbour against neighbour, city will rise against city, and kingdom against kingdom (Isa.19:2). Every man's hand shall be against the hand of his neighbour (Zech.14:13). From dawn to sunset they will slay each other (Enoch 100: 12). Friend shall war against friend; friends will attack one another suddenly (4 Ezra 5: 9; 6: 24). Some of them shall fall in battle, and some of them shall perish in anguish, and some of them shall be destroyed by their own (2 Baruch 70: 2-8). Many shall be stirred up in anger to injure many, and they shall rouse up all men in order to shed blood, and in the end they will all perish together (2 Baruch 48: 37).

The vision of the end was a vision of a time when all human relationships would be destroyed and the world a seething cauldron of embittered hate.

It is still true that the nation in which there is division between man and man and class and class and hatred based on competitive ambition and selfish desire is doomed; and the world in which nation is set against nation is hastening to its end.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 6:5-6

THE BLACK HORSE OF FAMINE

Revelation 6:5-6

When he had opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say: "Come!" And, behold, there came a black horse, and he who sat upon it had the beam of a balance in his hand. And I heard, as it were, a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying: "A measure of wheat for a denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius. But you must not injure the oil and the wine."

It will help us to understand the idea behind this passage if we remember that John is giving an account not of the end of things, but of the signs and events which precede the end. So here the black horse and its rider represent famine, a famine which is very severe and causes great hardship, but which is not desperate enough to kill. There is wheat--at a prohibitive price; and the wine and the oil are not affected.

The three main crops of Palestine were the corn, the wine and the oil; and it is these three which are always mentioned when the crops of the land are being described (Deut.7:13; Deut.11:14; Deut.28:51; Hos.2:8; Hos.2:22). The rider of the horse had the cross-beam of a balance in his hand. In the Old Testament the phrase to eat bread by weight indicates the greatest scarcity. In Leviticus it is the threat of God that, if the people are disobedient "they shall deliver your bread again by weight" (Lev.26:26). It is the threat of God to Ezekiel: "I will break the stall of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with fearfulness" (Eze.4:16).

It was not entirely abnormal that there should be wine and oil when there was no corn. The olive and the vine were much more deeply-rooted than the corn; and they could stand a drought which would wipe out the corn crop. When Jacob had to send down to Egypt for corn in the days of the famine in the time of Joseph, he was still able to send with his sons a gift of "the choice fruits of the land" (Gen.43:11). But it is true that a situation in which wine and oil were plentiful and corn prohibitively dear would be the equivalent of one in which luxuries were plentiful and necessities scarce.

We can see the extent of the scarcity from the statement of the voice from amidst the four living creatures. A measure of wheat or three measures of barley was to cost a denarius. The measure was a choinix (GSN5518), equivalent to two pints and consistently defined in the ancient world as a man's ration for a day. A denarius was the equivalent of four pence and was a working man's wage for a day. Normally one denarius bought anything from eight to sixteen measures of corn and three to four times as much barley. What John is foretelling is a situation in which a man's whole working wage would be needed to buy enough corn for himself for a day, leaving absolutely nothing to buy any of the other necessities of life and absolutely nothing for his wife and family. If instead of corn he bought the much inferior barley, he might manage to give some to his wife and family but again he would have nothing to buy anything else.

We have seen that, although John was telling of the signs which were to precede the end, he was nevertheless painting them in terms of actual historical situations which men would recognize.

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Revelation 6:5-6

There had been desperate famines in the time of Nero which left the luxury of the rich untouched. There was an occasion when a ship arrived in Italy from Alexandria. The starving populace thought it was a cornship, for all the cornships came from Alexandria; and they rioted when they discovered that the cargo was not corn but a special kind of sand from the Nile Delta to spread upon the ground of the arena for a gladiatorial show. This passage finds an amazing echo in certain events during the reign of Domitian, at the very time when John was writing. There was a very serious shortage of grain and also a superabundance of wine. Domitian took the drastic step of enacting that no fresh vineyards should be planted and that half the vineyards in the provinces should be cut down. At this edict the people of the province of Asia, in which John was writing, came very near to rebelling for their vineyards were one of their principal sources of revenue. In view of the violent reaction of the people of Asia, Domitian rescinded his edict and actually enacted that those who allowed their vineyards to go out of cultivation should be prosecuted. Here is the very picture of a situation in which corn was scarce and it was yet forbidden to interfere with the supply of wine and oil.

So, then, this is a picture of famine set alongside luxury. There is always something radically wrong with a situation in which some have too much and others too little. This is always a sign that the society in which it occurs is hastening to its ruin.

There is one other interesting point which, it has been suggested, is in this passage. It is from the midst of the four living creatures that there comes the voice telling of the famine prices of corn. We have already seen that the four living creatures may well symbolize all that is best in nature; and this may well be taken to be nature's protest against famine amidst men. The tragedy has nearly always been that nature produces enough, and more than enough, but that there are many people to whom that abundance never comes. It is as if John was symbolically indicating that nature herself protests when the gifts she offers are used selfishly and irresponsibly for the luxury of the few at the expense of the many.

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Revelation 6:7-8

THE PALE HORSE OF PESTILENCE AND DEATH

Revelation 6:7-8

When he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying: "Come!" And I saw, and, behold, there came a pale horse, and the name of him who sat upon it was Death, and Hades followed with him; and they were given power over a fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with famine, and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

As we approach this passage we must once again remember that it is telling not of the final end but of the signs which precede it. That is why it is a fourth part of the earth which is involved in death and disaster. This is a terrible time but it is not the time of total destruction.

The picture is a grim one. The horse is pale in colour. The word is chloros (GSN5515) which means pale in the sense of livid and is used of a face blanched with terror. The passage is complicated by the fact that the Greek word thanatos (GSN2288) is used in a double sense. In Rev.6:8 it is used to mean both death and pestilence.

John was writing in a time when famine and pestilence did devastate the world; but in this case he is thinking in terms provided by the Old Testament which more than once speaks of "the four sore judgments." Ezekiel hears God tell of the time when he will send his "four sore acts of judgment upon Jerusalem"--sword, famine, evil beasts, and pestilence (Eze.14:21). In Leviticus there is a passage which tells of the penalties which God will send upon his people because of their disobedience. Wild beasts will rob them of their children and destroy their cattle and make them few in number. The sword will avenge their breaches of the covenant. When they are gathered in their cities the pestilence will be among them. He will break the stall of bread and they will eat and not be satisfied (Lev.26:21-26).

Here John is using a traditional picture of what is to happen when God despatches his wrath upon his disobedient people. At the back of it all is the permanent truth that no man or nation can escape the consequences of their sin.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 6:9-11

THE SOULS OF THE MARTYRS

Revelation 6:9-11 (Part 1)

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw beneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the sake of the word of God and because of the witness which they bore. And they cried with a loud voice: "How long, Lord, Holy and True, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" And to each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to rest for still a little while, until there should be completed the number of their fellow-servants and of their brothers who must be killed.

At the breaking of the fifth seal comes the vision of the souls of those who had died for their faith.

Jesus left his followers in no doubt as to the suffering and the martyrdom they would be called upon to endure. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matt.24:9; Mk.13:9-13; Lk.21:12,18). The day would come when those who killed Christians would think they were doing a service for God (Jn.16:2).

The idea of an altar in heaven is one that occurs more than once in the Revelation (Rev.8:5; Rev.14:18). It is not by any means a new idea. When the furnishings of the tabernacle were to be made, they were all to be constructed according to the pattern which God possessed and would show (Exo.25:9; Exo.25:40; Num.8:4; Heb.8:5; Heb.9:23). It is the consistent idea of those who wrote about the Tabernacle and the Temple that the pattern of all the holy things already existed in heaven.

The souls of those who had been slain were there beneath the altar. That picture is taken directly from the sacrificial ritual of the Temple. For a Jew the most sacred part of any sacrifice was the blood; the blood was regarded as being the life and the life belonged to God (Lev.17:11-14). Because of that, there were special regulations for the offering of the blood.

"The rest of the blood of the bull the priest shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering" (Lev.4:7). That is to say, the blood is offered at the foot of the altar.

This gives us the meaning of our passage here. The souls of the martyrs are beneath the altar. That is to say, their life-blood has been poured out as an offering to God. The idea of the martyr's life as a sacrifice to God is in the mind of Paul. He says that he will rejoice, if he is offered up on the sacrifice and the service of the faith of the Philippians (Php.2:17). "I am already," he says, "on the point of being sacrificed" (2Tim.4:6). In the time of the Maccabees the Jews suffered terribly for their faith. There was a mother whose seven sons were threatened with death because of their loyalty to their Jewish beliefs. She encouraged them not to yield and reminded them how Abraham had not refused to offer Isaac. She told them that, when they reached their glory, they must tell Abraham that he had built one altar of sacrifice but their mother had built seven.

In later Judaism it was said that Michael, the archangel, sacrificed on the heavenly altar the souls of the righteous and of those who had been faithful students of the law. When Ignatius of Antioch was

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Revelation 6:9-11

on his way to Rome to be burned, his prayer was that he should be found a sacrifice belonging to God.

There is a great and uplifting truth here. When a good man dies for the sake of goodness, it may look like tragedy, like the waste of a fine life; like the work of evil men; and, indeed, it may be all these things. But every life laid down for right and truth and God is ultimately more than any of these things--it is an offering made to God.

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Revelation 6:9-11

THE CRY OF THE MARTYRS

Revelation 6:9-11 (Part 2)

There are three things in this section which we must note.

(i) We have the eternal cry of the suffering righteous--"How long?" This was the cry of the Psalmist. How long were the heathen to be allowed to afflict God's righteous people? How long were they to be allowed to taunt his people by asking where God was and what he was doing? (Ps. 79:5-10). The thing to remember is that when the saints of God uttered this cry, they were bewildered by God's seeming inactivity but they never doubted his ultimate action, and the ultimate vindication of the righteous.

(ii) We have a picture which is easy to criticize. The saints actually wished to see the punishment of their persecutors. It is hard for us to understand the idea that part of the joy of heaven was to see the punishment of the sinners in Hell. In the Assumption of Moses the Jewish writer (10: 10) hears God promise:

And thou shalt look from on high and shalt see thy enemies in Gehenna.

And thou shalt recognize them and rejoice,
And thou shalt give thanks and confess thy Creator.

In later times Tertullian (Concerning Spectacles 30) was to taunt the heathen with their love of spectacles and to say that the spectacle to which the Christian most looked forward was to see his one-time persecutors writhing in Hell.

You are fond of spectacles; expect the greatest of all spectacles, the last and eternal judgment of the universe. How shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many proud monarchs, and fancied gods, groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness; so many magistrates who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in fiercer flames than they ever kindled against the Christians; so many sage philosophers blushing in red hot flames with their deluded scholars; so many celebrated poets trembling before the tribunal, not of Minos, but of Christ; so many tragedians more tuneful in the expression of their own sufferings; so many dancers writhing in the flames.

It is easy to stand aghast at the spirit of vengeance which could write like that. But we must remember what these men went through, the agony of the flames, of the arena and the wild beasts, of the sadistic torture which they suffered. We have the right to criticize only when we have gone through the same agony.

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Revelation 6:9-11

(iii) The martyrs must rest in peace for a little longer until their number is made up. The Jews had the conviction that the drama of history had to be played out in full before the end could come. God would not stir until the measure appointed had been fulfilled (2Esdr.4:36). The number of the righteous first has to be offered (Enoch 47: 4). The Messiah would not come until all the souls which were to be born had been born. The same idea finds its echo in the burial prayer in the Anglican Prayer Book that "it may please thee shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect and to hasten thy kingdom." It is a curious notion but at the back of it is the idea that all history is in the hand of God, and that in it and through it all he is working his purpose out to its certain end.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 6:12-14

THE SHATTERED UNIVERSE

Revelation 6:12-14

I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black like sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the heaven fell upon the earth, as a fig-tree casts its figs, when it is shaken by a high wind; and the heavens were split like a roll that is rolled up, and the hills and islands were moved from their places.

John is using pictures very familiar to his Jewish readers. The Jews always regarded the end as a time when the earth would be shattered and there would be cosmic upheaval and destruction. In the picture there are, as it were, five elements which can all be abundantly illustrated from the Old Testament and from the books written between the Testaments.

(i) There is the earthquake. At the coming of the Lord the earth will tremble (Am.8:8). There will be a great shaking in the land of Israel (Eze.38:19). The earth will quake and the heavens will tremble (Jl.2:10). God will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land (Hag.2:6). The earth will tremble and be shaken to its bounds; the hills will be shaken and fall (Assumption of Moses 10: 4). The earth shall open and fire burst forth (2Esdr.5:8). Whoever gets out of the war will die in the earthquake; and whoever gets out of the earthquake will die in the fire, and whoever gets out of the fire will perish in the famine (2 Baruch 70: 8). The Jewish prophets and seers saw a time when earth would be shattered and a tide of destruction would flow over the old world before the new world was born.

(ii) There is the darkening of the sun and moon. The sun will set at midday, and earth will grow dark in the clear day light (Am.8:9). The stars will not shine; the sun will be darkened in his going forth and the moon will not cause her light to shine (Isa.13:10). God will clothe the heavens with blackness and will make sackcloth their covering (Isa.50:3). God will make the stars dark and cover the sun with a cloud (Eze.32:7). The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood (Jl.2:31). The horns of the sun will be broken and he will be turned into darkness, the moon will not give her light, and will be turned into blood; and the circle of the stars will be disturbed (Assumption of Moses 10: 4-5). The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give her light (Matt.24:29; Mk.13:24; Lk.23:45).

(iii) There is the falling of the stars. To the Jew this idea was specially terrible, for the order of the heavens was the very guarantee of the unchanging fidelity of God. Take away the reliability of the heavens and there was nothing left but chaos. The angel tells Enoch to behold the heavens, to see how the heavenly bodies never change their orbits or transgress against their appointed order (Enoch 2: 1). Enoch saw the chambers of the sun and moon, how they go out and come in, how they never leave their orbit, and add nothing to it and take nothing from it (Enoch 41: 5). To the Jew the last word in chaos was a world of falling stars. But in the end time the host of heaven would be dissolved and fall down as the leaf falls from the vine and the fig from the fig-tree (Isa.34:4). The stars will fall from heaven and the powers of heaven shall be shaken (Matt.24:29). The firmament shall fall on the sea and a cataract of fire will reduce the heavens and the stars to a molten mass (Sibylline Oracles 3: 83).

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Revelation 6:12-14

The stars will transgress their order and alter their orbits (Enoch 80: 5-6). The outgoings of the stars will change (2Esdr.5:4). The end will be a time when the most reliable things in the universe will become a disorderly and terrifying chaos.

(iv) There is the folding up of the heavens. The picture in this passage is of a roll stretched out and held open, and then suddenly split down the middle so that each half recoils and rolls up. God will shake the heavens (Isa.13:13). The heavens will be rolled together as a scroll (Isa.34:4). They will be changed like a garment and folded up (Ps.102:25-26). At the end the eternal heavens themselves will be rent in two.

(v) There is the moving of the hills and of the islands of the sea. The mountains will tremble and the hills will be moved (Jer.4:24). The mountains will quake and the hills will melt (Nah.1:5). John saw a time when the most unshakeable things would be shaken and when even rocky isles like Patmos would be lifted from their foundation.

Strange as John's pictures may seem to us, there is not a single detail which is not in the pictures of the end time in the Old Testament and in the books written between the Testaments. We must not think that these pictures are to be taken literally. Their point is that John is taking every terrifying thing that can be imagined and piling them all together to give a picture of the terrors of the end time. Today, with our increased scientific knowledge, we might well paint the picture in different terms; but it is not the picture that matters. What matters is the terrors which John and the Jewish seers foresaw when God would invade the earth when time was coming to an end.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 6:15-17

THE TIME OF TERROR

Revelation 6:15-17

And the kings of the earth and the great ones and the captains and the rich and the strong, and every slave and every free person hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the hills, and said to the mountains and to the rocks: "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

As John saw it in his vision, the end time was to be one of universal terror. Here again he is working with pictures familiar to all who knew the Old Testament and the later Jewish writings. When the Day of the Lord came, men would be afraid; pangs and sorrows would take hold of them; they would be in pain as a woman who travails; and they would be amazed at one another (Isa.13:6,8). At that time even the mighty man would cry bitterly (Zep.1:14). The inhabitants of the land would tremble (Jl.2:1). They would be frightened with fear; there would be no place to which to flee and no place in which to hide; the children of earth would tremble and quake (Enoch 102: 1, 3). God would come to be a witness against his sinning people (Mic.1:1-4). He would be like a refiner's fire, and who might abide the day of his coming? (Mal.3:1-3). The Day of the Lord would be great and terrible, and who could endure it? (Jl.2:11).

Men would say to the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us" (Hos.10:8), words which Jesus quoted on the way to the Cross (Lk.23:30).

This passage has two significant things to say about this fear.

(i) It is universal. Rev.6:15 speaks of the kings, the captains, the great ones, the rich, the strong, the slave and the free. It has been pointed out that these seven words include "the whole fabric of human society." No one is exempt from the judgment of God. The great ones may well be the Roman governors who persecute the Church; the captains are the military authorities. However great a governor a man is and however much power he wields, he is still subject to the judgment of God. However rich a man may be, however strong, however free he may count himself, however much of a slave, however insignificant, he does not escape the judgment of God.

(ii) When the day of the Lord comes, John sees people seeking somewhere to hide. Here is the great truth that the first instinct of sin is to hide. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve sought to hide themselves (Gen.3:8). H. B. Swete says: "What sinners dread most is not death, but the revealed presence of God." The terrible thing about sin is that it makes a man a fugitive from God; and the supreme thing about the work of Jesus Christ is that it puts a man into a relationship with God in which he no longer need seek to hide, knowing that he can cast himself on the love and the mercy of God.

(iii) We note one last thing. That from which men flee is the wrath of the Lamb. Here is paradox; we do not readily associate wrath with the Lamb but rather gentleness and kindness. But the wrath of God is the wrath of love, which is not out to destroy but even in anger is out to save the one it loves.

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Revelation 7:1-3

RESCUE AND REWARD

Revelation 7:1-3 (Part 1)

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, restraining the four winds of the earth so that the wind might not blow upon the earth, or upon the sea, or against any tree. And I saw another angel going up from where the sun rises, with a seal which belonged to the living God, and he shouted with a great voice to the four angels to whom was given power to harm the earth and the sea: "Do not harm the earth and the sea or the trees until we seal the servants of our God upon their foreheads."

Before we deal with this chapter in detail, it is better to set out the general picture behind it.

John is seeing the vision of the last terrible days aid in particular the great tribulation which is to come, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time (Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). In this coming tribulation there was to be a final assault by every evil power and a final devastation of the earth. It is to play their part in this devastation that the winds are waiting and from which for a little while they are being held in check.

Before this time of terror and devastation comes, the faithful are to be sealed with the seal of God in order that they may survive it. It is not that they are to be exempt from it but that they are to be brought safely through it.

This is a terrible picture; even if the faithful are to be brought through this terrible time, they none the less must pass through it, and this is a prospect to make even the bravest shudder.

In Rev.7:9 the range of the seer's vision extends still further and he sees the faithful after the tribulation has passed. They are in perfect peace and satisfaction in the very presence of God. The last time will bring them unspeakable horrors, but when they have passed through it they will enter into equally unspeakable joy.

There are really three elements in this picture. (i) There is a warning. The last unparalleled and inconceivable time of tribulation is coming soon. (ii) There is an assurance. In that time of destruction the faithful will suffer terribly, but they will come out on the other side because they are sealed with the seal of God. (iii) There is a promise. When they have passed through that time, they will come to the blessedness in which all pain and sorrow are gone and there is nothing but peace and joy.

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Revelation 7:1-3

THE WINDS OF GOD

Revelation 7:1-3 (Part 2)

This vision is expressed in conceptions of the world which were the conceptions of the days in which John wrote.

The earth is a square, flat earth; and at its four corners are four angels waiting to unleash the winds of destruction. Isaiah speaks of gathering the outcasts of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isa.11:12). The end is come upon the four corners of the earth in Ezekiel (Eze.7:2).

It was the belief of the ancient peoples that the winds which came from due north, south, east and west were all favourable winds; but that those which blew diagonally across the earth were harmful. That is why the angels are at the corners of the earth. They are about to unleash the winds which blow diagonally. It was the common belief that all the forces of nature were under the charge of angels. So we read of the angel of the fire (Rev.14:18) and the angel of the waters (Rev.16:5). These angels were called "The Angels of Service." They belonged to the very lowest order of angels, because they had to be continually on duty and, therefore, could not keep the Sabbath as a day of rest. Pious Israelites who faithfully observed the Law of the Sabbath were said to rank higher than these angels of service.

The angels are bidden to restrain the winds until the work of sealing the faithful should be completed. This idea has more than one echo in Jewish literature. In Enoch the angels of the waters are bidden by God to hold the waters in check until Noah had built the ark (Enoch 66: 1, 2). In 2 Baruch the angels with the flaming torches are bidden to restrain their fire, when Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonians, until the sacred vessels of the Temple could be hidden away and saved from the looting of the invaders (2 Baruch 6: 4). More than once we see the angels restraining the forces of destruction until the safety of the faithful has been made secure.

One of the interesting and picturesque ideas of the Old Testament is that of the winds as the servants and the agents of God. This was specially so of the Sirocco, the dread wind from the south-east, with the blast like hot air from a furnace which withered and destroyed all vegetation. Zechariah has the picture of the chariots of the winds, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth (Zech.6:1-5). Nahum speaks of the Lord who has his way in the whirlwind (the Sirocco) and the storm (Nah.1:3). The Lord goes with the whirlwinds of the south (Zech.9:14). The winds are God's chariots (Jer.4:13). God comes with his chariots like a whirlwind (Isa.66:15). The wind is the breath of God (Jb.37:9-10). The wind rends the mountains (1Kgs.19:11) and withers the grass (Isa.40:7; Isa.40:24) and dries up the stream, the river and the sea (Nah.1:4; Ps.18:15).

So terrible was the effect of the Sirocco that it gained a place in the pictures of the last days. One of the terrors which was to precede the end was a terrible storm. God would destroy his enemies as stubble before the wind (Ps.83:13). God's day would be the day of the whirlwind (Am.1:14). The whirlwind of the Lord goes forth in its fury and falls on the head of the wicked (Jer.23:19; Jer.30:23). The wind of the Lord, the Sirocco, will come from the wilderness and destroy the

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Revelation 7:1-3

fertility of the land (Hos.13:15). God will send his four winds upon Elam and scatter the people (Jer.49:36).

This is difficult for many of us to understand; the dweller in the temperate countries does not know the terror of the wind. But there is something here more far-reaching than that and more characteristic of Jewish thought, the Jews knew nothing of secondary causes. We say that atmospheric conditions, variations in temperature, land and mountain configurations, cause certain things to happen. The Jew ascribed it all to the direct action of God. He simply said, God sent the rain; God made the wind to blow; God thundered; God sent his lightning.

Surely both points of view are correct, for we may still believe that God acts through the laws by which his universe is governed.

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Revelation 7:1-3

THE LIVING GOD

Revelation 7:1-3 (Part 3)

Before the great tribulation smites the earth the faithful ones are to be marked with the seal of God. There are two points to note.

(i) The angel with the seal comes from the rising of the sun, from the East. All John's pictures mean something and there may be two meanings behind this: (a) It is in the East that the sun, the supreme earthly giver of light and life, rises; and the angel may stand for the life and the light that God gives his people even when death and destruction are abroad. (b) It is just possible that John is remembering something from the story of the birth of Jesus. The wise men come to Palestine searching for the king who is to be born, for "We have seen his star in the East" (Matt.2:2). It is natural that the delivering angel should rise in the same part of the sky as the star which told of the birth of the Saviour.

(ii) The angel has the seal which belongs to the living God. The living God is a phrase in which the writers of Scripture delight and when they use it, there are certain things in their minds.

(a) They are thinking of the living God in contra-distinction to the dead gods of the heathen. Isaiah has a tremendous passage of sublime mockery of the heathen and their dead gods whom their own hands have made (Isa.44:9-17). The smith takes a mass of metal and works at it with the hammer and the tongs and the coals, sweating and parched at his task of manufacturing a god. The carpenter goes out and cuts down a tree. He works at it with line and compass and plane. Part of it he uses to make a fire to warm himself; part of it he uses to make a fire to bake his bread and roast his meat; and part of it he uses to make a god. The heathen gods are dead and created by men; our God is alive and the creator of all things.

(b) The idea of the living God is used as an encouragement. In the midst of their struggles Joshua reminds the people that with them there is the living God and that he will show his strength in their conflicts with their enemies (Josh.3:10). When a man is up against it, the living God is with him.

(c) Only in the living God is there satisfaction. It is the living God for whom the soul of the psalmist longs and thirsts (Ps.42:2). Man can never find satisfaction in things but only in fellowship with a living person; and he finds his highest satisfaction in the fellowship of the living God.

(d) The biblical writers stress the privilege of knowing and belonging to the living God. Hosea reminds the people of Israel that once they were not a people, but in mercy they have become children of the living God (Hos.1:10). Our privilege is that there is open to us the friendship, the fellowship, the help, the power and the presence of the living God.

(e) In the idea of the living God there is at one and the same time a promise and a threat. Second Kings vividly tells the story of how the great king Sennacherib sent his envoy Rabshakeh to tell Hezekiah that he proposed to wipe out the nation of Israel. Humanly speaking, the little kingdom of Judah had no hope of survival, if the might of Assyria was launched against it. But with Israel there

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Revelation 7:1-3

was the living God and he was a threat to the godlessness of Assyria and a promise to the faithful of Israel (2Kgs.18:17-37).

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Revelation 7:4-8

THE SEAL OF GOD

Revelation 7:4-8 (Part 1)

And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand were sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel. Of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand; of the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand.

Those who are to be brought safely through the great tribulation are sealed upon their foreheads. The origin of this picture is very likely in Eze.9. In Ezekiel's picture, before the final slaughter begins, the man with the inkhorn marks the forehead of those who are faithful and the avengers are told that none so marked must be touched (Eze.9:1-7).

The idea of the king's seal would be very meaningful in the East. Eastern kings wore a signet ring whose seal was used to authenticate documents as really coming from the king's hand and to mark that which was the king's personal property. When Pharaoh appointed Joseph his prime minister and representative, he gave him his signet ring in token of the authority which had been delegated to him (Gen.41:42). So Ahasuerus gave his signet ring, first to Haman and then, when Haman's wicked schemes were unmasked, to Mordecai (Esth.3:10; Esth.8:2). The stone which shut Daniel into the lion's den was sealed (Dn.6:17), as was the stone with which the Jews sought to make the tomb of Jesus secure (Matt.27:66).

Very commonly a seal indicated source or possession. A merchant would seal a Package of goods to certify that it belonged to him; and the owner of a vineyard would seal jars of wine to show that they came from his vineyard and with his guarantee.

So here the seal was a sign that these people belonged to God and were under his power and authority.

In the early church this picture of sealing was specially connected with two things. (a) It was connected with baptism which was regularly described as sealing. It is as if, when a person was baptized, a mark was put upon him to show that he had become the property and the possession of God. (b) Paul regularly talks about the Christian being sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The possession of the Holy Spirit is the sign that a man belongs to God. The real Christian is marked out by the seal of the Spirit which enables him to have the wisdom and the strength to cope with life in a way beyond the attainment of others.

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Revelation 7:4-8

THE NUMBER OF THE FAITHFUL

Revelation 7:4-8 (Part 2)

There are certain quite general things to be noted here which will greatly help towards the interpretation of this passage.

(1) Two things are to be said about the number 144,000. (a) It is quite certain that it does not stand for the number of the faithful in every day and generation. The 144,000 stands for those who in the time of John are sealed and preserved from the great tribulation which at that moment was coming upon them. In due time, as we see in Rev.7:9, they are to be merged with the great crowd beyond all counting and drawn from every nation. (b) The number 144,000 stands, not for limitation but for completeness and perfection. It is made up of 12 multiplied by 12--the perfect square--and then rendered even more inclusive and complete by being multiplied by 1,000. This does not tell us that the number of the saved will be very small; it tells us that the number of the saved will be very great.

(ii) The enumeration in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel does not mean that this is to be read in purely Jewish terms. One of the basic thoughts of the New Testament is that the Church is the real Israel, and that the national Israel has lost all its privileges and promises to the Church. Paul writes: "He is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God" (Rom.2:28-29). "Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel," says Paul (Rom.9:6-7). If a man is Christ's, then is he Abraham's seed and an heir according to the promise (Gal.3:29). It is the Church which is the Israel of God (Gal.6:16). It is Christians who are the real circumcision, those who worship God in the spirit, who rejoice in Christ Jesus and who have no confidence in the flesh (Php.3:3). Even if this passage is stated in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel, the reference is still to the Church of God, the new Israel, the Israel of God.

(iii) It would be a mistake to place any stress on the order in which the twelve tribes are given, because the lists of the tribes are always varying in their order. But two things stand out. (a) Judah comes first, thus supplanting Reuben, who was the eldest son of Jacob. That is simply explained by the fact it was from the tribe of Judah that the Messiah came. (b) Much more interesting is the omission of Dan. But there is also an explanation of that. In the Old Testament Dan does not hold a high place and is often connected with idolatry. In Jacob's dying speech to his sons, it is said: "Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward" (Gen.49:17). In Judges the children of Dan are said to have set up a graven image (Judg.18:30). The golden calves, which became a sin, were set up in Bethel and in Dan (1Kgs.12:29). There is more.

There is a curious saying in Jer.8:16: "The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that fills it." That saying came to be taken as referring to Antichrist, the coming incarnation of evil; and it came to be believed among the Jewish Rabbis that Antichrist was to spring from Dan. Hippolytus (Concerning Antichrist 14) says: "As the Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, so will the

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Revelation 7:4-8

Antichrist be born from the tribe of Dan." That is why Dan is missed out from this list and the list completed by the including of Manasseh, who is normally included in Joseph.

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Revelation 7:9-10

THE GLORY OF THE MARTYRS

Revelation 7:9-10

After this I saw, and, behold, a great crowd, so great that none could count its number, drawn from every race and from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palms in their hands. And they shouted with a great voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated upon the throne and to the Lamb."

Here we have the beginning of the vision of the future blessedness of the martyrs.

(i) There is encouragement. There is coming upon the faithful a time of terror such as the world has never seen; and John is telling them that, if they endure to the end, the glory will be worth all the suffering. He is setting out how infinitely worthwhile it is in the long run to accept everything involved in the martyrdom which fidelity must undergo.

(ii) The number of the martyrs is beyond all counting. This may well be a memory of the promise that God made to Abraham that his descendants would one day be as the number of the stars in the heavens (Gen.15:5), and as the sand of the seashore (Gen.32:12); at the last the number of the true Israel will be beyond all reckoning.

(iii) John uses a phrase of which he is very fond. He says that God's faithful ones will come from every race and tribe and people and tongue (compare Rev.5:9; Rev.11:9; Rev.13:7; Rev.14:6; Rev.17:15). H. B. Swete speaks of "the polyglot cosmopolitan crowd who jostled one another in the agora or on the quays of the Asian sea-port towns." In any Asian harbour or market-place there would be gathered people from many lands, speaking many different tongues. Any evangelist would feel his heart afire to bring the message of Christ to this assorted crowd of people. Here is the promise that the day will come when all this motley crowd of many nations and many tongues will become the one flock of the Lord Christ.

(iv) It is in victory that the faithful finally arrive in the presence of God and of the Lamb. They appear, not weary, battered and worn, but victorious. The white robe is the sign of victory; a Roman general celebrated his triumph clothed in white. The palm is also the sign of victory. When, under the might of the Maccabees, Jerusalem was freed from the pollutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, the people entered in with branches and fair boughs and palms and psalms (2Macc.10:7).

(v) The shout of the triumphant faithful ascribes salvation to God. It is God who has brought them through their trials and tribulations and distresses; and it is his glory which now they share. God is the great saviour, the great deliverer of his people. And the deliverance which he gives is not the deliverance of escape but the deliverance of conquest. It is not a deliverance which saves a man from trouble but one which brings him triumphantly through trouble. It does not make life easy, but it makes life great. It is not part of the Christian hope to look for a life in which a man is saved from all trouble and distress; the Christian hope is that a man in Christ can endure any kind of trouble and distress, and remain erect all through them, and come out to glory on the other side.

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Revelation 7:11-12

THE PRAISE OF THE ANGELS

Revelation 7:11-12

And all the angels stood in a circle round the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell upon their faces before the throne, and worshipped God, saying:

"So let it be. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and strength belong to our God for ever and for ever. Amen."

The picture is of a series of great concentric circles of the inhabitants of heaven. On the outer ring stand all the angels. Nearer the throne are the twenty-four elders; still nearer are the four living creatures; and before the throne are the white-robed martyrs. The martyrs have just sung their shout of praise to God and the angels take that song of praise and make it their own. "So let it be," say the angels; they say "Amen" to the martyrs' praises. Then they sing their own song of praise and every word in it is meaningful.

They ascribe blessing to God; and God's creation must always be blessing him for his goodness in creation and in redemption and in providence to all that he has created. As a great saint put it: "Thou hast made us and we are thine; thou hast redeemed us and we are doubly thine."

They ascribe glory to God. God is the King of kings and the Lord of lords; therefore, to him must be given glory. God is love but that love must never be cheaply sentimentalized; men must never forget the majesty of God.

They ascribe wisdom to God. God is the source of all truth, the giver of all knowledge. If men seek wisdom, they can find it by only two paths, by the seeking of their minds and by waiting upon God--and the one is as important as the other.

They offer thanksgiving to God. God is the giver of salvation and the constant provider of grace; he is the Creator of the world and the constant sustainer of all that is in it. It was the cry of the psalmist: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Ps.103:2). Shakespeare said that it was sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child. We must see to it that we are never guilty of the ugliest and the most graceless of sins, that of ingratitude.

They ascribed honour to God. God is to be worshipped. It may be that sometimes we come to think of him as some one to be used; but we ought not to forget the claims of worship, so that we not only ask things from him but offer ourselves and all we have to him.

They ascribe power to God. God's power never grows less and the wonder is that it is used in love for men. God works his purposes out throughout the ages and in the end his kingdom will come.

They ascribe strength to God. The problem of life is to find strength for its tasks, its responsibilities, its demands. The Christian can say: "I will go in the strength of the Lord."

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Revelation 7:11-12

There is no greater exercise in the life of devotion than to meditate on the praise of the angels and, to appropriate to ourselves everything in it.

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Revelation 7:13-14

WASHING FROM SIN

Revelation 7:13-14 (Part 1)

And one of the elders said to me: "Do you know who these are who are clothed in white robes and where they came from?" I said to him: "Sir, you know." He said to me: "These are they who are coming out of the great tribulation, and who have washed their robes, and have made them white through the power of the blood of the Lamb."

One thing is to be noted before we go on to deal with this passage in detail. The King James Version generalizes the meaning by translating: "These are they who came out of great tribulation." But the Revised Standard Version correctly translates: "These are they who came out of the great tribulation." The seer is convinced that he and his people are standing at the end time of history and that that end time is to be terrible beyond all imagining. The whole point of his vision is that beyond that terrible time glory will follow. It is not tribulation in general of which he is speaking but of that tribulation which Jesus foretold when he said, "In those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be" (Mk.13:19; Matt.24:21). Nowadays we read this passage as speaking about tribulation in general and in that sense find it very precious; and we are right to read it so because the promises of God are for ever.

At the same time it is right to remember that originally it referred to the immediate circumstances of the people to whom John was writing.

This passage has two pictures which are very common in the Bible. We first look at these pictures separately and then we put them together in order to find the total meaning of the passage.

The great crowd of the blessed ones are in white robes. The Bible has much to say both about white robes and about soiled robes. In the ancient world this was a very natural picture, for it was forbidden to approach a god with robes which were unclean. The picture was still further intensified by the fact that often when a Christian was baptized he was dressed in new white robes. These robes were taken to symbolize his new life and to soil them was the symbolic way of expressing failure to be true to the baptismal vows.

Isaiah says: "We have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isa.64:6). Zechariah sees the high priest Joshua clothed in filthy garments and hears God say: "Remove the filthy garments from him... Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with rich apparel" (Zech.3:1-5). In preparation for the receiving of the commandments from God, Moses orders the people wash their garments (Exo.19:10,14). The Psalmist prays to God to wash him thoroughly from his iniquity, to purge him with hyssop, to wash him until he is whiter than snow (Ps.51:1-7). The prophet hears the promise that the sins which are as scarlet will be as white as snow and those that were red like crimson will be as wool (Isa.1:18). Paul reminds his people in Corinth that they have been washed and sanctified (1Cor.6:11).

Here is a picture which is present all through scripture, of the man who has stained his garments with sin and who has been cleansed by the grace of God. It is of the greatest importance to

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Revelation 7:13-14

remember that this love of God does not only forgive a man his stained garments, it makes them clean.

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Revelation 7:13-14

THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation 7:13-14 (Part 2)

This passage speaks of the blood of the Lamb. The New Testament has much to say about the blood of Jesus Christ. We must be careful to give this phrase its full meaning. To us blood indicates death, and certainly the blood of Jesus Christ speaks of his death. But to the Hebrews the blood stood for the life. That was why the orthodox Jew never would--and still will not--eat anything which had blood in it (Gen.9:4). The blood is the life and the life belongs to God; and the blood must always be sacrificed to him. The identification of blood and life is not unnatural. When a man's blood ebbs away, so does his life. When the New Testament speaks about the blood of Jesus Christ, it means not only his death but his life and death. The blood of Christ stands for all Christ did for us and means for us in his life and in his death. With that in our minds let us see what the New Testament says about that blood.

It is the blood of Jesus Christ which is cleansing us from all sin (1Jn.1:7). It is the blood of Jesus Christ which makes expiation for us (Rom.3:25), and it is through his blood that we are justified (Rom.5:9). It is through his blood that we have redemption (Eph.1:7), and we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1Pet.1:19). It is through his blood that we have peace with God (Col.1:20). His blood purges our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb.9:14).

There are four ideas here, the first being the main idea from which the others spring.

(i) The main idea is based on sacrifice. Sacrifice is essentially something designed to restore a lost relationship with God. God gives man his law; man breaks that law; that breach of the law interrupts the relationship between God and man; and sacrifice is designed to atone for the breach and to restore the lost relationship. The great work of Jesus Christ in his life and in his death is to restore the lost relationship between God and man.

(ii) This work of Christ has something to do with the past. It wins for man forgiveness for past sins and liberates him from his slavery to sin.

(iii) This work of Christ has something to do with the present. It gives a man here and now, upon earth, in spite of failure and of sin, a new and intimate relationship with God, in which fear is gone and in which love is the bond.

(iv) This work of Christ has something to do with the future. It frees a man from the power of evil and enables him to live a new life in the time to come.

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Revelation 7:13-14

THE SAINTS WHO HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

Revelation 7:13-14 (Part 3)

Let us now unite the two ideas of which we have been thinking. The blessed ones have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Let us try to express as simply as possible what that means.

The white robes always stand for two things. They stand for purity, for the life cleansed from the taint of past sin, the infection of present sin and the attack of future sin. They stand for victory, for the life which has found the secret of victorious living. Put at its very simplest, this means that the blessed ones have found the secret of purity and the secret of victory in all that Jesus Christ did for them in his life and in his death.

Now let us try to see the meaning of in the blood of the Lamb. There are two possibilities.

(i) It may mean in the power of the blood of the Lamb or at the cost of the blood of the Lamb. This would then be a vivid way of saying that this purity and victory were won in the power and at the cost of all that Jesus did for men in his life and in his death.

(ii) But it may be even more probable that the picture is to be taken literally; and that John conceives of the blessed ones as having washed their robes in the blood which flows from the wounds of Jesus Christ. To us that is a strange and perhaps even repulsive picture; and it is paradoxical to think of robes becoming white when washed in the scarlet of blood. But it would not seem strange to the people of John's day; to many of them it would be literally familiar. The greatest religious force of the time was the Mystery Religions. These were dramatic religions which by deeply moving ceremonies offered to men a rebirth and a promise of eternal life. Perhaps the most famous was Mithraism, at whose centre was the god Mithra. Mithraism had its devotees all over the world; it was the favourite religion of the Roman army and even in Britain there are relics of the chapels of Mithra where the Roman soldiers met for worship. The most sacred ceremony of Mithraism was the taurobolium, the bath of bull's blood.

It is described by the Christian poet Prudentius. "A trench was dug, over which was erected a platform of planks, which were perforated with holes. Upon this platform a sacrificial bull was slaughtered. Below the platform knelt the worshipper who was to be initiated. The blood of the slaughtered bull dripped through on to the worshipper below. He exposed his head and all his garments to be saturated with blood; and then he turned round and held up his neck that the blood might trickle upon his lips, ears, eyes and nostrils; he moistened his tongue with the blood which he then drank as a sacramental act. He came out from this certain that he was renatus in aeternum, reborn for all eternity."

This may sound grim and terrible to us; but in the last analysis it is not the picture which matters but the truth behind the picture. And the great and unchanging truth is that through the life and death of Jesus Christ, there has come to the Christian that purity and victory which he could never achieve for himself.

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Revelation 7:13-14

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE AND MAN'S APPROPRIATION

Revelation 7:13-14 (Part 4)

One thing in this passage remains to be noted, and it is of the first importance. It is said of the blessed ones that "they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Here is symbolically laid down man's part in his own salvation; the blessed ones washed their own robes. That is to say, the act of man's redemption is Christ's, but the effect is not passive and man has to appropriate it. There might be available to a man all the apparatus to cleanse his garments, but it remains ineffective until he uses it for himself.

How does a man avail himself of the sacrifice of Christ?

He does so through penitence. He must begin with sorrow for his sin and the desire for amendment. He does so through faith. He must believe with all his heart that Christ lived and died for us men and for our salvation, and that his sacrifice is mighty to save. He does so through using the means of grace. The Scriptures will awaken his penitence and his faith and kindle his heart; prayer will keep him ever close to Christ and daily increase his intimacy with him; the Sacraments will be channels through which by faith renewing grace will flow to him. He does so through daily loyalty and vigilance and living with Christ.

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Revelation 7:15

THE SERVICE IN THE GLORY

Revelation 7:15

That is why they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will spread the covering of his glory over them.

Those who have been faithful will have the entry into the very presence of God. Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt.5:8).

There is a very significant fact hidden here. Serving God day and night was part of the task of the Levites and the priests (1Chr.9:33). Now those who are before the throne of God in this vision are, as we have already seen in Rev.7:9, drawn from every race and tribe and people and tongue. Here is a revolution. In the earthly Temple in Jerusalem no Gentile could go beyond the Court of the Gentiles on pain of death. An Israelite could pass through the Court of the Women and enter into the Court of the Israelites, but no further. Beyond that was the Court of the Priests, which was for priests alone. But in the heavenly temple the way to the presence of God is open to people of every race. Here is a picture of heaven with the barriers down. Distinctions of race and of status exist no more; the way into the presence of God is open to every faithful soul.

There is one other half-hidden fact here. In Rev.7:15 the King James Version has it that he who sits upon the throne shall dwell among them. That is a perfectly correct translation, but there is more in it than meets the eye. The Greek for to dwell is *skenoun* (GSN4637), from *skene* (GSN4633) which means a tent. It is the same word as is used when John says that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn.1:14). The Jews always connected this with a certain Hebrew word which was somewhat similar in sound although quite unrelated in meaning. This was the word *shechinah* (compare HSN7931), the visible presence of the glory of God. Usually that presence took the form of a luminous cloud. So when the Ten Commandments were given, "the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days.... And the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain" (Exo.24:16-18). It was the same with the Tabernacle.

The cloud covered the tent of the congregation and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter into the Tabernacle because of the glory of the Lord. This was the cloud which guided the Israelites by day and the fire that guided them by night (Exo.40:34-38). At the dedication of Solomon's temple the glory of the Lord filled it so that the priests could not enter (2Chr.7:1-3).

Skenoun (GSN4637) always turned the thoughts of a Jew to *shechinah* (compare the Hebrew verb, *shakan*, HSN7931, to dwell): and to say that God dwelt in any place was to say that his glory was there.

This was always so for a Jew, but as time went on it became more and more so. The Jews came to think of God as increasingly remote from the world. They did not even think it right to speak of him as being in the world; that was to speak in terms which were too human; and so they took to substituting the *shechinah* (compare HSN7931), for the name of God. We read Jacob's words at

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Revelation 7:15

Bethel: "Surely the Lord is in this place" (Gen.28:16); the Rabbis changed that to: "The shechinah (compare HSN7931) is in this place." In Habbakuk we read: "The Lord is in his holy temple" (Hab.2:20); but the later Jews said: "God was pleased to cause his shechinah (compare HSN7931) to dwell in the temple." In Isaiah we read: "My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa.6:5); the later Jews altered it to: "Mine eyes have seen the shechinah (compare HSN7931), of the King of the world."

No Jew would hear the word *skenoun* (GSN4637) without thinking of shechinah; and the real meaning of the passage is that God's blessed ones would serve and live in the very sheen of his glory.

It can be so on earth. He who faithfully works and witnesses for God has always the glory of God upon his work.

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Revelation 7:16-17

THE BLISS OF THE BLESSED

Revelation 7:16-17 (Part 1)

They will not hunger any more, nor will they thirst any more; the sun will not fall on them, nor any heat; because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and will lead them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

It would be impossible to number the people who have found comfort in this passage in the house of mourning and in the hour of death.

There is spiritual promise here, the promise of the ultimate satisfying of the hunger and the thirst of the human soul. This is a promise which occurs again and again in the New Testament, and especially in the words of Jesus. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt.5:6). Jesus said: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger; and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn.6:35). "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn.4:14). Jesus said: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink" (Jn.7:37). God has made us for himself, as Augustine said, and our hearts are restless till they rest in him. As the hymn has it:

O Christ, in thee my soul has found,
And found in thee alone,
The peace, the joy, I sought so long,
The bliss till now unknown.

Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me!
There's love, and life, and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in thee.

But it may well be that we should not entirely spiritualize this passage. In the early days many of the Church's members were slaves. They knew what it was to be hungry all the time; they knew what thirst was; they knew what it was for the pitiless sun to blaze down upon their backs as they toiled, forbidden to rest. Truly for them heaven would be a place where hunger was satisfied and thirst was quenched and the heat of the sun no longer tortured them. The promise of this passage is that in Christ is the end of the world's hunger, the world's pain, and the world's sorrow.

We do well to remember that John found the origin of this passage in the words of Isaiah: "They shall not hunger or thirst; neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them; for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will lead them" (Isa.49:10). This is a supreme example of an Old Testament dream finding its perfect fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

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Revelation 7:16-17

THE DIVINE SHEPHERD

Revelation 7:16-17 (Part 2)

Here is the promise of the loving care of the Divine Shepherd for his flock.

The picture of the shepherd is something in which both the Old and New Testament delight.

"The Lord is my shepherd," begins the best loved of all the psalms (Ps.23:1). "O Shepherd of Israel," begins another (Ps.80:1). Isaiah pictures God feeding his flock like a shepherd, holding the lambs in his arms and carrying them in his bosom (Isa.40:11). The greatest title that the prophet can give to the Messianic king is shepherd of his people (Eze.34:23; Eze.37:24).

This was the title that Jesus took for himself. "I am the good shepherd," (Jn.10:11,14). Peter calls Jesus the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1Pet.2:25), and the writer to the Hebrews speaks of him as that great shepherd of the sheep (Heb.13:20).

This is a precious picture in any age; but it was more meaningful in Palestine than it can ever be to those who live in cities. Judaea was like a narrow plateau with dangerous country on either side. It was only a very few miles across, with on one side the grim cliffs and ravines leading down to the Dead Sea and on the other the drop to the wild country of the Shephelah. There were no fences or walls and the shepherd had to be ever on the watch for straying sheep. George Adam Smith describes the eastern shepherd. "With us sheep are often left to themselves; I do not remember to have seen in the East a flock without a shepherd. In such a landscape as Judaea, where a day's pasture is thinly scattered over an unfenced track, covered with delusive paths, still frequented by wild beasts, and rolling into the desert, the man and his character are indispensable. On some high moor, across which at night hyenas howl, when you met him sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning on his staff, and looking out over his scattered sheep, every one on his heart, you understand why the shepherd of Judaea sprang to the front in his people's history; why they gave his name to their king, and made him the symbol of Providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice."

Here we have the two great functions of the Divine Shepherd. He leads to fountains of living waters. As the psalmist had it: "He leads me beside still waters" (Ps.23:2). "With thee is the fountain of life" (Ps.36:9). Without water the flock would perish; and in Palestine the wells were few and far between. That the Divine Shepherd leads to wells of water is the symbol that he gives us the things without which life cannot survive.

He wipes the tear from every eye. As he nourishes our bodies so he also comforts our hearts; without the presence and the comfort of God the sorrows of life would be unbearable, and without the strength of God there are times in life when we could never go on.

The Divine Shepherd gives us nourishment for our bodies and comfort for our hearts. With Jesus Christ as Shepherd nothing can happen to us which we cannot bear.

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Revelation 8:1-5

THE SILENCE AND THE THUNDER OF PRAYER

Revelation 8:1-5

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense that he might add it to the prayers of the saints on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense went up with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God. And the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it on the ground. And there were crashes of thunder and loud voices and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Before we begin to examine this passage in detail, we may note one point about its arrangement. Rev.8:2, which tells of the seven angels with the seven trumpets, is clearly out of place. As it stands, it interrupts the sense of the passage and it should come immediately before Rev.8:7--probably a copyist's mistake.

The passage begins with an intensely dramatic silence in heaven for about half an hour. The sheer stillness is even more effective than the thunder and the lightning. This silence may have two meanings.

(i) It may be a kind of breathing-space in the narrative, a moment of preparation before another shattering revelation comes.

(ii) There may be something much more beautiful in it. The prayers of the saints are about to go up to God; and it may be that the idea is that everything in heaven halts so that the prayers of the saints may be heard. As R. H. Charles puts it: "The needs of the saints are more to God than all the psalmody of heaven." Even the music of heaven and even the thunder of revelation are stilled so that God's ear may catch the whispered prayer of the humblest of his trusting people.

The picture divides itself into two. In the first half an unnamed angel offers the prayers of the saints to God. In Jewish thought the archangel Michael made prayer for the people of Israel and there was a nameless angel called The Angel of Peace whose duty was to see that Israel "did not fall into the extremity of Israel" and who interceded for Israel and for all the righteous.

The angel is standing at the altar. The altar in the Revelation frequently appears in the picture of heaven (Rev.6:9; Rev.9:13; Rev.14:18). It cannot be the altar of burnt-offering, for there can be no animal sacrifice in heaven; it must be the altar of incense. The altar of incense stood before the Holy Place in the Temple (Lev.16:12; Num.16:46). Made of gold, it was eighteen inches square and three feet high. At each corner it had horns; it was hollow and was covered over with a gold plate, and round it was a little railing, like a miniature balustrade, to keep the burning coals from falling off it. In the Temple incense was burned and offered before the first and after the last sacrifices of the day. It was as if the offerings of the people went up to God wrapped in an envelope of perfumed incense.

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Revelation 8:1-5

Here we have the idea that prayer is a sacrifice to God; the prayers of the saints are offered on the altar and, like all other sacrifices, they are surrounded with the perfume of the incense as they rise to God. A man may have no other sacrifice to offer to God; but at all times he can offer his prayers and there are always angelic hands waiting to bring them to God.

There is another half of this picture. The same angel takes the censer, fills it with coals from the altar and dashes it on the ground; and this is the prelude to the thunder and the earthquake which are the introduction to more terrors. The picture comes from the vision of Ezekiel, in which the man in the linen-cloth takes coals from between the cherubim and scatters them over the city (Eze.10:2); and it is kin to the vision of Isaiah in which his lips are touched with a live coal from the altar (Isa.6:6).

But this picture introduces something new. The coals from the censer introduce new woes. H. B. Swete puts it this way: "The prayers of the saints return to the earth in wrath." The idea in John's mind is that the prayers of the saints avail to bring vengeance upon those who had maltreated them.

We may feel that a prayer for vengeance is a strange prayer for a Christian, but we must remember the agony of persecution through which the Church was passing when the Revelation was written.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 8:2, 6

THE SEVEN ANGELS WITH THE TRUMPETS

Revelation 8:2,6

And I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God, and seven trumpets were given to them; and the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared to sound the trumpets.

These seven angels, known as the angels of the presence, were the same as the archangels. Their names were Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel and Remiel (Tob.12:1,5).

That they were called the angels of the presence means two things. First, they enjoyed a special honour. In an oriental court it was only the most favoured courtiers who had the right at all times to the presence of the king; to be a courtier of the presence was a special honour. Second, although to be in the presence of the king meant special honour, even more it meant immediate readiness to be despatched on service. Both Elijah and Elisha repeatedly spoke of "the Lord God of Israel before whom I stand" (1Kgs.17:1; 1Kgs.18:15; 2Kgs.3:14; 2Kgs.5:16); and the phrase really means, "The Lord God of Israel whose servant I am."

The seven angels had seven trumpets. In the visions of the Old and the New Testament the trumpet is always the symbol of the intervention of God in history. All these pictures, and there are many of them, go back to the scene at Mount Sinai, when the law was given to the people. There were on the mountain thunders and lightnings and thick cloud, and a very loud trumpet blast (Exo.19:16,19). This trumpet blast became an unchanging part of the apparatus of the Day of the Lord. In that day the great trumpet will be blown and it will summon back the exiles from every land (Isa.27:13). On the Day of the Lord the trumpet will be blown in Zion and the alarm sounded in the holy mountain (Jl.2:1). That day will be a day of trumpet and alarm (Zeph.1:16). The Lord will blow the trumpet and go out with the whirlwind (Zech.9:14).

This picture passed into the New Testament visions of the last day. Paul speaks of the day when the trumpet shall sound and the corruptible will put on incorruption (1Cor.15:52-53). He speaks of the trumpet of God, which is to sound when Christ comes again (1Th.4:16). Matthew speaks of the great sound of a trumpet when the elect are gathered in (Matt.24:31).

It would be wrong to expect God literally to blow the trumpet; but none the less the picture has symbolic truth in it. A trumpet blast can be three things:

(i) It can sound the alarm. It can waken from sleep or warn of danger; and God is always sounding his warnings in the ears of men.

(ii) It can be the fanfare which announces the arrival of royalty. It is a fitting symbol to express the invasion of time by the King of eternity.

(iii) It can be the summons to battle. God is always summoning men to take sides in the strife of truth with falsehood and to become soldiers of the King of kings.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 8:7-12

THE UNLEASHING OF THE ELEMENTS

Revelation 8:7-12

The first angel sounded a blast on his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood and launched themselves on the dry land; and a third part of the dry land was burned up, and a third part of the trees was burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

The second angel sounded a blast on his trumpet, and what I can only call a great mountain burning with fire was hurled into the sea; and a third part of the sea became blood, and a third part of the creatures in the sea who had life died, and a third part of the ships were destroyed in wreckage.

The third angel sounded a blast on his trumpet, and a great meteor blazing like a torch fell from heaven; and it fell on a third part of the rivers, and on the springs of water. And the name by which the meteor is called is Wormwood; and a third part of the waters became wormwood; and many of mankind died because of the embitterment of the waters.

The fourth angel sounded a blast on his trumpet, and a third part of the sun was smitten, and a third part of the moon, and a third part of the stars, so that a third part of their light was darkened, and so that a third part of the day did not shine, and so with the night.

Here we have a picture of the elemental forces of nature hurled in judgment against the world. At each blast on the trumpet a different part of the world is attacked; the destruction that follows is not total for this is only the prelude to the end. First, the blast of destruction falls on the earth (Rev.8:7); then it falls upon the sea (Rev.8:8-9); then it falls upon the fresh water rivers and springs (Rev.8:10-11); then it falls on the heavenly bodies (Rev.8:12). The tide of destruction is unleashed on every part of the created universe.

We have further to note where John found his imagery. For the most part the pictures find their origin in the descriptions in Exodus of the plagues which fell on Egypt when Pharaoh refused to allow the people to go.

In John's picture hail and fire and blood fall upon the dry land. In Exo.9:24 we read how there came upon Egypt fire mixed with a hail of unparalleled destructiveness. John to increase the terror adds blood, remembering Joel's picture of the day when the sun would be turned into darkness and the moon into blood (Jl.2:10). In John's picture a third part of the sea becomes blood and the fishes in it die. In Exodus, when Moses lifted up his rod and smote the waters, the waters of the Nile turned to blood and the fishes in the river died (Exo.7:20-21). In Zephaniah's picture of the Day of the Lord the threat of God is: "I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea" (Zeph.1:3). There is no parallel for the picture of the fall of the flaming star, but there are many to the ideas of waters turning to wormwood.

Wormwood is a general name for the class of plants known as artemisia whose characteristic is bitterness of taste. They are not really poisonous in the sense of being fatal, although they are

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Revelation 8:7-12

noxious, but the Israelites dreaded their bitterness. Wormwood was the fruit of idolatry (Deut.29:17-18). It was the threat of God through Jeremiah that God would give his people wormwood to eat and the waters of gall to drink (Jer.9:14-15; Jer.23:15). Wormwood always stood for the bitterness of the judgment of God on the disobedient.

In John's picture there came a darkening of a third part of the lights of heaven. In Exodus one of the plagues was a darkness that could be felt over the whole land (Exo.10:21-23).

As we have so often seen, John is so steeped in the Old Testament that its visions come to him as the natural background of all that he has to say.

In this case it is by no means impossible that John is taking at least a part of his picture from actual events which he had seen or of which he had heard. A rain which looks like a rain of blood has more than once been reported from the Mediterranean countries. There is, for instance, a record of such a rain in Italy and all over south-east Europe in 1901. The reason for it is that fine red sand from the Sahara Desert is caught up into the upper air; and then when the rain comes it seems to be raining blood, as the rain and the fine red particles of sand fall together upon the earth. It may well be that John had seen something like this or had heard of it.

Further, he speaks of a flaming mass falling into the sea. This sounds very like a volcanic eruption. There was an eruption of Mount Vesuvius in August Of A.D. 79 which decimated Naples and its bay. That would be within a very few years of the writing of the Revelation. The Aegean Sea has volcanic islands and volcanoes beneath the sea. Strabo, the Greek geographer, reports an eruption in the Aegean Sea, in which Patmos lay, in the year 196 B.c., which actually resulted in the formation of a new island called Pataia Kaumene. Such events also may have been in John's mind.

In this picture of terror John has the vision of God using the elemental forces of nature to warn man of the final destruction to come.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 8:13

THE FLYING EAGLE

Revelation 8:13

And I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven crying with a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe! for those who dwell on the earth, because of what is going to happen when the rest of the trumpets speak, which the three angels are about to sound."

Here we have one of the pauses in the story which the Revelation uses so effectively. Three fearful woes are to come upon the earth when the three angels sound the last blasts on the trumpets; but for the moment there is a pause.

In this pause the seer sees an eagle--not an angel as the King James Version has it. It is quite possible that the Greek could mean "one solitary eagle." The expression "mid-heaven" means the zenith of the sky, that part where the sun is at midday. Here we have a dramatic and eerie picture of an empty sky and a solitary eagle winging its way across its zenith, forewarning of the doom to come.

Again John is using an idea which is not new. We have the same picture in Second Baruch. When the writer of that book has seen his vision and wishes to send it to the Jews exiled in Babylon by the waters of the Euphrates, he goes on: "And I called the eagle and spake these words unto it: 'The Most High hath made thee that thou shouldest be higher than all birds. Now go, and tarry not in any place, nor enter a nest, nor settle on any tree, till thou hast passed over the breadth of the many waters of the river Euphrates, and hast gone to the people that dwell there, and cast down to them this epistle'" (2 Baruch 77: 21-22).

The picture is not to be taken literally but the symbolism behind it is that God uses nature to send his messages to men.

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Revelation 9:1-2

THE UNLOCKING OF THE ABYSS

Revelation 9:1-2

The fifth angel sounded a blast on his trumpet, and I saw a star falling from heaven on the earth, and to him there was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless abyss; and he opened the shaft of the abyss; and smoke went up from the shaft like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke from the abyss.

The picture of terror mounts in its awful intensity. Now the terrors coming upon the earth are beyond nature; they are demonic; the abyss is being opened and superhuman terrors are being despatched upon the world.

The picture will become clearer if we remember that John thinks of the stars as living beings. This is common in Enoch where, for instance, we read of wandering and disobedient stars being bound hand and foot and cast into the abyss (Enoch 86: 1; 88: 1). To the Jewish mind the stars were divine beings, who by disobedience could become demonic and evil.

In the Revelation we read fairly often of the abyss or the bottomless pit. The abyss is the intermediate place of punishment of the fallen angels, the demons, the beast, the false prophet and of Satan (Rev.9:1-2,11; Rev.11:7; Rev.20:1,3). Their final place of punishment is the lake of burning fire and brimstone (Rev.20:10,14,15). To complete the picture of these terrors we may add that Gehenna--which is not mentioned in the Revelation--is the place of punishment for evil men.

This idea of the abyss underwent a development. In the beginning it was the place of the imprisoned waters. In the creation story the primaeval waters surround the earth and God separates them by creating the firmament (Gen.1:6-7). In its first idea the abyss was the place where the flood of the waters was confined by God beneath the earth, a kind of great subterranean sea, where the waters were imprisoned to make way for the dry land. The second step was that the abyss became the abode of the enemies of God, although even there they were not beyond his power and control (Am.9:3; Isa.51:9; Ps.74:13).

Next the abyss came to be thought of as a great chasm in the earth. We see this idea in Isa.24:21-22, where the disobedient hosts of heaven and the kings of the earth are gathered together as prisoners in the pit.

This is the kind of picture in which inevitably horror mounts upon horror. The most detailed descriptions of the abyss are in Enoch, which was so influential between the Testaments. There it is the prison abode of the angels who fell, the angels who came to earth and seduced mortal women, the angels who taught men to worship demons instead of the true God (Gen.6:1-4). There are grim descriptions of it. It has no firmament above and no firm earth beneath; it has no water; it has no birds; it is a waste and horrible place, the end of heaven and earth (Enoch 18: 12-16). It is chaotic. There is a fire which blazes and a cleft into the abyss whose magnitude passes all conjecture (Enoch 21: 1-10).

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Revelation 9:1-2

These things are not to be taken literally. The point is that in this terrible time of devastation which the seer sees coming upon the earth, the terrors are not natural but demonic; the powers of evil are being given their last chance to work their dreadful work.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 9:3-12

THE LOCUSTS FROM THE ABYSS

Revelation 9:3-12 (Part 1)

From the smoke locusts came forth upon the earth, and they were given power like the power of the scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only such men as had not the seal of God upon their forehead. They were not permitted to kill them, but to torture them for five months. Their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it strikes a man; and in those days men will seek for death and not be able to find it; and they will long to die but death flees from them.

In likeness the locusts were like horses prepared for battle; on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold. Their faces were like human faces and they had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. They had scales like iron breastplates, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of many chariots with horses running to battle. They have tails like scorpions with stings, and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. As king over them they have the angel of the bottomless abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek Appolyon. The first woe has passed. Behold, there are still two woes to follow it.

From the smoke which emerged from the shaft of the abyss came a terrible invasion of locusts. The devastation locusts can inflict and the terror they can cause is well-nigh incredible. All through the Old Testament the locust is the symbol of destruction; and the most vivid and terrible description of them and of their destructiveness is in Jl.1-2 which are a description of an invasion of locusts; and it is from these two chapters that John takes much of his material. They laid the vine waste and stripped the bark from the trees; the field is wasted and the corn is destroyed; every tree of the field is wasted and withered; and the flocks and herds starve because there is no pasture (Jl.1:7-18).

They are like a great strong people who darken the very sky; they are as destructive as a flame of fire and nothing escapes them; they are like horses and they run like chariots, with a noise like flame devouring the stubble; they march in their ranks like mighty men of war; they scale the mountains, climb into houses and enter in at the windows, until the very earth shudders at them (Jl.2:1-11). The two chapters of Joel should be read in full and set beside the description in the Revelation.

G. R. Driver in his commentary on Joel in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges has collected the facts about locusts in his notes and in a special appendix; and he has shown that the words of Joel and of the Revelation are no exaggeration.

The locusts breed in desert places and invade the cultivated lands for food. They may be about two inches in length, with a wing span of four to five inches. They belong to the same family as the household cricket and the grasshopper. They will travel in a column a hundred feet deep and as much as four miles long. When such a cloud of locusts appears, it is as if there had been an eclipse of the sun and even great buildings less than two hundred feet away cannot be seen.

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Revelation 9:3-12

The destruction they cause is beyond belief. When they have left an area, not a blade of grass is to be seen; the trees are stripped of their bark. Land where the locusts have settled looks as if it had been scorched with a bush fire; not one single living thing is left. Their destructiveness can best be appreciated from the fact that it is recorded that in 1866 a plague of locusts invaded Algiers and so total was the destruction which they caused that 200,000 people perished of famine in the days which followed.

The noise of the millions of their wings is variously described as like the dashing of waters in a mill-wheel or the sound of a great cataract. When the millions of them settle on the ground the sound of their eating has been described as like the crackling of a prairie fire. The sound of them on the march is like heavy rain falling on a distant forest.

It has always been noticed that the head of the locust is like the miniature head of a horse. For that reason the Italian word for locust is cavaletta and the German Heupferd.

When they move, they move inexorably on like an army with leaders. People have dug trenches, lit fires, and even fired cannon in an attempt to stop them but without success; they come on in a steady column which climbs hills, enters houses and leaves scorched earth behind.

There is no more destructive visitation in the world than a visitation of locusts, and this is the terrible devastation which John sees, although the demonic locusts from the pit are different from any earthly insect.

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Revelation 9:3-12

THE DEMONIC LOCUSTS

Revelation 9:3-12 (Part 2)

Hebrew has a number of different names for the locust which reveal its destructive power. It is called gazam (HSN1501), the lopper or the shearer, which describes how it shears all living vegetation from the earth; it is called 'arbeh (HSN0697), the swarmer, which describes the immensity of its numbers; it is called hasil, the finisher, which describes the devastation it causes; it is called caal'am (HSN5556), the swallower or the annihilator; it is called hargol (compare HSN7270), the galloper, which describes its rapid progress over the land; it is called tslatsal (HSN6767), the creaker, which describes the sound it makes.

It is not the vegetation of the earth which they are to attack; in fact they are forbidden to do that (Rev.9:4); their attack is to be launched against the men who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads.

The ordinary locust is devastating to vegetation but not harmful to human beings; but the demonic locust is to have the sting of a scorpion, one of the scourges of Palestine. In shape the scorpion is like a small lobster, with lobster-like claws to clutch its prey. It has a long tail, which curves up over its back and over its head; at the end of the tail there is a curved claw; with this claw the scorpion strikes and it secretes poison as the blow is delivered. The scorpion can be up to six inches in length; it swarms in crannies in walls and literally under almost every stone. Campers tell us that every stone must be lifted when a tent is pitched lest a scorpion be beneath it. Its sting is worse than the sting of a hornet; it is not necessarily fatal, but it can kill. The demonic locusts have the power of scorpions added to them.

Their attack is to last for five months. The explanation of the five months is almost probably that the life-span of a locust from birth, through the larva stage, to death is five months. It is as if we might say that one generation of locusts is being launched upon the earth.

Such will be the suffering caused by the locusts that men will long for death but will not be able to die. Job speaks of the supreme misery of those who long for death and it comes not (Jb.3:21); and Jeremiah speaks of the day when men will choose death rather than life (Jer.8:3). A Latin writer, Cornelius Gallus, says: "Worse than any wound is to wish to die and yet not be able to do so."

The king of the locusts is called in Hebrew Abaddon (HSN0011; GSN0003) and in Greek Apollyon (GSN0623). Abaddon (HSN0011) is the Hebrew for destruction; it occurs oftenest in the phrases "death and destruction," and "hell and destruction" (Jb.26:6; Jb.28:22; Jb.31:12; Ps.88:11; Prov.15:11; Prov.27:20). Apollyon (GSN0623) is the present participle of the Greek verb to destroy and itself means The Destroyer. It is fitting that the king of the demonic locusts should be called Destruction and The Destroyer.

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Revelation 9:13-21

THE HORSEMEN OF VENGEANCE

Revelation 9:13-21

The sixth angel sounded a blast on his trumpet and I heard a voice from the four horns of the altar saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet: "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." So there came the four angels who were prepared for that hour and day and month and year, to kill a third part of the human race. The number of the armed forces of cavalry was twenty thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number, and this was how I saw in appearance the horses and those who were seated on them. They had breastplates of fiery red, and smoky blue, and sulphurous yellow. The heads of the horses were like the heads of lions, and from their mouths there issued fire and smoke and brimstone. With these three plagues they killed a third part of the human race, with the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which were issuing from their mouths.

For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like snakes with heads, and with them they inflict their hurt.

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, even in spite of this did not repent of the deeds of their hands, so as to cease to worship demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which can neither hear nor see nor move; nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts.

The horror of the picture mounts. The demonic locusts were allowed to injure but not kill; but now come the squadrons of demonic cavalry to annihilate a third part of the human race.

This is a passage whose imagery is mysterious and whose details no one has ever been able fully to explain.

No one really knows who were the four angels bound at the river Euphrates. We can only set down what we know and what we can guess. The Euphrates was the ideal boundary of the territory of Israel. It was God's promise to Abraham: "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen.15:18). The angels, therefore, came from the distant lands, from the alien and hostile places from which the Assyrians and the Babylonians had in time past descended with destruction upon Israel.

Further, in the Book of Enoch we frequently meet angels who are described as the Angels of Punishment. Their task was at the right time to unleash the avenging wrath of God upon the people. Undoubtedly these four angels were included among the Angels of Punishment.

We have to add another fact to all this. We have frequently seen how the pictures of John are coloured by actual historical circumstances. The most dreaded warriors in the world were the Parthian cavalry; and the Parthians dwelt beyond the Euphrates. It may well be that John was visualizing a terrible descent of the Parthian cavalry on mankind.

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Revelation 9:13-21

The seer adds horror to horror. The number of the hosts of this terrible cavalry is 200,000,000, which simply means that they were beyond all numbering, like the chariots of God (Ps.68:17). They seem to be armoured in flame, for their breastplates are fiery red like the glow of a blazing furnace, smoky blue like the smoke rising from a fire and sulphurous yellow like the brimstone from the pit of hell. The horses have heads like lions and tails like serpents; they breathe out destructive fire and smoke and brimstone, and their serpent-tails deal out hurt and harm. The consequence of all this is that one-third of the human race is destroyed.

It would have been only natural to think that the remainder of mankind would take warning from this dreadful fate; but they did not and continued to worship their idols and demons and in the evil of their ways. It is the conviction of the biblical writers that the worship of idols was nothing less than devil worship and that it was bound to issue in evil and immorality.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 10:1-4

THE UNUTTERABLE REVELATION

Revelation 10:1-4

I saw another angel, a mighty one, coming down out of heaven, clad in a cloud, and with a rainbow on his head. His face was as the sun and his feet were like pillars of fire. He had in his hand a little roll which was opened. He put his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he cried with a loud voice as a lion roars, and, when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices. When the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write and I heard a voice from heaven saying: "Set a seal on what the seven thunders said, and do not write it."

Rev.10 and Rev.11:1-14 is a kind of interlude between the sounding of the sixth and the seventh trumpets. The sixth trumpet has already sounded, but the seventh does not sound until Rev.11:15, and in between there are terrible things.

The mighty angel in this passage is described in terms which show that he came straight from the presence of God and the Risen Christ. He is clad in a cloud and the clouds are the chariots of God, for "God maketh the clouds his chariot" (Ps.104:3). He has a rainbow on his head and the rainbow is part of the glory of the throne of God (Eze.1:28). The rainbow is caused by the light of the angel's face shining through the cloud. His face is as the sun which is the description of the face of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt.17:2). His voice was as the roar of a lion which is often used as a simile of the voice of God, "the Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem" (Jl.3:16; Hos.11:10; Am.3:8). Clearly this angel has come from the very presence of God; some think that he is none other than the glorified Christ himself.

The angel has one foot on the sea and one on the land. This shows his size and power, for sea and land stand for the sum total of the universe. It also shows that the power of God stands as firm on the sea as it does on the land. In his hand the angel has a little roll, unrolled and opened. That is to say, he is giving John a limited revelation about a quite small period of time. When the angel speaks, the seven thunders sound. They are most likely a reference to the seven voices of God in Ps.29.

Naturally, when the seer sees the open roll and hears the angel's voice, he prepares to make a record of it; but he is ordered not to do so. That is to say, he is being given a revelation which at the moment he is not to pass on. We get exactly the same idea when Paul tells us that he was caught up to the third heaven and "heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2Cor.12:4). We need not even begin to speculate about what the secret revelation was. We simply know that John had experiences which he could not communicate to others. God sometimes tells a man more than that man can say or than his generation can understand.

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Revelation 10:5-7

THE DIVINE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE END

Revelation 10:5-7

The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there was no time left; but that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he would sound his trumpet, there would be completed the secret purpose of God, the good news of which he announced to his servants the prophets.

The angel now makes an announcement and affirms it with an oath. Sometimes the announcement has been taken to mean that "Time shall be no more". That is to say, time as we know it is about to be ended and eternity to begin. It is more likely that the meaning is that there is no time left, that there is to be no further delay, that Antichrist is about to burst upon the scene in all his destructive terror. As the writer to the Hebrews had it: "Yet a little while and the coming one will come, and shall not tarry" (Heb.10:37). The hour has struck when the man of sin shall be revealed (2Th.2:3). Whichever be the meaning of the phrase, certainly the message is that Antichrist is about to invade the earth; the scene is being set for the final contest.

When this happens, as the Revised Standard Version has it, the mystery of God would be fulfilled. The meaning is that the whole purpose of God in human history will stand revealed. Much in life is difficult to understand; wickedness seems to hold sway. But, as John saw it, there is going to be a final show-down. God and Antichrist, good and evil, will face each other; final and total victory will be won, the questions will find their answers and the wrongs will be righted.

Beyond all the strangeness of the picture stands the truth that history is moving towards the inevitable triumph of God and that, though evil may flourish, it cannot in the end be triumphant.

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Revelation 10:8-11

THE JOY AND THE SORROW OF THE MESSENGER OF GOD

Revelation 10:8-11

And I heard the voice which I had heard from heaven speaking again to me and saying: "Go, take the little roll which lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." And I went away to the angel and asked him to give me the little roll. He said to me: "Take it and eat it. It will be bitter to your stomach but it will be as sweet as honey to your mouth." And I took the little roll from the hand of the angel and ate it; and it was as sweet as honey to my mouth and, when I ate it, it was bitter to my stomach. And they said to me: "You must prophesy in regard to many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

Before we deal with this passage in any detail, we note how twice the seer is told to take the roll. It is not handed to him; even when he asks the angel to give it to him, the answer is that he must take it. The meaning is that God's revelation is never forced on any man; he must take it.

This picture comes from the experience of Ezekiel who was told to eat the roll and to fill his belly with it (Eze.3:1,3). In both pictures the idea is the same. The messenger of God has to take God's message into his very life and being.

The sweetness of the roll is a recurring thought in Scripture. To the psalmist the judgments of God are sweeter than honey and the honey-comb (Ps.19:10). "How sweet are thy words to my taste! sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Ps.119:103). It may well be that behind these words lies a pleasant Jewish educational custom. When a Jewish boy was learning the alphabet, it was written on a slate in a mixture of flour and honey. He was told what the letters were and how they sounded. After the original instruction, the teacher would point at a letter and would ask: "What is that and how does it sound?" If the boy could answer correctly, he was allowed to lick the letter off the slate as a reward! When the prophet and the psalmist speak about God's words and judgments being sweeter than honey, it may well be that they were thinking of this custom.

John adds another idea to this. To him the roll was sweet and bitter at one and the same time. What he means is this. A message of God may be to a servant of God at once a sweet and bitter thing. It is sweet because it is a great thing to be chosen as the messenger of God; but the message itself may be a foretelling of doom and, therefore, a bitter thing. So for John it was an infinite privilege to be admitted to the secrets of heaven but at the same time it was bitter to have to forecast the time of terror, even if triumph lay at its end.

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Introduction to Revelation 11

ANTICHRIST

In the passages of the Revelation which we are now about to approach we will on many occasions meet the figure of Antichrist. This figure has exercised a strange fascination over the minds of men and many have been the speculations and theories about him. It will, therefore, be convenient to collect the material about Antichrist at this stage and to try to piece it into a connected whole.

We may lay it down as a general principle that Antichrist stands for the power in the universe which is against God. Just as the Christ is the Holy One and the Anointed King of God, so Antichrist is the Unholy One and the King of all evil. Just as the Christ is the incarnation of God and goodness, so Antichrist is the incarnation of the Devil and of evil.

The idea of a force opposed to God was not new. Antichrist had his predecessors long before the days of the New Testament; and it will help if we look first at some of the older pictures, for they left their mark on the New Testament picture.

(i) The Babylonians had a myth in regard to the creation of the world which they shared with all the Semitic peoples and with which the Jews must have come into contact. This myth painted the picture of creation in terms of a struggle between Marduk the creator and Tiamat the dragon, who stands for *primaeval* chaos. There was a further belief that this struggle between God and chaos would be repeated before the world came to an end.

This old belief in the struggle between the creating God and the dragon of chaos found its way into the Old Testament and is the explanation of certain obscure passages there. Isaiah tells of the day when God will slay the leviathan and the crooked serpent and the dragon that is in the sea (Isa.27:1). In Jewish thought this ancient dragon of chaos came to be known as Rahab. Isaiah says: "Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the dragon?" (Isa.51:9). When the Psalmist is recounting the triumphs of God, he says: "I will mention Rahab" (Ps.87:4). "Thou didst crush Rahab like a carcass," he says (Ps.89:10). Here is one of the ancestors of the Antichrist idea and that is one of the reasons why the dragon idea reappears in the Revelation (Rev.12:9).

(ii) There is the Belial--or, as it is sometimes called, Beliar--idea. The word Belial frequently occurs in the Old Testament as a synonym for evil. An evil man or woman is called a son or daughter of Belial. Eli's wicked sons are sons of Belial (1Sam.2:12). When Hannah was silently praying for a child in the Temple, Eli thought that she was drunk but Hannah says that she is not a daughter of Belial (1Sam.1:16). The wicked Nabal is called a son of Belial (1Sam.25:17,25). One of Shimei's insults was to call David a son of Belial (2Sam.16:7). The false witnesses produced by Jezebel against Naboth are sons of Belial (1Kgs.21:10,13), as are Jeroboam's revolutionary followers (2Chr.13:7). The exact meaning of the word is in doubt. It has been taken to mean prince of the air, hopeless ruin, worthlessness. Between the Testaments Belial came to be regarded as the chief of the demons. In the New Testament the word occurs only once: "What accord has Christ with Belial?" (2Cor.6:15).

There it is used as the antithesis of Christ. It may well be that this idea came in part at least from the Persian religion with which the Jews came into contact. Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, conceived of the whole universe as the battleground in which the struggle was fought out between

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Introduction to Revelation 11

Ormuzd, the god of light, and Ahriman, the god of darkness. Here again we have the conception of a force in the world opposed to God and fighting against him.

(iii) There is a sense in which the obvious Antichrist is Satan, the Devil. Sometimes Satan is identified with Lucifer, the son of the morning, the angel who in heaven rebelled against God and was cast down to hell. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!" (Isa.14:12). It is easy to find instances in which Satan--the very name means the Adversary--acted in such a way as to overturn the purpose of God, for it is his very nature to do so. Such an instance was when Satan persuaded David to number the people in direct contravention of the command of God (1Chr.21:1). But though Satan is the direct opponent of God, he remains an angel, whereas Antichrist is a visible figure upon earth in which the very essence of evil has become incarnate.

(iv) There is a sense in which the development of the idea of the Messiah made the development of the idea of Antichrist inevitable. The Messiah, God's Anointed One, is bound to meet with opposition; and that opposition is entirely likely to crystallize into one supreme figure of evil. We must remember that Messiah and Christ mean the same thing, being the Hebrew and the Greek respectively for The Anointed One. Where there is the Christ, there will of necessity be the Antichrist, for so long as there is sin there will be opposition to God.

(v) In the Old Testament there is more than one picture of the divine battle with the assembled opposition to God. We find such a picture in the struggle with Gog and Magog (Eze.38), and in the destruction of the destroyers of Jerusalem (Zech.14).

But, so far as the later Jews were concerned, the peak of the manifestation of evil was connected with one terrible episode in their history. This is commemorated in Daniel's picture of the little horn, which waxed great even against heaven, which stopped the daily sacrifice, which cast down the sanctuary (Dn.8:9-12). The little horn stands for Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria. He determined to introduce Greek ways, language and Greek worship into Palestine, for he regarded himself as the missionary of Greek culture. The Jews resisted. Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Palestine and captured Jerusalem. It was said that eighty thousand Jews were either slaughtered or sold into slavery. To circumcise a child or to possess a copy of the Law was a crime punishable by death. History has seldom, or never, seen so deliberate an attempt to wipe out the religion of a whole people. He desecrated the Temple.

He erected an altar to Olympian Zeus in the Holy Place and on it sacrificed swine's flesh; and he turned the rooms of the Temple into public brothels. In the end the gallantry of the Maccabees restored the Temple and conquered Antiochus; but to the Jews Antiochus was the incarnation of all evil.

It can be seen that the figure of Antichrist was taking shape already in the Old Testament; the incarnation of evil is an idea that is already there.

We now turn to the idea of Antichrist in the New Testament:

(i) There is very little mention of the Antichrist idea in the Synoptic Gospels. The only real occurrence is in the chapters which deal with the end and the signs of the end. There Jesus is

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represented as saying: "Then if any one says to you, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matt.24:23; Matt.24:44; Mk.13:6; Mk.13:22; Lk.21:8). In the Fourth Gospel Jesus is represented as saying: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (Jn.5:43). There the idea of Antichrist is rather that of false teaching, leading men away from true loyalty to Jesus Christ, a line of thought which, as we shall see, occurs again in the New Testament.

(ii) One of the main pictures of Antichrist is that of the Man of Sin in 2Th.2. Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of that which he had already taught them by word of mouth and of that which was an essential part of his teaching. He says: "Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this?" (2Th.2:5). In this picture there is first to be a general falling away; then the man of sin will come who will exalt himself above God and claim the worship which belongs to God by right, and work lying signs and wonders which will deceive many. At the moment when Paul is writing there is something which restrains this final manifestation of evil (2Th.2:7). In all probability Paul means the Roman Empire, seen by him as keeping the world from disintegrating into the chaos of the last time. Here Antichrist is concentrated into one person who is the very essence of evil.

This rather connects itself with the Beliar idea of the Old Testament and with the conflict of light and darkness in the Persian world view.

(iii) The idea of Antichrist occurs in the Letters of John. It is, in fact, only there that the actual word occurs. In the last time Antichrist is to come; in the times in which John writes many Antichrists have come; therefore, says John, they know that they are living in the last time (1Jn.2:18). He who denies the Father and the Son is Antichrist (1Jn.2:22). In particular he who denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is Antichrist (1Jn.4:3; 2Jn.7). The supreme characteristic of Antichrist is the denial of the reality of the Incarnation.

Here again the main connection of Antichrist is with heresy. Antichrist is the spirit of falsehood which seduces men from the truth and leads them into mistaken ideas which are the ruin of the Christian faith.

(iv) It is in the Revelation that the fullest picture of Antichrist is painted and it occurs in more than one form.

(a) In Rev.11:7 there is the picture of the beast from the abyss, who is to slay the two witnesses in Jerusalem and who is to reign for forty-two months. This gives us the picture of Antichrist as coming, as it were, from hell, to have a terrible and destructive, but limited, time of power. In this picture there is at least some connection with the Daniel picture of Antiochus Epiphanes as the little horn. That is certainly where the period of forty-two months comes from, for that was the period during which the terror of Antiochus and the desecration of the Temple lasted.

(b) In Rev.12 there is the picture of the great red dragon, who persecutes the woman clothed with the sun, the woman who begets the man child. This dragon is ultimately defeated and cast out of heaven. The dragon is definitely identified with the old serpent the devil (Rev.12:9). This has

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clearly some kind of connection with the old myth of the dragon of chaos who was the enemy of God.

(c) In Rev.13 there is the picture of the beast with the seven heads and the ten horns, which comes from the sea, and the other beast with the two horns, which comes from the land. There is no doubt that what is in John's mind is the terror and the savagery of Caesar worship; and in this case Antichrist is the great begetter of persecution of the Christian Church. Here the idea is of cruel, persecuting power, bent on the utter destruction of Christ and his Church.

(d) In Rev.17:3 we have the picture of the scarlet coloured beast, with the seven heads and the ten horns, on which the woman called Babylon is seated. We are told that the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. In the Revelation Babylon symbolizes Rome and Rome was built on seven hills. Clearly this picture stands for Rome and Antichrist is Rome's persecuting power unleashed upon the Church.

It is of great interest to note the change here. As we have seen, to Paul, when he wrote Second Thessalonians, Rome was the one power which restrained the coming of Antichrist. In Rom.13:1-7 Paul writes of the state as divinely appointed and urges all Christians to be loyal citizens. In 1Pet.2:13-17 the order to Christians is willingly to submit themselves to the government of the state, to fear God and to honour the king. In the Revelation there is a world of difference; times had changed; the full fury of persecution had broken out; and Rome had become to John the Antichrist.

(v) We note one last element in the picture of Antichrist. With the old Jewish idea of this anti-God power and with the Christian idea of a power who was the incarnation of evil, there combined an idea from the Graeco-Roman world. The worst of the Roman Emperors in the early days was Nero who was regarded as the supreme monster of iniquity, not only by the Christians, but also by the Romans themselves. Nero died by suicide in A.D. 68, and there went up a sigh of relief But almost immediately there arose the belief that he was not dead and that he was waiting in Parthia to descend on the world with the terrible hordes of the Parthians to let loose destruction and terror. This idea is called the Nero redivivus, the Nero resurrected, myth. In the ancient world it was widespread more than twenty years after Nero was dead. To the Christians, Nero was a figure of concentrated evil.

It was he who had put the blame of the great fire of Rome on to the Christians; it was he who had initiated persecution; it was he who had found the most savage methods of torture. Many Christians believed in the Nero redivivus myth; and frequently--as in certain parts of the Revelation--Nero redivivus and Antichrist were identified and the Christians thought of the coming of Antichrist in terms of the return of Nero.

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Revelation 11:1-19

THE VISION OF THINGS TO COME

Revelation 11:1-19

A measuring rod like a stall was given to me, with the instructions: "Rise and measure the Temple of God, and the altar and those who worship there. But leave out of the reckoning the outer Court which is outside the Temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles, and they will trample on the Holy City for forty-two months.

And I will give the task of prophesying to my two witnesses and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These witnesses are the two olive trees and the two lampstands who stand before the Lord of all the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and whoever tries to hurt them must be thus killed.

These have the authority to shut up the heaven so that rain may not fall during the period for which they prophesied a drought; and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood and to smite the earth with every plague as often as they wish.

When they shall have completed their witness, the beast which comes up from the abyss will make war with them and will overcome them and will kill them. Their corpses shall lie in the street of the great city, whose spiritual name is Sodom and Egypt, and where their Lord also was crucified. There are those of the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations who are to see their bodies for three and a half days, and they will not allow their bodies to be placed in a tomb. Those who inhabit the land will rejoice over them and will make merry and will send gifts to each other, because these two prophets tortured those who inhabit the land."

After the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell upon all who saw them. They heard a great voice from heaven saying to them: "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in the cloud, and their enemies saw them. At that hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth of the city collapsed and seven thousand persons were killed, and the rest of the people were in fear and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The second woe is gone and, behold, the third is coming quickly.

The seventh angel sounded a blast on his trumpet and there came great voices in heaven saying: "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Anointed One, and he will reign for ever and ever."

The twenty-four elders, who sat upon their thrones in the presence of God, fell down upon their faces, and worshipped God saying: "We give you thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, that you have taken your supreme authority and that you have entered upon your reign. The nations have raged, and your wrath has come, and there has come the time to judge the dead, and to give their reward to your servants the prophets and to God's dedicated people and to those who fear your name, both small and great, and to destroy those who are the destroyers of the earth."

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Revelation 11:1-19

And the Temple of God was opened in heaven, and in the Temple there was seen the Ark of the Covenant, and there were lightnings and voices and thunders and an earthquake and a great storm of hail.

It is better to see this chapter as a whole, before we make any attempt to deal with it in detail. It has been said that it is at one and the same time the most difficult and the most important chapter in the Revelation. Its difficulty is obvious and it contains problems of interpretation about whose solution there can be no real certainty. Its importance lies in the fact that it contains a deliberate summary of the rest of the book. The seer has eaten the little roll and taken into his mind the message of God; and now he sets it down, not yet in detail but in the broad lines of its development. So certain is he of the course of events that from Rev.11:11 he alters the tense of his narrative and speaks of things still in the future as if they were past. Let us then set out the scheme of this chapter which is also the scheme of the rest of the book.

(i) Rev.11:1-2. Here is the picture of the measuring of the Temple. As we shall see, the measuring is closely parallel to the sealing and is for the purposes of protection when the demonic terrors descend upon the world.

(ii) Rev.11:3-6. Here is the preaching of the two witnesses who are heralds of the end.

(iii) Rev.11:7-10. Here is the first emergence of Antichrist in the form of the beast from the abyss, and the temporary triumph of Antichrist which results in the death of the two witnesses.

(iv) Rev.11:11-13. Here follows the restoration to life of the witnesses and the consequent repentance and conversion of the Jews.

(v) Rev.11:14-19. Finally, here is the first sketch of the final triumph of Christ, the thousand years of his initial reign, the rising of the nations, the defeat of the nations and the judgment of the dead, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God and of his Anointed One.

We now proceed to examine the chapter in detail.

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Revelation 11:1-2

THE MEASURING OF THE TEMPLE

Revelation 11:1-2 (Part 1)

To the seer is given a measuring rod like a staff. The word for measuring rod is literally reed. There were certain grasses which grew with stalks like bamboo canes as much as six or eight feet high; these stalks were used as measuring rods. The word rod actually stands for a Jewish unit of measurement, equal to six cubits. The cubit was originally the space from the tip of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger and was reckoned as seventeen or eighteen inches; so the rod is equal to about nine feet.

The picture of measuring is common in the visions of the prophets. We find it in Ezekiel, Zechariah and Amos (Eze.40:3,6; Zech.2:1; Am.7:7-9); and no doubt these previous visions were in John's mind.

We find the idea of measuring used in more than one way. It is used as a preparation for building or for restoration and also as a preparation for destruction. But here the meaning lies in preservation. The measuring is like the sealing which is described in Rev.7:2-3; the scaling and the measuring are both for the protection of God's faithful ones in the demonic terrors to descend upon the earth.

The seer has to measure the Temple, but he must omit from his measurement the outer court which has been given over to the Gentiles. The Temple in Jerusalem was divided into four courts, converging, as it were, upon the Holy of Holies. There was the Court of the Gentiles, into which Gentiles might come but beyond which they might not pass under penalty of death. Between it and the next court was a balustrade, into which were set tablets warning any Gentile that to come further was to be liable to instant death. Next came the Court of the Women beyond which women could not come; then the Court of the Israelites beyond which ordinary men could not come. Lastly, there was the Court of the Priests, which contained the Altar of the Burnt-Offering, made of brass, the Altar of Incense, made of gold, and the Holy Place; and into this court only the priests might come.

The seer is to measure the Temple. But the date of the Revelation, as we have seen, is somewhere about A.D. 90; and the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed in A.D. 70. How, then, could the Temple be measured?

The solution lies in this. Almost certainly John is taking over a picture which had already been used. Almost certainly this passage was originally spoken or written in A.D. 70, during the last siege of Jerusalem. During that siege the party of the Jews who would never admit defeat were the Zealots; they would rather die to a man, as indeed they ultimately did. When who would never admit defeat were the Zealots; they would rather die to a man, as indeed they ultimately did. When the walls of the city were breached, these Zealots retired into the Temple to make a last desperate resistance there. It is practically certain that some of their prophets said: "Never fear. The Gentile invaders may reach the outer Court of the Gentiles and defile it; but they will never penetrate into the inner Temple.

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Revelation 11:1-2

God would never allow that." That confidence was disappointed; the Zealots perished and the Temple was destroyed; but originally the measuring of the inner courts and the abandoning of the outer court stood for the Zealot hope in those last terrible days.

John takes this picture and completely spiritualizes it. When he speaks of the Temple, he is not thinking of the Temple building at all which had been blasted out of existence more than twenty years before. For him the Temple is the Christian Church, the people of God. This picture meets us repeatedly in the New Testament. The Christians are living stones, built into a spiritual house (1Pet.2:5). The Church is founded on the apostles and the prophets; Jesus is the corner stone; the whole Church is growing into a holy temple in the Lord (Eph.2:20-21). "Do you not know," says Paul, "that you are God's temple?" (1Cor.3:16; compare, 2Cor.6:16).

The measuring of the Temple is the sealing of the people of God; they are to be preserved in the terrible time of trial; but the rest are doomed to destruction.

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Revelation 11:1-2

THE LENGTH OF THE TERROR

Revelation 11:1-2 (Part 2)

The length of the terror is to be forty-two months; the time of the preaching of the witnesses is to be twelve hundred and sixty days; their corpses are to lie on the street for three and a half days. Here is something which occurs again and again (compare Rev.13:5; Rev.12:6); and occurs in still another form in Rev.12:14 where the period is a time, times and half a time. This is the famous phrase which goes back to Daniel (Dn.7:25; Dn.12:7). We have to enquire, first, into the meaning of the phrase and, second, into its origin.

Its meaning is three and a half years. That is what forty-two months, and twelve hundred and sixty days--by Jewish reckoning--are. A time, times and half a time is equal to one year plus two years plus half a year.

The origin of the phrase comes from that most terrible time in Jewish history when Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, tried to force Greek language, culture and worship upon the Jews and was met with the most violent and stubborn resistance. The roll of the martyrs was immense but the dreadful process was finally halted by the rising of Judas Maccabaeus.

Judas and his heroic followers waged guerrilla warfare and won the most amazing victories. Finally Antiochus and his forces were driven out and the Temple was restored and cleansed. The point is that this dreadful period lasted from June 168 B.C. to December 165 B.C. (To this day the Jews celebrate in December the Festival of Hanukah which commemorates the restoration and the cleansing of the Temple.) That is to say this dreadful time lasted almost exactly three and a half years. It was during that time that Daniel was written and the phrase was coined which ever afterwards was stamped on the Jewish mind as indicating a period of terror and suffering and martyrdom.

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Revelation 11:3-6

THE TWO WITNESSES

Revelation 11:3-6

It was always part of Jewish belief that God would send his special messenger to men before the final coming of the Day of the Lord. In Malachi we hear God say: "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me" (Mal.3:1). Malachi actually identifies the messenger as Elijah: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord comes" (Mal.4:5). So, then, in our passage we have the coming of the messengers of God before the final contest.

These messengers have the task of prophesying; they will prophesy for 1,260 days, that is for three and a half years, which, as we have seen, is the period always connected with terror and destruction to come. Their message will be sombre, for they are clothed in sackcloth. It will be a message of condemnation; to listen to it will be like a torture and the people will be glad when the two witnesses are killed (Rev.11:10).

(i) Some scholars have entirely allegorized this passage. They see in the two witnesses the Law and the Prophets, or the Law and the Gospel, or the Old Testament and the New Testament. Or, they see in the two witnesses a picture of the Church. Jesus had told his followers that they must be witnesses to him in Jerusalem, in Judaea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth (Ac.1:8). Those who explain the two witnesses by the witness of the Church explain the number two by referring to Deut.19:15, where it is said that if a charge is brought against anyone it must be confirmed by the evidence of two witnesses. But the picture of the two witnesses is so definite that it seems to refer to definite persons.

(ii) The two witnesses have been taken to be Enoch and Elijah. Neither Enoch nor Elijah was said to die. "Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him" (Gen.5:24); Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind and in a chariot of fire to heaven (2Kgs.2:11); and Tertullian (Concerning the Soul, 50) refers to a belief that they were being kept by God in heaven to bring death to Antichrist.

(iii) Much more likely the witnesses are Elijah and Moses. Elijah was held to be the greatest of the prophets, just as Moses was the supreme law-giver; and it was fitting that the two outstanding figures in the religious history of Israel should be God's messengers at the last time. It was these two who appeared to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mk.9:4). Further, the things said of them fit Moses and Elijah as they fit no one else. It is said (Rev.11:6) that they have power to turn the water into blood and to smite the earth with all plagues, and that is what Moses did (compare specially Exo.7:14-18). It is said that fire proceeds out of their mouth and burns up their enemies, and that they can shut up the heavens so that the rain is withheld. That is what Elijah did with the company of soldiers sent to take him (2Kgs.1:9-10) and when he prophesied to Ahab that there would be no rain upon the earth (1Kgs.17:1).

We have already seen that Elijah was expected to return to herald the end; and it would not be difficult to regard God's promise that he would raise up a prophet like Moses (Deut.18:18) as a prophecy that Moses himself would return.

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Revelation 11:7-13

THE SAVING DEATH OF THE TWO WITNESSES

Revelation 11:7-13

The witnesses are to preach for their allotted time and then will come Antichrist in the form of the beast from the abyss; and the two witnesses will be cruelly slain.

This is to happen in Jerusalem; but Jerusalem is called by the terrible names of Sodom and Egypt. Long before this Isaiah had addressed the rulers of Jerusalem as the rulers of Sodom and the people of Jerusalem as the people of Gomorrah (Isa.1:9-10). Sodom and Gomorrah stand as the types of sin, the symbols of those who had not received strangers (compare the story in Gen.19:4-11) and who had turned their benefactors into slaves (Wis.19:14-15). The wickedness of Jerusalem had already crucified Jesus Christ and in the days to come it is to regard the death of his witnesses with joy.

So will the people of Jerusalem hate the two witnesses that they will leave their bodies unburied in the street. In Jewish thought it was a terrible thing that a body should not be buried. When the heathen attacked God's people, to the Psalmist it was the greatest tragedy of all that there was none to bury them (Ps.79:3); the threat to the disobedient prophet, a threat which came true, was that his carcase would not come to the sepulchre of his fathers (1Kgs.13:22). Even worse, such will be the hatred of the people for the witnesses of God that they will regard their death as a reason for festival.

But that is not the end. After three and a half days--here we have the same period--the breath of life entered again into the two slain witnesses and they stood upon their feet. Still more startling things were to happen. In sight of all, the two witnesses were summoned up into heaven, re-enacting, as it were, Elijah's first departure to heaven in the whirlwind and the chariot of fire (2Kgs.2:11).

To add to the terror came a destructive earthquake which wrecked a tenth of the city and brought death to seven thousand of its inhabitants. The result was that those who had seen these terrifying events and were spared, gave glory to God. That is to say, they repented, for that is the only real way to give glory to God.

The great interest of this passage lies in the fact that the unbelievers were won by the sacrificial death of the witnesses and by God's vindication of them. Here is the story of the Cross and of the Resurrection all over again. Evil must be conquered and men won, not by force but by the acceptance of suffering for the name of Christ.

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Revelation 11:14-19

THE FORECAST OF THINGS TO COME

Revelation 11:14-19

What makes this passage difficult is that it seems to indicate that things have come to an end in final victory, while there is still half the book to go. The explanation, as we have seen, is that this passage is a summary of what is still to come. The events foreshadowed here are as follows.

(i) There is the victory in which the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Anointed One. This is really a quotation of Ps.2:2, and is another way of saying that the Messianic reign has begun. In view of this victory the twenty-four elders, that is, the whole Church, break out in thanksgiving.

(ii) This victory leads to the time when God takes his supreme authority (Rev.11:17). That is to say, it leads to the thousand year reign of God, the Millenium, a thousand year period of peace and prosperity.

(iii) At the end of the Millenium there is to come the final attack of all the hostile powers (Rev.11:18); they will be finally defeated and then will follow the last judgment.

In Rev.11:19 we come back, as it were, to the present. There is a vision of the heavenly Temple opened and of the Ark of the Covenant. Two things are involved in this vision.

(i) The Ark of the Covenant was in the Holy of Holies, the inside of which no ordinary person had ever seen, and into which even the High Priest went only on the Day of Atonement. This must mean that now the glory of God is going to be fully displayed.

(ii) The reference to the Ark of the Covenant is as a reminder of God's special covenant with his people. Originally that covenant had been with the people Israel; but the new covenant is with all of every nation who love and believe in Jesus. Whatever the terror to come, God will not be false to his promises.

This is a picture of the coming of the full glory of God, a terrifying threat to his enemies but an uplifting promise to the people of his covenant.

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Revelation 12:1-17

THE WOMAN AND THE BEAST

Revelation 12:1-17

It is necessary to read this chapter as a whole before we examine it in detail.

A great sign appeared in the sky--a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon beneath her feet, and with a crown of twelve stars on her head; and she was with child, and she cried aloud in her labour and in her agony to bear the child.

And another sign appeared in heaven--lo! a great flame-coloured dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and with seven royal diadems upon its heads. Its tail swept a third part of the stars from the sky and cast them on to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to bear the child so that it might devour the child as soon as she bore him.

She bore a man child who is destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was snatched away to God, even to his throne.

The woman fled to the desert where she had a place prepared for her by God, that they might care for her there for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

There was war in heaven, in which Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought with them. The dragon was powerless to prevail and there was no longer any place for him in heaven. The great dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of all mankind, was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a great voice in heaven saying:

"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Anointed One, because there has been cast down the accuser of our brothers, who night and day accuses them before God. They have overcome him through the blood of the Lamb and through the word of their witness, and they did not love their soul to death. Rejoice, therefore, you heavens and you who dwell in them. Alas for the earth and the sea! because the Devil has come down to you with great wrath and well aware that he has only a little time left."

When the Devil saw that he was cast down into the earth, he pursued the woman who bore the man-child. The two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, that she might fly to the desert to her place, where she is cared for for a time and times and half a time away from the serpent. And after the woman the serpent hurled water from his mouth like a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the river of water; but the earth helped the woman and opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon hurled from his mouth.

The dragon was enraged because of the woman and went away to make war with the rest of her family, those who keep the commandments of God and who bear their witness to Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

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Revelation 12:1-2

THE WOMAN WITH CHILD

Revelation 12:1-2

John saw an amazing vision, like a tableau in the sky, whose details he draws from many sources. The woman is clothed with the sun; the moon is her footstool; and she has a crown of twelve stars. The Psalmist says of God that he covers himself with light as with a garment (Ps.104:2). In the Song of Solomon the poet describes his loved one as being fair as the moon and clear as the sun (SS.6:10). So John got part of his picture from the Old Testament. But he added something which the pagans of Asia Minor would well recognize as part of the old Babylonian picture of the divine. They frequently depicted their goddesses as crowned with the twelve signs of the zodiac and this also is in John's mind. It is as if he took all the signs of divinity and beauty which he could find and added them together.

This woman is in labour to bear a child who is undoubtedly the Messiah, Christ, compare Rev.12:5 where he is said to be destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron. That is a quotation from Ps.2:9 and was an accepted description of the Messiah. The woman, then, is the mother of the Messiah.

(i) If the woman is the "mother" of the Messiah, an obvious suggestion is that she should be identified with Mary; but she is so clearly a superhuman figure that she can hardly be identified with any single human being.

(ii) The persecution of the woman by the dragon suggests that she might be identified with the Christian Church. The objection is that the Christian Church could hardly be called the mother of the Messiah.

(iii) In the Old Testament the chosen people, the ideal Israel, the community of the people of God, is often called the Bride of God. "Your Maker is your husband" (Isa.54:5). It is Jeremiah's sad complaint that Israel has played the harlot in disloyalty to God (Jer.3:6-10). Hosea hears God say: "I will betroth you to me for ever" (Hos.2:19-20). In the Revelation itself we hear of the marriage feast of the Lamb and the Bride of the Lamb (Rev.19:7; Rev.21:9). "I betrothed you to Christ," writes Paul to the Corinthian Church, "to present you as a pure bride to her one husband" (2Cor.11:2).

This will give us a line of approach. It was from the chosen people that Jesus Christ sprang in his human lineage. It is for the ideal community of the chosen ones of God that the woman stands. Out of that community Christ came and it was that community which underwent such terrible suffering at the hands of the hostile world. We may indeed call this the Church, if we remember that the Church is the community of God's people in every age.

From this picture we learn three great things about this community of God. First, it was out of it that Christ came; and out of it Christ has still to come for those who have never known him. Second, there are forces of evil, spiritual and human, which are set on the destruction of the community of God. Third, however strong the opposition against it and however sore its sufferings,

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Revelation 12:1-2

the community of God is under the protection of God and, therefore, it can never be ultimately destroyed.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 12:3-4

THE HATRED OF THE DRAGON

Revelation 12:3-4

Here we have the picture of the great, flame-coloured dragon. In our study of the antecedents of Antichrist we saw that the eastern peoples regarded creation in the light of the struggle between the dragon of chaos and the creating God of order. In the Temple of Marduk, the creating god, in Babylon there was a great image of a "red-gleaming serpent" who stood for the defeated dragon of chaos. There can be little doubt that that is where John got his picture. This dragon appears in many forms in the Old Testament.

It appears as Rahab. "Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the dragon?" (Isa.51:9). It appears as leviathan. "Thou didst break the heads of the dragons in the waters. Thou didst crush the heads of leviathan" (Ps.74:12-14). In the day of the Lord, God with his sore and great and strong sword will punish leviathan (Isa.27:1). It appears in the dramatic picture of behemoth (HSN0930) in Jb.40:15-24. The dragon which is the arch-enemy of God is a common and terrible figure in the thought of the east. It is the connection of the dragon and the sea which explains the rivers of water which the dragon emits to overcome the woman (Rev.12:15).

The dragon has seven heads and ten horns. This signifies its mighty power. It has seven royal diadems. This signifies its complete power over the kingdoms of this world as opposed to the kingdom of God. The picture of the dragon sweeping the stars from the sky with its tail comes from the picture in Daniel of the little horn who cast the stars to the ground and trampled on them (Dn.8:10). The picture of the dragon waiting to devour the child comes from Jeremiah, in which it is said of Nebuchadnezzar that "he has swallowed me like a monster" (Jer.51:34).

H. B. Swete finds in this picture the symbolism of an eternal truth about the human situation. In the human situation, as Christian history sees it, there are two figures who occupy the centre of the scene. There is man, fallen, always under the attack of the powers of evil but always struggling towards the birth of a higher life. And there is the power of evil, ever watching for its opportunity to frustrate the upward reach of man. That struggle had its culmination on the Cross.

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Revelation 12:5

THE SNATCHING AWAY OF THE CHILD

Revelation 12:5

The child which the woman bore was destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron. As we have seen, this quotation from Ps.2:9 indicates that the child was the Messiah.

When the child was born, he was rescued from the dragon by being snatched up to heaven, even to the throne of God. The word used here for the child being snatched up is the same as is used in 1Th.4:17 to describe the Christian being caught up to meet the Lord in the air (compare 2Cor.12:2 where Paul uses it to tell of himself being caught up into the third heaven).

In a sense this is a puzzling passage. As we have seen, the reference is to Jesus Christ as Messiah, and, as John tells it, the story goes straight from his Birth to his Ascension; the snatching up must refer to the Ascension. As the Acts has it: "He was lifted up" (Ac.1:9). The strange thing is the total omission of the earthly life of Jesus. This is due to two things.

It is due to the fact that John is not at the moment interested in anything other than the fact that Jesus Christ was delivered by the direct action of God from the hostile powers which continually attacked him.

It is due also to the fact that all through the Revelation John's interest is not in the human Jesus but in the exalted Christ, who is able to rescue his people in the time of their distresses.

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Revelation 12:6

THE FLIGHT TO THE DESERT

Revelation 12:6

Here we read of the woman escaping into the desert from the attack of the dragon. By the help of God she escaped into a place where she was nourished and which had been prepared for her.

There is no doubt that there are many pictures in John's mind. There is the picture of the escape of Elijah to the brook Cherith, where he was nourished by the ravens (1Kgs.17:1-7); and of his flight into the desert, when he was nourished by the angelic messenger (1Kgs.19:1-8). There is the picture of the flight of Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus into Egypt to escape the murderous intent of Herod (Matt.2:13). But two incidents are specially in John's mind.

(i) In the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, when it was death to keep the law and to worship the true God, many "who sought after justice and judgment went down to the wilderness to dwell there" (1Macc.2:29).

(ii) Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. The years immediately before that were terrible years of bloodshed and of revolution in which anyone with eyes to see and a mind to understand could forecast what was about to happen. Eusebius, the Christian historian, tells us that, before the final disaster came, the Christians in Jerusalem had been warned by a revelation given to approved men to leave Jerusalem and to cross the Jordan into Perea and to dwell there in a town called Pella (Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History 3: 5). This is actually referred to in the account of Jesus' words to the disciples about the last times. When they saw the last terrors coming they were to flee to the mountains (Mk.13:14); this is exactly what they did.

H. B. Swete again sees something symbolic here. The Church had to flee into the wilderness and the wilderness is lonely. For the early Christians life was lonely; they were isolated in a pagan world. There are times when Christian witness is bound to be a lonely thing--but even in human loneliness there is divine companionship.

The one thousand two hundred and sixty days are once again the standard period of distress.

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Revelation 12:7-9

SATAN, THE ENEMY OF GOD

Revelation 12:7-9

Here we have the picture of war in heaven between the Dragon, the Ancient Serpent, the Devil, Satan--all these names describe the one evil being--and Michael and all his angels. The idea seems to be that, such was his hatred, the dragon pursued the Messiah even to heaven, where he was met by Michael with his heavenly legions and finally cast out. It will be convenient to gather together here what Scripture has to say about Satan; it presents a complicated picture.

(i) There is the echo of the ancient story of a *primaeval* war in heaven. Satan was an angel who conceived "the impossible thought" of placing his throne higher than that of God (2 Enoch 29: 4, 5) and was cast out of heaven. The Babylonians had a similar story of Ishtar, the god of the morning star. He, too, rebelled against God and was cast down from heaven. There is one definite reference to this old story in the Old Testament. In Isaiah we read: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!" (Isa.14:12). The sin which caused the fall from heaven was pride. There may be a reference to this in 1Tim.3:6, where it is urged that the Christian preacher must be kept from pride lest he fall into the same condemnation as the devil did. When Satan was cast out of heaven, his dwelling-place became the air in which he had to wander; that is why he is sometimes called The Prince of the Air (Eph.2:2).

(ii) There is a strong line of thought in the Old Testament in which Satan is still an angel under God's command and with access to his presence. In Job we find Satan numbered amongst the sons of God and possessing access to his presence (Jb.1:6-9; Jb.2:1-6); and in Zechariah we also find Satan in the presence of God (Zech.3:1-2).

To understand this conception of Satan we must first understand what the word Satan means. Satan originally meant simply an adversary. Even the angel of the Lord who stood in the path of Balaam to stop him from his sinful intentions can be called a satan against him (Num.22:22). The Philistines feared that David would be their satan (1Sam.29:4). When Solomon entered upon his kingdom, he was so blessed by God that he had no satan left (1Kgs.5:4). But later the foreign kings, Hadad and Rezon, were both to become his satans (1Kgs.11:14,23).

In the Old Testament Satan was the angel who was the counsel for the prosecution against men in the presence of God, their Adversary. Thus he is the counsel for the prosecution against Job, cynically suggesting that Job serves God for what he can get out of it and that, if he is involved in disaster, his loyalty will soon cease (Jb.1:11-12), and he is given permission by God to use every weapon short of death to test Job (Jb.2:1-6). So in Zechariah Satan is the accuser of Joshua the High Priest (Zech.3:1-2). In Ps.109:6 the King James Version actually uses the word Satan in this sense: "Let Satan stand at the right hand of the wicked." The Revised Standard Version rightly alters the translation to: "Let an accuser bring him to trial."

So, in the Old Testament Satan was the angel who is the counsel for the prosecution when a man was on trial before God; while Michael was the counsel for the defence. Between the Testaments there seems to have been a belief that there was more than one Satan engaged in the task of

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Revelation 12:7-9

bringing accusations against men and we read of the archangel whose duty it was to fend off the Satans (I Enoch 40: 6).

For the most part in the Old Testament Satan was very much under the jurisdiction of God.

(iii) In the Old Testament we never read of the Devil, although sometimes we come across devils; but in the New Testament Satan becomes the Devil. The Greek is Diabolos (GSN1228), literally a slanderer. There is not a very great dividing line between being a prosecuting counsel who brings charges against men and inventing such charges and tempting men into actions where such charges will be forthcoming. So, then, in the New Testament Satan becomes the seducer of men. We find that in the story of the temptations of Jesus the three names are indiscriminately used. This power of evil is Satan (Matt.4:10; Mk.1:13); the Devil (Matt.4:1,5,8,11; Lk.4:2-3,5,13); and the Tempter (Matt.4:3).

Since this is so, we find Satan engaged in certain nefarious purposes in the New Testament story. He seeks to seduce Jesus in his temptations. He puts the terrible scheme of betrayal into Judas' mind (Jn.13:2; Jn.13:27; Lk.22:3). He is out to make Peter fall (Lk.22:31). He persuades Ananias to keep back part of the price of the possession he had sold (Ac.5:3). He uses every wile (Eph.6:11) and every device (2Cor.2:11) to achieve his seducing purposes. He is the cause of illness and pain (Lk.13:16; Ac.10:38; 2Cor.12:7). He hinders the work of the gospel by sowing the tares which choke the good seed (Matt.13:39), and by snatching away the seed of the word from the human heart before it can gain an entry (Mk.4:15; Lk.8:12).

Thus Satan becomes the enemy of God and man, the Evil One par excellence, for we should probably translate in the Lord's Prayer: "Deliver us from the Evil One" (Matt.6:13).

He can be called the Ruler of this World (Jn.12:31; Jn.14:30; Jn.16:11), for, having been cast out of heaven, he has to exert his evil influence among men. He comes to be identified with the serpent because of the story of the Fall in Gen.3.

(iv) The strange thing is that the history of Satan is a tragedy, whatever version of the story we use. In one version, Satan is the angel of light, once the greatest of the angels, whose pride caused him to seek to be higher than God and who was cast out of heaven. In the other version, Satan was a real servant of God and perverted his service into an opportunity for sinning. Satan is the supreme example of that tragedy in which the best becomes the worst.

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Revelation 12:10-12

THE SONG OF THE MARTYRS IN GLORY

Revelation 12:10-12

In these verses we have the song of the glorified martyrs when Satan is cast out of heaven.

(i) Satan appears as the Accuser of excellence; Satan, as H. B. Swete put it, is "the cynical libeller of all that God has made." According to Renan he is "the malevolent critic of creation." Satan stands for the sleepless vigilance of evil against good.

The historical background of the age in which the Revelation was written lends sharpness to this picture of Satan. This was the great age of the informer, the delator. People were constantly being arrested, tortured, killed because someone had informed against them. Tacitus, writing some years before, had said: "He who had no foe was betrayed by his friend." That ancient world knew only too well what malevolent, cynical, venal accusers were like.

(ii) This picture, then, shows us what we might call the cleansing of heaven. Satan, the malevolent Accuser, is cast out for ever. It is for this reason that the martyrs in glory sing their song of triumph.

The martyrs are those who have overcome Satan.

(a) Martyrdom is itself a conquest of Satan. The martyr, has proved superior to every seduction and to every threat and even to the violence of Satan. Here is a dramatic truth for life every time we choose to suffer rather than to be disloyal is the defeat of Satan.

(b) The victory of the martyrs is won through the blood of the Lamb. There are two meanings here. First, on his Cross and through his Resurrection Jesus overcame forever the worst that evil could do to him; and those who have entrusted their lives to him share in that victory. Second, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross sin is forgiven; when a man accepts in faith what Christ has done for him, his sins are wiped out. And when he is forgiven, there is nothing for which he can possibly be accused. As Charles Wesley put it:

No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in him is mine! Alive in him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine, Bold I approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

(c) The martyrs are victorious, because they lived the great principle of the gospel. They did not consider life more important than loyalty. "He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn.12:25). This principle runs all through the gospel (Matt.10:39; Matt.16:25; Mk.8:35; Lk.9:24; Lk.17:33). For us this is not necessarily a matter of dying for the faith but of setting loyalty to Jesus Christ before the comfortable way.

(iii) This passage finishes with the idea that Satan is cast out of heaven and has come down to earth. His power in heaven is broken, but he has still power on earth; and he rages ferociously

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Revelation 12:10-12

because he knows that all that he has left is a short time upon this earth before he is finally destroyed.

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Revelation 12:13-17

THE ATTACK OF THE DRAGON

Revelation 12:13-17

The dragon, that is the Devil, on being cast out of heaven and descending to earth, attacked the woman who was the mother of the man child. We have seen that the woman stands for the Church in its widest sense of God's Chosen People from the midst of whom God's Anointed One came.

Here, then, is a certain symbolism. The dragon can injure the child by injuring the mother; that is to say, to injure the Church is to injure Jesus Christ. The words of the Risen Christ to Paul on the Damascus road were: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Ac.9:4). Paul's persecution had been directed against the Church; but the Risen Christ makes it clear that persecution of his Church is persecution of himself. When we despoil the Church of the help we might have given it, we despoil Jesus of the help we might have given him; and when we serve the Church, we serve Jesus himself.

We have already seen (Rev.12:6) that the escape of the woman to the desert place comes from the escape of the Church to Pella on the other side of Jordan before the final destruction of Jerusalem. But in the escape of the woman and in the attack of the dragon John uses two pictures very familiar to those who knew the Old Testament.

The woman escaped on the two wings of the great eagle. Again and again in the Old Testament the eagle's wings are the symbol of the upbearing arms of God. "You have seen," God said to Israel, "what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself" (Exo.19:4). "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the Lord alone did lead him (the people of Israel)" (Deut.32:11-12). As the Scots paraphrase has it of Isa.40:31:

On eagles' wings they mount, they soar, their wings are faith and love, Till, past the cloudy regions here, they rise to heav'n above.

We may note that, when men came to allegorize Scripture, Hippolytus saw in the eagles' wings the symbol of "the two holy arms of Christ outstretched upon the Cross."

The second picture is of the floods of water cast out by the serpent. We have seen how the old dragon of chaos was a sea dragon and, therefore, to connect the floods with him is quite natural. But again here we have an Old Testament picture. Again and again in the Old Testament tribulation and persecution are likened to an overwhelming flood. "All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me" (Ps.42:7). It is God's promise to the Psalmist that "the rush of great waters" shall not come near him (Ps.32:6). If the Lord had not helped him, the waters would have overwhelmed him and the streams would have gone over his soul (Ps.124:4). When he passes through the waters, God will be with him (Isa.43:2).

The chapter finishes with two further pictures.

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Revelation 12:13-17

When the dragon ejected the floods of waters, the earth swallowed them up and so the woman was saved. It is not difficult to see where John got this picture. It quite often happened in Asia Minor that rivers were swallowed up in the sand only to reappear after travelling a distance underground. There was, for instance, a case of this near Colossae, an area which John must have known well.

But it is not so easy to see what the picture means. The symbolism is very likely this. Nature itself is on the side of the man who is faithful to Jesus Christ. As Froude the historian pointed out, in the world there is a moral order and in the long run it is well with the good and ill with the wicked.

Finally John has the picture of the dragon going to war with the rest of the family of the woman, with the rest of the Church. This tells of the coming spread of persecution all over the Church.

As John saw it, Satan cast down to earth is in his last terrible convulsion and that convulsion is going to involve the whole family of the Church in the agony of persecution.

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Revelation 13:1-18

THE POWER OF THE BEAST

Revelation 13:1-18

I saw a beast coming up from the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads; and it had ten royal crowns on its horns; and on its heads I saw blasphemous names.

The beast which I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's feet; its mouth was like a lion's mouth; and to it the dragon delegated its power and its throne and its great authority.

I saw that one of its heads looked as if it had been wounded to death; and its deadly wound had been healed.

The whole earth was drawn in wonder after the beast; and they worshipped the dragon, because it had delegated its authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast. "Who," they said, "is like the beast? Who is able to make war with it?" To it there was given a mouth which made arrogant and blasphemous claims; and it was given authority to go on doing so for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to launch blasphemies against God, to insult his name and his dwelling-place and those who dwell in the heavens.

It was given power to make war with the dedicated people of God and to overcome them; and it was given authority over every tribe and people and tongue and race. All who dwell upon the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain.

Whoever has an ear, let him hear.

If anyone is to be taken into captivity, into captivity let him go. If anyone slays with the sword, he himself will be slain with the sword. Here is the summons to steadfastness and to loyalty from the dedicated people of God.

I saw another beast coming up from the land, and it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises before it all the power of the first beast. It causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, the beast whose deadly wound has been healed. It works such great miracles that it causes even fire to come down from heaven in the sight of men. It deceives those who dwell on the earth, because of the miracles which it has the power to do in the presence of the beast. It tells those who dwell upon the earth to make an image of the beast, who has the wound of the sword, and who lived again. It was given power to give the breath of life to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast should even speak and so that it should bring it about that all who do not worship the beast should be killed.

It causes all, small and great, rich and poor, free men and slaves, to take to themselves a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, It so arranges things that no one can buy or sell, unless he has the mark, which consists of the name of the beast or the number of his name.

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Revelation 13:1-18

Here there is need of wisdom. Let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for the number is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

It will be much easier if we treat this chapter as a whole before we undertake any detailed study of it. That is all the more necessary because this chapter is the essence of the whole book.

The general meaning is this. Satan, cast out of heaven, knows that his time is short and is determined to do as much damage as he can. To cause that damage on earth he delegates his power to the two beasts who are the central figures in this chapter.

The beast from the sea stands for the Roman Empire, to John the incarnation of evil and is described in terms which come from Daniel. In Dn.7:3-7 there is a vision of four great beasts who come out of the sea; they are the symbols of the great empires which have held world power and of an empire which, when Daniel was written, was holding world sway. The beast like a lion with an eagle's wings stands for Babylon; the one like a bear stands for Media; the one like a leopard with four wings stands for Persia; and the fourth stands for the empire of Alexander the Great. As the writer of Daniel saw these world powers, they were so savage and inhuman that they could be symbolized by nothing but bestial figures. It was only natural for a Jew to go back to this picture of the beastly empires when he wished to find a picture of another satanic empire threatening God's people in his own day.

John's picture in the Revelation puts together in the one beast the features of all four. It is like a leopard with bear's feet and a lion's mouth. That is to say, for John the Roman Empire was so satanic that it included all the terrors of the evil empires which had gone before.

This beast has seven heads and ten horns. These stand for the rulers and the emperors of Rome. Since Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, there had been seven emperors; Tiberius, A.D. 14-37; Caligula, A.D. 37-41; Claudius, A.D. 41-54; Nero, A.D. 55-68; Vespasian, A.D. 69-79; Titus, A.D. 79-81; Domitian, A.D. 81-96. These seven emperors are the seven heads of the beast. But in addition it is said that the beast had ten horns. The explanation of this second figure lies in this. After the death of Nero there was a short period of almost complete chaos. In eighteen months three different men briefly occupied the imperial power, Galba, Otho and Vitellius. They are not included in John's list of the seven heads but are included in the list of the ten horns.

John says that on the heads of the beast there were blasphemous names. These are the titles which the emperors took to themselves. Every emperor was called *divus* or *sebastos* (GSN4575), which means divine. Frequently the very name God or Son of God was given to the emperors; and Nero on his coins called himself The Saviour of the World. For any man to call himself divine was a blasphemous insult to God. Further, the later emperors took as their title the Latin word *dominus*, or its Greek equivalent *kurios* (GSN2962), both of which mean lord, and in the Old Testament are the special title of God and in the New Testament the special title of Jesus Christ.

The second beast which figures in this chapter, the beast from the land, is the whole provincial organization of magistrates and priesthoods designed to enforce Caesar worship, which confronted the Christians with the choice either of saying, "Caesar is Lord," or of dying.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:1-18

So, then, our picture falls into place. These two savage beasts, the might of Rome and the organization of Caesar worship, launched their combined attack on the Christians--and no nation had ever withstood the might of Rome. What hope had the Christians--poor, defenceless, outlaws?

THE HEAD WOUNDED AND RESTORED

There is another recurring theme in this chapter. Among the seven heads there is one which has been mortally wounded and restored to life (Rev.13:3); that head above all is to be worshipped (Rev.13:12,14); it is the supreme evil, the supreme enemy of Christ.

We have seen that the seven heads stand for the seven Roman emperors. A head wounded and restored to life will, therefore, stand for an emperor who died and came to life again. Here is symbolized the Nero redivivus, or Nero resurrected, legend which the Christians fused with the idea of Antichrist. In the Sibylline Oracles we read of the expectation in the last terrible days of the coming of a king from Babylon whom all men hate, a king fearful and shameless and of abominable parentage (5: 143-148). A matricide shall come from the east and bring ruin on the world (5: 361-364). One who dared the pollution of a mother's murder will come from the east (4: 119-122). An exile from Rome with a myriad of swords shall come from beyond the Euphrates (4: 137-139).

It is only when we realize what Nero was that we see how his return might well seem the coming of Antichrist.

No man ever started life with a worse heritage than Nero. His father was Cnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, who was notorious for wickedness. He had killed a freedman for no other crime than refusing to drink more wine; he had deliberately run over a child in his chariot on the Appian Way; in a brawl in the Forum he had gouged out the eye of a Roman knight; and he finally died of dropsy brought on by his debauchery. His mother was Agrippina, one of the most terrible women in history. When Ahenobarbus knew that he and Agrippina were to have a child he cynically said that nothing but a monstrous abomination could come from himself and her. When Nero was three, Agrippina was banished by the Emperor Caligula. Nero was handed over to the care of his aunt Lepida who entrusted his education to two wretched slaves, one a barber and the other a dancer.

Under the Emperor Claudius, Agrippina was recalled from exile. She had now only one ambition--somehow to make her son emperor. She was warned by fortune-tellers that, if ever Nero became emperor, the result for her would be disaster. Her answer was: "Let him kill me, so long as he reigns."

Agrippina set to work with all the passion and the intrigue of her stormy nature. Claudius already had two children, Octavia and Britannicus, but Agrippina badgered him into adopting Nero as his son, when Nero was eleven years of age, and persuaded him to marry her although he was her uncle. Agrippina then summoned the famous philosopher, Seneca, and the great soldier, Afranius Burrus, to be Nero's tutors. Steadily Britannicus, the heir to the throne, was pushed into the background and Nero was given the limelight.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:1-18

For five years the marriage lasted and then Agrippina arranged for Claudius' poisoning by a dish of poisoned mushrooms. When Claudius lay in a coma, she hastened his end by brushing his throat with a poisoned feather. No sooner had Claudius died, than Nero was led forth as emperor, the army having been bribed to support him.

A curious situation ensued. For the next five years Rome was never better governed. Nero was busy playing at painting, sculpture, music, theatricals; he was the complete dilettante; and the wise Seneca and the upright Burrus governed the empire.

Then Nero stopped being the cultured dilettante and embarked on a career of vicious crime. At night with other gilded youths he would roam the streets attacking all whom he could find. Worse was to come. He murdered Britannicus as a possible rival.

No young man or woman was safe from his lust. He was a blatant homosexual. He publicly married a youth named Sporus in a state wedding; and he took Sporus with him on a bridal tour of Greece. He was "married" to a freedman called Doryphorus. He took Poppaea Sabina the wife of Otho, his closest friend, as his paramour, and kicked her to death when she was with child.

He had a passion for wild extravagance and extracted money from all and sundry. The imperial court was a welter of murder, immorality and crime.

One of Nero's passions was building. In A.D. 64 came the great fire of Rome which burned for a week. There is not the slightest doubt that Nero began it or that he hindered every attempt to extinguish it, so that he might have the glory of rebuilding the city. The people well knew who was responsible for the fire but Nero diverted the blame on to the Christians and the most deliberately sadistic of all persecutions broke out. He had the Christians sewn up in the skins of wild animals and set his savage hunting dogs upon them. He had them enclosed in sacks with stones and flung into the Tiber. He had them coated with pitch and set alight as living torches to light the gardens of his palace.

The insanity of evil grew wilder and wilder. Seneca was forced to commit suicide; Burrus was murdered by a poisoned draught which Nero sent him as a cure for a sore throat; anyone who incurred Nero's slightest displeasure was killed.

Agrippina made some attempt to control him and finally he turned against her. He made repeated attempts to murder her--by poison, by causing the roof of her house to collapse, by sending her to sea in a boat designed to break up. Finally, he sent his freedman Anicetus to stab her to death. When Agrippina saw the dagger, she bared her body. "Strike my womb," she said, "because it bore a Nero."

It could not last. First Julius Vindex rebelled in Gaul, then Galba in Spain. Finally the senate took its courage in its hands and declared Nero a public enemy. In the end he died by suicide in the wretched villa of a freedman called Phaon.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:1-18

This is the head of the beast, wounded and restored; the Antichrist whom John expected was the resurrected Nero.

We must now look at this chapter section by section in more detail. This may involve a certain amount of repetition, but in a chapter so central and so difficult the repetition will make for clarity.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:1-5

THE DEVIL AND THE BEAST

Revelation 13:1-5

We begin by summarizing the facts already set out in the introductory material to this chapter. The beast is the Roman Empire; the seven heads are the seven emperors in whose time Caesar worship became a power in the empire--Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. The ten heads are these seven emperors together with the three other rulers whose total reigns lasted for only eighteen months in the time of chaos which followed the death of Nero--Galba, Otho and Vitellius. The head which was wounded and restored to life again symbolizes the Nero redivivus idea.

In this picture the Roman Empire is symbolized by a beast which was like a leopard, with a bear's feet and a lion's mouth.

This indicates a completely changed attitude to Rome. Paul had received nothing but help from the Roman government. Time and again the intervention of the Roman authorities and the fact that he was a Roman citizen had saved him from the fury of the Jews. It had been so in Philippi (Ac.16); in Corinth (Ac.18); in Ephesus (Ac.19); and in Jerusalem (Ac.21-22). It had been Paul's view that the powers that be were ordained of God and that all Christians must render a conscientious obedience to them (Rom.13:1-6). In the Pastoral Epistles prayer is to be made for kings and for all who are in authority (1Tim.2:1). In First Peter the injunction is to be a good citizen; to be subject to governors; to fear God, and to honour the emperor (1Pet.2:13-17). In 2Th.2:6-7 the most probable explanation is that it is the Roman Empire which is the restraining force which keeps the world from disintegrating into chaos and the man of sin from beginning his reign.

In the Revelation things are changed. Caesar worship has emerged. The emperors call themselves by blasphemous names--divine, Son of God, Saviour, Lord. The might of Rome is arrayed to crush the Christian faith; and Rome has become the agent of the devil.

In the description of the beast, H. B. Swete sees a symbol of the power of Rome. The empire has the vigilance, craft and cruelty of the leopard, ever ready to spring upon its prey; it has the crushing strength of the bear; it is like the lion whose roar terrifies the flock.

"Who is like the beast?" is a grim parody of the great question: "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?" (Exo.15:11). H. B. Swete points out that the beast's claim to preeminence lies not in any moral greatness but in sheer brute force. Any empire founded on brute force and not on moral greatness is anti-God. The description of the beast as speaking haughty things (Rev.13:5) comes from the description in Daniel of the little horn (Dn.7:8; Dn.7:20).

One great truth stands out in this section. In this world a man and a nation have the choice between being the instrument of Satan and the instrument of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:6-9

INSULT TO GOD

Revelation 13:6-9 (Part 1)

Rev.13:6 is difficult. It says of the beast that it opened its mouth to launch blasphemies against God and his dwelling-place and those who dwell in the heavens.

(i) This may be taken quite generally. It may mean that the power of the empire and the institution of Caesar worship are a blasphemy against God, and heaven, and the angels. If we like to take this a little further, we can take more out of the word used for God's dwelling-place; the Greek is skene (GSN4633), which means a tent or a tabernacle or a place to dwell. Although it has really no connection with it, skene (GSN4633) always reminded a Jew of the Hebrew word shechinah, the glory of God. (Compare the Hebrew verb, shakan, to dwell, HSN7931). So it may be that John is saying that the whole conduct of the Roman Empire, and particularly the institution of Caesar worship, is an insult to the glory of God.

(ii) But it is possible to take this passage in a more particular sense. The beast is the Roman Empire. It may be that John is thinking of all the ways--not just those in his own time--in which Rome had insulted God and his dwelling-place.

Most Roman Emperors were embarrassed by Caesar worship; but not Caligula, A.D. 37-41, who was an epileptic and more than a little mad. He took his divinity very seriously and insisted that he should be universally worshipped.

The Jews had always been exempt from Caesar worship because the Romans were well aware of their immovable allegiance to the worship of one God. This is closely parallel to the fact that of all peoples in the empire the Jews alone were exempt from military service, because of their strict observance of food laws and their absolute observance of the Sabbath. But Caligula insisted that an image of himself should be set up within the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews would have suffered extermination rather than submit to such desecration of the Holy Place but Caligula had actually collected an army to enforce his demand (Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews 18: 8) when by great good fortune he died.

If ever there was an insult to the dwelling-place of God, this action of Caligula was one. And it may well be that this notorious incident is in John's mind when he speaks of the insults which the beast launched against the dwelling-place of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:6-9

EARTHLY DANGER AND DIVINE SAFETY

Revelation 13:6-9 (Part 2)

It was given to the beast to overcome those whose names were not written in the Book of Life. The Book of Life is mentioned frequently in the Revelation (Rev.3:5; Rev.13:8; Rev.17:8; Rev.20:12; Rev.20:15; Rev.21:27). In the ancient world rulers kept registers of those who were citizens of their realms; only when a man died or lost his rights as a citizen, was his name removed. The Book of Life is the register of those who belong to God.

In Rev.13:8 there is a question of translation. So far as the Greek goes, there are two equally possible translations, either: "Those whose names have been written before the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb that was slain," or, "Those whose names have been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world."

(i) The first is undoubtedly the translation in the parallel passage in Rev.17:8. A close parallel would be in Eph.1:4 where Paul says that God has chosen us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. The meaning would then be that God has chosen his own from before the beginning of time, and nothing in life or in death, nothing in time or eternity, nothing that the Devil or the Roman Empire can ever do can pluck them from his hand. This is the rendering of the Revised Standard Version and the newer translations.

(ii) The second translation speaks of Jesus Christ as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. A close parallel to this would be in 1Pet.1:19-20 where Peter speaks of Jesus and his sacrifice as being foreordained before the foundation of the world. The Jews held the belief that Michael, the archangel, was created before the foundation of the world to be the mediator between Israel and God; and that Moses was created before the foundation of the world to be the mediator of the covenant between God and Israel. There would, therefore, be nothing unfamiliar to Jewish thought in saying that Jesus was created before the beginning of the world to be the Redeemer of mankind.

We have in these two translations two equally precious truths. But, if we must choose, we must choose the first, because there is no doubt that is the way in which John uses the phrase when he repeats it in Rev.17:8.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:10

THE CHRISTIAN'S ONLY WEAPONS

Revelation 13:10

At first sight this is a difficult verse.

If anyone is to be taken into captivity, into captivity let him go. If anyone slays with the sword, he himself will be slain with the sword. Here is the summons to steadfastness and to loyalty from the dedicated people of God.

The verse is made up of two quotations. It begins by quoting from Jer.15:2, where Jeremiah is told to tell the people that such as are for death will go forth to death; such as are for the sword will go forth to the sword; such as are for famine will go forth to famine; and such as are for captivity will go forth to captivity. The idea there is that there is no escaping the decree of God. The verse then goes to quote the saying of Jesus in Matt.26:52. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when the mob has come to arrest Jesus and Peter draws his sword to defend him, Jesus says: "Put your sword back into its place: for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." There are three things here.

(i) If the Christian faith means imprisonment, the Christian must uncomplainingly accept it. Whatever is involved in following Christ, the Christian must accept.

(ii) Christianity can never be defended by force; the man who takes the sword perishes with the sword. When the Roman government began persecuting, the Christians could be numbered perhaps by the hundred thousand; and yet it never occurred to them to use force to resist. It is an intolerable paradox to defend the gospel of the love of God by using the violence of man.

(iii) There are weapons which the Christian can use and these are steadfastness and loyalty. The word for steadfastness is *hupomone* (GSN5281), which does not simply mean passively enduring but courageously accepting the worst that life can do and turning it into glory. The word for loyalty is *pistis* (GSN4102), which means that fidelity which will never waver in its devotion to its Master.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:11-17

THE POWER OF THE SECOND BEAST

Revelation 13:11-17 (Part 1)

This passage deals with the power of the second beast, the organization set up to enforce Caesar worship throughout the empire. Certain things are said about this power.

(i) It produces signs and wonders, such as fire from heaven; it brings it about that the image of the beast should speak. Everywhere there were statues of the emperor in the presence of which the official act of worship was carried out. In all ancient religions the priests knew how to produce signs and wonders; they knew well how to produce the effect of a speaking, image. Pharaoh had had his magicians in the time of Moses, and the imperial priesthood had its experts in conjuring tricks and ventriloquism and the like.

In Rev.13:11 there is a curious phrase. This beast from the land is said to have two horns like a lamb; that is, it is a grim parody of the Lamb in the Christian sense of the term. But it is also said to speak like a dragon. It is just possible that that last phrase should be that it spoke like the serpent. The reference would then be to the serpent who seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden. The imperial priesthood could easily use seductive appeals: "Look what Rome has done for you; look at the peace and the prosperity you enjoy; have you ever known a greater benefactor than the emperor? Surely in simple gratitude you can give him this formal act of worship." There are always excellent arguments why the Church should compromise with the world; but the fact remains that, when it does, Christ is betrayed again.

(ii) This beast brings it about that those who will not worship will be killed. That was, in fact, the law. If a Christian refused to make the act of worship to Caesar, he was liable to death. The death penalty was not always carried out; but, if a Christian had not the mark of the beast, he could not buy or sell. That is to say, if a man refused to worship the emperor, even if his life was spared, he would be economically ruined. It remains true that the world knows how to bring pressure to bear on those who will not accept its standards. Often still a man has to choose between material success and loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:11-17

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Revelation 13:11-17 (Part 2)

Those who had given the worship to Caesar which was demanded had on them the mark of the beast on their right hand and on their forehead. This mark is another of the grim parodies which occur in this chapter; it is a parody of a sacred Jewish custom. When a Jew prayed, he wore phylacteries on his left arm and on his forehead. They were little leather boxes with little scrolls of parchment inside them on which the following passages were written--Exo.13:1-10; Exo.13:11-16; Deut.6:4-9; Deut.11:13-21.

The word for the mark of the beast is charagma (GSN5480), and it could come from more than one ancient custom.

(i) Sometimes domestic slaves were branded with the mark of their owner. But usually they were branded only if they had run away or had been guilty of some grave misdemeanour. Such a mark was called a stigma (GSN4742); we still use the word in English. If the mark is connected with this, it means that those who worship the beast are his property.

(ii) Sometimes soldiers branded themselves with the name of their general, if they were very devoted to him. This, to some extent, corresponds to the modern custom of tattooing upon one's person the name of someone specially dear. If the mark is connected with this, it means that those who worship the beast are his devoted followers.

(iii) On every contract of buying or selling there was a charagma (GSN5480), a seal, and on the seal the name of the emperor and the date. If the mark is connected with this, it means that those who worship the beast accept his authority.

(iv) All coinage had the head and inscription of the emperor stamped upon it, to show that it was his property. If the mark is connected with this, it again means that those who bear it are the property of the beast.

(v) When a man had burned his pinch of incense to Caesar, he was given a certificate to say that he had done so. The mark of the beast may be the certificate of worship, which a Christian could obtain only at the cost of denying his faith.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:18

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

Revelation 13:18

In this verse we are told that the number of the beast is six hundred and sixty-six; and it is almost certainly true that more ingenuity has been expended on this verse than on any other verse in Scripture. Who is this satanic beast so symbolized? It must be remembered that the ancient peoples had no figures and the letters of the alphabet did duty for numbers as well. This is as if in English we used A for 1, B for 2, C for 3, D for 4, and so on. Every word, therefore, and in particular every proper name, can also be a number. One charming and romantic way in which use was made of this fact is quoted by Deissmann. On the walls of Pompeii a lover wrote: "I love her whose number is 545," and thereby he at one and the same time identified and concealed his loved one!

The suggestions as to the meaning of 666 are endless. Since it is the number of the beast, everyone has twisted it to fit his own arch-enemy; and so 666 has been taken to mean the Pope, John Knox, Martin Luther, Napoleon and many another. Dr. Kepler provides us with an example of what ingenuity produced during the Second World War. Let A = 100; B = 101; C = 102; D = 103 and so on. Then we can make this addition:

H = 107 I = 108 T = 119 L = 111 E = 104 R = 117

and the sum is 666!

Very early we saw that the Revelation is written in code; it is clear that nowhere will the code be more closely guarded than in regard to this number which stands for the arch-enemy of the Church. The strange thing is that the key must have been lost very early; for even so great a Christian scholar as Irenaeus in the second century did not know what the number stood for.

We set down four of the very early guesses.

Irenaeus suggested that it might stand for Euanthas. In Greek numbers E = 5; U = 400; A = 1; N = 50; TH (the Greek letter theta) = 9; A = 1; S = 200; and the sum is 666. But as to what Euanthas meant Irenaeus had no suggestion to make; so he had simply substituted one riddle for another.

Another suggestion was that the word in question was Lateinos. L = 30; A = 1; T = 300; E = 5; I = 10; N = 50; O = 70; S = 200; and the sum is 666. Lateinos could be taken to mean Latin and, therefore, could stand for the Roman Empire.

A third suggestion was Teitan. T = 300; E = 5; I = 10; T = 300; A = 1; N = 50; and the sum is 666. Teitan could be made to yield two meanings. First, in Greek mythology the Titans were the great rebels against God. Second, the family name of Vespasian and Titus and Domitian was Titus, and possibly they could be called the Titans.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 13:18

A fourth suggestion was arnoume. A = 1; R = 100; N = 50; O = 70; U = 400; M = 40; E = 5; and the sum is 666. It is just possible that arnoume could be a form of the Greek word arnoumai (GSN0720), "I deny." In this case the number would stand for the denial of the name of Christ.

None of these suggestions is convincing. The chapter itself gives us by far the best clue. There recurs again and again the mention of the head that was wounded to death and then restored. We have already seen that that head symbolizes the Nero redivivus legend. We might well, therefore, act on the assumption that the number has something to do with Nero. Many ancient manuscripts give the number as 616. If we take Nero in Latin and give it its numerical equivalent, we get:

N = 50

E = 6

R = 500

O = 60

N = 50

The total is 666; and the name can equally well be spelled without the final N which would give the number 616. In Hebrew the letters of Nero Caesar also add up to 666.

There is little doubt that the number of the beast stands for Nero; and that John is forecasting the coming of Antichrist in the form of Nero, the incarnation of all evil, returning to this world.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 14:1

THE FATHER'S OWN

Revelation 14:1

I saw, and behold the Lamb stood on Mount Sion, and there were with him one hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name, and the name of his Father written on their foreheads.

John's next vision opens with the Lamb standing in triumph on Mount Sion and with him the one hundred and forty-four thousand of whom we read in Rev.7. They are marked with his name and with the name of his Father on their foreheads. We have already thought about the meaning of the marking but we must look at it again. In the ancient world a mark upon a person could stand for at least five different things.

(i) It could stand for ownership. Often the slave was branded with his owner's mark, as sheep and cattle are branded. The company with the Lamb belong to God.

(ii) It could stand for loyalty. The soldier would sometimes brand his hand with the name of the general whom he loved and would follow into any battle. The company of the Lamb are the veterans who have proved their loyalty.

(iii) It could stand for security. There is a curious third or fourth century papyrus letter from a son to his father Apollo. Times are dangerous, and the son and the father are separated. The son sends his greetings and good wishes, and then goes on: "I have indeed told you before of my grief at your absence from among us, and my fear that something dreadful might happen to you, and that we may not find your body. Indeed, I often wished to tell you that, having regard to the insecurity, I wanted to stamp a mark upon you" (P. Oxy. 680). The son wished to put a mark upon his father's body in order to keep it safe. The company of the Lamb are those marked for security in life and in death.

(iv) It could stand for dependence. Robertson Smith quotes a curious example of this. The great Arab chieftains had their humble clients who were absolutely dependent on them. Often the sheik would brand them with the same mark as he used to brand his camels to show that they were dependent on him. The company of the Lamb are those who are utterly dependent on his love and grace.

(v) It could stand for safety. It was common for those who were the devotees of a god to be stamped with his sign. Sometimes that worked very cruelly. Plutarch tells us that after the disastrous defeat of the Athenians under Nicias in Sicily, the Sicilians took the captives and branded them on the forehead with a galloping horse, the emblem of Sicily (Plutarch: Nicias 29). 3 Maccabees tells us that Ptolemy the Fourth of Egypt ordered that "all Jews should be degraded to the lowest rank and to the condition of slaves; and that those who spoke against it should be taken by force and put to death; and that these when they were registered should be marked with a brand on their bodies, with the ivy leaf, the emblem of Bacchus" (3 Maccabees 2: 28, 29).

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 14:1

These instances involve degradation and cruelty. But there were others. The Syrians were regularly tattooed on the wrist or the neck with the mark of their god. But there is a more relevant instance than any of these. Herodotus (2: 113) tells us that there was a temple of Heracles at the Canopic mouth of the Nile which possessed the right of asylum. Any criminal, slave or free man, was safe there from pursuing vengeance. When such a fugitive reached that temple, he was branded with certain sacred marks in token that he had delivered himself to the god and that none could touch him any more. They were the marks of absolute security. The company of the Lamb are those who have cast themselves on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ and are for ever safe.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 14:2-3

THE SONG WHICH ONLY GOD'S OWN CAN LEARN

Revelation 14:2-3

And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the voice of great thunder, and the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps. And they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders, and no one was able to learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased for God from the earth.

This passage begins with a wonderful description of the voice of God.

(i) It was like the sound of many waters. Here we are reminded of the power of the voice of God, for there is no power like the crash of the mountainous waves upon the beaches and the cliffs.

(ii) It was like the voice of great thunder. Here we are reminded of the unmistakableness of the voice of God. No one can fail to hear the thunder-clap.

(iii) It was like the sound of many harpers playing on their harps. Here we are reminded of the melody of the voice of God. There is in that voice the gentle graciousness of sweet music to calm the troubled heart.

The Lamb's company were singing a song which only they could learn. Here there is a truth which runs through all life. To learn certain things a man must be a certain kind of person. The Lamb's company were able to learn the new song because they had passed through certain experiences.

(a) They had suffered. There are certain things which only sorrow can teach. As someone made the poets say: "We learned in suffering what we teach in song." Sorrow can produce resentment but it can also produce faith and peace and a new song.

(b) They had lived in loyalty. It is clear that, as the years pass on, the leader will draw closer to his loyal followers and they to him; then he will be able to teach them things the unfaithful or spasmodic follower can never learn.

(e) That is another way of saying that the company of the Lamb had made steady progress in spiritual growth. A teacher can teach deeper things to a mature student than to an immature beginner. And Jesus Christ can reveal more treasures of wisdom to those who day by day grow up into him. The tragedy of so many is static Christianity.

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Revelation 14:4a

THE FINEST FLOWER

Revelation 14:4a

These are they who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins.

We take this half verse by itself, for it is one of the most difficult sayings in the whole of the Revelation, and it is of the utmost importance to get its meaning clear. It describes the unsullied purity of those who are in the company of the Lamb, but in what does that purity consist?

(i) Does it describe those who in sexual relationships have been pure? That can hardly be the case, for the people in question are described, not simply as pure, but as virgins, that is, as those who have never known sexual relations at all.

(ii) Does it describe those who have kept themselves free from spiritual adultery, that is, from all disloyalty to Jesus Christ? Again and again in the Old Testament we find it said of the people of Israel that they went awhoring after strange gods (Exo.34:15; Deut.31:16; Judg.2:17; Judg.8:27,33; Hos.9:1). But this passage does not read as if it was metaphorical.

(iii) Does it describe those who have remained celibate? The days soon came when the Church glorified virginity and held that the highest Christian life was possible only for those who renounced marriage altogether. The Gnostics held that "marriage and generation are from Satan." Tatian held that "marriage is corruption and fornication." Marcion set up churches for those who were celibates and from which all others were barred. One of the greatest of the early fathers, Origen, voluntarily castrated himself to ensure perpetual virginity.

In the Acts of Paul and Thecla (11) it is the charge of Demas against Paul that "he deprives young men of wives and maidens of husbands by saying that in no other way shall there be a resurrection for you save by remaining chaste and keeping the flesh chaste." There is a record of a Roman trial (Ruinart: Acts of the Martyrs, 27th April, 304) in which the Christians are described as "the people who impose upon silly women and tell them that they must not marry and persuade them to adopt a fanciful chastity." This is precisely the spirit which was to beget the monasteries and the convents, and the implication that everything to do with sex and the body is wrong.

This is far from the teaching of the New Testament. Jesus glorified marriage, saying that for this cause a man left his own family and was so closely united to his wife that they were one flesh, and warning that what God has joined no man may put asunder (Matt.19:4-6). In his highest teaching Paul glorified marriage, likening the relationship of Christ to his Church to the relationship between man and wife (Eph.5:22-33). The writer to the Hebrews lays it down: "Let marriage be held in honour among all" (Heb.13:4).

What, then, are we to say of our present passage? If we are to treat it honestly, we cannot avoid the conclusion that it praises celibacy and virginity and belittles marriage. There are two possible explanations.

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Revelation 14:4a

(a) It is possible that the writer of the Revelation did mean to exalt celibacy and virginity; the likelihood is that he was writing about A.D. 90 when this tendency was already in the Church. If that is so we will have to lay this passage on one side, because, tested by the rest of the New Testament, it is not a correct statement of the Christian ethic.

(b) There is another possible interpretation. When scribes were copying New Testament books they often added notes and comments in the margin, to explain the text. It may well be that some scribe in later days, copying this passage wished to give his opinion as to who the one hundred and forty thousand were; and added in the margin: "This means those who never defiled themselves with women and who remained virgins." This is all the more likely since many of the later scribes were monks. When the manuscript was recopied, the comment in the margin may well have been included in the text as very commonly happened. This would then mean that the first half of Rev.14:4 is not the words of John at all but the comment of a scribe.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 14:4b-5

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

Revelation 14:4b-5

These are they who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were bought from amongst men, a sacrifice to God and to the Lamb, and no falsehood was found in their mouth, for they are without blemish.

The company of the Lamb are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. The simplest definition of a Christian is simply one who follows Jesus Christ. "Follow me!" Jesus said to Philip (Jn.1:43), and to Matthew (Mk.2:14). "Follow me!" he said to the rich young ruler (Mk.10:21), and to the unnamed disciple (Lk.9:59). When Peter asked what was to happen to John, Jesus told him not to bother about what would happen to others but to concentrate on following him (Jn.21:19-22). He left us an example, said Peter, that we should follow in his steps (1Pet.2:21).

John calls the company of the Lamb three things:

(i) They are a sacrifice to God and to the Lamb. The word for sacrifice is *aparche* (GSN0536). This really means the sacrifice of the first-fruits. The first-fruits were the best of the crop; they were a symbol of the harvest to come; and they were a symbolic dedication of the whole harvest to God. So the Christian is the best that can be offered to God; each Christian is a foretaste of the time when all the world will be dedicated to God; and the Christian is the man who has consecrated his life to God.

(ii) No falsehood was found in their mouth. This is a favourite thought in Scripture. "Blessed is the man," says the Psalmist, "in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Ps.32:2). Isaiah said of the servant of the Lord: "And there was no deceit in his mouth" (Isa.53:9). Zephaniah said of the chosen remnant of the people: "Nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue" (Zeph.3:13). Peter took the words about the servant and applied them to Jesus: "No guile was found on his lips" (1Pet.2:22). There is something here which we can well understand. Just as we desire friends who are sincere, so does Jesus Christ.

(iii) They are without blemish. The word is *amomos* (GSN0299) and is characteristically a sacrificial word. It describes the animal which is without flaw and so fit for an offering to God. It is interesting to note how often this word is used of the Christian. God has chosen us that we should be holy and without blame before him (Eph.1:4; compare Col.1:22). The Church must be glorious, not having spot, or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph.5:27). Peter speaks of Jesus as a Lamb without blemish and without spot (1Pet.1:19). We received life to make of it a sacrifice to God; and that which is offered to God must be without blemish.

There follows the vision of the three angels, the angel with the summons to worship the true God (Rev.14:6-7), the angel who foretells the doom of Rome (Rev.14:8), and the angel who foretells the judgment and destruction of those who have denied their faith and worshipped the beast (Rev.14:9-12).

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Revelation 14:6-7

THE SUMMONS TO THE WORSHIP OF GOD

Revelation 14:6-7

And I saw another angel flying in the midst of the sky with an everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell upon the earth and to every race and tribe and tongue and people. And he was saying with a great voice: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the springs of waters."

One of the signs which were to precede the end was that the gospel would be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations (Matt.24:14). Here is the fulfillment of that prophecy. The angel comes with the message of the gospel to all races and tribes and tongues and peoples.

The angel comes with an everlasting gospel. Everlasting could mean that the gospel is eternally valid, that even in a world which is crashing to its doom its truth still stands. It could mean that the gospel has existed from all eternity. Paul in the great doxology in Romans speaks of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began (Rom.16:25). It could mean that the gospel is the eternal purpose of God for man. It could mean that it deals with the eternal things.

It may seem strange that the angel with the gospel is followed immediately by the angels of doom. But the gospel has of necessity a double-edged quality. It is good news for those who receive it but it is judgment to those who reject it. And the condemnation of those who reject it is all the greater because they were given the chance to accept it.

The words of the angel are interesting. They are a summons to worship the God who is the Creator of all things. This message is not specifically Christian but the basis of all religion. It corresponds exactly to the message which Paul and Barnabas brought to the people of Lystra, when they told them that they must "turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that is in them" (Ac.14:15). H. B. Swete called this "an appeal to the conscience of untaught heathenism, incapable as yet of apprehending any other."

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Revelation 14:8

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Revelation 14:8

And another angel, a second angel, followed him saying: "Fallen, fallen is the great Babylon, who made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

Here is prophesied the doom of Rome. Throughout the Revelation Rome is described as Babylon, a description which was common between the Testaments. The writer of 2 Baruch begins his pronouncement against Rome: "I, Baruch, say this against thee, Babylon" (2 Baruch 11: 1). When the Sibylline Oracles describe the imagined flight of Nero from Rome, they say: "Then shall flee from Babylon a king shameless and fearless, whom all mortals and the best men loathe" (Sibylline Oracles 5: 143). In the ancient days Babylon to the prophets had been the very incarnation of power and lust and luxury and sin; and to the early Jewish Christians Babylon seemed to have been reborn in the lust and luxury and immorality of Rome.

The fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Persian had been one of the shattering events of ancient history. The very words which the Revelation uses are echoes of those in which the ancient prophets had foretold that fall. "Fallen, fallen is Babylon," said Isaiah, "and all the images of her gods he has shattered to the ground" (Isa.21:9). "Suddenly Babylon has fallen," said Jeremiah, "and been broken" (Jer.51:8).

Babylon is said to have made all the nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. In this phrase two Old Testament conceptions have been fused into one. In Jer.51:7 it is said of Babylon: "Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore, the nations went mad." The idea is that Babylon had been a corrupting force which had lured the nations into a kind of insane immorality. The background is the picture of a prostitute persuading a man into immorality by filling him full of wine, so that he could no longer resist her wiles. Rome has been like that, like some glittering prostitute seducing the world. The other picture is of the cup of the wrath of God. Job says of the wicked man: "Let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty" (Jb.21:20). The Psalmist speaks of the wicked having to drink the dregs of the red cup in the hand of God (Ps.75:8). Isaiah speaks of Jerusalem having drunk the cup of God's fury (Isa.51:17).

God instructs Jeremiah to take the wine cup of his fury and to give it to the nations to drink (Jer.25:15).

We might paraphrase by saying that Babylon made the nations drink of the wine which seduces men to fornication and which brings as its consequence the wrath of God.

Behind all this remains the eternal truth that the nation or the man whose influence is to evil will not escape the avenging wrath of God.

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Revelation 14:9-12

THE DOOM OF THE MAN WHO DENIES HIS LORD

Revelation 14:9-12

And another angel, a third angel, followed them saying with a great voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, he too shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, mingled undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and he will be tortured with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. The smoke of their torture ascends for ever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image have no rest by day or night, nor has anyone who receives the mark of his name."

Here is the summons to steadfastness on the part of God's dedicated ones, who keep the commandments of God and maintain their loyalty to him.

Warning has already been given of the power of the beast and of the mark that the beast will seek to set upon all men (Rev.13). Now there is warning to those who fail in that time of trial.

It is significant that this is the fiercest warning of all. Of all dooms, as the Revelation sees it, the doom of the apostate is worst. The reason is that the Church was battling for its very existence. If it was to continue the individual Christian must be prepared to face suffering and trial, imprisonment and death. If the individual Christian yielded, the Church died. In our day the individual Christian is still of paramount importance, but his function now is not usually to protect the faith by being ready to die for it, but to commend it by being diligent to live for it.

The doom of the apostate is thought of in pictures of the most terrible judgment that ever fell on this earth--that of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Lo, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace" (Gen.19:28). John echoes the words of Isaiah describing the day of the Lord's vengeance: "And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into brimstone; her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up for ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever" (Isa.34:8-10).

The wicked will be destroyed in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. As we have seen before, part of the blessedness of heaven was to see the suffering of the sinner in hell. As 2 Esdras has it: "There shall be shewn the furnace of hell, and opposite to it the paradise of delight" (2Esdr.7:36). We have the same idea in the Book of Enoch: "I will give them over (the wicked) into the hands of mine elect: as straw in the fire, so shall they burn before the face of the holy: as lead in the water shall they sink before the face of the righteous, and no trace of them shall be found any more" (Enoch 48: 9). A feature of the last days will be "the spectacle of righteous judgment in the presence of the righteous" (Enoch 27: 2, 3). When Chrysostom was encouraging Olympias to steadfastness, he encouraged her by promising that in due time she would see the divine torture of the persecutors, just as Lazarus saw Dives tormented in flames.

We may dislike this line of thought; we may condemn it as subchristian--and indeed it is. But we have no real right to speak until we have gone through the same sufferings as the early Christians

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Revelation 14:9-12

did. Many a time the heathen had looked down from the crowded seats of the arena on the sufferings of the Christians; and the early Christians were sustained by the thought that some day the divine justice of heaven would adjust the balance of earth's injustices.

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Revelation 14:13

THE REST OF THE FAITHFUL SOUL

Revelation 14:13

And I heard a voice from heaven saying: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed, because they rest from their labours, for their deeds follow with them."

After the terrible prophecies of the terrors to come and the terrible warnings to those who are false, there comes the gracious promise.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord--the idea of dying in the Lord occurs more than once in the New Testament. Paul speaks of the dead in Christ (1Th.4:16) and of those who have fallen asleep in Christ (1Cor.15:18). The meaning of all these phrases is those who come to the end still one with Christ. Everything was trying to separate men from Christ; but the supreme happiness was for those who came to the end still inseparable from the Master whom they loved.

The promise is of rest. They will rest from their labours. Rest is never so sweet as after the most strenuous toil. As Spenser had it:

Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas,
Ease after war, death after life does greatly please.

Their works follow with them--at first this sounds as if the Revelation is preaching salvation by works. But we have to be careful what John means by works. He speaks of the works of the Ephesians--their labour and their patience (Rev.2:2); he speaks of the works of the Thyatirans--their charity and their service and their faith (Rev.2:19). By works he means character. He is in effect saying: "When you leave this earth, all that you can take with you is yourself. If you come to the end of this life still one with Christ, you will take with you a character tried and tested like gold, which has something of his reflection in it; and, if you take with you to the world beyond a character like that, blessed are you."

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Revelation 14:14-20

THE HARVEST OF JUDGMENT

Revelation 14:14-20

And I saw and behold a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man. On his head he had a victor's crown of gold, and in his hand he had a sharp sickle. And another angel came forth from the temple, saying with a great voice to him who was seated on the cloud: "Put in your sickle, and begin to reap, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe and more than ripe." And he who was seated on the cloud put in his sickle upon the earth, and the earth was reaped. And another angel came from the temple which is in heaven and he too had a sharp sickle, and there came forth from the altar another angel, the angel who controls the fire, and he called with a great voice to him who had the sharp sickle saying: "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, because the grapes are ripe." So the angel put his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, as high as the horses' bridles, for sixteen hundred stades.

The final vision of this chapter is of judgment depicted in pictures which were very familiar to Jewish thought.

It begins with the picture of the victorious figure of one like a son of man. This comes from Dn.7:13-14: "And I saw in the night visions, and, behold with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man and he came to the ancient of days, and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him."

This picture goes on to depict judgment in two metaphors familiar to Scripture.

It depicts judgment in terms of harvesting. When Joel wished to say that judgment was near, he said: "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe" (Jl.3:13). "When the grain is ripe," said Jesus, "at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mk.4:29); and in the parable of the wheat and the tares he uses the harvest as a picture of judgment (Matt.13:24-30; Matt.13:37-43).

It depicts judgment in terms of the wine press, which consisted of an upper and a lower trough connected by a channel. The troughs might be hollowed out in the rock or they might be built of brick. The grapes were put into the upper trough which was on a slightly higher level. They were then trampled with the feet and the juice flowed down the connecting channel into the lower trough. Often in the Old Testament, God's judgment is likened to the trampling of the grapes. "The Lord flouted all my mighty men in the midst of me...the Lord has trodden as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah" (Lam.1:15). "I have trodden the winepress alone; and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger, and trampled them in my wrath; their life blood is sprinkled upon my garments" (Isa.63:3).

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Revelation 14:14-20

Here, then, we have judgment depicted in the two familiar figures of the harvest and of the winepress. To this is added another familiar picture. The wine press is to be trodden outside the city, that is, Jerusalem. Both in the Old Testament and in the books between the Testaments there was a line of thought which held that the Gentiles would be brought to Jerusalem and judged there. Joel has a picture of all the nations gathered into the valley of Jehoshaphat and judged there (Jl.3:2,12). Zechariah has a picture of a last attack of the Gentiles on Jerusalem and of their judgment there (Zech.14:1-4).

There are two difficult things in this passage. First, there is the fact that the one like a son of man reaps and also an angel reaps. We may regard the one like the son of man, the risen and victorious Lord, reaping the harvest of his own people, while the angel with the sharp sickle reaps the harvest of those destined for judgment.

Second, it is said that the blood came up to the horses' bridles and spread for a distance of sixteen hundred stades or furlongs. No one has ever discovered a really satisfying explanation of this. The least unsatisfactory explanation is that sixteen hundred stades is almost exactly the length of Palestine from north to south; and this would mean that the tide of judgment would flow over and include the whole land. In that case the figure would symbolically describe the completeness of the judgment.

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Revelation 15:1-2

THE VICTORS OF CHRIST

Revelation 15:1-2

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and wonderful--it was seven angels, with seven plagues which are the final ones, because in them the wrath of God reaches its climax. And I saw what I can only call a sea of glass intermingled with fire; and I saw standing beside the sea of glass, with the harps of God, those who had emerged victorious from their struggle with the beast and with his image and with the number of his name.

It might have been thought that John could have conveniently stopped when he had told of the reaping of judgment; but he has still much to tell--the final horrors, of the thousand year reign of the saints, of the final battle and of the final blessedness.

He has told of the opening of the seven seals; he has told of the sounding of the seven trumpets; and now he must tell of the pouring out of the seven bowls of the wrath of God. His arrangement is typical of the way the apocalyptic writers tended to arrange their material in groups of seven and of three and would regard three groups of seven as standing for perfection.

The scene is in heaven. Before John tells of the seven angels with the seven bowls of wrath, he has a picture of those who came through martyrdom for Christ. They are standing beside the sea which looked as if it was of glass. We have already seen this sea in Rev.4:6. This time the glass is intermingled with fire, a natural addition in the circumstances. This is a passage of judgment and fire in Scripture is often the symbol of judgment. There comes upon Egypt hail mingled with fire (Exo.9:24); the chaff is to be consumed in the fire (Matt.3:12); our God is a consuming fire (Heb.12:29). The whole scene is grimly illuminated with the lurid light of the fire of judgment which is to descend upon the earth.

We are shortly to hear of the song of Moses. This is the song which Moses sang when the children of Israel had come triumphantly through the dangers of the crossing of the Red Sea. Even so, as H. B. Swete puts it, the martyrs have come safely through the sea of martyrdom and have arrived at the shore of heaven.

It is said that the martyrs have emerged victorious from their contest with the forces of Antichrist. There is something very significant here. The martyrs died the most savage deaths and yet they are said to have emerged victorious. It was the very fact that they had died that made them victors; if they had remained alive by being false to their faith, they would have been the defeated. Again and again the records of the early church describe a day of martyrdom as a day of victory. In the record of the martyrdom of Saint Perpetua we read: "The day of their victory dawned, and they walked from prison to the amphitheatre as if they were walking to heaven, happy and serene in countenance." Jesus said: "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt.16:25). The real victory is not prudently to preserve life but to face the worst that evil can do and if need be to be faithful to death.

"May God deny you peace," said Unamuno the Spanish mystic, "and give you glory."

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Revelation 15:3-4

THE SONG OF THE VICTORS OF CHRIST

Revelation 15:3-4

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

Great and wonderful are your works, O Lord, God the Almighty; Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who shall not fear and glorify your name, O Lord? Because you alone are holy; Because all the nations will come and worship before you; Because your righteous judgments have been made plain for all to see.

The victorious martyrs sing two songs. They sing the song of the Lamb which, as we have seen, is the song which they alone could learn (Rev.14:3). They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God. This was the song which Moses sang in triumph to God after the safe crossing of the Red Sea. It is in Exo.15:1-19. "The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.... Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods, who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?... The Lord will reign for ever and ever." This song was stamped upon the memory of the Jews. It was sung at every Sabbath evening service in the synagogue.

At every Jewish service the recital of the Shema (compare the verb, HSN8085), the creed of Israel, was followed by two prayers--it still is--and one of these prayers refers to this song: "True it is that thou art Jehovah our God, and the God of our fathers, our King, and the King of our fathers, our Saviour, and the Saviour of our fathers, our Creator, the Rock of our Salvation, our Help and our Deliverer. Thy name is from everlasting, and there is no God beside thee. A new song did they that were delivered sing to thy name by the sea-shore; together did all praise and own thee King, and say, Jehovah shall reign, world without end! Blessed be the Lord who saveth Israel." The song of Moses commemorated the greatest deliverance in the history of God's people Israel, and the victorious martyrs, brought through the sea of persecution to the promised land of heaven, sing that song.

But the martyrs have their own song. Two things stand out about it.

(i) It is almost entirely composed of quotations from the Old Testament. We set down first the words in the song and below them the Old Testament passages of which they remind us.

Great and wonderful are your works.

O Lord, how great are thy works! (Ps.92:5); The works of the Lord are great (Ps.111:2); he has done marvellous (wonderful) things (Ps.98:1); Wonderful are thy works (Ps.139:14).

Just and true are your ways.

The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings (Ps.145:17).

Who shall not fear and glorify your name, O Lord

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Revelation 15:3-4

All the nations thou hast made shall come and bow down before Thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name (Ps.86:9).

You alone are holy.

There is none holy like the Lord (1Sam.2:2); Let them praise thy great and terrible name! Holy is he! (Ps.99:3); Holy and terrible is his name (Ps.111:9).

All the nations will come and worship before you.

All the nations thou hast made shall come and bow down before thee, O Lord (Ps.86:9).

Your righteous judgments are made manifest.

The Lord has made known his victory, he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations (Ps.98:2).

A passage like this lets us see how steeped in the Old Testament John was.

(ii) There is another thing which must strike anyone about the song of the triumphant martyrs. There is not one single word in it about their own achievement; from beginning to end the song is a lyric outburst on the greatness of God.

Heaven is a place where men forget themselves and remember only God. As R. H. Charles finely puts it: "In the perfect vision of God self is wholly forgotten." H. B. Swete puts it this way: "In the presence of God the martyrs forget themselves; their thoughts are absorbed by the new wonders that surround them; the glory of God and the mighty scheme of things in which their own sufferings form an infinitesimal part are opening before them; they begin to see the great issue of the world-drama, and we hear the doxology with which they greet their first unclouded vision of God and his works."

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Revelation 15:5-7

THE AVENGING ANGELS

Revelation 15:5-7

And after this I saw, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and there came out of the temple the seven angels who have the seven plagues; and they were clothed in shining white linen, and they were girt about the breasts with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever.

The tent of witness, or the tent of testimony, is a common title in the Old Testament for the tabernacle in the wilderness (Num.9:15; Num.17:7; Num.18:2). It is, therefore, clear that John is seeing this picture, not in terms of the Jerusalem temple, but in terms of the ancient tabernacle.

It is from within the tabernacle that the seven avenging angels come forth. In the centre of the Holy Place within the tabernacle lay the Ark of the Covenant, the chest in which were contained the tables of the ten commandments, the essence of the Law. That is to say, these angels come out from the place where the Law of God rests and come to show that no man or nation can with impunity defy the Law of God.

They are clothed in a shining white robe and are girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. The robes of the angels are symbolic of three things. (a) Their dress is priestly dress. The robe of white fine linen and the gold embroidered girdle about the breast is the dress of the High Priest. The High Priest might well be called God's representative among men; and these angels come forth as the avenging representatives of God. (b) Their dress is royal dress. The white linen and the high girdle are the garments of princes and of kings; and these angels come forth with the royalty of the King of kings upon them. (c) Their dress is heavenly dress. The young man at the empty tomb of Christ was clothed in a long white garment (Mk.16:5; Matt.28:3); and the angels are the inhabitants of heaven, come to execute God's decrees upon earth.

It is one of the four living creatures who hands them the bowls of the wrath of God. When we were thinking about the four living creatures when they first emerged on the scene (Rev.4:7) we saw that the first was like a lion, the second like an ox, the third like a man, and the fourth like an eagle; and that, they may well symbolize all that is strongest and bravest and wisest and swiftest in nature. If that be so, it is fitting that one of them should hand the bowls of wrath to the seven angels. The bowls of wrath are to bring disasters in nature to the world; and the symbolism may well be that nature is handing itself to God to serve his purposes.

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Revelation 15:8

THE UNAPPROACHABLE GLORY

Revelation 15:8

And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels had been completed.

The idea of the glory of God being symbolized as smoke is common in the Old Testament. In the vision of Isaiah the whole house was filled with smoke (Isa.6:4).

Further, the idea that no one could approach while the smoke was there is also common in the Old Testament. This was true both of the tabernacle and of the temple. Of the tabernacle it is said: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exo.40:34-35). Of the dedication of Solomon's temple it is said: "And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1Kgs.8:10-11).

There is a double idea here. There is the idea that the purposes of God will often be clouded to men, for no man can see into the mind of God; and there is the idea that the holiness and the glory of God are such that man in his own right can never approach God.

But R. H. Charles sees more in this passage. No man could come into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels have been completed. Charles sees in that a symbolic statement that no approach of man to God can halt the coming judgment.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 16:1-21

THE SEVEN BOWLS OF THE WRATH OF GOD

Revelation 16:1-21

It will be better to read through the whole chapter before we study it in detail,

1 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying to the seven angels: Go, and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God 2 upon the earth. The first angel went away and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and there came an outbreak of evil and malignant ulcerous sores on the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image. 3 The second poured out his bowl upon the sea; and it became blood, like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died of the things in the sea. 4 The third poured out his bowl upon the rivers and the 5 springs of waters, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying: You are just, you who are and who were, O Holy One, because you have delivered this 6 judgment. Because they poured out the blood of God's dedicated ones and of the prophets, you have given them blood to drink. They well deserved it. 7 And I heard the altar saying: Yes, O Lord, the Almighty, true and just are your judgments.

8 The fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given 9 power to scorch men with fire; and men were scorched with a great scorching. And men flung their insults at the name of the God who had authority over the plagues, but they did not repent to give him glory. 10 The fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was wrapped in darkness, and men gnawed their tongues in anguish. 11 And men flung their insults at the God of heaven for their pains and their sores, but they did not repent from their deeds. 12 The sixth poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, that the way for the kings from the east might be prepared. 13 I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come from the mouth of the dragon, and the mouth of the beast, and the mouth 14 of the false prophet, for they are demonic spirits who perform signs, which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited world, to bring them together for war on the great day of God, the Almighty.

15 (Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is he who is awake, and who keeps his garments so that he may not walk naked and so that his shame may not be exposed to the gaze of men.) 16 And they gathered them to the place that is called in Hebrew Har Maggedon. 17 The seventh poured out his bowl upon the air and there came a great voice from the Temple.. from the throne, saying: It is done! 18 And there came flashes of lightning and voices and peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as never happened since mankind was upon the earth, so great was the earthquake. 19 And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. And the great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the wrath of 20 his anger. Every island fled and the mountains were not to be 21 found. Great hailstones, weighing as much as a hundredweight, descended from heaven upon men. And men hurled their insults at God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was exceedingly great.

Here we have the last terrible plagues. They have a certain connection with two things, the ten plagues in Egypt and the terrors which followed the sounding of the seven trumpets in Rev.8-11. It is worth while to set out the three lists in order to see the resemblances.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 16:1-21

First, we set out the ten plagues when Moses confronted Pharaoh with the wrath of God.

- (i) The water made into blood (Exo.7:20-25).
- (ii) The frogs (Exo.8:5-14).
- (iii) The lice (Exo.8:16-18).
- (iv) The flies (Exo.8:20-24).
- (v) The plague on the cattle (Exo.9:3-6).
- (vi) The boils and sores (Exo.9:8-11).
- (vii) The thunder and the hail (Exo.9:22-26).
- (viii) The locusts (Exo.10:12-19).
- (ix) The darkness (Exo.10:21-23).
- (x) The slaying of the first-born (Exo.12:29-30).

Second, we set out the terrors which followed the sounding of the seven trumpets.

- (i) The coming of hail, fire and blood, through which a third part of the trees and all the green grass are withered (Rev.8:7).
- (ii) The flaming mountain cast into the sea, whereby one third of the sea becomes blood (Rev.8:8).
- (iii) The fall of the star Wormwood into the waters, whereby the waters become bitter and poisonous (Rev.8:10-11).
- (iv) The smiting of one third of the sun and the moon and the stars, whereby all is darkened (Rev.8:12).
- (v) The coming of the star who unlocks the pit of the abyss, from which comes the smoke out of which come the demonic locusts (Rev.9:1-12).
- (vi) The loosing of the four angels bound in the Euphrates and the coming of the demonic cavalry from the east (Rev.9:13-21).
- (vii) The announcement of the final victory of God and of the rebellious anger of the nations (Rev.11:15).

Third, we set out the terrors of this chapter.

- (i) The coming of the ulcerous sores upon men (Rev.16:2).
- (ii) The sea becoming like the blood of a dead man (Rev.16:3).
- (iii) The rivers and fountains becoming blood (Rev.16:4).
- (iv) The sun becoming scorchingly hot (Rev.16:8).
- (v) The darkness over the kingdom of the beast, and its agony (Rev.6:10).
- (vi) The drying up of the Euphrates to open a way for the hordes of the kings of the east (Rev.16:12).

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Revelation 16:1-21

(vii) The pollution of the air and the accompanying terrors in nature, the thunder, the earthquake, the lightning and the hail (Rev.16:17-21).

It is easy to see how many things these lists have in common--the hail, the darkness, the blood in the waters, the ulcerous sores, the coming of the terrible hordes from beyond the Euphrates. But in the Revelation there is this difference between the terrors which follow the trumpets and the terrors which follow the pouring out of the bowls. In the former the destruction is always limited, for instance, to one third of the earth; but in the latter the destruction is complete on the enemies of God.

In this final series of terrors John seems to have gathered together the horrors from all the stories of the avenging wrath of God and to have hurled them on the unbelieving world in one last terrible deluge of disaster.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 16:1-11

THE TERRORS OF GOD

Revelation 16:1-11

The voice from the temple is the voice of God who is despatching his angelic messengers with their terrors upon men.

The first terror is a plague of malignant and ulcerous sores. The word is the same as is used to describe the boils and the sores in the plague in Egypt (Exo.9:8-11); the pains which will follow disobedience to God (Deut.28:35); the sores of the tortured Job (Jb.2:7).

The second terror is the turning of the waters of the sea into blood; this and the following terror, the turning of the rivers and the springs into blood, is reminiscent of the turning of the waters of the Nile into blood in the days of the plagues in Egypt (Exo.7:17-21). It may be that the thought of a sea of blood came to John in Patmos; often there he must have seen the sea like blood in the dying splendour of the sunset.

In Hebrew thought every natural force--the wind, the sun, the rain, the waters--had its directing angel. These angels were the ministering servants of God, placed in charge of various departments of nature. It might have been thought that the angel of the waters would have been angry to see the waters turned into blood; but even he admits the justice of God's action. In Rev.16:6 the reference is to actual persecution in the Roman Empire. God's dedicated ones are the members of the Christian Church; the prophets are not the Old Testament prophets but the prophets of the Christian Church (1Cor.12:28; Ac.13:1; Eph.4:11), who, being the leaders of the Church, were always the first to suffer in any time of persecution. The grim punishment of those who have shed the blood of the leaders and of the rank and file of the Church is that the waters will be gone from the earth and there will be nothing but blood to drink.

In Rev.16:7 the voice of the altar praises the justice of the judgments of God. This may be the voice of the angel of the altar, for the altar, too, had its angel; or the idea may be this. The altar in heaven is the place where both the prayers of his people and the lives of his martyrs are offered as a sacrifice to God; and the voice of the altar may be, so to speak, the voice of Christ's praying and suffering Church praising the justice of God when his wrath falls upon their persecutors.

The fourth terror is the scorching of the world by the sun; the fifth is the coming of the thick darkness, reminiscent of the darkness which came upon Egypt (Exo.10:21-23).

In Rev.16:9,11 and Rev.16:21 we have a kind of refrain which runs through this chapter. The men on whom these terrors fell cursed God--but they did not repent, impervious alike to the goodness and to the severity of God (Rom.11:22). It is the picture of men who had no doubt of the existence of God and even saw his hand in events--and who still went their own way.

We are bound to ask ourselves whether we are so very different. We do not doubt the existence of God; we know that God is interested in us and in the world which he has made; we are well aware

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Revelation 16:1-11

of God's laws; we know his goodness and we know that sin has its punishment; and yet time and time again we go our own way.

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Revelation 16:12

THE HORDES FROM THE EAST

Revelation 16:12

This gives us a picture of the drying up of the Euphrates and the opening of a way for the hordes of the east to descend upon the world.

One of the curious features of the Old Testament is the number of times when the drying up of the waters is a sign of the power of God. It was so at the Red Sea. "The Lord drove the sea back...and made the sea dry land" (Exo.14:21). It was so at Jordan, when the people under Joshua passed through the river. "All the Israelites passed over on dry ground" (Josh.3:17). In Isaiah the act of the power of God is that he will enable men to pass through the Egyptian sea dry-shod (Isa.11:16). The threat of God's vengeance in Jeremiah is: "I will dry up her sea, and make her fountain dry" (Jer.51:36). "All the depths of the Nile," says Zechariah, "shall dry up" (Zech.10:11).

It may well be that here John is actually remembering a famous incident in history. Herodotus tells us (1: 191) that when Cyrus the Persian captured Babylon he did so by drying up the Euphrates. The river flows right through the centre of Babylon. When Cyrus came to Babylon her defences seemed so strong that her capture seemed impossible. Cyrus formed a brilliant plan. He left one section of his army at Babylon and another he took up the river. By a magnificent engineering feat he temporarily deflected the course of the river into a lake. The level of the river dropped and in the end the channel of the river through Babylon became a dry road; along that road there was a breach in the defences and by that road the Persians gained an entry into Babylon, and the city fell.

John is using a picture which was engraved in the minds of all in his generation. The greatest enemies of Rome, the one nation she could not subjugate, were the Parthians who lived beyond the Euphrates. Their cavalry was the most dreaded force of fighting men in the world. For the cavalry of the Parthians to come sweeping across the Euphrates was a thought to strike terror into the bravest heart. Further, as we have already seen, it was to Parthia that Nero was said to have gone; and it was from Parthia that Nero redivivus was expected to come back; in other words, it was from across the Euphrates that the invasion of Antichrist was expected.

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Revelation 16:13-16

THE UNCLEAN SPIRITS LIKE FROGS

Revelation 16:13-16 (Part 1)

These four verses are full of problems which must be solved if their meaning is to become reasonably clear.

Three unclean spirits, like frogs, came out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

In the Greek there is a kind of play on words. The unclean spirits came out of the mouths of the evil forces. The mouth is the organ of speech and speech is one of the most influential forces in the world. Now the word for spirit is *pneuma* (GSN4151) which is also the word for breath. To say, therefore, that an evil spirit came out of a man's mouth is the same as to say that an evil breath came out of his mouth. As H. B. Swete puts it, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet "breathed forth evil influences."

It is said that the unclean spirits were like frogs.

(i) Frogs are connected with plagues. One of the plagues in Egypt was a plague of frogs (Exo.8:5-11). "He sent frogs...which destroyed them," says the Psalmist (Ps.78:45). "Their land swarmed with frogs even in the chambers of their kings" (Ps.105:30).

(ii) Frogs are unclean animals. Although not mentioned by name, they are included by definition in the list of unclean things in the water and the sea which begins in Lev.11:10. The frog stands for an unclean influence.

(iii) Frogs are famous for their empty and continuous croaking--brekekekex coax coax, as Aristophanes transliterated it. "The frog," said Augustine, "is the most loquacious of vanities (Homily on Psalms 77: 27). The sound the frog makes is the symbol of meaningless speech.

(iv) In Zoroastrianism, the Persian religion, frogs are the bringer of plagues and the agent of Ahriman, the power of darkness, in his struggle against Ormuzd, the power of light. It is fairly certain that John would know this bit of Persian lore.

So, then, to say that frogs came out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet is to say that their words were like plagues, were unclean, were empty futilities, and were the allies of the power of the dark.

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Revelation 16:13-16

THE FALSE PROPHET

Revelation 16:13-16 (Part 2)

Our next problem is to identify the false prophet. The dragon is identified as Satan (Rev.12:3,9). The beast, the Roman Empire with its Caesar worship, has already appeared in Rev.13:1. But this is the first time the false prophet has appeared upon the scene. Since he appears without any explanation, we must assume that John believes that the reader already has the key to his identity.

The false prophet was a figure whom God's people were well warned to expect both in the Old and in the New Testament. In the Old Testament men are forbidden to listen to the false prophet, however impressive his signs may be, and it is laid down that the punishment for the false prophet is death (Deut.13:1-5). It was part of the regular duty of the Sanhedrin to deal with the false prophet and to condemn him to death. The Christian Church was warned that false Christs and false prophets would arise to seduce Christ's people (Mk.13:22). H. B. Swete says of these false prophets that the name covers a whole class--"magic-vendors, religious impostors, fanatics, whether deceivers or deceived, regarded as persons who falsely interpret the mind of God. True religion has no worse enemies and Satan no better allies."

The false prophet is mentioned here and in Rev.19:20 and Rev.20:10; if we place two passages together, we will find a clue to his identity. Rev.19:20 tells us that in the end the false prophet was captured along with the beast and he is described as the person who worked miracles before the beast, and deceived those who had the mark of the beast and worshipped its image. In Rev.13:13-14 we have a description of the second beast, the beast from the land; it is said that this second beast does great wonders...and that he deceives those who dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he was allowed to do in the presence of the beast. That is to say, the works of the false prophet and the works of the second beast are identical; so, then, the false prophet and the beast from the land are to be identified. We have already seen that that beast is to be identified with the provincial organisation for the enforcement of emperor worship. The false prophet, then, stands for the organization which seeks to make men worship the emperor and abandon the worship of Jesus Christ.

A man who tries to introduce the worship of other gods, who tries to make men compromise with the state or with the world, who tries to seduce other men from the exclusive worship of God is always a false prophet.

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Revelation 16:13-16

ARMAGEDDON

Revelation 16:13-16 (Part 3)

We have still another problem to solve in this passage. The evil spirits went out and stirred up the kings of all the earth to bring them to battle. The idea of a final conflict between God and the forces of evil is an old one. We find it in Ps.2:2: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and his anointed."

This battle was to take place at what the King James and Revised Standard Versions call Armageddon (GSN0717). Moffatt has Harmagedon. The English Revised Version has Har-Magedon. Even the name is uncertain.

Magedon or Maggedon may well be connected with the name Megiddo (HSN4023). Megiddo is in the Plain of Esdraelon, which was part of the great highway from Egypt to Damascus. From the most ancient times to the time of Napoleon it was one of the great battle-grounds of the world. This was the plain where Barak and Deborah overthrew Sisera and his chariots (Judg.5:19-21); where Ahaziah died by the arrows of Jehu (2Kgs.9:27); where the good Josiah perished in battle with Pharaoh Necho (2Kgs.23:29-30), a tragedy which burned itself into the Jewish mind and which the Jews never forgot (Zech.12:11). It was a battle-ground, as H. B. Swete says, "familiar to a student of Hebrew history."

Armageddon (GSN0717) would mean the city of Megiddo; Harmagedon would mean the mountain (compare har, HSN2022) of Megiddo. It is most likely that the latter form is right, and yet the plain seems a much more likely battle-ground than the mountains. But there is another strand to add to this. When Ezekiel was describing the last struggle with Gog and Magog, he said that the final victory would be won in the mountains of Israel (Eze.38:8; Eze.38:21; Eze.39:2,4; Eze.39:17). It may well be that John spoke of the Mount of Megiddo to bring his story into line with the ancient prophecy.

By far the most likely view is that the word is Har-Magedon, and that it describes the region near Megiddo in the Plain of Esdraelon which was perhaps the most storied of all battle-grounds in Jewish history.

We must mention two other views of this strange word. Gunkel thought that it went back to the old Babylonian story of the struggle between Marduk, the creator, and Tiamat, the ancient power of chaos. But it is less than likely that John knew that story.

Another view connects it with Isa.14:13 where Lucifer is made to say: "Above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly." The Babylonians believed that there was a mountain called Aralu in the north country, which, rather like Olympus in Greece, was the home of the gods. Lucifer is going to take his seat among the gods; it has been suggested that the Mount of Mageddon is this mountain, and that the picture is of a last battle against the assembled gods in their own dwelling-place.

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Revelation 16:17-21

NATURE AT WAR

Revelation 16:17-21

The seventh bowl was poured out upon the air. H. B. Swete speaks of "the air that all men breathe." If the air was polluted, the very life of man was attacked at its source. Nature became at war with man. That was what happened. There came lightning and thunder and earthquake. The first century was notable for earthquakes, but John says that, whatever horror the world has known from the shaking earth, the earthquake to come will far surpass them all.

The great Babylon, that is Rome, is split into three. Rome had thought that she could do as she liked with impunity--but now her sin was remembered and her fate was on the way. The mills of God may grind slowly but in the end there is no escape for sin.

The earthquake sank the islands and levelled the mountains. The last of the terrible features was a deadly hail in which the hailstones weighed as much as a hundredweight. Here is another recurring feature of the manifestations of the wrath of God. A devastating hail was part of the plagues of Egypt (Exo.9:24). In the battle with the five Amorite kings at Beth-horon, under Joshua, there came a great hail upon the enemies of Israel so that more died by the hailstones than died by the sword (Josh.10:11). Isaiah speaks of the tempest of hail and the destroying storm which God in his judgment will send (Isa.28:2). Ezekiel speaks of God pleading with men with pestilence and blood, and sending an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone (Eze.38:22).

The emptying of the seven bowls of wrath upon the earth ends with the chorus which has run all through the chapter. The men to whom these things happened remained impervious to any appeal of God's love or God's anger. God has given men the terrible responsibility of being able to lock their hearts against him.

Rev.17-18 tell of the fall of Babylon. Rev.17 is one of the most difficult in the Revelation. The best way in which to study it is first to read it as a whole; then to make certain general identifications and so to see the general line of thought in it; and finally to study it in some detail. This will involve a certain amount of repetition, but in a section like this repetition is necessary.

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Revelation 17:1-18

THE FALL OF ROME

Revelation 17:1-18

1 One of the seven angels, who had the seven bowls, came and spoke with me. "Come here," he said, "and I will show you the judgment of the great harlot, who sits upon many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication and with the wine of whose adultery those who inhabit the earth have become drunken." 3 He carried me away in the Spirit to a desert place, and I saw a woman, seated upon a scarlet beast, which was full of names which were insults to God, and which had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet and bedizened with gold and jewellery and pearls. She had in her hand a golden cup, full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication.

5 And on her forehead there was written a name with a meaning which was secret except to those who knew its meaning: "Babylon, the great, the mother of the harlots and the abominations of the earth." I saw the woman, drunk 6 with the blood of God's dedicated people and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her I was stricken 7 with a great wonder. The angel said to me: "Why are you moved to wonder? I will tell you the secret meaning of the woman and of the beast who bears her and has the seven 8 heads and the ten horns. The beast, which you saw, was and is not, and is about to come up from the abyss, and is on the way to destruction; and the inhabitants of the earth, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world will be stricken with wonder, when they see the beast, because it was, and is not, and 9 will come. Here there is need for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They 10 are also seven kings.

Five have fallen; one at present exists; another has not yet come, and, when he shall come, he 11 must remain for a short time. The beast, which was and is not, is itself the eighth. It proceeds from the series of the seven and it is on the way to destruction. 12 The ten heads you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received their royal authority, but they are to receive authority as kings 13 for one hour in the company of the beast. They have one mind in common and they hand over power and authority to the beast. 14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, and the called, the chosen and the loyal will share his victory." 15 And he went on to say to me: "The waters which you saw, on which the harlot is seated, are peoples and crowds and nations and tongues.

16 The ten horns, which you saw, and the beast will hate the harlot, and will make her desolate and naked, and will devour her flesh, and will burn her in the fire; for it is God who 17 has put it into their minds to perform his purpose, and to be of one mind to give their royal power to the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. 18 And the woman which you saw is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth."

1. THE WOMAN ON THE BEAST

The woman is Babylon, that is to say, Rome. The woman is said (Rev.17:1) to sit upon many waters. In this picture of Rome, John was using many of the things said by the prophets about ancient Babylon. In Jer.51:13 Babylon is addressed as: "O you who dwell by many waters." The river Euphrates actually ran through the midst of Babylon; and she was also the centre of a system of irrigation canals, spreading out in every direction. When this description is applied to Rome, it

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Revelation 17:1-18

does not make sense. Later in Rev.17:15, John realizes this and gives the waters a symbolic interpretation as the many nations and peoples and tongues over whom Rome rules. For this way of speaking, also, we must look to the Old Testament.

When Isaiah is forecasting the invasion of Palestine by Assyria, he writes: "Therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks; and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck" (Isa.8:7-8). Again, when Jeremiah is prophesying the coming invasion, he uses the same picture: "Behold, waters are rising out of the north, and shall become an overflowing torrent; they shall overflow the land, and all that fills it" (Jer.7:2).

In Rev.17:4 the woman is said to be clothed in purple and scarlet and decked with all kinds of ornaments. This is symbolic of the luxury of Rome and of the meretricious and lustful way in which it was used, the picture of a wealthy courtesan, decked out in all her finery to seduce men.

The woman is said to have in her hand a golden cup, full of abominations. Here we have another picture of Babylon taken direct from the prophetic condemnation of the Old Testament. Jeremiah said: "Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad" (Jer.51:7). So Rome is said to hold the golden cup in which is that power of seduction which has spread immorality over all the earth.

The woman is said to have a name on her forehead (Rev.17:5). In Rome the prostitutes in the public brothels wore upon their foreheads a frontlet giving their names. This is another vivid detail in the picture of Rome as the great corrupting prostitute among the nations.

In Rev.17:6 the woman is said to be drunk with the blood of God's dedicated people and with the blood of the martyrs. This is a reference to the persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire. But it does more than simply stamp Rome as the great persecutor. She is glutted with slaughter; and she has revelled in that slaughter as a drunken man revels in wine.

In Rev.17:16 she is to be destroyed by the invasion of the ten kings. This we shall discuss more fully when we come to discuss the symbolism of the beast. It is sufficient to say just now that it foretells the destruction of Rome by the rising against her of her subject nations. It is as if to say that the great prostitute will in the end be destroyed by her lovers turning against her.

2. THE BEAST

It is much harder to fix the meaning of the beast than of the woman, mainly because the meaning of the beast does not stay steady. The beast has a series of interconnected meanings, whose point of union is that they are all closely connected with Rome and with her empire.

(i) The woman sits on the beast and the beast is filled with blasphemous names which are all insults to God (Rev.17:3). If the woman is Rome, clearly the beast is the Roman Empire. It is full of blasphemous names. This includes two things. First, it is a reference to the many gods of which the Roman Empire was full. All these names are insults to God, for they are all infringements of his

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supreme and unique authority. No one has the right to the name of God save only the true God. Second, it is a reference to many of the titles of the emperor. The emperor was Sebastos, or Augustus, which means to be revered; and reverence belongs to God alone. The emperor was divus or theios (GSN2304), which, the first in Latin and the second in Greek, mean divine; and to God alone belongs that adjective. Many of the emperors were called soter (GSN4990), saviour, which is uniquely the title of Jesus Christ. Most common of all, the emperor was in Latin dominus and in Greek kurios (GSN2962), lord, which is the very name of God.

(ii) The beast has seven heads and ten horns (Rev.17:3). This is a repetition of what is said of the beast in Rev.13:1, and we shall very soon return to its meaning here.

(iii) The beast was, and is not, and is about to come (Rev.17:8). This goes back to Rev.13:3,12,14 and is a clear reference to the Nero redivivus legend, which is never far from the mind of John. We have already seen that the ideas of Nero resurrected and of Antichrist had become inseparably connected. Therefore, in this passage the beast stands for Antichrist.

(iv) The beast has seven heads. These are doubly explained.

(a) In Rev.17:9 the seven heads are seven hills. Here we have an easy identification. Rome was the city upon seven hills; this once again identifies the beast with Rome.

(b) The second identification is one of the riddles of the Revelation (Rev.17:10-11).

They (the heads) are also seven kings. Five have fallen; one at present exists; another has not yet come, and, when he shall come, he must remain for a short time. The beast, which was and is not, is itself the eighth. It proceeds from the series of the seven, and it is on its way to destruction.

Five have fallen. The Roman Empire began with Augustus; and the first five emperors were Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. These, then, are the five who have fallen. We have already seen that after the death of Nero there were two years of chaos in which Galba, Otho and Vitellius followed each other in quick succession. They were not in any real sense emperors and cannot be included in any list.

One at present exists. This must be Vespasian, the first emperor to bring back stability to the empire, after the chaos following the death of Nero; he reigned from A.D. 69-79.

Another has not yet come, and, when he shall come, he must remain for a short time. Vespasian was succeeded by Titus, whose reign lasted for only two years from 79-81.

The beast which was, and is not, is itself the eighth. It proceeds from the series of the seven, and is on its way to destruction. This can only mean that the emperor who followed Titus is being identified with Nero redivivus and Antichrist; and the emperor who followed Titus was Domitian.

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Revelation 17:1-18

Can Domitian reasonably be identified with the evil force which Nero redivivus personified? We turn to the life of Domitian written by Suetonius the Roman biographer, remembering that Suetonius was not a Christian. Domitian, as Suetonius tells, was an object of terror and hatred to all. We get a grim picture of him at the beginning of his reign. "He used to spend hours in seclusion every day, doing nothing but catch flies and stab them with a keenly-sharpened stylus." Any psychologist would find that a curiously revealing picture. He was insanely jealous and insanely suspicious. He formed a homosexual attachment for a famous actor called Paris. One of the pupils of Paris so much resembled his teacher that it was not unreasonable to suppose that he was his son; the lad was promptly murdered. Hermogenes, the historian, wrote things which Domitian did not like; he was executed, and the scribe who had copied the manuscript was crucified. Senators were slaughtered right and left.

Sallustius Lucullus, governor of Britain, was executed because he allowed a new type of lance to be called Lucullan. Domitian revived the old punishment of having his victims stripped naked, fixed by the neck in a fork of wood and beaten to death with rods. He put down a civil war that broke out in the provinces. Suetonius goes on: "After his victory in the civil war he became even more cruel, and, to discover any conspirators who were in hiding, tortured many of the opposite party by a new form of inquisition, inserting fire in their privates; and he cut off the hands of some of them."

Early in his reign he appeared wearing a golden crown with the figures of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva in it, while the priest of Jupiter sat by his side. When he received back his divorced wife, he announced that she had returned to the divine couch. When he entered the amphitheatre, he loved to be greeted with the cry: "Good fortune attend our lord and his lady." He began his official edicts: "Our lord and god bids this to be done." Soon that was the only way in which he might be addressed.

He was so suspicious that he never gave prisoners a hearing in private, and, even when he heard them with his guards present, they were chained. He so feared for his own life that he had the passages and colonnades through which he moved tiled with phlengite stone, which is like a mirror, so that he could see anyone who was moving behind him. Finally, on 18 September, A.D. 96, he was murdered in the bloodiest circumstances.

To all this we may add a final fact; it was Domitian who first made Caesar worship compulsory and who was, therefore, responsible for unloosing the flood-tides of persecution on the Christian Church.

It might well be that John saw in Domitian the reincarnation of Nero. Others did precisely the same. Juvenal spoke of Rome being "enslaved to a bald-headed Nero" (Domitian was bald) and was exiled and finally murdered for his temerity. Tertullian called Domitian "a man of Nero's type of cruelty," and "a sub-Nero," a verdict which Eusebius repeated.

The one difficulty is that it makes it look as if John wrote in the reign of Vespasian; and we know that John in fact wrote under Domitian. Two possibilities may explain this. John may have written this particular vision years before in the time of Vespasian, lived to see it come terribly true and incorporated it in his final draft of the Revelation. Or he may have written it all in the reign of

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Revelation 17:1-18

Domitian, and, projected himself back into the time of Vespasian to trace in retrospect the terrible lines that history had taken.

However we explain it, the picture is satisfied if we hold that John saw in Domitian the reincarnation of Nero, the supreme embodiment of Roman wickedness and defiance of God; we need not go on to say that he identified Domitian with Antichrist.

There remains one problem in identification and it is less susceptible of definite solution than the others. In Rev.17:12-17 it is said that the ten horns are ten kings who have not yet received their power. They will receive it, and when they do, two things will happen. They will unanimously agree to hand over their own power to the beast; and with him they will rise against the harlot and make war with the Lamb and finally be defeated.

By far the likeliest interpretation of this is that the ten kings are the satraps of the Parthian hosts, who will make common cause with Nero redivivus and under him fight the last battle in which Rome will be destroyed and the Lamb will subdue every hostile force in the universe.

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Revelation 17:1-2

THE CITY WHICH BECAME A HARLOT

Revelation 17:1-2

In these two verses Rome is described as the great harlot. More than once in the Old Testament heathen and disobedient cities are described as harlots. It is thus that Nahum describes Nineveh, when he speaks of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot (Nah.3:4). It is thus that Isaiah describes Tyre (Isa.23:16-17). Even Jerusalem can be so described. "How the faithful city has become a harlot!" mourns Isaiah (Isa.1:21). And the charge of Ezekiel is: "You trusted in your beauty and played the harlot" (Eze.16:15).

It is a way of speaking which is strange to modern ears; but there is great symbolism behind it.

(i) Behind it is the idea of God as the lover of the souls of his people. Primasius, the old Latin commentator, says that Rome is called a harlot, because "she left her Creator and prostituted herself with devils." When we turn our backs upon God, it is not so much a sin against law as a sin against love.

(ii) There is another idea behind this. Beckwith suggests that Rome is called the great harlot, because she is "an allurements to godlessness and immorality." The sin of the harlot is not only that she sins herself, but also that she deliberately persuades others into sin. God will never hold guiltless the man who seduces others into sin.

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Revelation 17:3

THE VISION IN THE WILDERNESS

Revelation 17:3

John says that he was carried away in the Spirit to a desert place.

The prophet is a man who lives in the Spirit. "The Spirit," said Ezekiel, "lifted me up and took me away" (Eze.3:14). "The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem" (Eze.8:3). "And the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea to the exiles" (Eze.11:24). It is not that the Spirit physically moves a man about from place to place; but, when a man lives in the Spirit, his horizons are widened; he may live in time, but he becomes a spectator of eternity. The prophets could see the trends of history ahead because they lived in the Spirit.

One of the ever-recurring features of the Bible story is that it was in the desert that the great men of God saw their visions. It was in the wilderness that Moses met God (Exo.3:1). It was when he had gone a day's journey into the wilderness that Elijah met God and regained his courage and his faith (1Kgs.19:4). It was in the wilderness that John the Baptist grew to manhood and it was there that he received his message from God (Lk.1:80). It was to the wilderness that Jesus went to settle the way he would take before he set out to preach and teach and die for men and for God (Matt.4:1).

It may well be that there is not enough quietness in our lives for us to receive the message which God is eager to give.

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Revelation 17:4-5

THE GREAT HARLOT

Revelation 17:4-5

These verses give us a vivid picture of the great harlot. She is clothed in purple and scarlet, the royal colours, the colours of luxury and splendour. She is bedecked with gold and precious stones and pearls. She has the golden cup with which she makes her lovers drunk. She has the harlot's frontlet on her forehead with her name. The name is a mystery. In Greek a musterion (GSN3466) is not necessarily something abstruse; it is something quite unintelligible to the uninitiated but crystal clear to the initiated. The mystery in this case is that Babylon means Rome; the thing which the stranger does not know, but which the Christian reader does know, is that while the story is told under the name of Babylon everything relates to Rome.

(i) John may have got this picture from the temple prostitutes of Asia Minor. One of the strange features of ancient religion was that to many temples there were attached sacred prostitutes; there were, for instance, a thousand of them attached to the Temple of Aphrodite at Corinth. To have intercourse with them was an act of worship which paid homage to the life force.

(ii) John possibly had in mind the most notorious of all the Roman Empresses, Messalina. She was the wife of the weak and almost imbecile Claudius; and it is related of her that at nights she would go down to the public brothels and serve there like any common prostitute. Juvenal paints the picture in vivid terms (Satire 6: 114-132): "Hear what Claudius endured. As soon as his wife perceived that her husband was asleep, this august harlot was shameless enough to prefer a common mat to the imperial couch. Assuming a night-cowl, and attended by a single maid she issued forth; then, having concealed her raven locks under a light-coloured peruque, she took her place in a brothel reeking with long-used coverlets. Entering an empty cell reserved for herself, she there took her stand, under the feigned name of Lycisca, her nipples bare and gilded, and exposed to view the womb that bore thee, O nobly-born Britannicus.

Here she graciously received all comers, asking from each his fee; and when at length the keeper dismissed the girls, she remained to the very last before closing her cell, and with passion still raging hot within her went sorrowfully away. Then, exhausted by men but unsatisfied, with soiled cheeks, and begrimed by the smoke of the lamps, she took back to the imperial pillow all the odours of the stews."

When even an empress stooped to this, is there any wonder that John thought of Rome as a harlot?

The cup of the harlot Rome is full of unclean things. Lest it be thought that this is the verdict of some narrow-minded Christian, let it be remembered that Tacitus called Rome "the place into which from all over the world all atrocious and shameful things flow and where they are most popular," and Seneca called her "a filthy sewer." John's picture of Rome is actually restrained in comparison with some of the pictures which the Romans themselves drew. This was the civilization into which Christianity came; and it was out of this that men were converted to chastity. We may well speak of the miracles of the Cross.

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Revelation 17:6

DRUNK WITH THE BLOOD OF THE SAINTS AND THE MARTYRS

Revelation 17:6

As we have already pointed out in the general introduction to this chapter, the way in which John describes Roman persecution is very significant. He says that Rome is drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs. The implication is that Rome did not simply persecute the Christians as a legal necessity but took fiendish delight in hounding Christians to death.

No doubt John is thinking of the persecution which took place under Nero. The Neronian persecution sprang from the great fire in A.D. 64 which burned for a week and devastated Rome. The people of Rome were convinced that the fire was no accident; they were also convinced that those who tried to extinguish it were hindered and that when it died down, it was deliberately rekindled; and they were also convinced that the instigator of the fire was Nero. Nero had a passion for building, and the people believed that he had deliberately burned down the city in order to rebuild it.

Nero had to find a scapegoat to divert suspicion from himself; and he fixed on the Christians. This was the first great persecution and in many ways the most savage of all. We quote Tacitus' description in full because it is one of the few passages in pagan literature where the name of Christ occurs (Tacitus: Annals 15: 44):

All human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor (Nero), and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius, at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred of mankind.

Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs, and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burned, to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired.... Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion, for it was not, as it seemed for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty that they were being destroyed.

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Revelation 17:7-11

THE REINCARNATION OF EVIL

Revelation 17:7-11

In the introduction to this chapter we have already seen that the likeliest explanation is that John is projecting himself backwards into the reign of Vespasian. The five who have been are Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero; the one who is is Vespasian; the one who is to come and who is to last for only a very short time is Titus; the one who is to be the equivalent of the head wounded and restored, who is to be Nero all over again, is Domitian, the man of savage cruelty. Lying behind all this imagery are three permanent truths.

(i) Even when Nero died, his wickedness lived on and John sees it re-emerging in Domitian, the new Nero. Everyone leaves something behind in this world. It may be a memory which is a helper of all that is fine and good; it may be an evil influence which lays a trail of trouble for many generations to come. Every man's life points somewhere; he must see that it points to goodness and to God.

(ii) In Rev.17:8 we read that those whose names have not been written in the Book of Life will be dazzled at the coming of the evil one. There are always those who can be dazzled by evil. The one way to avoid its fascination is to keep our eyes on Jesus Christ. Then evil is seen for what it is.

(iii) In Rev.17:11 we read that the beast is on his way to destruction. However great the success of evil may be, it has in it the seeds of self-destruction. He who allies himself with evil has chosen the losing side.

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Revelation 17:12-18

THE PURPOSES OF MAN AND THE PURPOSES OF GOD

Revelation 17:12-18

This passage speaks of the ten kings whom the ten horns represent. It is likely that the ten kings are the satraps of the East and of Parthia whom the resurrected Nero, the Antichrist, is to lead against Rome. Or they may simply stand for all the world powers which in the end will turn against Rome and destroy her. We note certain things in this passage.

(i) In Rev.17:14 we read that these world powers war with the Lamb but the Lamb destroys them; and the called, the chosen and the loyal share in the victory of the Lamb. One of the great conceptions of Jewish thought was that the saints and the martyrs would share in God's final triumph. "Sinners," says Enoch, "shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous" (Enoch 91: 12). "Be hopeful, ye righteous," says Enoch again, "for suddenly shall the sinners perish before you, and ye shall have lordship over them according to your desires" (Enoch 96: 1). In a grim passage the same book says: "Woe to you who love the deeds of unrighteousness.... Know that you shall be delivered into the hands of the righteous, and they shall cut off your necks and slay you, and have no mercy upon you" (Enoch 98: 12). In the Wisdom of Solomon there is the same promise to those who have lived and suffered and died for God.

"Having borne a little chastening, they shall receive great good, because God made trial of them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace he proved them, and as a whole burnt-offering he accepted them. And in the time of their visitation they shall shine forth, and as sparks among the stubble they shall run to and fro. They shall judge nations and have dominion over peoples" (Wis.3:5-8). It is no doubt this belief that was in the minds of James and John when they came and asked Jesus for the places on his right and his left when he entered into his kingdom (Matt.20:21; Mk.10:37).

This Jewish thought has two aspects, one noble and one subchristian. The subchristian one is that there were times when this became nothing other than a thirst for vengeance; but who shall blame the persecuted for longing for the day when the world's roles will be reversed in eternity? The noble idea is that the saints and martyrs will aid Christ to win his triumph and share in the glory. It is an affirmation that for us, too, after the Cross comes the crown.

(ii) Rev.17:16 gives a picture of the ten horns rising violently against the harlot who had been their mistress. They will devour her flesh. In the Old Testament that is the action of a most savage and powerful enemy. It is the complaint of the Psalmist that the wicked ate up his flesh (Ps.27:2; King James Version). The wicked in Israel, with their grasping oppression, eat the flesh of the people of God (Mic.3:3). This is a picture of terrible vengeance. They will burn her in the fire. This is the punishment for the most heinous sin (Lev.20:14), and above all the punishment for the daughter of a priest who has been guilty of sexual immorality (Lev.21:9).

It is to be noted that the harlot's previous lovers turned against her. Evil has in it a divisive power.

(iii) In Rev.17:12-13 we read of the ten kings making common purpose with the beast; and in Rev.17:17 we read that God put this into their hearts that his purposes might be carried out and his

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Revelation 17:12-18

words fulfilled. Here is a strange thing. These evil powers thought they were working out their own purposes but they were, in fact, working out the purposes of God. R. H. Charles says: "Even the wrath of men is made to praise God." The truth behind this is that God never loses control of human affairs. In the last analysis God is always working things together for good.

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Revelation 18:1-3

THE DOOM OF ROME

Revelation 18:1-3

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority and the earth was lit up by his glory. He cried with a loud voice saying: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great. She has become a dwelling-place of demons, and a stronghold of every unclean spirit, and a stronghold of every unclean and hated bird, because the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich with the wealth of her wantonness."

In this chapter we have a form of prophetic literature common in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. This is what is called "A Doom Song," the doom song of the city of Rome.

We quote certain Old Testament parallels. In Isa.13:19-22 we have the doom song of ancient Babylon:

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendour and pride of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. It will never be inhabited or dwelt in for all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. But wild beasts will lie down there, and its houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will dwell, and there satyrs will dance. Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.

In Isa.34:11-15 we have the doom song of Edom:

But the hawk and the porcupine shall possess it, the owl and the raven shall dwell in it. He shall stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plummet of chaos over its nobles.... Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses. It shall be the haunt of jackals, an abode for ostriches. And wild beasts shall meet with hyenas, the satyr shall cry to his fellow; yea, there shall the night hag alight, and find for herself a resting place. There shall the owl nest and lay and hatch and gather her young in her shadow; yea, there shall the kites be gathered, each one with her mate.

Jer.50:39 and Jer.51:37 are part of doom songs of Babylon:

Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her; she shall be peopled no more for ever, nor inhabited for all generations. And Babylon shall become

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Revelation 18:1-3

a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing without inhabitant.

In Zeph.2:13-15 we have the doom song of Nineveh:

And he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dry waste like the desert. Herds shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the field; the vulture and the hedgehog shall lodge in her capitals; the owl shall hoot in the window, the raven croak on the threshold; for her cedar work will be laid bare. This is the exultant city that dwelt secure, that said to herself, "I am and there is none else." What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts! Every one who passes by her hisses and shakes his fist.

In spite of their grim foretelling of ruin these passages are all great poetry of passion. It may be that here we are far from the Christian doctrine of forgiveness; but we are very close to the beating of the human heart.

In our passage the angel charged with the message of doom comes with the very light of God upon him. No doubt John was thinking of Eze.43:1-2: "He brought me to the gate, the gate facing east; and behold the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with his glory." H. B. Swete writes of this angel: "So recently he has come from the Presence that in passing he brings a broad belt of light across the dark earth."

So certain is John of the doom of Rome, that he speaks of it as if it had already happened.

We note one other point. Surely the most dramatic part of the picture is the demons haunting the ruins. The pagan gods banished from their reign disconsolately haunt the ruins of the temples where once their power had been supreme.

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Revelation 18:4-5

COME YE OUT!

Revelation 18:4-5

I heard another voice from heaven saying: "Come out, my people, from her, lest you become partners in her sins, and lest you share in her plagues, because her sins are piled as high as heaven, and God has remembered her unrighteous deeds."

The Christians are bidden come out of Rome before the day of destruction comes, lest, sharing in her sins, they also share in her doom. H. B. Swete says that this call to come out rings through Hebrew history. God is always calling upon his people to cut their connection with sin and to stand with him and for him.

It was the call which came to Abraham: "Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country, and your kindred, and your father's house, to the land that I will show you" (Gen.12:1). It was the call that came to Lot, before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Up, get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city" (Gen.19:12-14). It was the call that came to Moses in the days of the wickedness of Korah, Dathan and Abiram: "Get away from about the dwelling of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.... Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men" (Num.16:23-26). "Go forth from Babylon," said Isaiah, "flee from Chaldea" (Isa.48:20). "Flee from the midst of Babylon," said Jeremiah, "and go out of the land of the Chaldeans" (Jer.50:8). "Flee from the midst of Babylon, let every man save his life" (Jer.51:6). "Go out of the midst of her people. Let every man save his life from the fierce anger of the Lord" (Jer.51:45). It is a cry which finds its echo in the New Testament.

Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?" (2Cor.6:14-15). "Do not participate in another man's sins; keep yourself pure" (1Tim.5:22).

Swete well points out that this cry and challenge do not involve a coming out at a definite moment. They imply a certain "aloofness of spirit maintained in the very heart of the world's traffic." They describe the essential apartness of the Christian from the world. The commonest word for the Christian in the New Testament is the Greek *hagios* (GSN0040), whose basic meaning is different. The Christian is not conformed to the world but transformed from the world (Rom.12:2). It is not a question of retiring from the world; it is a question of living differently within the world.

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Revelation 18:6-8

THE DOOM OF PRIDE

Revelation 18:6-8

Repay her in the coin with which she paid others; and repay her double for her deeds. Mix her a double draught in the cup in which she mixed her draughts. In proportion to her boasting and her wantonness give her torture and grief, for she says in her heart: "I sit a queen: I am not a widow; grief is something that I will never see." Because of this her plagues will come upon her in one day - pestilence and grief and famine and she will be burned with fire, because the Lord God who judges her is strong.

This passage speaks in terms of punishment. But the instruction to exact vengeance on Rome is not an instruction to men; it is an instruction to the angel, the divine instrument of justice. Vengeance belongs to God, and to God alone. We have here two truths which we must remember.

(i) There is in life a law by which a man sows that which he reaps. Even in the Sermon on the Mount we find an expression of that law: "The measure you give will be the measure you get" (Matt.7:2). The double punishment and the double reward come from the fact that frequently in Jewish law anyone responsible for loss or damage had to repay it twice over (Exo.22:4,7,9). "O daughter of Babylon, you devastator!" says the Psalmist, "happy shall he be who requites you with what you have done to us" (Ps.137:8). "Requite her according to her deeds," says Jeremiah of Babylon, "Do to her according to all that she has done; for she has proudly defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel" (Jer.50:29). There is no getting away from the fact that punishment follows sin, especially if that sin has involved the cruel treatment of fellowmen.

(ii) We meet here the stern truth that all pride will one day be humiliated. Rome's supreme sin has been pride. It is in Old Testament terms that John speaks. He reproduces the ancient judgment on Babylon:

You said, "I shall be mistress for ever," so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end. Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children": These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments.

Nothing rouses such condemnation as pride, Isaiah speaks grimly: "Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet the Lord will smite with a scab the heads of the daughters of Zion" (Isa.3:16-17). Tyre is condemned because she has said: "I am perfect in beauty" (Eze.27:3).

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Revelation 18:6-8

There is a sin which the Greek called hubris (GSN5196), which is that arrogance, that comes to feel that it has no need of God. The punishment for that sin is ultimate humiliation.

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Revelation 18:9-10

THE LAMENT OF THE KINGS

Revelation 18:9-10

The kings of the earth, who committed fornication with her and who shared in her wantonness, will weep and lament over her, when they will see the smoke of her burning, while they stand afar off because of the fear of her torture, while they say: "Alas! Alas! for the city that seemed so strong, for Babylon the strong city! for in one hour your judgment is come."

In the rest of this chapter we have the dirges for Rome; the dirge sung by the kings (Rev.18:9-10), the dirge sung by the merchants (Rev.18:11-16), the dirge sung by the shipmasters and the sailors (Rev.18:17-19). Again and again we hear of the greatness, the wealth and the wanton luxury of Rome.

We may well ask whether John's indictment is justified or whether he is merely a fanatic shouting doom without any real justification. If we wish to find an account of the luxury and the wantonness of Rome we will find it in such books as Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius, by Samuel Dill, Roman Life and Manners, by Ludwig Friedlander, and especially in the Satires of Juvenal, the Lives of the Caesars by Suetonius, and the works of Tacitus, themselves Romans and themselves appalled by the things about which they wrote. These books show that nothing John could say of Rome could be an exaggeration.

There is a saying in the Talmud that ten measures of wealth came down into the world and that Rome received nine and all the rest of the world only one. One famous scholar said that in modern times we are babes in the matter of enjoyment compared with the ancient world; and another remarked that our most extravagant luxury is poverty compared with the prodigal magnificence of ancient Rome.

In that ancient world there was a kind of desperate competition in ostentation. It was said of Caligula that "he strove, most of all to realize what men deemed impossible," and it was said that "the desire of the incredible" was the great characteristic of Nero. Dill says: "The senator who paid too low a rent, or rode along the Appian or Flaminian Way with too scanty a train, became a marked man and immediately lost caste."

In this first century the world was pouring its riches into the lap of Rome. As Dill has it: "The long peace, the safety of the seas, and the freedom of trade, had made Rome the entrepot for the peculiar products and delicacies of every land from the British Channel to the Ganges." Pliny talks of a meal in which in one dish India was laid under contribution, in another Egypt, Cyrene, Crete and so forth. Juvenal speaks of the seas peopled with great keels and of greed luring ships on expeditions to every land. Aristides has a purple passage on the way in which things flowed into Rome.

"Merchandise is brought from every land and sea, everything that every season begets, and every country produces, the products of rivers and lakes, the arts of the Greeks and the barbarians, so that, if anyone were to wish to see all these things, he would either have to visit the whole inhabited world to see them--or to visit Rome; so many great ships arrive from all over the world at every

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Revelation 18:9-10

hour, at every season, that Rome is like some common factory of the world, for you may see such great cargoes from the Indies, or, if you wish, from the blessed Arabias, that you might well conjecture that the trees there have been stripped naked; clothing from Babylon, ornaments from the barbarian lands, everything flows to Rome; merchandise, cargoes, the products of the land, the emptying of the mines, the product of every art that is and has been, everything that is begotten and everything that grows. If there is anything you cannot see at Rome, then it is a thing which does not exist and which never existed."

The money possessed and the money spent was colossal. One of Nero's freedman could regard a man with a fortune of 652,000 British pounds as a pauper. Apicius squandered a fortune of 1,000,000 British pounds in refined debauchery, and committed suicide when he had only 100,000 British pounds left because he could not live on such a pittance. In one day Caligula squandered the revenues of three provinces amounting to 100,000 British pounds and in a single year scattered broadcast in prodigal profusion 20,000,000 British pounds. Nero declared that the only use of money was to squander it, and in a very few years he squandered 18,000,000 British pounds. At one banquet of his the Egyptian roses alone cost 35,000 British pounds.

Let the Roman historian Suetonius describe his emperors, and remember that this is not a Christian preacher but a pagan historian. Of Caligula he writes: "In reckless extravagance he outdid the prodigals of all times in ingenuity, inventing a new sort of baths and unnatural varieties of food and feasts; for he would bathe in hot or cold perfumed oils, drink pearls of great price dissolved in vinegar, and set before his guests loaves and meats of gold." He even built galleys whose sterns were studded with pearls. Of Nero Suetonius tells us that he compelled people to set before him banquets costing 20,000 British pounds. "He never wore the same garment twice. He played at dice for 2,000 British pounds per point. He fished with a golden net drawn by cords woven of purple and scarlet threads. It is said that he never made a journey with less than a thousand carriages, with his mules shod with silver."

Drinking pearls dissolved in vinegar was a common ostentation. Cleopatra is said to have dissolved and drunk a pearl worth 80,000 British pounds. Valerius Maximus at a feast set a pearl to drink before every guest, and he himself, Horace tells, swallowed the pearl from Metalla's ear-ring dissolved in wine that he might be able to say that he had swallowed a million sesterces at a gulp.

It was an age of extraordinary gluttony. Dishes of peacocks' brains and nightingales' tongues were set before the guests at banquets. Vitellius, who was emperor for less than a year, succeeded in spending 7,000,000 British pounds mainly on food. Suetonius tells of his favourite dish: "In this he mingled the livers of pike, the brains of pheasants and peacocks, the tongues of flamingoes, and the milk of lampreys, brought by his captains and triremes from the whole empire from Parthia to the Spanish strait." Petronius describes the scenes at Trimalchio's banquet: "One course represented the twelve signs of the zodiac.... Another dish was a large boar, with baskets of sweetmeats hanging from its tusks. A huge bearded hunter pierced its side with a hunting knife, and forthwith from the wound there issued a flight of thrushes which were dexterously captured in nets as they flew about the room.

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Towards the end of the meal the guests were startled by strange sounds in the ceiling and a quaking of the whole apartment. As they raised their eyes the ceiling suddenly opened, and a great circular tray descended, with a figure of Priapus, bearing all sorts of fruit and bon-bons."

In the time when John was writing a kind of insanity of wanton extravagance, to which it is very difficult to find any parallel in history, had invaded Rome.

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Revelation 18:11-16

THE LAMENT OF THE MERCHANTS (1)

Revelation 18:11-16 (Part 1)

And the merchants of the earth will weep and lament over her, for no one buys their cargo any more, the cargo of gold and of silver and of precious stones and of pearls, of fine linen and of purple and of silk and of scarlet, all kinds of thyine wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, and of bronze and of iron and of marble, and cinnamon and perfume and incense, and myrrh, and frankincense and wine and oil, and fine flour, and wheat and cattle and sheep, horses and chariots and slaves, the souls of men.

The ripe fruit your soul desired has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendours have perished, never again to be found. The merchants who dealt in these wares, who grew wealthy from their trade with her, shall stand afar off because of the fear of her torture, weeping and grieving. "Alas! Alas!" they shall say, "for the great city, for the city which was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, the city which was decked with gold and with precious stones and with pearls, for in one hour so much wealth is desolated!"

The lament of the kings and the merchants should be read along with the lament over Tyre in Eze.26-27 for they have many features in common.

The lament of the merchants is purely selfish. All their sorrow is that the market from which they drew so much wealth is gone. It is significant that both the kings and the merchants stand afar off and watch. They stretch out no hand to help Rome in her last agony; they were never bound to her in love; their only bond was the luxury she desired and the trade it brought to them.

We will learn still more of the luxury of Rome, if we look in detail at some of the items in the cargoes which came to Rome.

At the time during which John was writing there was in Rome a passion for silver dishes. Silver came mainly from Carthagera in Spain, where 40,000 men toiled in the silver mines. Dishes, bowls, jugs, fruitbaskets, statuettes, whole dinner services, were made of solid silver. Lucius Crassus had wrought silver dishes which had cost 50 British pounds for each pound of silver in them. Even a fighting general like Pompeius Paullinus carried with him on his campaigns wrought silver dishes which weighed 12,000 pounds, the greater part of which fell into the hands of the Germans, spoils of war. Pliny tells us that women would bathe only in silver baths, soldiers had swords with silver hilts and scabbards with silver chains, even poor women had silver anklets and the very slaves had silver mirrors.

At the Saturnalia, the festival which fell at the same time as the Christian Christmas, and at which gifts were given, often the gifts were little silver spoons and the like, and the wealthier the giver the more ostentatious was the gift. Rome was a city of silver.

It was an age which passionately loved precious stones and pearls. It was largely through the conquests of Alexander the Great that precious stones came to the west. Pliny said that the fascination of a gem was that the majestic might of nature presented itself in a limited space.

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Revelation 18:11-16

The order of preference in stones set diamonds first, emeralds--mainly from Scythia--second, beryls and opals, which were used for women's ornaments, third, and the sardonyx, which was used for seal-rings, fourth.

One of the strangest of ancient beliefs was that precious stones had medicinal qualities. The amethyst was said to be a cure for drunkenness; it is wine-red in colour and the word amethyst was derived--so it was said--from a which means not and methuskein (GSN3182) which means to make drunk. The jasper, or bloodstone, was held to be a cure for haemorrhage. The green jasper was said to bring fertility. The diamond was held to neutralise poison and to cure delirium, and amber worn on the neck was a cure for fever and for other troubles.

Of all stones the Romans loved pearls more than any other. As we have seen, they were drunk dissolved in wine. A certain Struma Nonius had a ring with an opal in it as big as a filbert worth 21,250 British pounds, but that pales into insignificance compared with the pearl which Julius Caesar gave Servilia and which cost 65,250 pounds. Pliny tells of seeing Lollia Paulina, one of Caligula's wives, at a betrothal feast, wearing an ornament of emeralds and pearls, covering head, hair, ears, neck and fingers, which was worth 425,000 British pounds.

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Revelation 18:11-16

THE LAMENT OF THE MERCHANTS (2)

Revelation 18:11-16 (Part 2)

Fine linen came mainly from Egypt. It was the clothing of priests and kings. It was very expensive; a priest's robe, for instance, would cost between 40 and 50 British pounds.

Purple came mainly from Phoenicia. The very word Phoenicia is probably derived from phoinos, which means blood-red, and the Phoenicians may have been known as "the purple men," because they dealt in purple. Ancient purple was much redder than modern purple. It was the royal colour and the garment of wealth. The purple dye came from a shellfish called murex. Only one drop came from each animal; and the shell had to be opened as soon as the shellfish died, for the purple came from a little vein which dried up almost immediately after death. A pound of double-dyed purple wool cost almost 50 British pounds, and a short purple coat more than 100 pounds. Pliny tells us that at this time there was in Rome "a frantic passion for purple."

Silk may now be a commonplace, but in the Rome of the Revelation it was almost beyond price, for it had to be imported from far-off China. So costly was it that a pound of silk was sold for a pound weight of gold. Under Tiberius a law was passed against the use of solid gold vessels for the serving of meals and "against men disgracing themselves with silken garments" (Tacitus: Annals 2: 23).

Scarlet, like purple, was a much sought after dye. When we are thinking of these fabrics we may note that another of Rome's ostentatious furnishings was Babylonian coverlets for banqueting couches. Such coverlets often cost as much as 7,000 British pounds, and Nero possessed coverlets for his couches which had cost more than 43,000 British pounds each.

The most interesting of the woods mentioned in this passage is thyine. In Latin it was called citrus wood; its botanical name is *thuya articulata*. Coming from North Africa, from the Atlas region, it was sweet-smelling and beautifully grained. It was used especially for table tops. But, since the citrus tree is seldom very large, trees large enough to provide table tops were very scarce. Tables made of thyine wood could cost anything from 4,000 to 15,000 British pounds. Seneca, Nero's prime minister, was said to have three hundred of such thyine tables with marble legs.

Ivory was much used for decorative purposes, especially by those who wished to make an ostentatious display. It was used in sculpture, for statues, for swordhilts, for inlaying furniture, for ceremonial chairs, for doors, and even for household furniture. Juvenal talks of the wealthy man: "Nowadays a rich man takes no pleasure in his dinner--his turbot and his venison have no taste, his unguents and his roses seem to smell rotten--unless the broad slabs of his dinner table rest upon a ramping, gaping leopard of solid ivory."

Statuettes of Corinthian brass or bronze were world famous and fabulously expensive. Iron came from the Black Sea and from Spain. For long marble had been used in Babylon for building, but not in Rome. Augustus, however, could boast he had found Rome of brick and left it of marble. In the

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Revelation 18:11-16

end there was actually an office called the *ratio marmorum* whose task was to search the world for fine marbles with which to decorate the buildings of Rome.

Cinnamon was a luxury article coming from India and from near Zanzibar, and in Rome it commanded a price of about 65 British pounds per pound (of weight).

Spice is here misleading. The Greek is *amomon* (GSN0299); Wycliff translated simply "amome". *Amomon* was a sweet-smelling balsam, particularly used as a dressing for the hair and as an oil for funeral rites.

In the Old Testament incense had altogether a religious use as an accompaniment of sacrifice in the Temple. According to Exo.30:34-38 the Temple incense was made of *stacte*, *onycha*, *galbanum*, and *frankincense*, which are all perfumed gums or balsams. According to the Talmud seven further ingredients were added--*myrrh*, *cassia*, *spikenard*, *saffron*, *costus*, *mace* and *cinnamon*. In Rome incense was used as a perfume with which to greet guests and to scent the room after meals.

In the ancient world wine was universally drunk, but drunkenness was regarded as a grave disgrace. Wine was usually highly diluted, in the proportion of two parts of wine to five parts of water. The grapes were pressed and the juice extracted. Some of it was used just as it was as an unfermented drink. Some of it was boiled to a jelly, and the jelly used to give body and flavour to poor wines. The rest was poured into great jars, which were left to ferment for nine days, then closed, and opened monthly to check the progress of the wine. Even slaves had abundant wine as part of their daily ration, since it was no more than 2 1/2 pence per gallon.

Myrrh was the gum resin of a shrub which grew mainly in Yemen and in North Africa. It was medically used as an astringent, a stimulant, and an antiseptic. It was also used as a perfume and as an anodyne by women in the time of their purification, and for the embalming of bodies.

Frankincense was a gum resin produced by a tree of the genus *Boswellia*. An incision was made in the tree and a strip of bark removed from below it. The resin then exuded from the tree like milk. In about ten or twelve weeks it coagulated into lumps in which it was sold. It was used for perfume for the body, for the sweetening and flavouring of wine, for oil for lamps and for sacrificial incense.

The chariots here mentioned--the word is *rede*--were not racing or military chariots. They were four-wheeled private chariots, and the aristocrats of Roman wealth often had them silver-plated.

The list closes with the mention of slaves and the souls of men. The word used for slave is *soma* (GSN4983), which literally means a body. The slave market was called the *somatemporos*, literally the place where bodies are sold. The idea is that the slave was sold body and soul into the possession of his master.

It is almost impossible for us to understand how much Roman civilization was based on slavery. There were some 60,000,000 slaves in the empire. It was no unusual thing for a man to have four hundred slaves. "Use your slaves like the limbs of your body," says a Roman writer, "each for its own end." There were, of course, slaves to do the menial work; and each particular service had its

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slave. We read of torch-bearers, lantern-bearers, sedan-chair carriers, street attendants, keepers of the outdoor garments. There were slaves who were secretaries, slaves to read aloud, and even slaves to do the necessary research for a man writing a book or a treatise. The slaves even did a man's thinking for him. There were slaves called nomenclatores whose duty it was to remind a man of the names of his clients and dependants! "We remember by means of others," says a Roman writer.

There were even slaves to remind a man to eat and to go to bed! "Men were too weary even to know that they were hungry." There were slaves to go in front of their master and to return the greetings of friends, which the master was too tired or too disdainful to return himself. A certain ignorant man, unable to learn or remember anything, got himself a set of slaves. One memorized Homer, one Hesiod, others the lyric poets. Their duty was to stand behind him as he dined and to prompt him with suitable quotations. He paid 1,000 British pounds for each of them. Some slaves were beautiful youths, "the flower of Asia," who simply stood around the room at banquets to delight the eye. Some were cup-bearers. Some were Alexandrians, who were trained in pert and often obscene repartee. The guests often chose to wipe their soiled hands on the hair of the slaves. Such beautiful boy slaves cost at least 1,000 or 2,000 British pounds. Some slaves were freaks--dwarfs, giants, cretins, hermaphrodites.

There was actually a market in freaks--"men without shanks, with short arms, with three eyes, with pointed heads." Sometimes dwarfs were artificially produced for sale.

It is a grim picture of men being used body and soul for the service and entertainment of others.

This was the world for which the merchants were grieving, the lost markets and the lost money which they were bewailing. This was the Rome whose end John was threatening. And he was right--for a society built on luxury, on wantonness, on pride, on callousness to human life and personality is necessarily doomed, even from the human point of view.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 18:17-19

THE LAMENT OF THE SHIPMASTERS

Revelation 18:17-19

And every shipmaster and everyone who sails the sea, and sailors who gain their living from the sea, stood afar off and cried, when they saw the smoke of her burning. "What city was like the great city!" they said, and they flung dust upon their heads, and cried weeping and lamenting: "Alas! Alas! for the great city, in which all who had ships on the sea grew rich from her wealth, because in one hour she has been desolated."

First, the kings uttered their lament over Rome; then, the merchants; and now, the shipmasters. John was taking his picture from Ezekiel's picture of the fall of Tyre, from which so much of this chapter comes. "At the sound of the cry of your pilots the countryside shakes, and down from their ships come all that handle the oar. The mariners and all the pilots of the sea stand on the shore and wail aloud over you, and cry bitterly. They cast dust on their heads and wallow in ashes." (Eze.27:28-30).

Rome, of course, was not upon the sea coast, but its port was Ostia, and, as we have seen, the merchandise of the world flowed into the port of Rome.

It is little wonder that the shipmasters and the sailors will lament, for all the trade which brought so much wealth will be gone.

There is something almost pathetic in these laments. In every case the lament is not for Rome but for themselves. It is one of the laws of life that, if a man places all his happiness in material things, he misses the greatest things of all--love and friendship with his fellowmen.

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Revelation 18:20

JOY AMIDST LAMENTING

Revelation 18:20

Rejoice over her, O Heaven, and you dedicated ones of God, and you apostles, and you prophets, because God has given judgment for you against her.

Amidst all the lamenting comes the voice of joy, the voice of those who are glad to see the vengeance of God upon his enemies and their persecutors.

This is a note which we find more than once in Scripture. "Praise his people, O you nations; for he avenges the blood of his servants, and takes vengeance on his adversaries, and makes expiation for the land of his people" (Deut.32:43). Jeremiah says of the doom of ancient Babylon; "Then the heaven and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon; for the destroyers shall come against them out of the north, says the Lord" (Jer.51:48).

We are here very far from praying for those who spitefully use us. But two things have to be remembered. However we may feel about this voice of vengeance, it is none the less the voice of faith. These men had utter confidence that no man on God's side could ultimately be on the losing side.

Second, there is little personal bitterness here. The people to be destroyed are not so much personal enemies as the enemies of God.

At the same time this is not the more excellent way which Jesus taught. When Abraham Lincoln was told that he was too lenient with his opponents and that his duty was to destroy his enemies, he answered: "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" The real Christian attitude is to seek to destroy enmity, not by force, but by the power of that love which won the victory of the Cross.

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Revelation 18:21-24

THE FINAL DESOLATION

Revelation 18:21-24

And a strong angel lifted a stone like a great mill-stone, and cast it into the sea. "Thus," he said, "with a rush Babylon the great city will be cast down, and will never again be found. The sound of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters will never again be heard in you. No craftsman of any craft will ever again be found in you. No more will the sound of the mill be heard in you. No more will the light of the lamp shine in you. No more will the voice of the bridegroom and the bride be heard in you; for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and because all nations were lead astray by your sorcery, and because in her was found the blood of the prophets and of God's dedicated ones and of all who have been slain upon the earth."

The picture is of the final desolation of Rome.

It begins with a symbolic action. A strong angel takes a great millstone and hurls it into the sea which closes over it as if it had never been. So will Rome be obliterated. John was taking his picture from the destruction of ancient Babylon. The word of God came to Jeremiah: "When you finish reading this book, bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates: and say, Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the evil that I am bringing upon her" (Jer.51:63-64). In later days Strabo, the Greek geographer, was to say that ancient Babylon was so completely obliterated that no one would ever have dared to say that the desert where she stood was once a great city.

Never again will there be any sound of rejoicing. The doom of Ezekiel against Tyre reads: "And I will stop the music of your songs, and the sound of your lyres shall be heard no more" (Eze.26:13). The harpers and the minstrels played and sang on joyous occasions; the flute was used at festivals and at funerals; the trumpet sounded at the games and at the concerts; but now all music was to be silenced.

Never again will there be the sound of a craftsman plying his trade.

Never again will the sound of domestic activity be heard. Grinding was done by the women at home with two great circular stones one on the top of the other. The corn was put into a hole in the uppermost stone; it was ground between the two stones and emerged through the lower stone. The creak of stone on stone, which could be heard any day at any house door, will never again be heard.

Never again will there be light on the streets or in the houses.

Never again will there be any sound of wedding rejoicing for even love will die. Jeremiah uses the same pictures: "I will banish from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones, and the light of the lamp" (Jer.25:10; compare Jer.7:34; Jer.16:9).

Rome is to become a terrible silent desolation.

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Revelation 18:21-24

And this punishment will come for certain definite reasons.

It will come because she worshipped wealth and luxury and lived wantonly, and found no pleasure except in material things.

It will come because she led men astray with her sorceries. Nahum called Nineveh "graceful and of deadly charms" (Nah.3:14). Rome flirted with the evil powers to make an evil world.

It will come because she was blood guilty. "Woe to the bloody city!" said Ezekiel of Tyre (Eze.24:6). Within Rome the martyrs perished and persecution went out from her all over the earth.

Before we begin to study the last four chapters of the Revelation in detail, it will be well to set out their general programme of events.

They begin with a universal rejoicing at the destruction of Babylon, the power of Rome (Rev.19:1-10). There follows a description of the emergence of a white horse and on it him who is Faithful and True (Rev.19:11-18). Next comes the assembling of hostile powers against the conquering Christ (Rev.19:19); then the defeat of the opposing forces, the casting of the beast and of the false prophet into the lake of fire, and the slaughter of the rest (Rev.19:20-21).

Rev.20 opens with the binding of the devil in the abyss for a period of a thousand years (Rev.20:1-3). There follows the resurrection of the martyrs to reign with Christ for a thousand years, although the rest of the dead are not yet resurrected (Rev.20:4-6). At the end of the thousand years Satan is again loosed for a brief space; there is final conflict with the enemies of Christ who are destroyed with fire from heaven while Satan is cast for ever into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev.20:7-10). Then comes the general resurrection and the general judgment (Rev.20:11-14); and finally the description of the new heaven and the new earth to take the place of the things which have passed away (Rev.21; Rev.22:1-5).

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Revelation 19:1-2

THE TE DEUM OF THE ANGELS

Revelation 19:1-2

After these things I heard what sounded like a great voice of a vast multitude in heaven. "Hallelujah!" they were saying. "Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, because his judgments are true and just, for he judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and has avenged upon her the blood of his servants."

In the description of the total destruction of Babylon, come the words: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!" (Rev.18:20). Here now is the rejoicing which was called for.

It begins with the shout of a vast multitude in heaven. We have already come upon two vast multitudes in heaven, the martyrs in Rev.7:9 and the angels in Rev.5:11. Here is most likely the multitude of the angels, first in the Te Deum of praise.

This shout of rejoicing begins with Hallelujah. Hallelujah is a very common word in religious vocabulary but the only time it actually appears in Scripture is on the four occasions in this chapter. Like Hosanna (HSN3467 + HSN4994 and GSN5614) it is one of the few Hebrew words which have established themselves in ordinary religious language. It probably came to be so well known to even the simplest member of the Church through its special use as a response of praise in the Easter worship.

Hallelujah literally means "Praise God". It is derived from halal (HSN1984), which means to praise, and Jah (HSN3050), which is the name of God. Although Hallelujah appears only here in the Bible, it occurs in a translated form frequently. It is actually the first phrase in Ps.106; Ps.111-113; Ps.117; Ps.135; Ps.146-150. The series of Psalms from Ps.113-118 were called the Hallel (compare HSN1984), the Praise God, and were part of the essential education of every Jewish lad. Where Hallelujah occurs in the Old Testament it is translated by Praise God, but here in this chapter the original Hebrew form, transliterated into Greek, is retained.

God is praised because salvation, glory, and power belong to him. Each of these three great attributes of God should awaken its own response in the heart of man. The salvation of God should awaken the gratitude of man; the glory of God should awaken the reverence of man; the power of God is always exercised in the love of God and should, therefore, awaken the trust of man. Gratitude, reverence, trust--these are the constituent elements of real praise.

God is praised because he has exercised his just and true judgment on the great harlot. Judgment is the inescapable consequence of sin. T. S. Kepler comments: "The moral law can no more be broken than the law of gravity; it can only be illustrated." It is said that the judgments of God are true and just. God alone is perfect in judgment for three reasons. First, he alone can see the inmost thoughts and desires of any man. Second, he alone has that purity which can judge without prejudice. Third, he alone has the wisdom to find the right judgment and the power to apply it.

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Revelation 19:1-2

The great harlot is judged because she corrupted the world. The worst of all sins is to teach others to sin.

All forbidden things we've sought,
All the mischief we have wrought,
All the sin to others taught,
Forgive, O Lord, for Jesus' sake.

There is one other reason for the rejoicing. The judgment on Rome is the guarantee that God never in the end abandons his own.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 19:3-5

THE TE DEUM OF NATURE AND THE CHURCH

Revelation 19:3-5

And a second time they said: "Hallelujah! for the smoke from her rises for ever and ever."

And the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped the God who is seated upon the throne. "Amen," they said, "Hallelujah!" And a voice came forth from the throne. "Praise our God," it said, "all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great."

The angelic host sings a second Hallelujah. Their praise is that the smoke of Babylon rises for ever and ever. That is to say, never again will she rise from her ruins. The actual picture comes from Isaiah: "The streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into brimstone; her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up for ever and ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever" (Isa.34:9-10).

There follows praise from the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures. The twenty-four elders were prominent in the early visions (Rev.4:4,10; Rev.5:6,11,14; Rev.7:11; Rev.11:16; Rev.14:3) as were the four living creatures (Rev.4:6-9; Rev.5:6-14; Rev.6:1-7; Rev.7:11; Rev.14:3; Rev.15:7). We saw that the twenty-four elders represent the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, and, therefore, stand for the totality of the Church. The four living creatures, respectively like a lion, an ox, a man and an eagle, stand for two things, for all that is bravest, strongest, wisest and swiftest in nature--and for the cherubim. Hence a song of praise from the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures is a Te Deum from the whole of the Church and the whole of nature.

The voice that comes from the throne is most likely to be understood as the voice of one of the cherubim. "Praise our God," says the voice, "all you his servants, you who fear him." Once again John finds his model in the words of the Old Testament, for that is a quotation from Ps.135:1; Ps.135:20.

Two sets of people are called on to praise God. First, there are his servants. In the Revelation two kinds of people are specially called the servants of God; the prophets (Rev.10:7; Rev.11:18; Rev.22:6), and the martyrs (Rev.7:3; Rev.19:2). First, then, this is the praise of the prophets and the martyrs who have witnessed for God with their voices and with their lives. Second, there are the small and the great. H. B. Swete says that this comprehensive phrase embraces "Christians of all intellectual capacities and social grades, and of all stages of progress in the life of Christ." It is a universal summons to praise God for his mighty acts.

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Revelation 19:6-8

THE TE DEUM OF THE REDEEMED

Revelation 19:6-8 (Part 1)

And I heard a voice which sounded like the voice of a vast multitude, and like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of mighty crashes of thunder.

"Hallelujah!" they said, "because the Lord our God, the Almighty, has entered into his kingdom. Let us rejoice and let us exult, and let us give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has prepared herself, and it has been granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, shining and pure." For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of God's dedicated people.

The final shout is the praise of the host of the redeemed. John goes out of his way to heap up similes to describe its sound. It was, as H. B. Swete puts it, like "the din of a vast concourse, the roar of a cataract, the roll of thunder."

Once again John finds his inspiration in the words of Scripture. In his mind are two things. First, he is remembering Ps.97:1: "The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice." Second, he says: "Let us rejoice and exult." There is only one other place in the New Testament where these two verbs (chairein, GSN5463, and agallian, GSN0021) come together--in Jesus Christ's promise to the persecuted: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt.5:12). It is as if the multitude of the redeemed sent up their shout of praise because the promise of Christ to his persecuted ones had come abundantly true.

Next comes the marriage of the Lamb to his bride. That picture stands for the final union between Jesus Christ and his Church. R. H. Charles finely says that the marriage symbolism "denotes the intimate and indissoluble communion of Christ with the community which he has purchased with his own blood" a communion which is "first reached in fulness by the host of the martyrs."

The thought of the relationship between God and his people as a marriage goes far back into the Old Testament. Again and again the prophets thought of Israel as the chosen bride of God. "I will betroth you to me for ever," Hosea hears God say, "I will betroth you to me in righteousness" (Hos.2:19-20). "Your Maker is your husband; the Lord of hosts is his name," says Isaiah (Isa.54:5). Jeremiah hears God say and appeal: "Return, O faithless children, for I am your master" (Jer.3:14). Ezekiel works out the whole picture most fully in Eze.16.

The marriage symbolism runs all through the Gospels. We read of the marriage feast (Matt.22:2); of the bridechamber and the wedding garment (Matt.22:10-11); of the sons of the bridechamber (Mk.2:19); of the bridegroom (Mk.2:19; Matt.25:1); of the friends of the bridegroom (Jn.3:29). And Paul speaks of himself as betrothing the Church like a pure virgin to Christ (2Cor.11:2), and for him the relationship of Christ to his Church is the great model of the relationship of husband and wife (Eph.5:21-33).

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Revelation 19:6-8

This may seem to us a strange metaphor. But it conserves certain great truths. In any real marriage there must be four things which must also be in the relationship between the Christian and Christ.

(i) There is love. A loveless marriage is a contradiction in terms.

(ii) There is intimate communion, so intimate that man and wife become one flesh. The relationship of the Christian and Christ must be the closest in all life.

(iii) There is joy. There is nothing like the joy of loving and of being loved. If Christianity does not bring joy, it does not bring anything.

(iv) There is fidelity. No marriage can last without fidelity, and the Christian must be as faithful to Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ is to him.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 19:6-8

THE ALMIGHTY AND HIS KINGDOM

Revelation 19:6-8 (Part 2)

This passage calls God by a certain name; and says that he has entered into his kingdom.

It calls God the Almighty. The word is pantokrator (GSN3841), literally the one who controls all things. The significant thing about this great word is that it occurs ten times in the New Testament. Once it is in an Old Testament quotation in 2Cor.6:18; the other nine times are all in the Revelation (Rev.1:8; Rev.4:8; Rev.11:17; Rev.15:3; Rev.16:7,14; Rev.19:6,15; Rev.21:22). In other words, this is the characteristic title for God in the Revelation.

There was never a time in history in which such forces were drawn up against the Church as when the Revelation was written. There was never a time when the Christian was called upon to undergo such suffering and to accept so continually the prospect of a cruel death. And yet in such times John calls God pantokrator (GSN3841).

Here is faith and confidence; and the whole point of this passage is that that faith and confidence are vindicated.

The Church, the Bride of Christ, is clothed in fine linen, pure and shining. There is a contrast with the scarlet and gold of the great harlot. The white linen represents the good deeds of God's dedicated people; that is to say, it is character which forms the robe which arrays the Bride of Christ.

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Revelation 19:9-10a

THE ONLY WORSHIP

Revelation 19:9-10a

And he said to me: "Write! Blessed are those who are invited to the feast of the marriage of the Lamb!" And he said to me: "These are the true words of God." And I fell down before his feet to worship him; and he said to me: "See that you do not do this. I am your fellow-servant and the fellow-servant of your brothers who possess the testimony which Jesus gave. Worship God!"

The Jews had the idea that, when the Messiah came, God's people would, as it were, be entertained by God to a great Messianic Banquet. Isaiah speaks of God preparing for his people "a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined" (Isa.25:6). Jesus speaks of many coming from the east and the west and sitting down with the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven (Matt.8:11). The word used for sitting down is the word for reclining at a meal. The picture is of all men sitting down at the Messianic Banquet of God. Jesus at the Last Supper said that he would not again drink of the cup until he drank it new in his Father's kingdom (Matt.26:29). That was Jesus looking forward to the great Messianic Banquet.

It may well be from that old Jewish idea that there came the idea of the marriage feast of the Lamb, for that indeed would be the true Messianic Banquet. It is a simple picture, not to be taken with crude literalness, but simply saying very beautifully that in his kingdom all men will enjoy the bounty of God.

But this passage confronts us with something which became of very great importance in the worship of the Church. It was John's instinct to worship the angelic messenger; but the angel forbids him to do that, because the angels are no more than men's fellow-servants. Worship is for God alone. John was forbidding angel worship; and that was a very necessary prohibition, for in the early church there was a well-nigh inevitable tendency to worship angels, a tendency which has never wholly disappeared.

(i) In certain circles of Judaism the angels had a very large place. Raphael tells Tobit that he is the angel who brought his prayer before God (Tob.13:12-15). In the Testament of Dan (6: 2) the angel who intercedes for men is mentioned. In the Testament of Levi (5: 5) Michael is said to be the angel who intercedes for Israel. A fourth century A.D. Rabbi, Jehudah, actually gave the odd instruction that men ought not to pray in Aramaic because the angels did not understand Aramaic! The prevalence of all this in Judaism is underlined by the fact that certain Rabbis insisted that prayers must always be offered direct to God, and not to Michael or to Gabriel.

In Judaism there was increasingly stressed the transcendence of God, because of that it was increasingly felt that man needed some intermediary. Hence arose the prominence of angels.

When Jews came over into Christianity, sometimes they brought this special reverence for the angels with them, forgetting that with the coming of Jesus no other intermediary between God and man can be necessary.

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Revelation 19:9-10a

(ii) A Greek came into the Church from a world of thought which made angel worship a real danger. First, he came from a world in which there were many gods--Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Aphrodite and the rest, What was easier than to keep the old gods in the form of angels? Second, he came from a world in which it was believed that God did not interest himself directly but made his contact through the demons (daimon, GSN1142), by means of whom he controlled the natural forces and acted upon men. What was easier than to turn the demons into angels and to worship them?

John insists that angels are no more than the servants of God; and that God alone must be worshipped. Any other intermediary than Jesus Christ between God and man must be utterly opposed.

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Revelation 19:10b

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

Revelation 19:10b

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. We take this phrase by itself, because it is both ambiguous and important.

The ambiguity springs from the fact that the testimony of Jesus can bear either of two meanings.

(i) It can mean the witness which the Christian bears to Jesus Christ. That is the way in which H. B. Swete takes it. He says: "The possession of the prophetic spirit, which makes a true prophet, shows itself in a life of witness to Jesus, which perpetuates his witness to the Father and to himself" A prophet's message lies in the personal witness of his life, even more than in the spoken witness of his words.

(ii) It can equally mean the witness which Jesus Christ gives to men. On that interpretation the phrase will mean that no man can speak to men until he has listened to Jesus Christ. It was said of a great preacher: "First he listened to God, then he spoke to men."

This is the kind of double meaning of which the Greek language is capable. It may well be that John intended the double meaning; and that we are meant not to choose between the meanings, but to accept both of them. If so, we can define the true prophet as the man who has received from Christ the message he brings to men, and whose words and works are at one and the same time an act of witness to Christ.

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Revelation 19:11

THE CONQUERING CHRIST

Revelation 19:11

And I saw heaven opened, and, behold, a white horse, and he who is mounted on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

Here is one of the most dramatic moments in the Revelation, the emergence of the conquering Christ.

(i) John sees Christ as the conqueror. He is, as H. B. Swete puts it, "a royal commander followed by a dazzling retinue." Here is a picture which is essentially Jewish. Jewish dreams were full of the warrior Messiah, who would lead God's people to victory and smash his enemies. In the Psalms of Solomon we have that picture:

Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king the Son of David,
At the time in which thou seest, O God, that he may reign over Israel, Thy servant.
And gird him with strength that he may shatter unrighteous rulers,
And that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her down to destruction.
Wisely, righteously, he shall thrust out sinners from the inheritance,
He shall destroy the pride of the sinner as a potter's vessel,
With a rod of iron he shall break in pieces all their substance,
He shall destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth;
At his rebuke nations shall flee before him,
And he shall reprove sinners for the thoughts of their hearts
(Wis.17:23-27).

There is a Rabbinic picture of the Messiah: "How beautiful is the king Messiah, who is about to rise from the house of Judah. He hath bound his loins and gone forth to war against those who hate him; kings and princes shall be slain; he will make red the rivers with the blood of the slain...his garments will be dipped in blood."

The white horse is the symbol of the conqueror, because it was on a white horse that a Roman general rode when he celebrated a triumph.

It is well to remember that the whole background of this picture lies in Jewish expectations of the future and has little to do with the Christ of the Gospels who was meek and lowly in heart.

(ii) His name is Faithful and True. Here, on the other hand, is something which is valid for all time. Christ is described by two words.

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Revelation 19:11

(a) He is faithful. The word is pistos (GSN4103); it means absolutely to be trusted.

(b) He is true. The word is alethinos (GSN0228) and has two meanings. It means true in the sense that Jesus Christ is the one who brings the truth and who never at any time has any falsehood in anything that he says. It also means genuine, as opposed to that which is unreal. In Jesus Christ we meet reality.

(iii) He judges and makes war in righteousness. Again John finds his picture in the prophetic words of the Old Testament, where it is said of the chosen king of God: "With righteousness he shall judge the poor" (Isa. 11:4). John's age knew all about the perversion of justice; no one could expect justice from a capricious heathen tyrant. In Asia Minor even the tribunal of the proconsul was subject to bribery and to maladministration. Wars were matters of ambition and tyranny and oppression rather than of justice. But when the conquering Christ comes, his power will be exercised in justice.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 19:12

THE UNKNOWABLE NAME

Revelation 19:12

His eyes are a flame of fire, and on his head are many royal crowns, and he has a name written which no one knows except himself.

We begin the description of the conquering Christ.

His eyes are a flame of fire. We have already met this description in Rev.1:14 and Rev.2:18. It stands for the consuming power of the victorious Christ. On his head he has many crowns. The word used here for crown is diadema (GSN1238), which is the royal crown, as opposed to stephanos (GSN4735) which is the crown of victory. To be crowned with more than one crown may seem strange, but in the time of John it was quite natural. It was not uncommon for a monarch to wear more than one crown in order to show that he was the king of more than one country. For instance, when Ptolemy entered Antioch he wore two crowns or diadems--one to show that he was lord of Asia and one to show that he was lord of Egypt (1Macc.11:13). On the head of the victor Christ there are many crowns to show that he is lord of all the kingdoms of the earth.

He has a name known to no one but himself. This is a passage whose meaning is obscure. What is this name? Many suggestions have been made.

(i) It has been suggested that the name is kurios (GSN2962), Lord. In Php.2:9-11 we read of the name above every name which God has given to Jesus Christ because of his complete obedience; and there the name is almost certainly Lord.

(ii) It is suggested that the name is Y-H-W-H. That was the Jewish name for God. In Hebrew writing there were no vowels; the vowels had to be supplied by the reader. No one really knows what the vowels in Y-H-W-H were. The name was in fact so holy that it was never pronounced. We usually pronounce it JEHOVAH; but the vowels in Jehovah are really those of the Hebrew word 'Adonay (HSN0136), which means Lord, the name by which the Jews called God in order to avoid pronouncing the sacred name. Many scholars think the name should be Y-A-H-W-E-H. The letters Y-H-W-H (Yahweh) are called the sacred tetragrammaton, the sacred four letters.

(iii) It may be that the name is one which can be revealed only at the final union of Christ and the Church. In the Ascension of Isaiah (9: 5) there is a saying: "Thou canst not bear his name until thou shalt have ascended out of the body." There was a Jewish belief that no man could know the name of God until he had entered into the life of heaven.

(iv) It may be that here is a lingering relic of the old idea that to know the name of a divine being was to have a certain power over him. In two Old Testament stories, the wrestling of Jacob at Peniel (Gen.32:29), and the appearance of the angelic messenger to Gideon (Judg.13:18) the divine visitor refuses to tell his name.

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Revelation 19:12

(v) It may be that we shall never know the symbolism of the unknown name but H. B. Swete has the very fine idea that in the essence of the being of Christ there must always remain something beyond man's understanding. "Notwithstanding the dogmatic helps which the Church offers, the mind fails to grasp the inmost significance of the Person of Christ, which eludes all efforts to bring it within the terms of human knowledge. Only the Son of God can understand the mystery of his own being."

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Revelation 19:13

GOD'S WORD IN ACTION

Revelation 19:13

He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God.

Here are two further pictures of the warrior Christ.

(i) He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, not his own but that of his enemies. As R. H. Charles puts it, it is essential to remember that the Heavenly Leader is this time, not the Slain One, but the Slayer. As usual John takes his picture from the Old Testament and is thinking of the terrible picture in Isa.63:1-3, where the prophet pictures God returning from the destruction of Edom; "I trod them in my anger, and trampled them in my wrath; their life blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment." This is the Messiah of Jewish apocalyptic expectation far more than the Messiah whom Jesus claimed to be.

(ii) His name is the Word of God. Although the words are the same as in the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel, the meaning is quite different and much simpler. Here we have the purely Jewish idea of the Word of God. To a Jew a word was not merely a sound; it did things. As Dr. John Paterson puts it in *The Book that is Alive*: "The spoken word in Hebrew was fearfully alive. It was not merely a vocable or sound dropped heedlessly from unthinking lips. It was a unit of energy charged with power. It is energised for weal or for woe." We can see that, for instance, in the old story in which Jacob filched Esau's blessing from Isaac (Gen.27). The blessing given could not be taken back.

If that is so of human words, how much truer it is of the divine word. It is by his word that God created the earth and the heavens and everything in them. And God said is the recurring phrase in the narrative of creation (Gen.1:3,6,9; Gen.1:14; Gen.1:26). The word of God, said Jeremiah, is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces (Jer.23:29).

In Wisdom there is a description of the plagues in Egypt, and in particular of the slaying of the first-born sons of the Egyptians: "Thine Almighty Word leaped down from heaven out of thy royal throne, as a fierce man of war, into the midst of a land of destruction, and brought thine unfeigned commandment as a sharp sword, and standing up filled all things with death; and it touched the heaven, but it stood upon the earth" (Wis.18:15-16). It is the active word which carried out the commandment of God. Here is the idea in Heb.4:12: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword."

When John here called the warrior Christ "The Word of God", he means that here in action is all the power of God's word; everything that God has said, and threatened, and promised is embodied in Christ.

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Revelation 19:14-16

THE AVENGING WRATH

Revelation 19:14-16

The armies which are in heaven followed him, on white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure.

From his mouth there comes forth a sharp two-edged sword, so that with it he may smite the nations, and he will control them with an iron rod. He will tread the winepress of the anger of the wrath of God the Almighty.

And on his robe, and on his thigh, he has a name written--King of kings and Lord of lords.

The description of the warrior Christ is further filled in.

He has with him the armies of heaven. With this we may compare Jesus' words at his arrest, when he said he could have had twelve legions of angels to fight for him (Matt.26:53). The armies of heaven are the hosts of the angels.

From his mouth goes forth a sharp two-edged sword (compare Rev.1:16). This description of the warrior Christ comes from two Old Testament passages put side by side. Isaiah says of the heavenly king: "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isa.11:4). The Psalmist says of the Messianic king: "You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps.2:9). Once again we must remember that this picture is demonstrably painted in Jewish terms.

He will tread the winepress of the anger of the wrath of God. The picture is of the warrior Christ trampling the grapes so as to produce the wine of the wrath of God, which his enemies must drink to their doom.

Our most difficult task here is to discover the picture behind the statement that the warrior Christ has the name King of kings and Lord of lords written on his robe and on his thigh. Various suggestions have been made. It has been suggested that the name is either embroidered on his girdle or engraved on his sword hilt. It is suggested that it is on the skirt of his general's cloak, for that is where it would be easiest to read on a horseman. It is suggested that it is actually written on his thigh, because it was sometimes the custom to engrave the titles of statues on the thigh. It seems clear that the name is visible to all, and, therefore, probably the likeliest solution is that it was written on the skirt of the warrior Christ's robe, lying over his thigh, as he rode upon the white horse. In any event, the name singles him out as the greatest of all rulers, the only true divine One and the universal King.

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Revelation 19:17-21

THE DOOM OF THE ENEMIES OF CHRIST

Revelation 19:17-21

And I saw one angel standing in the sun, and he cried with a great voice to all the birds who fly in midheaven. "Come," he said, "assemble for the great feast which God will give you, that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of those who ride them, and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, both small and great."

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war with him who rides the horse, and with his army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet, who performed in his presence signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, and who worship his image. The two of them were cast alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone; and the rest were slain with the sword of him who rides the horse, with the sword which comes out of his mouth; and all the birds were glutted with their flesh.

Here is a grim picture of birds of prey being invited to come from all over the sky to glut themselves on the corpses of the slain. Again this is a picture taken directly from the Old Testament, from Ezekiel's picture of the slaughter of the forces of Gog and Magog. "Speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field.... You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth--of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bulls.... And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are drunk at the sacrificial feast which I am preparing for you" (Eze.39:17-19). This bloodthirsty picture is again far more in line with Old Testament apocalyptic expectations than with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Here we have a repetition of the imagery of chapter 13. The beast is Nero redivivus; the false prophet is the provincial organization which administered Caesar worship; those who have the mark of the beast are they who have worshipped at the shrine of Caesar; the kings of the earth and their armies are the Parthian hosts, which Nero was to lead again against Rome and against the world.

So all the forces hostile to God assemble themselves; but the warrior Christ is to conquer. Antichrist and his henchmen are cast into the lake of fire; and all their supporters are slain, to await in Sheol the final judgment.

The cosmic drama is drawing to a close. Nothing has yet been said of the fate of Satan, but now we go on to see that fate.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 20:1-15

THE THOUSAND YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST AND THE SAINTS

Revelation 20:1-15

Since the great importance of this chapter is that it is what might be called the foundation document of Millenarianism or Chiliasm, it will be better to read it as a whole before we deal with it in detail.

1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven with the key of the abyss, and with a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a 3 thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and locked him in, and set a seal over him, that he might no longer deceive the nations, until the thousand years were completed. After that he must be set free for a little time. 4 And I saw thrones, and those who had received the privilege of judgment sat upon them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their witness to Jesus, and for the sake of the word of God, and such as had not worshipped the beast nor his image, and who had not received the mark upon their forehead, and upon their hand. And they came to life again, and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were completed. This is the 6 first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has a share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. 7 And whenever the thousand years shall have been completed, Satan will be loosed from his prison, and 8 he will come forth to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to assemble them for war; and their number will be as the sand of the sea. 9 And they came up over the broad plain of the earth, and they encircled the camp of God's dedicated ones, and the beloved city; and fire came down from 10 heaven and devoured them; and the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where both the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tortured day and night for ever and ever. 11 And I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it. Earth and the sky fled from his presence, 12 and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened. And another book was opened, the Book of Life; and the dead were judged by that which was written in these books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea rendered up the dead in it, and Death 14 and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the 15 second death, the lake of fire; and everyone who was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Millennium means a period of one thousand years; and chiliasm is derived from the Greek *chilias* (GSN5505), a thousand. To put it briefly, the commonest form of Millenarianism teaches that for a thousand years before the end Christ will reign upon this earth in a kingdom of his saints; and after that will come the final struggle, the general resurrection, the last judgment and the final consummation.

We note two general facts: First, this was a very common belief in the early church and it still has its adherents. Second, this is the only passage in the New Testament in which it is clearly taught.

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Revelation 20:1-15

The picture is that first of all the Devil will be bound in the abyss for a thousand years. Then those who have been martyred for Christ, although the rest of mankind, even the Christians among them who did not suffer martyrdom, will not be resurrected. There will then be a period of a thousand years in which Christ and his saints will reign. After that for a brief time the Devil will be released. There will follow a final struggle and the general resurrection of all men. The devil will be finally defeated and cast into the lake of fire; his supporters will be burned up with fire from heaven; those whose names are in the Book of Life will enter into blessedness, but those whose names are not in the Book of Life will also be cast into the lake of fire.

This doctrine does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament but it was prevalent throughout the early church especially among those who had received their Christianity from Jewish sources. Here is our key. The origin of this doctrine is not specifically Christian but is to be found in certain Jewish beliefs about the Messianic age which were common in the time after 100 B.C.

Jewish Messianic beliefs were never an unvarying system. They varied from time to time and from thinker to thinker. The basis was that the Messiah would come and establish upon earth the new age, in which the Jewish nation would be supreme.

In the earlier times the general belief was that the kingdom so established would last for ever. God would set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed; it would break in pieces the other kingdoms, but it would stand for ever (Dn.2:44). It was to be an everlasting dominion (Dn.7:14, Dn.7:27).

From 100 B.C. onwards there came a change. It was felt that this world was so incurably evil that within it the Kingdom of God could never finally come; and so there emerged the conception that the Messiah would have a limited reign and that after his reign the final consummation would come. The Apocalypse of Baruch foresees the defeat of the forces of evil; then the principate of the Messiah will stand for ever, until this world of corruption is at an end (2 Baruch 40: 3). One section of Enoch sees history as a series of weeks. There are seven weeks of past history. The eighth is the week of the righteous, when a sword is given to the righteous and sinners are delivered into their hands, and the house of God is built. In the ninth week the evil are written down for destruction, and righteousness will flourish. In the tenth week comes judgment; and only then comes the eternal time of goodness and of God (Enoch 93: 3-10).

There was much rabbinic discussion of how long the Messianic age would last before the final consummation arrived. Some said 40, some 100, some 600, some 1,000, some 2,000, some 7,000 years.

We look particularly at two answers. 2 Esdras is very definite. God is represented as saying: "My Son the Messiah shall be revealed, together with those who are with him, and shall rejoice the survivors for four hundred years. And it shall be, after these years, that my Son the Messiah shall die, and all in whom there is human breath. Then shall the world be turned into the primaeval silence seven days, like as at the first beginnings, so that no man is left." And then after that the new age comes (2Esdr.7:28-29). This passage is unique in foretelling, not only a limited reign of the Messiah, but the Messiah's death. The period of four hundred years was arrived at by setting

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Revelation 20:1-15

side by side two passages from the Old Testament. In Gen.15:13 God tells Abraham that the period of the affliction of Israel will last for four hundred years.

In Ps.90:15 the prayer is: "Make us glad as many days as thou hast afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil." It was, therefore, held that the period of bliss, like the period of affliction, would last for 400 years.

More commonly it was held that the age of the world would correspond to the time taken for its creation and that the time of creation was 6,000 years. "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday" (Ps.90:4). "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2Pet.3:8). Each day of creation was said to be 1,000 years. It was, therefore, held that the Messiah would come in the sixth thousand of the years; and the seventh thousand, the equivalent of the Sabbath rest in the creation story, would be the reign of the Messiah.

Although the reign of the Messiah was to be the reign of righteousness, it was often conceived of in terms of material blessings. "The earth also shall yield its fruit ten thousand-fold, and on each vine there shall be a thousand branches, and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster shall produce a thousand grapes, and each grape a cor (120 gallons) of wine" (2 Baruch 29: 5, 6). There will be no more disease, no more untimely death; the beasts will be friendly with men; and women will have no pain in childbirth (2 Baruch 73).

Here, then, we have the background of the idea of the Millennium. Already the Jews had come to think of a limited reign of the Messiah, which would be a time of the triumph of righteousness, and of the greatest spiritual and material blessings.

On the basis of this passage of the Revelation Millenarianism or Chiliasm was very widespread within the early Church, although it was never universal.

For Justin Martyr it was an essential part of orthodox belief, although he agreed that there were good Christians who did not accept it. "I and others, who are right-minded Christians at all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built adorned and enlarged as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare" (Dialogue with Trypho 80). Irenaeus also (Against Heresies 5: 32) firmly held to the belief in a Millennium upon earth. One of his reasons was the conviction that, since the saints and the martyrs had suffered upon earth, it was only just that upon earth they should reap the rewards of their fidelity. Tertullian also insisted upon the coming of the Millennium.

Papias, the second century collector of so much material upon the Gospels, insisted that Jesus taught the doctrine of the Millennium, and he hands down as the words of Jesus a passage which foretells the wondrous fertility of the earth which is to come: "The days will come in which vines shall grow each having ten thousand shoots, and on each shoot ten thousand branches, and on each branch again ten thousand twigs, and on each twig ten thousand clusters, and on each cluster ten thousand grapes, and each grape when pressed shall yield five and twenty measures of wine. And when any of the saints shall have taken hold of one of their clusters, another shall cry, I am a better cluster; take me, bless the Lord through me.

Likewise also a grain of wheat shall produce ten thousand heads, and every head shall have ten thousand grains, and every grain ten thousand pounds of fine flour, bright and clean, and the other

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Revelation 20:1-15

fruits, seeds and the grass, shall produce in similar proportions, and all the animals, using these fruits which are products of the soil, shall become in their turn peaceable and harmonious, obedient to man in all subjection." Papias gives this passage as an actual saying of Jesus, but it can be seen that it is very close to the passage of 2 Baruch which we have already quoted.

We have already said that, although many in the early church accepted the belief in the Millennium as a part of orthodoxy, many did not. Eusebius almost contemptuously dismisses Papias' report. "I suppose he got those ideas," he says, "through a misunderstanding of the apostolic records, not perceiving that the things said by them were said mystically in figures. For he seems to have been of very limited understanding" (Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History 3: 38).

One of the things which brought discredit upon Millennialism was the fact that it undoubtedly lent itself to a materialistic interpretation in which it offered physical as much as spiritual pleasures. Eusebius tells how the great scholar Dionysius had in Egypt to deal with a certain much-respected bishop called Nepos who taught "a millennium of bodily luxury upon this earth" (The Ecclesiastical History 7: 24). Cerinthus, a heretic, deliberately taught a millennium of "delights of the belly and sexual passion, eating and drinking and marrying" (Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History 3: 28). Jerome spoke contemptuously of "these half-Jews who look for a Jerusalem of gold and precious stones from heaven, and a future kingdom of a thousand years, in which all nations shall serve Israel" (Commentary on Isaiah 60: 1).

Origen rebuked those who looked for bodily pleasure in the Millennium. The saints will eat, but it will be the bread of life; they will drink, but it will be the cup of wisdom (De Principiis 2. 11. 2-3). It was Augustine, however, who, we may almost say, dealt Millennialism its death blow. At one time he himself had been a Millennialist, although it was always spiritual blessings for which he longed. H. B. Swete summarizes Augustine's position: "He had learned to see in the captivity of Satan nothing else than the binding of the strong man by the stronger than he which the Lord had foretold (Mk.3:27; Lk.11:22); in the thousand years, the whole interval between the first Advent and the last conflict; in the reign of the saints, the entire course of the kingdom of heaven; in the judgment given to them, the binding and loosing of sinners; in the first resurrection, the spiritual share in the Resurrection of Christ which belongs to the baptised" (Augustine: The City of God 20: 7).

Augustine spiritualized the whole idea of the Millennium.

Millennialism is by no means extinct within the Church; but it has never been the universally accepted belief of the Church, this is the only passage in the New Testament which unequivocally teaches it, its whole background is Jewish and not Christian, and the literal interpretation of it has always tended to run into danger and excess. It is a doctrine which has long since been left behind by the main stream of Christian thought and which now belongs to the eccentricities of Christian belief.

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Revelation 20:1-3

THE CHAINING OF SATAN

Revelation 20:1-3

The abyss was a vast subterranean cavern beneath the earth, sometimes the place where all the dead went, sometimes the place where special sinners were kept awaiting punishment. It was reached by a chasm reaching down into the earth and this the angel locks in order to keep the Devil in the abyss.

It was the abyss which the devils feared most of all. In the story of the Gerasene demoniac the request of the devils was that Jesus would not command them to leave the man and to go out into the deep, that is, the abyss (Lk.8:31).

The seal is set on the chasm to ensure the safe-keeping of the prisoner, just as the seal was set on the tomb of Jesus to make sure that he would not escape (Matt.27:66).

The Devil is to be kept in the abyss for a period of a thousand years. Even the way in which the word thousand is used in Scripture warns us against taking this literally. Ps.50:10 says that the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God; and Jb.9:3 says that a man cannot answer God once in a thousand times. Thousand is simply used to describe a very large number.

At the end of the period the Devil is to be let loose for a little time. H. B. Swete suggests that the reason for the final loosing of the Devil is this. In a period of peace and righteousness, in a time when the opposition, so to speak, did not exist, it might easily happen that people came to take their faith unthinkingly. The loosing of the Devil meant a testing-time for Christians, and there are times when a testing-time is essential, if the reality of the faith is to be preserved.

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Revelation 20:4-5

THE PRIVILEGE OF JUDGMENT

Revelation 20:4-5

In the first resurrection only those who have died and suffered for the faith are to be raised from the dead. The general resurrection is not to take place until after the thousand year reign of Christ upon earth. There is special privilege for those who have shown special loyalty to Christ.

Those who are to enjoy this privilege belong to two classes. First, there are those who have been martyred for their loyalty to Christ. The word used for the way in which they were killed means to behead with an axe, and denotes the most cruel death. Second, there are those who have not worshipped the beast and have not received his mark on their hand or on their forehead. H. B. Swete identifies these, as those who, although they were not actually martyred, willingly bore suffering, reproach, imprisonment, loss of goods, disruption of their homes and personal relationships for the sake of Christ.

In the ancient Church in the days of persecution two terms were used. Martyrs were those who actually died for their faith; confessors were those who suffered everything short of death for their loyalty to Christ. Both he who dies for Christ and he who lives for Christ will receive his reward.

Those who have been loyal to Christ are to receive the privilege of judgment. This is an idea which occurs more than once in the New Testament. Jesus is represented as saying that, when he returns to sit on the throne of his glory, his twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt.19:28). Paul reminds the litigious Corinthians that the destiny of the saints is to judge the world (1Cor.6:2). Again we do not need to take this literally. The idea symbolized is that the world to come will redress the balance of this one. In this world the Christian may be a man under the judgment of men; in the world to come the parts will be reversed and those who thought they were the judges will be the judged.

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Revelation 20:6

THE PRIVILEGES OF THE WITNESSES OF CHRIST

Revelation 20:6

Rev.20:6 describes the privileges of the Christians who have been true to Christ, even when loyalty was a costly thing.

(i) For them death has been utterly vanquished. The second death has no power over them. Physical death for them is not a thing to be feared, for it is the gateway to life everlasting.

(ii) They are to be the priests of God and of Christ. The Latin for priest is pontifex, which means a bridge-builder. The priest is the builder of a bridge between God and man; and he, as the Jews saw it, is the one man with the right of direct access into the presence of God. Those who have been loyal to Jesus Christ have the right of free entry into the presence of God; and they have the privilege of introducing others to Jesus Christ.

(iii) They are to reign with Christ. In Christ even the most ordinary man becomes a king.

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Revelation 20:7-10

THE FINAL STRUGGLE

Revelation 20:7-10

At the end of the thousand years the Devil is to be loosed, but he has learned no lesson; he begins where he has left off. He will assemble the nations for the final attack on God.

A final attack on Jerusalem by the hostile nations is one of the standard pictures of the last times in Jewish thought. We find it especially in Dn.11 and in Zech.14:1-11. The Sibylline Orders (3: 663-672) tell how the kings of the nations shall throw themselves against the land in troops, only to be ultimately destroyed by God.

But here we come on a picture which etched itself deeply, if mysteriously, on Jewish thought, the picture of Gog and Magog. We find it first in Eze.38-39. There Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and of Tubal, is to launch the great attack upon Israel and is to be in the end utterly destroyed. It may be that originally Gog was connected with the Scythians whose invasions -all men feared.

As time went on, in Jewish thought Gog (HSN1463; GSN1136) and Magog (HSN4031; GSN3098) came to stand for everything that is against God. The rabbis taught that Gog and Magog would assemble themselves and their forces against Jerusalem, and would fall by the hand of the Messiah.

The hostile armies under the Devil's leadership come up against the camp of God's people and against the beloved city, that is, Jerusalem; the hosts are consumed with fire from heaven, the Devil is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to share the fate of the beast and of the false prophet, and the triumph of God is complete.

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Revelation 20:11-15

THE FINAL JUDGMENT (1)

Revelation 20:11-15 (Part 1)

Now comes the final judgment. God, the Judge, is on his great white throne which symbolizes his unapproachable purity.

It may be that some will find a problem here. The regular picture of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ is judge. Jn.5:22 represents Jesus as saying: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son." In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats it is the glorified Christ who is the judge (Matt.25:31-46). In Paul's speech at Athens it is said that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by Jesus (Ac.17:31). In 2Tim.4:1 Jesus is the one who is about to judge the living and the dead.

There are two answers to this apparent difficulty.

First, the unity of the Father and the Son is such that there is no difficulty in ascribing the action of the one to the other. That is in fact what Paul does. In Rom.14:10 he writes: "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." But in 2Cor.5:10 he writes: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Second, it may be that the real reason why God is the judge in John's Revelation is that the whole background of the book is Jewish; to a Jew, even when he became a Christian, God stood unique; and it would seem natural to him that God should be judge.

As John tells the story, the judgment begins with the passing away of this present world; earth and sky flee from his presence. John is thinking in pictures which are very familiar in the Old Testament. God laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of his hands. None the less it is still true that "they will perish ... they will all wear out like a garment; thou changest them like raiment, and they pass away" (Ps.102:25-27). "The heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment" (Isa.51:6). "Heaven and earth will pass away" (Mk.13:31). "The heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up" (2Pet.3:10). The new man in Christ must have a new world in Christ.

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Revelation 20:11-15

THE FINAL JUDGMENT (2)

Revelation 20:11-15 (Part 2)

Now follows the judgment of mankind.

It is the judgment of great and small. There is none so great as to escape the judgment of God, and none so unimportant as to fail to win his vindication.

Two kinds of book are mentioned. The first contains the records of the deeds of men. This is a common idea in Scripture. "The court sat in judgment," says Daniel, "and the books were opened" (Dn.7:10). In Enoch the sealed books are opened before the Lord of the sheep (Enoch 90: 20). The Apocalypse of Baruch foretells the day when "the books shall be opened in which are written the sins of all those who have sinned, and again also the treasures in which the righteousness of all those who have been righteous in creation is gathered" (2 Baruch 24: 1). When the present age passes away, the books will be opened before the face of the firmament, and all shall see together (4 Ezra 6: 20).

The idea is simply that a record of all men's deeds is kept by God. The symbolism is that all through life we are writing our own destiny; it is not so much that God judges a man as that a man writes his own judgment.

The second book is the Book of Life. This, too, occurs often in Scripture. Moses is willing to be blotted out of the Book of Life if it will save the people (Exo.32:32). It is the prayer of the Psalmist that the wicked will be blotted out of the Book of the Living and not written with the righteous (Ps.69:28). Isaiah speaks of those who are written among the living (Isa.4:3). Paul speaks of his fellow-labourers whose names are in the Book of Life (Php.4:3). It is the promise of the Risen Christ to the Church at Sardis that the name of him who overcomes will not be blotted out of the Book of Life (Rev.3:5). Those whose names are not written in the Book of Life are given over to destruction (Rev.13:8). The idea behind this is that every ruler had a roll-book of living citizens under his control; and, of course, when a man died, his name was removed from the roll. Those whose names are in the Book of Life are those who are living, active citizens of the kingdom of God.

At the time of judgment it is said that the sea will give up its dead. The point is twofold. First, in the ancient world burial was all important; if a man did not obtain burial, his spirit would wander, homeless, neither in earth nor in heaven. And, of course, those who died at sea could never be buried. John means that even such as these will appear before the judgment seat of God. Second, H. B. Swete puts the matter in a more general form. "The accidents of death," he says, "will not prevent any from appearing before the judge." No matter how a man dies, he will not escape his punishment nor lose his reward.

Finally, Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. As H. B. Swete puts it, these voracious monsters who have themselves devoured so many are in the end themselves destroyed. In the

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Revelation 20:11-15

judgment those who are not in the Book of Life are condemned to the lake of fire with the Devil, their master, but for those whose names are in the Book of Life, death is for ever vanquished.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:1

THE NEW CREATION

Revelation 21:1

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had gone; and the sea was no more.

John has seen the doom of the wicked, and now he sees the bliss of the blessed.

The dream of a new heaven and a new earth was deep in Jewish thought. "Behold," said God to Isaiah, "I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, or come into mind" (Isa.65:17). Isaiah speaks of the new heaven and the new earth which God will make, in which life will be one continual act of worship (Isa.66:22). This idea is equally strong between the Testaments. It is God's promise: "I will transform the heaven and make it an eternal blessing and light; and I will transform the earth and make it a blessing" (Enoch 45: 4). There will be a new creation accomplished which will endure to eternity (Enoch 72: 1). The first heaven will pass away, and the new heaven shall appear; the light of heaven will be seven times brighter; and the new creation will last for ever (Enoch 91: 16). The Mighty One will shake creation only to renew it (2 Baruch 32: 6). God will renew his creation (2Esdr.7:75).

The picture is always there and its elements are always the same. Sorrow is to be forgotten; sin is to be vanquished; darkness is to be at an end; the temporariness of time is to turn into the everlastingness of eternity. This continuing belief is a witness to three things--to the unquenchable immortal longings in man's soul, to man's inherent sense of sin and to man's faith in God.

In this vision of the future bliss we come on one of the most famous phrases in the Revelation--"And the sea was no more." This phrase has a double background.

(i) It has a background in the great mythological beliefs of John's time. We have already seen that the Babylonian story of the creation of the world is of a long struggle between Marduk, the god of creation, and Tiamat, the dragon of chaos. In that story the sea, the waters beneath the firmament, became the dwelling-place of Tiamat. The sea was always an enemy. The Egyptians saw it as the power which swallowed up the waters of the Nile and left the fields barren.

(ii) It has a much more human background. The ancient peoples hated the sea, even though, by the time of John, they were voyaging long and far. They did not possess the compass; and, therefore, as far as possible, they coasted along the shores. It is not till modern times that we come on people who rejoice in being sea-faring.

Matthew Arnold spoke of "the salt, estranging sea." Dr. Johnson once remarked bitterly that no man who had the wit to get himself into gaol would ever choose to go to sea. There is an old story of a man who was weary of battling with the sea. He put an oar on his shoulder and set out with the intention of journeying inland until he reached people who knew so little of the sea that they asked him what strange thing he carried on his shoulder.

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Revelation 21:1

The Sibylline Oracles (5: 447) say that in the last time the sea will be dried up. The Ascension of Moses (10: 6) says that the sea will return into the abyss. In Jewish dreams the end of the sea is the end of a force hostile to God and to man.

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Revelation 21:2

THE NEW JERUSALEM (1)

Revelation 21:2 (Part 1)

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, like a bride adorned for her husband.

Here, again, is a dream of the Jews which never died--the dream of the restoration of Jerusalem, the holy city. Once again it has a double background.

(i) It has a background which is essentially Greek. One of the great contributions to the world's philosophical thought was Plato's doctrine of ideas or forms. He taught that in the invisible world there existed the perfect form or idea of everything upon earth, and that all things on earth were imperfect copies of the heavenly realities. If that be so, there is a heavenly Jerusalem of which the earthly Jerusalem is an imperfect copy. That is what Paul is thinking of when he speaks of the Jerusalem that is above (Gal.4:26), and also what is in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews when he speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb.12:22).

That way of thought left its mark on Jewish visions between the Testaments. We read that in the Messianic Age the Jerusalem which is invisible will appear (2Esdr.7:26). The writer of 2 Esdras was, he says, given a vision of it in so far as it was possible for human eyes to bear the sight of the heavenly glory (2Esdr.10:44-59). In 2 Baruch it is said that God made the heavenly Jerusalem before he made Paradise, that Adam saw it before he sinned, that it was shown in a vision to Abraham, that Moses saw it on Mount Sinai, and that it is now present with God (2 Baruch 4: 2-6).

This conception of preexisting forms may seem strange. But at the back of it is the great truth that the ideal actually exists. It further means that God is the source of all ideals. The ideal is a challenge, which, even if it is not worked out in this world, can still be worked out in the world to come.

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Revelation 21:2

THE NEW JERUSALEM (2)

Revelation 21:2 (Part 2)

(ii) The second background of the conception of the new Jerusalem is entirely Jewish. In his synagogue form of prayer the Jew still prays:

And to Jerusalem thy city return with compassion, and dwell therein as thou hast promised; and rebuild her speedily in our days, a structure everlasting; and the throne of David speedily establish there. Blessed art thou, O Lord, the builder of Jerusalem.

John's vision of the new Jerusalem uses and amplifies many of the dreams of the prophets. We shall set down some of these dreams and it will be clear at once how the Old Testament again and again finds its echo in the Revelation.

Isaiah had his dream.

"O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of precious stones" (Isa.54:11-12).

Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you.... Your gates shall be open continually; day and night they shall not be shut.... You shall suck the milk of nations, you shall suck the breast of kings.... Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron.... Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended (Isa.60:10-20).

Haggai had his dream.

The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts (Hag.2:9).

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Revelation 21:2

Ezekiel had his dream of the rebuilt Jerusalem (Eze.40 and Eze.48) in which we find even the picture of the twelve gates of the city (Eze.48:31-35).

The writers between the Testaments had their dreams.

The city which God loved he made more radiant than the stars and the sun and the moon; and he set it as the jewel of the world and made a Temple exceeding fair in its sanctuary, and fashioned it in size of many furlongs, with a giant tower, touching the very clouds, and seen of all, so that all the faithful and the righteous may see the glory of the invisible God, the vision of delight (The Sibylline Oracles 5: 420-427).

And the gates of Jerusalem shall be builded with sapphire and emerald,
And all thy walls with precious stones,
The towers of Jerusalem shall be builded with gold,
And their battlements with pure gold,
The streets of Jerusalem shall be paved
With carbuncle and stones of Ophir,
And the gates of Jerusalem shall utter hymns of gladness,
And all her houses shall say, Hallelujah!
(Tob.13:16-18).

It is easy to see that the new Jerusalem was a constant dream; and that John lovingly collected the differing visions--the precious stones, the streets and buildings of gold, the ever-open gates, the light of God making unnecessary the light of the sun and the moon, the coming of the nations and the bringing of their gifts--into his own.

Here is faith! Even when Jerusalem was obliterated, the Jews never lost confidence that God would restore it. True, they expressed their hopes in terms of material things; but these are merely the symbols of the certainty that there is eternal bliss for the faithful people of God.

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Revelation 21:3-4

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (1)

Revelation 21:3-4 (Part 1)

And I heard a great voice from heaven. "Behold," it said, "the dwelling-place of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them; and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, nor will there be any grief or crying, nor will there be any more pain, for the first things have gone."

Here is the promise of fellowship with God and all its precious consequences. The voice is that of one of the Angels of the Presence.

God is to make his dwelling-place with men. The word used for dwelling-place is skene (GSN4633), literally a tent; but in religious use it had long since lost any idea of an impermanent residence. There are two main ideas here.

(i) Skene (GSN4633) is the word used for the Tabernacle. Originally in the wilderness the Tabernacle was a tent, the skene (GSN4633) par excellence. This, then, means that God is to make his tabernacle with men for ever, to give his presence to men for ever. Here in this world and amidst the things of time our realisation of the presence of God is spasmodic; but in heaven we will be permanently aware of that presence.

(ii) There are two words totally different in meaning but similar in sound which in early Christian thought became closely connected. Skene (GSN4633) is one; and the Hebrew shechinah, the glory of God, is the other. SKENE (GSN4633)--SHECHINAH (compare the Hebrew verb, shakan, to dwell, HSN7931)--the connection in sound brought it about that men could not hear the one without thinking of the other. As a result, to say that the skene (GSN4633) of God is to be with men immediately brought the thought that the shechinah (compare HSN7931) of God is to be with men. In the ancient times the shechinah (compare HSN7931) took the form of a luminous cloud which came and went. We read, for instance, of the cloud which filled the house at the dedication of Solomon's Temple (1Kgs.8:10-11). In the new age the glory of God is not to be a transitory thing, but something which abides permanently with the people of God.

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Revelation 21:3-4

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD (2)

Revelation 21:3-4 (Part 2)

God's promise to make Israel his people and to be their God echoes throughout the Old Testament. "I will make my abode among you... and I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev.26:11-12). In Jeremiah's account of the new covenant the promise of God is: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer.31:33). The promise to Ezekiel is: "My dwelling-place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Eze.37:27). The highest promise of all is intimate fellowship with God, in which we can say: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (SS.6:3).

This fellowship with God in the golden age brings certain things. Tears and grief and crying and pain are gone. That, too, had been the dream of the prophets of the ancient days. "They shall obtain joy and gladness," said Isaiah of the pilgrims of the heavenly way, "and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa.35:10). "I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress" (Isa.65:19). Death, too, shall be gone. That, too, had been the dream of the ancient prophets. "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces" (Isa.25:8).

This is a promise for the future. But even in this present world those who mourn are blessed, for they will be comforted, and death is swallowed up in victory for those who know Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings and the power of his Resurrection (Matt.5:4; Php.3:10).

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Revelation 21:5-6

ALL THINGS NEW

Revelation 21:5-6

And he who is seated upon the throne said: "Behold, I make all things new." And he said: "Write, for these are words that are trustworthy and true." And he said to me: "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Without price I will give to the thirsty of the fountain of the water of life."

For the first time God himself speaks; he is the God who is able to make all things new. Again we are back among the dreams of the ancient prophets. Isaiah heard God say: "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing" (Isa.43:18-19). This is the witness of Paul: "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2Cor.5:17). God can take a man and re-create him, and will some day create a new universe for the saints whose lives he has renewed.

It is not God but the Angel of the Presence who gives the command to write. These words must be taken down and remembered; they are true and absolutely to be relied upon.

"I am Alpha and Omega," says God to John, "the beginning and the end." We have already come upon this claim by the risen Christ in Rev.1:8. Again John is hearing the voice that the great prophets had heard, "I am the first, and I am the last; besides me there is no God" (Isa.44:6). Alpha (GSN0001) is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and omega (GSN5598) the last. John goes on to amplify this statement. God is the beginning and the end. The word for "beginning" is arche (GSN0746), and does not simply mean first in point of time but first in the sense of the source of all things. The word for "end" is telos (GSN5056), and does not simply mean end in point of time but the goal. John is saying that all life begins in God and ends in God. Paul expressed the same thing when he said perhaps a little more philosophically: "For from him, and through him, and to him are all things" (Rom.11:36), and when he spoke of "one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all, and in all" (Eph.4:6).

It would be impossible to say anything more magnificent about God. At first sight it might seem to remove God to such a distance that we are no more to him than the flies on the windowpane. But what comes next? "To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life." All God's greatness is at the disposal of man. "God so loved that he gave ..." (Jn.3:16). The splendour of God is used to satisfy the thirst of the longing heart.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:7-8

THE GLORY AND THE SHAME

Revelation 21:7-8

"He who overcomes will enter into possession of these things, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowards, the unbelieving, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all the liars--their part is in the lake burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

The bliss is not to everyone but only to him who remains faithful when everything seeks to seduce him from his loyalty.

To such a man God makes the greatest promise of all--"I will be his God and he shall be my son." This promise, or something very near to it, was made in the Old Testament to three different people. First, it was made to Abraham. "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you," God said to Abraham, "... to be God to you and your descendants" (Gen.17:7). Second, it was made to the son who was to inherit David's kingdom. "I will be his father," said God, "and he shall be my son" (2Sam.7:14). Third, it was made in a Psalm which the Jewish scholars always interpreted of the Messiah. "I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth" (Ps.89:27). Here is a tremendous thing. The promise of God to those who overcome is the same that was made to Abraham the founder of the nation, to David on behalf of Solomon his son, and to the Messiah himself. There is no greater honour in all the universe than that which God gives to the man who is true to him.

But there are those who are condemned. The cowards are those who loved ease and comfort more than they loved Christ, and who in the day of trial were ashamed to show whose they were and whom they served. The King James Version gives a wrong impression when it translates *deilos* (GSN1169) by "fearful." It is not fear that is condemned. The highest courage is to be desperately afraid and in spite of that to do the right thing and to hold fast to loyalty. What is condemned is the cowardice which denies Christ for safety's sake. The unbelieving are those who refused to accept the Gospel or those who with their lips accepted it, but by their lives showed that they did not believe it. The polluted are those who allowed themselves to be saturated by the abominations of the world. The murderers may well be those who in persecutions slaughtered the Christians. The fornicators are those who lived lives of immorality.

Ephesus was full of sorcerers; Ac.19:19 tells how at the preaching of the name of Christ in the early days the magicians burned their books. The idolaters are those who worshipped the false gods of whom the world was full. The liars are those who were guilty of untruth and of the silence which is also a lie.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:9-27

THE CITY OF GOD

Revelation 21:9-27

It will be better to read the description of the city of God as a whole before we deal with it in detail.

9 There came to me one of the seven angels who have the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and he spoke with me. "Come," he said, "and I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a 10 great and lofty mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, and it had the glory of God. 11 Its light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, glittering like crystal. 12 It had a wall great and high with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels. There were names written on the 13 gates which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. On the east were three gates, and on the north were three gates, and on the south were three gates, and on the west were three gates. 14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 He who was speaking with me had a golden measuring rod, that he might measure the city and its gates and its walls.

16 The city lies four-square, and its length is the same as its breadth. He measured the city with his measuring rod, and the measurement was twelve thousand stades. Its length and breadth and height are equal. And he measured its wall, 17 and the measurement was one hundred and forty-four cubits, by the measurement of a man, that is, of an angel. 18 The building material of the wall was jasper, and the city was of pure gold like pure glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was a jasper; the second, a sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, 20 an emerald; the fifth, a sardonyx; the sixth, a carnelian; the seventh, a chrysolith; the eighth, a beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprase; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates consisted of a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

22 I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, is its temple, and the Lamb. 23 The city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine for it, for the glory of God illumines it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the earth 25 will bring their glory to it. Its gates will never be shut by day, 26 for, as for night, there will be no night there. They shall bring 27 to it the glory and the honour of the nations; but nothing unclean shall enter into it, nor shall he who practises abominable things or uses falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:9-10

THE BRINGER OF THE VISION

Revelation 21:9-10

The personality of the bringer of the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem must come as a surprise. He is one of the angels who had the seven bowls filled with the last seven plagues; and the last time we met such an angel he was the bringer of the vision of the destruction of Babylon, the great harlot. It is extraordinary that in Rev.17:1 the invitation of the angel is: "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot," and that in Rev.21:9 the invitation, perhaps even of the same angel, is: "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."

No one can say for certain what much of the symbolism of this chapter stands for. John must have meant something by making the same angel the bearer of such different messages. It may be that John wishes us to see that the servant of God does not choose his task but must do whatever God sends him to do, and must speak whatever word God gives him to speak.

The angel, says John, carried him away in the Spirit to a high mountain. It is in this way that Ezekiel also describes his experience. "He brought me in the visions of God into the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain" (Eze.40:2). H. B. Swete points out that it is wrong to take this literally; the lifting up stands for the elevation of spirit in which a man sees the visions and hears the words which are sent to him by God.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:11

THE CITY'S LIGHT

Revelation 21:11

There is a certain difficulty of translation here. The word used for "light" is phoster (GSN5458). The normal Greek word for "light" is phos (GSN5457), and phoster (GSN5458) is normally the word used for the lights of heaven, the sun, the moon and the stars, for instance, in the Creation story (Gen.1:14). Does this, then, mean that the body which illumined the city was like a precious stone? Or does it mean that the radiance which played over all the city was like the glitter of a jasper?

We think the word must describe the radiance over the city; it is later quite distinctly said that the city needs no heavenly body like the sun or the moon to give it light, because God is its light.

What, then, is the symbolism? H. B. Swete would find a hint in Php.2:15. There Paul says of the Christians at Philippi: "You shine as lights in the world." The holy city is inhabited by thousands and thousands of the saints of God, and it may well be that it is the light of these saintly lives which gives it this glittering glow.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:12

THE WALL AND THE GATES OF THE CITY

Revelation 21:12

Round the city is a great high wall. Again John is thinking in terms of the prophetic pictures of the re-created Jerusalem. The song of the land of Judah will be: "We have a strong city; God sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks" (Isa.26:1). Zechariah hears God say: "I will be to her a wall of fire round about" (Zech.2:5). The simplest interpretation of the wall is that it is "the insurmountable bulwark of faith." Faith is the wall behind which the saints of God are secure against the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil.

In the wall are twelve gates, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. The word for gate is interesting. It is not the normal word which is *pule* (GSN4439); it is *pulon* (GSN4440). The *pulon* could be either of two things. A large house was built round an open courtyard. It opened on to the street by a great gate in the outer wall, leading into a spacious vestibule. That could be the picture here. *Pulon* (GSN4440) can also mean the gate-tower in a great city, like the gate leading into a battlemented castle.

There are two things to note.

(i) There are twelve gates. Surely this stands for the catholicity of the Church. A man can come by many roads into the kingdom, for "there are as many ways to the stars as there are men to climb them."

(ii) On the gates are the names of the twelve tribes. Surely this stands for the continuity of the Church. The God who revealed himself to the patriarchs is the God who also, and far more fully, revealed himself in Jesus Christ; the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:13

THE GATES OF THE CITY

Revelation 21:13

There are three gates on each of the four sides of the city of God. Part at least of that picture John got from Ezekiel (Eze.48:30-35). What John meant to symbolize by this arrangement other than the catholicity of the Church we do not know. There is one symbolic interpretation which was unlikely to be in his mind, but which is none the less very beautiful and very comforting.

There are three gates on the east. The east is the place of the rising sun and the beginning of the day. These gates could represent the way into the holy city of those who find Christ in the glad morning of their days.

There are three gates on the north. The north is the cold land with a certain chill in it. These gates could stand for the way into the holy city of those who come to Christianity by the intellectual exercise of thought, and have found the faith through their minds rather than through their hearts.

There are three gates on the south. The south is the warm land, where the wind is gentle and the climate soft. These gates could stand for the way into the holy city of those who have come to Christ through their emotions, whose love ran over at the sight of the cross.

There are three gates on the west. The west is the land of the dying day and the setting sun. These gates could stand for the way into the holy city of those who come to Christ in the evening of their days.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:15-17

THE MEASURING OF THE CITY

Revelation 21:15-17

John takes his picture of the man with the measuring rod from Eze.40:3.

(i) We must note the city's shape. It was four-square. It was common enough for cities to be built in the form of a square; both Babylon and Nineveh were like that. But the holy city was not only square; it was in the form of a perfect cube. The length, breadth and height were the same. This is significant. The cube was the symbol of perfection. Both Plato and Aristotle refer to the fact that in Greece the good man was called "four-square" (Plato, Protagoras 339 B; Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1. 10. 11 ; Rhetoric 3.11).

It was the same with the Jews. The altar of the burnt offering, the altar of the incense, and the High Priest's breast-plate were all in the form of a cube (Exo.27:1; Exo.30:2; Exo.28:16). Again and again this shape occurs in Ezekiel's visions of the new Jerusalem and the new temple (Eze.41:21; Eze.43:16; Eze.45:2; Eze.48:20). But most important of all, in Solomon's temple the Holy of Holies was a perfect cube (1Kgs.6:20). There is no doubt of the symbolism which John intends. He intends us to see that the whole of the holy city is the Holy of Holies, the dwelling-place of God.

(ii) We must note the city's dimensions. Each side of the city was twelve thousand stades (compare GSN4712). A stade is very nearly a furlong; therefore, each side was 1,500 miles long, and the total area of the city was 2,250,000 square miles. The rabbinic dreams of the re-created Jerusalem were vast enough. It was said that it would reach to Damascus and would cover the whole of Palestine. But a city with that area would stretch nearly from London to New York. Surely we are meant to see that in the holy city there is room for everyone. Men are so apt to limit their Churches, to shut out those who do not believe as they do or who do not administer as they do.

Strangely enough it is different when we come to the wall. The wall is 144 cubits high, that is, 266 feet, not very high. The wall of Babylon was 300 feet high, and the walls of the porch of Solomon's temple were 180 feet high. There is no comparison between the height of the wall and the size of the city. Again there is symbolism here. The wall cannot be for defence, for all hostile beings, spiritual and human, have been obliterated or cast into the lake of fire. The only thing the wall can do is delimit the area of the city; and the fact that it is so low shows that delimitation is comparatively unimportant. God is much more eager to bring men in than to shut them out--and his Church must be the same.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:18-21

THE PRECIOUS STONES OF THE CITY

Revelation 21:18-21

The city itself was of pure gold, so pure that it seemed like transparent glass. It is possible that John is here accentuating a feature of the earthly Jerusalem. Josephus describes Herod's temple: "Now the outward face of the temple in its front lacked nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes; for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendour, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn away their eyes, just as they would at the sun's own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for as to those parts that were not golden, they were exceeding white" (Josephus: Wars of the Jews 5.5.6).

John goes on to speak of the twelve foundations of the city. Between the twelve gates there were twelve spaces, and the idea is that between these spaces there was one vast foundation stone. Again John may have been thinking of the vast stones in the foundations of the Jerusalem Temple. In the passage which we have just quoted Josephus speaks of stones in the Temple foundation walls of almost 70 feet in length, 8 feet in height, and 9 feet in breadth. In verse 14 John has said that the stones are inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles. They were both Jesus' first followers and his ambassadors, and they were literally the foundations of the Church.

In the city of God these foundation stones were all precious stones. The jasper was not the modern opaque jasper but a translucent rock crystal, green in colour. The sapphire appears in the Old Testament story as the stone of the paving on which God stood (Exo.24:10). Again, it was not the modern sapphire. Pliny describes it as sky-blue, flecked with gold. It was most likely the stone now known as lapis lazuli. The chalcedony was a green silicate of copper, found in mines near Chalcedon. It is described as being like the sheen of green on a dove's neck or in a peacock's tail. The emerald was the modern emerald, which Pliny describes as the greenest of all green stones. The sardonyx was an onyx in which the white was broken by layers of red and brown; it was specially used for cameos. The sard or carnelian took its name from Sardis. It was blood-red, and was the commonest of all stones used for engraving gems. The identification of the chrysolite is uncertain. Its Hebrew name means the stone of Tarshish.

Pliny describes it as shining with a golden radiance. It could be a yellow beryl or a gold-coloured jasper. The beryl was like an emerald; the best stones were sea-blue or sea-green. The topaz was a transparent, greenish-gold stone, very highly valued by the Hebrews. Job speaks of the topaz of Ethiopia (Jb.28:19). The jacinth is described by ancient writers as being a violet, bluish-purple stone. It is likely that it was the equivalent of the modern sapphire. The amethyst is described as being very similar to the jacinth, but more brilliant.

Have these stones any symbolism?

(i) It may be noted that eight of them are the same as the stones in the breast-plate of the High Priest (Exo.28:17). John may simply have used the breast-plate as his model.

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Revelation 21:18-21

(ii) It may well be that the only intention of John is to stress the splendour of the city of God in which even the foundations were stones beyond price.

(iii) There is another interesting possibility. In the east there was the idea of the city of the gods in the skies. There the gods dwelt; the sun and the moon and the stars were its lights; the Milky Way was its great street; there were twelve gates through which the stars went in and out upon their business. Connected with the city of the gods there are the signs of the Zodiac, the signs of the parts of the heavens through which the sun passes. The curious thing is that the signs of the Zodiac have as their corresponding precious stones exactly these twelve.

The table is as follows:

The Ram -- amethyst. The Bull -- jacinth. The Twins -- chrysoprase. The Crab -- topaz. The Lion -- beryl. The Virgin -- chrysolite. The Balance -- carnelian. The Scorpion -- sardonyx. The Archer -- emerald. The Goat -- chalcedony. The Water-carrier -- sapphire. The Fishes -- jasper.

There is at least the possibility that John was thinking of the city of God as the consummation of the old idea of the city of the Gods, but far outshining it.

But there is one curious point. If that be so, John gives the signs of the Zodiac in precisely the reverse order! What the symbolism of that would be it is impossible to tell, unless it is John's way of saying that the city of the gods is made new in the city of God.

The most staggering use of precious stones in this picture is that the gates of the city of God each consist of one vast pearl. In the ancient world pearls were of all stones most valued. All his life the merchantman would seek the pearl of great price and then count it worth selling all his possessions to buy it (Matt.13:46). Gates of pearl are a symbol of unimaginable beauty and unassessable riches.

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Revelation 21:22-23

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Revelation 21:22-23

In Rev.21:22 John lays down a unique feature of the city of God; in it there is no temple. When we remember how precious the Temple was to the Jews, this is amazing. But we have already noted that the city is built in the shape of a perfect cube, indicating that it itself is the Holy of Holies. The city needs no temple because the presence of God is continually there.

Here is symbolism which is plain for all to see. Buildings do not make a Church nor liturgy, nor form of government, nor method of ordination to the ministry. The one thing which makes a Church is the presence of Jesus Christ. Without that there can be no such thing as a Church; with that any gathering of people is a real Church.

The city of God needed no created light, because God the uncreated light was in the midst of her. "The Lord," said Isaiah, "will be your everlasting light" (Isa.60:19-20). "In thy light," said the Psalmist, "do we see light" (Ps.36:9). Only when we see things in the light of God, do we see things as they are. Some things which seem vastly important are seen to be unimportant when seen in the light of God. Some things which seem permissible enough are seen to be dangerous when seen in the light of God. Some things which seem unbearable are seen to be a path to glory when seen in the light of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:24-27

THE WHOLE EARTH FOR GOD

Revelation 21:24-27 (Part 1)

A passage like this enables us--and even compels us--to redress a wrong which is often done to Jewish thought. Here is a picture of all nations coming to God and of all kings bringing him their gifts. In other words, here is a picture of universal salvation. It is often said that the Jews looked for nothing but the destruction of the Gentiles. It is true that we find sayings like: "God created the Gentiles to be fuel for the fires of hell." It is true that there is a strain of Jewish thought which expected the annihilation, or at least the enslavement, of the Gentiles; but there is much on the other side, and voice after voice speaks of the time when all men shall know and love God.

Isaiah has a picture of the day when all nations will go up to Mount Sion to be taught the law and to learn to walk in the ways of God (Isa.2:2-4). God will set up an ensign to which all the nations will come (Isa.11:12). It is God's word of privilege to Israel: "I will give you for a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isa.49:6). The isles will wait upon God and in his arm will they trust (Isa.51:5). Nations who never knew God will run to him (Isa.55:5). The sons of the stranger will learn to love God and to serve him. God will gather others to him (Isa.56:6-8). It is Israel's task to declare God's glory among the Gentiles (Isa.66:19). The ends of the earth are invited to look to God and to be saved (Isa.45:22). All nations shall be gathered to Jerusalem, and shall recognize it as the throne of the Lord, and will no more stubbornly follow their evil heart (Jer.3:17).

The Gentiles will come to God from the ends of the earth, confessing and repenting of the previous errors of their ways (Jer.16:19-21). All peoples, nations and languages will serve the one who is like a son of man (Dn.7:14). All men shall worship God, everyone from his place, even all the isles of the heathen (Zeph.2:11). God will give all men a pure language in which they may with one consent call upon him (Zeph.3:9). All flesh will be silent before God (Zech.2:13). Many people and the inhabitants of many cities will come to Jerusalem. People of all races and tongues shall "take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech.8:20-23). The day will come when the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day there will be one Lord (Zech.14:9).

What is true of the Old Testament is true of the literature between the Testaments. The vision in Tobit is:

A bright light shall shine unto all the ends of the earth; Many nations shall come from afar, And the inhabitants of the utmost ends of the earth unto thy holy name; With their gifts in their hands unto the king of heaven (Tob.13:11).

All the nations which are in the whole earth, all shall turn and fear God truly, all shall leave their idols (Tob.14:6).

Enoch writes nobly of God's chosen one:

He shall be a stall to the righteous whereon to stay themselves

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:24-27

and not fall,
And he shall be a light of the Gentiles,
And the hope of those who are troubled of heart.
All who dwell on earth shall fall down and worship before him,
And will praise and bless and celebrate with song the Lord of
Spirits (Enoch 48: 4-5).

The writer of Enoch hears the voice of God say: "All the children of men shall become righteous, and all nations shall offer adoration, and shall praise me, and shall worship me" (Enoch 10: 21).

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs is full of this universal hope. When the Messiah comes "in his priesthood the Gentiles shall be multiplied in knowledge upon the earth, and enlightened in the grace of the Lord" (Testament of Levi 18: 9). It is the word of God: "If ye work that which is good, my children, both men and angels will bless you; and God shall be glorified among the Gentiles through you." It is Israel's task "to gather the righteous from among the Gentiles" (Testament of Naphtali 8: 3, 4). God will save all Israel and all the Gentiles (Testament of Asher 7: 3). The Sibylline Oracles has a noble passage which tells of the reaction of the Gentiles when they see the goodness of God to Israel:

Then all the isles and the cities shall say, How doth the Eternal
love those men! For all things work in sympathy with them and
help them, the heaven, and God's chariot the sun, and the moon.
A sweet strain shall they utter from their mouths in hymns. Come,
let us all fall upon the earth and supplicate the Eternal King, the
mighty, everlasting God. Let us make procession to his Temple,
for he is the sole Potentate. And let us all ponder the law of the
Most High God, who is the most righteous of all upon the earth.
But we had gone astray from the path of the Eternal, and with
foolish heart worshipped the work of men's hands, idols and images
of men that are dead (Sibylline Oracles 3: 710-723).

Nations shall come from the ends of the earth to see the glory of God (Wis.17:34).

When John pictured the nations walking in the light of the city of God and the kings bringing their gifts to it, he was foretelling the consummation of a hope which was always in the hearts of the greatest of his countrymen.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 21:24-27

RECEPTION AND REJECTION

Revelation 21:24-27 (Part 2)

We gather up three further points before we leave this chapter.

(i) More than once John insists that there will be no night in the city of God. The ancient peoples, like children, were afraid of the dark. In the new world the frightening dark will be no more, for the presence of God will bring eternal light. Even in this world of space and time, where God is, the night is as bright as the day (Ps.139:12).

H. B. Swete sees further symbolism here. In the city of God there will be no darkness. Again and again it has happened that an age of brilliance has been followed by an age of darkness. But in the new age the darkness will be gone and there will be nothing but light.

(ii) John, like the ancient prophets, repeatedly speaks of the Gentiles and their kings bringing their gifts to God. It is true that the nations did bring their gifts to the Church. The Greeks brought the power of their intellect. To them, as Plato said, "the unexamined life was the life not worth living," and so the unexamined faith was the faith not worth having. To the Greeks we owe theology. The Romans were the greatest experts in government the world has ever seen. To the Church they brought their ability to organize and to administer and to formulate law. When a man enters the Church, he must bring his gift with him; the writer his power in words, the artist his power in colour, the sculptor his mastery of line and form and mass, the musician his music, the craftsman his craft. There is no gift which Christ cannot use.

(iii) The chapter ends with a threat. Those who will not lay aside the evil of their ways are barred from the city of God. There is a sinner who sins against his will; there is a sinner who deliberately sins. It is not the repentant sinner, but the defiant sinner, who is barred from the city of God.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 22:1-2

THE RIVER OF LIFE

Revelation 22:1-2 (Part 1)

And he showed me the river of the water of life, shining like crystal, coming out from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the city street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, which produced twelve kinds of fruit, rendering its fruit according to each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

So far the description has been of the exterior of the holy city; now the scene moves inside.

First, there is the river of the water of life. This picture has many sources in the Old Testament. At its back is the river which watered the Garden of Eden and made it fruitful (Gen.2:8-16). Still closer is Ezekiel's picture of the river which issued from the Temple (Eze.47:1-7). The Psalmist sings of the river whose streams make glad the city of God (Ps.46:4). "A fountain," says Joel, "shall come forth from the house of the Lord" (Jl.3:18). "Living waters," says Zechariah, "shall flow out from Jerusalem" (Zech.14:8). In Second Enoch there is the picture of a river in Paradise, which issues in the third heaven, which flows from beneath the tree of life, and which divides into four streams of honey, milk, wine, and oil (2 Enoch 8: 5).

Closely allied with this is the picture so common in Scripture of the fountain of life; we have it in Rev.7:17; Rev.21:6 in the Revelation. It is Jeremiah's complaint that the people have forsaken God who is the fountain of living waters to hew themselves out broken cisterns which can hold no water (Jer.2:13). The warning in Enoch is:

Woe to you who drink water from every fountain,
For suddenly shall ye be consumed and wither away,
Because ye have forsaken the fountain of life (Enoch 96: 6).

The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life (Prov.10:11).
The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life (Prov.13:14).
The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life (Prov.14:27).
Wisdom is a fountain of life to him who has it (Prov.16:22).
With God, says the Psalmist, is the fountain of life
(Ps.36:9). "God," said the rabbis in their dreams of the
golden age, "will produce a river from the Holy of Holies,
beside which every kind of delicate fruits will grow."

H. B. Swete identifies the river of life with the Spirit. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus says: "He who believes in me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." John goes on to explain: "This he said about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive" (Jn.7:38-39).

But it may well be that there is something simpler here. Those who live in a civilization in which the turn of a tap will bring cold, clear water in any quantity can scarcely understand how precious

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Revelation 22:1-2

water was in the East. In the hot lands water was, and is, literally life. And the river of life may well stand for the abundant life God provides for his people which is there for the taking.

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Revelation 22:1-2

THE TREE OF LIFE

Revelation 22:1-2 (Part 2)

In this passage there is an ambiguity of punctuation. In the midst of the city street may be taken, not as the end of the first sentence, but as the beginning of the second. It will then be not the river which is in the midst of the street but the tree of life. Taking the phrase with the first sentence seems to give the better picture.

John takes his picture of the tree of life from two sources--from the tree in the Garden of Eden (Gen.3:6); and even more from Ezekiel. "And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing" (Eze.47:12). Here again the rabbinic dreams of the future are very close. One runs: "In the age to come God will create trees which will produce fruit in any month; and the man who eats from them will be healed."

The tree gives many and varied fruits. Surely in that we may see the symbolism of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22-23). In the different fruit for each month of the year may we not see symbolized that in the life which God gives there is a special grace for each age from the cradle to the grave? The tree of life is no longer forbidden; it is there in the midst of the city for all to take. Nor are its fruits confined to the Jews; its leaves are for the healing of the nations. Only in the Spirit of God can the wounds and the breaches of the nations be healed.

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Revelation 22:3-5

THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

Revelation 22:3-5

No longer shall there be any accursed thing. And the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him, and shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night will be no more, for they have no need of the light of a lamp, or the light of a sun, for the Lord God will be a light to them, and they will reign for ever and ever.

Here is the final culmination of the description of the city of God.

There will be no accursed thing there. That is to say, there will be no more of the pollutions which harm the Christian life.

God's servants shall see his face. The promise will come true that the pure in heart will see God (Matt.5:8). We may best understand the greatness of that promise by remembering that the Christian is promised a privilege which was denied even to Moses to whom God's word was: "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Exo.33:20,23). It is in Christ alone that men can see God.

The sight of God produces two things. It produces the perfect worship; where God is always seen, all life becomes an act of worship. It produces the perfect consecration; the inhabitants of the city will have the mark of God upon their foreheads, showing that they belong absolutely to him.

John returns to his vision that in the city of God there can never be any darkness nor need of any other light, for the presence of God is there.

The vision ends with the promise that the people of God will reign for ever and ever. In perfect submission to him they will find perfect freedom and the only true royalty.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 22:6-9

FINAL WORDS

Revelation 22:6-9

And he said to me: "These words are trustworthy and true, for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show to his servants the things which must speedily happen."

"And, behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

It is I John who am the hearer and the seer of these things. And, when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who was showing them to me. And he said to me: "See that you do not do this. I am your fellow-servant, and the fellow-servant of your brothers the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

What remains of the last chapter of the Revelation is curiously disjointed. Things are set down without any apparent order; there are repetitions of what has gone before; and it is often very difficult to be sure who is the actual speaker. There are two possibilities. It may be that John is deliberately sounding again many of the themes which run through his book, and bringing on the stage many of the characters for a final message. It is perhaps more likely that he did not finally set in order this last chapter and that we have it in unfinished form. We have three speakers.

The first is one of the angels who have been the interpreters of the divine things to John. Once again he stresses the truth of all that John has seen and heard. "The God of the spirits of the prophets" means the God who inspired the minds of the prophets. Therefore the messages John received came from the same God as inspired the great prophets of the Old Testament, and must be treated with equal seriousness.

The second speaker is Jesus Christ himself. He reiterates that his return is not to be long delayed. Then he pronounces his blessing on the man who reads and obeys the words of John's book. Swete aptly calls this "the felicitation of the devout student." The devout student is the best of all students. There are too many who are devout, but not students; they will not accept the discipline of learning and even look with suspicion upon the further knowledge which study brings. There are also too many who are students, but not devout; they are interested too much in intellectual knowledge and too little in prayer and in service of their fellow-men.

The last speaker is John. He identifies himself as the author of the book. Then, strangely enough, he delivers exactly the same warning against angel worship as in Rev.19:10. Either John would have removed this passage as a needless repetition, if he had had opportunity fully to revise his book; or he was so aware of the danger of angel worship that he believed it necessary to give the same warning twice. He certainly leaves us in no doubt that worship of angels is wrong and that worship must be given to God alone.

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Revelation 22:10-11

THE TIME IS NEAR AND THE TIME IS PAST

Revelation 22:10-11

And he said to me: "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is near. Let the wrong-doer continue in his wrong-doing; let him who is filthy continue in his filthiness; let the righteous man continue in his righteousness; let him who is dedicated to God continue in his dedication."

This passage insists that the coming of Christ is close at hand; it must be the Risen Christ who is speaking.

In the older Apocalypses, written between the Testaments, the instruction is always to seal them and lay them up for a distant future. In Daniel, for instance, we read: "Seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence" (Dn.8:26). But now it is not the time to seal but it is the time to open and read; for the coming of Christ will take place at any moment.

What, then, is the meaning of this curious passage which seems to say that men must remain as they are? There are two possibilities.

(i) There comes a time when it is too late to change. In Daniel we read: "The wicked shall do wickedly" (Dn.12:10). As Ezekiel had it: "He that will hear, let him hear; and he that will refuse to hear, let him refuse" (Eze.3:27). A man can so long refuse the way of Christ that in the end he cannot take it. That is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

(ii) The ancient commentator, Andreas, says that the Risen Christ is saying: "Let each man do what pleases him; I will not force his choice." This, then, would be another warning that every man is writing his own destiny.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 22:12-13

THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

Revelation 22:12-13

Behold, I am coming soon, and I have my reward with me, to render to each man, as his work is. I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

The Risen Christ once again announces his speedy coming; and he makes two great claims.

(i) He has his reward with him and will render to every man according to his work. H. B. Swete says: "Christ speaks as the Great Steward, who in the eventide of the world will call the labourers to receive their day's wages."

(ii) He is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. This is a repetition of titles used in Rev.1:17; Rev.2:8; Rev.21:6. There is more than one idea here.

(a) There is the idea of completeness. The Greeks used from alpha (GSN0001) to omega (GSN5598) and the Hebrews from aleph to tau to indicate completeness. For instance, Abraham kept the whole Law from aleph to tau. Here is the symbol that Jesus Christ has everything within himself and needs nothing from any other source.

(b) There is the idea of eternity. He includes in himself all time, for he is the first and the last.

(c) There is the idea of authority. The Greeks said that Zeus was the beginning, the middle, and the end. The Jewish rabbis took over this idea and applied it to God, with their own interpretation. They said that, since God was the beginning, he received his power from no one; since he was the middle, he shared his power with no one; and since he was the end, he never handed over his power to anyone.

Barclay's Commentary

Revelation 22:14-15

THE ACCEPTED AND THE REJECTED

Revelation 22:14-15

Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and that they may enter into the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the fornicators and the murderers and the idolaters and everyone who loves and acts falsehood.

(i) Those who wash their robes have the right of entry into the city of God; the King James Version has: Blessed are they that do his commandments. In Greek the two phrases would be very like each other. Those who have washed their robes is hoi (GSN3588) plunontes (GSN4150) tas (GSN3588) stolas (GSN4749), and those that do his commandments is hoi (GSN3588) poiountes (GSN4160) tas (GSN3588) entolas (GSN1785). In the early Greek manuscripts all the words are written in capital letters and there is no space left between them. If we set down these two phrases in English capital letters, we see how closely they resemble each other.

HOIPLUNONTESTASSTOLAS
HOIPOIOUNTESTASENTOLAS

"Those who have washed their robes" is the reading of the best manuscripts, but it is easy to see how a scribe could make a mistake in copying and substitute the more usual phrase.

This phrase shows man's part in salvation. It is Jesus Christ who in his Cross has provided that grace by which alone man can be forgiven; but man has to appropriate that sacrifice. To take a simple analogy, we can supply soap and water, but we cannot compel a person to use them. Those who enter into the city of God are those who have accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

(ii) There follows the list of those who are debarred from the city of God. We have already considered a very similar list in Rev.21:8 of those who were cast into the lake of fire. The new phrase here is the dogs. This can have two meanings.

(i) The dog was the symbol for everything that was savage and unclean. H. B. Swete says: "No one who has watched the dogs that prowl in the quarters of an eastern city will wonder at the contempt and disgust which the word suggests to the oriental mind." That was why the Jews called the Gentiles dogs. There is a rabbinic saying: "Whoever eats with an idolator is the same as he who would eat with a dog. Who is a dog? He who is not circumcised." Andreas suggests that the dogs are not only the shameless and the unbelieving, but also Christians who after their baptism "return to their vomit." The dog may, then, be a symbol of all that is disgusting.

(ii) But there is another possibility. There is a strange phrase in Deut.23:18. The full verse runs: "You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow." The first part is clear enough. It is forbidden to offer to God money that has been made by prostitution. But the wages of a dog is more difficult. The point is this. In the ancient temples there were not only female sacred prostitutes, there were also male sacred

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Revelation 22:14-15

prostitutes; and these male prostitutes were commonly called dogs. Dog can denote a thoroughly immoral person, and that may be its meaning here.

Every one who loves and acts falsehood is shut out. Here is an echo of the Psalmist: "No man who practises deceit shall dwell in my house; no man who utters lies shall continue in my presence" (Ps.101:7).

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Revelation 22:16

THE GUARANTEE OF TRUTH

Revelation 22:16

I, Jesus, sent my angel to you to testify to these things for the sake of the Churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright morning star.

Jesus guarantees the truth of all that John has seen and heard. The point of this guarantee is this. The book begins by promising a revelation to be given by Jesus (Rev.1:1); this is the attestation of Jesus that, however the vision came, it came from him.

He then goes on to give, as it were, his credentials. "I am the root and the offspring of David," he says. That is a reference to Isa.11:1: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Jesus is saying that in him is the fulfilment of this prophecy, that he is at one and the same time the eternal source of being from which David came and his promised descendant.

"I am the bright morning star," he says. To call a man a morning star was to class him very high among the heroes. The rabbis, for instance, called Mordecai by that name. More than that, this would recall the great Messianic prophecy: "A star shall come forth out of Jacob" (Num.24:17).

This would awaken other realms of thought. The morning star is the herald of the day which chases away the darkness of the night; before Jesus the night of sin and death flees away.

Surely this would awaken still another memory. In the days of his flesh Jesus had said: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn.8:12). When the Risen Christ said that he was the morning star, he claimed again to be the light of the world and the vanquisher of all the world's darkness.

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Revelation 22:17

THE GREAT INVITATION

Revelation 22:17

The Spirit and the Bride say: Come! And let him that hears say: Come! Let him who is thirsty come and let him who wishes take the water of life without price.

There are two different interpretations of this passage.

H. B. Swete takes the first two parts as an appeal to Christ to fulfil his promise and come quickly back to this world; and he takes the third part as an invitation to the thirsty soul to come to Christ. But it seems very improbable that there should be such a difference between the first two parts and the third. It is much more likely that the whole passage is a great invitation to all men to come to Christ. It falls into three sections.

(i) There is the invitation of the Spirit and the Bride. The Bride, we know, is the Church. But what are we to understand by the Spirit? It may be the Spirit who is operative in all the prophets and who is always calling men back to God. Much more likely, John uses the Spirit for the voice of Jesus himself. The regular ending of the letters to the seven Churches is an invitation to hear what the Spirit is saying (Rev.2:7,11; Rev.2:17; Rev.2:29; Rev.3:6,13; Rev.3:22). Now, the speaker to the seven Churches is the Risen Christ; and, therefore, quite clearly there the Spirit and the Christ are identified. "The Spirit and the Bride say: Come!" probably means that Christ and his Church join in the invitation to accept all that he has to offer.

(ii) "Let him that hears say: Come!" symbolizes the great truth that every Christian is to be a missionary. He who has been found by Christ must find others for Christ.

(iii) The third section is an invitation to all thirsty souls to come to Jesus Christ that their need may be satisfied. It must remind us of God's great invitation, "Ho, every one who thirsts come to the waters, and he who has no money; come, buy and eat! come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa.55:1); and also of the great word of Jesus himself. "He who comes to me shall not hunger; and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn.6:35). In Christ alone the longing of the soul can be satisfied.

O Christ, in thee my soul hath found,
And found in thee alone,
The peace, the joy, I sought so long,
The bliss till now unknown.
Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other Name for me!
There's love, and life, and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus found in thee.

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Revelation 22:18-19

THE WARNING

Revelation 22:18-19

I give this warning to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book. And, if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

There are certain things to note about this solemn warning.

(i) It is not to be interpreted with absolute literalness. It does not refer to every individual word of the Revelation. It so happens that the text is, in fact, in bad condition and we do not know for certain what the actual wording is. What it does warn against is distorting the teaching which the book contains. It is very much what Paul meant, when he said: "If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal.1:8-9). It is the truth, and not the wording of the truth, which must not be changed.

(ii) This is far from being an unique ending to an ancient book. It is, in fact, the kind of ending that ancient writers commonly added to their books. We find similar warnings in the Bible in other places. "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it; that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you" (Deut.4:2). "Every word of God proves true.... Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar" (Prov.30:5-6). In the Book of Enoch the writer demands that no one should "change or minish ought of my words" (Enoch 104: 10).

The Letter of Aristeas tells how the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, was made by seventy Jewish scholars at the request of the King of Egypt. When the task was done "they bade them pronounce a curse in accordance with their custom upon any who should make any alteration either by adding anything or changing in any way whatever any of the words which had been written or making an omission" (Letter of Aristeas 310, 311). In the preface to his book On Origins, Rufinus adjures in the sight of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, anyone who reads or copies his book, not to add, subtract, insert, or alter anything.

Eusebius (The Ecclesiastical History 5.20.2) quotes the way in which Irenaeus, the great second century Christian scholar, ends one of his books: "I adjure thee who mayest copy this book, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by his glorious advent, when he comes to judge the quick and the dead, to compare what thou shalt write, and correct it carefully by this manuscript, and also to write this adjuration, and to place it on your copy."

In the ancient days, since all books were hand-copied by scribes and everyone knew how easy it was for a scribe to make mistakes in the copying, it was a regular custom to insert at the end of a book a solemn warning against change.

It is in the light of that regular custom that we must read John's words. To use this passage as an argument for verbal inspiration is an error.

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Revelation 22:18-19

One final word must be said about this passage. R. H. Charles points out that this warning may not be part of the original book at all. We must be impressed by the number of times John insists that Christ will come at any moment (Rev.22:7,10,12,20). "Behold, I am coming soon" is the very refrain of the chapter. And yet this warning would seem to imply the expectation of a long time of reading and copying the book, a time which John himself clearly did not expect. It is, therefore, by no means impossible that these words are the words not of John but of a later scribe, anxious that none should alter the book in the days to come.

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Revelation 22:20-21

LAST WORDS

Revelation 22:20-21

He who testifies to the truth of these things says: "Yes, I am coming soon." So let it be! Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

There is both pathos and glory in the way in which the Revelation ends. Amidst the terrible persecution of his day, the one thing which John longed for was the speedy return of Christ. That hope was never realized in the way in which he expected, but we can never doubt that Christ nevertheless abundantly kept his promise that he would be with his own even to the end of the world (Matt.28:20).

Then comes the glory. Come what may, John was sure of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and equally sure that it was sufficient for all things.

It is surely symbolic, and it is surely fitting, that the last word of the Bible should be GRACE.